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Imagining and Co-creating Futures of Sustainable Consumption and Society

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Abstract

With the increasing pressure on the climate from human activities, it is urgent to envision and facilitate radically different ways of life that allow for significantly lower GHG emissions. This only happens if policy and action initiatives go beyond discursive practices that treats climate change mitigation as a matter of technological fixes, and individual behavioral change. Decades of research on the sociology of consumption show that lifestyle changes are as much about changes to norms and ideas about what 'a good life' is as they are about access to the necessary competences, infrastructures and sustainable alternatives.

Acknowledging the growing body of sociological research that seeks to understand how expectations of the future shape processes of social change in the present, more attention could be paid to the role of discourse, narratives, and storying when it comes to making efforts towards carbon neutral climate futures.

Taking as a point of departure a futuring-methodology called The Future Travel workshop, this paper discusses the potential role of stories through Moezi et al 2017's notion of *stories as inquiry* and *stories as process* for futurity. Comprised of three sessions, the workshop explores what future everyday lives and societies might look and feel like. Each session is framed by a set of narratives coining climate related problems of the present, and how these problems affect the way we think about futures. Interestingly, the participants' imagined futures went from technologically utopic and tension-free towards tense and radically different conceptions of the needed levels of societal reorganization.

Keywords

Climate futures; storying; social futures; futuring; workshop methodology

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[1] At the time of article submission, Charlotte was affiliated Aalborg University as Associate Professor.

MAIN MANUSCRIPT:

1. Introduction

The IPCC (2021) establishes that human activities are warming the atmosphere to a level that is contributing to unprecedented changes to the climate system. We are looking towards climate futures where global warming of 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions occur within the coming decades. It is therefore increasingly urgent to enable radically different (future) lifestyles that allow for significantly lower emissions than are currently achievable.

Enabling radically different lifestyles means enabling new ideas about what a good life is and should be. This paper presents a framework which serves as an example of how this process can move forward. For all too long, paths towards sustainability have been framed as matters of individual behaviour or technological optimisation, despite the fact that much of an individual's climate footprint is embedded in larger social, political and material infrastructures and lies outside the realm of individual control (e.g. Bjørn et al., 2018; Jensen et al., 2019; Welch and Southerton, 2019; UNEP, 2022). Decades of research on the sociology of consumption show that lifestyle changes are just as much about changes to meanings, norms and ideas about what 'a good life' is as they are about access to the necessary competences, infrastructures and sustainable alternatives (see e.g. Sahakian et al., 2021). Challenging collective and normative ideas about 'the good life' is a delicate endeavour. As meaning and normativity are partly created through discursive practices (Schatzki 1996) addressing the type of discourses present in current sustainable development and climate change efforts seems important.

Addressing climate change through transition discourses that largely replicate the discursive practices of existing and, arguably, flawed development and modernization frameworks is thus problematic. While modernity has propelled economic activity and a growing living standard for many, Murphy et al. (2021) argue that this has come at the expensive of unequal distribution and a rapid and accelerating expenditure and exploitation of our inheritance of fossil fuels and finite resources. Kothari et al. (2019, eds) argue that the term 'development' has largely been defined by modernity where modernization frameworks are limited to that of technological and economic progress. A nation's development is thus measured through GDP performance, implying that developed nations are better equipped to lead the way toward 'progress'. The implications of this colonisation, both of progress and knowledge, as well as the inherent and narrow-minded focus on technological development as the benchmark for sustainability are critical. Continuing down this path seems to imply continued (and increasing) inequality leading to potential breakdowns of eco-systems (Fanning et al., 2021).

Creating change initiatives that invoke critical and deliberate reflections about what 'a good life' is and should be is difficult and may require fundamental changes to societal imaginaries (Milkoreit, 2017). Frameworks are emerging that seek to respond to the climate change emergency beyond the assignment of responsibility to the individual or to technology alone, of which the most recognisable might be the emerging Circular Economy and Planetary Boundaries frameworks that promise alternative framings of development and its boundaries. Yet these frameworks remain positioned largely within existing definitions of modernity and development. As Bauwens (2021) argues, the Circular Economy is often heralded as an encompassing solution decoupling economic growth from the ecological impacts of economic activities, even though an expanding body of empirical evidence shows that increases in the global gross domestic product (GDP) have thus far always been closely connected to an increase in the size of the material footprint and associated ecological impacts (Hickel and Kallis, 2020). Other critics argue that circular

economy frameworks maintain a primary focus on managing resource streams and increasing effectiveness (Jager-Erbern et al., 2021), thus diverting attention away from enabling sufficiency-based and diverse lifestyles (Fuchs et al., 2021), and towards ensuring that 'scarce' resources are well-managed within a closed loop, all the while allowing an endless production of goods and materials to continue within planetary boundaries, not unlike the pursuit of the perpetual motion machine. This tendency is unsurprising. As Asayama (2021) argues, the IPCC not only establishes the scientific basis for understanding the changes to our climate, it also creates a public discourse for the efforts to negate the worst effects of climate change – namely as matters of scarcity, budgeting and deadline management. Ultimately, responses emerge that consider climate change a managerial problem of staying within a given physical limit, often by optimising and streamlining existing patterns. Although the IPCC working group III contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2022 acknowledges that lifestyle changes are needed, current responses do not offer any imaginations or ideas about *how* ways of life need to change in order to stay within these limits. Hulme (2020) infers that a scarcity discourse even holds a serious risk of inhibiting our cognitive capacity to imagine human life as something beyond the prevention of climate change, which only reinforces the tendency to treat climate change mitigation as a managerial problem rather than an opportunity for reinvention and contributes to the 'fear of the unknown' hampering us from action. As a result, we are often presented with climate discourses that are based on either *utopia* or *dystopia*. Technological utopia presents an optimised society which has overcome all climate related issues through technological development, ensuring that demand and perpetual growth can continue uninterrupted. Dystopia forewarns a future where familiar forms of societal and everyday life patterns have given way to a gloomy post-apocalyptic scenario. Both extremes of the spectrum render us passive and unable to respond. As Ricoeur (1976) puts forward, imaginaries are often reproductive in the sense that they reproduce today's dominant ideologies of society. This fails to be productive in providing new imaginaries, so productive imaginaries should instead go beyond existing ideology to enable pictures and narratives of a future world and societies completely different from those of the present. There is thus a need to enable and support new change-related discursive practices that allow us to explore new ways of life through creative, inclusive and more open-ended deliberation.

