The basic conflict: Simplicity vs. consumption

Ever-expanding consumption has saturated the worlds of these boomers, as everyone around them races to “keep up with the Joneses.” Against strong external pressures, these boomers have struggled to define their lives by striving for simplicity. In a marketplace scrambling to capitalize on boomers’ next life stages, they are clarifying what it means to have stability, security, and satisfaction without paying a service premium for them. In searching to attain financial, social, and ecological stability, they struggle with the overwhelming assumptions and pressure of their peers and their milieu. They may participate in bringing more sustainable living arrangements into the world as both physical and social structures and will feed their experiences back into their niches in mainstream institutions.

Lifestyle: Putting together the pieces

These boomers have been honing their foresight for several decades; they think and act with the future in mind. They know uncertainty exists and have planned for it by gathering information and meticulously managing changes in the systems of their lives. They have banded together in efforts like the New Roadmap Foundation and worked within their vocational circles to propagate the values of sustainable lifestyles among their peers. They calmly face aging because they are well acquainted with the resources available to them. They embrace the roles of being elders in their families, an experience often triggered by the passing of their parents. These are boomers to whom retirement is an important and relevant stage of life, and they are preparing meticulously to enter it and make it what they want it to be.

Expectations: Living within limits

These boomers find themselves torn between a desire to make institutions more sustainable and a conviction that the government should play a role in mitigating the personal and social consequences of others’ unsustainable lifestyles. Since they doubt that government will step in soon enough, some of them see increased civic engagement as a way to advance these values in mainstream institutions. The functional interrelationships between local communities and global communities matter a great deal to these boomers. In terms of locale, they live in opposite extremes of the American landscape: in either dense urban areas or rural enclaves. There is a stark division between urban and rural expressions of sustainable aging. For the urbanites, their placement looks to a time when they will be less mobile, both physically and economically as energy prices rise. Their faith in urban infrastructure allows them to live an ideal of urban sustainability. For those in rural places, they give up the convenience of services and independence from cars in exchange for working closely with natural resources and getting off of the grid, hedging for the possibility of infrastructural collapse.

Aging sustainably means understanding the importance of balance between homes and environments, retirements and finances, and relationships and legacies.

A feeling that they are outside the mainstream is ingrained in the identity of some baby boomers. They have participated in simple living and back-to-the-land movements and see, in part, the responsibility for the attention the environmental movement receives today. These boomers have spent their lives resisting what they see as the pull of consumption. Now, as they confront aging, they focus on the importance of relationships with place, thoughts about energy, financial situation, and reflections on their own physical and emotional health. Classically caught between the increasing independence of their children—for those who have them—and the mortality of their elders, they carefully consider their legacies to future generations. Interpersonal and institutional forces can be these boomers’ hopes and pains collide with the larger environments of nature and the economy. They don’t just make different areas of life, but whole systems of resources, meaning, and satisfaction. Although they value their social networks deeply, they aim to live as self-sufficient as possible when making decisions. Their independence reflects the simplicity they see as the key to balance and sustainable aging.

Aging Sustainably

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Search the Future

The Future at the Past

BOOMER ACTION TYPE:
Aging Sustainably
The Action Ecology illustrates the complexity with which boomers anticipate, plan for, and deal with changes in their lives. The inner portion of the ecology highlights resources, sorted into four categories: people, information, institutions, and capitals. The outer ring, organized around our seven dimensions of decision making, describes practices and strategies through which boomers put their resources into action. Finally, there are the “decisions in suspension,” questions that these boomers don’t have answers to just yet.
The Dimensions of Decision Making

The boomers we talked to helped us discover the key dimensions of the seven big stories that emerge at the intersection of aging, cohort, and period effects. For each story, we found a pair of defining actions—two poles of behavior that turn the stories into scales. We then used these scales to define the action types, each of which represents a unique profile.

**Extended Capacity**

In the coming decades, these boomers will focus on the environment to navigate challenges. From an intense focus on their physical and social homes, to the integration of those homes into larger natural systems, boomers aging sustainably will create space, resources, and aesthetic niches for themselves. They have learned the lay of the land and will work to shape and maintain it to their advantage.

**Resequenceing Life Stages**

While many of these boomers do identify or have identified with counter-culture movements and practices, they nonetheless seek shifts that have renewable implications. They have been instrumental in bringing ‘alternative’ narratives into the mainstream consciousness and have experienced many iterations of the mainstreaming process, which provides them the opportunity to leave better legacies to future generations.

**Self-Help 2.0**

Boomers aging sustainably have a strong sense of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. They will bring this confidence to their engagements with material goods, services, and civic activities. They are extremely thoughtful about the limits of their material needs, and value active efforts to limit what they need to the capacity of natural and economic systems.

**New Sociability**

While these boomers prefer to adjust their surroundings rather than themselves, their current and anticipated experiences have many ramifications for their identities. In order to resolve the new identities they’re developing, these boomers turn to their relationships—particularly their estate partnerships, their children, their parents, and close circles of friends—for clues.

**Re-Destitutition**

Mainstream institutions and rites of passage—be they retirement, finding the nest empty, or public schooling—have definite meaning to these boomers. Instead of abandoning these institutions and seeking new ones, however, they will strive to remake them in the light of their own values of simplicity, sustainability, and holism.

