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A Draft Proposal for Radical Lifestyle Reform to Reach Climate Goals

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This article addresses the urgent need for accelerated climate action by proposing a radical, digitally enforced lifestyle reform. The objective is to explore how individual consumption patterns can be reshaped through a global carbon quota system, enforced via a smartphone application. The methodology is conceptual and normative, grounded in existing climate data and aims to leverage capitalism's own mechanisms to drive systemic change. The proposal includes calculating locally valid Total Lifecycle (TLC) emissions for all products and services, assigning personal CO_2 limits, and enabling global quota trading. The expected results include a gradual shift in consumer behaviour, redistribution of wealth, and a forced transformation of corporate product and service portfolios toward sustainability. The article concludes that while the proposal faces significant implementation challenges, it offers a bold framework for debate and innovation in climate policy.

Keywords: climate change, lifestyle reform, carbon quota, digital solution, sustainability

1. Introduction

This draft article is less an academic writing but was prepared as part of my civic engagement. It calls for a radical digital solution that uses capitalism's logic to make much faster progress towards climate goals than is currently the case.

The article first outlines the starting points and then presents a digital solution for a radical lifestyle change to accelerate the transformation of people's consumption habits globally and thereby indirectly force a sustainability renewal of companies' product and service portfolios.

The article will also briefly outline the expected impacts and the huge challenges that would likely be encountered in the implementation process. The article aims to generate a debate, hopefully not just a scientific one, to look for out-of-the-box digital solutions to the current climate crisis.

2. Starting Points

Apart from climate sceptics, it is widely accepted that our current economies are unsustainable, with carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions well above the level needed to meet the Paris climate target (United Nations 2015).

In the recent economic and social conditions, meeting climate targets is too slow or even unthinkable. Hence, a climate catastrophe seems to be inevitable, therefore, a rapid and radical change is needed to alter the course of our fate.

Carbon emission is linked to end consumers: more than 60% of the carbon dioxide emissions are related to the consumption of individuals at the end of the value

chains (the products & services they buy and use – see Thunberg 2023, pp. 352–353). But it is also true that the biggest polluters are those companies which produce these products and services: 100 companies are responsible for 70% of the pollution in the world (Thunberg 2023, p. 403). We need a complex solution that addresses individuals and companies simultaneously to respond responsibly to climate change.

My proposal is based on the hypothesis that if we could change the consumption habits of individuals (what they buy or are *allowed to buy*), this would quickly have an impact on the portfolio of products and services developed and provided by firms. Hence, the necessary changes could occur in the required time frame.

3. The Recommended Radical Digital Solution

The proposed digital solution is based on a few interrelated assumptions or suggestions:

- We should be capable of calculating locally valid Total Lifecycle (TLC) for every product & service: calculating TLC for every product and service regarding carbon dioxide emission is a key element and condition of my concept. It should include production & transportation and other aspects of products and services, thus always having a locally valid value.
- Smartphone application for counting CO_2 emission for individual purchases: we should introduce a compulsory smartphone-based application worldwide for every person. The application would count every purchase of the individuals and estimate the TLC locally for CO_2 (at the place of purchase). The critical condition is that any product or service can be bought (paid for with local currency) only via this application worldwide. The main difference compared to existing applications (such as Earth Hero) is that the application I propose would be mandatory rather than voluntary, and based on a quota system rather than relying solely on gamification to motivate users.
- Personal carbon dioxide limit for everyone: we should introduce a personal carbon dioxide limit for every citizen on Earth on an annual basis. Starting at the recent level for those who produce CO_2 above one ton/year (level of sustainability, see Thunberg, 2023, p. 25) and one ton for those below that level. The recent level is based on each individual's estimated purchase habits over the past years.
- Reduction of the limit: we should gradually reduce personal carbon dioxide emissions to a sustainable level on a global scale (for example, reducing by 5–20% every year until it reaches the one ton/person/year sustainability level)
- Selling and buying personal quotas via the app: those citizens who produce less CO_2 than allowed in the given year may sell their surplus quotas to any other citizen worldwide who wants to buy them via the application.