Acknowledging this, we ask ourselves; *how might we enable new climate discourses that confront and challenge current climate discourses whilst supporting the ability to imagine radically different futures?*

In Section 2, we discuss how the fields of *social futures* and *futuring* might equip us to do exactly this. Firstly, the field of 'social futures' acknowledges and explores the critical role that processes of meaning-making about the future play in social change processes in the present. Secondly, the emerging body of work regarding 'storying' (Moezi et al 2017) enables us to explore ways to imagine radically different future alternatives by employing 'world building' techniques (also known as 'worlding', as proposed by Haraway (2016)). Engagement in storying processes might allow us to envision altogether different (and uncertain) futures that are not bound by existing ways of organising society. It may be (better) equipped to embrace 'pluriversal' (Kothari et al., 2019) and contested visions of the future, that not only allow for humans to flourish but also include dignified and just lives for the more-than-humans, such as animals and plants (Celemajer et al, 2020) as well as to escape the tempting trap of streamlined technological utopia. Section 2, by no means exhaustive, serves as inspiration and contextualisation of the empirical portion of the paper presented in Section 3. Section 3 presents a workshop format called 'Future Travel Workshop' and discusses the overall results as well as their implications for processes of futuring and worlding. Section 4 highlights the main contributions from the workshop and section 5 concludes the paper by addressing the applicability of the workshop format as a method to co-create and explore futures of sustainable consumption and society.

2. The role of futures in social change processes

A growing body of sociological research is dedicating serious attention to the future's critical role in the present (Mische, 2009). This body of work seeks to understand how expectations of the future shape processes of social change in the present, including what is prioritised and how these prioritisations are negotiated and discussed. In science and technologies studies (Borup et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2000), a well-established "sociology of expectations" explores the role of expectations about the future in shaping current change. This work seeks to shift the analytical gaze from the future itself towards the phenomenon of *future orientation*, i.e. towards looking at "how the future … is constructed and managed, by whom and under what conditions" (Brown et al., 2000: 4) in the present. More recent work has explored the role of imagined futures in science and technology policy (Jasanoff and Kim, 2009; 2015), social movements (Mische 2014), and capitalism (Beckert, 2016). This serious consideration of the role of the future in the present represents a fundamental shift in the social scientific perspective, which traditionally sees present social conditions as outcomes emerging from the past. The perspective is shifting from a reified view of the future as a 'given'—a "neutral temporal space into which objective expectations can be projected" (Brown and Michael, 2003: 4)—to a view of the future as a field of projectivity, recognising the profound link between futurity, agency and social action (Mandich, 2017).

2.1 Making social futures

Having acknowledged that current climate-change related problems and perceived spaces for change in the *now* critically shape and mould climate *futures*, it seems profoundly important to utilise methods for futuring that understand the role and expectations of the future in the now, and that critically question current assumptions and reasonings about who and what 'the future is for'. Explicitly moving towards futuring methods that actively build upon more pluriversal approaches to society, as well as explicitly move beyond that of technological fixes, capitalist approaches to progress and individual behaviour change concepts might solve some of the problems of current climate change discursive practices highlighted in Section 1 and aid productive imaginaries through social dreaming (Dunne and Raby, 2013) of radically different futures. It seems particularly essential to challenge current normative understandings of 'progress' and 'the good life'. Responding to Asayama's (2020) concern that scarcity discourses might inhibit our abilities to envision radically different futures, we take seriously a social practice theoretical position (e.g. Schatzki 1996) whereby meaning *becomes* when we share words, narratives, pictures and symbols in particular ways through our practices. If we are to consume differently, and if we are to value things, ideas and beings differently, new narratives, words and ideas are bound to emerge, and thus exploring futures through worlding techniques that urges new narratives about particular climate futures might be fruitful . Futuring can be seen as a way of building capacity to act in new ways as the unimaginable becomes imaginable through narrative sense-making.

In the following we distinguish between discourse, storying and narrative: processes of storying might create new climate change narratives that may, over time, inspire new climate change discursive practices.

2.1.1 Storying as futuring

Processes of storying are finding their way into energy and climate change research as a means for subjecting climate change and sustainable energy futures to inclusive exploration and negotiation. Moezzi et al. (2017) offer a substantial review of storying in energy and climate change research. They propose a categorisation of the way that stories are seen, used and interpreted across research, suggesting three overall categories: *stories as data, stories as inquiry and stories as process* (Moezzi et al., 2017, 4). *Stories as data* views stories as companions to quantitative assessments of e.g consumption-based emissions and

associated carbon footprints, and can include anything from a narrative about larger socio-technical transitions to an exemplification of personal or local perspectives associated to said emissions. A great example of this is presented by Jack and Ivanova (2021). *Stories as inquiry* views stories as a tool to reimagine pasts and futures and to understand and narrate (future) identities and everyday lives. *Stories as process* views stories as a format in which people can actively participate, e.g. through a workshop, and tell their own stories or create different views on futures.

