

# Access to land is the main bottleneck for a substantial move to a low carbon lifestyle

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More and more people and specialists (including politicians) are abandoning the idea that we can control global warming without greatly diminishing our prosperity. Based on this reasoning:

- The current global rush to make our energy consumption emission-free through a wave of mega-investments will push global manufacturing processes to unprecedented heights over the [next five years](#). Global relations ruined by the war in Ukraine will further boost these volumes.
- So in the years to come, ppm will rise even more (exceeding 450 ppm), causing even more social desperation, generating even more hasty engineering policies – see Kerry's [blind faith](#) in technology – and meanwhile, the climate inevitably gets **out of control**.

Therefore, only a **massive reduction** in global production and consumption can prevent our doom. This implies that the size and nature of these processes must be the subject of a structural socio-economic policy. Such regulating and limiting means a profound political change.

## Restrictive government policies

A restrictive policy should always answer two main questions: What are you going to restrict? And who are you going to restrict?

The first concerns the **prioritization** of production, that is, what is superfluous? The second concerns the **repartition** of pain over the population. For each of these two socially explosive bombs, there is an effective rule of thumb for dismantling them:

- a) In order to set priorities, this formula is called "**Back to basics**". It means, switching to a local and much simpler way of life, centered on the basic necessities.
- b) To establish repartition, this formula is called "**Social Justice**": That is, you need to **disempower the competitive way** of satisfying certain essential human needs, otherwise you won't get the fear of not being able to obtain a fair portion – which triggers expansion – out of the minds of everyday people.

But how to make society to address such a deep socio-economic remedy?

In my opinion - and I will limit myself here to commenting on the situation in France - an important first step would be that the various forces already working on this issue better align their argumentations.

## Aligning the argumentations

Let me start with [Terre des Liens](#). Their [recent decision](#) to put more attention on making small-scale farming more accessible to young people is a great step forward, but it must be embedded in a broader vision of the future that provides a response to the environmental conditions that will threaten the lives of French people in the decades to come.

As it happens, recently ([February 7, 2022](#)), such a broader vision for a low-carbon French economy

was conceived here in France by the Shift project of Jankovici and his coworkers. The name of the plan: Plan de Transformation de l'Economie Française: PTEF.

I consider this plan (see also [this analysis](#) of national plans) to be the world's first truly serious emissions reduction plan. Why?

It has two very strong features: **(a)** detailed step-by-step planning, and **(b)** a more substantial focus on structural **transformations** than on pure energy transition.

Here are some of the key strategic elements of this plan:

- ◆ Relocate and limit (meat, milk, eggs) agricultural production
- ◆ Downsize the cities
- ◆ Reduce private cars (-66%) and flights (-35%)
- ◆ Drastically reduce life-work distances
- ◆ Limit new residential construction
- ◆ Reduce individual energy consumption ("sobriety")

The main strategic choice behind all this is, of course, to bring together the functions of "housing", "producing", "transforming", "buying", "trading", "relaxing", "recycling," and "repairing," and thus, within the framework of land-use planning (= making space accessible), to work on integrating all these functions into the living spaces to be created. Indeed, an essential dimension of the PTEF transformations is that they all converge towards a change in lifestyle that can only be achieved if the French population **moves closer** to agricultural production. To put it briefly: an economy of proximity to primary sources.

### **Many lines of argument reach similar conclusions**

Some argue for a similar policy for the sake of [post-urbanization](#), degrowth, or [livelihood](#), and others - like XR, [Soulèvement de la Terre](#), and the ZADs - for the sake of the ongoing deterioration of all essential living conditions.

[Soulèvements on facebook: *The ecological catastrophe is not to come, it is already there. We will not bring ourselves to contemplate it, helpless, isolated and locked in our homes. The causes and those responsible surround us, they are the ones who participate in the destruction of the soil: creeping concreting, polluting industries, and monopolization of food-producing land by agro-industry. We want to specifically target and block these perpetrators. **We also want to occupy and cultivate the land that has been taken from us.** Because everything suggests that it's now or never we have decided to throw our forces into battle.*]



The fact that all these lines of reasoning tend towards the same final conclusion is only very reassuring. This implies for Terre des Liens that from this future perspective - i.e. a transformed France, more anchored in the world of farming - they can militate much more strongly in favour of a much wider access to an agricultural living space for young people. Major transformations are needed. Integrate cities more with the land by moving a large proportion of young adults

into eco-neighborhoods where they can live independently in small houses/dwellings **on large plots of land**, while producing food and energy.

