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Discussing a survival strategy and its realization

Jac Nijssen¹

1. The idea of survival

● Two notions

The concept of 'survival' is beginning to play an increasingly important role in climate discussions. Not really surprising. If you suspect you're about to perish, survival is the key question. That threat of collapse also clarifies the two main ways in which this concept is currently guiding climate reasoning.

The **first** is, how am I going to survive when all sorts of conditions around me deteriorate to such an extent that the familiar ways won't work anymore. How do I deal with those conditions?

The **second** is, which economic activity is more essential to survive together and what we must prioritize when we have to strip our current lifestyle in such a way that we can prevent essential living conditions from falling into disrepair.

● Emerging

As I said, recently the use of both notions of 'survival' is emerging at the surface of climate discussions like a tsunami from the deep sea of all reports and books on climate issues since 1998. After all, most of those reports implied somewhere that if this or that emission target were not achieved on time, exceptional restrictive measures would become unavoidable. One threatened without mentioning specific issues and also **without wanting** to become specific, because that would put everybody, and many economic activities, in a very uncomfortable position².

After all, as soon as you start suggesting to reduce the grasp-ability of something, social hell breaks loose: because who gets or threatens to get a little less? Rights and claims fly about, and nobody sleeps peacefully anymore. Valerie³ says 'cut back'. Many call for simplicity⁴. It embodies the sentiment that we will never succeed to stop the use of fossil fuels in time without limiting some sorts of consumption.

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- 1 The author is responsible for the outputs of [Afwendbaar](#). This small independent European-based group has focused on structural socio-economic catalysts of global warming since 1999. It is sympathetic to XR and FforF. The main line of this article is based on discussions with several climate activists. Subject and scope were inspired by contacts with the XR-strategy group (UK). The article was written in August 2020
 - 2 This attitude is exactly what Kevin Anderson currently blames academia for. [He argues](#) that on mitigation, the academic community has tailored their conclusions to fit with what they judge to be politically palatable. He concludes: "*Many senior academics, senior policymakers, basically the great and good of the climate world have decided that it is unhelpful to rock the status quo boat and therefore choose to work within that political paradigm*".
 - 3 "In order to stabilise our climate, we must thoroughly transform our way of producing and consuming. To reach 1.5 degrees, austerity is a prerequisite. Using less energy, wasting less primary raw materials, adopt different diet patterns." Source: *Hens T., Climate scientist [Valerie Masson-Delmotte](#) warns: 'Beware of alibi trees', MO, Brussels, february 2020.*
 - 4 In [a survey](#) conducted by the YouGov polling institute for the consultancy firm Greenflex, and supported by Ademe, shows that more and more people are becoming aware of the need to reduce affluence. It is endorsed by 27% of French respondents in 2019, comparing by 14% in 2017 . Overall, nine out of ten French people (and 80% of Europeans) indicated to want to live in a society where consumption is less important.

But in order to limit you have to steer, and in order to steer you have to determine direction (i.e. making choices between alternatives). Even worse: steering means **planning**, because the restrictions have to be divided. Who gets imposed what restrictions, in the light of the degrading environmental conditions to be estimated? And then the distribution of the scarcity must also be done carefully because everyone must be sure of his room to move. All that is a totally different story than letting everyone mess in the neoliberal way, by purposefully not interfering in the volumes traded mutually, and dumping the mess that goes with them in a few deep wells⁵.

● Sneaky packaged

This contamination of the survival concept with social decision-making trouble is undoubtedly the main reason why change and transition proposals did avoid the survival concept in recent years. Kate's donut is, just like the more general sustainability thinking, an example of this. Those proposals continue to suggest expansion space as long as you stay out of certain limits. Such a positive representation of a restrictive future consumption trajectory has been certainly justified because the aversion to the back-to-nature thinking of twig eaters and goat milkers⁶ is nestled so deeply ensconced in the minds of those whose main interests lie in a greater demand for flashier techniques and faster redesign of organisational structures – that any reflection on it would push them over the mental edge, and thus every message in that direction must be metamorphosed and wrapped up with the utmost care⁷.

In that sphere of visionary ideas that revolve around each other, while they fearfully avoid throwing the meat on the table, the survival answer to the climate problem tries ❶ to crystallize substantively, and ❷ to gain a foothold in the minds of the highly heterogeneous (in terms of interests, knowledge, profession, and stage of life) group of climate activists all over the world.

● Hot topic between climate activists

In my discussion last winter with several of these activists, I came across a lot of great uncertainties, core questions and also fears held by them. Mainly about:

- The shaping of the survival strategy i.e. how the resulting lifestyle could look like?;
- The sales pitch around it i.e. how do you get it into the hearts of many, how do you get everyone's up to it?

The second question often preceded the first because climate activists want to communicate something, and after the great protests of 2019 they ended up a bit at the end of their latin in the sense that they wondered how you could go ahead, now the alarm about the threat of extinction of all life has been adequately communicated. Another factor was that many personally found the climate storm so threatening that they preferred to continue preparing (i.e. rearranging their own lives) for a deep adaptation to the misery to come, rather than still believing in ways to prevent global climate disruption.

Okay, let's deal with that last dilemma first based on my answer when an XR rebel asked me an opinion on [Bendell's deep adaptation](#). It will also justify the kind of issues around the survival strategy we are going to evaluate in this paper.

5 Such as criminals in prisons, greenhouse gases in the air, and plastic in the oceans.

6 To whose lifelong commitment (= fighting against the main current) and choices (mostly high risk) today's high-tech population owe a broad supply of organic food, detergents, vitamins and clothing.

7 As for example in this misty formulation: "*We must start investing in what matters, by laying the foundation for a green, circular economy that is anchored in nature-based solutions and geared toward the public good*". Source: Dixson-Declève, Lovins, Schellnhuber, and Raworth, [Green reboot after pandemic](#), may 2020.

● A main split

"I took some time to study the proposals of Bendell. Despite my appreciation for his radical switch in defining the research field of sustainability, I don't quite understand his reasoning. Once we have landed in a collapse, should we suddenly be able to keep ourselves alive with little and also divide it neatly to each other, while we could not do that now to prevent that collapse? Sorry, I can't fully follow that. Are we so completely addicted to this way of life that we must first burn down the house totally before we can set priorities and choose a safe way out to prevent a fatal disaster?

So, his proposal and mine are not the same. While he proposes deep adaptation, I propose superfast mitigation. His approach is defensive and wants to respond to the "inevitable collapse" by boosting the capacities of resiliency, relinquishing bad behaviours, and restoration. My approach is to take the offensive and act **proactive** vis-à-vis the climate catastrophe by **forcing** people to prevent a collapse.

It makes no sense to prepare for unvivable conditions. First of all, climate is such an all-powerful force that once she becomes unstable, ...no salvation of life is possible anymore. Secondary, it's psychologically unwise right now to let the driving forces take their course, and in the meantime to fight with ghost images around climate chaos in order to find out how you could get stuck in there as late as possible. A very unwise way in my opinion, because you can only use the current period of still liveable conditions to prevent those conditions become unvivable. We still have the power and inputs (food, air, diversity) to deal with it. Increasing disruptions will undermine that strength. So we have to rise up now, and strike at the driving forces that are deliberately killing our future. We're at 417 ppm. There's not a moment to lose⁸.

How? In the first place by figuring out the social-economic reorganization that can melt the emissions immediately, secondly by naming and publicly proposing that reorganization, thirdly disturbing the current economic course by using three forces, the adults with guts in their trousers, the teenagers with anger in their heart (FforF is a huge force), and the intellectuals (scientists, students) with a heavy load of doubt about the current use of their innovative capacity⁹. That will do the job if the struggle can long enough endure."

● Jumping back and forth

Of course, this rather firm answer raises a lot of questions. It is far too straightforward to push climate activists out of their climate dilemma. By climate dilemma I mean: That everyone in their struggle to imagine a viable future is **doing the splits**, by swinging back and forth between elements from a high tech future picture¹⁰ and elements from a low tech¹¹ survival picture.

Everybody tries to figure out how and what may be feasible, for their selves, their community, their country, the world. Usually not out loud, of course. Being candid about what you actually do not want to think about, is almost impossible. It locks you up, and stops you from coming up with propositions in a public way. Afraid of pain elsewhere, afraid of losing face, afraid of the chill of choices. The strategy

8 See for example how now – and this abruptness is undoubtedly caused by the recent bushfire crisis – in Australia a newly formed Commission for the Human Future [is calling for](#) the planet to come together and develop a strategy for human survival. "It is time for humanity to act together to secure our future".

9 See the proposal of Chatterton (["The climate emergency and the new civic role for the university"](#)), or the declarations of Steinberger and Grossman (in ["Scientists endorse mass civil disobedience to force climate action"](#)), or the [open letter from](#) the Swiss academic world ("the social contract has been broken").

10 Newest hug: green hydrogen!

11 i.e. technology at a level as described in detail by [Philippe Bihouix](#) since 2014.

discussion is severely affected by this. Everyone continues to swim their own length, back and forth past each other.