The 'Future Travel Workshop' described in Section 3 falls under this categorisation, involving *Storying as process* and is intended to enable participants to reflect on their own narratives for the future whilst actively and critically thinking about the temporal aspect of said narratives, and who and what is part of them (or not) and why. The resulting narratives are characterised by *Storying as inquiry* and participants are invited to share and reflect upon similarities, differences and even controversies within and across the narratives. This process invites the participants to reimagine their futures collectively whilst reflecting upon their own (and others') role in the unfolding narratives.

The workshop described in Section 3 should be seen as an *example* of futuring. The workshop was carried out as a pilot study with the intent to explore what this type of futuring might bring about. In designing and carrying out the workshop, we have learned what storying might entail for social futures and processes of futuring. The positioning and discussion of the workshop format and outcomes within the broader field of sustainability transformation and social futures can be considered our contribution to the ongoing conversation about the role of narratives and discourses in social- and climate futures. The results of the workshop are described in overall terms in order to convey a sense of the process participants underwent and what type of futures they imagined and narrated during the workshop. The outcomes are described with special attention to the evolution of the narratives during the workshop.

3. The Future Travel Workshop: an example of futuring through storying

The Future Travel Workshop was developed as one of eight modules for an extracurricular educational programme on climate change called Klimaakademiet[2] (translated and henceforth referred to as the Climate Academy). The Climate Academy was designed for current (postgraduates) or recently graduated (masters) students. Enrolment in the Climate Academy was by application only. Selection criteria were employed to ensure diversity of gender, academic background, climate-related experience and motivations for applying. Of 96 applicants, 60 were accepted as participants. Fees to attend the Climate Academy were 2000 DKK (270 euro) for students and 4000 DKK (540 euro) for graduates with employment. Of the participants, 75% identified as female and 25% as male, reflecting an overrepresentation of female applicants. The participants represented two of the larger Danish urban areas, Copenhagen and Aarhus. 50% of the participants were graduates, and the remaining 50% were still students. Most of the participants came from a background in social science and humanities with a small fraction of the participants having a background in natural science. Most of the graduates were unemployed. Of the 60 accepted participants, about 25% were employed in a job.

The Climate Academy ran as a pilot programme in the fall of 2021 and rests one overarching assumption: that societal change requires changes in the way we think and talk about society. The academy is therefore designed to enable immersion in the scientific, philosophical and democratic deliberations about climate change and society, ultimately resulting in the education of change agents equipped to work towards sustainable futures (Klimakademiet, 2021).

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[2] Klimaakademiet

The Future Travel workshop design corresponds to The Climate Academy's overarching assumption by contributing to the re-making of social- and climate futures. Acknowledging that technological or individual behavioural change is not enough, the workshop format critically 1) challenges the idea that existing development paradigms are equipped to meet the Paris Agreement's goals (Fanning et al., 2021) and 2) acknowledges that we are experiencing a crisis of imagination (as argued by Bindé, 2000; Bifo Berrardi, 2011; Andersen, 2020), where societal actors (citizens, politicians and companies) have difficulty imagining how a future sustainable everyday life and society might look and feel (Asayama, 2021; Hulme, 2020).

Designed as a full-day workshop to be completed early in the Climate Academy, the Future Travel Workshop took place on Samsø in September, 2021. 50 Climate Academy participants participated in the workshop. The participants were divided arbitrarily into 10 groups of 5 participants each and allowed to stand, sit on chairs or pillows, or lie down, depending on individual preference. The participants were informed that the workshop and their participation in the workshop would be documented for the purposes of evaluating the workshop format and academic dissemination. The participants agreed to allow photography during the workshop, but efforts were made on our part to avoid capturing any identifying features in the pictures. The participants are kept anonymous in this paper. The step-by-step format of the workshop is briefly described in Section 3.1 below, and a more detailed version of the method can be found in Fischer et al. (forthcoming).

3.1 Workshop format – storying as process

The Future Travel Workshop is a multi-tiered workshop format thematically divided into three different sessions with different purposes. A detailed description of the framings of the sessions is given below. Each session further includes a facilitated 'future travel'.

The "future travel" itself is a guided, 30-minute mindful mental voyage into a sustainable future followed by 60 minutes of individual and collective deliberation on what participants imagined. The voyage is guided by the facilitator, who poses a set of questions differing across sessions (see Table 1). Each "future travel" begins with the facilitator "transporting" the participants to "a time in the future, where a sustainable transition has happened". The "transportation" takes a few moments, during which mindfulness techniques involving breathing, relaxation and awareness of body exercises alternate with instructions to experience time dissolving, as the participants "move forward". The time in which the participants arrive, as well as the level of transition, is deliberately left unspecified to enable participants to actively reflect upon what that means for them. Consequently, participants might "arrive" at very different time horizons; some might arrive in an immediate future, whereas others might arrive in a future that is decades or even centuries away. After "arrival" participants are asked to explore their immediate surroundings. The facilitator asks questions about the place and space that the participant has arrived in (if any in particular) and participants are then, question by question, asked to explore who and what is present, leading to questions about the way society is organised, how people spend their time, how one moves around and so on. Prior to "departure", participants are encouraged to make the process their own and linger over particular questions for as long as they want while skipping other questions, if that makes sense for their imaginative process. The participants "visit" their "futures" for approximately 20-30 minutes before they are "transported" back. When participants have "returned to the present" they are asked to sit quietly and reflect (and ideally write down/draw these reflections) for about 10-15 minutes before engaging in discussions in the small groups of 5 participants. Each participant is invited to share what they experienced whilst "travelling". At least one participant from each group serves as illustrator, writing or drawing what the others are saying. Large sheets of paper are provided so that each group can create shared imaginaries. Participants are asked to notice commonalities as well as tensions between their individually envisioned

futures. Participants use the same paper for each session, using different colours to distinguish the drawings or writings from each session. This highlights any potential differences between stories resulting from the different session-framings and allows us (the authors of this paper) to follow the development of the narratives as the workshop progressed. An example of the large drawings is presented in Figure 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE.

