

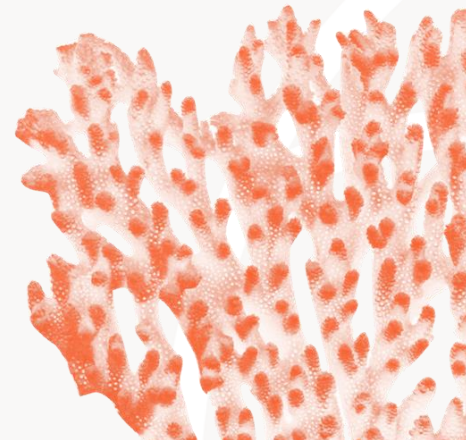
# Changing the way we think about Change in Norway

Systems change methodology to address  
complex societal challenges

Dr Anna Birney



School  
of System  
Change



# Learning to lead change in a complex world

[schoolofsystemchange.org](http://schoolofsystemchange.org)



# On a journey of change

**Why** we need to take a different approach

**What** is systems change?

**How** do we cultivate systemic change



The background features a light gray field with several thick, white, curved lines that create a sense of movement and depth. In the top-left and bottom-right corners, there are detailed, textured illustrations of coral in shades of orange and red. The central text is positioned in the middle of the frame, between the coral and the white lines.

# Why we need a different approach to change



# **COVID-19: THE FIRST SHOCK OF THE DECADE**

**A moment of deep discontinuity and uncertainty.**

**We don't even know yet how long this shock will last.**

**We do know it has shown the deep interconnections between the systems that underpin our society, our environment and our economy.**

**KEY  
DYNAMIC  
AREAS**



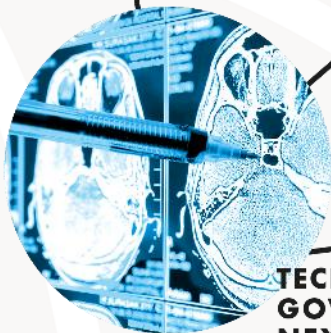
**EQUITABLE  
TRANSITIONS**



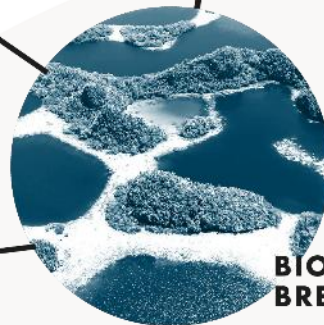
**ECONOMIC  
CRISIS & REFORM**



**REGENERATIVE  
OPENINGS**



**TECH &  
GOVERNANCE  
NEXUS**



**BIOSPHERE  
BREAKDOWN**





The importance of worldviews





**Resource  
flows**

**Policies**

**Practices**

**Decisions**

**Power  
dynamics**

**Relationships**

**World  
views**

# Our current approaches to change are informed by a worldview that are not future-fit

Focus on singular issues and solutions, innovations

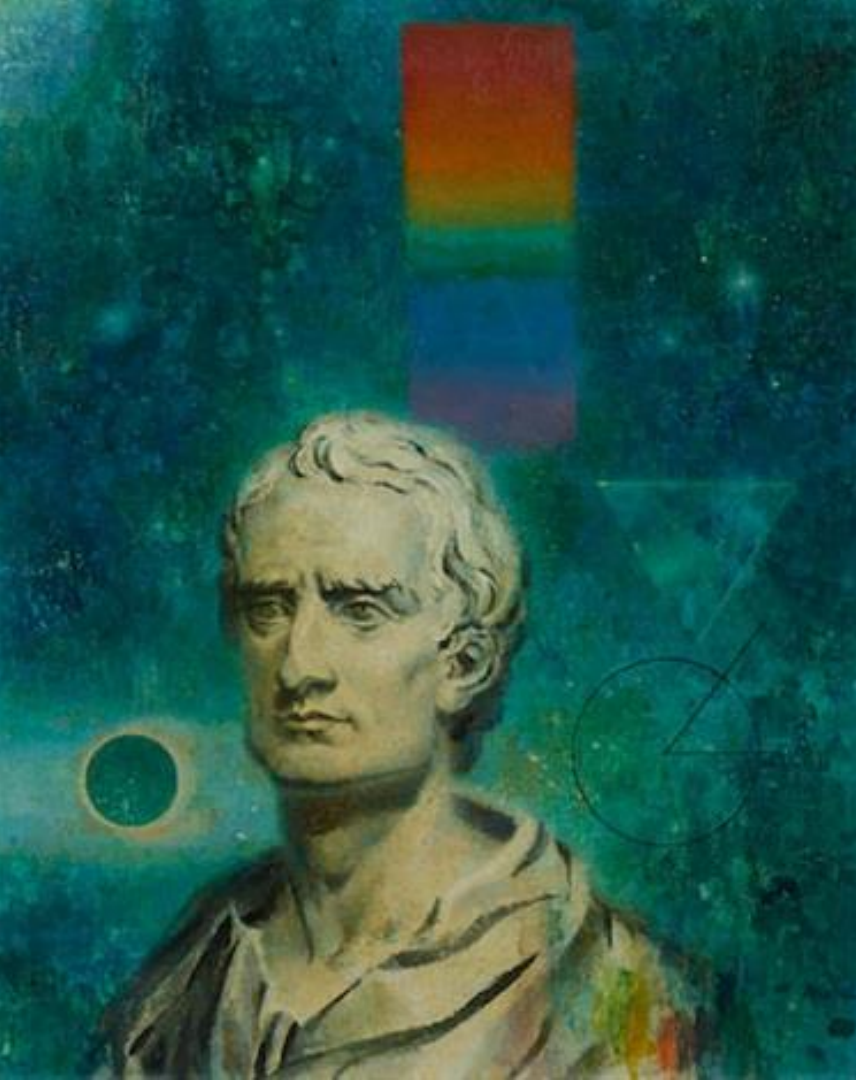
Competing or siloed efforts in sectors

Regulation and advocacy that focuses on reducing harm

Works on short term plans and resources

Takes a scientific rational approach

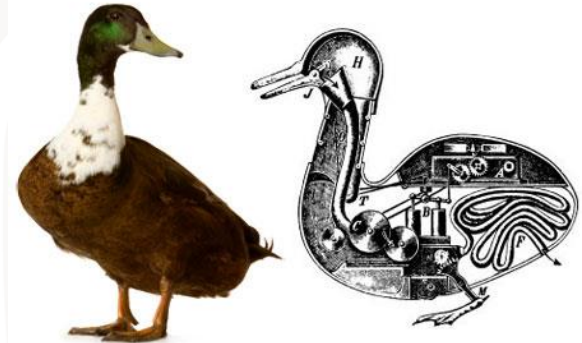




## The *Newtonian Paradigm*

A way of seeing the world where everything is described as the result of linear, cause-and-effect chains.