The size of the plot is therefore decisive in this transformation. Enough land generates enthusiasm and ties. The secret of the success of the [dacha districts](#) around Russian cities is entirely based on this key element.

### **Whose land?**

To trigger this transformation, farmland will have to become the main controllable parameter of our collective decision making. Two questions are key:

➤ Who would have to deliver it?

There is an important turn to be taken by **the rural population** who must share their large living space with the people without land. The rural population is very hostile to local change, don't get me wrong. They will have to stop chasing redundant youth to the cities, to apartments with sports fields, parking lots and shopping malls, and stop closing the doors tightly to all those who want to live simply with low emissions but don't have the means or the good connections to make it happen.

➤ Who should get it?

Young people, of course! If the current wave of outgoing (city) youth – motivated by climate emergency, Covid, war, or social activism – collapses because of the lack of a workable transition to a new habitat, we're going to waste the few years we have left to save the climate before the remaining carbon budget is finally burned up. What I mean is that the **current exodus** has already passed through a sea of mental and economic transitions, and we need to treat them very carefully instead of defusing them or letting them perish in their apartments. Every young adult who hasn't found a place to settle down adjusts their ambitions after three failures and returns to where they came from taking five years to bounce back if they bounce



back at all. The trajectory of exodus from the city includes long delays and many uncertainties, such as weaning oneself from an urban lifestyle and a circle of friends that goes with it and

gaining the trust of potential new exodus partners, acquiring skills for more independent living, etc. They need time, impulse and [dynamics](#) to become mature enough to take concrete steps, because the motivation is never rationally manufacturable or injectable by teaching, as the imperious conceptualization of [Post-Urban plans](#) somewhat suggests. In every human being, the main compass floats in a turbulent soup of thousands of impressions and feelings. And it takes a lot of time and interaction to arrive at a fixed position and stable decisions. But how much time do young people still have?

So policy-makers must work very hard to synchronize the answers to these two questions. How might this be done?

### **Reshaping access to land**

The key idea that needs to emerge among politicians is that they recognize that tackling climate change is only possible by initiating an intensive two-way interaction between land and citizens, and that this reciprocity can only be made stronger by regulating access to land **locally**. Thus, a localized regulation of agriculture is required to trigger the shift to a local low-emission economy.

To make this happen, two administrative proceedings must first be dismantled. Namely:

- On the one hand, the way in which the departmental services currently regulate the installation of young farmers.
- On the other hand, the way in which the local authorities (of cities/villages) currently facilitate and regulate new population settlements by developing new residential zones (= spatial and urban planning).

Subsequently, a new law will have to give the municipalities the leeway to organise themselves the access of young adults to local livelihoods - such as land, housing, workshops, etc.

With this step, we simultaneously create a local decision-making dynamic **to trigger** a self-sufficient circular economy. Because impenetrable access to land is currently the bottleneck blocking any transformation to a low-emission lifestyle. Widening that bottleneck opens up a world of possibilities.

### **Prepare some kindling and light it.**

A logical first step would be to focus plans for new neighborhoods not on people with lots of money, but on young adults who are highly motivated to live emission-free through partial self-sufficiency (food and energy). Regarding this second type of projects, there are already numerous initiatives underway in Europe, both on the demand side

On a national and [European](#) level there is a rapid development of the movement of [lightweight hamlets](#) and [tiny houses](#). The latter is a social initiative advocating voluntary simplicity through the habitation of small houses. It is linked to the "zero waste" movement, oriented to the practice of consuming less and better, avoiding waste through recycling, recovering, valorizing, and throwing away as little as possible. So: a simple way of life, more autonomous, prioritizing being over showing.

and on the supply side

Many European municipalities are already in reaction to these movements by providing space for innovative forms of housing with concrete plans for implementation. See, for example, this



description of [some 20 German municipalities](#) that are preparing large areas of land for the construction of micro-houses with a permanent residence permit ('Erstwohnung').



