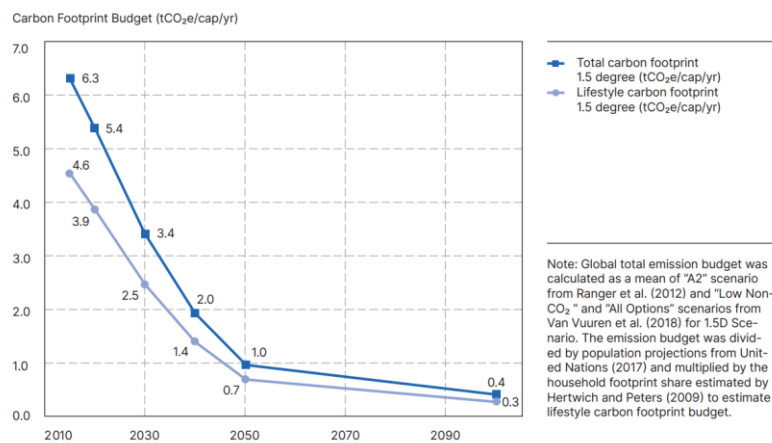




## Funders for Sustainable Living Network: Summary Report 2020-2021

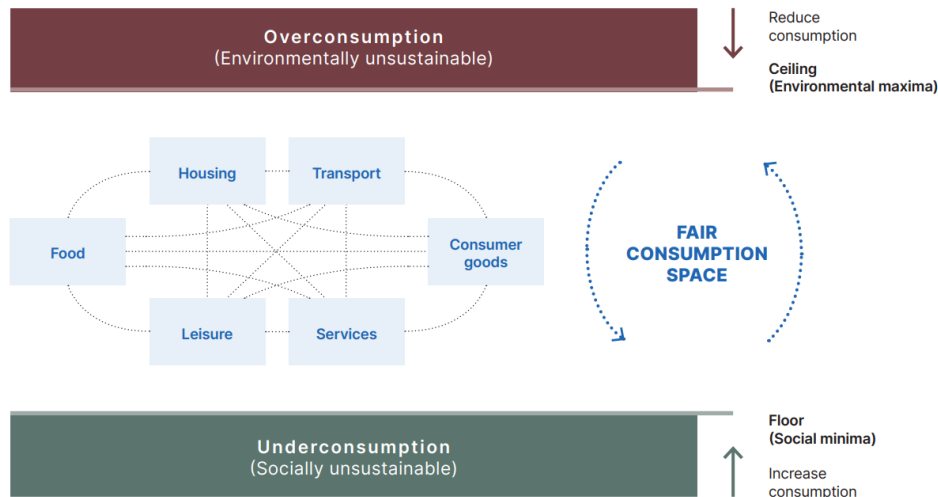
Funders for Sustainable Living is an open network for mutual support, collaboration and knowledge sharing between funders working on or exploring sustainable behaviours.

We are interested in ambitious action for radically equitable and sustainable ways of living, informed by the [1.5 Degree Lifestyles](#) research programme: an equity-based approach to give the 1.5-Degree target a reasonable chance of being achieved – by keeping per capita consumption emissions below 2.5 tons per year by 2030 and 0.7 tons per year by 2050.



Lifestyle carbon footprint budget comparable with 1.5°C target (without or with less use of negative emissions technologies). Source: [Hot or Cool Institute](#)

In a world with a limited and fast-shrinking global carbon budget, coupled with vast inequalities, funders can play a key role in ensuring we distribute the remaining carbon allowance in a manner that is fair: promoting deep and rapid shrinking of our footprints to avoid irreversible ecological damage. To meet the 2050 ambitious Paris target, high-income countries' lifestyle footprints need to be reduced by over 90% (91–95%), upper-middle-income countries need to reduce their footprints by 68–86%, and lower-middle-income countries like India need to reduce footprints by 76%. This approach has profound implications for the need to transform our way of living and organising our societies.