**Wealth Generation**

Boomers aging sustainably are sensitive to risk, whether the risks stand to affect their own physical or financial health, their community’s collective health, or natural and built environments that have shaped how they eat, invest, and make their homes. They have been sensitized to too many risks proliferating in their lives to avoid engaging with and managing risk.

**Global Transparency**

Partly because of their sensitivity to the land and the communities around them, these boomers have come to value sustains. In their view, it’s the other way around: our communities have come to value them, both due to financial resources and their ecological footprints.

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Profiles & Quotations

Each of these profiles describes a person who embodies the Aging Sustainably action type. These three personal stories best illustrate the decision-making lens of the action type but are not the only interviewees who shaped the type. The profiles represent actual people and their worlds, although their names and some details about their lives have been changed to protect their identities.

Susan Petersen
Age: 56
Urban Northwest

Susan identifies more strongly as a “person who’s non-conformist” than as a baby boomer. She is alarmed by the spiraling debt and material excess of her peers, and strives to maintain simplicity in all aspects of her life. In the past three years, she and her husband have dealt with the deaths of four parents and the settling of their material and financial affairs. This left Susan with an increased sensitivity to her own needs and future; she began to reflect on the sustainability of her future years and her legacy. Her children have moved out, and her husband recently retired to focus on his artistic passions. At the same time, she has shifted her work as a librarian to a contract basis. She looks to sustain her relationship with a women’s Episcopal church group that is engaged with social efforts locally and globally. Susan and her husband are focused on making their retirement as “green” as possible, and believe in the principles of sustainability and simplicity put forward by Seattle’s New Roadmap Foundation. They find it more sustainable to live in an urban center, where they can live without a car and be close enough to the things they want and need to walk to. They have, too, been dedicated themselves to living responsibly and simply, and the couple has committed themselves to a pattern of “living lighter” and establishing a retirement community with their current community.

On sustaining connections:
“...I’m interested in not being a burden on my children, and making sure that they anticipate financial security in the sense that they learn to be sustainable and independent, that we live simply, that we live less so that we can less be a burden on them...”

On material possessions:
“There are a lot of people in our age range who spend a lot of money on appearances and are pretty deeply in debt. That’s going to have consequences. We’ve lost several parents in just the last few years. That reinforces that feeling that stuff is not important; it’s the people that are important.”

On retirement in the counterculture:
“I have read a pretty wide spectrum of information about planning for retirement from the kind of counterculture you know, living with as low a footprint and impact as you possibly can. So I have pretty strong leanings in that, and...”

On mortality:
“You’re parents are some kind of a buffer between you and the end of life, and when they’re gone, it’s like: you’re next. So I think there’s definitely some identity issues that come along with that, being aware of your own mortality...”

David Martelli
Age: 56
Rural East Coast

A successful psychotherapist with a global clientele, David has balanced a professional, urban identity with a back-to-the-land lifestyle that continues to evolve. He is interested in the “balance shift” when one can shift focus: working to support oneself, rather than financial wealth to support others. David takes pride in his “small footprint,” and occurs to him the “funny” times when he lived in a spiritual commune and trained as a therapist, and takes pride in his close proximity to the land. David anticipates a “balance shift” when he will spend more time tending to the gardens, fruit trees, animals, and visiting grandchildren. He sees this phase of his life as “attenuated”—a time when he is no longer striving to build a career, his children are grown, and his wife is rehabilitating her life after a long illness.

On sustaining connections:
“...they lifted me out of being a burden on my children, and made sure that they anticipated financial security in the sense that they learn to be sustainable and independent, that we live simply, that we live less so that we can be less a burden on them...”

On material possessions:
“...it’s the people that are important...”

On mortality:
“You’re parents are some kind of a buffer between you and the end of life, and when they’re gone, it’s like: you’re next.”

On the environment:
“...it’s the people that are important...”

Source: flickr.com/beancounter
Source: IFTF
On the consequences of materialism: “I don’t think there’s going to be a dramatic doomsday cataclysm, but I think that the dominant culture is going to be considerably less affluent by the standards we have today. And there’ll be an enormous amount of people in need.”

On sustaining the body: “I’ve always been kind of athletic, but I had a very random approach. I have some structural weaknesses genetically that we’ve been working on them until a few years ago, even though I intellectually knew a lot about the body. So that feels really good. I feel strong and centered and, in spite of twisting my ankle, less accident prone than I used to be.”

On the changing nature of retirement: “Nobody close to my age has anything resembling a perspective on retirement that my parents’ generation had. It’s not the same at all. There’s no sense of leisure retirement or something. It’s more like the freedom to do work you really want to do and not be bound to income.”

On the rhythms of the land: “The purpose of having it [solar and hydroelectric power] is not financial, and it’s not even so much a social activist kind of issue. It’s more like a sense of responsibility—the same with the food thing. It feels like if you’re gonna have a piece of Earth, that to have a full and comprehensive relationship with a piece of land is advisable. And that is how you create a cycle of life … It’s a lot about living with it, living with the process of moving toward something rather than goal achievement.”