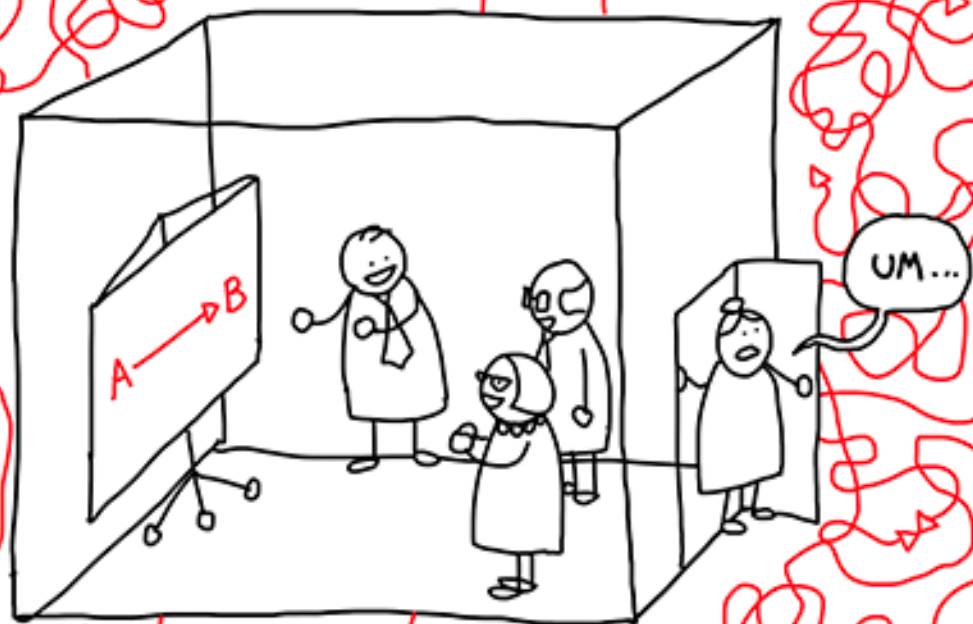
Led to reductionism - the process of breaking things down into simple components and linear relationships.



# A complexity paradigm

A way of seeing the world as changing, interconnected wholes





“

The world is a complex, interconnected finite,  
ecological-social-psychological-economic  
system.

We treat it as if it were not, as it were divisible,  
separable simple and infinite.

Our persistent, intractable, global problems  
arise directly from this mismatch.

Meadows, 2010

The background features a light gray field with white, stylized branching lines that resemble coral or a network. Two realistic coral fragments are positioned in the top-left and bottom-right corners, rendered in shades of orange and red. The central text is in a bold, dark blue font.

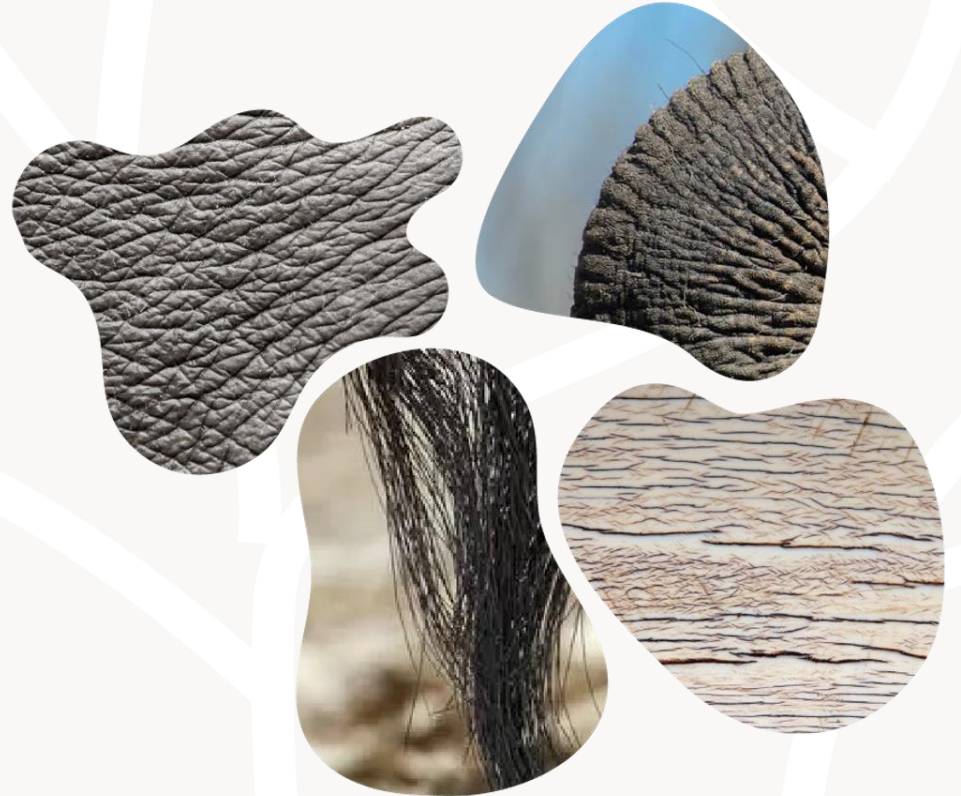
**What is systems change?**

# What is a system?

More than the sum of parts

“A system is an **interconnected** set of **elements** that is coherently organised in a way that achieves something **(function or purpose).**”

[Meadows, 2008](#)





# What is the purpose or function of a system?

Focus on verbs not nouns

A system...

...to extract?

...to exploit?

...to grow?

...to fix?

...to control?

...to 'fight'?

...to survive?

...to regenerate?

...to replenish?


...to nurture?

...to cultivate?

...to navigate?

...to heal?

...to flourish?



For example - a system for governance

How can we make dairy protein production sustainable?



## The protein challenge: reframing the question

The Protein  
Challenge

How can we meet the protein needs of **9 billion** people in a way that is affordable, healthy and good for the environment?



**A BICYCLE AS A SYSTEM:** A set of components, put together in a certain way to create certain flows, towards a purpose of personal transportation.





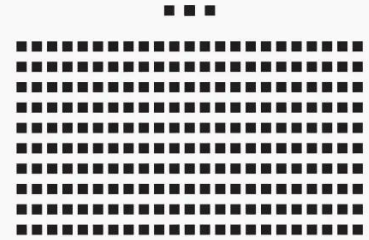
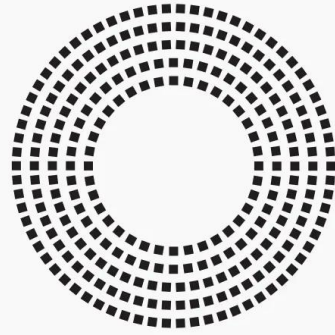
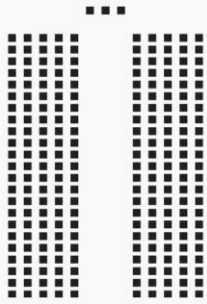
Systems change is about re-orienting structure towards a new goal or function for the system.