For the Climate Academy, the three sessions were intentionally framed as follows:

Session 1 was about initial capacity building, allowing the participants to practice and engage with a facilitated exploration of how a sustainable future might look based solely on participants' own creativity and imagination. The "future travel" portion of the session was guided through general questions (see Table 1).

Session 2 critically explored the current climate issues related to consumption patterns and lifestyles of (western) society with the intent to prime participants to critically reflect upon what aspects of society and everyday life might need to change in the future. The session was set and introduced through three brief academic presentations that (critically) addressed the status quo in relation to society and sustainability. The first presentation gave an overview of the current climate impacts of Danish lifestyles and consumption areas, e.g. food, living spaces and travel. The second presentation introduced the implications and potentials of understanding everyday life as a system of resource intensive social practices, e.g. cooking, cleaning, working and mobility. The third presentation gave a few examples of how climate fiction might contribute to exploring and describing altogether different ways of life and society, e.g. through political, existential and technological change.
The presentations were meant to offer inspiration to participants for their next future travel by 1) giving participants an up-to-date idea about the climate impact of their current lifestyles; 2) enabling participants to think differently about spaces for action by thinking about their 'behaviours' as derived from, and dependent on, a number of different social practices and material infrastructures; and finally 3) encouraging participants to think outside-the box and depart from existing ideologies when thinking about futures by introducing examples of radically different climate futures presented in science fiction and climate fiction. After the three presentations, participants were invited to once again embark on a "future travel" following the same procedure as in session 1, but with a slightly different set of facilitating questions (see table 1).

Session 3, the final, slightly shorter session, critically explored current climate change discourses and their embedded normative assumptions about possible spaces for change and offered alternative inspirations of futuring, with the intent to equip participants to critically reflect upon societal organisation and systemic aspects of their future narratives. A presentation on the broader current trends in climate change discourses depicted their political nature and highlighted the types of narratives usually met in the climate debate, which often correspond to the managerial, scarcity and control-based approaches discussed in section 1. The presentation focused mostly on Danish climate future discourses and narratives, which tend to be technologically optimistic. It was originally planned that the participants should then go on a final "future travel", but since the participants grew tired and weary, the session was altered slightly. The final "future travel" was replaced by a plenum discussion about how the participants' experiences and resulting narratives from sessions 1 and 2 resonated with or challenged current climate narratives and, potentially, discourses.

In the next section, Section 3.2, the main content generated by each session is described and discussed, with particular attention to similarities, harmonies, and tensions within and between the resulting

narratives. Section 3.2 is based on 1) the large pieces of paper that participants wrote and drew on and which were submitted after the workshop, 2) field notes, 3) transcriptions of the plenum discussions (live transcripts; no recordings exist) and 4) a short focus group session with 5 participants held after the workshop.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

3.2 Workshop outcomes – storying as inquiry

The workshop format (*storying as process*) described above provides a framework and opportunity for participants to imagine entire worlds, rather than isolated elements in a pre-determined context with pre-determined policy or social desires (Moezzi et al., 2017). Sharing the worlds that they "experienced" allows participants to co-create content (*storying as inquiry*) and meaning, and critically reflect upon what they are (and are *not*) able to imagine when asked to think about how sustainable futures and everyday lives might look and feel.

Noteworthily, participants' ability to imagine futures morphed as the sessions progressed: the initial imagined futures, rather homogenous and tension-free, with tremendous (yet unspecified) responsibility assigned to technological infrastructure, became significantly more fragmented and tense, fielding radically different ways of living, particularly in terms of economic and social organisation of society. Content generated in sessions 1 and 2 are described below. The results from each session are organised as follows: features of time, place and space are introduced first, followed by a presentation of main content and focus before aspects of harmony and tension are highlighted. Session 3 is presented slightly different, as this session included no "future travel"; participants instead reflected upon how their experiences during sessions 1 and 2 compared to the existing climate future narratives and discourses presented as part of session 3.

Session 1

Who, where and when:

Most of the participants travelled as 'themselves', although seven participants travelled as someone else. These participants assumed a different body or identity through fictional characters, mostly human, but also including one animal. No details were given as to why this was so, other than that some participants expressed difficulties travelling as themselves either due to problems with imagining themselves in the future, or because they travelled to a very distant future.

Approximately one fifth of the participants "arrived" at a space identical to their current living spaces and homes. Others arrived at a generalised version of 'home'. Approximately half of the participants "arrived" in an urban setting, whereas the other half arrived in a rural or semi-rural setting. This share is interesting, as it does not reflect participants' current living situations (most live in an urban setting.) Furthermore, most participants experienced themselves alone or isolated from others, even though most imagined their local neighbourhoods to be rather communal and socially oriented.

Generally, participants arrived in a time that was unspecified. Some arrived in a time close to the present, as they experienced themselves in their current form (more or less) in their imagined future. Others imagined themselves as slightly older, or with children. Some arrived in a time that was much further away, but unspecified.

Main content and focus:

Participants envisioned clean, slow-paced and community-oriented futures, where people and nature were brought together in harmony. Many included local decision-making processes and intergenerational harmony. Some participants experienced cities that were densely built but dressed in greenery. Others experienced more localised and semi-rural areas with round houses and organic features. Several participants experienced a closer relationship between nature and food production, which was envisioned to be very locally organised and clean, whether in community gardens or through vertical farming. In contrast, a few participants envisioned food as something technical that prioritised nutrition over taste with a focus on clean and efficient production.