On preparing for retirement: “We had talked about a seven-year plan to get our finances to the point that we could sell the house, we could move with little debt. When I got sick, we rethought planning to do this. It was that whole three-year thing that started knocking seriously on houses in Arkansas. So it’s been about a seven-year process. I was forced out of my job when I got sick; it really accelerated what we were going to do. It’s not like all of a sudden this decision is happening to move. We’ve been thinking about it for many years and how to prepare and how to prepare to get there.”

On citizenship: “The whole concept of democracy and patriotism is to question your government. That’s the duty of the citizen: to question government.”

On energy and travel: “We practice what we need to do to live in retirement years. We don’t have to travel as much anymore. So that has cut back on gasoline usage. We’re meaningful we can live on our retirement [income]. It’s a no-nonsense when we drive but we think when we move with it we’ll still be okay. But we’re young enough that we could work if we find that we can’t pay the bills!”

Mike Diaz
Age: 57
Suburban West Coast

Mike is remarkably calm for all of the changes he has lived through and their affects on his plans for the future. He worked as a computer analyst and programmer, but was unable to work after suffering from a near-paralyzing nerve disorder in addition to heart problems. His illness and recovery prompted his wife, Gail, to retire early this year as a long-time teacher and a teacher. To be closer to children who will care for them, Mike and Gail are preparing to move to rural Arkansas, where they have purchased a house and will allow Mike to regain some of his mobility after a heart operation last year. Mike and Gail have prepared for retirement; seven years ago, they started planning to do this. It was the last three years that started knocking seriously on houses in Arkansas. So it’s been about a seven-year process. I was forced out of my job when I got sick; it really accelerated what we were going to do. It’s not like all of a sudden this decision is happening to move. We’ve been thinking about it for many years and how to prepare and how to prepare to get there.”

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Wealth Generation

What to set aside in the transition to retirement and how to build a legacy?

outer ring, organized around our seven dimensions of decision making, describe strategies through which boomers plan for, and deal with, changes in their lives. The Action ecology illustrates the complexity with which boomers anticipate, plan for, and deal with changes in their lives. These boomers are feeling out what is most sustainable for them and the world around them. They are most sustainable for them and the environment in the long run.

# 老龄可持续

一、基本概念

1. **Simplicity vs. consumption**
   - Ever-expanding consumption has saturated the markets of their cities.
   - These boomers have struggled to define their lives simply, in a manner appropriate according to their values.
   - They have participated in simple living and back-to-the-land movements and are, in part, driven by a feeling that they are outside the mainstream.

2. **Living within limits**
   - These boomers have struggled to define their lives simply, in a manner appropriate according to their values.
   - They have participated in simple living and back-to-the-land movements and are, in part, driven by a feeling that they are outside the mainstream.

# 决策的可持续性

1. **Money and meaning**
   - Whether they arrived at this conclusion through a conscious process or not, these boomers live simply because it makes personal sense. They identify the need to put their resources into action. Finally, there are the "declinists in suspense." Good riddance! These boomers don’t have answers to party yet.

2. **Sustainability and independence**
   - Boomers aging sustainably assess even more of their financial capacities and limits and manage the systems that are in place around them.
   - Whatever their experience, they need to find new resources, new information, new relationships, and new technologies to find ways to deal with a changing environment.

3. **Providing resources**
   - Providing resources for financial independence is the key to their sustainability.
   - Providing resources for financial independence is the key to their sustainability.

# 结论

A feeling that they are outside the mainstream is ingrained in the identity of some baby boomers. They have participated in simple living and back-to-the-land movements and are responsible for the attention the environmental movement receives today. These boomers have spent their lives realizing the value of the old world of community. They have focused on the importance of relationships with place, thoughtfulness about energy, and resiliency to meet their financial needs, and joy. There are several possibilities on the horizon for these boomers, some of which have already been realized. After decades of experience in their youth, many of these boomers have engaged in community organizing. Now, they turn to a new phase of scaling for sustainability, flexibility, and agency. There are several possibilities on the horizon for these boomers, some of which have already been realized. After decades of experience in their youth, many of these boomers have engaged in community organizing. Now, they turn to a new phase of scaling for sustainability, flexibility, and agency. There are several possibilities on the horizon for these boomers, some of which have already been realized. After decades of experience in their youth, many of these boomers have engaged in community organizing. Now, they turn to a new phase of scaling for sustainability, flexibility, and agency. There are several possibilities on the horizon for these boomers, some of which have already been realized. After decades of experience in their youth, many of these boomers have engaged in community organizing. Now, they turn to a new phase of scaling for sustainability, flexibility, and agency. There are several possibilities on the horizon for these boomers, some of which have already been realized. After decades of experience in their youth, many of these boomers have engaged in community organizing. Now, they turn to a new phase of scaling for sustainability, flexibility, and agency. There are several possibilities on the horizon for these boomers, some of which have already been realized. After decades of experience in their youth, many of these boomers have engaged in community organizing. Now, they turn to a new phase of scaling for sustainability, flexibility, and agency. There are several possibilities on the horizon for these boomers, some of which have already been realized.