

The future of sustainability

Society is constantly confronted with moral dilemmas; sustainability versus comfort, ethics versus convenience. As the world's resources are depleting, support and awareness for durability and sustainability is growing. In this shifting balance, full of insecurities and opportunities, designers feel right at home. How can we help shape the future of sustainability?



Urgency

According to the [TU Delft position on climate action](#), worldwide CO₂ emissions should be reduced to **zero** in 30 years, if we want to limit the warming of the earth to 1,5 °C. Both the process of climate mitigation (preventing climate change) and the process of climate adaptation (preparing for climate change) cannot be postponed any longer. As service- and product designers, IDE alumni find themselves right in the centre of consumerism, exactly where mitigation must gain traction.

A future vision of sustainability can be dark and apocalyptic, or optimistic and hopeful. The latter requires direct action, but is still attainable.

Societal changes

Human behaviour will not change, especially in the timeframe we have, to such a degree that economic growth and personal comfort are traded in significant numbers for ecological restoration. As personal and financial wellbeing are directly connected to the increasing material and energy use, in 2050, we will accommodate this human wellbeing while at the same time recognizing the planet's limits in resources and climate. This is now considered a collective objective rather than an individual responsibility. The feeling of uncertainty and risk that once surrounded sustainable products and services, such as when using second-hand materials, repairing rather than buying new, and sharing instead of owning, has been exchanged for a feeling of empowerment and unity.

Although our ways of travelling and consumption have changed, we do not feel limited in our lives. 'Sustainable alternative' is no longer used as an expression; sustainability is a given. High quality items, materials, and services were embraced, instead of single use products. And although the digitization of society has not decreased material and energy use as hoped, it was recognized in time that it also brought new opportunities to help the planet's ecological problems.

Designing for the decades

Industrial Design Engineers have stepped up to the plate. We realised that baby steps would not be enough to reach our goals in time; significant changes were required. Designs are no longer focusing on downcycling and waste management, but look generations rather than years into the ecological future. We have learned how to extend product lifetimes, and accustomed the consumers to responsible behaviour such as re-use, sharing, and pay-per use – all while valuing their wellbeing and comfort as essential for a successful transition to this sustainable society.



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