However, the cause of doing the splits also lies in the constant weighing up of a climate activist what he puts his energy into.

- a) In **personal** climate actions i.e. restructuring one's own situation, on the one hand out of curiosity as to how living without emissions feels, on the other hand, as a means of disconnection and independence from emission driving forces and thus to be able to take a firm stand against them through a low-emission or zero-waste identity.
- b) Or in **public** climate actions i.e. fighting and convincing the emissions driving forces.

Why does that stimulate the dichotomy?

During the reflection on personal climate action you will notice which techniques you would like to continue using, and how useful certain novelties could be. Each moment there is doubt, searching, letting go and clinging. When you notices how dependent you (still) are on driving forces, you will stay eager to lean on them again. And so you do keep jumping back and forth between the plates full of temptation that techies are serving.

With this figuring out how to work, eat, transport, travel, communicate you are actually giving substance to your proactivity (mitigation) by adapting to a large extent to the fact that we're balancing on the edge of unvivable conditions. This fumbling also explains partly the attention to deep adaptation thinking within the climate movement. Why? Because you sell those restrictions or restrictive proposals to yourself and your environment (proposals that often bothers them highly) by referring to climate conditions that do not yet exist but which you already paint very black. So here we see how the adaptation thought paths and the mitigation thought paths drag each other (through the fire) and shape it. So **no contradiction**. No need of bludgeoning each other out of the loft. They're phases while thinking about interrelated personal and social solutions for the climate problem.

● **But the whole must be right**

Yet it is precisely in these solutions that a (guiding) basic idea must emerge, just as capitalism, socialism, and communism once did. You can't make a fist against the driving forces if you don't come up with a **strong alternative**. Worse still, you don't dare to make that fist. Environmental organizations, sustainability think tanks, and climate groups now come up with long disjointed¹² lists of often radical proposals that lack focus and coherence. I mean, time is getting too short to continue with this jumping back and forth between elements of promising but shaky high-tech futures and elements of safe but fairly primitive organisation of our economy. We have to choose. Single-minded. In order to arrive at a picture of the future that is consistent, not teeming with contradictions¹³, but in which all the elements fit together so that the whole stands as a house.

Okay, let's start looking at the beginning of thinking about a survival strategy within the youngest¹⁴

12 Because of subjects that are not mentioned because they are untouchable in own circle, like international development cooperation, tourism, the foreign student industry, the labor migration, defense, culture.

13 For example, when you strive for a local circular economy because you want to eliminate transport, refrigeration, and packaging out of the production chains, you should stop assuming at the same time that you can keep international trade open.

14 By which I mean: FforF, XR, Code Rood, EndeGelände, Staygrounded, Sunrise, as well as the more established organizations such as Carbonfree, 350.org, Greenpeace and other groups or coalitions (like CAN) that advocate an emergency stop on the use of fossil fuels. About the ancient climate movement –

climate movement, and then discuss the main issues¹⁵ that cause that little progress is made at present in crystallising a coherent survival picture.

2. Core and form

● First abstract designations of a main survival strategy

The first call for far-reaching structural economic measures is, of course, contained in the increasingly common slogan of **system change**. The recent XR uprising has spread this around constantly. It proves that most XR people understand that we need to take a very big step back in terms of lifestyle (standard of living, way of life) if we want to be able to stabilize the climate very quickly, because everyone now realizes that the planned transition to so-called emission-free energy will cause so many fossil fuels to use that meanwhile the CO2 absorption capacity will collapse under our ass.

I see this XR-awareness confirmed in their strategy statement:

*This global action is only possible with global change towards a new social and economic paradigm based on **sufficiency** and respect for our interdependence with the natural world.*

Hervé Kempf urged [recently also in this clear direction](#):

*“And it is even probable that, in rich countries more aware of the climatic danger, in Europe, to put it simply, the very large part of the population has not yet understood that the answer to the ecological crisis will go through **simplicity**, and by a reduction in the average standard of living (even if the reduction of inequalities is a prerequisite for everything). The climate movement will not really move opinions if this bitter prospect does not enter the common consciousness. You have to know how to say and explain that it is our way of life that is to be negotiated. Otherwise, the disastrous effects of uncontrolled climate change will resolve our hesitations”*

Now in the XR strategy is already acknowledged (see “*change towards a new social and economic paradigm*”) that you can’t lower life styles without changing the current societal rules, norms, and laws that regulate the way people interact economically with each other when they exchange goods, services, labour, money, property, and information. Why not? Well, that is because the present societal laws define and regulate a **game** in which everyone is totally directed to upgrading his personal life style and personal domain, if only to not be pulled down on these points. Lifestyles are infinitely expandable and upgradable, and may also sink deeply. It’s an **open** game for more and better positions. Not for less¹⁶. This configuration is unsuitable for enabling people to live sober and simple with dignity and stability.

● How to enrich this strategy?

The survival strategy must be a kind of picture that XR should offer to people. A blueprint of a set of reorganizations of the current society model that everyone can understand. A set of measures that can

with core figures such as Daley, Holmgren, Hopkins, Fleming – and the steady-state economy I wrote appendix 4 in '[The blind spot of climate models](#)'.

15 In which I follow the main lines of discussion that recently took place via my mail-box.

16 Many authors point out the 'social justice' **hurdle** you have to take if you want to restrict access to any of the now accessible economic activities. [Luc Semal](#) puts it concisely with: "The prospect of a drastic reduction in energy comfort raises the question of how to distribute the austerity efforts needed for the transition. These efforts should first weigh on the richest, who are the biggest polluters." Source: *Cholez L., Civilisée ou barbare: De quelle façon allons-nous sortir de la civilisation thermo-industrielle?*, [Reporterre.net](#), july 16, 2019.

safely and stably avert the threat, and also are perfectly feasible in terms of implementation. Yes alright. But can you make that blueprint? Do you have to work it out in detail? Given all the uncertainty, does that not lead to a shot in the dark, and to intellectual bickering about historically grown ideology controversies? And even worse, do you not jump over your primary task, namely that you want to roughly offer people a way out that they can embrace acutely. After all, there is no time for endless weighing. We have to make a move that offers a climate safe future, but which also allows a run, I mean a spontaneous massive **embrace**. After that embrace we can leave it to the spontaneous cooperation that follows that it works out well. Man is inventive to the bone.

No time I say?

Yes, I expect a much faster escalation of very bad¹⁷ news. Everything is going faster than we thought, we are constantly going to be hit very hard. Technicians, scientists, institutions, companies and journalists will also come up with increasingly absurd and dangerous proposals to save us¹⁸, if only to encourage themselves or calm down feelings of guilt.

In this way I want to argue that we should not go into detail on alternative models, but look for a **flashy** representation of a way out that sounds like a clock. That is also the power of Kate's doughnut economy. It is a slogan that appeals, and that converges a lot of proactive thinking activity.

● Flashy strategy

Why a flash, and what should it consist of? To answer that, I would like to comment on what goes through people in a flash when they start to get stuck in a situation.

Such a moment is quite common:

- i. Think of a marriage in which suddenly one of the partners becomes crystal clear because of unfaithfulness of the other: "I cannot and will not continue with this: I have to get out of this"

17 For example, this one [about cloud formation](#). The validity and accuracy of mathematical prediction models suggested with a poker face is completely nonsense. Reality is thousands of times more fine grained and thousands of times more complex in their operating than those models contain. Plus that an abundance of really dangerous positive loops – such as the workings around permafrost, viruses, algae, deep sea, earthquakes, volcanoes, and ozone hole – are not integrated in it (as says Rockström himself, see also the further model shortcomings that Jem Bendell [recently indicated](#) in his response to criticism of his propositions). They are undirected try-outs from back-seat drivers who don't know the limits of the **edge**. People with experience are much more reliable to signal when and what needs to be done, and especially when you need to take cover. We've known for a long time that the number of ppm's per year continues to grow mercilessly, in line with constantly increasing world trade volumes and carbon emissions, so there was no point to continue with comma fucking of mathematical models. The danger signals have long been convincing enough to put very large spokes in the wheels of this deaf and blindly spinning global exchange circus and to be able to justify it morally. But no, this didn't happen. And so, on the basis of seemingly scientifically valid insight into meteorological expansion space, the fossil investors and fossil addicts have run up a life-threatening path, themselves further and further maneuvered to the edge of the abyss and tolerated. Twenty years ago (when the North Pole began to melt unusually quickly and unusual hot summers were arising, and forest fires increased dramatically) we should have acutely renounced fossil fuels, but **we continued to step up** its use in such a absurd way that now we can't take a single punch more or all humanity is going to disappear.

18 Just as they've seduced the energy addicts over the last few decades to **expand** their fossil fuel use, [Anderson](#) says too many models for tackling climate change relied too heavy on "unproven technologies far in the future", such as carbon capture and storage "Perhaps we'll be lucky and they will work at huge planetary scale – but it's one hell of a gamble."

