Imagining sustainable futures for Europe in 2050

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• Unprecedented challenges
• How is the EU policy agenda responding?
• How can foresight help us move towards the future we want?
• EEA and Eionet at a glance
• Imagining sustainable futures for Europe in 2050
Europe faces environmental challenges of huge scale and urgency

Achieving EU’s 2050 goal of ‘living well within planetary boundaries’ requires policies, investments and knowledge to transform core systems of production and consumption

The context is one of urgency, uncertainty and complexity

The question is no longer why or whether sustainability transitions are necessary, but **HOW** to make them happen at unprecedented speed
The European Green Deal puts the need for transformative change at the heart of EU policy.

It promotes the transformation of key systems (food, energy, mobility, buildings), as well as cross-cutting objectives, e.g.

- no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050
- decoupling of economic growth from resource use
- protecting, conserving & enhancing EU’s natural capital
- ensuring a just transition
The role of foresight

- Transforming societal systems is a major **governance challenge** → system innovation is complex and uncertain, characterised by risks, unintended outcomes and trade-offs

- **Foresight can play important role in helping society define and move towards desired futures**, e.g. using participatory processes to explore futures, pathways, risks and opportunities for policy and action

- European Commission sees **foresight as key tool** to support EU’s transformative agenda, foster policy coherence and ensure short-term initiatives are grounded in a longer-term perspective
EEA & Eionet at a glance

- **European Environment Agency (EEA):** EU agency that generates knowledge to support policymaking and governance

- The EEA works closely with ‘Eionet’ – its network of 38 member and cooperating countries

The Eionet covers various topics, including **foresight**

**EEA-Eionet vision for 2030**

“Enable a sustainable Europe through trusted and actionable knowledge for informed decision-making on environment and climate priorities and solutions”
Since 2008, EEA & Eionet have been building foresight literacy and co-creating anticipatory knowledge to inform **environmental policy** at ≠ scales and **assessments** of the state and outlook of the environment.

For example, by:

- Identifying relevant **emerging risks & opportunities**
- Analysing **global megatrends** and **drivers of change**
- Developing **qualitative scenarios** to open-up new & systemic ways of thinking about the future
- Feeding **national expertise and perspectives** into EU policy **processes** and vice-versa
Imagining sustainable futures for Europe in 2050

• EEA-Eionet **co-creation project** initiated in 2020

• **Aim:** develop plausible and contrasting images of what a sustainable Europe could look like in 2050 (→ **NOT projections or forecasts**)

Imagining sustainable futures for Europe in 2050

Phase 1 (2020-2022): develop four imaginaries that capture prominent discourses on sustainability

Technocracy for the common good
- Strong national governments
- High tech monitoring, control
- Big businesses + state influence
- Utilitarian logic
- Strategic autonomy

Unity in adversity
- Strong EU government
- Recurrent environmental crises
- Strong environmental measures
- Constrained corporate power
- Uncertain economic growth
- Solidarity and cultural change

The great decoupling
- Strong private sector
- Technological breakthroughs
- Green growth
- Liberalised global markets
- Weak and flexible EU
- Nature has instrumental value

Ecotopia
- Strong civil society
- Localism, deurbanisation
- Sufficiency, frugality, degrowth
- Stakeholder-driven business
- Deglobalisation
- Nature has intrinsic value
Imagining sustainable futures for Europe in 2050: scenario development

Steps

1. Influencing Factors (STEEP-Analysis)
   - Guiding question: What influencing factors could shape the future?
     - a) Solution Scenarios: Sustainable EU 2050
     - b) Context Scenarios: The world in 2050

2. Impact-Uncertainty Analysis
   - Guiding question: What are the factors with the highest impact and highest uncertainty?

3. Key Factor Analysis (Projections)
   - Guiding question: How could the key factors look like in 2050 (=projections)?

4. Scenarios
   - Guiding question: What are consistent combinations of projections and how can the narrative be described?

5. Wind Tunnelling
   - Guiding question: How robust are the solution scenarios against the backdrop of each context scenario?

6+ Next Steps
   - Guiding question: From the beginning of the project, it was agreed that the short narratives will be enriched beyond 2020.

Result

List of Influencing Factors
- IF 1
- IF 2
- IF 3
- IF 4
- IF 5
- IF 6
- IF 7
- IF 8
- IF 9
- IF 10
- IF 11
- IF ...

Key Factors
- KF 1
- KF 2
- KF 3

Key Factors & Projections
- KF 1
  - PR 1
  - PR 2
  - PR 3
  - PR 4
- KF 2
  - PR 1
  - PR 2
  - PR 3
  - PR 4
- KF 3
  - PR 1
  - PR 2
  - PR 3
  - PR 4

Scenarios
- KF 1
- KF 2
- KF 3

Robustness Check
- Context Scenario 1
- CS 2
- Solution Scenario 1
- SC 2

Participatory scenario processes

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Phase 2 (2022-2024):

- Run multistakeholder workshops to explore what Europe’s core production-consumption systems (food, energy, mobility, built environment) could look like in the four imaginaries
- Highlight cross-system tensions inherent in the simultaneous attainment of sustainability goals
- Highlight trade-offs between different sustainable futures, and surface the implicit assumptions these futures depend on (e.g. technological or social change)
- Assess resilience against different global contexts or disruptions
- Explore implications for policy and governance
Imagining sustainable futures for Europe in 2050

- **EEA report (2024)** to feed into SOER 2025 and constitute a resource for policymakers and other actors engaging with transitions governance

  - Imaginaries play an important role in opening up thinking about how the future could develop from a systemic lens
  
  - A sustainable Europe could take many forms – different economic and governance models, technologies, values and cultural norms, etc., and imply different trade-offs between sustainability goals, and different ‘winners’ and ‘losers’
  
  - Surfacing these issues can help build a shared understanding of where we are and where we want to go, and thus generate actionable knowledge that can inform policymaking and action towards sustainability

  ‘The best way to predict the future is to create it’ - Abraham Lincoln
Thank you!

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Technocracy for the common good

- Strong national governments
- High tech monitoring and control
- Big businesses with state influence
- Collective interests over individual
- Strategic autonomy, lean towards deglobalisation
Unity in adversity

- Strong EU government
- Recurrent environmental crises
- Strong environmental measures
- Constrained corporate power
- Uncertain economic growth
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