Although there was variation in how 'technological' participants' imagined futures were, there was a consistent tendency to allocate significant power and responsibility to an invisible but omnipresent technological infrastructure that would order and structure society such that needs were met without people having to make decisions for themselves, e.g. in terms of how much food to stock and prepare. Technology would, in many cases, offer gateway solutions to more sustainable food and travel, but very few of the participants' imagined futures offered up any explicit details about how these technological changes would come about, who would provide them and why. Highspeed trains and bikes were emphasised, whereas cars were hidden away (in tunnels, underground) but still in use.
The technological 'turn' in participants imagined futures is not surprising, given that session 1 was a baseline session, and participants would at this point have been exposed mostly to the technological optimism represented in most of the dominant (Danish) public discourse surrounding climate change mitigation, reproducing existing imaginaries (Ricoeur, 1976). Similarly, no one (vocally) questioned the need for or right to travel, and if mentioned, travel was made possible through "more sustainable modes of transportation". Some participants even actively stated that their futures were "not without airplanes". This corresponds well with the intrinsic entitlement to travel without hinderance established in capitalist societies (Bianchi et al., 2020).

Somewhat in contrast to the above, participants generally envisioned their futures as slowed down, compared to the (experienced) pace of current society, and several participants noted that they felt less stressed and spent their time on something other than 'work'. Some participants highlighted that in their imagined futures they would spend time enabling community, and that 'work' was something more than or different from a paid job. Strikingly, many of the participants experienced their futures as silent or filled with animal sounds.

Larger questions such as how society and the economy were organised were not specifically addressed, but, when prompted in the plenum discussions, some mentioned that they were aware that economy would play a role but had not really been able to envision how.

Harmony and tension:

The tension-free futures that most participants experienced on their first "future travel" resulted in two general and rather contradictory narratives. Participants seemed happy with the tension-free and harmonious futures envisioned, yet they also seemed somewhat concerned about them. It had them questioning human nature, the role of things, and gaps between what kind of futures they wanted and what futures they felt were realistic. One participant reflected during the plenum discussion: *"What you imagine doesn't have to reflect what you would like to have… I am thinking about what we have to realistically do"*. Another participant noted that *"human nature is dissolved in these futures".* This was followed by a similar statement about human nature; *"in the future we all agree about the things we shouldn't do . . . but in the future we are also, all of us, human beings"* implying that it may be impossible to

reach the level of agreement imagined. Another participant highlighted some unresolved feelings about the role and level of consumption and 'things'. They asked; *"Where do we draw the limits in terms of what creates identity? We are making mistakes with our over-consumption, but we do need some things. If you make pottery, you feel enriched and good – but that is also a 'thing'".*

Ultimately, many of the participants acknowledged that futures will not and cannot be tension-free, and that there are many things about the way they live now that must be renegotiated in the future. They did not, however, feel equipped or inclined to imagine futures that would represent these dilemmas and corresponding negotiation in any concrete way, possible reflecting the established crisis of imagination pointed out by Andersen (2020) and Hulme (2020).

Similarly, and interestingly, none of the participants vocally reflected upon the responsibility that most of them delegated to technology until one of the facilitators brought it up. At the same time, some participants had explicitly envisioned deliberate distinctions between when and how technology would be prominent and when it would not. Some had even imagined a space in their envisioned future living space, where they could not (and would not have to) access the internet or be 'available'.

Session 2

Who, where and when:

At this session, most participants appeared to return to the same body, time and place as in session 1, with a few possible exceptions. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, given the presentations and guiding questions asked during this "future travel" (see table 1), participants' imagined futures became slightly more systems-oriented, resulting in more systems-oriented explorations and deliberations during the group discussions. This demonstrates well that it matters what questions we ask, what stories tell stories (Haraway 2016). Most of the drawings (see for instance Fig 1) also reveal a somewhat systemic worlding process. Cities and communities were explored in more detail, and practices received some attention as well, which had not happened during session 1. More people seemed to populate participants' envisioned futures, which is not surprising given the social ontological nature of the presentations framing session 2, but participants were unable to give much detail on the role and nature of these people.

Main content and focus:

Compared to session 1, participants envisioned how society and work was organised more explicitly. Some focused on how education was designed to enable people to live more sustainably, while others focused on how the job market would change, e.g. automation of jobs and implementation of universal basic incomes. Many of the participants' futures prioritised practical and creative work, considering it essential. Some participants envisioned jobs performed entirely online or virtually, whereas others focused on practical work requiring a physical presence.

A large share of the participants had envisioned a future with climate taxes, such as CO_2 taxes, and some even referred to CO_2 budgets. In general, the imaginaries were a lot more 'restrictive' than the imaginaries from session 1, in that people would not be allowed to buy new things before old things had been appropriately handled in terms of reuse, recycling and circularity. Moving away from assigning responsibility and power to technology, participants began assigning responsibility and decision-making power to (communities of) people. Technology still played a prominent role in measuring and allocating resources, but the focus on the interplay of industry, producers and consumers in symbiotic relationships was much more explicit than in session 1.

Participants continued to emphasise community in their envisioned futures, with an added emphasis on collective responsibility and obligation as well. Some participants had envisioned and discussed citizen-parliament structures, where citizens of the future would deliberate in local communities about how to structure and organise local life. Some participants reflected upon the role of voluntary work and activism in future organisations of society. The local, circular and organic way of structuring buildings, communities and, to some extent, society was still present in many of the participants' futures during session 2. Some participants had envisioned domes where people would live in balance with natural life, expanding a bit on experience of 'home' from session 1.

Some participants actively questioned the role of capitalism and started thinking about other ways of organising a society not based on growth paradigms. These considerations were not present in session 1. Many participants had reflected actively on the balance between work and leisure, and the slow-paced society continued to be emphasised as in session 1. Some participants argued that a future society would have to confront and eradicate stress, as *"stress cannot be sustainable"*.

