



CREATIVE  
COLLECTIVES  
FOR UTOPIA

VISIONS  
OF BETTER  
WORLDS

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# THE CREATIVE COLLECTIVES FOR UTOPIA



We are a group of 46 master's students, 2 Assistant Professors, and 2 PhD candidates passionate about fostering critical and imaginative capacities within our university and society. In the second rendition of the elective **Imagining the future for transformation**, developed by the Urban Futures Studio at Utrecht University, we continued to build the social movement **CC4Utopia—Creative Collectives for Utopia\***. Members of the movement become archaeologists and co-designers of possible futures. Archaeologists in the sense of uncovering the politics and dynamics that have narrowed what futures are seen as plausible,

or even possible. Co-designers through our collaboration with diverse societal initiatives in parts of Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America to generate approaches that can expand our collective imagination and action towards more just and sustainable futures. Throughout the pages of this zine you will find the depictions of what a better world means to citizens, farmers, designers, policymakers, non-humans and more. You will also find approaches we have created to engage with these utopian imaginaries in critical and generative ways — to open up pathways towards what is not yet but could be.

**\*Scan the QR code on the back of this zine to learn more about CC4Utopia**

# OUR FUTURING PRINCIPLES

*The following six principles guided our work this year as CC4Utopians. We see them as important to consider in any initiative that seeks to reimagine and reshape the future.*

**Reflexivity** concerns how your assumptions, positionality, subjective perceptions and actions influence your futuring efforts and their impacts on others. Reflexivity involves surfacing and critically reflecting on what you take for granted when imagining the future, including the process of futuring itself and its framing and tracking how it may impact others. It demands your attention to the norms, imaginaries, and structures you are implicated in shaping or reproducing. Reflexivity demands being humble about your knowledge, seeking out disconfirming information, and being willing to change course considering feedback or unintended outcomes.

**Care** is about taking responsibility and sustaining the emotional and relational basis for your futuring approach. This requires attention to the peoples, environments and non-human entities involved or affected by your efforts. It is premised on a sensitivity to suffering and hope for the possibility to alleviate it. Acting with care demands attending to the ethical and practical implications of your decisions their impacts, and correcting these when needed, and striving to always act in ways that affirm and cultivate the dignity and agency of others through mutually affirming relationships.

**Plurality** asks how your futuring approach makes space for distinct worldviews, values, and priorities. It invites you to consider if you are creating opportunities for diverse participants to engage in the process of futuring meaningfully and if their perspectives are valued and considered. Plurality requires an intentional effort to listen to and integrate different ways of knowing/being and building spaces that allow for deep listening and understanding. This requires attention to which voices are currently marginalised or underrepresented or altogether missing (e.g. non-human perspectives), and intentional effort to include them.

**Empowerment** asks how your futuring approaches enable those involved to alter, challenge or reinforce power hierarchies and structures and take a more active stance towards influencing futures. It involves recognising how power is implicated in past and present circumstances and acting intentionally to support participants' ability to engage with futures that affirm their perspectives and meet their needs. Empowerment can happen on various scales, from personal relationships to a global scale.

**Co-creation** means weaving together different perspectives, knowledge systems, and skills in ways that recognise the validity of different perspectives and the unique role each member can play in the process, with clear communication of expectations up front and producing a shared vision. It requires finding appropriate ways to facilitate dialogue and integration between different perspectives while making space for tensions between perspectives. Co-creation is dependent on a reinforced participant's ability to work together.

**Temporalities** asks for engaging with and learning from time's fluid nature and shaping and incorporating diverse perceptions of time in futuring efforts. This demands going beyond linear, singular or progressive conceptions of time presumed within the modernity worldview. Alternatively, time can be understood as something that holds experiences and patterns that repeat and influence each other. The point is not to define every aspect and characteristic of time but to create a space where people can contemplate what time means to them and how past, present and future intersect and mutually influence one another.



— Global capitalist economic system



— Universal knowledge system

Rooms  
Toiletten  
Toilets

**Where do you see expressions of coloniality around us?**

*Images by CC4Utopians; exercise guided by Darko Lagunas,  
using Sharon Stein's (2019) Decolonial Approach to Climate Change in Higher Education.*

— Foundation of separation

**EMBASSY OF  
THE PEAT IN THE  
NETHERLANDS**

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# INTRODUCTION

## GIVING A VOICE TO THE PEATLAND

“Peatlands are inherently in transition, queer bodies continuously cycling through life and death, each dependent on the other. They hold a piece of our future to be studied in the present.” (Re-Peat, n.d.)

Peatlands are vital ecosystems that have historically played a crucial role in carbon sequestration, flood control, water storage, recreation, and a habitat for specialised species. In the Netherlands, mires (i.e. lands where peat is still being formed) once covered extensive areas, with approximately 180,000 hectares present in the 17th century. However, centuries of exploitation have led to a dramatic decline, with only around 3,600 hectares remaining today<sup>1</sup>. Major drivers of this degradation include drainage for agriculture, urbanisation, and peat extraction for fuel, which have profoundly altered the landscape and ecological balance of these areas<sup>2</sup>.

The exploitation of peatlands has resulted in several critical issues. The drainage of these ecosystems disrupts their hydrology, leading to peat compaction and increased decomposition rates. As a result, carbon that was previously stored in the peat is released into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide, contributing significantly to climate change<sup>3</sup>. Recent estimates indicate that approximately 276.4 Giga tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> have been released due to the degradation of wetlands, including peatlands, over the past several decades.

A feedback loop exacerbates climate change, as higher temperatures can further dry out peatlands, leading to additional carbon release and land subsidence from compaction<sup>4</sup>.

Peatlands also provide essential ecosystem services beyond carbon storage. They act as natural water filters, play a critical role in flood regulation by retaining excess water during heavy rains, and support unique flora and fauna, such as Sphagnum moss which is central in peatlands dynamics<sup>4</sup>. Peatlands face ongoing risks from drainage and nitrogen deposition which reduce their capacity to function and provide ecosystem services<sup>5</sup>. This is of particular concern due to issues with land subsidence in the Netherlands which leads to a drop in ground level in areas causing damage to roads, buildings, and in coastal areas ‘increasing salt seepage and flood risk’<sup>6,7</sup>. Given their historical significance and the urgent need for conservation, it is critical to prioritise



*Sphagnum moss at Fochteloërveen, Friesland. Photo by O'Dobovan, J. 2024*

Impacts of groundwater drainage on peatland subsidence and its ecological implications on an Atlantic raised bog. *Water Resources Research*, 55.

5 Andersen, R., Farrell, C., Graf, M., Muller, F., Calvar, E., Frankard, P., Caporn, S., & Anderson, P. (2017). An overview of the progress and challenges of peatland restoration in Western Europe. *Restoration Ecology*, 25(2), 271–282.

6 Hoogland, T., Van den Akker, J. J. H., & Brus, D. J. (2012). Modeling the subsidence of peat soils in the Dutch coastal area. *Geoderma*, 171, 92–97.

7 Stouthamer, E., Erkens, G., Cohen, K., Hegger, D., Driessen, P., Weikard, H. P., ... & Van Rijswijk, M. (2020). Dutch national scientific research program on land subsidence: Living on soft soils—subsidence and society. *Proceedings of the International Association of Hydrological Sciences*, 382, 815–819.

1 Tomassen, H. B. M., Smolders, A. J. P., van der Schaaf, S., Lamers, L. P. M., & Roelofs, J. G. M. (2010). Restoration of Raised Bogs: Mechanisms and Case Studies from the Netherlands. In M. Eiselová (Ed.), *Restoration of Lakes, Streams, Floodplains, and Bogs in Europe: Principles and Case Studies* (pp. 285–330). Springer Netherlands.

2 Brouns, K., Keuskamp, J. A., Potkamp, G., Verhoeven, J. T. A., & Hefting, M. M. (2016). Peat origin and land use effects on microbial activity, respiration dynamics and exo-enzyme activities in drained peat soils in the Netherlands. *Soil Biology and Biochemistry*, 95, 144–155.

3 Müller, J., & Joos, F. (2021). Committed and projected future changes in global peatlands – continued transient model simulations since the Last Glacial Maximum. *Biogeosciences*, 18.

4 Regan, S., Flynn, R., Gill, L., Naughton, O., & Johnston, P. (2019).



the protection of peatlands in the Netherlands. Safeguarding these ecosystems is essential not only for maintaining these critical ecosystems but also for combating climate change and preserving the ecological integrity of the landscape for future generations. Immediate action is necessary to halt further losses and ensure the survival of these invaluable environments.

The negotiation about the future of the drastically degraded Dutch peatlands is one that predominantly takes place in policy forums which include a range of stakeholders such as farmers, regional governments, nature-protection organisations, policymakers, landowners and citizens. However, the peatland and all its *more-than-human* inhabitants, as well as future generations, are not included as active agents in these discussions. Therefore, the idea arose that the voices and concerns of those who cannot speak for themselves need to be represented on the political stage. From this challenge, so-called embassies for the *more-than-human* were born. In the Netherlands, a prominent example is the Embassy of the North Sea, which has been working on creating a rights-based approach to represent the subject of the North Sea within political and legal debates under the premise of self-ownership of the North Sea<sup>8</sup>.

Drawing from this idea, Mandy van den Ende and Tom Wils established the Embassy of the Peat, recognising the peatland as an iconic and simultaneously controversial ecosystem of the Netherlands. The Embassy of the Peat is thus giving the marginalised ecosystem the platform it so desperately needs. The founders are in the early days of the establishment of their ideas, focusing on finding a theoretical framework for their approach as well as co-creating with others to develop the first actionable steps. They are aiming to imagine futures which go beyond solely granting rights to the peatland as a legal subject but also aiming at changing the relationship of the Dutch to their soil which is literally slipping away underneath their feet.

Central to the idea of giving the peatland a voice is the consideration of how communication with the

more-than-human could work. In an effort to tackle this challenge, the Embassy of the Peat has created a pathway to establish a meaningful conversation with the peatland. In a four-step plan, they imagine the integration of all relevant stake-, rights- and knowledge-holders into a democratic process of designing peatland futures. First, these actors need to be recognised, including the more-than-human, such as birds, plants, insects, microbes, soil and the peat itself. The next step is to listen, so that the concerns and needs of each actor can be taken into consideration. The third step entails speaking with these stake- and knowledge-holders so that they can be negotiated with in the last and fourth step. Communication and engagement not only with humans but also more-than-human critters, organisms and soils is central to the Embassy's work and this is where their potential lies. There are different ways in which this could happen, but an organisation like the Embassy of the Peat could figure a representative for all those that currently lack the ability to speak for themselves in democratic forums. This also entails thinking and speaking for future generations, that do not get a say in present policy making. By doing this the configuration of Dutch peatland futures becomes more just and equitable and a window is opened to imagine radically different futures for the cohabitation and flourishing of Dutch soils.



A dragonfly co-creating the Dutch peatland of tomorrow. Image provided by the Embassy of the Peat.

8 Ambassade van de Noordzee. (2024, August 16). *Embassy of the North Sea - Embassy of the North Sea*. Embassy of the North Sea. <https://www.embassyofthenorthsea.com/> (Accessed 23.10.24)

# THE DOMINANT NARRATIVES OF THE DUTCH PEATLANDS

The Embassy of the Peat is engaging with a range of people who are in some way connected to the Dutch peatlands. During such interactions particular visions, ideas and stories are being interchanged about the peat. How the peatlands and their value and utility are being framed in dominant discourses gives us insight into why the peat has become so degraded by human activity. The narratives that are most powerful shape how we generally perceive the peat ecosystems and the multitude of environmental and social problems that are intertwined with its well-being. Furthermore, how such problems are being framed also legitimises particular knowledge sources and methods for creating solutions, while other kinds of solutions are being framed as illegitimate, or even hiding them from view altogether.

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The most dominant narratives concerning the Dutch peatlands come from certain influential stakeholders which we have identified as governmental agencies, academic institutions, farmer coalitions/organisations, nature protection agencies and the water management authorities. It has become increasingly clear that the continued lowering of groundwater levels for agricultural or infrastructural purposes has resulted in ecological and social problems that cannot be ignored any longer<sup>1</sup>. Scientists working for universities and governmental research organisations such as the *planbureau voor de leefomgeving* have pointed to the unsustainability of current peatland management practices and reached general consensus that peatland management should be improved to limit further damages. However, the way in which improvement is proposed stays in line with the old frameworks of the exploitation of nature and optimization of profit. It does not tackle deeper issues at hand such as interspecies, or intergenerational justice and will therefore, likely result in continued exploitation of ecosystems and the short-term economic benefits that accompany

those. Intervention is focussed on quickly avoiding societal damages but there is very limited ambition for actually restoring ecosystem health.

National policy briefings are aspiring for 'new solutions' in order to adhere to the Dutch participation in the international climate agreements<sup>2</sup>. Emphasis is put on the negative financial consequences of peatland preservation for farmers. In order to come to the most efficient solutions, an approach is laid out where scientific research and experimentation should lead the way to new methods of farming that should slow down or stop peat soil degradation while simultaneously securing the economic profits of farmers on peat soils. Words like 'efficiency', 'proven', 'knowledge based', 'innovation', and 'cost-effective solutions' are dominating policy information.

In a letter to the *minister van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit* (the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality) about the loss of soil quality in Dutch farmlands, the soils are immediately described as the primary means of production for the agrarian sector, to only secondly be named as opportunities for overcoming '*climate challenges*'<sup>3</sup>. Farmers are designated as '*agrarian entrepreneurs*' and '*soil managers*' who are expected to '*innovate*' throughout the next years. The means of innovation seem to be primarily based on gathering, sharing and analysing data through scientific methodologies, increasing farming efficiency with new technologies and taking a transdisciplinary approach to the multitude of problems connected to peat soil degradation<sup>4</sup>. By taking a transdisciplinary approach, such as connecting involved parties on different levels, looking at water, soil

1 PBL. (2016). Dalende bodems, stijgende kosten. Mogelijke maatregelen tegen veenbodemdaling in het landelijk en stedelijk gebied. Uitgeverij PBL. <https://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/downloads/pbl-2016-dalende-bodems-stijgende-kosten-1064.pdf>

2 Rijksoverheid. (2020). 100 miljoen beschikbaar voor veenweide aanpak. Rijksoverheid.nl. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/10/19/100-miljoen-beschikbaar-voor-veenweide-aanpak>

3 van Dijk, J. J., & Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit. (2020). Nationaal Programma Landbouwbodems. <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-65d5a49a-480b-4c31-972c-ecdb7611d5aa/pdf>

4 VIPNL. (2023). Innovaties voor een toekomstbestendig veenweidegebied. VIPNL: Veenweide Innovatieprogramma Nederland.

and air quality simultaneously, and bringing multiple societal and ecological problems together, the hope is that a multitude of problems can be solved simultaneously with a specific smart intervention, and without causing new problems in other sectors. Also, in academic research, it is common to discuss the future of peatlands in the framework of getting as much utility from the land as possible, as can be seen for instance in the study by Verstand, van der Voort & Vijn<sup>5</sup>.

For now, research shows that raising groundwater levels is effective for diminishing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from peat soils but that this directly opposes the economic benefits of traditional dairy cow farming<sup>6</sup> which is what most peat soils now are used for. By shifting the responsibility of peatland preservation from governmental institutions towards dairy farmers (the agricultural entrepreneurs) is basically instilling on them an impossible task. Policy briefings tell us that there are opportunities for exploring non-traditional ways of farming that might make profits and high groundwater co-exist, but up until now they are limited in their scale and feasibility<sup>7</sup>. During the last decade the farming sector in the Netherlands has, like in many other western European countries, been defined by unrest and dissatisfaction aimed at both European and national policymakers because of the process of ever increasing pressures on farm businesses from the market, policy and climate at the same time. A political party based on protecting farmers interests (the BoerBurgerBeweging) has emerged from this dissatisfaction and now holds a prominent position in national government. Their mission is to give farmers more autonomy over their lands and relieve pressures from the policy side, allowing farmers to more easily gain economic profits but acknowledging no *other-than-human* interests, or intergenerational considerations. The narrative of peatlands and their future is thus built upon ensuring profitable exploitation of the ecosystems for as long as they will last.

Solutions that are proposed to deal with peatland complications are expected to be thoroughly grounded in empirical science to ensure that success can be measured, compared and guaranteed. This is especially true for governmental agencies as they are expected to spend public money responsibly. For soil subsidence for instance it is said that the problem is *'urgent but not acute. This indicates that it is not possible to wait, but also that there is time to come up with **sensible, proven, and cost-effective** measures and have them prove themselves.'*<sup>8</sup>.

Monetary, environmental and social successes thus have to be translated into specific numbers to enable some sort of comparison between interventions. If effects are not measurable in this sense, they are not really included in discussions. As social researchers like Çalıřkan & Callon<sup>9</sup> tell us, by converting qualities into numbers, everything becomes susceptible to economic thinking: these numbers reinforce an economic logic that suggests that everything, economic and non-economic, can be made measurable and interchangeable with each other. In this way ecosystem health could be 'traded' for something else that holds a higher price tag.

5 Verstand, D., van der Voort, M., & Vijn, M. (2020). Uitwerking boerderijvarianten op economie en broeikasgasemissies: Klimaatbestendige akkerbouw op veengronden. Wageningen University & Research. <https://edepot.wur.nl/535251>

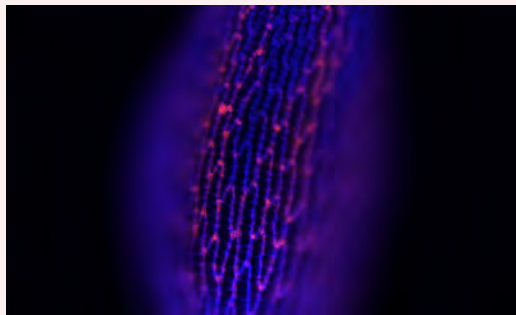
6 Van Den Akker, J., Kuikman, P., De Vries, F., Hoving, I., Pleijter, M., Hendriks, R., Wolleswinkel, R., Simões, R., & Kwakernaak, C. (2010). Emission of CO<sub>2</sub> from agricultural peat soils in the Netherlands and ways to limit this emission. <https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/wurpubs/fulltext/159747>

7 VIPNL. (2024). Themashet Boeren op hoog water – VIPNL. Vip-Nl. <https://vip-nl.nl/portfolio-item/themashet-boeren-op-hoog-water/>

8 Provincie Noord-Holland. (2022). Regionale Veenweide Strategie 1.0. Provincie Noord-Holland.

9 Çalıřkan, K., & Callon, M. (2010). Economization, part 2: a research programme for the study of markets. *Economy and Society*, 39(1), 1–32.

# IMAGINARY - A RELATIONAL AND RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PEATLAND



The Embassy of the Peat aspires to imagine a different future for Dutch peatlands, where humans and peatlands co-exist with respectful, relational, and reciprocal relationships, recognising the entangled nature of peatlands in the everyday lives of people in the Netherlands. This imaginary is rooted in an ecocentric framework - an ontological approach, viewing the more-than-human as being imbued with intrinsic value, situating humans as not separate nor superior to the more-than-human, but instead positioning humans as part of ecological systems<sup>1</sup>. An ecocentric approach challenges notions of anthropocentrism, which work as “social contracts validating the desire for purposeless possession and control” (p.139)<sup>2</sup>.<sup>3</sup> This underlying assumption highlights the Embassy of the Peat’s aspiration to create a world where socio-political systems recognise and embody the rights, agency and animacy of the more-than-human world in peatlands<sup>4</sup>. It also simultaneously acknowledges the beautifully complex, liminal, and dynamic nature of peatlands<sup>5</sup>. Recognising their

existence as an interface between pasts, presents and futures opens pathways for imagining a different future for the Dutch peatland<sup>2</sup>.

The co-creative nature of the Embassy of the Peat stimulated generative and reflexive dialogue, whereby we explored the various means through which the organisation aims to materialise this imaginative world. For the scope of this project a legal framework, similar to the futuring approach of the Embassy of the North Sea, and an ethical framework, were collectively deemed as an inappropriate method to materialise their imaginative approach. A legal framework can be criticised, being embedded in anthropocentric onto-epistemologies, in administrative rationalist bureaucracy, in perpetuating the binaries between nature/culture and in still contextualising and co-opting “nature” within “unbounded” capitalism<sup>78910</sup>. Should we “have exclusive rights to its fate? To dispose of it at will? To deny others its use?”<sup>2</sup> (p.139). An ethical approach on the other hand, runs the risk of creating normative binaries across behaviours, labelling some behaviours as “right” or “ethical” and ostracising others as being “unethical” or “wrong”<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, opting for an ontological approach allows the Embassy of the Peat to materialise their world into being. An ontological approach challenges and provokes individuals to simultaneously (un)make and (re) make their sense of self and being within the world, (re)questioning how they relate to Dutch peatlands<sup>1213</sup>. The assumptions rooted in an

1 Hoffman, A. J., & Sandelands, L. E. (2005). Getting right with nature: Anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, and theocentrism. *Organization & Environment*, 18(2), 141-162.

2 Kimmerer, R. W. (2021). Gathering moss: A natural and cultural history of mosses. Penguin UK1,

3 Kopnina, H., Washington, H., Taylor, B., and Piccolo, J. (2018). Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem. *The International Journal of Ecopsychology (IJE)*, 3(1), 1-23. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/ije/vol3/1/s>

4 Head, L., Atchison, J., Phillips, C., & Buckingham, K. (2014). Vegetal politics: belonging, practices and places. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 15(8), 861-870

5 Flint, A., & Jennings, B. (2020). Saturated with meaning: peatlands, heritage and folklore. *Time and Mind*, 13(3), 283-305.0

6 Re-Peat. (n.d). Why Peatlands? There is no climate justice without peatland justice. Re-Peat. <https://crane-burgundy-w7gx.squarespace.com/why-peatlands>.

com/why-peatlands.

7 Spash, C. L. (2015). The dying planet index: life, death and man’s domination of nature. *Environmental Values*, 24(1), 1-7.

8 Tola, M. (2018). Between Pachamama and Mother Earth: Gender, political ontology and the rights of nature in contemporary Bolivia. *Feminist review*, 118(1), 25-40.

9 Ferdinand, M. (2022). Behind the Colonial Silence of Wilderness: “In Marronage Lies the Search of a World”. *Environmental Humanities*, 14(1), 182-201

10 T. Karelse, personal communication, October 18, 2024

11 Serrano-García, I. (1994). The ethics of the powerful and the power of ethics. *American journal of community psychology*, 22(1), 1-20.

12 Smith, B. (2012). *Ontology. In The furniture of the world* (pp. 47-68). Brill.

13 Escobar, A. (2019). Thinking-feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the

ontological approach call for addressing the subject's emotions and their sense of care, engendering the heart to feel for the peatlands. It also challenges the current Western, anthropocentric (dis)connection that exists between people and Dutch peatlands as peatlands are centred around "profitable exploitation"<sup>14</sup><sup>15</sup>. This ontological futuring discourse is not rooted in an ethical or legal approach, but instead asks us to (re)question our sense of being in relation to peatlands. Relational ontologies allow us to deeply immerse ourselves into an entirely different way of imagining and worlding that disrupts our anthropocentric imaginaries of the peatland<sup>13</sup>. It teaches us to look and feel attentively from the perspective of the manifold relations that make this world what it is. The Dutch peatland ecosystem is entangled with co-constituted and relational entities, involving interactions between minerals, gas molecules, microorganisms, water, sphagnum, flora, and fauna; an intermeshing assemblage of underground, "underwater, surface and areal life"<sup>13</sup> (p. 17). This "rhizomal" and entangled "logic" between species, processes and temporalities make up the relational ontology in the peatland<sup>13</sup>.