- ii. Or you have a job somewhere, and the business goes bankrupt, so you'll end up on the street tomorrow.
- iii. Or you travel by train, and the locomotive catches fire, causing you to get stuck halfway through your destination

Two things happen there:

1. First one is facing the situation, i.e. to feel the irrevocable and urgent, and also to realize immediately: "This is finished, I have to get out of this, I have to change!!"
2. Then one evaluates possible ways out in a flash on two points:
 - 2.1. Are the costs and benefits of the way out feasible?
 - 2.2. Is the context certain, that is to say that I am not an open target there for disruptions that are even worse than what I am now in, i.e. that surrounding people can accept me to be there and that the situation can stabilize; does it not become a fighting pit there?

In the "feasible" you evaluate the inputs (energy you have to put in, money, persuasiveness) for each way out and the outputs (where can you end up, how certain is that, and what will it yield). For example, in the case of the unfaithful spouse, she is evaluating the possibility of living with an aunt for the time being: "Do I have enough money for that, does he leave me alone there, don't my parents force me to go back? "

That evaluation is all done in a **flash**. It is those flashes that go through you when you travel grumpy in the evening from work to your apartment, in the dark by bus passing beautiful lighted houses with beautiful interiors, and you secretly wonder if living in such a place with your loved one could be something for you, and you immediately realize that you will never have the means/resources for it. Look, the first thing you do when evaluating a possible change of life situation (work, partner, house, child, sinking ship, crashing car) is figuring out which fixed costs are involved, and how sure the benefits are (in context of a dynamic environment). When those signals goes red you don't evaluate further at all.

I mean to say that in that flash everything revolves entirely around the **resources/means** that are available to you at that moment, and how you can jump out of your jammed or unpleasant situation through an opening. In the unfaithful spouse example, the woman may have evaluated in that flash: "I have my aunt, I have my bike, I know the way, and my aunt makes sure my parents stay out of this; so I'm gonna do that!!". And then look, she has determined her way out.

● The flash

In such a flash you look for viable possibilities. Let me use the metaphor of the sinking Titanic to explain more clearly what is ultimately essential in that flash.

Passengers were seated comfortably, with all services, in a gigantic self-consciously well-organized progressive whole. The Titanic is similar to how urban culture nowadays envelops people; every citizen functions in a web of global dependency relationships (inputs and outputs). When that boat tilted, there was really only one major management problem that had to be strategically figured out: How do we get everyone well-distributed and orderly as quickly as possible in the lifeboats?

That was a bit prepared of course. There were teams for that. But every situation is different, and the main problem was also that a large part of the leading crew thought that the ship could not sink (double hull), so that the need for a survival concept did not arise with great urgency in their minds. In the meantime, there were a couple of them who felt goddamn well what was coming, and they started off with an emergency response. Their two biggest problems?

1. Make sure that people enter a state of alarm, that they are looking for a way out and that they therefore need a **survival image**. I think you should strategically wait here for the ship to tilt. I mean, the power of climate change is our biggest jack at the moment. It must pound as hard as possible, so that they get diarrhoea from the shock, and head in the right direction.
2. Do guide and keep calm the growing stream of survival seekers so that you get them well distributed in the lifeboats, and then those boats on the water. This can be done by screaming: "All to the life-boats immediately"

Is that all? Yes, I think so. That one **scream** can do the whole job, if it is put together properly. Look, if those boats are well stocked and end up well, then they themselves are able to withstand the circumstances (waves, wind, hazards) and find out how and what. Resiliency is super fast, it really doesn't require a manual.

● Towards a survival flash

That is also how I see our task ahead. The cities must be unfolded. **Low-carbon life** can only be achieved by **decoupling** people from centralized productions and services, and from all global flows and mining that go along with them. Everyone has to live a rural life, perform their essential care (food, clothes, shelter, health, safety) much more manually, so that little complex tools are needed, and also little control above that, so that the primary productions are not burdened with high fixed costs. The local lifeboat consists of land, seed, plants, trees, cattle, rain, sun, and house plus some communal facilities. I don't think any manual is necessary for the organization of that local life, people are perfectly capable of, and want to be, able to set it up and figure it out for themselves.

No, the main problem is: how do we get everyone in that direction in time (see stage 1 of the titanic flash), and how do we arrange the **property transmission** (see below) in such a way that we can assign people their place in time (= assigning accessibility = stage 2 of the titanic flash) .

Also with this problem, just like with the Titanic, we run into leaders who estimate that the situation is cool, and farmers who use the lifeboats (= land, space, resources, homes, farms, and sheds) for other purposes. But the more skew their structures hang in the air because of the tilting climate, their earning models collapse, the more cooperative they will become in preventing a civil war.

If not, war is on, and they know that.

Remember the shout "All to the life-boats immediately". This scream contained exactly so much information on the sinking ship that everyone could evaluate and approve that way out (= go to sea with a lifeboat away from the sinking ship). That is all that had to happen at that time. We (= XR) want to show the way, so we have to look for that **scream**. We must figure out its content. It must be something that everyone can immediately feel: "Yes, that could work for everyone, and offers a safe way out of this dangerous situation". At that moment spontaneous cooperation arises, the noses are moving in the same direction, so that they can implement the way out quickly via self-organization (instead of difficult top-down organization and a lot of guidance).

● What should the flash contain in the first place?

Let me now further explain why I think the **property assignment** should form the core of the scream with which you point everyone to the survival picture (= life-boat)¹⁹.

19 It also fits seamlessly with the important **empowerment principle** of the [new economics movement](#): "Systematic empowerment of people (as opposed to making and keeping them dependent), as the basis for people-centred development." And also fits in their thesis "that a general shift in emphasis from generating more income (= conventional economics) to generating less expenditure (= new economics),

A survival picture must fulfill minimally: (a) people have to survive and therefore need at least enough food and water and shelter all year round, (b) it must be low-carbon (in order to stabilize the climate). But if you recommend this rudimentary form to someone, they will immediately think of the means/resources that they lack to obtain such a place. I have seen many individuals and groups come and go, searching a low carbon life style. Their absolute key problem: **acquisition of property**, and the fixed costs and social-economic access requirements involved. After all, what is the pivot of every economic activity? That is the place where the process can take place, and the way in which that place is positioned in its environment. Being properly positioned is essential to embrace a place. But all space is occupied, so nowadays you have to buy a place expensive, and therefore you have to make production and also keep a job elsewhere, and with that you limit the possibility of running your processes with little or no fossil energy²⁰.

Another lack of this rudimentary form is **context stability**. Nobody sees him or herself survive in an environment where competition is admitted, and even a must to defend and continue situations. Competition is caused and reinforced by our current rules and laws around the transmission of property. Look, the way in which we now transfer property (through inheritance, income surpluses, banking decisions) has the disadvantage that everyone remains insecure about their proper place and reserves throughout their lives. Everyone keeps on pushing and grabbing to more; to blankets and **buffers** around his situation. No one has never enough because there is always a mightier party around that may attack and grab your portion of the means you have acquired. This insecurity and uncertainty ignites growth, expansion, **competition**, and therefore innovation, because innovations can make you stronger and leaner than competitors.

Well, in the survival picture (= a social-economic setting whereof you expect that as many people as possible can withstand the coming climate dynamics) you have to neutralize that growth ignition, and the uncertainty caused by that. Then people get calm, and don't feel threatened anymore. They stop

is a necessary aspect of the shift to sustainable development". Reducing inputs (= costs) means positioning people more autonomously and vertically. (Quotes from [Robertson](#)).

- 20 Look what happened during [the development](#) of the **eco-village Boekel**. At first there was an enthusiastic group of people who wanted to live and work in their own way. Maybe it was originally a TT group. They occupy a 11 acres plot of land and install mobile homes where gradually more and more families are staying, temporarily and permanently. Protests are coming from the neighbouring residential area. Indignation about children playing in the mud there. Then the town deprives them of 8.5 acres on which nothing has yet been built. They're told to leave. Then a dialogue is established and they must promise to build houses according to national housing standards. Eventually they make a building plan with about 30 climate-positive houses and a [lot of attention](#) for materials (no cement) and energy consumption. Then you see how this project is going to be wrapped up in debt. The municipality sells them the land (2.5 acres) for more than 1 million euros. They collect this money by crowdfunding plus the sale of certificates (with 2% interest). On top of that, a German cooperative bank lends them 4,5 million with 2.2% interest and the province also borrows 1 million. The construction has just begun. Everything is done by construction companies. See [this link](#). So in the end you see that their initial longing to decouple from the current economy only ends up with the fact that they will be able to live emission-free in terms of housing. But they must all continue to work in that current economy to be able to pay and repay the burdens. They do have plans to do something about food, but (a) they already have too little territory for that, and (b) how much time are they able to spend on it, all the more because their collective organization needs a lot of regulating (think of coordinating care for maintenance and mutual relationships, handling procedures regarding departures and new entrants, managing financial input and output).

pushing and expanding , because they are constantly certain about the availability of their primary means of subsistence. Otherwise, when everyone has to go backwards, they keep pushing each other away from the resources that remain, meanwhile boosting emissions and causing fatal degradation. So, by eliminating the competitive element of our mutual economic actions, we also get to grips with the interaction element (source of most emissions). Those two main elements of our economies (i.e. the competitive element and the interaction element) now make the use of fossil fuels by definition insatiable²¹.