Harmony and tension:

Session 2 sparked considerably more debate, disagreement, and frustration among participants both individually (during their "future travel") and when sharing their imagined futures. They disagreed on quite fundamental questions concerning how to organise society, how to structure work and how to determine the balance between individual freedom and collective obligation.

Aspects such as whether work and labour should be more or less automated were debated, and discussions around universal basic income created tensions, as some argued that UBI would simply create a different type of inequality, without exemplifying this in further detail. Some participants felt caught between envisioning a very local community and envisioning a central administration, explicitly arguing that there would be a need for central administration. This was also tied to aspects of globalisation that featured in many of the imagined futures, yet participants felt unclear about how to get rid of unsustainable value chains. In some cases, participants explored quite concrete future practices of e.g. showering – mostly without confronting social norms about cleanliness and the frequency of showering – through quite extreme depictions whether it would be highly technical or highly communal in nature. Other participants expressed difficulties experiencing anything concrete during this session.

The plenum discussion revealed frustration amongst participants during session 2, and a strikingly large share of the participants described feeling a sense of meaninglessness and chaos. This feeling appeared to be connected to more than one aspect. Some participants had difficulties envisioning anything concrete, partly because they felt irritated by some of the guiding questions, and partly because the imagined futures became significantly more fragmented, as the participants felt exposed to large and unruly dilemmas when actively thinking about (and being asked questions about) work, the job market, and the economy. This might certainly be connected to the lack of symbols, pictures and narratives for adequately dealing with changes at this scale, which highlights the need for these processes of "other meaning" and new types of sensemaking, as well as patience and a high degree of facilitation.

For some, the frustration seemed connected to the ambivalence of wanting the same 'freedoms' present ways of living offer while also knowing that many things will (must) change in the future. Some participants acknowledged frustration about not being able to stay in the tension-free imaginaries that most had built during session 1. Some participants conceded that the contradictions they experienced were probably necessary or at least unavoidable. This illustrates an interesting phase in the process of meaning-making: at some point, participants will be involved in two different narratives simultaneously, drawn to an emerging

discourse while having not entirely let go of the previous public discourse. This is much like being caught between competing practices during a process of change (Jensen 2020).

Participants had very different coping strategies for dealing with the frustration. While some participants fell asleep during the "future travel", others contemplated leaving the room. One participant explained that they had instead tried to direct attention to what they liked about their current way of life and then tried to envision how some of those aspects could be incorporated in future ways of life. Some lashed out, criticising the guiding questions, arguing that they were too broad in their focus, making it difficult to experience anything concrete. Ultimately, this reaction might be rooted in a resistance towards dealing with certain types of systemic changes when other types of changes, particularly those that seem more local, appear more straight forward.

Session 3

The facilitators (and authors of this paper) decided to alter session 3 in response to participants' (expressed) weariness, eliminating the third "future travel". After the introductory presentation highlighting the political nature of current climate future narratives, participants were instead invited to discuss within their groups to what extent their experiences during sessions 1 and 2 reflect current narratives of climate futures.

Notes from this session were added in light green to the large papers they had been working on throughout the day. Several participants appeared to turn their frustration into questions, which allowed them to confront and accept the ambiguity of futures. While participants titled their thoughts '*a new narrative?*', others deliberated on the term 'freedom' and asked; *"freedom for what and to do what?"*.
Some discussed the need for new calculation models to weigh whether something is 'worth it' and why, and to better capture other types of 'value'. Others posed questions about what *"a good life is and should be"*. Some participants highlighted the need for general education and democracy as part of their envisioned futures.

In general, it seemed that when given space to reflect upon and discuss experiences from sessions 1 and 2, some of the frustration and sense of meaninglessness was channelled into questions of how to create new goals, make space for new meanings, be empathetic and sympathetic towards futuring as a difficult and emotionally hard process, and reflect critically about the climate future narratives we are exposed to, what they mean, who and what are part of them and why.

4. Discussion

During the workshop, the participants were presented with different types of climate future narratives and information about current levels of climate impacts to help them to think beyond technological, capitalist and deeply anthropocentric ideas of sustainable development. Interestingly, participants' imagined futures changed as the workshop progressed, from technologically utopic and tension-free towards tense and somewhat radically different societal imaginations. Topics emerged that allowed participants to explicitly deliberate and reflect on the role of people, animals, plants, everyday life, technology, economy and societal organisation. For instance, participants initially assigned significant responsibility to technology in the process of reaching sustainability, but later assigned greater responsibility and agency to people and democratic processes. Interestingly, many of these aspects emerged as participants shared their imagined futures with each other. Aspects such as decision making, responsibility and valuation grew more prominent in participants' imagined futures, which also led to considerably more tension and frustration amongst the participants, as they felt unresolved and ill-equipped to imagine how these things were to

come about, corresponding well to emerging critiques of current climate change discourses (Asayama 2021, Hulme 2020).

Some participants acknowledged that the workshop allowed them to explicitly reflect upon their own embedded assumptions about possible futures, revealing certain unquestioned notions enabled by privilege and societal welfare. Other participants felt annoyed and frustrated with the process and argued that the format had made it difficult for them to explore the futures they wanted. Some of the participants found the facilitator's questions distracting while others faulted them as a reason for the homogeneity of the envisioned futures. Interestingly, the facilitating questions were designed to be quite open-ended, mostly asking how the future looks, smells, and sounds, who is part of it and how. Participants did not to a similar degree acknowledge that the homogeneity of their envisioned futures might just as easily be traced to their own homogeneity as a group with similar academic backgrounds from a single cultural setting, exposed to the same public climate change discourses. Some participants did, however, express interest in carrying out the workshop with people from other parts of society or from different cultures. While acknowledging that the participants had different experiences during the workshops, reflecting the inevitable ambiguity associated to imagining societal futures, a few reflections can be made about some general themes emerging from the workshop results;

The role of consumption

Consumption and consumptive activities were hidden or taken care of by technology in most envisioned futures. This was largely constant across sessions and reveals an interesting dilemma associated with consumption: while most participants knew that overconsumption is bad for the climate, they struggled to let go of consumptive activities and the need for acquiring things. Using technology to organise and allocate consumption seems a convenient step towards streamlining consumption patterns without challenging them. This speaks volumes about the hardship that is reducing or changing consumption patterns. The future travels enabled participants to reflect upon this and begin questioning the role of consumption, taking initial steps towards meaning-making processes that critically examine the role of consumption in our daily lives, (see e.g Pirgmaier 2020).