Relational ontologies teach us to redefine our relationships with the more-than-human, practising to exist amongst, with and in relation to peatlands. Beings do not simply dominate peatlands, they inhabit it, threading communal paths through their entangled meshworks, contributing to an ever-evolving relational tapestry of rhizomal networks and entanglements<sup>13</sup><sup>15</sup>. Understanding how we are making and becoming-with the peatland is crucial to foster a deeper sense of response-ability - a feeling of mutual care of all beings in the intermeshed web of life<sup>15</sup>. These relationalities can be transformational, as we create an emotional bond that pushes us to care and think with and for peatlands<sup>15</sup>. Embodying and recognising our entangled threads within the larger rhizomal networks, enables us to understand that peatlands are sacred to life - to destroy it, is to destroy ourselves. Furthermore, these relational worlds do not require a divide between nature/culture in order to exist; on the contrary, they are co-created by processes which do not rely on such divides<sup>8</sup><sup>13</sup>. This teaches us

to deconstruct static binaries of nature/culture in peatlands, breaking away the foundations for anthropocentric systems. Thinking beyond a nature/culture divide and with relational ontologies teaches us to create deeper, respectful, and communal relationships towards the peatland. The embedded assumptions here show us that relational ontologies offer an alternative pathway to current dominant peatland management practices rooted in exploitation, extraction and domination. Instead relational peatland management practices foster a world of sympoiesis; a world of making-with, acting with and building with peatlands<sup>15</sup>. Peatlands in this better world are envisioned to flourish, being recognised as animate agents that support life in the Netherlands.

Lastly, it is important to note that relational ontologies are embedded in Indigenous and non-Western frameworks, where the Embassy of the Peat's imaginary was respectfully inspired by Maori and Pachamama cosmovisions. The imaginative inspiration of Indigenous frameworks highlights deep assumptions of how Western-centric frameworks, rooted in anthropocentric discourses, (re)produce exploitative practices towards peatlands. Indigenous cosmovisions on the other hand, highlight how deep relationalities are established through genealogical connections, where responsibility and reciprocity form the core of guardianship relations between humans and the *more-than-human*<sup>16</sup><sup>17</sup><sup>18</sup><sup>19</sup>. This leads us to question: how does one bring to life relational ontologies in peatland settings?

13

South. In *Knowledges born in the struggle* (pp. 41-57). Routledge.

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18 Stewart-Harawira, M. W. (2020). Troubled waters: Maori values and ethics for freshwater management and New Zealand's fresh water crisis. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water*, 7(5), e1464.

19 Watene, K. (2016). Valuing nature: Māori philosophy and the capability approach. *Oxford Development Studies*, 44(3), 287-296.

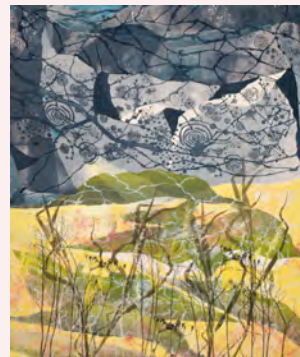
# UTILITARIAN NATURE OF DUTCH PEATLAND MANAGEMENT

The Embassy of the Peat is confronting challenges in its quest to elevate the status of peatlands in societal and environmental discourse. Its primary objective is clear: to challenge the traditional, anthropocentric narrative that underpins Dutch peatland management and policy, advocating instead for an ecocentric approach that recognises peatlands as entities deserving of rights and protection.

The dominant narrative around peatlands in the Netherlands is highly utilitarian and anthropocentric. This traditional dominant narrative regards peatlands as mere resources within the agricultural and commercial sectors, rather than vital ecosystems with intrinsic value. Early national peatland strategies sought a balance between economic use and environmental protection, reflecting a perspective that prioritised “production value” and agricultural support<sup>1</sup>. The Netherlands’ extensive use of peatlands for agricultural purposes, especially dairy farming, has led to significant land subsidence and environmental degradation. The current system prioritises economic utility over ecological sustainability, perpetuated by entrenched economic interests and private land ownership. An agrocentric perspective is primarily concerned with retaining control over the land, autonomy in decision-making, and the effectiveness of peatland restoration or rewetting interventions<sup>2</sup>. Farmers, who hold a significant amount of decision-making power over land use, also face pressure from various sources, including the food industry, government policies, and market demands. This economic focus has resulted in short-term technical solutions aimed at controlling water levels or managing greenhouse gas emissions rather than addressing the broader

ecological impact or ethical considerations involved.

The Embassy of the Peat advocates for a shift from technical, piecemeal solutions toward a more holistic, ecocentric perspective. They argue that the prevailing narrative is narrowly focused on mitigating climate impacts, particularly CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, without considering the broader implications on biodiversity, interspecies justice, and long-term ecological well-being. This limited perspective restricts efforts to address interconnected issues, such as biodiversity loss, flood risks, and the degradation of ecosystem services. By advocating for a reciprocal and ecocentric approach, the focus on peatlands shifts from an economic asset to a critical component of public interest, echoing frameworks where natural entities are safeguarded as part of a shared environmental trust. Studies on the stewardship of natural entities, such as New Zealand’s Whanganui River, illustrate that recognising ecosystems as essential public allies can foster a sense of collective responsibility and help hold policy makers accountable for environmental conservation<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, prioritising peatlands as common partners could amplify their “voice” in policy discussions, encouraging policymakers to treat peatland conservation as a matter of shared ecological interest.



*In the Liminal Lands (Sarah Keast, 2018)*

1 Nordbeck, R., & Hogl, K. (2024). National peatland strategies in Europe: current status, key themes, and challenges. *Regional Environmental Change*, 24(1).

2 Lees, K. J., Carmenta, R., Condliffe, I., Gray, A., Marquis, L., & Lenton, T. M. (2023). Protecting peatlands requires understanding stakeholder perceptions and relational values: A case study of peatlands in the Yorkshire Dales.

3 O'donnell, E. L., & Talbot-Jones, J. (2018). Creating legal rights for rivers: Lessons from Australia, New Zealand, and India. *Ecology and Society*, 23(1).

# THE DISOCCURATIVE AND EXTRACTIVE NATURE OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM

The anthropocentric worldview based on the domination of the more-than-human has led to suffering of species and ecosystems, leaving a gaping disconnect between humans and the more-than-human world. Anthropocentrism refers to a cosmivision that places humans as the focal point of the universe, making “us” the most valuable measure of all things<sup>4</sup>. In doing so, it separates humans from nature and views us as superior to it, creating a dangerous and fictitious binary. Anthropocentrism is akin to human chauvinism and speciesism<sup>5,6</sup>. Specifically, human chauvinism leads to the specification of differences in a way that favours humans, and delineates what counts as being worthy of respect and care. This interlinks with speciesism, which, as Hayward<sup>7</sup> (p. 52) describes, occurs when “[humans] give preference to interests of members of their own species over the interests of members of other species for morally arbitrary reasons”.

Rovirosa-Madrado<sup>8</sup> connects the development of anthropocentrism to the epistemological factors underpinning the Eurocentric paradigm of “civilisation” and “modernity”, which led to centuries of oppression and failure to acknowledge different ways of being with the world. During the colonial era, nature was perceived as an instrument through which to obtain resources, land, and dominance. Peatlands are one such resource: historically, they have been excavated and exploited for fuel and arable land to fulfil agricultural and forestry purposes<sup>9</sup>. Perhaps most

importantly, such continuous exploitation has led to a relationship with the peatland that is hierarchical, violent, and human-centred.

The Embassy of the Peat challenges anthropocentrism and embodies a transition towards relationality and reciprocity. Its vision encourages us to see the more-than-human world not as a resource, but as a relational partner deserving of respect. Nonetheless, shifting away from the deeply entrenched anthropocentric worldview is challenging. The dominance of the societal paradigm that favours exploitation and profit works actively against viewing the *more-than-human* world as relational partners, leading to resistance against the ideas of the Embassy of the Peat. The main challenge identified within the Embassy’s imaginary is thus how to materialise this ontological transformation in practice, particularly when considering the hegemony of anthropocentric ontologies and the neglect of alternative cosmivisions.

This is closely interlinked with the first challenge identified, as anthropocentrism underpins contemporary policies regarding the peatland. Current governance approaches neglect the broader implications of land management on the more-than-human world, instead prioritising economic and technocentric interests. However, a core difference between the two challenges is their starting points: while the first challenge focuses on issues related to land management and governance mechanisms to manage peatlands, the second challenge outlined in this section highlights issues within dominant worldviews, norms, and ways of *relating* to peatlands. While the first challenge prompts us to consider how we can view the more-than-human as an essential partner in public stewardship and decision-making, the second challenge encourages us to think about ways to inspire a transformation towards a more reciprocal, relational, and entangled relationship with the Dutch peatland.

4 Probyn-Rapsey, F. (2018). Anthropocentrism. *Critical terms for animal studies*, 47-63.

5 Kopnina, H., Washington, H., Taylor, B., and Piccolo, J. (2018). Anthropocentrism: More than just a Misunderstood Problem. *The International Journal of Ecopsychology (IJE)*, 3(1), 1-23. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/ije/vol3/iss1>

6 Kimmerer, R. W. (2021). *Gathering moss: A natural and cultural history of mosses*. Penguin UK.

7 Hayward, T. (1997). Anthropocentrism: A misunderstood problem. *Environmental Values*, 6(1), 49-63.

8 Rovirosa-Madrado, C. (2023). Eurocentrism and Anthropocentrism in International Law? Obstacles for the criminalisation of ecocide at the ICC. *The Promise Institute for Human Rights*, 1-22.

9 FooYuen, N. F., Basiron, Y., & Sundram, K. (2016). A historical perspective of peat exploitation in Europe and its sustainability. <https://www.jopec.com.my/index.php/jopeccommon/article/viewFile/100/137>

# APPROACH OF ROLE PLAYING WORKSHOP

**This workshop utilises a unique futuring approach that combines educational dialogue with an engaging role-playing element inspired by the mechanics of Dungeons & Dragons.**

Role-play stimulates active learning and can be seen as a practice that stimulates reflexivity<sup>1</sup>. This method can enhance interaction and empathy and can increase the appreciation of the role and responsibilities that relate to this role<sup>2</sup>. This interactive experience invites policymakers in different levels of government (national government, provinces, municipalities, and water boards) to explore the vital role of peatlands while recognizing the responsibilities of various stakeholders in their preservation and restoration. The aim is twofold: (1) emphasising the importance of peatlands, specifically by focusing on ecosystem services, and (2) shifting the narrative on peatlands from the 'opportunity of exploitation' towards the 'opportunity of public services'. We mean by this that peatlands are a common good that should be protected by the Dutch government for future generations.

The workshop is designed to be flexible and can be conducted across different municipalities. This allows policymakers to witness firsthand the impacts of peatland degradation and engage with those affected in their communities. For easy transport and to enhance the experience the participants will travel in the Bog Bus (Figure 1 & 2). This bus would be decorated on the exterior to show healthy peatlands, along with facts and interesting points. The interior would have low lighting and background music inspired by peatlands, the chairs and curtains would be sphagnum patterned, and it would be a quiet calming space for reflection and meditation between sites. Inviting policymakers into the Bog Bus not only makes the workshop more convenient and accessible, it also allows policymakers to stay

immersed in the 'landscape' of the peat, instead of moving out to travel to different sites.



the "Bog Bus" concept for peatland workshops.  
Generated by: Microsoft Copilot, 2024

Participants will visit three critical site types to grasp the current issues facing peatlands and envision potential futures:

**Degraded Peatland:** The first stop will be at a site that has been drained for agriculture, urbanisation, or peat extraction. Here, participants will discuss the history and consequences of exploitative practices. The visual impact of the drained land serves as a powerful reminder of our actions. Policymakers will engage with local farmers and/or landowners, learning about their experiences with degradation and its implications.

**Soil Subsidence Areas:** The second stop will focus on areas experiencing soil subsidence due to peatland degradation, which is causing damage to houses, roads and other infrastructure and creates increased flooding risks. Policymakers will meet with affected locals to understand the physical implications of peatland loss. Personal stories shared by these stakeholders will foster empathy and underline the urgent need for action.

**Restored Peatland:** The final site will showcase a restored or conserved peatland, where natural

1 Paschall, M., & Wüstenhagen, R. (2011). More than a game. *Organizational Behavior Teaching Review*, 36(4), 510–543.

2 Sutcliffe, M. (2002). *Simulations, games and role-play*.



ecosystems are thriving. Preferably, this is where the participants will come to the site of the exhibition (explained in the 2nd approach) and explore not only the landscape but also their personal relationships to the peat. If this is unrealistic, another healthy peatland will suffice. Participants will explore this area and hear from nature organisations about the significance of conservation efforts. Discussions will emphasise the intrinsic value of peatlands and our collective responsibility to protect and nurture these ecosystems.



*Restored peatland at the Fochteloërveen, Friesland.  
Photo by J. O'Donovan, 2024*

After visiting the three sites, the policymakers will engage in dialogue and discussion based on the game of Dungeons & Dragons. This gamification approach allows the policymakers to really immerse themselves into an imaginative world, which reflects real-world dynamics. The game is guided by a storyteller (preferably somebody from the embassy), who will set the stage and context during the game and make sure that participants are guided through their characters and choices. There are five elements that should be considered.

**Character Creation:** Assign each policymaker a stakeholder role with a backstory, going into their motivations and challenges related to the peatland. There are six stakeholder roles or characters: (1) policymaker, (2) farmer/landowner, (3) nature organisation, (4) dairy cow, (5) sphagnum moss, and (6) a grandchild. By including the dairy cow, the sphagnum, and the grandchild as marginalised voices of the non-human and future generations into this dialogue, we aim to create a more equal power balance between the dominant stakeholders and marginalised stakeholders. At the start of the workshop the policymakers will be assigned a character so they can develop their character throughout the workshop in the Bog Bus on their character sheet.

**Scenario-Based Challenges:** Create real-world inspired scenarios as 'quests' which participants need to solve collaboratively to achieve certain sustainability outcomes.

**Interactive Mechanisms:** Use of dice rolls and skill checks to guide outcomes, which spurs creative thinking and problem-solving whilst simulating real-world events.

**Team Collaboration:** Opportunity to stimulate teamwork based on character roles which highlights the need for diverse perspectives and allows for synergies to develop for decision-making processes.

**Storytelling and Reflection:** The participants construct a common narrative on the basis of their choices and actions, which is followed by a reflection of what this means for current and future policy on peatlands.

By incorporating these five elements into role-playing dialogue, the policymakers will hopefully have more profound knowledge of the importance of peatlands, and feel more responsible for the current and future preservation and restoration of peatlands.

We acknowledge that reciprocity is an important consideration when inviting policymakers, or other stakeholders for that matter. By taking part in this workshop and hopefully recognizing the benefits of sound peatland stewardship, policymakers are rewarded directly through the opportunity to foster ongoing engagement and collaboration with other stakeholders. There are also indirect benefits, such as improved carbon storage, better water quality, soil subsidence protection, flood risk protection, preservation of ecosystems, and potential opportunities for ecotourism. A post-workshop group will be established, connecting policymakers with the stakeholders from their communities and another group for just policymakers from various regions. These groups will provide a platform for continued discussion, reflection, and collaborative efforts in crafting legislation and policies that align with sustainable peatland management.

# APPROACH TO A CO-CREATED IMMERSIVE AND SENSORIAL EXHIBITION

Our futuring approach takes the form of an immersive, sensorial exhibition which aims to transform people's relationship with the peatland. Therefore, we are taking a dramaturgy approach to create a setting and space in which normative behaviours can be rethought<sup>1, 2</sup>. Such "utopian dramaturgical arrangements [stimulate] temporary changes in perspectives, experiences, and social roles and [postpone] usually entrenched binaries, such as future versus past, nature versus culture, and public versus private"<sup>3</sup> (p. 13). By incorporating interactive as well as sensorial exhibition pieces we want to counteract the tendency of visitors to remain passive spectators. Encouraging emotional involvement with a subject increases the willingness to engage while creating a more embodied experience of factual knowledge<sup>4</sup>. It also overlaps with the second and third step of the Embassy of the Peat of starting to listen and speak to the more-than-human actors of the peatland.

To initiate broader societal change, the targeted audience is the general public including families with children as they form the future generation. We furthermore suggest linking the futuring approaches of both groups presented in this chapter. Within the frame of a workshop regional policy-makers who hold decision making power could be encouraged to visit the exhibition to challenge their notion of relational ontologies and their relationship with the peatland. Notwithstanding, accessibility is an important issue which we address by making the entry free of charge as well as by incorporating various engagement options into the design. We thus place the principle of care at the core of engaging with the human and more-than-human involved in our approach. We expand the notion of accessibility beyond the visitors to the artists by encouraging a diverse

range of creative actors to co-create the exhibition, by contributing their own relational artworks with the peatland and providing feedback for the curation.

For the location of the exhibition, we propose an informal event space close to peatland. One promising example is the Stookhuis on the grounds of the De Proef art and ecological centre in Drenthe where the adjacent gardens and lands also include a functional peatland patch<sup>5</sup>. By placing the exhibition in close proximity to the peatland, we avoid the erasure of the more-than-human actors within the exhibition but instead allow them to co-create the space. Yet, having an indoor space is crucial to create an illusion of leaving the current world and immersing into another which encourages imaginative processes and allows for weather sensitive exhibits.

**Entry space:** The visitors enter the exhibition by stepping into a white room which symbolises the departure from their current reality. This first space aims to acknowledge the different worldviews, efforts and relationships to the peatland through the projection of a documentary style video. The video introduces the history of the peatland, the purpose of its exploitation and acknowledges the stakeholders that still depend on it. This includes for example the successful increase of food production, the economic pressures on farmers and the danger of peatland induced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. At the end, the exhibition is framed by rewinding the video and posing the question: "What if we had taken a different path?". The participants are thus encouraged to leave their current assumptions behind, to be open to reimagine their relationality to the peatlands. They will then enter the exhibition space by passing through several curtains of fabric which materialise the layers of the peatland (water, moss, soil etc.) to further inspire the transition.

1 Burke, K. (1969). *A grammar of motives*. University of California Press.

2 Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor.

3 Hoffman, J., Versteeg, W., & Hajer, M. A. (2024). Utopianism in state-society interaction: Reflections on the transdisciplinary intervention 'Places of Hope'. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 1-17.

4 Persson, K., Andr e, M., & Caiman, C. (2024). Becoming-with the bog born: Emotional collectives in ecological fieldwork. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*.

5 DE PROEF. (n.d.). About DE PROEF campus , its mission and vision. <https://deproef.org/campus> (Accessed 23.10.24)

To make the abstract concept of reciprocity and relationality with the more-than-human world more tangible, we propose the development of an audio guide (or booklet) which connects the exhibition with European folklore. It is easier to identify and build relationships with the *more-than-human* through local stories which personify them<sup>6</sup>. For example, the Welsh mythology about the water horse Ceffyl Dwr embodies the aquatic and emotional aspects of water<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, stories are easily remembered and can thus, through re-telling reach beyond the individual exhibition participant.

We specifically suggest the usage of folklore instead of drawing from indigenous backgrounds from non-Western contexts to avoid appropriation and extraction<sup>8</sup>. Folklorism can provide symbolic resources which are embedded in the Dutch local context<sup>9</sup>.

**Main space:** The second part offers the main space for the contributions by various artists. The different elements in this room can change dynamically depending on the co-creation allowing for recurring engagement over time. The central focus of the installations is to allow for different ways of active and sensorial engagement which aims to go beyond the visual and factual intake of information creating an embodied understanding of what it means to relate to the peatland. Speaking to a multiplicity of senses enables a more emotional engagement, creating better access for a broader scope of individuals and provokes longer lasting memories for participants<sup>10 11 12</sup>.



Light-motion sensitive technologies<sup>13</sup>

The photos show an example for an immersive and sensorial room that materialises relationality. The space has movement and touch sensing light-lianas hanging from the ceiling, made out of sphagnum moss capturing the complex, inter-meshing system of the peatland. As individuals meander through, the lianas glow-up reflecting the bodily movements within the meshworks of the sphagnum lianas. This visualises that the entanglement and relationality between humans and the peatland means the constant reshaping of each other's materiality<sup>6 14</sup>.



Organic materiality of liana and vines<sup>15</sup>

**Outdoor space:** One enters the third part of the exhibition by stepping out onto the peatland. By including an outdoor space, the peatland can co-create counteracting its continuous marginalisation. This last part encourages the participants to reflect how their relationship to the peatland has changed throughout the exhibition, which is crucial to allow the exhibition to have a lasting ontological impact. Therefore, the outdoor area offers a space for conversation within small groups which are facilitated through suitable seating arrangements, around a fire on cold days, as well as through provided prompts. As a reminder of our continuing entanglement with the peatland, there will be a choice of elements which can be taken home such as miniature terrarium kits which house a tiny moss ecosystem or printed stories of peatland people who describe their personal relationship with the more-than-human.

6 Höckert, E. (2020). On scientific fabulation: Storytelling in the more-than-human world. In *Ethics and Politics of Space for the Anthropocene* (pp. 51-70). Edward Elgar Publishing.

7 Ross, A. (2001). *Folklore of Wales*. The History Press.

8 Ross, A. (2001). *Folklore of Wales*. The History Press.

9 Escobar, A. (2019). Thinking-feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South. In *Knowledges born in the struggle* (pp. 41-57). Routledge.

10 Flint, A., & Jennings, B. (2020). Saturated with meaning: peatlands, heritage and folklore. *Time and Mind*, 13(3), 283-305.

11 Eardley, A. F., Mineiro, C., Neves, J., & Ride, P. (2016). Redefining Access: Embracing multimodality, memorability and shared experience in Museums. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 59(3), 263-286. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.1216>

12 Lehmann, S., & Murray, M. M. (2005). The role of multisensory memories in inensory object discrimination. *Cognitive Brain Research*, 24(2), 326-334.

13 Vi, C. T., Ablart, D., Gatti, E., Velasco, C., & Obrist, M. (2017). Not just seeing, but also feeling art: Mid-air haptic experiences integrated in a multisensory art exhibition. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 108, 1-14

14 Random International. (2019). *Our Future Selves*, 2019. <http://www.random-international.com/our-future-selves>.

15 Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

16 Lygoe, J. (n.d.). *The Womb*. Rebecca Louise Law. <https://www.rebeccalouiselaw.com/womb>.



WE  
ASK

**How have you become trapped in The One-World World?**

By Tamara Luiken

**IMFRAHUB.AFRICA**

**SEEDS OF AFRICAN  
FUTURES**

*Aniol Gironès López  
Arthur de Visser  
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# BUILDING WITH PURPOSE – INFRAHUB'S COMMUNITY-CENTRAL VISION

## Introduction

Infrahub.Africa (hereafter referred to as “Infrahub”) is a pioneering initiative launched in 2023 through a collaboration between the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, and the Urban Futures Studio at Utrecht University, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. Its main goal is to showcase diverse successful just and sustainable infrastructure development across Africa to inspire others to reimagine their cities. To achieve their goal, they have developed an online platform which provides a growing database of infrastructure projects that prioritize social, environmental, and economic sustainability. This database now comprises 50 successful case studies in 28 different countries across Africa, 15 of which are located in South Africa. These case studies, which are developed by local communities, business or governments across Africa, explore the use of sustainable infrastructure as an entry point for imagining more sustainable and equitable cities in the continent. By emphasizing a bottom-up approach instead of importing Western infrastructural models, Infrahub seeks to empower communities, encourage knowledge sharing, and inspire innovative solutions that address infrastructure challenges uniquely suited to diverse African contexts.

## Inspiring infrastructure change

The above-mentioned case study database is intended as tool for inspiring change to sustainable, economically inclusive and socially just infrastructures across the continent. Each case study serves as an open resource that communities, policymakers, businesses, and non-profit organizations can use as inspiration to foster a more collaborative, inclusive approach to infrastructure development. By categorising each case study according to specific types of infrastructure services and sectors, such as water, health, energy, education, and buildings, Infrahub facilitates the identification of relevant projects that address local basic needs for multiple households.

Moreover, the platform highlights the broader impacts of each project, detailing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) covered and the number of households reached per case study, allowing users to understand the potential scale and replicability of each initiative. This approach enables stakeholders to view sustainable infrastructure not only as a technical endeavour but as a participatory and scalable effort essential to realizing Africa’s urban future. In this sense, Infrahubs’ overarching aim is to inspire the creation of new infrastructure experiments, encouraging collaborations and adaptation to other contexts, and ultimately stimulating more hopeful imaginaries of Africa’s urban future.

A key aspect of the initiative is its openness to new contributions: anyone involved in the development of an infrastructure project falling into at least two out of Infrahub’s three core principles: ecological sustainability, social justice, and economic inclusivity, can freely submit it to the website. This open-access approach shall, in theory, allow the database to expand continuously, showcasing a diverse range of community-driven projects that amplify its impact as a catalyst for change. Through this knowledge-sharing hub, insights, best practices, and innovative solutions are accessible to a broad audience, including community leaders, policymakers, and infrastructure developers across Africa. This approach aligns with the platform’s mission to democratize infrastructure by fostering a bottom-up approach to urban development. By serving as a repository of proven ideas, the platform not only enriches the exchange of ideas but also enhances the potential for other communities to replicate, adapt, and experiment with these solutions, inspiring sustainable infrastructure initiatives across varied contexts.