A Fair Consumption Space for Sustainable Lifestyles. Source: [Hot or Cool Institute](https://www.hot-or-cool.org/)

F4SL impacts include co-funding initiatives and increasing overall funding for ambitious sustainable living initiatives. We stay connected and keep up to date with innovative research and practice through our monthly workshops with guest experts.

**Examples of workshop themes:**

- What are “sustainable living”, “behaviour change”, and “1.5-degree lifestyles”?
- Funder collaboration: agenda-setting for high-ambition work on sustainable living
- Philanthropy behaving sustainably
- Narratives and storytelling to mainstream zero carbon living
- Revitalising Citizenship for Sustainable Living
- Bringing Sustainable Living into the heart of climate policymaking
- Tackling Consumerism
- New economics and the connection to sustainable consumption

**What is the relationship between systemic change and individual action?**

Funders and change-makers still meet pushback from others in our field, who suggest that individual lifestyle changes are a harmful distraction from systems change. This false dichotomy hinders discussions about how we can ease deep and rapid systemic change.

**We need top-down and bottom-up approaches: action at individual, community, institutional and governmental levels.** As funders, we can be more aware of the dangers of this false dichotomy and give credibility to all approaches even if our work focuses on aspects more classically described as “systems change” such as advocacy and infrastructure.

Funders are increasingly attuned to inequality in consumption, emissions, and climate impacts - and therefore a discussion of who’s lifestyle should be changing. The urgent need to reduce the consumption emissions of the top 10% of earners has been quoted often in the last 2-3 years, but there is a lack of acceptance of the radical reduction in consumption needed by medium-high income earners, and the political and economic shifts needed to make this a reality.

## Is it more effective to work with domain or deeper infrastructures?

Several foundations work with key consumption domains such as food, household energy or transport: to what extent can this promote deeper systemic changes?

<b>Domain-based approach</b>	<b>Deeper infrastructures</b>
It is important to <b>ground our work in the practical changes</b> that are essential, such as car-free cities and plant-based diets. We know the changes that are needed but they are still far from mainstream policy.	A domain-based approach could <b>obscure the level of ambition needed</b> : local currencies, cycling and veganism are important but will not get us to 1.5-degree lifestyles by themselves. Our societies, economies and way of living will need deeper shifts.
If we don't address these domains now, we will continue to <b>build infrastructure</b> that perpetuates unsustainable consumption, rather than urgently shifting to low-carbon lifestyles.	A focus only on one domain <b>risks giving a false impression</b> that we can make some simple swaps (e.g., public transport instead of cars in cities) and this will be sufficient to mitigate climate catastrophe.
Working on high-impact domains (as well as growing impact areas such as textiles and digital) enables <b>engagement with existing policy processes</b> .	The <b>equity commitments of the 1.5-degree global goal</b> can be more easily avoided when working on domains rather than considering whole lifestyles that fit within fair carbon budgets. Are we avoiding difficult conversations by focusing on the domains and their policy processes?
Projects can <b>make fast progress on reducing emissions</b> : which delays tackling the underlying drivers of environmental degradation.	We need to do both: tackle the high-impact domains such as food, housing, and mobility, and <b>simultaneously tackle the underlying drivers of overconsumption</b> , such as the economic model, systems of production and consumption, and social norms.
We can <b>model specific shifts</b> that are unavoidable within equitable 1.5-degree lifestyles, such as avoiding flying, driving, and living in large homes. These essential shifts are controversial even within the climate sector: it is important to prove that they are necessary, possible, and compatible with a decent quality of life.	There is a <b>need for an honest exploration</b> of how healthy and happy societies can be sustained with exceptionally low levels of energy and resource use and radically lower levels of consumption in richer parts of the world.
Suitable for <b>initiatives at the local level</b> , including community-led projects. These projects may be more manageable than those trying deep change to our economy and society.	How <b>fundors can support projects to maximise systemic impact</b> through our funding of domains. How could local and domain-based approaches connect with work that promotes sustainable alternatives to the current economic system?