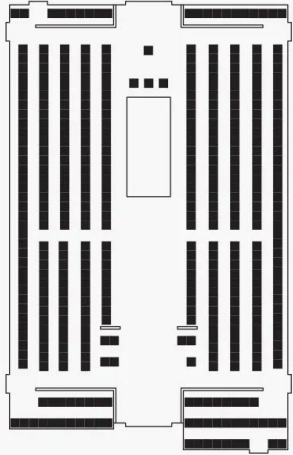


Maisons du Monde

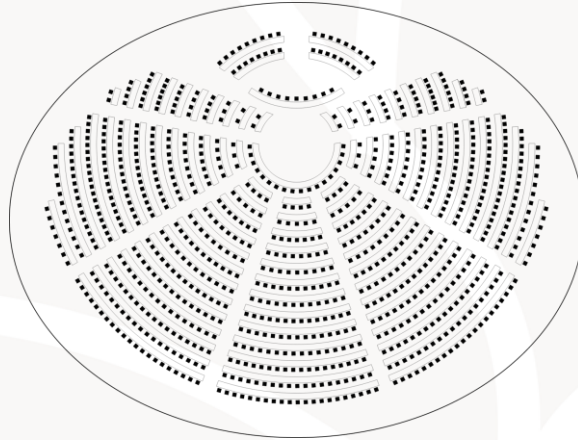


Pacific Fence & Wire Co.

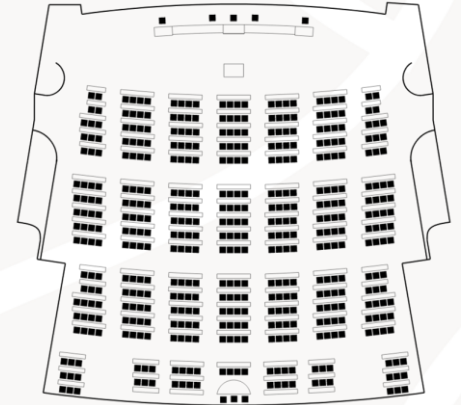




UK



EU Strasbourg



Russia





## Systems change

### Outcome

A system is seen to have changed towards a different, sustaining pattern of organising or system structure

### Process

In order to bring about systems change as an outcome, we need to adopt ways of creating change that are systemic

### Worldview

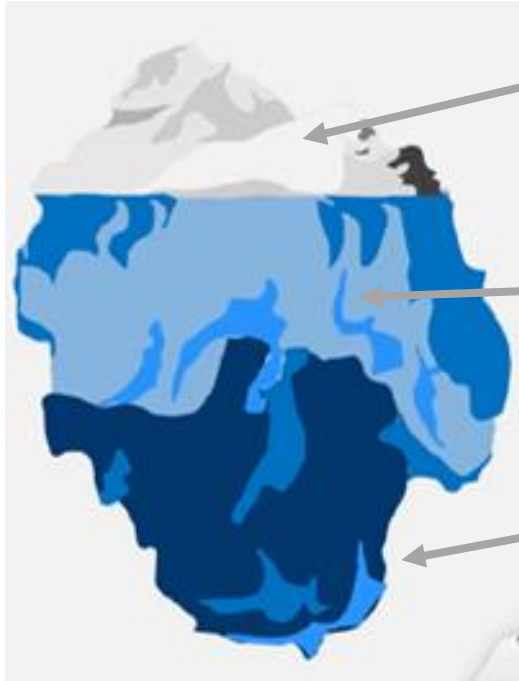
The world is constantly changing, through the ongoing evolution and interaction of complex living systems



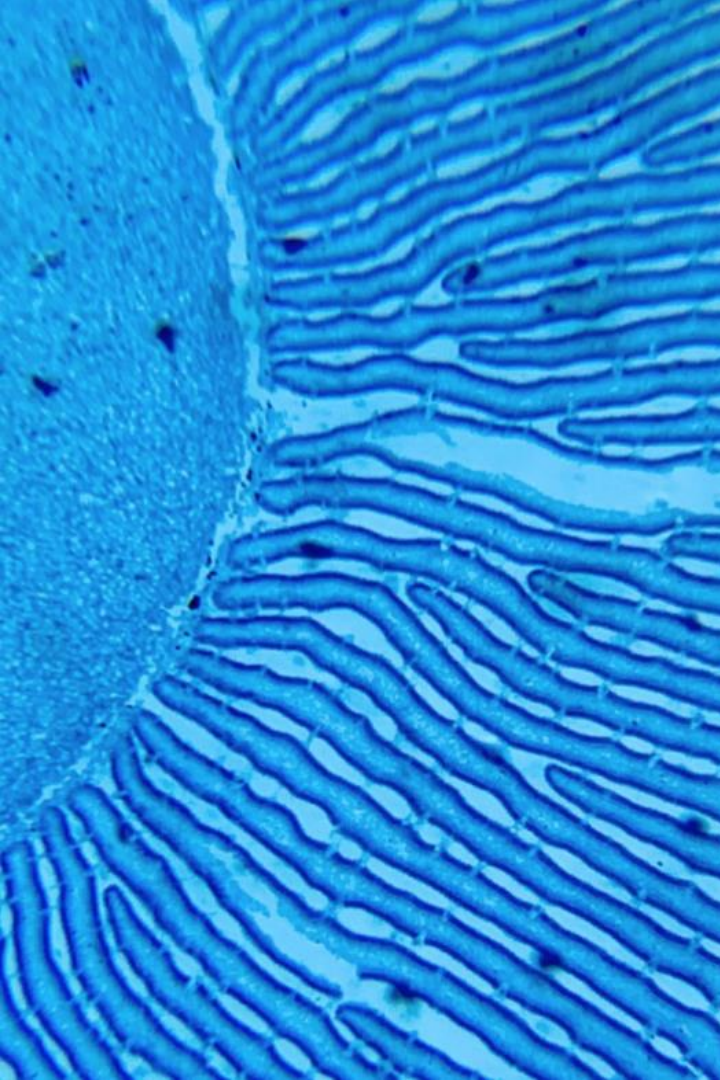
# How do we cultivate systemic change?

How might we change the way we change Norway?

# Putting a systems change approach into practice is like an iceberg



- System change tools and frameworks are visible, but only a fraction of what true systems change practice is about
- Embracing systems change means developing a whole new set of capabilities in our change work
- Ultimately it should enable our change work to see the world in a completely new way



# Why take a systems approach?

A systems approach can:

...Enable the development a better analysis of the challenge through a systemic diagnosis

[Understand]

...Support strategic decisions making by better understanding where the leverage to intervene is [Decide]

...Inform the design of interventions and how we learn from them and consequently adapt

[Deliver]

# Systemic practices and frameworks help navigate complexity

Iceberg Model



**EVENTS**

What is happening?  
These are the kinds of things you see in the news.

**PATTERNS**

What are the trends or cycles that can be observed?  
These are the kinds of things academics/coronaviruses might report on...

**STRUCTURES**

What creates or influences the patterns?  
What are the relationships between the parts?

**MENTAL MODELS**

What assumptions, beliefs and values underlie the system, that hold it in place?  
Think, big ideas or values passed down over time.