Some European projects may be large in scale, but in terms of design they fall short of what is essential for the persistence of huge datscha districts around Russian cities, namely: **sufficient land per plot**. In order to grow fruit and vegetables, at least 1500 square meters must be available per family. It is precisely through this amount of land that people are lifted to the scale at which they can regain control of their lives, and work out a low-emission lifestyle for themselves.

Let's suppose that it is decided to divide every available hectare for eco-neighborhood (in an urban plan) into 5 building plots of 2000 m<sup>2</sup> each, equipped with sewer, electricity and water connections, and to distribute them at a **rather low price** – because there is almost no need for roads inside the plots – to young people who want to (let) build a (or two in case there are children) micro-house (< 40 m<sup>2</sup>) on solid ground (and not on trailer) and use it as a main residence, then 5 families could live there at an affordable price (< 50.000 euros) and with very low emissions, because they will live much more outdoors than indoors, and their pursuit of comfort and ease will be strictly limited by other values and goals. By imposing an A-frame model (see photo) on the buyers, for example, it is possible to maximize the surface area for installing photovoltaic panels.



Another deficiency of the current initiatives is that the normal settlement (of citizens and farmers) expansion plans are simply continuing. These should **stop**. They are destructive and are not the kind of fire starters (kindling) with which to jump start a low-emissions economy of proximity.



The vast majority of current so-called eco-neighborhood projects in France will result in very expensive houses (> 200,000 euros) that can be bought and lived in only by families with two good salaries, or by rich retirees. But this group of people can already afford to install low-emission systems in existing homes, and it is a group that (if they move into the eco-neighborhood) will continue to have a GHG-rich lifestyle in other aspects of life (in terms of transportation, travel, entertainment, working elsewhere, and luxury). The installation (with public support) of young farmers must also be **stopped**. The common practice of pipelining young adults into industrial agriculture (and astronomical debts) through donations must be abandoned. For every farmer who stops without a successor, land around a village or town can be freed up through reparcelling and then allocated to eco-dwellers.



By targeting spatial planning **entirely** at people who aspire to a modest, community-based, self-sustaining way of life that combines gardening and housekeeping, local production and care tasks, a circular economy of proximity is really taking hold.

At the same time, many other problematic political issues are being tackled. This new kind of urbanism will slow down the deterioration of the climate, slow down the growth of energy demand, slow down the waste of resources, and improve biodiversity; yes, of course, but it will also:

- decrease local long-term unemployment;
- reduce health problems caused by overspecialization, body immobility, and unhealthy diets;
- prevent addictions to alcohol, drugs, and gambling;
- reduce societal tensions due to unwarranted differences in wealth and income;



- increase local resilience to disasters elsewhere by reducing input dependencies;
- neutralize the current decline  $\Phi$  – caused by excessive and apathetic interaction with virtual realities – of essential human capacities, especially the abilities to learn, value, reason, decide, negotiate, organize, and collaborate.

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#### $\Phi$ Why does partial self-sufficiency cure the degradation of mental capacities?

By linking people vertically to land, physical space, and living objects, such a structure (i.e., a spacious eco-neighborhood) stimulates the development of their physical and mental capacities in an automatic and regular way. After all, there is constant ongoing **exposure** to environmental variables.

Exposure to large (in terms of bandwidth) streams of sensory impressions is the key to human viability. Exposure involves intensive direct contact, that is, contact where something is at stake, where decision-making actions are actually implemented, where decisiveness and care are required. This forced **opening** of mind and body is crucial because it is through these holes that the elementary raw materials of thought and feeling can flow. This determines the subsequent capacity for recalling and is therefore decisive for the ability to get to know and to give meaning and value to things. In this way, direction and **orientation** are developed.

This will counteract the post-modern distancing of young people (and adults) caused by their excessive and passive interaction with virtual (programmed) realities, and their tendency to sink into lethargy and indifference due to their excessive reliance on 'turnkey' solutions provided by specialists, experts and technicians.