● Why the accessibility issue has to be an essential point of attack in any climate battle?

All this has led to the fact that reorganizing the **transfer of property** is playing a major role in my survival picture²². I argue that free and equal accessibility to the local means is a key condition for installing people in such a way that they can stably construct an emission-free lifestyle through local circular processes. See also [my plan X](#).

In short: such a survival idea boils down to:

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- 21 We have established a fairly efficient global economy. It is an **interaction** economy. Runs actually all about transportation and transfer. It's an exchange circus; enormously energy-dependent and energy-consuming. First of all, we did split up all production processes (and connected in serie) and geographically disseminated, and scaled up every particle, so we have to transport everything back and forth. In addition, we did specialize each human effort in relation to those processes to the bone, so that we are constantly busy connecting the inputs from one to the outputs of the other. Second, within that whole circus there's a huge mass of research and design activity to ensure that tomorrow everyone takes a step different, better and faster than his competitor can run, because all that specializing, scaling up, splitting up, and relocating is outcome of a **competition** between countries, organisations, and individuals to attract as much exchanges in a particular area as possible in order to provide livelihoods.
- 22 It is true that such a type of proposal is treated by many authors and thinkers under the umbrella term **social justice**. But in my opinion that concept is far too broadly interpretable. It contains ❶ too much condemnation and disapproval of the economic game as we've played it so far. Let's not go bickering about how that game grew, and why who became the winners, and others the losers. Let's not imagine ourselves being able to judge and condemn that whole completed historical dynamic. That game has been played. Mandela gave a shining example of how to get past a bogged game.
- My second ❷ objection to the social justice concept is stuck in its **paternalistic** tone. It reminds me of the slowly ingrained habit of governments to use a gamma of arrangements to compensate the failure and vulnerabilities associated with the unbridled interplay of economic forces, and make it bearable for all participants. With all the alienation, control, and related costs. Meanwhile, the elite remains responsible (are at the wheel), and the rest remains compensating (festivals, fun, consumption, trips) playing the back-seat driver. That role play brings us not on the right cohesion track. With such a social justice approach you avoid the problem, or puts it on somebody else's plate, or uses it ([Jancovici](#) advocates this) as an argument to build additional nuclear power plants because you fear the violence between the classes if not enough energy is allocated to them. The problem isn't just the behaviour of the rich, it's the behaviour of everyone around, shopkeepers, self-employed, employees, unemployed. Everyone must re-organize his complete household, namely fossil-free to the deepest reaches of all its dependencies (i.e. inputs and outputs). That's not a question of more tax for the rich, more income for the poor, and keeping the rich responsible for bread and butter, but to draw up every member of society equivalent and viable in terms of resources, knowledge and skills, and in that way to ensure that everyone is able to carry his own weight. No more top-down game, but everyone active in equal positions on a level playing field.

"Enable everyone to produce locally in a low-tech circular way the essential goods and food for a simple life-style, through equal access for all to the local means of subsistence".

I can draw up a whole list in which specific battles for access to local space and means took place:

- x Each eko village goes through a fight with local authorities in order to obtain the right to construct and operate in its own way;
- x Think of squatting complexes, usually monasteries, which were then regularized into experimental living communes;
- x Think of occupied areas around airports that have been regularized into experimental agricultural areas after persistent resistance;
- x Think of the recent struggle of people that want to settle in tiny houses;
- x Think of city farms fighting for space and adaptation of hygienic and social requirements, so that they can apply multi-level vegetable cultivating and recycling techniques.

So the deepening that I recommend on the XR strategy message ([see original here](#)):

*"This global action is only possible with global change towards a new social and economic paradigm based on **sufficiency** and respect for our interdependence with the natural world. The basic action point of this new paradigm consists of fast upscaling of individual **accessibility** to all local resources."*

This will make everyone interact much more vertically with their own resources and immediate environment. That extinguishes a lot of long-distance interactions. Within an intensive local setup they have no use, and there's almost no time for it. Plus, because everyone's sure of their own resources, which can not be obtained by others, you also wipe out the growth ignition in the social-economic system.

3. First main criticism

● Please explain!

From the interpretation of a social survival strategy described above, it was not so much the direction as certain *details* that aroused great curiosity, annoyance and criticism. The criticism was mainly for the following paragraph ([see original here](#)):

The cities must be unfolded. Low-carbon life can only be achieved by **decoupling** people from centralized productions and services, and from all global flows and mining that go along with them. Everyone has to live a rural life, perform their essential care (food, clothes, shelter, health, safety) much more manually, so that little complex tools are needed, and also little control above that, so that the primary productions are not burdened with high fixed costs. The local lifeboat consists of land, seed, plants, trees, cattle, rain, sun, and house plus some communal facilities.

From those reactions I understood that I was asked kindly but urgently: What does this look like in the detail? And so I answered what follows.

● Unfolding cities?

I did not mean mass deportation and city demolition. What matters to me is the **direction** that will be chosen to downsize emissions. Main orientation: City people will have to move more towards life on the land in order to reduce emissions quickly. It can occur gradually. People can also initially continue to live in cities if good and frequent transport is set up, allowing them, for example, to properly exploit a parcel of land ten kilometers from their home. Just like old times as the allotments were just outside the city, and everyone cycled down there.

A similar initiative of such a transition is a project in Amsterdam, called Kaskantine. It is a mobile modern farm²³ that is being used by the municipality for abandoned building plots to fulfill a bridging function between interested local residents on common essential subjects like food and body. So it's about the **direction**. Something TT (= Transition Towns) did not want to be clear about, but I will come to that later.

In summary, I see two main reasons for urban implosion or meltdown.

- The first is very practical, and involves the realization of the "**decoupling**" (see [Please explain](#), above). You can not shrink the global flows (including their ongoing energy and resource-consuming technological refurbishments) if you do not ensure that city dwellers have something else to do. If people do not have to commit themselves physically and mentally to live from the local natural growth processes, they keep doing other things which consume energy. If they are working full-time on basic processes in an integrated way (= thinking, acting, moving, observing, feeling), they don't drive their cars, they don't go shopping, they don't fly, they don't surf the internet, they don't eat out of home, etc. And this is the only way to shut down imports and to domesticate energy consumption.
- The second is psychological²⁴ and social. A person cannot appraise or value an object or a process if he does not deal with it. Only by intensive use of muscles and limbs and senses a person develops his feelings. That stuff cannot be injected by words or taught by teachers. Feelings are the main ingredient in shaping values, and also to get those values play a strong role in the process of thinking. Only something that comes out of your heart when you think about it (= feeling in what way it is important to you) can straighten your thoughts, can prepare intentional behavior, and then tackle it firmly. I wrote recently a book²⁵ about the role that exposure has for feeling development²⁶, and for keeping our weighing of feelings in good shape (values are credit balances of feelings). By linking everyone fairly parallel to the same kind of environment/domain, not only development of feelings is ensured, but it is also much easier to achieve a great convergence in values between society members (and therefore social

23 Modern because they generate their own energy, purify all their waste water and grow fish on it, and grow vegetables on multi floors and without land, also process surpluses from supermarkets, and prepare meals every day for the neighbourhood. See kaskantine.nl

24 Recall what I wrote about the Titanic: "Passengers were seated comfortably, with all services, in a gigantic self-consciously well-organized progressive entity" (see [original here](#)). The Titanic is similar to the way urban culture envelops people today and serves them very well.; every citizen does function in a web of global dependency relationships (inputs and outputs) that keep their comfort cocoon going. They live in an incubator functioning with tubes, and selector buttons to have contact with global situations and artificial ones such as games, TV, films, posts, via bright screens. In this way people are damaged and cannot keep themselves whole. That is also made clear, by the fact that almost everyone needs specialist care nowadays.

25 « Tackling Human Complexity » for sale by Amazon or libris.nl or any book shop.

26 The development of feelings is a self-organizing neuronal process in response of input fluctuations from outside. Someone who counts banknotes all day long develops completely different areas of feeling (and therefore valuations) than a carpenter or a farmer. Does anyone have had enough exposure to hunger and thirst for example in order to be able to long for food and water and to prioritize his different longings? Exposure and thus continuous maintenance and development of the peripheral (contact) nervous system is a primary condition for a balanced development of emotionality, affectivity, and control capacity in both thinking (thoughts) and doing (action plans).

cohesion) than in the case that everyone is connected in series with his speciality and deals with a disjunct part of reality where a great deal of responsibility is also relieved from it by much organizational control from above.