The role of community and care

Most participants emphasised a slower, more community-oriented way of life in their imagined futures. When participants shared their futures with each other, it emerged that participants' ideas about the good life seem tied to having more time to be creative, to care for other people and the planet and to feeling less stressed, things they find themselves unable to do right now. As the workshop progressed, more and more participants connected the role of economic systems to the enabling or disabling of care and creativity, suggesting a call for a care economy (see eg Spangenberg and Lorek (2022)).

The role of technology

The role of technology changed during the workshop. During the first session, significant responsibility for sustainable change was assigned to technology, where it enabled smooth and tension-free futures. After session 2, the role of technology was more fragmented. Some participants discussed technology- or IT-free zones, and the role of people, different practices and new forms of work and care grew more prominent as the sessions progressed. This might be a result of the framing of session 2 but could also indicate that some participants feel that technology and IT are too present in their current lives. When asked to reflect on that, they thus begin to actively question the sometimes ambiguous role of technology and digitalisation in society (see e.g Strengers and Nicholls (2017).

The role of nature

Nature played a diverse role in participants' envisioned futures. The sounds of the future were mainly birdsongs, and several participants envisioned future living more connected to nature, either through local and manual production of food, or through nature-based solutions for life in and between buildings. Other participants envisioned future life explicitly detached from nature, with synthetic food production suggesting a vision of nature as something to preserve and protect but not be dependent upon. There may be several reasons for this. Some participants may have a romanticised view of nature or want nature to be a much bigger part of their daily lives. Others may find it painful to think about nature in terms of resources and thus expect food and other types of production systems to be completely de-coupled from nature (see Rubow, 2022).

5. Concluding remarks

We are not only experiencing a climate crisis, we are also experiencing a crisis of imagination. Public discourses that frame responses to climate change as a managerial matter of scarcity and control tend to hinder futuring processes that might allow us to look beyond budgeting and policing to imagine how future sustainable lives might look and feel. We have presented the format and outcomes of a futuring process called the Future Travel Workshop to contribute explicitly to worlding methods for futuring. The content and format of the Future Travel workshop – based on a social ontology and acknowledging the role of future orientation for social change – can be categorised as *storying as process* and *storying as inquiry.* The workshop design takes seriously both the assumption that futures are made in the present and the close link between meaning-making, social change, agency and futurity. This process seems to have a) provided a capacity-building platform for the participants to explore potential futures and b) played an important role in participants' deliberation and meaning-making processes in envisioning everyday life futures, what they might include, and what they might *not* include. Topics emerged that allowed participants to explicitly deliberate and reflect on the role of people, nature, everyday life, technology, economy and societal organisation. Interestingly, participants initially assigned significant responsibility to technology in the process of reaching sustainability, but later assigned greater responsibility and agency to people and democratic processes.

The workshop format is not without problems and issues that can and should be addressed in future versions. For example, several participants felt frustrated with the increasing 'unruliness' of the imagined futures, as the workshop progressed and as their imagined futures developed from rather technological and tension-free to more radically different versions of societal organization. Most participants envisioned themselves alone in their future imaginaries, despite the explicit social orientation of most of the envisioned futures and corresponding narratives. The workshop format did not explicitly equip participants to explore futures from other perspectives, e.g. a non-human point of view, perhaps due to its embedding in a social ontology. Although one of the participants 'travelled' as an animal, thus experiencing a climate future from an animal perspective, humans nonetheless dominated the imaginaries. Furthermore, and heartbreakingly, (some) participants distinguished between the future that they would like to have and the future they consider possible. Although the workshop format, in its pilot form, enabled the participants to critically explore and confront some of the existing discursive practices they are part of associated to climate change, as well as equipped them to explore and share different, and more pluriversal, potential climate futures, new imaginaries need to be developed over time to be fully immersive, through the engagement of different sectors as well as through education and general media engagement.

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Key messages:
- Enabling radically different lifestyles means enabling new ideas about 'the good life'
- Perceived spaces for change in the *now* critically shape and mould climate *futures*
- Future Travel Workshops enable participants to explore radically different spaces for change
- Participants changed their expectations of the future from technological utopia toward societal reorganization.