Levels of Paradigm



**REGENERATIVE LIFE**

Bringing the essence of something forward into a new context in a new way.  
Cook - biomass - laboratory. Continuous unfolding/iteration.

**DOING GOOD**

The act of moving things towards an ideal.  
The act of "doing" what is deemed to be good and create good.

**RESILIENCE**

Ability to return to full state after falling apart.  
Healing resilience through community connections.

**VALUE RETURN**

Return on investment.  
Getting something back after putting something in at an individual level.

Multi-level Perspective adapted from Ogburn



**LANDSCAPE**

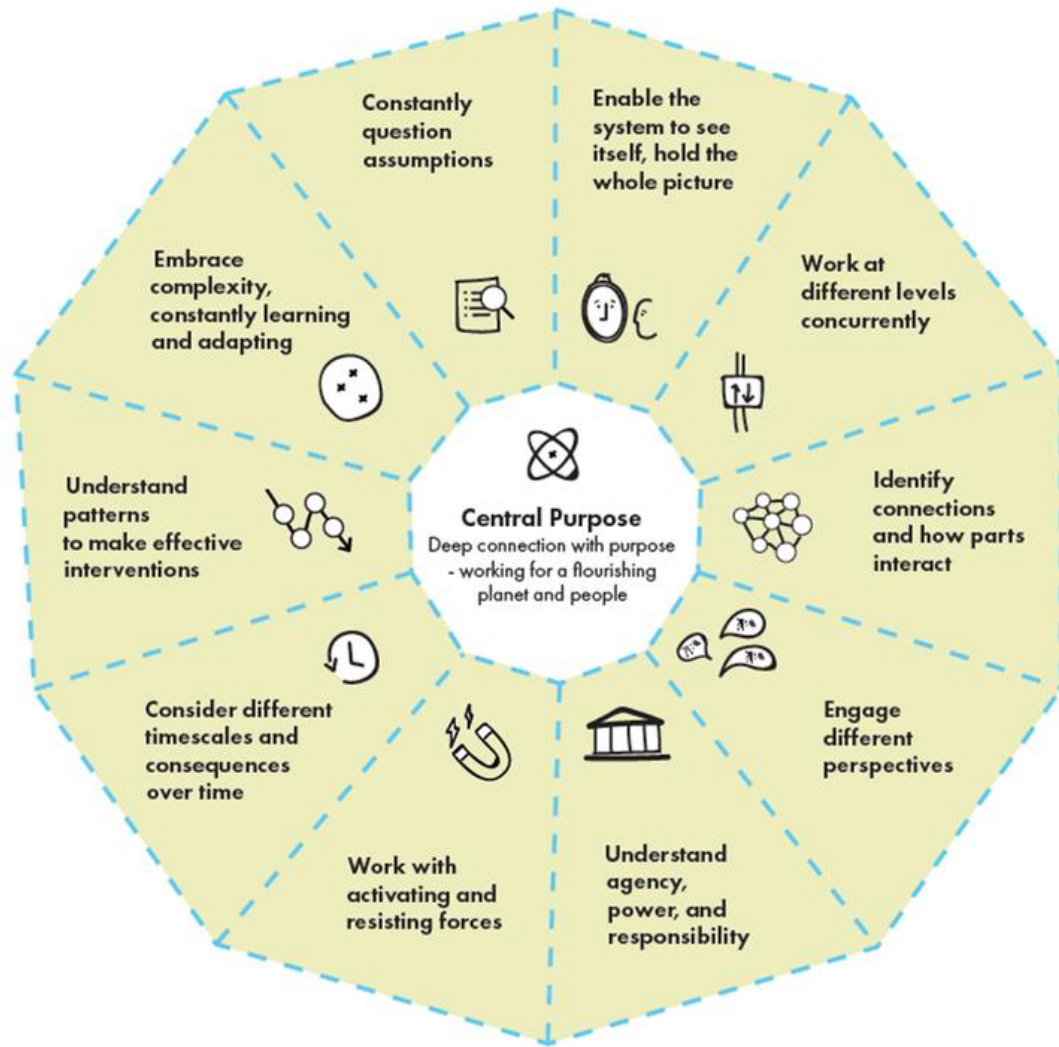
The big picture "topping context" of long term mega trends and shared social values.

**REGIME**

The mainstream, day-to-day "business as usual".

**NICHE**

The margins of the mainstream - technical innovations.





# Introducing #OneLess

A case study of a 6-year long systems change initiative we'll be referring to throughout the systems change thread



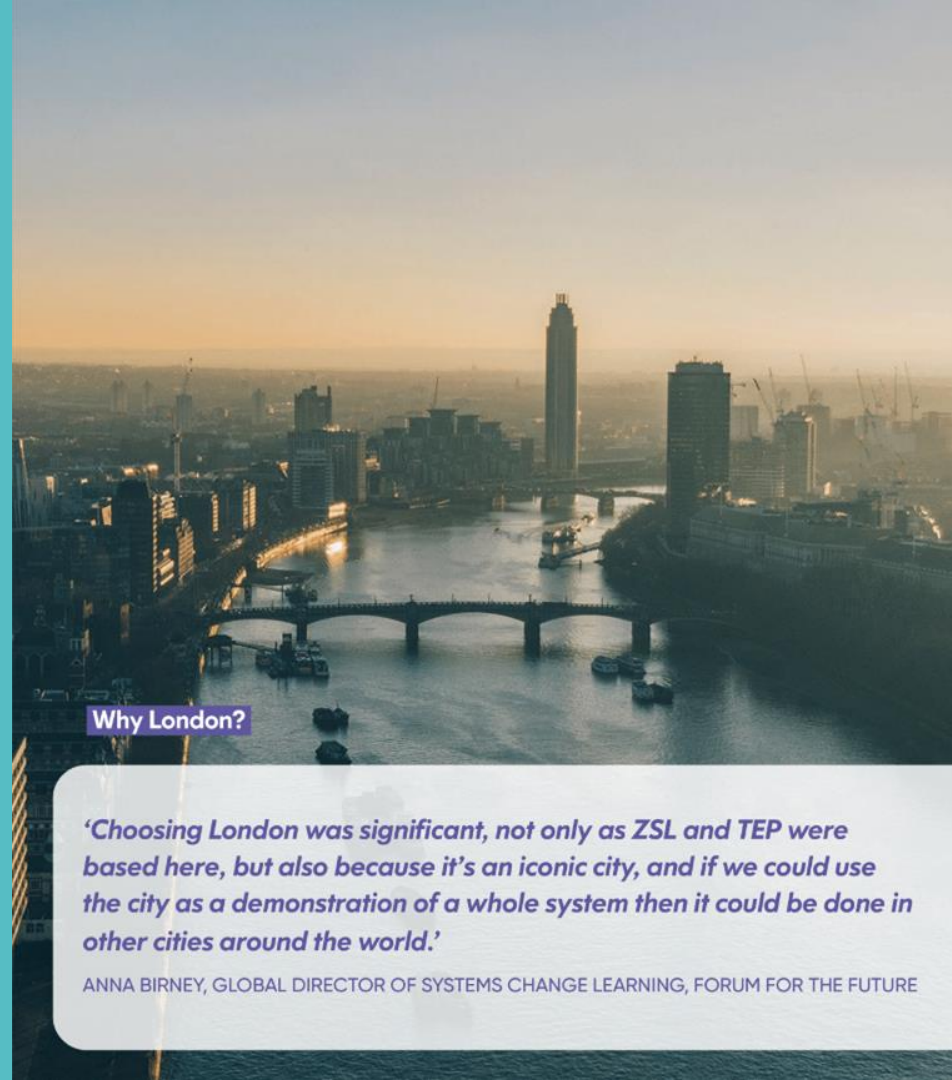
# Applying systems change approaches: Learning from #OneLess London

# London has a plastic problem

London gets through 1.2 billion single-use plastic water bottles every year.