The above mentioned justification of making '*an equal rural positioning of everyone*' a main structural element of a survival picture, can be better understood by the second doubt that some people mailed me, namely what level of life will be possible there and desirable to be. They interrogated what it could look like.

● **What do humans on a practical level need to live well?**

Look, here you can look at all sorts of alternative living groups about how they first form a collective and then try to shape a shared dream based on the environmental conditions. Basic elements are usually: autonomy, self-provision, and off-grid in terms of energy.

But I think it is much more important to look for the conditions that make collective decision-making about controversial issues²⁷ lean and easy²⁸. **This is essential.** If everyone wants to go in a different direction all the time, and long deliberations won't end, very difficult unworkable compromises have to be implemented with high chance that they will be evaded and even reversed. There will be more control than process. A great control device is needed to regulate dissidence.

My proposition is that once you (through the **accessibility principle** of '*an equal rural autonomous positioning of everyone*') have come firmly in the track of great social cohesion (i.e. once you created the basics for great social cohesion), the figuring out and take stock of how much infrastructure you still have locally²⁹, regional³⁰, and national³¹ to afford to function within the limits of national emission limits, will become a piece of cake. Where everyone has the same interests to the same extent, social decisiveness and practicability are rock-solid.

I have elaborated this accessibility principle in more detail in the AUTTOE approach in the dutch book *De dode hoek van klimaatmodellen*³². The most important feature of this economic approach is that everyone acts autonomously in ownership of an equal part of the national available space and assets (houses, buildings, sources, resources) but the ownership only applies for the time of someone's working life (30-60th year of life). These portions can be exchanged between owners, but can't be traded, and not inherited. Ownership is therefore temporary and not stackable or expandable³³.

27 Such as dealing with emission limits and the consequences that those must have on essential elements of the lifestyles such as limiting birth rate, lifespan, health care, defence, travelling and communication, research, education, etc.

28 I mean, with quick unanimity and a lot of joint effort.

29 Such as how many tractors / buses do you need per village, how many solar panels, how much cotton and calcium must be supplied, how many work- and kitchen-tools, how many educational resources?

30 Such as how many doctors and dentists, how much reproductive material, how many windmills, how much steel and copper, how many servers ?

31 About trains and boats, culture, national administrations.

32 = [The blind spot of climate models](#). You may read a one page summary of the main reasons for increasing autonomous accessibility [via this link](#). And a summary of details [via this link](#).

33 So each part cannot be expanded, enlarged or reduced. Assets are therefore always distributed among the population. No one can in any way obtain anything more than he is assigned. In fact you thereby create a society that unites the liberal element of capitalism with communal controlled rules of transmission. Although **capitalism** is primarily a way of dealing with reserves/stocks, this way has mainly been based

What do I want to communicate with this?

That the concern about how simplicity (i.e. "*what humans on a practical level need to live well*") can take shape, can be left with confidence to the concrete situation of equal and parallel lined up participants. This is difficult to imagine in advance. And why should we? It is not a concern at all. Producing special qualities in lifestyle once essential conditions are secured is a personal outing. Besides, every country has different locations, different climate, different population structure, different history and customs³⁴.

But let's take a look together at the movement that has so far been the most prominent advocate of downsizing long distance economic activity, namely TT (transition towns). Have they clearly defined a feasible limited lifestyle?

● **Wait and see, says TT**

The TT movement started the discussion on energy-reducing strategies regarding transportation, food production ('food feet, not food miles), waste and recycling and repair, and economic traffic (local currencies), and did spend most of its efforts on the emotional impact of changing to a low energy world (building resilience).

However, they have underestimated the rate of climate change, and overestimated the speed at which peak oil would turn up. They thought that increasing scarcity of oil and gas would immediately reduce energy consumption. That the depletion of fossil energy sources would force humanity to run its economy on less energy. But that dream did not come true. Peak oil was wishful thinking. The TT movement (including Postcarbon) did not identify the deep causes behind the global energy addiction, namely the key role of energy in winning or losing any economic market situation. In fact that role makes it impossible to drag an energy-addicted society out of the track of unbridled oil extraction and oil consumption. Fracking came, deep-sea sources and polar-sea sources became exploitable, tar fields too, and many new sources were traced. There is sufficient fossil energy in stock to boost the CO2 level of the atmosphere in no time up to 1000 ppm.

on a practice of strong mutual competition for access, and less on practices in which equal division was useful. It therefore contains two design errors, it makes excessively unequal access possible, and it secures nobody to a basic extent. It is propelled by the need for cushions/back ups/reserves. And so actually makes itself necessary. More and more blankets around you, buffers for when, for later, for the children if then. Everyone keeps on grabbing, there is no end to it. It is cruel and limitless.

The mistake of **communism** is in their reformatory character by applying the idea of the commons too deep into the private lives of the inhabitants. All those private places had to be broken open and regulated because they also opted for making everyone's efforts highly productive by training people to become specialists and then connecting them in series in large-scale production processes. But that meant on the one hand that everyone was exposed one-sided, and therefore started to diverge (qua values, knowledge, living condition), and on the other hand concatenating in series of highly centralized production processes caused intensive long-distance exchange lines between the processes. If you then have to coordinate all that, you get a mountain of planning and control, and a prison regime for everyone.

34 There are different ingredients (means/resources, people) everywhere, which means that a wide variety of life styles can be produced. See, for example, how quickly in Africa the concept of "[zero-waste farming](#)" has been realized and spread once governments made enough land available. In fact, this form of farming is the same as the mixed farming that did flourish for centuries in Europe and America, but in this case without the blood-sucking effect (through lease, rent, services, and taxes) of castle lords, churches, banks, investors, and governments.

Look, TT has always thought: the growth economy will run into its own limits, and will then adjust the social rules that make it impossible to stop this destructive growth. In the meantime, we go steadily preparing life under restrictive circumstances, they thought, and so they have focused on giving courses/conferences. But TT can wait a very long time for that moment to come, because why would the elite (i.e. the winners) change their own rules? And if, then how? TT, hoping for peak oil, continued to avoid that question. They have hardly demanded free access to local means, have hardly proposed feasible economic reorganizations, and have not wanted to face up to the fact that you will probably have to reduce/cut all global mainstreams in order to maintain local growth power of crops and trees. They did not identify nor attacked the catalytic role of crucial society rules³⁵. Thus, their vision of what level of life we will have or will be able to maintain, and how to get there, has not further been developed³⁶.

It's not surprising, incidentally, that movements that reasoned less from the urban side and more from the rural side – like Women's Earth and Climate Action Network, Local Futures, Via Campesina, and Soil Not Oil – have for a long time been expressing themselves much more clearly on the subject of an alternative socio-economic approach than most recent sustainability and climate movements. Less rooted in trade, finance, and services they were less reluctant to mentally dismantle some rock-solid economic rules of the free trade game.

Two examples:

- x The package that Shiva ([Soil Not Oil](#)) lists contains all the main points for a strong and consistent survival plan. **Her proposition:** *Root the economy in a fertile soil; power down energy & resource consumption, power up collective democratic energy, break free from “global supermarkets”, live lightly, defend small farmers and indigenous communities, and give everyone equal rights to ecological space.*
- x [The sketch by Norberg-Hodge](#), the founder of Local Futures, is rather complete but less seaworthy, because it does steer towards a rural solution but does not make clear how to change the transfer of property (pieces of rural) in order to realize and stabilize that solution. **Her proposition:** *This is not about ending global trade or industrial production, but for most of our needs, we will need to shift towards smaller scale and more localized structures: decentralized, community-controlled renewables for energy, revitalized local food systems to feed us, and robust local business environments to employ more people and keep wealth from draining out of our communities.*

35 At the moment I see substantive criticism of economic structures developing at, for example, Staygrounded. See their [position paper](#) (“*Instead of aiming to triple the volume of transport by 2050, we need to reduce the demand for goods from far away and develop localised economies. The aim here is climate protection, not nationalist-style protectionism. This can and needs to happen alongside maintaining multi-cultural and open minded societies*”). And at XR of course. They dare to denounce social and economic structures. Whatever. No matter how deep. Quite chaotic, okay, but the basic attitude – that the current climate threat justifies major upheavals – is a big step in the right direction.

36 From the very outset, Postcarbon has also adopted that wait-and-see attitude. It is true that they have propagated the rural solution ([see link](#)), and partly worked it out, but they did not have formulated any economic interventions as to how you can make that rural solution possible en masse. It is as if these movements are reluctant to imagine a rural future for themselves. As if food is not their prime cup of tea, and can be handled with by farmers (and banks!).

4. Second main criticism

● The fear wall

Last winter Greta gave a speech to the world elite in Davos. I wrote an admiring [article](#), suggesting that she would not only have asked that elite, "*How are you going to explain to your children that you did not give the zero-emission option a try*", but also very pithy had proposed a survival strategy³⁷.