## Infrahub’s approach, long-term vision, and project impact

Infrahub adopts an experimental (or prefigurative) approach to futuring, using the idea of transformative “seeds” in infrastructure development. Rather

than pushing for rigid or top-down plans, Infracub encourages the organic emergence and propagation of bottom-up, context-specific infrastructure experiments across Africa. This open-ended, non-directive methodology draws inspiration from nature, resembling the spread of these transformative seeds to a mushroom's growth across a forest floor. Infracub aims to generate a network of impactful, sustainable projects by fostering local, community-led initiatives that embody Infracub's three core principles. This network, in turn, has the potential to inspire broader changes in Africa's infrastructure landscape. Central to Infracub's approach is an emphasis on being rooted in the African context.



The initiative encourages local actors, whether from communities, businesses or government, to develop and lead infrastructure projects without imposing predefined goals or plans. This approach is sensitive to countering Africa's colonial history, by avoiding top-down interventions and respecting the unique needs and aspirations of each community. However, a delicate balance is necessary. While Infracub promotes broad transformative principles, it tries to prevent the uncritical application of ideas from one community to another, acknowledging that context-specificity is vital in Africa's complex and regionally diverse socio-political landscape.

### **Future goals and expansion**

Infracub's foundational mission to democratize infrastructure development in Africa represents a significant shift towards inclusive, sustainable, and community-centered approaches. By functioning as an archive of context-driven projects, the platform supports local actors in

building urban futures that are grounded in the priorities of African communities. This commitment to open access and knowledge sharing facilitates a rich exchange of solutions and ideas, inspiring cross-regional collaborations and enabling new infrastructure initiatives that are attuned to local needs and aspirations.

The next section will delve deeper into the visionary framework that underpins Infracub. Through two distinct imaginaries—bottom-up and top-down—we will explore how community-driven projects not only transform local infrastructure but also may challenge entrenched narratives and assumptions within South Africa's urban development landscape. While the bottom-up perspective emphasizes grassroots efforts and localized empowerment, the top-down view highlights how systemic, government-led visions aim to shape the future of infrastructure in Africa. Together, these perspectives reveal the transformative potential of an inclusive and adaptive approach to infrastructure development..

### **Positionality note**

As a group of eight students from Utrecht University, we approached our collaboration with Infracub mindful of our positionality and our predominantly European backgrounds. Although two of us have some Asian roots, we do not feel like it has given us a different perspective than from our group members. The recognition of the lasting impacts of colonialism—which European nations historically imposed on many African countries—grounds our approach in humility and respect. We aim to avoid reinforcing imbalanced power dynamics that can sometimes go unnoticed, and instead seek ways to support Infracub's goals in a way that prioritizes local voices and needs. Through this engagement, we hope to contribute constructively and respectfully to sustainable infrastructure development across diverse African contexts, focussing on South Africa.

# UTOPIAN IMAGINARIES – GOVERNMENTAL VISION FOR TODAY

From the bottom-up perspective, we investigated the utopian imaginary of the South African case studies from Infrahub's database. Three overarching goals corresponding to the core principles of Infrahub were found: social justice and co-creation, economic inclusion, and sustainable ecological practices. We conceptualized these as follows: the first goal emphasizes co-designing concepts and utilizing solutions that can be adopted and maintained by communities with limited resources, with a central focus on their specific needs. Social justice and co-creation are realized through participatory decision-making and community-based approaches. The second goal, economic inclusion, can be achieved by investing in local communities through skills development and employment. Locals are often included in the planning and construction phases of the case studies. Lastly, ecological practices are supported through efforts like reducing waste by reusing and recycling materials. Additionally, Infrahub has the goal of encouraging the use of local construction materials and leveraging traditional and indigenous building techniques.

We have identified five indicators that show how these three goals materialise throughout the case studies. First, decentralizing access to essential resources and enhancing community resilience and self-sufficiency. There are several successful exemplary case studies, like Gcwalisa, where access to affordable food and energy is expanded to low-income communities. Moreover, the DC GO Solar PV Towers project provides electricity to off-grid informal settlements, increasing energy accessibility. Similarly, the iShack Project enables energy access for lighting and small appliances through solar home systems. Another notable case is the Safisana biogas digester, which converts waste into biogas for affordable electricity and nutrient-rich organic fertilizer. These examples show how decentralizing access to resources can make communities less vulnerable to external disruptions.

Another indicator we investigated is marginalized communities having better access to basic needs

and being able to actively participate in the local community and economy through sustainable practices. For example, the Soil for Life initiative empowers urban residents to grow their own food, which contributes to a more secure food network. In addition, by building houses from locally sourced materials, the Mbekweni stonehouses project provides affordable housing while creating jobs for local construction workers. These initiatives make basic services accessible and foster community-driven growth, while also reinforcing local economies and improving resilience.



*Image on Infrahub.Africa, supplied by Soil for Life*

The third indicator surfacing in Infrahub's future imaginary involves residents directly in planning and building infrastructure. This fosters a sense of agency and inclusivity within the community. For instance, Empower Shack Khayelitsha involves locals in designing and constructing safe housing within informal settlements. This co-creation model helps communities shape their environment according to their unique needs and preferences. Additionally, providing communities with skills and knowledge ensures they can continue to maintain and replicate sustainable practices independently. The Gando Primary School offers another example, involving the local community of Gando in building a sustainable and affordable learning environment for students. Lastly, DC GO Solar PV Towers stands out as it not only builds solar energy infrastructure



but also trains locals in solar technology, creating long-term job opportunities.

A fourth indicator is the development of skills through leveraging local and indigenous knowledge along with skills transfer to empower locals to use them in different areas. For example, Sandbag & Ecobeam Houses trains locals to use indigenous building methods, enabling them to practice sustainable construction techniques. The Hikma Community Complex transformed a derelict mosque into a public library, which provided employment and skills development opportunities for local labourers, and now also offers sewing and computer skills classes to women. This approach enriches the community, empowering residents to contribute to future projects and support sustainable growth in other areas.

Finally, the fifth indicator is focused on sustainability. Previous case examples mentioned the use of local materials, renewable energy sources, and other sustainable practices. Reducing the environmental impact while supporting the local economy will not only have great benefits in the short term but especially in the long term. The Wall-Mounted Solar Public Lighting project, for example, optimizes renewable energy use with solar-powered lights, enhancing public safety without relying on high-energy lighting systems. Additionally, some projects actively restore natural areas, such as the community-run Mangroves Together project. In the long term, renewable energy and sustainable practices help to build resilient, self-sufficient infrastructure that benefits communities for years to come.

To summarise, the bottom-up utopian imaginary emerging from *infrahub.Africa* envisions a world in which change is initiated and encouraged by the communities it is intended to serve, rather than imposed from above. The goals established by *Infrahub* and the five indicators we derived from them serve as cornerstones for creating inclusive, responsive infrastructure systems that are centred on the specific needs and values of individual communities. This allows projects to evolve organically based on local insights and challenges. Like mushrooms propagating across landscapes, these transformative initiatives take root where conditions are right and gradually create networks for resilient, community-led change. This process respects the autonomy and dignity of each community and fosters an infrastructure of collective

empowerment and adaptability.



*Image on [Infrahub.Africa](https://infrahub.africa), supplied by Enabel*

# UTOPIAN IMAGINARIES – GOVERNMENTAL VISION FOR TODAY

The second vision adopts a top-down perspective and describes Infrahub's urban development setting, aiming to understand the governmental forces influencing the process. The South African Ministry of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs devised the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) as a response to South-Africa's urbanisation trends. The national development plan works to develop an urban development policy that will cater for the increasing urban population by ensuring adequate planning and necessary infrastructure to support this growth<sup>1</sup>. Since Infrahub spotlights infrastructure cases, we focus here on the integrated urban infrastructure section of the IUDF (p. 68-74)<sup>1</sup>.

*“Infrastructure is consumed as a bundle of services, and so the planning, financing, constructing, operating and maintaining of each service needs to be done in an integrated and sustainable way.” (IUDF, 2016, p. 69)<sup>1</sup>.*

## POLICY LEVER 4: INTEGRATED URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Cities and towns that have transitioned from traditional approaches to resource-efficient infrastructure systems, which provide for both universal access and more inclusive economic growth.

*Part of IUDF's Integrated urban development framework*

Urban development can be shaped in many different ways, but when it comes to infrastructure the IUDF mentions three main directions that generally describe the priorities of authorities:

- Addressing new basic services demands and backlogs (particularly in townships and informal settlements)

- Investing in and maintain economic infrastructure, and to reliably deliver services to underpin economic growth
- Prioritising infrastructure projects that can catalyse new economic growth

To coordinate these efforts, the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission (PICC) has launched 18 Strategic Infrastructure Projects (SIPs) across multiple sectors, including transportation (rail, roads, ports), water management (dams, irrigation, sanitation), energy (new generation plants and transmission lines), communication (broadband), and social infrastructure (hospitals, schools, universities). The integration of green technologies in renewable energy is also prioritized, with rising energy costs and electricity shortages creating opportunities for domestic manufacturing of these technologies.<sup>1</sup>

### Status quo, the projects and its challenges

Despite all these projects, there is currently not enough capital to finance the projected infrastructure requirements, meaning 4 billion ZAR per sector is needed to fully implement the infrastructure plans<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the condition of infrastructure in cities varies from excellent to dysfunctional, expressing the need of maintenance as well as adding new infrastructure for growth. Therefore, significant challenges hinder development progress. The governance of urban infrastructure remains fragmented, with local governments lacking the legal framework to implement integrated plans, resulting in unclear accountability and poor coordination. This disjointed approach prevents effective long-term budgeting and confidence-building for citizens and businesses. Additionally, there is insufficient funding for capital investments and infrastructure maintenance. As municipalities increasingly rely on national or provincial funds, the gap between financial needs and available resources is widening. Capacity constraints, inadequate energy supply and faulty transport infrastructure are limiting economic growth, which cannot exceed 3% without resolving these issues<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> IUDF. 2016. Integrated urban development framework: a new deal for South African cities and towns. Available at: [https://iudf.co.za/pdf\\_downloads/2016-integrated-urban-development-framework/](https://iudf.co.za/pdf_downloads/2016-integrated-urban-development-framework/)



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By Echando una mano

## Envisioned future

The idea of the future that is envisioned by the South African government revolves around creating an optimal state to pursue economic growth, creating efficient, equitable, and resilient cities which foster social and economic opportunities for their inhabitants. One of the main directions highlights the importance of inclusiveness due to the country's history of Apartheid. The focus is on addressing current backlogs in townships and informal settlements while at the same time investing in infrastructure that supports economic growth, inherently attending the economic and social imbalances present in infrastructural development. Additionally, the importance of environmental sustainability is emphasized, focusing on adopting low-carbon technologies to make cities resilient and resource-efficient.

To achieve these objectives, they seek to create an engaging collaboration between the state, the private sector and communities to plan and shape urban spaces to improve liveability, especially for marginalised communities within informal settlements. Local governments are believed to take on a new critical role in this process by giving them autonomy to lead these efforts and to ensure inclusivity in decision-making processes.

## Futuring approaches

In the IUDF, the South African government employs various futuring approaches, with a particular focus on backcasting, where a desired future is envisioned, and steps are traced backward to determine how to achieve it<sup>2</sup>. This approach informs national urban policies, municipal plans, and long-term visions aimed at realising the government's goals. Additionally, governments generally use a

plausible futures approach, especially scenario development, to complement back-casting. By analysing environmental and social factors, economic trends, and other factors, they gain insights into potential future scenarios. This enables them to mitigate disasters and make informed decisions regarding investments in development initiatives.

In addition to these strategies, the government mentions a co-productive approach to futuring, stressing the need to collaborate with local communities. Many initiatives require co-production with the private sector or local stakeholders to foster collective 'place-shaping' decisions aimed at improving liveability (IUDF, 2016). Therefore, this collaborative approach is crucial to mention in the efforts of the government to enable a more sustainable future. Their goal of trying to develop infrastructure as a bridge between urban and rural areas sketches a well-developed, inclusive socio-economic state where facilities and opportunities are shared. However, the co-productive approach is not explained and substantiated with examples on how the government is going to foster co-production in their infrastructure plans to reach those goals. While a key strength of co-production initiatives is incorporating diverse perspectives from all parties involved, including bottom-up approaches, the government has not emphasized this as an important aspect in the IUDF. It therefore becomes questionable whether and how the government will actually account for this in their future urban infrastructure plans.

## What does this mean for Infrahub?

The national government's goal of shifting more responsibilities to local governments and emphasizing co-production creates a valuable opportunity for Infrahub. With focus on bottom-up initiatives, Infrahub is naturally more connected to local governments than to the national government. Both Infrahub and the national government share a commitment to integrated urban infrastructure, though their core objectives differ: while the national government aims to drive economic growth, Infrahub focuses on enhancing civil well-being. Infrahub could dissociate themselves from the government, or they could use the similarities in imaginaries as an opportunity to connect top-down and bottom-up infrastructure stakeholders to reach common goals. How this envisioned co-production will be realised presents an interesting challenge for both the national government and Infrahub.

<sup>2</sup> Mulgan, G. 2020. The imaginary crisis (and how we might quicken social & public imagination).

# TWO VISIONS, ONE GOAL - DECRATIZING SOUTH AFRICAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Both imaginaries show the focus on creating a sustainable and resilient urban future through facilitating infrastructure development. While the top-down perspective, represented by the South African government, enables this through national policies and by delegating responsibilities to local governments, the bottom-up perspective, demonstrated by Infracore, places power in the hands of local citizens and businesses who directly shape - and interact with - the infrastructure. The top-down perspective prioritises resolving service delivery gaps in townships and informal settlements, strengthening and sustaining essential infrastructure to support economic growth, and focusing on infrastructure projects that stimulate new economic opportunities, such as advancements in information technology, aiming for co-production in infrastructure development. The bottom-up perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes self-reliance, community resilience and environmental sustainability as core components of an infrastructure that supports, rather than exploits, marginalized communities.

When comparing the priorities of these two imaginaries, the most notable difference lies in the stakeholders considered during infrastructure development and in how a sustainable urban future is defined. The top-down perspective envisions economic growth through co-production, whereas the bottom-up perspective prioritizes citizens' agency to decide their future and well-being, therefore putting them as central figures in urban infrastructure development. However, one can argue that these two goals are interconnected. Although the two perspectives differ in their priorities, they show an interdependence in their common goal of achieving a sustainable and resilient urban future, which is why we argue that the bottom-up and top-down approaches can be brought together.

Considering the bottom-up imaginary, Infracore must overcome several difficulties, including the potential inhibition of the so-called mushroom propagation concept. This relates to the scalability

and reach of the projects, whose local focus may limit their impact on a broader scale. While these solutions work well in the communities they serve, their implementation on a larger scale or in other regions can pose various challenges. The assumption that site- and context-specific infrastructure projects successful in one place can also thrive in a completely different context is, in our view, unrealistic; a more decolonial approach involving locals could help identify solutions. Moreover, the projects are implemented at the edge of existing infrastructure, often without integration into municipal waste management, national electricity grids or urban planning. This lack of systemic coordination can limit their effectiveness and long-term sustainability, resulting in fragmented infrastructure regimes that operate in isolation rather than a cohesive system. The same accounts for communities whose established habits and behaviours need to be considered and respected. Metaphorically speaking, if a mushroom does not adapt the shape of its surrounding ecosystem, it cannot survive in the long term. Another important topic is South Africa's history with Apartheid. Certain power dynamics rooted in the country's past may prevent the mushroom approach from working as intended, necessitating a closer examination of past wounds and an appropriate adaptation of the initiative's approaches and tools.

However, even if the mushroom approach were to work, there remain critical concerns about the autonomy, process and longevity of the presented case studies. If the following aspects are not explored further, the question arises as to the desirability of sharing the case studies as examples. First, in terms of funding and financial sustainability, many of these initiatives depend on initial investment or partnerships, and securing ongoing funding can be a challenge. Secondly, more transparency is needed on how the case studies came about, as only a very brief description can be found on Infracore's website. Last but not least, we find that there is a lack of consultation with the communities involved in project

development.

On the other hand, the top-down imaginary mainly focuses on the national urban policy document of South Africa and especially on the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) which points out different challenges that have been stated by the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department. These challenges encompass governance fragmentation, financial constraints, lack of inclusivity and gaps in capacity that obstruct the long-term objectives of South Africa's urban development initiatives.

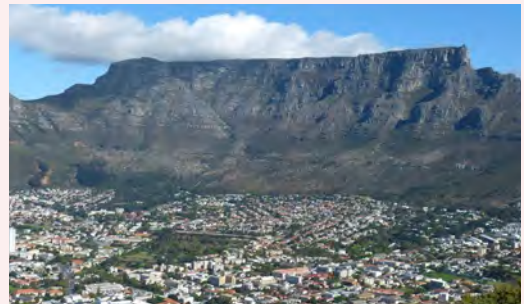
A significant challenge within South Africa's national urban policy is its fragmented governance structure. Infrastructure planning is divided across various sectors and levels of government, leading to poor coordination and inefficiency, hindering its long-term efficiency. The overlapping responsibilities among national, provincial, and local governments often blur accountability lines, causing delays in decision-making and implementation. Such fragmentation undermines policy coherence, making it difficult to implement a unified vision for urban development across the country.

Another important challenge that the government faces is the funding shortfalls which severely limit a policy's potential impact. Municipalities which are heavily reliant on national funding often fall short of what is needed. As a result, critical infrastructure projects face delays, and maintenance of existing structures is inadequate, compounding urban development issues. These financial constraints are further exacerbated by a lack of skilled professionals and weak project management capacities within local governments.

Finally, another major issue and challenge of the top-down structure of the IUDF is its own nature of limiting flexibility and not enabling local knowledge to take part in their planning. This creates issues regarding responding to diverse community needs. In the IUDF, attention is taken to ensuring communities opportunities to share and co-produce futures together with the government, however it is not explicitly explained how to achieve this co-production state. This leads to a situation where some policies can be overlooking unique local challenges, perpetuating inequality. Therefore, democratizing infrastructure and opening-up opportunities and spaces for

communities to raise their opinions becomes a critical need for South Africa's urban policy. This involves not only consulting communities but actively involving them in decision-making processes to ensure that infrastructure projects truly reflect their needs and priorities.

The challenges described above point to an overarching, key challenge that summarizes the problem at hand: the democratization of infrastructures in South Africa. We can clearly identify a need for the involvement of local communities, as well as the provision of resources and transparent, continuous cooperation between several actors from different sectors. To end this part with our analogy: for the mushrooms to flourish and spread, first and foremost a nutritious soil must be sown that provides the conditions for successful growth, whatever this may look like in different contexts accompanied by individual challenges.



*Cape Town, South Africa via Pixabay*

# EMPOWERING LOCAL FUTURES VISIONS THROUGH THE COMMUNITY FUTURES HUB

To address the need to increasingly democratize infrastructure in South Africa we created a novel futuring approach for Infrahub: the “Community Futures Hub” (CFH). CFH’s goal is to serve as an inclusive and collaborative space where communities can explore and deliberate the future of South African urban — and at later stages rural — spaces, reflecting their distinct cultures, stories, values, needs and aspirations. Open-ended and community-led imagination practices, in a workshop setting, form the core of the CFH. To empower these imaginaries for change on a systemic level, the CFH facilitates the bridging of perspectives from local communities, policymakers, city planners, artists, NGOs, entrepreneurs, to funding organizations.

We recognize that interaction norms vary globally, and views on democratic decision-making may differ within and outside African communities, where elders or other leaders often hold spokesperson roles. This especially applies to rural areas and culturally diverse informal settlements with unique power dynamics. To avoid imposing a narrow colonial understanding of democratic processes, the CFH is encouraged to tweak its approach in different local contexts. For the following CFH format, the choice was made to focus on informal urban settlements in South Africa, as that is where needs are most pronounced and residents have a vested interest in advocating for better services. In many cases, there may already be local organisations championing these causes.

## Ensuring balance and safety

To ensure workshops are effective, mediators will be present in the CFH to bridge Infrahub and the community, fostering a safe space for sharing ideas and addressing tensions, such as those stemming from Apartheid history. Their role involves facilitating balanced discussions, ensuring equal participation, preventing power imbalances, and guiding conversations with cultural sensitivity to keep community-driven visions central.

Additionally, all workshops can be attended in

either common areas and/or rooms separated by groups of age, gender, family or community (etc.) to reduce intimidation and power imbalances, facilitating free and genuine contributions.

In order to provide feedback and maintain communication a trust person - ideally a respected community member - is present at every CFH-participant interaction. From the beginning onwards, they report on community sentiment, serving as a consistent link and trust-builder between the community and the hub. This is essential for relationship-building and tailoring the hub’s approach to local needs.



Image on [infrahub.africa](http://infrahub.africa), supplied by Gcwalisa

## CFH Logistics

A dilemma surfaced when thinking about optimal CFH locations. On the one hand, prioritizing sites with planned government funding would provide essential resources to carry out post-CFH-participation projects and might thereby mitigate the risk of disappointing potential expectations raised during the CFH futuring workshops. However, focusing solely on areas with available money for CFH-inspired projects risks excluding communities that already experience less access to funds. A balanced approach might involve selecting locations with available funding but historically low support, to address both resource needs and CFH’s concern for social inequalities.

Another characteristic is the temporality of CFH. It is enough for the workshops to be held for a set amount of time (e.g. 2-3 months) to build a trust-based relationship with the community and empower them to successfully future a vision. This allows focussing on more locations,

facilitating democratising the infrastructure futuring. Afterwards, there would be one month to reflect on learnings from the location and communities, canvassing for new locations incorporating these reflections, and rest.

The CFH is by and for the community. However, organizers are needed to set up the CFH. By contacting trust persons as well as local activist, Infrahub can determine if a CFH is desired in a given location. The organizers are responsible for informing and engaging with the community, staying in contact with the trust person, and facilitating workshops as a mediator. Lastly, to make the CFH accessible to all, organizers can travel to different neighbourhoods, bringing discussions directly to residents. This mobile approach allows for the inclusion of community members' ideas and concerns - regardless of availability and proximity - thus empowering a diverse range of voices to shape community visions.



*Image on  
infrahub.africa,  
supplied by Lem  
Ketema*

## Workshop Sessions

CFH workshops could centre on storytelling and dialogue, starting for instance with 'Storytelling Sessions' where community members share personal histories of their neighbourhoods, fostering inclusivity by acknowledging diverse perspectives on past and present. Acknowledging the plurality of narratives people hold about the past and present is crucial for creating inclusive and healing futures; especially in South Africa, where voicing past wounds, grievances, and injustices and creating spaces of trust is vital due to the Apartheid legacy and deep-seated inequalities.

Building on insights from diverse pasts and presents, a second workshop could focus on 'Future Story Circle Sessions', where participants envision their future community focussing on democratic access to crucial infrastructure, gathering around commonalities of basic needs. These sessions may involve abstract dialogue and storytelling or

more tangible methods like arts, songs, music, and walks, accommodating for diverse cognitive habits. Participants will also be encouraged to reflect on how these envisioned futures can transcend the legacy of Apartheid.

These sessions could be complemented by creative 'Imaginative Design Sessions' in which participants could visualise and materialize their imagined future cityscapes using locally available and recycled materials, designing elements like energy sources, communal spaces, and housing structures through collages, sketches, or miniature models while outlining their purposes. This attempts to render their future more tangible and enhance their sense of agency to influence and perform it.

A third element of the CFH will be Case Studies from the Infrahub database, showcased through banners, posters, videos, and models, or testimonials by individuals involved in their development (storytelling or audio messages about successes, process, critiques). These case studies aim to empower participants' perceived agency in shaping the future but should only be introduced after the above-mentioned workshops to avoid narrowing their imagination. Framing these case studies as mere inspiration to complement their ideas and encouraging adjustment to local contexts is vital.