## Uncomfortable challenges for funders of sustainable living

### **Building a mandate for unpopular lifestyle changes**

It is often said that climate action needs to “start where people are”: but the result of this approach is that we often invite people to only do things they feel comfortable with, even at this stage of the climate emergency. An example is suggesting that individuals replace their cars with electric cars: this minimises the lifestyle change, while only partly reducing emissions. Better options, such as active transport & public transport, are available but require far more work to build social and political support as well as the necessary infrastructural and economic shifts to make these lifestyle options accessible to the majority and possible. Some funders note that necessary systemic actions include shutting down power stations and airports and working for disarmament - but often our sector asks people to slightly reduce their emissions with small, easy lifestyle changes that leave unsustainable systems unchanged.

### **Acknowledging deeper social and economic injustices in the work that we do**

Funders question why there is a lack of moral outrage about the existential harm being done by a minority of over-consumers - presumably because many people working in the climate mitigation field in the global north are in the top 10% of income earners causing about 50% of carbon emissions. It is essential to acknowledge and work with these deeper issues of inequality in power and access to resources, to develop responses that are proportional – in scale and speed of change, and appropriately address the influence of the “polluter elite.”

### **Understanding how social change happens**

Sustainable living is broad, and funding has many entry points, including narratives and framing, regulations, fiscal policy, community initiatives, infrastructural provision, movement building and technical research. We can support change at the household level, in cities, through institutions and at all levels of policymaking. A more thorough understanding of the role of these leverage points in systemic change could enhance our collaborative strategizing.

### **Introducing controversial strategies to Board members**

Funders are advocating within their organisations, for example, for higher ambition and for a greater understanding of the need to change the systems that drive overconsumption. Some staff feel constrained - by an organisational preference for incremental change, by low prioritisation of work on sustainable living, or by the need for guaranteed impacts rather than ambitious experiments. Staff from some foundations self-censor, to avoid conflict with leadership on issues such as questioning economic growth, or the need to limit consumption.

These conversations led to questioning what those of us with both privilege and influence can do that is much braver.

## Recommendations for Funders of sustainable living

- We need to socialise the idea of limits to consumption, making “maximum consumption levels” a legitimate conversation.
- The polluter elite issue needs addressing not only due to direct emissions, but also the investments and political influence of this minority.

- There are still some difficult conversations that have not been tackled in relation to sustainable living e.g., the need to decrease house sizes / m2 living spaces.
- Funders can support experimentation and the value of imagination in creating enabling environments for sustainable living, as well as making it possible for the sector to react quickly to opportunities and challenges.
- In addition to amplifying positive change, we also need to prepare for pushback and opposition strategies.
- We could do more to get out of our silos and work on intersectional issues including social justice, care work, health, and economics. It is important to bring in diverse voices e.g., unions, and indigenous communities.
- It is essential to tackle cultural shifts at the same time as tackling policy change - these need to work together. Social movements are essential, both to imagine/build alternatives to our current way of life, and to pressure systemic change.

Next steps for the Funders for Sustainable Living (F4SL) network: under discussion

1. **Mapping the field to reveal the dynamic norm for ambitious interventions.** There is a perception gap in the field of fair consumption: people increasingly support strong policies for limiting overconsumption but assume that others have a low tolerance for radical change. Making this visible (through anonymous surveys and mapping) encourages ambitious work on fair consumption limits.
2. **Pooling funds for innovation:** foundations keen to experiment with high-ambition work towards fair consumption face several barriers including caution about backlash, lack of in-house experts for due diligence, and preferring a collaborative rather than pioneering role. Pooled funding for innovation on fair consumption allows foundations to distribute funds outside of their core programme while sharing risks.
3. **Framing consumption as a Climate Justice issue:** climate justice needs changing systems that drive overconsumption, especially in the Global North. Climate Justice movements have rightly pushed back against campaigns for small behavioural changes that are not connected to deeper economic and political shifts; however, we need to be better at communicating why demand reduction among high emitters is necessary for building equitable and sustainable societies.

## Invitation

Our growing global network would love to welcome you! If you work for a funder and you are interested in the field of sustainable living, we would love to tell you more and invite you to a forthcoming workshop that interests you. Please contact Kate Power ([k.power@hotorocool.org](mailto:k.power@hotorocool.org)).