She could have said the following:

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are facing the choice between losing the earth and losing a part of our prosperity. I am sure that most earthlings are willing to choose the second option when offered a set of cohabitation rules (= alternative social model = **survival concept**) that allows them to relinquish part of their prosperity **in a decent way**.”

She could have elaborated the forgoing as follows:

"We will achieve that zero-emission goal in the short term only if we strongly reduce the global series-connected production processes as well as all communication and traffic flows. This is only possible if we relinquish a considerable part of our prosperity. However, such a collective trajectory cannot be realized under the current economic game rules because that game is designed to win, not to take a collective step back and give up prosperity. After all, the current game rules do not guarantee that someone who sacrifices prosperity can trust others to do the same, nor do they prevent such a sacrifice causing a free fall in the social hierarchy. We are currently in a race for resources. No one ever has enough because there will always be someone in the vicinity waiting to undermine or obtain already acquired resources. This insecurity leads to growth, expansion, competition, and – consequently – innovation in order to beat others. This never stops.

We must therefore adopt – perhaps only temporarily – **a safer arrangement** for everyone. Ensuring equal access for all to local livelihoods (land, water, homes) could be the solution because such an arrangement not only neutralizes the game, it also guarantees that everyone can fulfill their life's basic necessities (food, clothing, shelter, health, distraction) in an almost emission-free way via local circular processes. 'Equal rules for everyone, and equal resources within reach' is the basic prerequisite for realizing very quickly the zero-emission option."

Of course, the reaction of climate campaigners to my Greta-proposal was snappy. They immediately asked themselves: Can you deliver such a message? Communicating giving up prosperity is going to be extremely tricky as this is the opposite of what most people aim for!

This **criticism** has as improvement that not the goal is denounced but the way to it is. So let us focus now on that **implementation trouble** around a survival strategy.

So we have to say more about how climate groups can shape their actions if they would develop more content in their work of socio-economic change, then just pointing out the great urgency. How do you incite people to very different forms of society, how do you get people ripe for major economic structural changes? What happens when you just barg in with a compact proposal that immediately puts their current jobs at risk?

That kind of campaigning is much more far-reaching than pointing out a danger, because with every bit of content you come up very close to where they are nestled in a web of stable organized relationships, and put a strange setup with completely different rules of play instead. You show them a great twist. And then happens what always happens, namely that every change is scary. Very, very scary. Why do

³⁷ A survival strategy in line with what has been discussed above.

people miss the bend? Why do a lot of people get too fat? Why do many people smoke and drink themselves to death? Because changing an existing situation into a desirable one triggers three emotions³⁸, that shake up and steer mental processes like a swing mill at a fairground. **The existing situation** is therefore stuck tremendously. They can see the bend, but doing nothing is easier.

Let's use the above mentioned sigh (' *Communicating giving up prosperity is going to be extremely tricky*') and see which principal troubles are teasing the implementation of a survival strategy, and how we can then organize climate campaigning accordingly.

● **Change is the worry, not prosperity**

Let's first deduce that the assumption that a survival proposal merely throws 'giving up prosperity' on the board of mankind is cuddlesome thinking. I mean: you crawl up on their lap, and confirm them in the value of their hug. XR herself says that the situation is hopeless, that all our affluence is hanging on a silk thread above a ravine. When your essential living conditions are about to implode, don't call it prosperity any more³⁹.

So, given the current threat to that prosperity from climate escalations, there is no question of giving up. You don't have to give up anything if it's already unrealizable. It's just not a viable option anymore. Our prosperity is based on energy-guzzling global dependencies. This structure (= a global high-tech interaction economy) is turning itself into a morass of endless pain and cruelty.

Secondly, I do not immediately see that a survival trajectory implies reducing affluence. Without a car, without luxury, without being able to travel, is that less prosperity? Of course it does not have to be. It may be that what you do next – for example, a more direct and daring and constant and closer contact with natural and social processes in a local low-tech circular economy – produces much more peace and well-being than can be scored within the global infrastructure of shops, websites, care centres and tourist paradises.

Is it not the case that these kinds of questions, anticipations of what you will evoke when you take to the streets with such proposals, arise entirely from both your own fear of proposing **changes** and the wall of unrest that you feel when you estimate how much fear is going to wave through people when you preach that we must radically change our mutual economic relations in order to survive?

In fact, I don't think most people are at all opposed to a loss of affluence. Yes, of course at the point where nobody wants to be the first to surrender anything, but not against the general idea. The mental knot is much more a result of the horror in the background. The horror to have to question the current status quo. So **reluctance to change**. Very healthy and normal. The chair is warm, and it's all so nicely arranged. The houses, the facilities, the harbours, the ports, stations, institutes, regulations, etc. etc.

So the aversion comes from having to think and talk about changing an ingrained and stabilized way of doing things – in terms of mutual manners, in terms of mutual relationships, in terms of laws and correction procedures, in terms of mutual care. Every change is scary. What do you get in return? The unstable, uncertain nature of it, grabs you by the throat.

I think this **scary** nature of the change inhibits much more than the possible reduction in personal prosperity. How to overcome? Intellectual (i.e. dissolve by logic⁴⁰), or natural (i.e. guided by fear⁴¹).

38 Namely unrest because of the task of bringing solutions to a successful conclusion, fear because of investigating eventualities, and hope for feasible solutions.

39 And this is increasingly publicly endorsed. Everyone is groping in the dark, but surveys show that the drive to search and grope has increased enormously, and that many people really dare to think about changing their lifestyle. See Suzanne Moore ([reinvent ourselves](#), the arts of life).

● How to handle the fear for change

This brings me to a point of criticism. I have an abhorrence of isolated thinking. It paralyzes, and often serves that purpose. Let me explain.

The separation of thinking, feeling, and handiwork (or acting in general) is the stupidest thing mankind has ever done. Why?

Actually, mainly because thinking **disconnected** from broad and continuous streams of inputs is very dangerous. You can think anything. That can sometimes be useful to come up with something new, okay, but can also lead to fairy tales, illusions, mazes, deadly embraces, and complete paralysis. Mind should be used, but should then be turned off to give room to acting, and to feeling. I mean, mind should not dominate and stand in the way of acting and feeling. Our senses can bring in great streams of information. These information flows are essential to check and adjust our values and knowledge. Those input **flows** are generated and broadened by acting and then feeling what is happening⁴². You can better understand my resistance to isolated thinking if you know a little more about my past. As is described in [the foreword](#) to Tackling Human Complexity.

In my opinion, the scientific underestimation of the climate problem is also a consequence of such overspecialized mono-disciplinary thinking. Scientists are all so defensively entrenched in their fields of study, so impoverished in terms of the bandwidth of variables outside their own field, that they no longer have an overview of the dynamics of the whole of which their field is a part, but often pretend to have.

I see it as part of the current imperialist power thinking that their specialists in solving problematic situations immerse themselves in that specialty in such a way that they get stuck in it, i.e. want to design completely rational solution trajectories and see through all the consequences, but within the preconditions of all those things that the seated elite **wants to keep untouched**, such as international and social relations, and of course our current lifestyle..

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- 40 Using game theory and risk models for example. The weak point of these models is that no valid descriptions are available to predict both individual and group behavior. See [for example](#) E. Ostrom's criticism on using the prisoners dilemma model to describe the dynamics (tragedy) of the commons. Without those essential equations those exercises and computations make just as much sense as reading the tea leaves. Developing and applying these models is expensive fortune telling (divination). Their commitment by the wealthy and powerful elites also serves that purpose. See us do magic. See us make futures translucent. Hokus pocus pilatus pas. All in all a theater made up to impress people.
- 41 **Fear** is actually the mentally passing through (giving attention and experiencing virtually) the states in which you could end up if you were to perform a certain act. When deciding, you always try to find out the possible consequences of each choice option. During this feedforward activity, to be on the safe side, you also check the different scenarios of how the things **you don't control** can influence those consequences. In this contingency (eventualities) study you let your likes and dislikes that would be triggered by certain consequences if they would actually happen, actually determine which options are acceptable for you, and which ones are not at all. So it's an excellent mechanism because you're more likely to be in the shit than you get out of it. That's why: Fear regulates the heartbeat of feedforward. Fear is worth its weight in gold. But [dealing with it](#) can also be quite unpleasant.
- 42 The continuous confrontation with an undeniable **reality** forces our thought processing to honesty (about what we can't) and humility, and even a kind of submission, suggests M. Crawford. Without manual activity we are inclined to believe that reality is what we make of it and start living in our models/stories. See Crawford M., The case for working with your hands, Viking, London, 2009.

So if you are going to use this model yourself in a counter-movement, you put yourself, as it were, in the chair of such exaggerated solution thinking, and present yourself as such to your audience (supporters, peers). But excessively continuing to think about the possibilities of mutual movement is typically a sport of those who do not yet feel the water on their lips, and can afford to continue to evaluate situations; often only out of resistance to facing fundamental changes in their current comfortable position within it, and also to delay the communication with opponents.