The CFH must create a safe space for communities to share their past, present, and future visions. Initial workshops should take place in familiar, trusted settings. Later, direct and indirect interactions will be offered with external actors, like policymakers, spatial planners, funders, etc in 'Bridging Perspectives'. With direct interaction, actors may join under the condition to be briefed to primarily actively listen to local needs (see top-down futuring approach). Communities will be informed of their role and can choose to limit or refuse the interactions. They can also opt for an indirect, anonymous interaction by means of sounds-recordings or written messages. All participants will follow clear communication rules, including consent-based interactions, with mediators ensuring these rules are respected and power dynamics minimized. After the listening phase, communities may request to connect with the external actors in a dialogue format, where each stakeholder can share their perspectives on future visions and the possibility to implement these physically.



# CO-FUTURING APPROACH ENABLING COMMUNITY DECISIONS THROUGH GOVERNMENT PROVISION

**We suggest an approach for Infrahub to position funders, like the government, as financial enablers instead of decision-makers. This future approach, called the Co-Futuring Approach (CFA) would frame the top-down vision within a bottom-up approach led by local communities. Our main concept, therefore, is to transform the relationship between top-down funding and decision-making actors and bottom-up development.**

Currently, the government of South Africa is using its futuring approaches to impose singular visions of what development projects should look like onto the country. These approaches often exclude a multiplicity of voices, particularly those of local and vulnerable groups, and they take inadequate account of system complexity. Instead of fostering inclusive futures, they reinforce the status quo without creating space for co-producing diverse future visions. However, some of the development goals of the government overlap with the initiative goals of Infrahub. Additionally, the government aims to have more co-production sessions, creating a space for Infrahub to leverage its bottom-up approach.

The CFA is not a full solution for all the challenges Infrahub faces but serves as a starting point for reimagining futures through a critical and experimental lens. Our proposal revolves around two key steps: engaging with top-down stakeholders to secure funding and facilitating a long-term ethical collaborative framework. The CFA also includes regular feedback sessions as an ongoing dialogue between the top-down funders and local communities. Both the top-down funders as well as the community stakeholders would be able to adapt to developing challenges and align each other's concerns for an ongoing collaboration.

## Steps for Infrahub

### 1. Leverage Dataplatform to Attract Funders

The first step of the CFA is for Infrahub to use their case-study database to attract funders. Since the

South African government indicated that they want to have more co-production, and international funders constantly seek out local development projects, these funding opportunities should be utilized.

We suggest that the funding strategy for Infrahub should be based on a collaborative reimagining of African development. This means that Infrahub may help decision-makers and funders realise how alternative infrastructure pathways may better achieve their social and environmental objectives. In practice, it is crucial to remember that when approaching government officials or larger project funders there is a need for language which attracts top-down funding. Additionally, evidence-based reports with visual stories and narratives add richness to a funding application.

Therefore, a rich database by Infrahub could be used to draw on examples and success stories of bottom-up and local projects. This could look like a portfolio or infographic page with three or four example projects outlined, showing the futuring narrative of the community-driven solutions. Stories that formed this narrative, as well as images (as visual stories), the outcomes, and the communities' agencies throughout the project development could be elaborated on. This narrative-building is then aligned with the national urban development goals or policies of South Africa or larger continental goals like the African Union's Agenda 2063. For instance, a goal of the South African government is to have less polluting and carbon-intensive technologies for their future cities (IUDF, 2016). To showcase why Infrahub should receive funding, a project that seeks to approach this goal would be outlined, stressing not only the community narratives, but also how the specific goal is achieved. For example, the solar public lighting project in Khayelitsha, South Africa would be a project that could be highlighted to stress the aligned goals.

### 2. Establishing an Ethical Framework for Collaboration



For futures to be co-created in a just and respectful manner, there is a need for a framework to guide the collaboration between the top-down resource providers and the local communities. Therefore, the aim of this step is to ensure that the futures are co-created in a just and respectful manner. The principle of multiple perspectives is crucial here, as it ensures that community voices are heard, valued, and included. This framework can function as output of the alternative futuring sessions, which is outlined in “Workshops 454”.

In the framework, clear roles and boundaries of each party should be discussed and established. We suggest making it clear that the top-down funders, like the government, take on the role of resource providers, and the local communities as the decision-makers. By establishing these boundaries, each actor will be part of a collaborative effort to foster future imaginaries, reflecting collective wisdom and diversity of aspirations and worldviews. This can be done by creating a document that outlines the roles and responsibilities for future collaboration, which can be drawn upon in times of need. This document should also include clarity on who takes accountability for which steps and the boundaries of power for each participant throughout the project. Moreover, this ethical framework document should be grounded in shared values between the two parties. Therefore, a discussion should be held on the motivations and expectations which each party may have for the collaboration, and the values which should guide this. Key futuring principles that come up should be gathered in a collective vision statement, ensuring that from thereon out the decisions align with shared values.

In developing this ethical framework, it is essential to address the history of Apartheid and other historical inequalities to avoid the emergence of new power imbalances. Additionally, potential power imbalances may arise if policymakers, as resource providers, create a dependency among citizens. To prevent such imbalances, the ethical framework should outline structured methods of collaboration that empower citizens and ensure shared authority. These six questions, based on the six futuring principles, function as guidance for the collective vision statement and should be used by both the local communities and top-down funders:

1. What conceptions of futures, norms and values do you have and in what ways might they differ from or conflict with others in the room? (Reflexivity)
2. Who are the individuals impacted by your actions, and how do you practice a responsibility that honours their dignity, well-being, and needs? (Care)
3. Whose voices and experiences are included in this process, and who might still be left out? How can you actively bring in those missing perspectives? (Plurality)
4. How can you ensure that the local communities' opinions are respected and upheld as central in decision-making, without being overridden by funders or external actors? (Empowerment)
5. How do you create a safe environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and disagreements can be expressed? (Co-creation)
6. How do you understand and honour the interconnections of past, present, and future in this collaboration? (Temporalities)

Ultimately, by facilitating this collaboration, we envision a future where local communities have the power and capabilities to choose their futures and create them while major funders provide the necessary resources. Concrete result of the ethical framework could therefore be the realisation of pilot projects lead by local communities, experimentally materialising the futuring approach.



Image on [infrahub.africa](http://infrahub.africa), supplied by ARCADE



WE  
ASK

Is care an affection? A kindness? A responsibility? A practice?  
An intervention? A burden?

By Yan He

**CLIMATE FARMERS**

**REGENERATING  
AGRICULTURE IN  
EUROPE**

*Enzo Saquetti Bernardinelli  
Feija Pieterse  
Jard Pol  
Leroy van Rhijn  
Linda Schipper  
Marco Bijkerk  
Teun de Craen  
Wendy de Waart*

# ENVISIONING A RESILIENT FUTURE FOR REGENERATIVE FARMING IN EUROPE



Climate Farmers is a hybrid organisation, operating as both a non-profit and for-profit, focused on scaling regenerative agriculture across Europe<sup>1</sup>. The organisation supports farmers in the transition from conventional to regenerative farming through a combination of education, community-building, and providing tools such as carbon credits and financial models. They emphasize soil health, biodiversity, and sustainable practices while fostering a community-driven approach that allows farmers to exchange knowledge and resources. Climate Farmer’s mission is to encourage regenerative farming on a hectare-by-hectare basis with emphasis on resilience and ecosystem restoration to rebuild the agricultural sector towards a regenerative agricultural landscape community.



The farmer community is composed by over 600 farmers throughout Europe is pursuing “a world where humans live in harmony with nature” and its mission is to build the infrastructure to further scale regenerative agriculture within Europe. Opposed to conventional farming, regenerative agriculture is a management approach focused on enhancing

the life-holding capacity of the agricultural system<sup>2</sup>. It focuses on building soil and ecosystem health, through which the farmer enhances resilience and fertility in their farming operation. This means no chemical fertilizer and pesticides, but natural control by means of diversification of flora and fauna to produce tastier and healthier food.

*“Once in your life, you need a doctor, a lawyer, a priest and a policeman. But every day, three times a day, you need a farmer” – Climate Farmers*

To reach that vision Climate Farmers works with a variety of stakeholders including farmers, agricultural communities, policymakers, and businesses. They focus on building networks between regenerative farmers, offering support through educational programs, carbon credit systems, and MRV processes to assist with the transition to regenerative agriculture. They also collaborate with scientists and other experts to create a robust knowledge base and offer solutions tailored to European farming ecosystems. An example is the 18 months Horizon Europe BENCHMARKS project in which Climate Farmers co-hosted 21 dynamic soil health workshops across 19 regions in 11 European countries, involving over 600 stakeholders and 150 land stewards. This project is building long-term collaborations for soil health improvements and implementing a Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) framework to help farmers and businesses integrate scientifically-backed soil health management into their practices<sup>3</sup>.

To safeguard the integrity of Climate Farmers’ mission against the diverse influences of various stakeholders, the organization upholds a set of core values:

- **We are for the farmers:** Farmers are at the

1 Climate Farmers. (2024). *Growing regenerative farming one hectare at a time*. Retrieved on October 29, from: <https://www.climatefarmers.org/about-us/>

2 Chesapeake Bay Foundation. (2024). *Regenerative Agriculture*. Retrieved on October 29, from: <https://www.cbf.org/issues/agriculture/regenerative-agriculture.html>

3 Personal correspondence with Paola Pollmeier in 2024.

centre of everything we do. We believe the work of farmers is the foundation of our civilisation, and their role should be recognised as such.

- **We are purpose driven:** We are in the business of scaling regenerative farming. Everything we do comes down to this. That is why the non-profit arm of our organisation has the last vote in what our for-profit arm does.

- **We harness synergies:** The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Rather than trying to reinvent the wheel, we believe in the power of collaboration.

- **We care deeply:** We are all a part of nature. Every decision we make is in the context of bringing people closer to nature and limiting the challenges facing society.

- **We work systemically:** Our goal is to change agriculture. We realise that this can only be done by influencing everyone in the agri-food system.

Climate Farmers aligns with future imaginaries by envisioning and working towards a future in which regenerative farming is the new standard and transforming agricultural landscapes into resilient ecosystems. By imagining regenerative and resilient agricultural systems, Climate Farmers helps to shape a future where farming regenerates the environment, enhances biodiversity, and supports farmer livelihoods in a changing climate. Their work encourages shared visions for sustainable, ecosystem-based futures.

*“We’re paving the way to a regenerative future and supporting farmers every step of the way” – Climate Farmers*

Farmers are one of the pillars of society since they are responsible for our food. Because sustainable, happy farmers are key to society, we focus on some core principles regarding future visions for regenerative farming.

**1. Education for future happiness:** To produce better, healthier food, good soil health is crucial<sup>4</sup>. To reach this potential education is of importance. As also mentioned by Paola, events, workshops, etc are helping farmers build a community. If farmers can be granted educational programs to reschool their current farming practices it can help far-

mers grow their business. Next to the flourishing potential of the business farmers can also learn and teach each other which deepens the feeling of belonging. Seeing things grow, discovering new species on the land, and a deeper connection with nature essentially enhances the feeling of happiness farmers perceive<sup>5</sup>.

**2. Planetary boundaries:** By promoting sustainability, regenerative methods restore soil health, enhance biodiversity, and sequester carbon, effectively mitigating climate change and preserving ecosystems<sup>6</sup>. Adhering to these boundaries encourages responsible resource management, fostering careful use of water, soil, and nutrients to minimize degradation. Additionally, regenerative practices support biodiversity which is crucial for ecosystem resilience. By focusing on carbon sequestration and soil health, regenerative farming strengthens agricultural systems against climate fluctuations.

**3. Understand farmers:** Creating a personal relation with the farmers will enhance their feeling of being listened to; enabling them to share their concerns. Climate Farmers values the context of farming practices; the envisioned future perspectives include ecology, economy, and community health. Context-specific guidance is a natural solution to understanding farmers and helping them develop future strategies.

**4. Isolation of farmers:** Most regenerative farmers are very isolated<sup>7</sup>. They often lack a community that shares knowledge or machinery. It is no secret that farming can be an isolating profession. But the path doesn't need to be walked alone. Organisations, such as Climate Farmers, can lay the fundamentals for farmer gatherings, providing space for integrated fabrication of the future and co-creation of knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> EIT Food. (2022). *Why is soil health important for food production?* Retrieved on October 29, from: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/communitydevelopmentpractice/chapter/27/https://www.eitfood.eu/blog/why-is-soil-health-important-for-food-production>

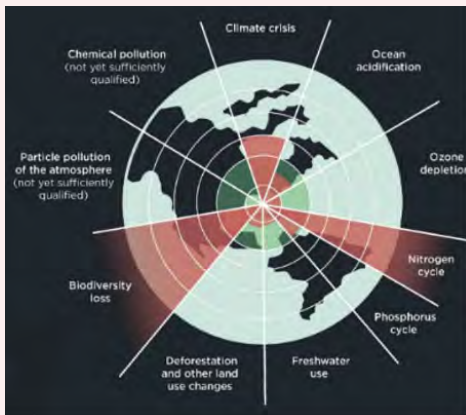
<sup>5</sup> Personal communications with Rick and Eefje in 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Rockström, J., Steffen, W., Noone, K., Persson, Å., Chapin, F. S. I., Lambin, E., Lenton, T. M., Scheffer, M., Folke, C., Schellnhuber, H. J., Nykvist, B., De Wit, C. A., Hughes, T., Van Der Leeuw, S., Rodhe, H., Sörlin, S., Snyder, P. K., Costanza, R., Svedin, U., ... Foley, J. (2009). Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity. *Ecology And Society*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-03180-140232>

<sup>7</sup> Ritchie, H. (2021). *Do we only have 60 harvests left?* Retrieved October 29, from: <https://ourworldindata.org/soil-lifespans#article-citation>

# FOUNDATIONS OF FLOURISHING FOR CLIMATE FARMERS

Together with the Climate Farmers collective and regenerative farmers our vision is to build a regenerative, equitable, and resilient agricultural system that aligns human needs with ecological health. By promoting farming practices that nourish people, planet, and the environment, we aim to restore soils, protect biodiversity, and mitigate climate change. Guided by the planetary boundaries framework<sup>1</sup>, which outlines Earth's ecological limits, we focus on shifting agriculture toward ecosystem, restoration. Acknowledging agriculture's role in exceeding these limits<sup>2</sup>. We aspire to create a world where regenerative farming not only secures food for current and future generations but also fosters a thriving planet, ensuring that both people and nature can flourish together as a community.



Powerpoint Paola, Climate Farmers 2024

## Farmers Core Assumptions

Based on interviews with multiple regenerative farmers we discovered core assumptions farmers have about the current system versus a more resilient farming system. The utopian vision for regenerative farming rests on both idealistic hopes

and practical actions. The idealism lies in the assumption that human health, agricultural productivity, and environmental integrity are fundamentally interconnected, where (sustainable) agriculture can support both people and the planet. This vision seeks policies and incentives that safeguard Earth's boundaries, though implementing them faces practical challenges in the form of financial terms as well as policy consistency across Europe as national and international regulations may conflict.

There are ecological boundaries that must not be exceeded to avoid irreversible damage to vital Earth systems<sup>1</sup>. Regenerative farming aims to respect ecological limits, such as those warned by the United Nations—if soil degradation continues, there may be only 60 harvests left<sup>3</sup>. The practicality of regenerative methods lies in their proven ability to restore soil health, enhance biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon, addressing both ecosystem health and climate change.

This perception also idealizes the role of strong local communities, where education empowers farmers to sustain food traditions while adapting to modern needs, and to preserve traditional food practices while meeting present-day needs. Practical elements include providing training on sustainable farming techniques and encouraging informed consumption choices. Education facilitates both ecological resilience and preservation of traditions, fostering an empowered, community-driven approach to sustainable food systems<sup>4</sup>.

1 Rockström, J., Steffen, W., Noone, K., Persson, Å., Chapin, F. S. I., Lambin, E., Lenton, T. M., Scheffer, M., Folke, C., Schellnhuber, H. J., Nykvist, B., De Wit, C. A., Hughes, T., Van Der Leeuw, S., Rodhe, H., Sörlin, S., Snyder, P. K., Costanza, R., Svedin, U., ... Foley, J. (2009). Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity. *Ecology And Society*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-03180-140232>

2 Climate Farmers. (2024). *Growing regenerative farming one hectare at a time*. Retrieved on October 29, from: <https://www.climatefarmers.org/about-us/>

3 Ritchie, H. (2021). *Do we only have 60 harvests left?* Retrieved October 29, from: <https://ourworldindata.org/soil-lifespans#article-citation>

4 Sterling, E. J., Betley, E., Ahmed, S., Akabas, S., Clegg, D. J., Downs, S., Izumi, B., Pamela, K., Kross, S. M., Spiller, K., Teron, L. and Valley, W. (2021). *Centering Equity in Sustainable Food Systems Education*. Sec. Social Movements, Institutions and Governance Volume 5 – 2021;



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## Approaches for The Future of Farming

To realise a future vision for sustainable and regenerative agriculture, we developed the “Foundations of Flourishing” framework. This holistic tool allows farmers to articulate their needs and aspirations, focusing on their personal well-being and farm resilience. By filling in this framework, the farmers who are a member of Climate Farmers can identify critical areas for their professional and environmental growth, enabling them to voice preferences on sustainable practices, resource needs, and personal goals. This reflective process not only empowers farmers to envision a future state but also supports a transition to farming systems that respect both ecological boundaries and individual farmer welfare and internal happiness.

In an interview with Rick Verhaar, he spoke of a farmer who had transformed a piece of valuable land in the middle of the farm into a *voedselbos* (food forest). Instead of using the land to grow conventional crops, the farmer chose to do something totally different and let nature decide what happens. This has transformed that part of

land into the ‘beating heart’ of the farm where the employees can relax, swim, and enjoy themselves. It is also a place where a new habitat for birds and deer has been created. This gave us the inspiration to create a framework in the form of a tree. This tree symbolizes the ‘beating heart’ of the farming industry, where farmers can find a sense of direction as to how they can sustain their farm in a sustainable way.

All parts of the tree stand symbol for the fundamentals of the farming system: The **trunk** of the tree is the community that the farmers form. The goal is to create a strong trunk, rich in nutrients and which grows stronger over time, to create resilience. The **roots** then symbolize the farmers who are a member of Climate Farmers and their farms. The roots are the mouth of the tree, the gatherers of input to catch the necessary nutrients from the soil for the tree to grow. The **leaves** symbolize the happiness of the farmers, that by adhering to and working on the fundament of the farm, the roots, he can create his own happiness. For the tree to grow and flourish, the tree needs the “**Foundations of Flourishing**”, the nutrients and practices that the soil needs. The “Foundations of Flourishing” can be made by the farmers themselves, as to what they perceive to be important to sustain a healthy farm, and a healthy farmer.

## Critical Examination in the ‘Foundations of Flourishing’ Framework”

A critical evaluation of the “Foundations of Flourishing” framework reveals underlying assumptions that may challenge its effectiveness<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, its focus on decentralized, local food systems assumes that food security can be sustained without centralized industrial agriculture, which would require significant societal shifts in food production and distribution perspectives.

Another critical aspect is the assumption that farmers are willing and able to fully engage with the framework. Filling it out and assessing current practices demands both time and reflective effort, which may be impractical for some due to time constraints or discomfort in self-assessment. These factors highlight that while the framework is conceptually sound, its practical application may be limited without systemic support and adjustments for real-world farming constraints.

# RETHINKING THE FUTURE - FROM ISOLATION TO REGENERATION

This two-page spread delves into the utopian imaginary surrounding a key demographic in agriculture, a group whose future visions might clash with regenerative initiatives or potentially align as influential allies. The narrative explores the dominant visions around technology-driven agriculture and its limitations, addressing the challenges and unrealized potential of shifting towards more sustainable, community-focused farming practices.

## The Current Dominant Imaginary: Technology and Separation from Nature

As it stands, the most popular future imaginaries surrounding agriculture are very technology oriented. There are many articles about technologies such as autonomous tractors or improved irrigation systems. It is believed that increasing technologies will improve efficiency and sustainability of agriculture. One argument often brought forward in Dutch livestock farming is that innovation will solve manure pollution problems, and the government invests in such research and initiatives. This entirely rests on the assumption that such innovation is in fact possible. However, this optimism often overlooks the complexity of ecological interdependencies, resting on an unverified belief that innovation alone can drive sustainability.



Vision of Future Farming, 2024<sup>1</sup>

Another major aspect of the dominant future imaginary is the separation of farming from nature. This is in line with modern thinking where everything is separate. Farmers do their own thing on their land, and whatever pollutants spill over and impact the local ecosystem are acceptable, or so is assumed. An example of this is the current wide-spread use of pesticides, despite its many adverse effects, is only increasing. This, combined with the growing demand for food, is problematic.

## Monoculture as a Symbol of the Imagined Future

Additionally, major future imaginaries have agriculture remain largely monocultural, technologies and the like will change, and supposedly improve, but the concept of monoculture remains firm with images depicting large fields of the same crop, with drones or robots doing the work. Technological advancements are presumed to enhance these systems, but the concept of monoculture itself remains largely unchallenged. Even indoor, urban farms remain monocultures, despite the potential of diversified urban agriculture to meet sustainability goals.



Vision of Future Farming, 2024<sup>2</sup>

However, this future imaginary of monocultures, chemicals, and large-scale automation is rife with problems. Monocultures are not resilient to pests

1 Future Farming. (2024a). *Gateway to the world of smart farming*. LinkedIn page, retrieved on November 1, from: <https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/future-farming/?originalSubdomain=nl>

2 Future Farming. (2024b). *A worldwide supplier of technological units in the field of modern agriculture*. Retrieved on November 1, from: <https://www.futurefarming.group>





# WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

*How to combine multiple future imaginaries into solving the challenge Climate Farmers face, while trying to reach regenerative farming*

## **Introduction to Utopian Imaginaries**

Regenerative farming is a method to envision a sustainable approach for the future of the agricultural system. The two dominant utopian imaginaries offer a way to view this process in a different way. The first imaginary mainly focuses on how the whole agricultural system can be transformed, by prioritizing biodiversity, soil health, and ecological resilience. With the regenerative approach, the agricultural system focuses on the intricate web of relationships, where the soil is the most important actor.

The second imaginary, however, places the individual farmer as the initiator of the transition towards regenerative farming. Here, enhancing the well-being of farmers and promoting a strong connection between farmers and their communities plays a central role. The farmers are the agents of change, who can foster the environment of their farm to stimulate the farm to thrive, both ecologically and financially.

Both imaginaries are in search of a method to facilitate a successful transition towards regenerative farming. Although the imaginaries differ significantly based on their disposition, the diversity of perspectives can strengthen the attempt to attain regenerative farming and farmers happiness.

## **Differences**

### ***Farming Systems vs. Farmers***

The farming-imaginary envisions systemic changes as the primary levers for creating sustainable farming practices, perceiving the farm itself as part of a larger regenerative ecosystem. Here, the farmer is one element within a broader, interdependent network, contributing to an overarching goal of ecological regeneration. In this view, sustainable farming relies on a network of farms functioning together to maintain ecosystem health, with each farm playing a role in nurturing biodiversity and reducing environmental impacts.

The farmer-centred imaginary, by contrast, emphasises the significance of their personal

agency. This perspective highlights the importance of the farmer's individual happiness, financial stability, and capacity to adapt to changes without experiencing isolation. In this vision, the farming future is closely tied to the well-being and resilience of individual farmers, they are seen as key decision-makers driving positive change and adopting sustainable practices within their local communities.

### ***Community vs. Individual***

Both imaginaries acknowledge the value of community, but they differ in focus. In the first imaginary, community is foundational to the farming approach. It emphasizes collective learning, resource-sharing, and ecosystem health, underscoring that sustainable agriculture is best achieved through a network of supportive interconnected farms. This vision stresses the importance of collaboration and knowledge exchange among farmers to advance shared ecological goals.

The second imaginary, contrastingly, prioritizes the farmer's need for supportive community as a means of combating isolation and boosting morale. While it values community, it does so from the perspective of how it benefits each individual resilience. Here, community is envisioned as a necessary support system for farmers, helping them adapt to change while ensuring they feel connected and valued within a broader network. This approach highlights that community is critical not only for shared learning but also for fostering individual well-being and sustainability on a personal level.

