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This paper describes recent progress in the utilization of participatory scenario-based backcasting approaches to sustainability research that blend quantitative and qualitative analyses in order to explore alternative climate change futures, as undertaken in a range of academic, government, and private sector projects in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada.

These projects reveal that buy-in to policy proposals may be enhanced by participation, but there is a risk of participants being overwhelmed by the complexity of the choices they are being asked to make. Furthermore, tools are grounded in a process, which must itself be the explicit focus of attention...

Research Highlights: Second order backcasting is explicitly normative and participant-led. It facilitates social learning about consequences of initial preferences. It may enhance our ability to explore complex, uncertain, and value-laden issues. Frontier of backcasting is increasingly participatory and makes use of visual tools. Possible tradeoff between number of people engaged and depth of discussion/learning.