● The natural way

On the other hand, there is the way of practically merciless striking the moment a situation becomes dangerous, the moment you begin to feel really uncomfortable. In the women's lib movement there was a saying: **don't make a mountain out of it**, take a step, make a small start, then you change something, you detach something loose, that's what makes it look different, others start reacting as well, new openings come up that you couldn't come up with beforehand. In short: the attitude of well-considered jumping in troubled water, suggesting possibilities, and bombarding your opponents with it. This is the way I propose. It can start with a small collection of deliberate slogans that concisely express what social and economic development you crave and long for.

This approach was often followed in the seventies and eighties⁴³ and with success. Large-scale actions were prepared in grassroots groups, and then argued to the whole of civil society, so that a broad consensus was eventually created in society. A wall that governments could no longer ignore, and so initiated legislation.

How did this resistance grow during those years? Remarkably, **in each of those movements**, that there **was a clear basic idea** put forward as to what was at stake and what the social conflict was about⁴⁴. So **there was content**. Otherwise, of course, you can never be successful in the natural way. I mean there must be wool to start knitting collectively. So at this point I see a flaw at the current climate movement. If you don't get clear on content, and don't come up with holistic criticism of the existing economic structure and processes, and doesn't give any indication as to which way it should go in order to get rid of fossil emissions in a flash, then you continue to stalk the mob without harvesting any contact. If there's not a single provisional choice in it on which you can hold on to, and which could become fine-tuned and deepened through reactions from opponents, the result is weak on both sides of the Mississippi. It won't knit because there's no wool.

● Just face it

Sorry that I continue to insist on this point, namely that we have to make a begin of a choice in order to set the social wriggling in motion. As I remarked (at *The whole must be right*): "Time is getting too short to continue with jumping back and forth between elements of promising but shaky high-tech futures and elements of safe but fairly primitive organisation of our economy. We have to choose."

It is certainly true that for some years now a suspicion is growing within the current climate protest that a techno-fix within the dynamics of the current economic system cannot prevent the fatal unleashing of our climate conditions, otherwise the call for system change and paradigm shift would not be heard more strongly all the time, but up till now **the call for system change** is lacking sufficient substance to decisively and sharply reject the techno-fix.

43 By ❶ the women's lib movement (abortion, emancipation), by ❷ the peace movement (cruise missiles), and by ❸ the anti-nuclear movement (Kalkar, Dodewaard).

44 ❶ Abortion was to be allowed and regulated. ❷ The cruise missiles had to leave the Netherlands immediately. ❸ The Kalkar plant (a fast breeder sodium-cooled nuclear reactor) simply had to close.

Reducing this lack of substance is the aim of this discussion of course. But I don't think we're gonna get anywhere with that discussion as long as everyone keeps mentally bouncing back to the techno-fix every time that a system change proposal carries within it uneasy consequences for the status quo.

This bouncing back is just a chewy reflex. Technology has become [the solid brother we call to help](#) in every situation we want to solve. It's my feeling that our basic trust in that aspect of our old economy is so deeply ingrained in our soul that we will not allow ourselves to become unfaithful or to set it aside. I mean, a door has to be slammed first to move along. That we have to jump of that seesaw before we can as lost souls give substance to system change because we must then.

This phase in the climate battle seems to me to take place right now. The increasing misery and disturbances that the old economy is sending to our homes and bodies (see this explanation: [Why proposing a high-tech solution is no longer gambling but suicide](#)) is going to smother the jump back to the high tech show, and make people jump from the seesaw. The knot will be cut, no matter how tough its nature. Recently [Thunberg, Neubauer, De Wever, and Charlier](#) did put their fingers on it with this core sentence: "*And since we don't have all the technical solutions we need to achieve that, we have to work with what we have at hand today. And this has to include stopping doing certain things. That's also a fact. However, it's a fact that most people refuse to accept. Just the thought of being in a crisis that we cannot buy, build or invest our way out of seems to create some kind of collective mental short circuit*".

Anyway, suppose you take a flashy survival strategy unanimously as a starting point, what about implementation? What kind of tissue do you have to create between people to get things going, that it is accelerated and that there is more clarity?

5. How to get it going?

● Implementation tricks

Suppose a mother thinks her child is getting too old for that dirty cuddly toy she drags with her everywhere... What to do? Taking it away doesn't work, but making her forget about the hug usually is successful. Creating context around it.

Another example. Cows don't want to enter a stable when winter arrives because they remember that their calf was taken away from them exactly there. Hunting them doesn't work, cows are strong as hell, but by giving them better and tastier hay every day a little closer to the stable they won't forget that calf misery but finally just take the bad with the good, and walk in when the weather's really bad.

So implementation pivots on this: Identify and concentrate on the repugnance, and how context can be created around it so that carrying capacity arises from which the repugnance can be surmounted.

What context should we consider in this case?

With every proposal⁴⁵ about quite a drastic economic U-turn people feel that their earning model (and thus their existing home-feelings) will crash, because in today's interaction economy all those earning models depend on each other with hundreds of wires. So in the current situation you can not seduce people with a few aspect-based policy proposals to imagine for themselves if as a consequence of those proposals our entire interaction economy could end up on a stable but totally different track - such as a regionalized circular economy. Their disgust makes them dive. You only get everyone come along if you offer them **overview**, and above all: if you offer them the chance to develop their own overview.

45 See for example the set of proposals of [Rebecca Willis](#) in "The five things every government needs to do right now to tackle the climate emergency".

I mean: If you want to work towards a more **vertical** survival orientation of people⁴⁶, and want them to decrease or slim down their horizontal interactions significantly, you have to let them develop a mental gangway in their mind about how that could happen, and where the whole economy could end up. Look, and then it's about the point that everyone has to start probing whether others also engage in it⁴⁷, how they turn their thoughts to it, especially with those who will have to share or largely relinquish their power over the regional means of production. Building up a vision among themselves, and from there gain confidence in a way out. And then daring to do so.

● Local integrated physical group interaction

Take a good look at the [Goed-veur-mekare-group](#) from Wijhe-Olst (NL). From a limited target (i.e. to build and manage together a windmill) they have accomplished to get Olst taking a slightly larger than marginal step: a 25 ha area originally reserved for companies will change in terms of destination to energy, food and biodiversity production. This group has undoubtedly gone a long way together, cause they now dare to take a gigantic debt on their necks, and take responsibility for a lot of organization.

Such laborious group development work around a major social economic change (U-turn) seems to be a waste of time - after all, we have the internet and a great box of specialists who can figure and budget all this out - but it's absolutely necessary⁴⁸. Everyone has personally to give in. If people don't all want it, then it doesn't work, and besides why would we do it? People is the principal pivot on which local circular acting (i.e. the regional household) should float, and that force will thrive when it may swim in own waters⁴⁹.

Okay, so build mutual overview and trust. The best way to do this is by discussing and examining the situation for a long time together⁵⁰. People investigate their situation. I see such meetings as a logical successor to the VOS courses⁵¹ from the 1980s in the Netherlands. The POLS - people orientate on local simple life - could be organized in the same way, by forming a kind of (physical) talk groups in each city quarter, village, and street, that aim at **building mental context**, and **mutual trust**. That's the general idea.

Such intensive interactions are a long neglected matter in our culture of one-liners. Through today's beautiful screen and web culture, an air of confusion, sweat, and fatigue hovers around serious physical

46 Any downsizing of global and national flows to and from regions implies replacement of horizontal long-distance interactions with vertical intensive interactions with the resources on the spot.

47 Precisely about the hot issues that now frightens people and hold them back, that is, how can you imagine the structure of the survival economics, and how could you jump from your current job to a position within that possibly regional economy.

48 See [here an example](#) of organizing deliberative processes, such as citizens' assemblies, as applied by the Green Alliance in the UK.

49 It is precisely when the solution is sought in the direction of regional self-sufficiency, and thus in short chains which are disconnected from global dependencies (inputs/outputs), that many macro-problems evaporate. This brings people back to the scale on which they can take control of their own lives. See the integral urban-district development work of [Henk Oosterling](#) and others in Rotterdam (Eco3 Doen denken, Japsam books, Prinsenbeek, 2013).

50 This boils down to collectively setting up a regional household cash book, or making together an assessment of future staffing needs or of an annual budget. So that everyone has to face up to the limits within which we have to operate. Everyone has to enter those boundaries and walls in mind in order to be able to evaluate how it might work. Everyone's spontaneous and generous commitment is essential, otherwise it's a blind alley.

conversations where you're going to have to come clean about what you really want, what you consider possible and feasible, what is hard to accept, what you don't know, and what holds you back or doesn't dare. Reality – even-though life-sized – is fled en masse via the products of a massive compensation industry, which sells itself as culture but only warms you up by sublimation. However, in our history we have had to run away from such a feast more often to find each other's voices and hands, and to reorganize our daily interactions together to save ourselves out of very tricky situations⁵².