## **Key Challenge**

### ***Harmonizing Both Visions***

Climate farmers face the challenge of developing a framework that respects and integrates both visions, recognizing that each perspective addresses unique yet essential dimensions of the regenerative farming movement. On one side, there is the emphasis on farmer-centric approaches, which prioritises the autonomy,

and well-being of the farmers themselves. This perspective acknowledges that empowering farmers to adapt regenerative methods in ways that align with their individual goals and lifestyles foster creativity, long-term commitment, and resilience in their work.

On the other side are the broader, systemic objectives. These goals are fundamental to the sustainability of farming practices on a wider scale, supporting the ecological balance and climate resilience that regenerative agriculture aims to achieve.

Finding a balance between these two visions is crucial for a successful implementation of regenerative farming. By aligning farmer independence with the overarching goals of control, Climate Farmers can create a supportive framework that not only respects the individual farmer's experience, but also contributes to the health of the planet.



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## Potential Solutions

To overcome the differences mentioned above, and gain benefit from the shared visions, the challenge of how to reach generative farming practices can be solved through consideration of the following suggestions:

### **Building an Inclusive Platform**

Creating a user-friendly data and learning platform is key to bridging the needs of individual farmers with the larger goals of regenerative agriculture. Such a platform would enable farmers to access relevant resources, data, and learning modules. Beyond the technical resources, the platform can offer knowledge-sharing opportunities, which allows farmers to learn from each other in similar cases. By emphasizing usability and relevance, this platform can act as a comprehensive support system, empowering farmers while reinforcing regenerative goals.

*“A farmer believes a farmer”  
– Paola, Climate Farmers*

### **Continuous Feedback Loops**

Creating structured and continuous feedback loops is essential for capturing farmers' ongoing experiences and integrating their insights into the platform's evolution. These feedback mechanisms could include surveys, or regular workshops, allowing for a constant stream of input from farmers. A system for updates based on feedback can help build trust, showing farmers that their input is valued and directly influences the tools and resources available. By embedding these insights into the larger strategy, farmers not only feel included, but become co-creators in the regenerative movement.

### **Supporting Well-being and Economic Stability**

Supporting farmer well-being and economic stability is vital for a thriving farming community. The platform can offer a suite of tools and resources that bolster economic resilience, to access regenerative finance options, subsidies, and carbon credits. Community building initiatives, create a network of solidarity among farmers. Practical tools for physical and mental well-being, would further support farmers holistically. By addressing economic and personal needs alongside ecosystem goals, the platform ensures farmers are supported not only as land stewards, but as individuals, creating a sustainable foundation for long-term engagement with regenerative farming.



# THE TREE OF REGENERATION

*How Climate Farmers can use the Foundation of Flourishing Approach to achieve farmer well-being for all their community members*

To shortly recap, the tree represents the community of farmers, with a resilient trunk built over time. Farmers and their farms act as roots, drawing essential nutrients from the soil to support growth. The leaves reflect the farmers' well-being, nurtured by a solid foundation in farming practices. Growth and resilience of the tree come from the "Foundations of Flourishing", providing necessary nutrients for the roots to sustain the whole.

The Foundations of Flourishing in its current form is based on interviews we conducted with farmers, as to what they perceive to be important to sustain a healthy farm and become a flourishing farmer. We established this framework with four exemplary pillars based on what struggles were mentioned most during the interviews, and to give an overview of its working. However, the farmer can adjust the pillars of the framework into their own desired points of improvement. With guiding questions posed at the end of the foundations, it becomes clearer for the farmer to envision how they want to achieve their future goals.

To put this framework into practice we envisioned Climate Farmers asking the farmers to fill in a journal at the start of every season. Since it can be quite personal to fill in such journals, the farmers can decide themselves whether they want to share their entry or not. The shared entries can then serve as a basis for the Climate Farmers to evaluate important factors the farmers potentially seek help with. Assessing these forms seasonally invites the farmers to reflect on their past goals, struggles, and well-being. Example questions could be:

"What has changed since previously filling the journal?"  
"What improvements did you see?"  
"How do you feel about communication with others?"  
"How did your foundations change over the past months?"  
"How did your imagination affect your subjective perception?"

Such questions can help reflect on concerns and past perceptions where it paves the way for willingness to change and open-mindedness.

Addressing these journal entries data wise but also in the form of quarterly sessions with the community can help envision the growth of the tree. A timeline of trees can be formed, seeing the growth of the regeneration movement together, the Farmers, locals, and Climate Farmers. These updates in the long-term can help rethink current paradigms and assess struggles on a bigger scale. With the potential to help overcome future challenges and help to enhance the community feeling of all members involved.

The Foundations of Flourishing currently consist of the following 4 foundations:

## **Foundation ONE: Community Based Financing**

From the conducted interviews and the consulted literature, it becomes clear that a healthy financial situation is difficult for farmers in the current age. The investments necessary to conduct correct agricultural practices are large, and the yields can vary yearly, fuelling financial insecurity and risks. Conventional farmers often have set contracts with, for example, supermarkets, which provide them financial security, but often with low prices for the crops produced. Within regenerative farming, the farmers have less security as they often sell directly to a consumer, without an intermediary, with varying crops and yields. However, in a community where all individual members contribute resources such as machinery, knowledge, and connections, the community will possess all the necessary resources required for regenerative farming. Because there are no subsidies in regenerative farming, acquiring all resources is a nearly impossible feat for an individual. By creating business cases built on community investments, it becomes possible to create financial security for a regenerative farm. Guiding questions can include:

**Foundation 1**  
"How can I engage with people to increase my financial security?"  
"What can I offer in return for investments and support?"  
"What types of paths of engaging could help raise funds while connecting the community to your farm?"

By asking these types of questions, the farmer can create fitting solutions and establish goals for their specific farm while engaging with the community.

### **Foundation TWO: Sharing and Decision Hub**

Foundation two explains the concept of sharing and concerns how decision making on and for the farm can be done in collaboration with the community. On a conventional farm, the farmer is the one who makes decisions on what is going to happen. The farmer is here the most knowledgeable of the farm and its intricacies, but it does prevent collaboration and the look of a fresh mind. With regenerative farms and community-based financing, it becomes possible to collaborate and make discussed decisions together. In combination with creating a marketplace where farms can lend each other's materials, such as tractors or mowing machines, financial investments decrease, as materials can be shared. By creating this marketplace and decision-making format, trust increases and the community feeling strengthens. By involving multiple stakeholders in decisions through regular meetings and knowledge-sharing platforms, farmers can pool their expertise and resources, leading to more sustainable practices. This approach not only lowers costs but also builds trust and stronger ties within the community, making it more resilient to challenges. Guiding questions include:

#### **Foundation 2**

"What would someone who has never been on your farm think of your decisions?"

"How can you retrieve the opinion of your community?"

"How can I establish trust between me and my stakeholders?"

These questions open the path to thinking outside of the borders of the farm, creating a more holistic view of how the farm can foster decision making.

*"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts" – Climate Farmers*

### **Foundation THREE: Social Engagement and Well-Being**

For a farm to be a healthy organization, the farmer must also be and feel healthy. The (mental) health of the farmer consists of multiple factors: emotional well-being, physical well-being, and financial security. To ensure great physical and mental health these factors amongst multiple other factors, are important. Here, community and social engagement are important, as communicating concerns with other people can create an overview of what is necessary for a person to thrive. For the social

engagement to take place, Climate Farmers can organize events and meetings on member farms, to promote conversation and community feeling. Providing the farmers with a way or channel to communicate with each other, farmers can then strengthen their social relations. Some guiding questions could be:

#### **Foundation 3**

"Where and how do you find rest and where and how do you find energy?"

"What financial goals could you set to create a calm mind?"

"In what ways can you have contact with other people to inspire yourself?"

As these are rather personal factors, the guiding questions are aimed at the farmer understanding his own feelings and emotions.

### **Foundation FOUR: Education and Skill Development**

A significant barrier that regenerative farming faces is the lack of awareness among conventional farmers, but also among consumers. By creating awareness and educating people, the benefits of regenerative farming can be explained to convince more people that regenerative farming is better for your health, and that of the environment. By continuing to develop the skills and practices used on different farms, farmers become more skilled, ensuring more yield and security. By setting up partnerships with universities, new technologies can be tested and applied quickly, to ensure innovation and skill development. In addition, by communicating the benefits of regenerative farming to conventional farmers, more awareness can be created. Farmers could be stimulated to adopt at least some regenerative practices on their farm, which would already create a huge impact. Guiding questions could be:

#### **Foundation 4**

"How did you learn about (the benefits of) regenerative farming, and do you think that could work for others?"

"What would you still like to learn?"

"What feedback would help you the most?"

These questions guide the farmer to achieving learning goals and engaging with how others can help him.

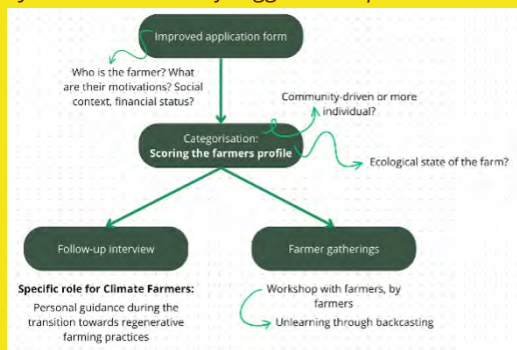
Climate Farmers can adjust the tree to their needs, and even add other symbolic parts to it, such as fruit growing on the tree, or flowers underneath it. This way the tree can form the basis, where additions create the availability for a new future vision.

# ONBOARDING AND FUTURING

*How to help farmers formulate their future visions through a guiding process for thinking beyond the currently dominant future imaginaries*

As a means to further improve the onboarding approach for farmers to join Climate Farmers, we suggest a series of measures that will all contribute to a successful transition towards regenerative farming. Recommendations for the enhanced application form, categorisation of the outcomes, and both individual and community supervision through active reflection may lead to the desired futures.

## *Systemic overview of suggested implementations*



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## **The Current Application Survey Is Not Sufficient**

The current application form scratches the mere surface of the potential it holds. It does not support personal reflection and can predominantly be filled in with simple and short answers. Also, it focuses on the individual farmer and the intended transition towards regenerative farming practices. Although the questions posed in this form are clearly identifying the farmer in question, it remains quite basic. The context of the new farmer applying for the regenerative plan is relevant for a specific transition towards regenerative farming practices. But so far, no concrete future visions or concerns of current practices are mentioned or asked for.

The current form does align somewhat with the “accounting for multiple perspectives principle”, as the voicing of your opinion is highly stimulated by the questions posed. Questions like: “What do you value?” and “What do you want?” can encourage the individual to create new visions,

and potentially apply new perspectives, and local knowledge, to their future. Examples regarding the physical farm or the ecosystem are provided, but are often materialist, as well as focused on further development of what is already there.

## **Why The Revised Application Survey Will Succeed**

Our suggestion would be to include questions based on the principles mentioned before (collaboration & co-creation; reflexivity; care & compassion; accounting for multiple perspectives; empowering through futuring; multiple temporalities). These principles help incorporate emotions, fears, reservations, concerns, limitations, hopes, and clear expectations and preconditions for the imagined future. The care and compassion principle will ensure the inclusion of emotions and addresses the question of how to engage with people that do not share your worldview. Uncertainties about the future and the farming practices go hand-in-hand with open-mindedness and awareness of the past (reflexivity principle).

Improved questions to include in the application form could therefore be inspired by the following:

- “What concerns do you envision for the future of your farm?”
- “Who has a place/is involved in your farm? What roles are included?”
- “Have you considered how the past brought you to this present?”
- “How would you include issues like biodiversity and the ecosystem within your future?”
- “Would you consider other types of agriculture instead of the status quo?”

## **What Is Next?**

In addition to the application form to the Regenerative Plan of the Climate Farmers, we suggest a series of follow-up meetings and interviews, to further elaborate on the aspired future visions. On top of that, we prescribe a second (and potentially third) follow-up meeting or interview after two to five years, to reflect on the progress so far, as well as monitoring of the processes towards regenerative farming practices. Additionally, the profiling of the farmers after the first application will enable Climate Farmers to

provide tailor-made advice and support.

## Categorisation and Scoring

To improve data collection, we advise to categorise the different types of farmers based on their responses in the application form. The diverse perspectives and emotions of farmers as they contemplate their future visions can contribute to the awareness of their position. By scoring the responses within a framework, Climate Farmers will better understand how individual motivations, community dynamics, financial considerations, and emotional states interact. This approach encourages a comprehensive exploration of future imaginaries that extend beyond the dominant narratives in agriculture.

The questions posed in the application survey will be oriented towards two categories: 1. ecological status of the farm, and 2. the level of community. The category focusing on ecological status and health covers the current physical condition of the farm. This includes soil quality, biodiversity, groundwater levels and quality, and limited chemical input, for example through fertilisers or pesticides. An ecologically healthy farm has more carbon sequestration, resilience to extreme weather events, increased farm profitability, high-quality nutrient-dense food, and farmer well-being. The second category, the level of community, is a scale from individual to community, and includes the cooperation between farmers (potential exchange of capital, material, or knowledge), the interactions between peers, and focuses on the ability to share concerns and challenges. Already mentioned in the values of the Climate Farmers, “the power of collaboration to change the paradigm of agriculture towards one of regeneration”<sup>14</sup>.

The following figure shows the potential outcome



Powerpoint Paola, Climate Farmers, 2024

of the categorisation. The current status of the ecology surrounding the farm is of moderate quality; the farmer could therefore be guided towards improving the ecological health by the Climate Farmers.



The relatively high score on Community Level indicates openness to sharing knowledge, experiences and perhaps even resources or machinery. This farmer benefits from interaction with other farmers in transition towards regenerative farming.

Outcomes of this categorisation can be integrated further in the process, especially during the individual guidance by Climate Farmers. This will lead to a more holistic understanding of the farmers' visions and challenges. Yet this is also easily altered in the future. If it is deemed that another category, such as economic sustainability of the farm, is important, then that can be added to the questions and the categories to be further embedded in the farmers' guidance.

## Interview Guidelines

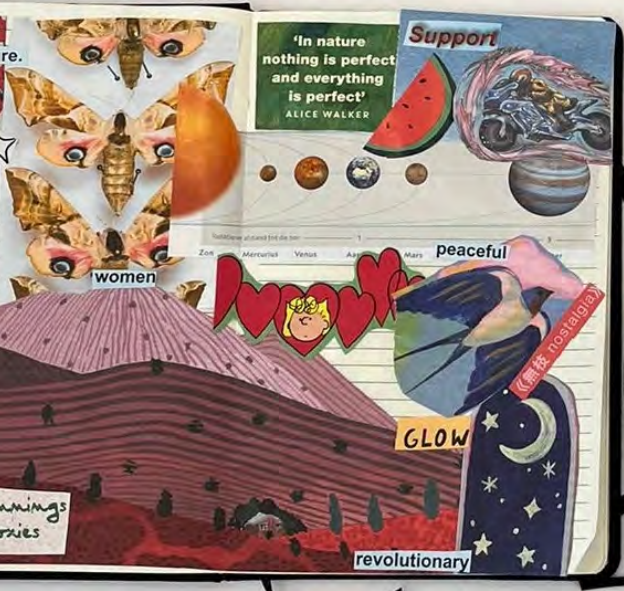
After the farmers' profiles are identified and clustered more guidance in the form of possible future steps, or invitations to specific events can be given by representatives of Climate Farmers. Furthermore, farmers oftentimes feel isolated from others, it is therefore important to ensure the feeling of being heard. Therefore, personal interviews or conversations should be held with the farmers. The interviews will create a personal connection between the farmer and Climate Farmers, fit for a long-term cooperation. Regular updates are essential for continual trust and valuable assistance from Climate Farmers. For example, when a farm is categorised as low ecological health, but high community levels, specific steps can be taken to enhance the physical characteristics of the farm. Additionally, the clusters of farmers can help each other, as their situations are likely to result and follow the same trajectory towards regenerative farming practices. Additionally, this helps future learning for Climate Farmers, as they can find what types of assistance work well in similar situations.

## Further Follow-up

As visualised in the systemic overview of suggested implementations, another activity would entail farmer gatherings. However, since Climate Farmers themselves already provide a diverse set of webinars and (online) community events, we decided not to further develop this follow-up activity.

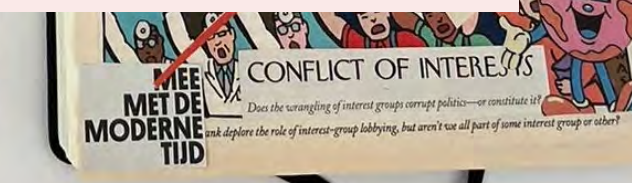
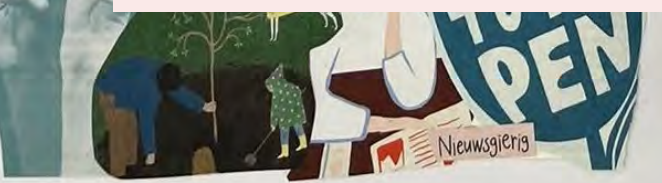


WE ASK



What might a decolonial praxis and future mean to you?

Collages by CC4Utopians; exercise facilitated by Cara Flores





# GREEN STATE VISION OF WEST PAPUA

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# WEST PAPUA - BACKGROUND

## Introduction

West Papua is situated in the west of the island of New Guinea. It borders the Pacific Ocean in the North, the independent state of Papua New Guinea in the East, and the Banda Sea in the South. West Papuans are residents and protectors of the third largest rainforest in the world, home to wide variations of flora and fauna<sup>1</sup>. West Papua is home to over 250 tribes with diverse languages and ways of being. In mountainous areas, inhabitants primarily practise small-scale agriculture, while coastal groups tend to live hunter-gatherer lifestyles<sup>2</sup>. Indigenous West Papuans are recognized as being of Melanesian ethnicity<sup>3</sup>.



## Colonial History of West Papua

The Netherlands colonised West Papua in the 19th century. The area's proximity to Indonesia linked the two in Western imaginaries as they were part of the Dutch East Indies. While the Dutch viewed the area as one sizeable money-making entity, they acknowledged significant geographical and cultural differences between Indonesia and West Papua. They used this to control West Papua after Indonesia gained independence in 1949<sup>4</sup>. Responding to external pressures, the Netherlands

created governance structures that would prepare West Papua for self-government throughout the 1950s, and in 1961, a congress was held in which independence was declared by the people of West Papua, and the Morning Star flag was raised<sup>2 4 5</sup>. Soon after, the Indonesian government invaded West Papua, leading to a conflict between West Papua, the Netherlands and Indonesia about control of the region.

After Indonesia leveraged Cold War politics, the US intervened and pressured the Netherlands to transfer the region to Indonesia without consulting West Papuans<sup>2 4 5 6</sup>. Since then, West Papuans have lived under violent, discriminatory and oppressive Indonesian military rule. Indonesia has systematically sought to eradicate West Papuan culture and populations in what many consider to be a genocide<sup>7</sup>. Today, West Papua is home to the Grasberg mine, one of the biggest gold mines and the third biggest copper mine in the world. Freeport McMoran, an American mining firm, owns the majority of



1 Greenpeace, "License to Clear: The Dark Side of Permitting in West Papua," Amsterdam, 2021. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BFo\\_ujcB8TrfHssUJ4qkNS4tu1PHO-BF/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BFo_ujcB8TrfHssUJ4qkNS4tu1PHO-BF/view)

2 Free West Papua campaign, "About West Papua - Free West Papua Campaign." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.freewestpapua.org/info/about-west-papua/>

3 G. Wyeth, "For the Melanesian Spearhead Group, West Papua Presents a Challenge," *The Diplomat*, 2023. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/for-the-melanesian-spearhead-group-west-papua-presents-a-challenge/>

4 E. Kluge, "West Papua and the International History of Decolonization, 1961-69," *Int Hist Rev*, vol. 42, no. 6, pp. 1155-1172, Nov. 2020, doi: 10.1080/07075332.2019.1694052

5 ULMWP, "Press Release: 'Provisional Government' of West Papua announced, Indonesian rule rejected." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ulmwp.org/press-release-provisional-government-of-west-papua-announced-indonesian-rule-rejected>

6 N. Viartasiwi, "The politics of history in West Papua - Indonesia conflict," *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 141-159, Jan. 2018, doi: 10.1080/02185377.2018.1445535.

7 E. Brundige, W. King, P. Vahali, S. Vladeck, and X. Yuan, "Indonesian human rights abuses in West Papua: Application of the law of genocide to the history of Indonesian control," *New Haven: Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School*, 2004, Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://www.freewestpapua.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/West\\_Papua\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://www.freewestpapua.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/West_Papua_final_report.pdf)

the company. Grasberg is now Indonesia's biggest taxpayer, with reserves worth an estimated 100 billion dollars<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, rampant deforestation occurs in the area to clear land for oil palm monoculture to produce biofuels<sup>1 9</sup>.

### Independence struggle

Despite these strenuous circumstances, West Papuans have continued to resist the military occupation to this day. In December 2020, the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) formed the provisional government to mobilise West Papuans to achieve an independence referendum, thereby rejecting the rule of Indonesia. West Papuans launched their Green State Vision during COP26, pledging to take decisive action to address the climate crisis and the impact of resource extraction in an independent West Papua.

*“We are a peaceful, public campaign, whose aim is very simple: to give the people of West Papua the freedom to choose their own destiny through a fair and transparent referendum – a freedom they have always been denied”  
– Free West Papua Campaign*

### Free West Papua NL

Free West Papua NL encompasses mostly West Papuans residing in the Netherlands, as the native population currently residing in West Papua are silenced and unable to speak up about the current events. Free West Papua NL works towards their aim with politicians of all parties, international and national NGOs and campaign groups, and members of the public. Free West Papua NL's main approaches are campaigning for a referendum where West Papuans could vote on whether they want independence from Indonesia, promoting the Green State Vision and building a West Papuan community in the Netherlands. Currently, they mainly focus on connecting West Papuans in the Netherlands to each other and strengthening the ties between the diaspora and West Papuan culture. This is achieved primarily through community events centred on food, music, and dance (papua-dalamhakitu.nl, 2024). These types of events foster the creation and maintenance of a shared vision and way of seeing the world. The Green State Vision picks up on this imaginary and becomes the shared understanding of what is striven for once self-sovereignty is achieved. West Papua is of Melanesian ethnicity and is trying to become a member of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). It is also part of the Pacific Islands family, which means that the Pacific Islands are West Papua's allies.



8 S. Schulman, "The \$100bn gold mine and the West Papuans who say they are counting the cost | Natural resources and development | The Guardian," The Guardian. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/nov/02/100-bn-dollar-gold-mine-west-papuans-say-they-are-counting-the-cost-indonesia>

9 H. N. Jong, "World's biggest deforestation project gets underway in Papua for sugarcane," Mongabay. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://news.mongabay.com/2024/09/worlds-biggest-deforestation-project-gets-underway-in-papua-for-sugarcane/>

# GREEN STATE VISION

The Green State Vision of West Papua is a vision for “Making Peace with Nature in the 21st Century”<sup>1</sup>. The objective is to restore, promote and maintain balance and harmony among human and non-human beings based on reciprocity and respect toward all beings. The people of West Papua are Melanesian tribes who have proven to be the best guardians of this green New Guinea Island and blue Melanesian archipelago. The Green State Vision is based on non-Western, Melanesian beliefs and Indigenous knowledge, which consider nature a living being, rather than a commodity<sup>2</sup>. There are three Green Life Values:



*Live in balance with one's own self, with each other and with all communities of beings.*



*Care for each other and every person, individually and collectively, among humans and with other communities of beings.*



*Harmony is the guiding star. Love for our fellow beings and neighbours must guide us.*

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Three pillars are established and maintained to achieve this vision: environmental and social protection, customary guardianship, and democratic governance.

## Environmental and social protection

The needs of people and the planet are put before profit. Instead of focusing on economic “growth” and “development”, the Green State will be oriented towards restoring and protecting the environment and maintaining balance and harmony between people and the environment. This includes the following. Firstly, ecocide will be a severe criminal offence in West Papua. Secondly, The Green State supports the inclusion of ecocide as a crime in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Lastly, The Green State will serve notice to oil, gas, mining and logging corporations, palm oil plantations and other significant contributors to climate change or severe environmental harm that they must introduce international best practices in environmental protection and immediately invest in green technologies to reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change drastically<sup>1</sup>.

