

# Adaptation as a Social Trap that Delays Fundamental Solutions Towards Sustainable Futures

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## Abstract

Affluence constitutes one of the main causes of climate change and socio-environmental distress. Fundamental policies to reach sustainable futures focus on transitioning towards more sustainable lifestyles or mitigation through radical technological progress. However, despite the increasing impact of climate change, lifestyle changes have not been widely adopted. We examine the transition process to more sustainable lifestyles using a simulation model in which humanity reacts to socio-environmental pressures by adaptation, mitigation, or adopting a sustainable lifestyle. Simulation experiments show adaptation and mitigation policies, respectively, reduce the perception of climate change impacts or emissions generation. Our findings highlight how adaptation policies help cope with pressures in the short term, while delaying the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles and also reducing the allocation of resources directed to mitigation. Focusing much of our effort on adaptation may constitute a social trap, whereby we unintentionally postpone and even undermine fundamental solutions to climate change.

**Keywords:** sustainability transition, beyond-affluence, simulation modelling, mitigation, adaptation, symptomatic solutions.