● The thorny issues to address together

In common exploring and imagining regionalisation I see three main steps:

- (a) **Is there enough volition?** First of all, assessing whether people are willing to become more self-sufficient and more austere lifestyle if they were given the means to do so on a stable basis (e.g. a house with some land around it, and local crafts in the immediate vicinity).
- (b) **What can be traded, and what should be traded on the interface of the region?** In other words: what volumes may go outwards and what volumes inwards? You will have to reduce many export branches in an area, and thus need to assess which **exports** are best maintained (in terms of climate impact in production, transport and necessary imports) and then given the achievable level of export earnings determine (or match) what level of really necessary **imports** (such as machine parts, information flows, raw materials) could and should be attained.
- (c) Then you have to **converge the results of (a) and (b) towards each other**. The import sheet about what volumes you can still enter the region (= result of (b)) strongly determines the attainable lifestyle level of prosperity. And people's self-sufficiency (= result of (a)) determines both the space available for export production, as well as the need for imports. If you make a lot yourself, you don't need much from elsewhere.

● How to bend volition to a local orientation

How can you orient people's willpower more strongly on short chains and local processes?? There is a lot of work to be done on this point, because many yearn for it, but few believe in it and really want it.

51 The project V.O.S. (Women orient themselves on society), originated from an initiative of the association of housewives, gradually became a lever of the Dutch Women's Movement. It was open to everyone, and consisted of weekly meetings in which in a quite self-organising way everybody looked at one's own life, and at the longings for what one would actually like to do. Discovering and experiencing together how everyone's personal situation and the social system are related, that things could be changed, and that every step may get it going.

52 Spontaneous moments of reflection in which different walks of life (farmers, fishers, merchants, artisans, laborers) started to talk to each other, have always played an important role in difficult times of the Dutch history. Think of the rise of the Society for the Utility in General (i.e. in dutch: de Maatschappij voor het Nut van het Algemeen) when the Fourth English War around 1784 had completely stripped the Dutch Republic. Her objective: "To promote the participation of all citizens in social life". This Society had three great strengths: a decentralized organizational form, an a-political attitude, and accessible to all. At the same time as a dialogue, it has also triggered an enormous flow of money from notables to economically important community services like education, libraries, urban allotments, insurance, news agencies. To strengthen the community, yes, but through this sowing of confidence, many companies and services came into being, governments were able to expand, and half a century later the leap to mechanization and industrialisation passed in the Netherlands much more quietly than in surrounding countries. Because that is the **trick**: constantly giving each other the opportunity to verbalize what's the worry.

POLS can only work out well if most parties want to participate. Participation will not be a problem for those who have a strong desire for it. But oil dealers, garage owners, and almost everyone whose profit model or income depends heavily on fossil fuels production or use, do not see any reason to go local, and don't want to go anywhere near that. We have been seeing that for thirty years. **How do we change their volition?** They simply deny climate science, so along that path there is no cure attainable. But on each aspect of their revenue model they are very sensitive. Very sensitive. They milk customers. Customers are their foundation. Along that path, namely via their delicate relationship with customers, I see three avenues that climate activists can take at the same time **to redirect the volition** of everyone involved in long-chain and long-distance production and distribution.

1. **Via the demand** for their products and services.

Any climate activist can minimize material interactions with the long-chain and long-distance business or permanently quit them. Such a boycott will do wonders with the values (= volition) of the providers. It will also immediately boost the demand for local stuff. That will set things in motion there – gaps in the market, I mean – where doubters within the long-chain business can mentally (in terms of appreciation) jump to.

2. **Via the supply side:** the **reputation** of the provider.

Now that we have to get rid of the use of fossil fuels immediately, the existing intensive interaction structure of worldwide scattered large scale production processes can be described as criminal⁵³ as well pathogenic⁵⁴ and inhuman⁵⁵. So sue them and blame them⁵⁶ so that a certain smell pops up around this unfettered long chain processes that fling around and exploit people and resources wherever they want, and dump their waste, residuals and emissions wherever they are.

3. **Via the supply-side:** the **price** of products and services.

The main objection to any long-distance product or service is the volume of emissions accumulated. If that objection were to be included in the price in such a way that the effects of

53 Because they have been continuing something for twenty years that we all knew will wipe us out, and so they are consciously persisting in behavior that is extremely dangerous for the survival of humanity. See the arguments (like [this one](#), or [this one](#)) of many lawsuits against the oil industry.

54 Today's long production and distribution chains are not only absurd energy intensive but also a succession of chemical injections and chemical migrations between product and environment (pipes, plastic, foil, gases). Each product puts the consumer in contact with a load of foreign substances and/or radiation. Consequence: cancer worldwide.

55 It causes huge labour migration flows all over the world with all the alienation and family distortions that goes with it. Labour migrants flow on the one hand to special economic zones and export processing zones (EPZ's) in cheap wage countries, on the other hand to rich countries [to do the shitjobs](#) while the ladies and gentlemen regulate and innovate the long chains and epilate themselves. Above the radar (ILO data), some 120 million labour migrants enter the US, EU, and Arab states every year. And below the radar? When I read that 300,000 German elderly people receive 24-hour [nursing care at home](#) from Eastern European women and that 90% of them are paid undeclared, or that 1.2 million dutch households have a cleaning lady mostly a undocumented one and mostly paid undeclared, or that [the UK's shadow](#) economy includes a million 'undocumented' migrant workers, I start some wondering.

56 Regarding this kind of actions I propose no searching for exhaustive common justification. Exhaustive justification is very touchy, takes much group interaction time, and the outcomes block massification. When people wipe you out of the way cause they want to consolidate or expand their high carbon lifestyle, your right of self-defence of your right to live (and of all forms of living you care for, and whose destruction is hurting you) implies justification enough. In my opinion.

those emissions could be compensated or mirrored, at the same time (a) a level playing field would be created between all productions wherever they took place, and (b) the customer would be encountered in a honest way⁵⁷. In other words, include a carbon tax in the price, but how do you burden all those involved in proportion to the emissions they add to the total process? For example you could tax each **input ω** of each link X (= sub-process) in a chain with a carbon tax of one euro⁵⁸ per kg CO2-eq calculated according to LCA (life-cycle-analysis) of all equipment processes involved from the point of the inputs of the link X-1 (= foregoing sub-process in the chain) that supplied that **input ω**. A policy of this kind can blow out a whole bunch of long-chain and long-distance activity completely⁵⁹. For example the use of fertilizer and imported cattle feed by farmers becomes totally unprofitable. All imported products, including ready-made food from abroad, will take a blow. Transport and relocation become expensive, and so short chain products and services become relatively cheap at the same time. The local economy will therefore provoke investments. The volition of everyone involved in long-chain productions and long-distance traffic may then rapidly start to change orientation. Exactly what you want.

● Small steps brought together

In the Middle Ages, in sharp contrast to an increasing number of abuses throughout Europe, monastic communities arose, where men and women voluntarily distanced themselves from affluence, and from the taking part in competition and trampling on each other's economic positions. Not only their social activities (education, science, care of the sick and poor) and economic activities (agriculture, animal husbandry, book reproduction, food processing) was stabilizing the society, also their form of cohabitation. Those communities were constantly showing old and young in the distant surroundings **how to confer to each other sufficient space for simple living** and how that could flourish. Without these waves of courageous cooperative resistance against the suffocating game that the nobility - which were constantly at war with each other - played with the locals, our current constitutions would never have come to being. Their ideas, trials, interventions, and influences formed clouds full of **context** around the everyday worries of every lost soul.

And ain't we all [just that](#).

57 The provider comes clean, i.e. delivers no longer to the customer a product or service in which a damage is hidden, but indicates by means of the price how many emissions are associated with it.

58 Sweden already levies a carbon tax of 100 euro per ton (but only on direct emissions) and this price is also [proposed by Ecosys](#) in the Netherlands to assess investment options within companies. The move to 1000 euro per ton is therefore not absurd, especially in light of the consequences of the current and coming climate chaos, that are already becoming increasingly uninsurable (crops, coastal homes, for example).

59 One kilo of Dutch cheese will become unsaleable in Hong Kong because the carbon tax would add [about](#) 20 euros per kg upon the current price of ±10 euros. Somebody who buys a car (also an electric one) will get a shock about the very high price, because the Wuppertal Institut stated in Der Spiegel of 12-08-2017 that "In the environmental balance sheet of a car, 60 to 70 percent of the resource used happens in the production phase, and only 30 to 40 percent in the usage phase". Or buying a flower? According to a [study by the Lancaster University](#), a UK resident who buys a bunch of dutch flowers (11 stems) is responsible for 31 kg of CO2-eq greenhouse gases according to LCA analysis. So that would become a bouquet of flowers for a total of 31 + 5 (actual price) = 36 euros. By the way, if someone does this once a week, they or he will emit over 1½ tons per year only to fill the flower vase. Too absurd and too criminal for words, because in order to meet the Paris targets, 1½ tons would have to become everyone's ultimate total annual emission limit.