This will not only benefit the Indigenous tribes in West Papua, but Indigenous Peoples all over the world. West Papua is part of the Pacific Island family, meaning the Green State Vision will assist the Pacific Islands in combating climate change<sup>3</sup>. Besides, The Green State will provide citizens and residents with free education and free healthcare while developing other equally solid social protection and care policies. Environmental protection and customary norms and values will be prioritised in education. Within this pillar, Indigenous knowledge and values will be used to achieve harmony between people and nature, while Western knowledge systems will be used to protect this harmony legally at an international level.

## Customary guardianship

The Green State Vision will restore necessary decision-making powers on the occupation and guardianship of the use of lands, forests, rivers,

<sup>1</sup> ULMWP and Provisional Government, “Green State Vision,” 2021. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://greenstatevision.info/green-state-vision/>

<sup>2</sup> B. Wray, “We could all learn from West Papuan campaigners’

‘green state vision’,” openDemocracy. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/west-papua-green-state-vision/>

<sup>3</sup> D. Chivers, “West Papua: A Green State vision,” New Internationalist. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://newint.org/features/2021/11/04/west-papua-green-state-vision-cop26>

<sup>4</sup> C. Nongkas and A. Tivinarlik, “Melanesian indigenous knowledge and spirituality,” Contemporary PNG Studies. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.132874274057100>

and other waters to the customary authorities at the family, clan, and tribal levels. This customary guardianship will be underpinned by Indigenous knowledge, customs, and values, connecting places and cultures and emphasising holistic approaches. Indigenous people feel responsible for their ancestors and future generations, significantly informing their development and way of life. The decision-making process is communal, discussing, fed back, and reflexive. This is all based on traditional Melanesian beliefs around reciprocity between all beings and explicitly places the rights of people and the planet before profit. Melanesian spirituality interconnects with nature and the way people live. There is no separation between the empirical and non-empirical, natural and supernatural within the cosmos<sup>4</sup>. The connections between people and nature are embraced and essential. For example, efforts in conservation are not solely focused on “saving a species” but instead on looking at different approaches to sustainable use of the environment. Rather than lock a species away, never to be touched by humans, in an attempt to save or conserve it, conservation is about environmentally friendly and sustainable practices. This strengthens local livelihoods and culture.

The Green State of West Papua will support this customary guardianship with adequate and appropriate laws, policies, technical assistance, funds, and enforcement. There is an overall community focus, ensuring that a substantial and fair proportion of the benefits of decision-making and guardianship go to the local community and is channelled towards essential areas such as education and healthcare. The Green State will subsequently manage institutional and legal safeguards to prevent abuse of customary powers. This pillar uses Indigenous systems of guardianship while using Western knowledge systems to embed these practices into a legal framework, safeguarding the Indigenous way of living in an internationally acknowledged nation-state.

### Democratic governance

The Green State of West Papua will adopt the best features of the modern democratic state while adapting them in accordance with Indigenous knowledge systems. This will include a representative legislature, an effective, responsive and accountable executive government, an independent and impartial judiciary, and other effective and independent institutions and mechanisms to ensure good governance and to prevent corruption



*Raki Ap & Benny Wenda promoting the Green State Vision at COP28 in Dubai to offer a true climate solution.*

and the abuse or misuse of power at all levels (national, regional and customary)<sup>1</sup>. Key stakeholders will be consulted and involved before and while making laws and policies that significantly affect people’s rights and interests. As most of the world’s biodiversity and forests are located on Indigenous land, Indigenous people will have the most power and be the most significant stakeholders in climate discussions. The Indigenous perspective on climate change will be at the centre of political decision-making<sup>3</sup>. The Green State will also cooperate with other states in combating, mitigating, and adapting to climate emergencies. There will be effective and independent procedures to ensure that the coercive arms of the state, such as the Police and the Military do not misuse their power. Citizens and residents of West Papua will be safe and secure from unlawful killing, arbitrary detention, and abuse and ill-treatment at the hands of the state. In this sense, power is local. The Green State Vision empowers the local people of West Papua by giving them the tools to bring their knowledge about nature and the environment to fruition. Corporations currently active in West Papua, such as BP, will no longer have the power to continue the current environmental destruction. Corporations not operating in line with the Green State Vision will not operate in West Papua<sup>3</sup>.



# GREEN NGOs

**Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focus on environmental issues, aiming to promote sustainability and nature protection. Although the missions, goals, and values differ for each NGO, Green NGOs focus on areas including climate change, biodiversity, conservation, pollution, and sustainable development. Due to the history of West Papua, Indonesia, and the Netherlands, as well as the purpose of NGOs, Free West Papua NL deems relationships with and support from NGOs in the Netherlands as vital for realising the Green State Vision. The largest four NGOs, the most essential for Free West Papua NL, are Greenpeace, Milieudefensie, Oxfam Novib and WWF. The future imaginaries of these NGOs are all rooted in aspirations for a more just, sustainable world. However, their vision and ways of working towards it can differ. These four visions will be explained below.**



**GREENPEACE**

Greenpeace's vision is organised around two central themes, Climate and Nature, reflecting their mission to address both systemic environmental issues and protect ecosystems. Greenpeace focuses on demanding accountability from the largest polluters, advocating for an end to fossil fuel use, and promoting sustainable energy solutions and sustainable agriculture. For Greenpeace, the protection of ecosystems is a central part of their vision. This includes efforts to preserve forests, oceans, and biodiversity through community collaboration and non-violent action<sup>1</sup>. They collaborate with researchers, local communities, and other NGOs to restore valuable ecosystems, advocating for sustainable agricul-

tural practices and actions to address crises like deforestation and ocean degradation. Greenpeace envisions a future where people and nature coexist harmoniously through ambitious climate action and the restoration of ecosystems. Greenpeace's ideal future is one where environmental justice is a reality, particularly for vulnerable regions, ensuring that all people are protected from the impacts of climate change.



Milieudefensie's vision is to achieve a "good life for all people on earth and for generations to come." This vision is driven by principles of climate justice and systemic economic change. They imagine a world where the earth's natural wealth is justly distributed, ensuring that all people have access to a safe and healthy environment. This vision includes holding accountable those who disproportionately contribute to environmental harm, especially wealthy nations and corporations, while advocating for the rights of those most affected by climate change, such as human rights activists in Indonesia and communities in the Amazon. Their strategy includes campaigning against large polluters and advocating for protecting low-income households in the Netherlands and abroad. Their systemic vision is collaborative, working with international partners to promote sustainable forest management and strengthen the role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in managing natural resources. Milieudefensie emphasises that respect for nature is fundamental to their vision. They work towards solutions that do not come at the Global South's or future generations' expense, aspiring to create a sustainable world where economic activities are aligned with ecological health<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Greenpeace Nederland, "Onze Missie." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.greenpeace.org/nl/over-greenpeace/missie/>

<sup>2</sup> Friends of the Earth International, "Netherlands - Friends of the Earth International." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.foei.org/member-groups/netherlands/>



Four key pillars guide Oxfam Novib's vision:

**1. "Equal —We Stand for an Inclusive World."**

Oxfam Novib envisions a world where all individuals have equal opportunities regardless of identity or background. This inclusive imaginary envisions a society where marginalised groups are empowered to participate fully, free from discrimination.

**2. "Green —We Demand Fair Climate Policy".**

Their vision of climate justice emphasises the importance of recognising that those least responsible for the climate crisis often bear its brunt. In Oxfam Novib's ideal world, wealthier nations take responsibility by supporting vulnerable countries and creating a fair global climate policy.

**3. "Safe —We Contribute to a Safe World"** Oxfam Novib envisions a future where natural disasters and conflicts no longer harm the most vulnerable disproportionately. They imagine a world where safety is a collective priority, achieved through international collaboration and equal access to emergency support, ensuring that no one is left behind during crises.

**4. "Fair —We Fight for Justice"** seeks to dismantle economic systems that widen the gap between rich and poor, imagining a world where prosperity is equitably distributed. Their vision of fairness involves reshaping economies to prioritise well-being and sustainability over profit, achieved through challenging inequitable economic models and empowering individuals to advocate for their rights.

They imagine a world where everyone, regardless of background, has equal opportunities to thrive and where marginalised groups are empowered to participate fully in society. Their vision includes a fair global climate policy where wealthier nations support those most affected by climate change, ensuring that the burden is shared equitably. In the future, conflicts will be resolved peacefully, and everyone will have access to protection from natural disasters. The organisation's ultimate goal is a world where prosperity is evenly distributed

and economies prioritise people's well-being over profit.



WWF's imaginary is centred around a nature-positive world, aiming to shift from nature loss to a state where ecosystems thrive, species are protected, and humanity's ecological footprint is minimised. Human activities no longer degrade ecosystems but contribute to their restoration and growth in their ideal future. In this future, critical habitats will be protected, species will be safeguarded from extinction, and the ecological footprint of human consumption will be halved<sup>3</sup>. WWF aims to achieve this through collaboration with communities, governments, and businesses, emphasising that local people must be empowered to lead in developing climate solutions that work for them [18]. Their ideal world is where nature and people thrive together, ensuring a sustainable planet for present and future generations.

### Overarching vision

Overall, the imaginary of green NGOs is a just and equal world where people are protected from climate change and appropriate measures to combat climate change have been taken. Noticeable is the lack of political engagement in their strategies towards this ideal future. It can be said that in the imaginary of NGOs, climate and nature are and will stay non-political in the future.

<sup>3</sup> WWF, "Wat WWF doet." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.wwf.nl/wat-we-doen>

Our analysis of the Green State Vision of West Papua and the imaginaries of green NGOs in the Netherlands shows that these groups have different ways of seeing nature and our relationship with nature, climate, and the politicisation thereof. While the Green State Vision clearly sees environmental struggles and political struggles as interconnected and inseparable, green NGOs in the Netherlands do not necessarily share this view. **The challenge we have identified for this initiative is the need to repoliticise environmental protection, meaning that the environment is no longer seen as a non-political existence but rather as something constantly influenced by politics.** We have identified two ways this challenge surfaces in the imaginaries of the Green State Vision of West Papua. On the one hand, we wonder how the holistic Green State Vision articulated by West Papuan activists can function within a nation-state narrative and structure. On the other, we ponder how struggles for environmental protection and justice and struggles for Indigenous liberation can be viewed as being two sides of the same coin.

### West Papua: A Green Nation-State?

West Papuans acknowledge the interconnectedness of nature and politics, as the ecocide and genocide currently happening in West Papua are intertwined. As a response, the Green State Vision was created, which assumes a future vision where West Papuans are free and in harmony with nature. To realise this, political change is necessary. The Provisional Government of West Papua seeks to implement the Green State Vision once West Papua has gained independence and introduce Other-than-Human representatives to their legislative<sup>1</sup>.

It must be noted that the Green State Vision is a guiding document and does not go into the specific implementation processes of West Papua's holistic goals. However, it is clear that West Papua must become independent to realise the Green State

Vision. This presents several key challenges, the main being the difficulty of achieving liberation from the Indonesian military occupation and gaining international recognition as an independent sovereign state. The latter opens up several issues around what such a state would look like that represents Indigenous governance systems and ways of living within a global nation-state order built on Western modes of thinking and the colonial legacies that created West Papuan oppression in the first place.

Free West Papua and the ULMWP whole-heartedly entangle environmental and social protection, governance and customary guardianship, juxtaposing criminalisation of ecocide, access to healthcare, definitions of democracy, and redistribution of decision-making power about territory in the Green State Vision<sup>2</sup>. This challenge of applying ideological and spiritual discourse to social, economic, and political dimensions has not yet been strategised and tackled. There is a struggle between the decolonial approach of the Green State Vision and the nation-state framework that might be needed to realise it. One can look to Ecuador and Bolivia's political implementations of Buen Vivir to understand the challenges of any practical social, economic and political application of an ideological and spiritual discourse [19]. Regulations and local/global interactions must be reshaped to fit a vastly different iteration of the existing structural dynamic. Unlike Bolivia and Ecuador, West Papua does not have to undergo a "re-constitutionalisation" process, as the Green State Vision is the ULMWP's first constitutional vision. This can be an advantage, as the influence of initial operationalisation choices on later political and institutional dynamics should not be neglected [20]. Some open questions thus remain about how West Papua can build a State that practically enacts and later maintains its Green State Vision, remaining resilient in the face of internal and external undesired eventualities.

<sup>1</sup> ULMWP, "Press Release: 'Provisional Government' of West Papua announced, Indonesian rule rejected." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ulmwp.org/press-release-provisional-government-of-west-papua-announced-indonesian-rule-rejected>

<sup>2</sup> ULMWP and Provisional Government, "Green State Vision," 2021. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://greenstatevision.info/green-state-vision/>



## Political Boundaries and Environmental Justice

The overall non-political view of nature protection and climate activism that green NGOs share poses a challenge for West Papua and Indigenous struggles worldwide. At most, certain NGOs acknowledge the oppression West Papuans face from the Indonesian government. However, this is insufficient to liberate West Papuans and realise the Green State Vision. While it has been made clear that the Green State Vision would benefit people globally, it has not been enough to get the appropriate support from green NGOs. This is caused by their non-political view of the environment, which leads to an entanglement with the politics involved when supporting Indonesia in its climate crisis. According to Raki Ap, advisor to the Free West Papua Campaign and leader of the Dutch branch, Indonesia declares West Papua as a no-go zone for green NGOs<sup>3</sup>. Combined with the political entanglement of ecocide and genocide in West Papua, green NGOs are unwilling to give West Papua the appropriate support out of fear of political repercussions. It is ironic that NGOs neglect the politicalness of the environment while being held back from supporting West Papua due to politics. Free West Papua thus faces the challenge of convincing actors like green NGOs that the West Papuan liberation struggle and the question of “nature” conservation in West Papua are the same fight and cannot exist as separate issues.

Although most international green NGOs have heralded “climate justice” as a core activity since the early 2010s, definitions and boundaries of what this is vary and remain vague, increasing the risk of the term becoming an empty signifier<sup>4</sup>.

Additionally, many organisations relegate “the political” to the background in order to engage more successfully with influential actors in a neo-liberalised, globalised world (Robinson, 2004). Rather than achieving “climate justice”, it further perpetuates the marginalisation of Indigenous communities. Climate justice can only be achieved by truly embracing the environment as political and acting in a way that aligns with that vision.

To overcome this key challenge, Free West Papua needs to constantly reflect internally on the Green State Vision. More significant questions about rethinking the colonial foundations of the nation-state, emancipatory transitions, and decolonising green futures need to be pondered upon iteratively to build the first Green Nation State. At the same time, the interconnectedness of the environment and Indigenous liberation needs to be made aware and communicated to NGOs.



3 "Personal Communication," 2024.

4 A. Kenis and E. Mathijs, "Climate change and post-politics: Repoliticizing the present by imagining the future?," *Geoforum*, vol. 52, pp. 148–156, Mar. 2014, doi: 10.1016/j.GEOFORUM.2014.01.009.



# INTERVAE WORKSHOP TOOLKIT

For West Papuans who support the Green State Vision, keeping everyone on the same page and communicating their ideas clearly can be challenging. You have faced challenges like a lack of understanding and political support from potential allies. Although you have a vision for the future that fits your history and culture, the idea of a Green State — blending modern democracy with Indigenous practices — can be challenging for many to grasp. This is especially true in the West, where neoliberal capitalism and nation-states dominate. While creating this Green State is not impossible, it would be the first of its kind, and so would face many challenges in making it come to life. This can be seen in how hard it is for green NGOs, politicians, and the public to imagine or support such a vision.

## What is backcasting?

Backcasting is a planning method in which people start by imagining a future that they want and then work backwards to figure out how to get there. This process includes exploring what changes in the present and near future are needed to reach

a specific goal and creating different pathways to that goal.

## Goals

To address these challenges and limited imaginations of Western communities, politicians and organizations, we offer a series of workshops for you to use. In these workshops, you can develop a more detailed understanding of how to make the Green State Vision a reality. Specifically, these workshops focus on discussing the political, economic and social processes and structures that you and the West Papuan community would need to create during the transition process after independence from Indonesia is achieved. This should then help you create strategies to clearly communicate your needs in the present, with real examples of how your vision could come to life.

## Structure

To guide these discussions, we have prepared a set of questions for effective backcasting focused on the Green State Vision. The questions are organized into three main themes:

- Rethinking the foundations of nation-states
- Preventing co-optation
- Decolonizing green futures

Each theme includes two types of questions: philosophical and action-based. Philosophical questions explore the more profound ideas and beliefs behind the issues, while action-based questions focus on the specific actions and decisions needed to make the ideas a reality. Each set of questions comes with background information on why the theme is essential for the Green State Vision and resources from other Indigenous struggles for liberation. Given these topics' emotional and intellectual intensity, we encourage participants to approach the workshops with open minds and curiosity. There often will not be clear right or wrong answers, and more questions may arise. We suggest breaking each theme into separate workshops over time. Each workshop should have a facilitator from the group to help guide the discussions and support everyone in exploring their thoughts and feelings.



## **\*Example: Governance Structure, Sovereignty, and Institutions: Rethinking the Colonial Foundations of the Nation-State**

### **Philosophical Question**

How can the green state model respect and coexist with Indigenous concepts of land, sovereignty, and relational governance without reproducing the colonial narratives of control, extraction, and exclusion that are embedded in the modern nation-state?

### **Clarifying Questions**

- How do you envision governance that respects Indigenous sovereignty while operating within the green state framework?
- What are the ethical implications of enforcing traditional state borders on communities that practise non-territorial ways of living? Are you risking reproducing colonial boundary-making violence?
  - Which structures and institutions should remain, and which need to be transformed or replaced to accommodate Indigenous ways of life and governance?
  - Are you limiting your vision to the form of a nation-state? Can you imagine forms of non-state governance or decentralised confederations of communities that respect plurality and diversity?
- What can be learned from Indigenous movements like the Mapuche in Chile or the Zapatista model in Mexico, which challenge Western governance and sovereignty norms?
  - How might pluriversal and relational governance systems offer pathways for co-governance and ecological sustainability?<sup>1 2 3</sup>

### **Action-Based Question**

How can policies and governance structures be designed to respect Indigenous sovereignty, land stewardship, and autonomy without imposing rigid state-centric laws? Further, how can these structures be adopted or adapted to ensure that Indigenous peoples and marginalised communities are not just included but co-creating the political future of the green state?

### **Clarifying Questions**

- Who should hold authority in decision-making processes, and how will these decisions integrate

local autonomy and co-governance?

- What mechanisms of decentralised governance can be implemented to enable Indigenous communities to control their resources, laws, and cultural preservation?
- How will the green state address conflicts when non-Indigenous land claims overlap with Indigenous territories? What institutional safeguards can be implemented to ensure that historically marginalised voices (e.g., women, LGBTQ+ communities, Indigenous groups) have equitable power and representation in governance?
- Can a green state envision more flexible, fluid borders that respect Indigenous land sovereignty and mobility?
- What are the potential challenges to this approach, and how could they be addressed?<sup>2 3</sup>
- How do you envision justice in the future? Are these types of concepts tied to Western legal frameworks and how can you adopt them with Indigenous legal systems, relational governance, and restorative justice as core principles?

### **Resources & Inspiration**

- **Zapatista Model of Decentralised Governance:** The Zapatistas operate autonomously within their territories in Mexico, fostering community decision-making and ecological sustainability outside of state control<sup>4</sup>.
- **Mapuche Territorial Reclamation in Chile:** The Mapuche are working to restore land rights and traditional governance practices, resisting extractive industries and promoting land stewardship as part of their autonomy<sup>5</sup>.
- **Plurinational Models in Bolivia and Ecuador:** These models legally recognize Indigenous sovereignty and legal pluralism, allowing for Indigenous governance structures within a broader national framework, which is relevant for envisioning decentralised authority in the green state<sup>1</sup>.
- **Kurdish Women's Movement:** This movement emphasises community-based governance and equity across marginalised groups, providing a model for inclusive governance in diverse communities.

1 A. Escobar, "Thinking-Feeling with the Earth : Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South," *Knowledges Born in the Struggle*, pp. 41–57, Oct. 2019, doi: 10.4324/9780429344596-3.

2 G. S. Coulthard and T. Alfred, "Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition," 2014, doi: 10.1080/2325548X.2016.1146013.

3 L. B. Simpson, *As we have always done: indigenous freedom through radical resistance*, no. 3. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. doi: 10.1080/19460171.2022.2057344.

4 R. Zibechi, *Dispersing power: Social movements as anti-state forces*. AK Press, 2010. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://books.google.com/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=KvfBsK6LLwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=ispersing+power:+Social+movements+as+anti-state+forces&ots=JH8Oah3Xeq&sig=eu\\_ptcMDRS9POWaCSqkAJOGh16U](https://books.google.com/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=KvfBsK6LLwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=ispersing+power:+Social+movements+as+anti-state+forces&ots=JH8Oah3Xeq&sig=eu_ptcMDRS9POWaCSqkAJOGh16U)

5 C. Brey, "Land Rights and Regime Change: Trends in Mapuche Territorial Conflict from 1970 to Present in South-Central Chile," *Proceedings of GREAT Day*, vol. 2019, no. 1, Apr. 2020, Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/proceedings-of-great-day/vol2019/iss1/7>



# THEATRICAL INTERVENTION

## STORYTELLING TO NGOS

### About West Papuan Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful tool that can help people connect, teach, inspire and feel. By creating a sense of familiarity and trust, storytelling can enable listeners to engage with the world from their own perspective, enabling more profound understanding and learning. While dry facts or abstract ideas can be hard to grasp, storytelling can help present complex ideas in relatable narratives, which resonate emotionally with people<sup>1</sup>. Stories can have multiple meanings and be an efficient and impactful approach to share political messages in a way that can change people's minds.

Sharing stories can unite people through common history, culture and values. Stories create bonds and weave together communities. Storytelling is central to West Papuan culture<sup>2, 3</sup>. It has become an important form of protest in the West Papuan struggle for independence<sup>4</sup>. Through songs, poems, visual art and performance, colonial narratives of West Papua are contested, and a decolonial imaginary is built, in which collaboration and solidarity are narrated as active forms of kinship grounded in reciprocity<sup>4, 5</sup>.

**Storytelling can be deeply impactful within a community and also as a way to communicate with people outside of the initiative. By publicly engaging in storytelling practices, the initiative can grab the public's attention to create emotional responses, raise awareness, and**

### spark discourse.

For the Free West Papua campaign, we advise the initiative to work with techniques of Poetics of the Oppressed to tell the story of the Green State Vision to a Dutch audience. In Poetics of the Oppressed, theatre is used to make both the oppressive situation and mechanism of domination visible. It is a method that does not require any previous acting experience. Moreover, spectators become co-actors and/or co-creators of the performance, unlike typical theatre, where spectators only observe<sup>6</sup>. As such, the typical spectator-actor wall is broken, and the spectators are held responsible for the social transformation that occurs on stage. In the creation of something new - a "rehearsal of revolution"- something that has not yet existed begins to exist, not only in the mind of the actor but also in the mind of the spectator.

Free West Papua campaign could address the importance of green NGOs supporting the Green State Vision by staging a reality in which green NGOs support a Free West Papua. In this imaginary, green NGOs are part of a more extensive landscape of environmental protection from which political aspects are no longer looked away but rather understood and acted upon as central to achieving global climate goals. By making the West Papuan struggle visible in an engaging and accessible format, public performances can break down complex issues, encouraging spectators to see how the fight for ecological preservation and the defence of Indigenous rights share a common root: the fight against colonialism, corporate greed, and environmental degradation. In this way, the public can be brought to think about the inaction of NGOs in this area, which is inseparable from what they stand for. Creating favourable media attention could also play an essential role in this. The storytelling approach would, therefore, be critical when documenting (filming and photographing).

1 C. Brey, "Land Rights and Regime Change: Trends in Mapuche Territorial Conflict from 1970 to Present in South-Central Chile," Proceedings of GREAT Day, vol. 2019, no. 1, Apr. 2020, Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/proceedings-of-great-day/vol2019/iss17>

2 Papua Dalam Hatiku, "Twee projecten, één thema: muziek van Papua in de schijnwerpers." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.papudalamhatiku.nl/muziek-van-papua/>

3 V. Boris, "What Makes Storytelling So Effective For Learning?," Harvard Business Publishing. Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/what-makes-storytelling-so-effective-for-learning/>

4 Kal Angam-Kal (@kalangamkal), "Youth-led West Papuan Storytelling Project #kalangamkal 🇵🇵 Naarm, Kulin Nation [Instagram Profile]." Accessed: Oct. 31, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.instagram.com/kalangamkal/>

5 B. Etherington, "One Salt Water: The Storied Work of Trans-Indigenous Decolonial Imagining with West Papua," Contemp Pac, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 1-29, 2022, doi: 10.1353/CP.2022.0001.