Single-use plastic water bottles are a 'flagship species' for ocean plastic.

Completely unnecessary in a country with ready access to clean drinking water.



## Why London?

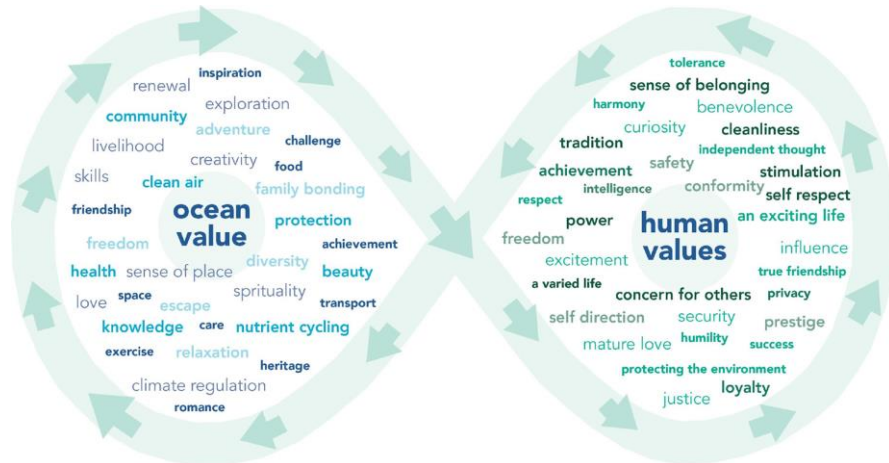
*'Choosing London was significant, not only as ZSL and TEP were based here, but also because it's an iconic city, and if we could use the city as a demonstration of a whole system then it could be done in other cities around the world.'*

ANNA BIRNEY, GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF SYSTEMS CHANGE LEARNING, FORUM FOR THE FUTURE



# A collaborative experiment:

How might we support London eradicate single-use plastic water bottles and become a place where refilling is the norm?



# London's Refill Revolution: the #OneLess theory of change

By uncovering the systems and infrastructure that underpin single-use plastic water bottles in London, #OneLess is aiming to develop an approach that can be applied to other single-use plastic items on a global scale.



Achieving our aim of transforming London-on-Sea into the first city in the world free of single-use plastic water bottles will require a collective, system-wide change in the way water is delivered and consumed in the city.



London-on-Sea



A MODEL  
Adopted by  
other 'plastic  
species'



## A FLAGSHIP SPECIES

Single-use plastic bottles are one of the most commonly found forms of plastic packaging littering the world's beaches.

#OneLess  
Passed on to  
other cities  
globally

## 4 LEVELS OF CHANGE

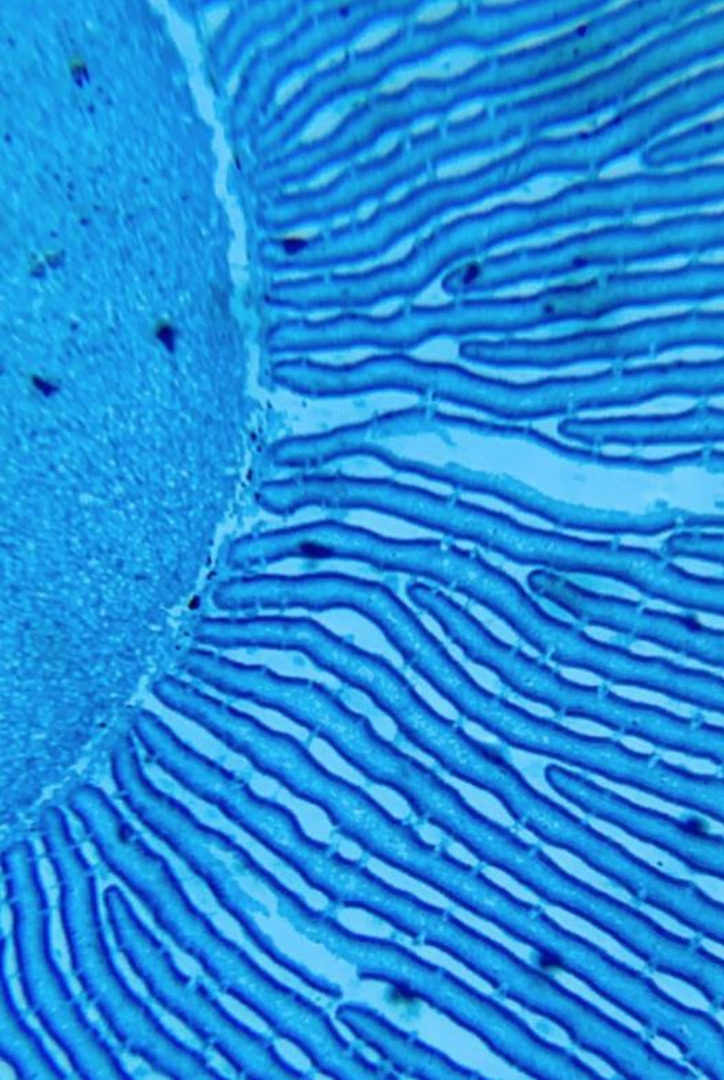
- 1 Policy** Policy: Achieve policy and legislative changes at the local and national level that enable and support the reduction of plastic pollution in the ocean
- 2 Structure** Structure: Create a structural change in the way water is delivered in London, from single-use plastic packaging to a new refillable model
- 3 Behaviour** Behaviour: Change the predominant drinking water behaviour in London, from using single-use plastic water bottles to a refillable bottle
- 4 Values** Values: Increase the sense of connection between people and the ocean.

## PARTNERS:

#OneLess is a collaborative initiative, run by the Marine CoLABoration, and led by four members of this collaboration: ZSL (the Zoological Society of London), Forum for the Future, IPSO and the Thames Estuary Partnership. Each member of the collaboration brings their own unique skill sets, enabling us to deliver a truly ground-breaking and multi-disciplinary project.