4. A Few Expected Impacts

I assume that people would have time to adapt and plan with the introduction of a system like this, because the changes would be gradual. Hence, people would slowly change their lifestyles and buy products and services that are more sustainable.

People would invest in sustainability personally as a rational economic choice. It is expected to make investments that support sustainability, e.g. insulating houses to use energy efficiently.

Money would flow from North to South and from the rich to the poor: people with higher incomes can only spend their money on products or services above their carbon dioxide limit if they buy carbon credits (or buy carbon-neutral products & services). This would shift money from the wealthier to the poorer, who would have more resources to make the necessary improvements to adapt to climate change locally. It would help somewhat mitigate the injustice of climate change as well (Thunberg 2023, p. 498).

Carbon quota would become a second currency besides money. In addition to the recent economic situation where money is the most widespread and accepted currency in our mainly capitalist world, the carbon quota would become a global currency worldwide (for a specific period of time, until sustainability is reached).

Companies adapt or perish: companies would be urged to develop products and services with a smaller carbon footprint or be entirely carbon-neutral. Otherwise, they would be unable to sell their products and services over time and would go bankrupt. So, capitalism's inner logic and operation would be put at the service of climate change.

This system is temporal: the application and the quota system would become redundant over time (I estimate about 20–50 years). On the one hand, until then everyone has already changed their lifestyle, and on the other hand, companies would sell almost exclusively carbon-neutral or low-emission level products and services, and the application would become obsolete.

5. A Few Challenges that Need To Be Addressed

Of course, I am not entirely naïve, it is obvious that even if radical change were necessary to reach climate goals, introducing my proposed digital system would encounter massive social, economic and political resistance. Besides these, a few other significant barriers need to be addressed:

- Strong political & social support is needed: the application and the system behind it cannot be implemented globally without strong political and social support and binding implementation. But some countries (e.g. Nordic countries) or regions, e.g., the European Union, could implement it alone as well, which would have an impact on other areas as well because it would have an extraterritorial effect on those companies that intend to sell products there (Scott 2013).
- Restriction of freedom: the introduction of the system restricts people's freedom (e.g. how they can spend their income). It is an important criticism,

however, there were examples of this kind of limitation under COVID-19 restrictions or during the Second World War (Thunberg 2023, 460–462).

- TLC calculation is not available and not evident: a TLC calculation system is not in place, evaluation of TLC is not evident, and the same products and services may have different carbon footprints in different parts of the world (e.g. depending on transportation) or at different times of the year (seasonal effects).
- Tricks to avoid the system: it is human nature to break certain rules, and some would try to cheat the system. For example, they may hide their consumption behind corporate purchases (e.g. company car or jet use for personal purposes). Hence, every spending should be able to be safely and unambiguously linked to individuals.
- Managing personal and family consumption: families' consumption should also be counted individually; consumption of those under 14 years old should be fully managed by their parents (guardians), and consumption of those over 14 years old should be partially managed by their parents (guardians) as long as they live in the same household.
- Exploitation of poor and digitally illiterate people: people with low incomes and the digitally illiterate must be educated on how they can use the app without being exploited. Companies and other mediators would be excluded from personal quota trading to avoid exploiting these people.
- Lack of necessary infrastructure and devices: not everyone has a smartphone in the world, and the network infrastructure required for handling payments and counting emissions is not yet available in every country or region. (Inegbedion 2021).

6. Conclusion

The climate crisis demands not only technological innovation but also bold systemic reforms that challenge the status quo. This proposal outlines a radical yet feasible digital mechanism to reshape individual consumption and corporate production through a globally enforced carbon quota system. By embedding sustainability into everyday economic transactions, the system would gradually shift both behaviour and market offerings toward climate goals. While the challenges – political, technical, and ethical – are substantial, the urgency of the climate emergency justifies exploring such transformative ideas. The aim is not to present a final solution, but to provoke discussion and inspire further development of actionable and scalable strategies that align with environmental and social justice.

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