6 W. Fatubun, "Papuan Voices: An Initiative for Decolonized Filmmaking to Document Indigenous People's Lived Experiences in West Papua: Decolonizing Visualities," Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-15, Nov. 2023, doi: 10.1163/23644583-BJA10044.

Ideally, the intervention would take place in a public setting where representatives of green NGOs are present, such as the square opposite the International Court of Justice in The Hague when the court rules about Ecocide on December 2nd, for instance.

## Poetics of the Oppressed

The roots of Poetics of the Oppressed lie in Brazil during the late fifties. In collaboration with actors from student groups, Augusto Boal, director of Teatro Arena in Sao Paulo, started developing Poetics of the Oppressed to break away from theatre's classical, bourgeois and European roots<sup>7</sup>. Instead, in these alternative forms of theatre, "the theatre" is reclaimed as something created by and for the people. Hence, it is not a tool for domination by the ruling class but a weapon for liberation for the oppressed<sup>8</sup>.

While there are many ways of approaching this, an array of which is presented in Figure [x], we particularly recommend Forum Theatre. Forum theatre involves a performance of a specific social issue or conflict that ends in a crisis. This approach does not require previous experience with acting. However, some practice is necessary to gain a certain level of familiarity and comfort when working with this way of interacting with an audience. Partnering with local artists and/or theatre groups may help foster comfortability and creativity. Additionally, a facilitator is necessary to guide the interaction between the "stage" and the audience.



### How does it work?

After the first performance, the audience is invited to intervene decisively and change the dramatic action. In particular, the audience is asked if they agree with the solution presented in the skit. Then, it is explained that the scene will be performed once more, but now, any spectator can replace

any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems most appropriate to them. The displaced actor steps aside but remains ready to replace the spectator when they terminate their participation<sup>6</sup>. The other actors respond according to the changes made in the scene by the spectator. After the new skit is performed, the audience is asked if they agree with this new solution or want to act out the scene differently.

*"Anyone may propose any solution, but it must be done on the stage, working, acting, doing things, and not from the comfort of their seat."* – Boal (2019)

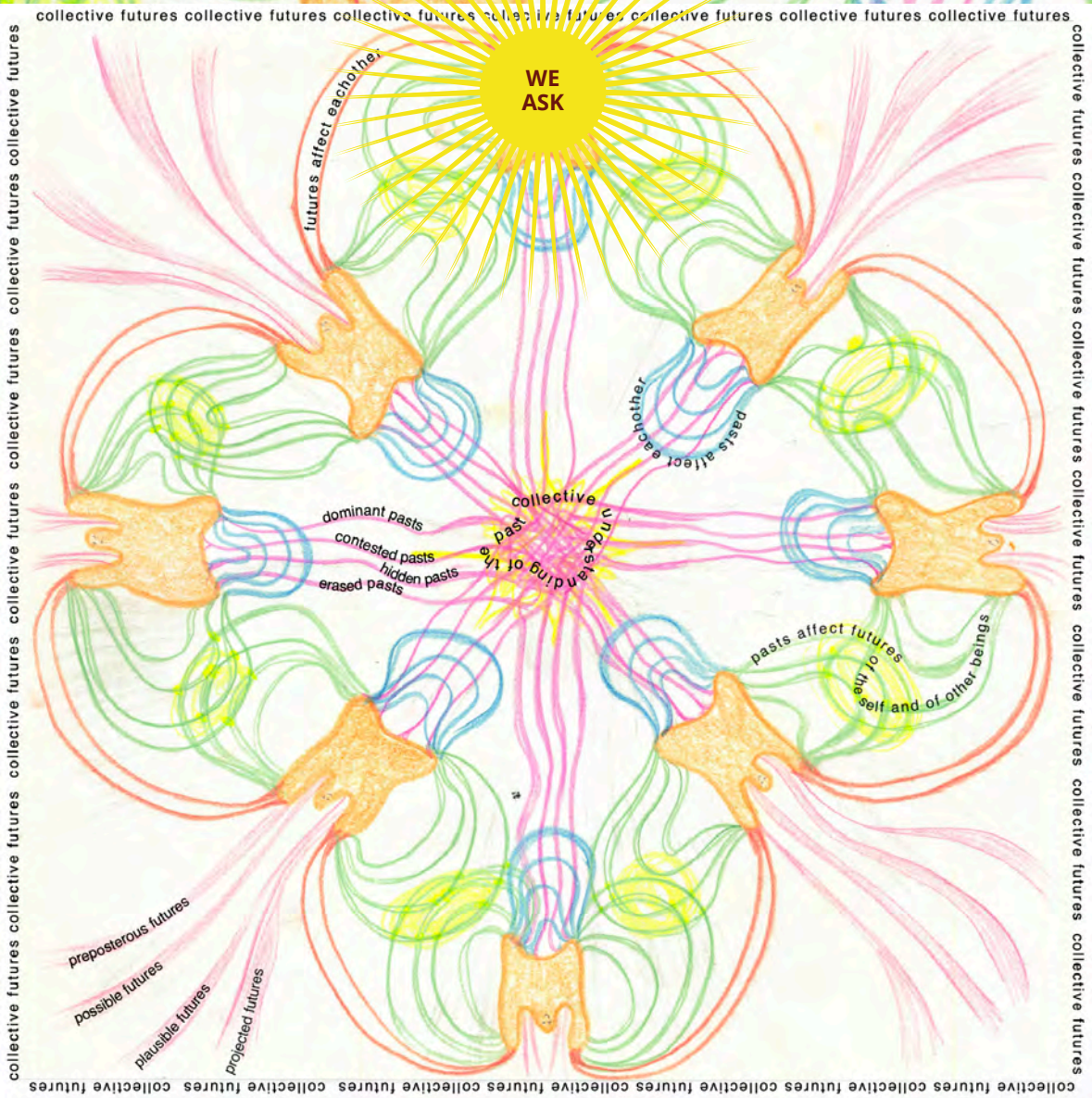
One of the initiative's concerns is that West Papuans performing and presenting their stories in Dutch public spaces runs the risk of reinforcing Othering while their community is already facing discrimination and racism in the Netherlands. Misinterpretation of a performance could result in even more biases and racial stereotypes. It is, therefore, essential to consider the risk of exoticising West Papuan storytelling forms. Kent et al<sup>8</sup>. state that showing West Papuan art in Western contexts is often deployed as or associated with showing something "primitive" by the state, media and other actors. Working with indigenous storytelling techniques can, therefore, run the risk of reproducing stereotypes and justifying discrimination against West Papuans.

Additionally, West Papuans' stories are deeply emotional, personal and serious topics. How to perform without trivialising these connections? We recommend approaching groups that can provide guidance and insights on effectively conveying the intended message (for instance, AstaroTheatro) or collaborating with West Papuan performance artists.



7 A. Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. PLUTO Press, 2019.

8 T. Mitchell, "Tactic: Legislative Theatre," *Beautiful Trouble*, doi: 10.1177/1474474007072821



**How else can you represent futures and pasts?**

By Nina Litsos

TRICOLOR COALITION

DOUGHTY

ECONOMICS IN

MEXICO CITY

*Agnese Salazzari  
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# MEXICO CITY'S DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS SOCIAL FOUNDATION

Environmental and social problems are arising worldwide. In urban areas like Mexico City, keeping up with the pace of these changes can be challenging. This challenge requires inclusive and sustainable approaches. In response, the **Tricolor Coalition** was founded as a collaborative and action-oriented initiative that uses the framework of **Doughnut Economics (DE)** to address these urgent problems. The initiative is a Mexican civil society platform that is interested in promoting a transition towards a sustainable Mexico City by using DE as a basis. The framework principles help to define sustainability as *a safe and just space for humanity* according to Tricolor.

## Vision and Purpose

Tricolor aims in its vision towards a sustainable future for Mexico City. By having a well-prepared city that can respond and adapt to both social and environmental future risks through governance processes that engage multiple stakeholders. In other words, the initiative is trying to involve as many stakeholders as possible in its decision-making processes. Therefore their mission is to create a nest of synergies that can boost sustainability transitions that are aligned with DE principles in Mexico City. Tricolor is trying to find a balance, by using the principles from DE and the collaboration of different parties affected by the environmental and social problems. Right now they are aiming to include citizens, different government bodies, private sectors and academia to approach this sustainable mission.

In the use of DE there are **two key priorities** for the initiative:

1. Meeting citizens' essential needs (representing the inner circle of the DE model).
2. Staying within environmental limits (represented by the outer circle of DE). This is where their vision of *a safe and just space* is represented.

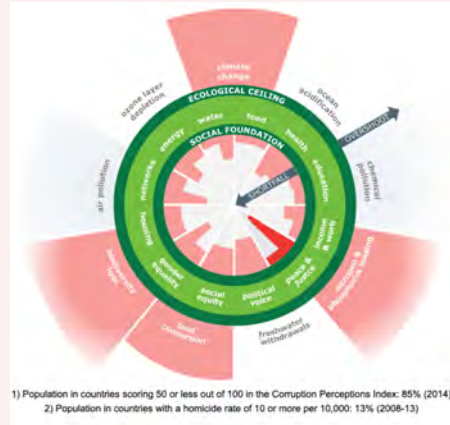


Image of DE framework by Kate Raworth.

## Imagining a sustainable future for Mexico City

The core of Tricolor's mission leads us to the question: "What kind of future do we envision for Mexico City?". The answers to this question verifies where the initiative aims to go with applying DE to Mexico City. Tricolor encourages a new way of taking action regarding the environment rather than just quick profits or growth. With the DE as a roadmap, Tricolor envisions a city that aligns decision-making processes with environmental and human-focused goals that respond to Mexico City's stakeholders' sustainability priorities. DE enlightens the focus of both of these goals, whereby Tricolor is trying to work together with all the stakeholders involved in this process. Imagining a desired future where DE can be applied to Mexico City through Tricolor's integration into this framework. By sharing a vision that includes everyone's ideation of a sustainable future with both environmental and human-centred goals.

## Current Actions

Tricolor is currently actively engaged in approaching the government and various projects that encounter the environmental and social problems of Mexico City. One of the projects is called "Gota Gota" a non-profit sub initiative



from Tricolor Coalition. This water management project focused on addressing the issues connected to water specifically within Mexico City. This project was introduced to us by Eva Valencia Lenero, who is one of the leads in this project. As currently one of the biggest problems in Mexico City is that the city might be running out of water. Due to high temperatures affecting the city are leading to more water usage. Another water problem is that there are leakages in pipes that create huge amounts of water loss.



*An image from CNN representing people who fill buckets in Azcapotzalco neighbourhood in Mexico City due to the water crisis by Henry Romero/Reuters.*

In this project, theoretical ideas are transformed into actionable water sustainability strategies aiming to make urgent plans or movements to address critical water issues in Mexico City. The Tricolor actions go beyond this project as it is trying to have an impact on policies regarding water management in the city. The stakeholders involved in this project are from government agencies, private sectors, citizens, academia, non-profit organisations, and school communities. “Gota Gota!” aims to bring together information from all these different stakeholders who are interested in promoting sustainable water transitions in Mexico City. The information gathered contains results for the implementation of Gota Gota’s water solution. Through research and collaboration, different water projects are reviewed and partnered with public, private and academic sectors to enhance the diversity of perspectives and add value. Other steps taken with this aim are workshops, educational materials, and impact assessments to bring together a combined solution to different water problems in Mexico City.

## Challenges

Although many projects like “Gota Gota” are successful for Tricolor still they face other challenges as well. The initiative faces limitations in funding and accurate adaptation of DE into scalable and actionable projects. As DE is a global framework, it makes it hard to directly apply to Mexico City. The framework needs to be adapted in a way whereby it meets the local needs and problems that Mexico City is currently facing, and strengthen the work already developed in Mexico City rather than trying to invent a new wheel. However, Institutional resistance and traditional models slow down the adaptation of such a global framework.

The initiative dreams of growing and becoming recognized as supporting sustainability leaders in Mexico City. Currently, they are using social media and partnerships to make people aware of their existence while they advocate for sustainability in multiple projects. Unfortunately, the team is still small and not able to reach out to every stakeholder as they would like. Not only is reaching out sometimes difficult, but they are also aiming for a future where interested stakeholders reach out to them. This long-term vision of the initiative is to provide accessible tools and projects that can be adopted more easily by businesses and organisations, where Tricolor is the link between which connects the information.

Having the active participation of several stakeholders like citizens and partners is their future goal of shaping an inclusive, sustainable and resilient Mexico City.



*The first International Donut Day in Mexico City, 2023 by Tricolor Coalition.*

1 “Gota Gota” means “Drop by Drop”

# DOUGHT ECONOMICS – THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

The name DE refers to the shape of the framework: a circle with a hole inside. The model gives clarity when social needs and life essentials fall short, this implies the social foundation is not met. And an overshoot of the ecological ceiling means that planetary boundaries have been crossed. Each DE model is different, often based on the cultural beliefs, resources or other limitations in the given geographical context.

The needs of people are described as the social foundation (inner circle) which consists of several indicators: food security, health, education, income and work, peace and justice, political voice, social equity, gender equality, housing, networks, energy, and water. The planetary boundaries (outer circle) are described as Earth's ecological ceiling which also consists of several indicators: climate change, ocean acidification, chemical pollution, nitrogen and phosphorus loading, freshwater withdrawals, land conversion, biodiversity loss, air pollution, and ozone layer depletion.

## Imagination of personal ideas

The DE can be seen as a version of a round shaped economy that aims to create a sustainable economy that balances economic growth and social needs without harming the ecological environment. Rather than defining one holistic future based on general beliefs and political statements for the whole of Mexico, it would be more useful to have people define their individual needs. Combining all the needs and demands of all individuals contributes to the knowledge and collaboration of ideas. Having people imagine what their perfect city would look like, helps people get involved in achieving that perfect imagination. Each person has another imagination of a perfect city that could be on sustainability, gender equity, balance in food resources or preserving culture/traditions.

## DE Implementation Illustrated

The DE framework is meant to be flexible and provides a guide to vision rather than a strict set of instructions. Its main goal is to help people live

well while respecting the Earth's limits. In wealthier regions, the challenge is to reduce their ecological footprint to stay within the boundaries of the planet. In low- and middle-income areas, the focus is more focused on lifting people out of poverty and bringing everyone into a safe space. This means making sure basic needs like food, education, and opportunities are available to all.

Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, is the first city in the world with a fully integrated DE model in their daily practices. This DE model is scaled down, meaning that it is adjusted to the needs of the City. This scaled-down model was developed in collaboration with Kate Raworth and is called "city portrait". This city portrait gives Amsterdam a broad overview of its social and environmental state of the city. It's designed to support the municipality to think bigger, work together across departments, and bring a variety of groups into decision-making. The goal is to inspire innovation and make lasting changes that shape a more sustainable future for the city.



*Amsterdam, the first city with a fully integrated DE model.  
(picture generated by AI)*

The municipality of Amsterdam found out that about 20% of tenants struggled to cover basic needs after paying rent. Followed by the fact that only 12% of the applicants for social housing were successful due to the housing shortage. To tackle this problem, you would think that building more houses would solve the problem.

However, The city portrait revealed that this will result in large amounts of carbon emissions with the result of crossing the borders of the ecological ceiling of the doughnut. The municipality of Amsterdam noted that the city needs more houses, but it's also essential to manage this carefully to stay within the boundaries of the DE model. Therefore, the municipality decided that constructors could only work with sustainable materials when possible.

One of Amsterdam's leading sustainable projects is Strandeiland (Beach Island) in IJburg. This newly created area is made out of six islands. The Municipality of Amsterdam put a lot of effort into making this project eco-friendly. During this project only special low-emission boats were used to transport the materials. Also, the foundation of these islands were built in such a way that it would not harm the underwater wildlife. Amsterdam's example has inspired many cities around the world.



*Strandeiland (Beach Island)<sup>1</sup>*

A climate-action network worked together with Kate Raworth in 2019 to create DE-reports of Amsterdam, Philadelphia, Copenhagen and Portland. So far, only Amsterdam and Copenhagen turned these results into a city-wide strategy. Brussels is applying the DE model by refurbishing an old mint (historical building where currency was produced) to reduce environmental impact and create social benefits. In addition to these examples, there are many other examples in places around the world doing different activities with Doughnut Economics framework from the global to the neighbourhood scale. They are engaging people from different countries such as China, India, Tunisia, Brasil, and many more countries in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Obtained from the site: <https://www.amsterdam.nl/projecten/strandeiland/>

# Visualizing Doughnut Economics to Mexico City

## Local Imaginary for Future

Mexico City is a vibrant metropolis with long-rooted culture and diversity, that also attracts various visitors from around the world, with energy and opportunities. Yet, beneath this dynamic surface, there are also deep-rooted inequities, corruption, and insecurity challenges as one of the largest cities around the world. For the residents of Mexico City, there are important aspects for their well-being to improve; they want a safer and more just future.

People are pursuing a future where sustainability is integrated into every sector, with the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) representing their aspirations. Mexico City is no exception in this global movement of the 21st century.

68 The key question is: how can this goal be achieved by local actions? The Mexico City government gave their answer by the 2019-2024 program<sup>1</sup> builds on the promise of reducing social inequalities while restoring environmental sustainability, envisioning a “City of Innovation and Rights.” Policymakers in Mexico City already have ideas in mind and are taking action, hoping these measures will bring real change. Beyond politicians, artists are also taking action; they plan to create 17 large murals to represent the SDGs, expressing their envisioned futures for the next generations<sup>2</sup>.

## Why Doughnut for Mexico City?

The framework of DE provides a powerful tool to communicate development challenges, goals, and pathways. The concept of the “ecological ceiling” clearly elaborates the local ecosystem’s capacity and resources, helping people have a measurable framework that can complement the current indicators so their practices can be more sustainable and respectful of ecological limits. The concept of a “social foundation” shows that beyond the

environmental concerns, they have to safeguard what the different communities in the city need to flourish, including essentials like housing, healthcare, education, and employment for all. The concept of a “safe and just space” proposed in the DE aligns perfectly with their needs, especially as they face challenges like crime and inequality.

The “Doughnut” also provides a powerful visual representation of our current position and our goals, highlighting the development challenges the city faces and guiding us toward sustainable progress. By visualising our current position, we can measure how far we are from our goals, determine if we can achieve them within the desired timeframe, and identify the necessary next steps to move forward.

Promoting a sustainability vision requires collaboration among various stakeholders who are working towards their individual goals but need to share knowledge effectively. As a communication tool, the DE can connect different pieces of information from diverse stakeholders and residents of Mexico City. The collection of individuals’ imaginations of the DE could enrich the understanding of their environments and offer valuable insights to Tricolor on how collaboration with specific individuals can help achieve a balance of essential life resources. Rather than relying solely on research, gathering opinions and personal life sketches would generate impactful ideas for fostering sustainability and equity.

## What Will Mexico City’s Doughnut Look Like?

The DE can be adapted to a regional scale by introducing national or subnational perspectives. Mexico City faces a unique set of social and ecological pressures, which means the DE framework needs to balance the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> with the interests and concerns of

1 Gobierno de la Ciudad De Mexico. (2019). *PROGRAMA DE GOBIERNO 2019 - 2024*. Retrieved October 28, 2024, from [https://servidoresx3.finanzas.cdmx.gob.mx/documentos/Plan\\_Gob\\_2019\\_2024\\_1.pdf](https://servidoresx3.finanzas.cdmx.gob.mx/documentos/Plan_Gob_2019_2024_1.pdf)

2 *Ecological murals in Mexico City*. (2023b, April 19). Enel Green Power. <https://www.enelgreenpower.com/stories/articles/2023/04/ecological-murals-mexico-city>

3 THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development. (n.d.-b). <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

local communities<sup>4</sup>. Regarding ecological ceilings and social foundations, we have observed that Mexico City has already conducted analyses across various sectors. Initiatives like Tricolor Coalition also contribute to developing boundaries in specific sectors like water and energy. In the future, a series of projects will be initiated by government and research institutions, creating space to determine the indicators and targets needed to frame a safe and just space for Mexico City. This will be a long-term, dynamic research effort, evolving to meet the city's sustainability and equity goals. Meanwhile, more people will engage in this sustainability transition movement through the platform created by Tricolor. At the same time, volunteer researchers will help include those without digital access by using fieldwork, mural art, surveys, and other methods to bring the concept to a wider audience.

Through the collective efforts of various stakeholders, everyone can place their visions for the future within the Doughnut model, tailoring Doughnuts for different regions and topics. By comparing and integrating these visions, a collective consensus will be formed within the Doughnut framework. Additionally, the Doughnuts in different sectors align with the social division of labour, allowing individuals with diverse knowledge, experiences, and professions to contribute their strengths within their respective Doughnut areas. Collective ideas and individual thought would reach a balance in this context.

In this way, this new proposal can bring new ideas that support the existing sustainable work in the city. Everyone can express their opinions and perspectives in a safe and comfortable environment safeguarding Mexican culture, while society provides sample space and increasing trust for creation. People will be willing and capable to build the communities they want. This new social order has the potential to inspire creativity and productivity, increasing capacities of historically disadvantaged groups as part of commonly nurtured communities and environments.

### Example: Future Water in Mexico City

The water accessibility is especially mentioned as a project of Tricolor. Access to water is essential for

life; however, it would be even better if people in regions with sufficient water access were informed about the shortages in other areas through sharing of their DE insights. This exchange of information could foster greater awareness and solidarity, encouraging collaborative efforts to address water scarcity.



Future water management in Mexico City using Doughnut Economics framework (generated by OpenAI)

The water crisis can be alleviated in the future through the development of a “water Doughnut.” Digital infrastructure projects will be implemented to gather data on water resources, distribution, and usage. A clear and structured overview of “who has how much water” will be made available to the public. Additionally, water-saving practices will be promoted based on the insights and opinions gathered from stakeholders. Through sharing different views, people will maybe be encouraged to provide balance. Through the promotion and dissemination of the “Water Doughnut” concept, people would be able to change their mindsets and recognize the necessity of working together to address the water crisis, ensuring that no one is left behind.

<sup>4</sup> Turner, R. A., & Wills, J. (2022). Downscaling doughnut economics for sustainability governance. CMexico Citynt Opinion in Environmental SustainabCDMX101180.

# CHALLENGES - BRIDGING BETWEEN LOCAL AND GLOBAL

## Global DE Model

When operationalizing the DE Model, it becomes clear that it was designed on a global level. As it incorporates global indicators in the DE model. Transforming the global model into actionable local policies can be challenging since these indicators need to be adapted to the unique context of Mexico City. Localised metrics would be necessary to specify the social foundations and environmental limits relevant to Mexico City. This is necessary to allow more adaptation to the local context since the overall model sets rather global benchmarks. For Tricolor the challenge is on including different stakeholders and identifying these localised metrics and to specify the relevant social foundations and environmental limits. Different stakeholders such as local communities and governmental parties are needed to get a broad amount of information through different perspectives for localising the DE Model.

## Decentralised governance issues

The government is one of the stakeholders needed to get an idea of their vision on the social foundations and environmental limits. However, there are some local governance issues which make the implementation of the DE hard in Mexico City. One of the issues is the resistance of governmental organisations since they are used to traditional growth metrics and thus do not see that change through the doughnut framework can provide opportunities. Besides this, the highly decentralised nature of governmental structures in the city leads to fragmented policies, and a struggle to align local initiatives with the broader DE goals. Therefore, Tricolor needs to emphasise transparent communication with government stakeholders and highlight the long-term benefits of the DE model. And engage policymakers through a policy research group, who could help by showing how the advantages of the DE model can align with governmental goals.

## One size does not fit all

Mexico City offers a highly diverse landscape that cannot be tackled with a one-size-fits-all approach

to the DE model. Every community has different needs which must be addressed. Future planning processes must include every group. For this reason, the inclusive involvement of a multitude of stakeholders is necessary to cover all needs. Economic incentives as well as flexible schedules can ensure the participation of a broader range of individuals of different backgrounds.