#OneLess





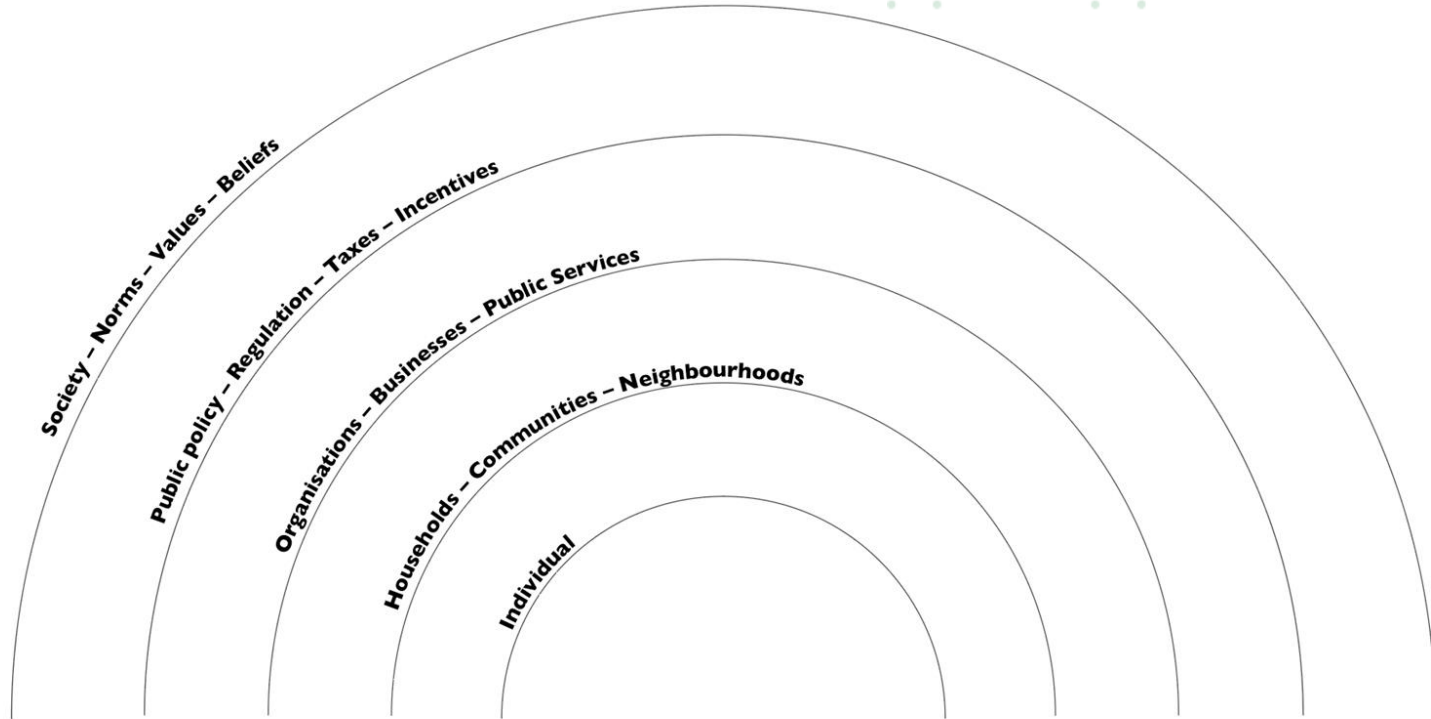
Approaches that embrace  
complexity, adaptation,  
uncertainty and ambiguity