PICTURES AND TABLES:

Tables and Figures

TABLE 1: Future Travel Workshop: sessions and guiding questions

Future Travel Workshop	Framing	Examples and excerpts of guiding questions
Session 1	Baseline – participants are guided to reflect about the future based on their own expectations and imagination.	**Traveling forward in time – this takes 3-4 minutes and draws on mindfulness techniques, breathing and taking the participants through time.** Arrival: It is early morning as you arrive in the future. Your eyes are closed, and you settle in your future body. Listen to your surroundings [20 sec pause] Now open your eyes to look around [20]. Home: If you aren't already there, move to your home, now. Walk around your home – what kind of a dwelling is this? [20] Do you live alone, or do you share the dwelling? Whom do you share with, and how do you share? […] What does it look like here? [further questions touched on: furniture & decoration incl. age, clothing incl. origin, where ppl eat, what kind of food is in the kitchen etc.] Social context: We will go outside to investigate your immediate neighborhood. Step outside your front door and stand there for a while, eyes closed. What do you hear and smell? [20] Sense beneath your feet: what is the surface you're standing on? [10] Now look around: what's your neighborhood like? [20] walk around and see whom you meet. Is it people or animals? … What is your relation to these beings? [20] If there are people about, what are they doing, and is this something you are usually part of? … [further questions in this section focused on: size of local community, structuring of families, ethnicity, religion and spirituality in the social fabric, inequality, values] Nature: Now look around for nature – be it wild or managed. What's the relation to nature in this future? How much is there? [20] How do humans and nature interact? How do YOU interact with nature? [20] How does it feel to live like this? [20] **Return journey – the return journey draws on the mindfulness techniques also used for the initial move forward in time.**
Session 2	Facts and Fiction – participants are exposed to three short presentations about current impacts of resources intensive lifestyles, possibilities for	**Traveling forward in time repeated. Arrival repeated.** Local Collectives: It's likely that we will rely more on the collective in the future.

	changes and alternative narratives, before being guided on another future travel, with this information in mind.	Again, you find yourself outside your front door. Look around to find traces of collective organisation. [20 sec] What kind of things are done collectively, and how? [20] Which collectives are you part of? What is your role? [20] Is there an outcome of these activities, and how is it shared in the collective? [a series of questions on the local organisation, expectations, reciprocity, division of tasks, rights and duties, ending on:] Take a minute to sense inward: how does it feel to live like this? [20] Work: […] What is work like in this future? And what are the structures around work like? [20] Looking at the duties you have in the course of a day, how much is something you name 'work' and how much is other kinds of duties? [questions moved on to the kind of work or duties done, the distribution, the meaning of work (to individual or as impact on community etc)] Time: What is the relation to time in this future? How do you spend your time? Who decides over your time? Sharing: Are there signs of new forms of sharing in this future? [10] Which kinds of things or services are shared in your community? And how does sharing work? Do you have libraries of things, clothes? Or maybe shared production of food - this may be the growing or the preparation? Shares energy production, facilities or maybe transportation? [20] Do you have a sharing economy, and how far does it reach? [20] Values, knowledge, learning and health: What is valuable knowledge in this society? Which kinds of skills do we need? [20] How do we pass knowledge and skills on? How does learning happen? [also a few questions on learning and ages, on changing trades or staying put] What makes 'the good life' in this society? [20] How do we make sure that all can get their share? [20] What's our take on 'health' in this future? How do we stay healthy? [20] What gives humans their worth? [20] How do humans thrive in this society? [10] How do you thrive? Belonging: In preparation of our return journey, I'd like you to go outside and sit in a lovely, quiet spot. Sense inward: Do you feel bound to this place? What is your relation to it? [30] Take a few deep breaths as you let yourself be filled by the sensations of this future. [30] And now, make your goodbyes. **Return journey repeated.**
Session 3	Dominant climate stories – participants are exposed to a presentation about current	**Note: below questions were not asked at the Future Travel Workshop, as session 3 was cut short.**

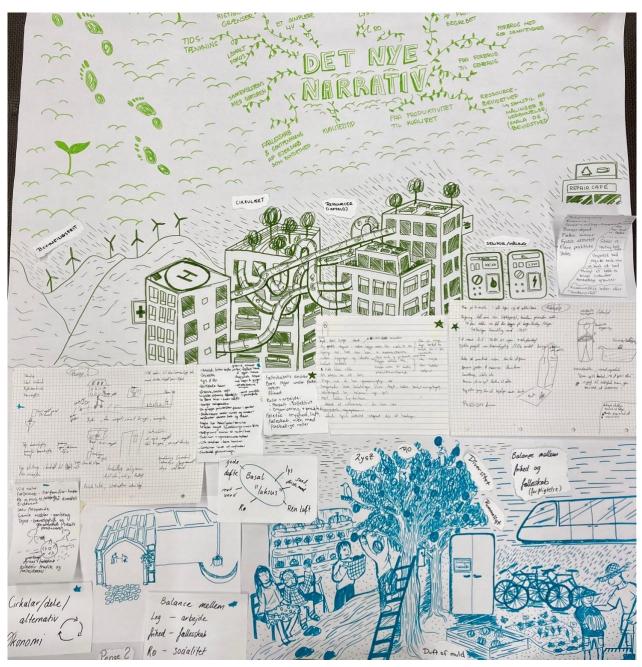|	narratives about climate futures and visions as presented in public and political discourse. Participants are asked to position their own imagined futures in accordance to existing stories, highlighting commonalities and tensions, and mapping out the positive narratives, both in what was presented and in the participants own imagined futures.	*[Moved to a lookout point near the participant's neighbourhood. From here they would be able to see far and wide. Participants were directed to gaze out across the land.* *Then questions examined: relations between city and countryside; the tracks left on the countryside by humans; considerations on how and by whom power over the land was held; their feelings for the land they looked out across.* *Then followed an opportunity to look more in depth at an issue or place of own choice - whatever the participants were most curious about.* *Finally, an interview in the future prompted the participants to consider what was the most important changes that had taken place; what gives quality of life in the future; what, if anything, participants were missing from life before the transition; and which change they were most proud of having contributed to. From here the voyage moved back to the present.]*

FIGURE 1: An example of a large paper produced by one of the groups. The different colors represent the progression through the sessions. In some cases, the drawings and text is carried out in the respective color. In the cases where the text and drawings was carried out with a black pencil, they have subsequently been marked with a star in the corresponding color. Session 1 is represented by blue/teal, session 2 by dark green, and session 3 by light green.

ALT TEXT: New ways of living socially and materially, as a result of future travels.