Working at multiple levels

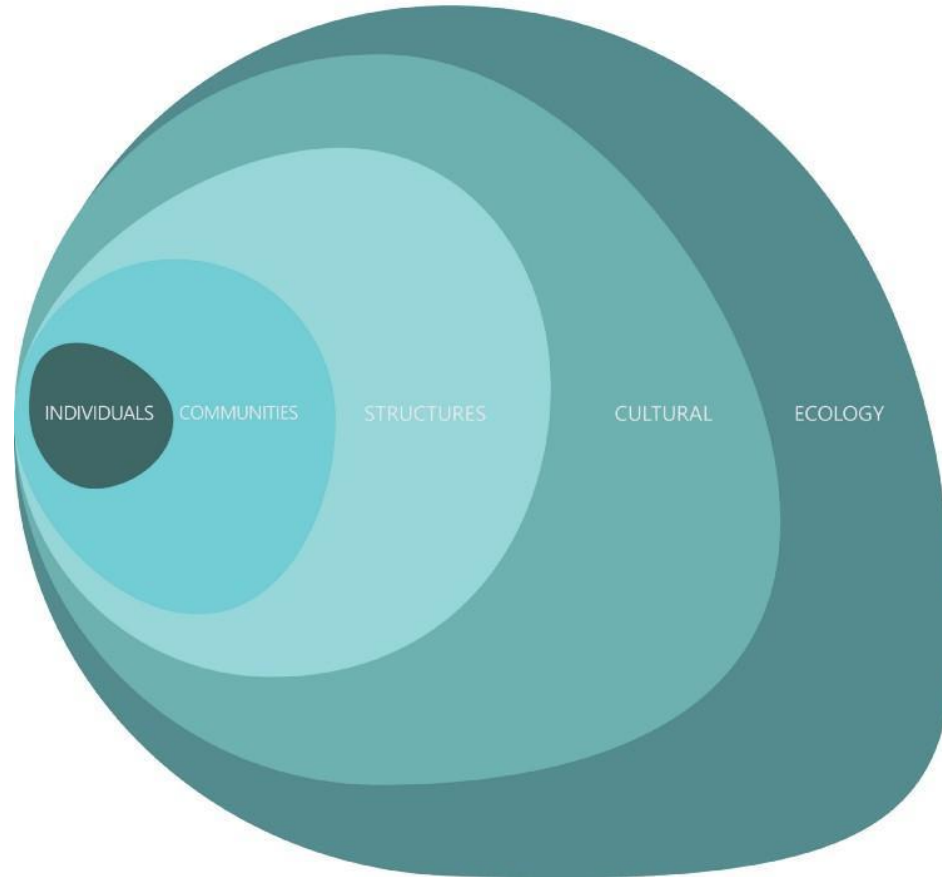
# Working at multiple levels

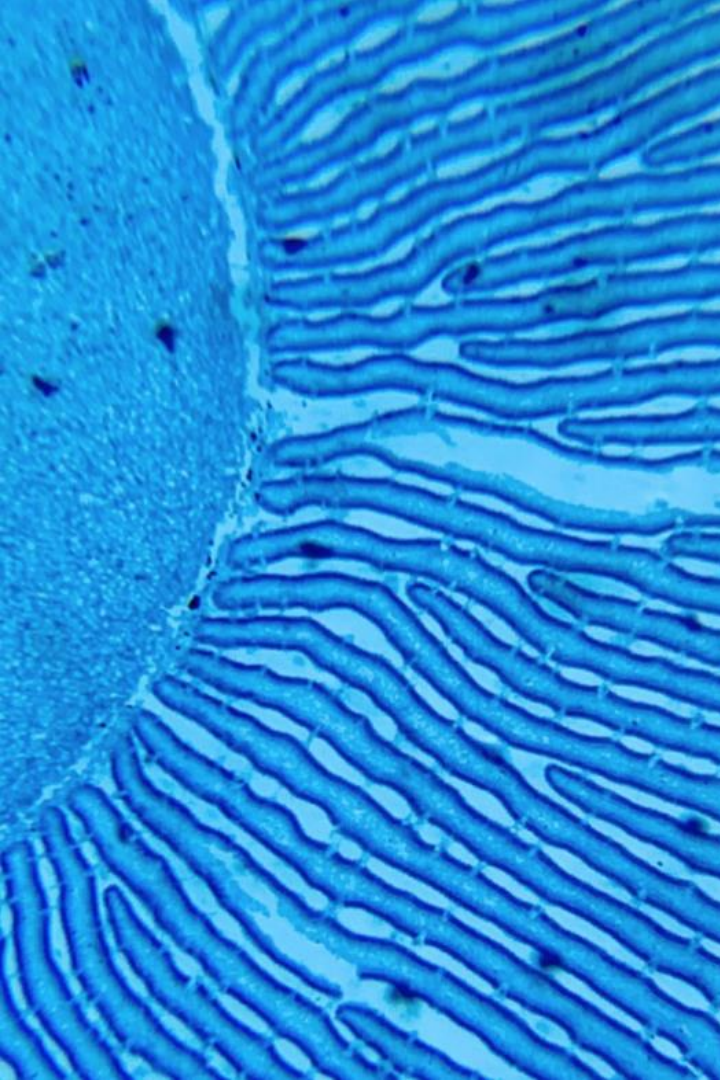


Scotland's Climate  
Assembly  
Seanadh Gnàth-shìde  
na h-Alba



# OUR SYSTEMS





Approaches that embrace complexity, adaptation, uncertainty and ambiguity

Working at multiple levels

**Working multidisciplinary - changing the way we think about collaboration**

# 37 members, 12 countries

Our members join as individuals, not as representatives of their organisations, but you can get an impression of our our organisational backgrounds below:



# Starting with the people and their energy







**1. BIRDS EYE VIEW**  
Our flowing journeys

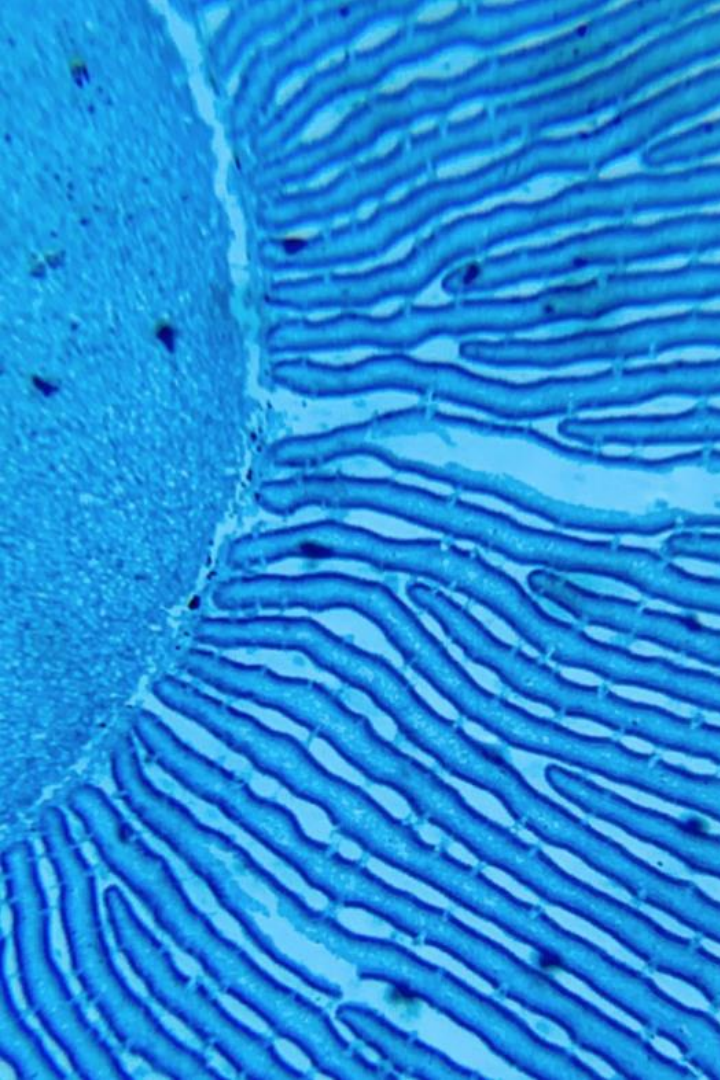


**The Campfire**

Instructions:  
Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://zoom.us/j/927>



A dynamic process - of people, ideas and actions weaving together



# Approaches that embrace complexity, adaptation, uncertainty and ambiguity

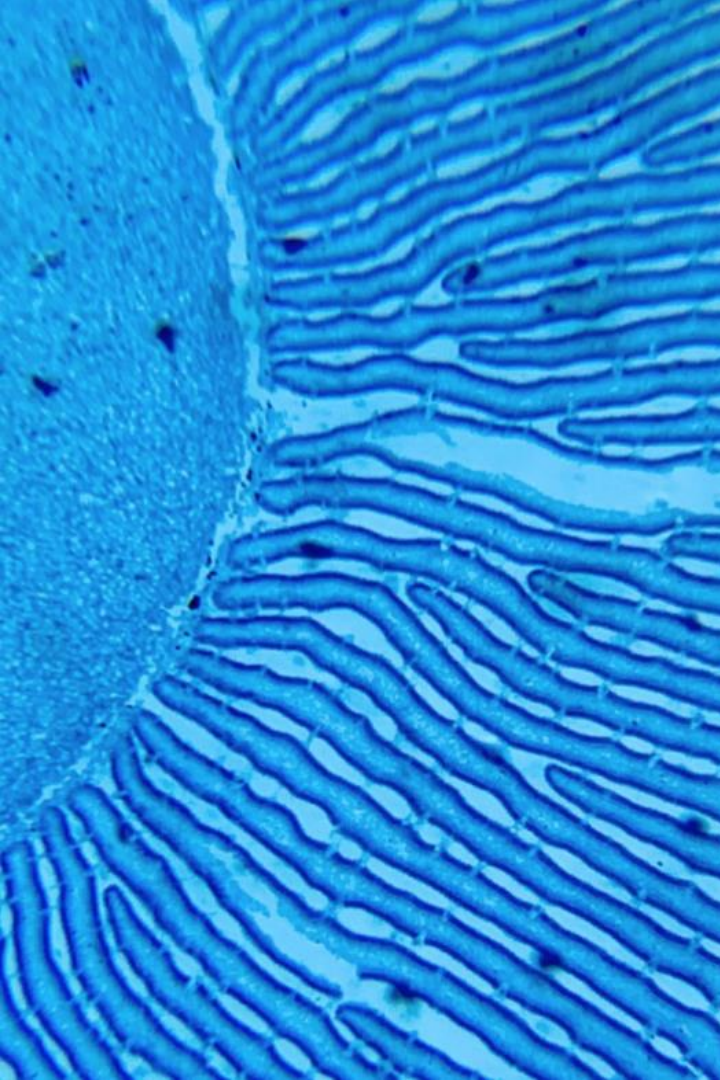
Working at multiple levels

Working multidisciplinary - changing the way we think about collaboration

**Multi-experiments - changing the way we think about innovation**

*Scaling deep and out*  
*Scaling through fractal*  
*patterns*





# Approaches that embrace complexity, adaptation, uncertainty and ambiguity

Working at multiple levels

Working multidisciplinary - changing the way we think about collaboration

Multi-experiments - changing the way we think about innovation

**New models and patterns of relationship - changing the way we think about leadership and power**

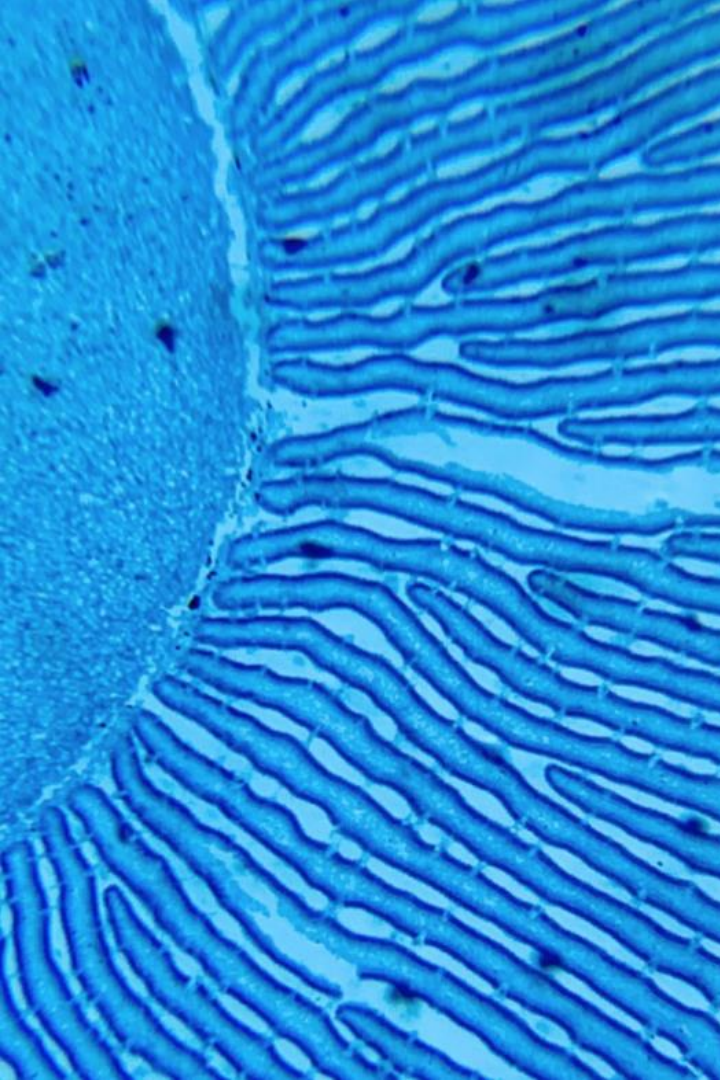
# Civil Society Futures.

The independent inquiry

## Our PACT

>>By civil  
society, for civil  
society, shared  
by us all





# Approaches that embrace complexity, adaptation, uncertainty and ambiguity

Working at multiple levels

Working multidisciplinary - changing the way we think about collaboration

Multi-experiments - changing the way we think about innovation

New models and patterns of relationship - changing the way we think about leadership and power

**Learning as change...**



# Our Approach to Change

We exist to nurture a systemic,  
living paradigm, where learning  
is change.

→ [schoolofsystemchange.org](https://schoolofsystemchange.org)





dissolving any notion that we have answers, plans or strategies that are watertight or universal. In fact our strategies must be more like water itself, undermining everything that is fixed, hard and rigid with fluidity, constant movement and evolution

John Jordan



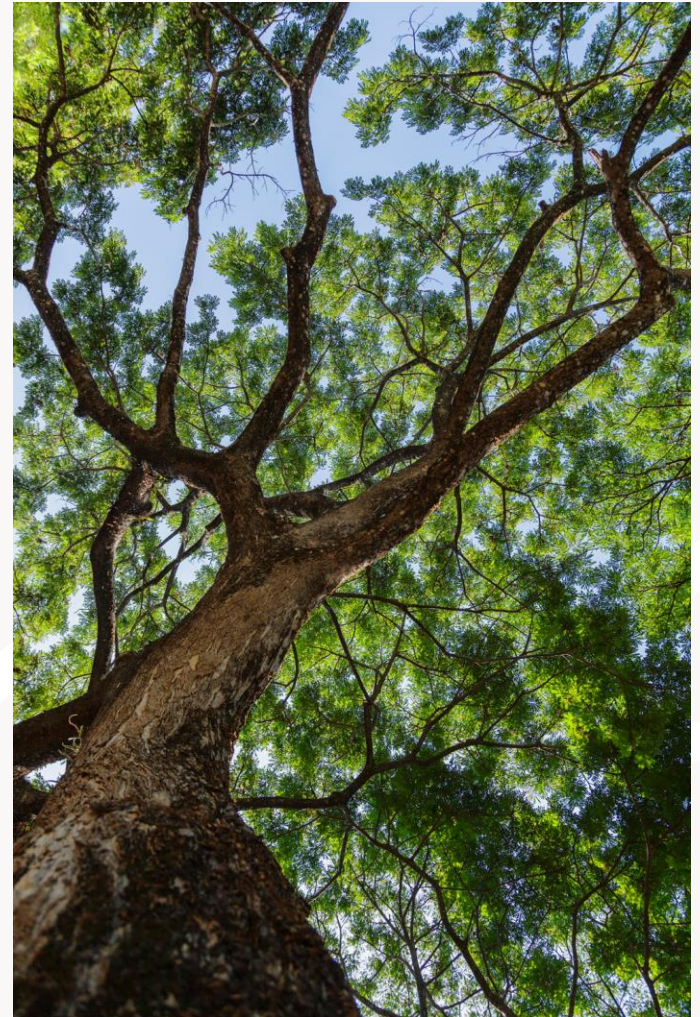
# Emerging questions across the field of practice

## Equity and justice

- Power
- Multiple ways of knowing and being

## Living Change & regenerative practice

- Facilitative capacity & governance
- Meaning and narratives



“

*“Living change is a core, base, essential practice — a way of being for those who seeking to influence and create change in the world. Grounded a recognition that that the changes we’re seeking to create are present within us, and are part of us as well. We a fractals of a bigger system at play. Learning from these changes at the different levels can make us more effective agents of change.”*

Thank you

Anna Birney

@annasquestions

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