## Data collection and integration

Another challenge Mexico City experiences when approaching the Doughnut Economy is collection, integration and management of data across departments. Reliable data is often collected by governmental institutions, making access to non-governmental organisations hard. This can hinder collection of reliable data for institutions such as Tricolor, hampering the implementation of recommendations which aim to pursue the DE principles. The fragmented data sources should be made more accessible or could be merged into one database. This data platform could have contributions from multiple departments such as NGOs, citizens or governmental institutions. To ensure data consistency, the database could feature modules which track metrics and provide a collaborative space for sharing data by a multitude of different stakeholders.

Furthermore, this unifying database could additionally provide information regarding resource limitations on a local scale. The financial, human or natural constraints in Mexico City hinder the effective implementation, specifically on a local level since there is solely scattered information around that. This tool could be crucial in providing access to different data integrated options.



# FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL DOUGH-MATE

Downscaling the DE to the local context is the challenge ahead for the Tricolor Coalition, which involves applying the ecological ceiling framework at the local level while ensuring a strong social foundation for its citizens<sup>1</sup>. To achieve optimal impact, it is essential to determine who to engage with, specify locally meaningful indicators and targets, and detect which sector is prioritised for pilot projects. These questions can be answered by policy research, online platforms, and evaluation research, which can be incorporated into the Dough-Mate project. Policy research helps to gain legitimacy for future projects of Tricolor, paving the way for government resources to support activities—including funding, data, and networking. The online platform incorporates the policy research findings and expands the use of knowledge and sharing through some modules. After explaining the process of the creation of the online platform the role of evaluation is discussed. Evaluation ensures that everything stays on track and that the purpose and future steps of data gathering are clear.

## Policy Research

Looking ahead, mapping out the existing indicators and targets of ecological limits is a demanding job for Tricolor. Most of the data, such as measured CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, is collected and managed by the government and official institutions. There is a high focus on both governance engagement and data collection since these challenges within DE and Tricolor. Implementing data collection and validation requires a high level of integration between departments, and for this to succeed, organisational cultures must adapt and evolve, which could have the potential to change the status quo of governance. To minimise institutional resistance, it's crucial for Tricolor to communicate transparently and emphasise the benefits of these changes during discussions with the government<sup>2</sup>.

By integrating the DE framework with the current environmental program—the Mexico City government's 2019-2024 plan—Tricolor can take on the role of coordinating to align Mexico City's Doughnut model with government goals and future actions. If DE is incorporated into future policy, it could lead to significant success. With Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo elected, who enacted the 2019-2014 plan, as the new president, her previous role as Mexico City's mayor and her dedication to addressing climate change suggest that she will probably continue to advance her environmental commitments, which is a positive sign for Tricolor<sup>3</sup>.

Promoting and gaining acceptance for a new concept within the government is not an easy task; it requires long-term connections. Tricolor can start with the government departments that communicated before during 'Doughnut Day' to examine the shortcomings of current policies based on their areas of expertise and identify the issues encountered during implementation.

A policy group needs to be established by Tricolor, which is responsible for reviewing public documents like policy papers, legislative documents, and annual reports, and attending public meetings or webinars held by the government. By doing so, a policy analysis report can be created to support consultation or advice for policy-makers, addressing problems of existing policies, unmet needs and gaps, and suggestions framed in terms of general policy goals or KPIs of the government departments.

1 Hosseini Karimabadi, S. H. (2024). Applying DE in Small scale Urban Development Projects: The Case Study of Future School, Tomelilla, Sweden.(pp16-19)

2 Dijkstra, W. A. B. (2023). *To Do or Doughnut: Defining the Limits of the Urban Safe and Just Operating Space* (Master's thesis, Norwegian

University of Life Sciences).

3 Grant, W. (2024, October 2). Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum vows "it's time for women." <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce3z263453lo>

## Online Platform: DoughMate

Data platform technology, such as an app, can be leveraged to create tailored Doughnut models, facilitating data collection, processing, storage, and visualisation<sup>4</sup>. The Tricolor Coalition could evolve into developing a Doughnut database platform, DoughMate, where individuals contribute by making their personal doughnut by the creation of raw data, users assist with validation, and collaboration. The DoughMate also reflects on the action-oriented focus of Tricolor since it can be incorporated as Do Mate = Go Buddy. The platform provides the data collection of personal doughnuts of a diversity of people from Mexico City. This contributes to the purpose of data collection through combining the different stakeholders into one Mexico City doughnut. However this will not lead to one outcome but the data gathering and modules will result in several outcomes in new projects with wider knowledge sharing. This aims to get a full live version of what indicators and targets individuals care about and has the potential to include different individuals' perspectives on the "just and safe space" in Mexico City. The details of the process are explained in the roadmap, the platforms includes among others; knowledge exchange and projects collaboration.

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Concept rendering of DoughMate (generated by OpenAI)

## Calling for join

Before the platform officially launches, we need to raise public awareness. This could be done by using murals or social media, starting with the question, "Do you want to live in a safe and just space?" to grab attention. This can be followed by introducing the concept of Doughnut Economics, showing that there's now a platform for everyone to participate in—where people can voice opinions, share knowledge, or provide data to help collectively build a safe and just space.

Outreach can also happen through workshops and similar activities, as outlined in approach 2.

Additionally, surveys and interviews with citizens could be conducted to gather opinions on information sharing, understand how they'd like to participate, and learn what outcomes they hope to see. This feedback would help tailor the platform to public interests and encourage deeper engagement.

## Features on DoughMate App

The app could feature three main modules: news, data service, and community. In the news module, users can access and comment on any newly published information related to the Mexico City Doughnut model. The initiative can also use this function to promote its events and campaigns, ensuring timely updates and encouraging user engagement. In the data service module, tailored Doughnut data would be collected, processed, stored, and published. Users with access can explore the published data in various formats, primarily through interactive data visualisations. This feature would allow users to engage with the data in a more dynamic and insightful way, enhancing understanding and analysis. The community module would serve as an open space for engaging diverse stakeholders, which would allow users to connect, exchange ideas, and collaborate on initiatives related to the Doughnut model, fostering active participation from various sectors.

## Roadmap on creating data

The co-creation of the data in the platform is through the interaction with users. The process to get the data within the platform, and the process of how users are informed and guided will be explained through the use of 5 phases:

- 1. Sign up:** in the first step users are asked basic questions (e.g. what are your needs and desires?, how do you imagine the future?) to share their thoughts, interests, needs and local preferences. This information is the input on the local targets and indicators used to create the personal doughnut.
- 2. Personal doughnut:** Is a visualisation of one's personal doughnut created based on the questions. This includes personal preferences, priorities, indicators and targets. The doughnut can further be personalised.

<sup>4</sup> Barns, S. (2018). Smart cities and urban data platforms: Designing interfaces for smart governance. *City, culture and society*, 12, 5-12.



**3. Modules:** After the doughnut is created each person will be added to community groups with other users who have the same indicators. Additionally, these groups with the same vision for Mexico City can work together on projects, share visions and identify shared interests.

**4. Revision:** Through the different models, and people with contrary visions, the perspective on topics will be broadened. Besides this, there is a chance to revise one's personal doughnut based on new insights of learned information. The personal doughnut is not fixed, but in motion as a fluid and constantly improving model.

**5. Action:** The platform can be used to help on projects which are worked on by Tricolor. It does have the possibility to start new collective projects. The end goal is to work towards your real creation of the just and safe space of Mexico City.

Those who need the data for research or educational purposes could access it by contributing to either data resources or money, building a collaborative and sustainable ecosystem. Since the government of Mexico City and official institutions have collected and analysed data on planetary boundaries, valuable and reliable information can be put on the data platform, on the condition that Tricolor successfully starts a research project cooperating with the government.

Using the water sector as an example of where these roadmap steps and other features of DoughMate could lead up to. Tricolor could create a "Water Doughnut" in DoughMate. A pilot region could be selected that already experiences a serious shortcoming, such as water scarcity in Iztapalapa<sup>5</sup>. This community could provide valuable insights into DoughMate implementation and testing of the "Water Doughnut" model, potentially fostering collaboration of Tricolor with local water management agencies. Focusing on a limited set of indicators and data at the first stage, subsequently, through collaboration with government agencies and other community-based or bottom-up initiatives, the "Water Doughnut" could be updated and refined to become more comprehensive and precise. Water-related data co-creation and sharing thus can be facilitated, while ensuring alignment with

Mexico City's broader ecological goals.

## Monitor & Evaluation

The transition to a sustainable society through the DE framework may take a significant amount of time and involve considerable uncertainty. For Tricolor, planning the process and identifying milestones (key stages) for the transition is crucial. Through data collection of the 'personal donuts', a reliable shared doughnut of Mexico City would be formed that incorporates a variety of perspectives. Furthermore, an increase in recognition of representative stakeholders can be achieved. Both these outcomes include stakeholders with intrinsic motivation to help work towards their just and safe space in Mexico City.

Tricolor can explore Theories of Change (ToC)<sup>6</sup> to evaluate the impact of the DoughMate platform. It is also a significant responsibility to monitor changes, ensuring that sustainability transition stays on track, understand which stage we are currently in, and determine next steps. It is necessary for Tricolor to be reflective of each decision or step by keeping the initial purpose in mind. Meanwhile, it could be encouraging for participants to know the effectiveness of their efforts. Also, citizens would expect positive outcomes through transition. Therefore, Tricolor can inform them of the progress, outcomes, and effects by applying tools or software of ToC. Also, evaluation results can be published in the DoughMate App. During the platform's operation, Tricolor can also analyse user profiles to see which users are most active and identify groups that haven't yet engaged. This insight can guide outreach efforts to make sure a broader range of people feel included and are encouraged to participate.

5 Think Hazard - Iztapalapa - Water scarcity. (n.d.). <https://www.thinkhazard.org/en/report/19830-mexico-district-federal-iztapalapa/DG>

6 Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (1998). Applying a theory of change approach to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: progress, prospects, and problems. *New approaches to evaluating community initiatives*, 2(15-44), 1-16.

# APPLYING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

To bridge the gap between the current state of Mexico City and the desired sustainable future that encompasses the DE model, steps need to be taken. One important step that we must take centres around the question “How to get everyone involved?”. Participation and cooperation of different stakeholders are important, to ensure that a sustainable and inclusive future can be realised. However, to achieve the participation and cooperation of different stakeholders, a suitable approach must be considered. Often futuring processes are designed by a specific group that intentionally or unintentionally prioritises the needs and desires of one group over the needs and desires of another group. This results in unequal outcomes which can negatively affect people. Therefore, it is important that we design a futuring approach that is inclusive and that incorporates all the needs and desires of all the different people living in Mexico City<sup>1</sup>.

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A suitable approach is through organising workshops and inviting different groups of people to participate. During these workshops, ideas, wishes, needs, and desires can be discussed. But it is also important to share fears and complaints. By organising workshops we can start conversations and discussions between people and start a dialogue on the future of Mexico City.

## Inclusive workshops for inclusive outcomes

To ensure full inclusivity and to involve everyone's needs and desires, workshops need to be designed in such a way that everyone's voice is heard. This means that the workshops need to be designed so that they create an inclusive and safe space that is inviting for all different kinds of people to attend. Having people attend the workshops and think about the future of Mexico City also contributes to the success of the outcomes. More inclusive and bottom-up ideas help people support feelings of

control over their actions and add a sense of responsibility for their decisions. This encourages them to take ownership of their choices and outcomes.

## What will these workshops look like?

Ensuring inclusivity in the process cannot be answered by applying one approach. Different groups have different needs and desires when it comes to the future of Mexico City, this also is true for the design of the workshops. Not every form of workshop is suitable for everyone. For some people, basic workshops would be sufficient, but some people might prefer other ways to engage in imagining the future of Mexico City. Therefore, multiple forms of workshops need to be considered to ensure everyone's participation. For example, workshops focussing on art or music that perhaps more reflect traditional Mexican cultures would be more suitable for certain groups of people than regular workshops would be.



*Future workshops (generated by Open AI)*

## Walkshops

One example is for workshops to be designed in forms of walkshops: tours and presentations in different parts of the city where people can show the sites and scenes that are important to them and about which they would like to talk. Through this method, important sites in Mexico City can be mapped. These walkshops can also be supported digitally, by pinning the mapped sites and adding them to a digital map. People can map things that are of importance to them. They can draw on the map and highlight sites that can play

<sup>1</sup> Schoon, M., & Cox, M. E. (2018). Collaboration, adaptation, and scaling: Perspectives on environmental governance for sustainability. *Sustainability*, 10(3), 679. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10030679>

a role in the creation of a sustainable future for Mexico City. The digital mapped sites can then be walked through digitally. This would make the tour more inclusive for people who have difficulties actually attending tours through the city. Through these virtual or on-site tours, all attendees of the workshops can get a better understanding of the living places of other people. And everyone will feel heard since they are able to show places that have significant importance to them in Mexico City. As a diverse group of people can attend these workshops, diverse perspectives on Mexico City will be shared. As a result, people will see the city through other views that are diverse, and they will get a better understanding of other people's views and perspectives on certain topics that come to play in Mexico City. Parts of the workshops could include serious games to introduce people to the initiative in a playful and interactive way<sup>2</sup>.

### **Incentives for inclusivity**

For the workshop to be attractive to people in the neighbourhood and the city, it needs to be clear from the start that people participating in the workshop will have a real opportunity to change and influence the decision-making process of the city. This will come through time, as the Tricolor Coalition makes a name for itself. However, in the beginning, collaboration with the governmental and scientific institutions involved in the workshops will be crucial to provide credibility. Moreover, it needs to be considered that some individuals might not have available time to join the workshop due to the necessity of going to work or caring for the family. Incentives for these people could come in the form of economic compensation for the time spent at the workshop, or in different kinds of compensation such as offering a group dinner for those participating in the workshop. Different workshops could also be scheduled at different times throughout the day tailored to the people usually available during those hours. The workshops also need to be engaging and interesting to keep people participating and involved. People need to feel like they are doing something real. When people feel that their values and opinions are taken seriously and will be considered when imagining the future of Mexico City, then they would feel more motivated to participate. Therefore Tricolor must emphasise

the importance and the value of people's voices being heard.

### **Tailoring the Workshop to Different Stakeholders**

The example shown above can be one of the types of workshops offered by the Tricolor Coalition in Mexico City. Although we recognize that one size does not fit all and that different people might need different kinds of workshops tailored to age groups, educational backgrounds, and digital access. Workshops can be tailored to for example classes of children in primary school to be more game-based. Or they could be tailored to people to introduce people to the data platform introduced in the previous chapter. These kinds of workshops could be used both to teach people how to interact with the data, but also to offer a space where people who do not have easy access to the internet or a laptop can still participate in the data process and eventually the creation of a better city for themselves. Moreover, we need to consider that tensions among stakeholder groups might arise during the workshop based on different views or other contexts. This is one more reason to tailor and monitor the workshop process closely during the designing and early implementation stages.

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<sup>2</sup> Utrecht University, (n.d.). *Utrecht2040: Gaming towards a sustainable future*. Retrieved October 31, 2024, from <https://utrecht2040.sites.uu.nl>

# EEN NIEUWE WERELD

Challenge capitalist monopoly of space



What could a more utopian classroom look and feel like?

Maps by CC4Utopians; exercise facilitated by Cara Flores



HOLION

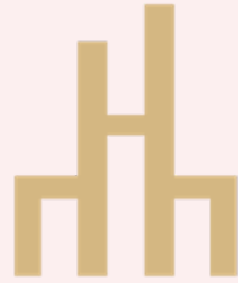
WEAVING CULTURAL  
HERITAGE AND  
SUSTAINABILITY  
INTO THE FABRIC OF  
TOMORROW

*Aine O’Nuanain  
Gwendolyn Philbrow  
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Yan He*

# WEAVING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY INTO THE FABRIC OF TOMORROW

**The Holistic Coalition of the Willing, or HoliCOW, committed to the values of sustainability, community, and spirit of Filipino identity, is a furniture and house goods collective based in Cebu City, Philippines. The coalition brings together designers, weavers, and manufacturers, primarily from the Visayas Region in Central Philippines, with various backgrounds, aesthetics, styles, and business views. Established during the economic recession in the Philippines in 2009, HoliCOW seeks to sustain cultural resilience of the Visayan weaving knowledge and practices, and raise their domestic recognition and appreciation, through mindful and sustainable designs.**

78 HoliCOW's vision of cultural resilience emphasizes that sustainability goes beyond environmental responsibility, but also demands the preservation of collective memories, shared experiences, and a strong sense of place. Cultural resilience, as HoliCOW envisions, is more than a static movement, but the capacity of the local community to construct shared values and thus form their collective cultural identity, that enables them to absorb challenges and disturbances, bouncing forward, under environmental, economic, and social pressures. Design, therefore, becomes a means of safeguarding the continuity of the Visayan weaving tradition, through durational encounters in practices of this cultural heritage and collaborative exchanges among designers, weavers, and manufacturers involved in the process of designing and making products. HoliCOW incorporates a relational approach that amplifies multiple temporalities for cultivating cultural resilience, centering the preservation of the Visayan weaving as long-lasting and



adaptive practices, that seek to trace Visayan stories and memories of land, culture, and identity into every weaving pattern. HoliCOW's guiding ethos is inspired by the Filipino cultural concept of *Malasakit*, meaning care and compassion<sup>1</sup>. Embodying *Malasakit* in their ways of organizing and working, HoliCOW also collaborates with indigenous artisans and grassroots organizations<sup>2</sup>. This approach nurtures a human-centered philosophy that aims to ethically and responsibly sustain and engage with Visayan weaving knowledge and practices, community well-being, and place-based materials.



1 Dagmang, F. D. (2008). *Malasakit* (compassion) and *damay* (empathetic assistance): An indigenous world-embedded compensation and resistance at the margins. *Unitas*, 81(2), 307-336.

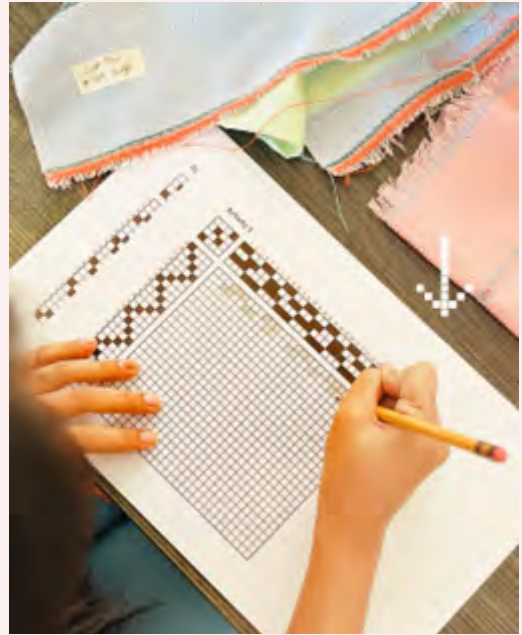
2 Dagooc, E. M. (2022, October 8). *Designer trio to showcase artisan products in Cebu*. Philstar. <https://www.philstar.com/the-freeman/cebu-business/2022/10/08/2215069/designer-trio-showcase-artisan-products-cebu>

Within this new future vision of a design paradigm that embodies *Malasakit* and a human-centered philosophy, in which HoliCOW finds themselves asking, *how can we make “them” care?* **In this, care refers to the serious attention or consideration about all aspects of the design process, the people, the traditional practices, the materials, and importantly, why should we design?** It is also this question, which we, a group of students from Utrecht University, aim to explore. It is a question that we are perhaps all too familiar with, in a world that continuously disconnects the individual from the collective, nature from humans, and culture from nature.

As we delve into this question, we explore two key perspectives (them): those of the consumers who engage with HoliCOW's products and those of the designers who create them. Each perspective plays a unique and influential role in advancing cultural resilience.

Focusing on consumers is important as they are not just buyers but potential supporters of cultural continuity. For HoliCOW, making consumers care is a significant challenge since there is no longer any insight into how consumers engage with a product and its “HoliCOW message” after it is purchased. The perspective of the designers, meanwhile, is equally crucial as they serve as cultural stewards whose creative work bridges traditional craftsmanship with contemporary designs over time, to preserve the weaving memories and knowledge across generations.

Whilst asking the question “How to make them care?”, it is important to acknowledge our own positionality as researchers. Even though we work closely with HoliCOW, we recognise that we, situated in the Netherlands, are not members of the Visayan or broader Filipino culture, thus our analysis and approach reflect an external perspective. Much of the insight gathered in this article comes from in-depth interviews with Kae Batiquin, a manager and designer of HoliCOW, whose perspectives help root our conversation in the lived experiences and values of HoliCOW's community. Our role is to facilitate a conversation about how consumers and designers can meaningfully connect with and safeguard cultural resilience while ensuring that this dialogue remains rooted in the values and experiences that HoliCOW and its community hold.



# HOLI COW'S JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

**To understand the relationship between HoliCOW and its primary consumers who actively engage with the value and core identity of HoliCOW, a distinction between the different types of consumers must be made: (1) the direct customer that purchases sustainable, fair trade products through HoliCOW (B2C), (2) businesses or institutions that have a relationship regarding purchasing products or collaborating with HoliCOW (B2B), and (3) the customer of said business or institution that has a relationship with HoliCOW (proxy B2C). These three types of consumers all care differently about the values that HoliCOW aims to convey.**

## Mapping the Key Consumer Challenges

HoliCOW serves as a vital link between creators — designers, weavers, and manufacturers — and consumers, aiming to share the creators' cultural stories, protect their craft, and support their livelihoods. However, achieving true cultural resilience while fostering meaningful consumer engagement involves navigating several interconnected challenges.

One of the central challenges lies in balancing sustainable practices with traditional economic growth models. In a world constrained by finite resources, HoliCOW resists the pressure to adhere to the model of continuous, linear growth, advocating instead for a value-driven approach that benefits both creators and consumers without straining ecological limits. This philosophy aligns closely with Tim Jackson's Prosperity Without Growth<sup>1</sup>, which argues that "more isn't necessarily better." HoliCOW's guiding principle of Malasakit—a commitment to mutual care and respect—emerges from this worldview, embracing a holistic approach where creators and consumers work in tandem to protect cultural heritage and sustain the ecosystem that supports it.

Operating within these ecological boundaries, HoliCOW acknowledges that creators are not

merely producers of endless goods but individuals whose work requires fair, humane treatment and sustainable conditions. HoliCOW's artisans and collaborators are engaged in preserving and revitalizing traditional practices, yet they face the constraints of finite materials, time, and energy<sup>2-3</sup>. Recognizing these limitations underscores HoliCOW's commitment to responsible production processes that prioritize quality, craftsmanship, and respect for human labor over sheer volume.

Compounding these material limitations is the challenge of unsustainable consumer use. While HoliCOW collaborates with artisans to produce sustainable, culturally significant items, these products often encounter consumer habits that prioritize fast consumption over mindful, long-term engagement. This temporal disconnect complicates HoliCOW's mission to promote cultural resilience, as the quick turnover of products runs counter to the notion of fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage and craftsmanship. By promoting the principle of Malasakit, HoliCOW encourages consumers to move beyond mere ownership and participate in a broader, culturally resonant cycle of care.

Another key challenge emerges from the hierarchical dynamics that can form between consumers and HoliCOW. The conventional, linear relationship between producer and consumer often reduces cultural products to commodities, undermining the inclusive and participatory identity that HoliCOW strives to build. HoliCOW's vision seeks to dismantle this hierarchy, advocating for a model where consumers are not passive recipients but active participants in cultural preservation. By cultivating these bidirectional relationships, HoliCOW envisions a community of consumers who contribute thoughtfully to the survival and flourishing of cultural practices.

<sup>1</sup> Jackson, T. (2009). Prosperity without growth: Economics for a finite planet. Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Kallis, G., Paulson, S., D'Alisa, G., & Demaria, F. (2020). The case for degrowth. John Wiley & Sons

<sup>3</sup> Bocken, N. M., Short, S. W., Rana, P., & Evans, S. (2014). A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes. Journal of cleaner production, 65, 42-56.



Finally, a general lack of consumer awareness regarding the concept of cultural resilience presents a significant barrier. Many consumers may lack a comprehensive understanding of what cultural resilience entails or how their purchasing choices impact it. This knowledge gap complicates efforts to inspire meaningful consumer care and connection. HoliCOW addresses this challenge by engaging in educational outreach and storytelling that communicate the importance of preserving cultural heritage and the labor that sustains it. Through this model, consumers become not just buyers but contributors to a shared legacy, helping to ensure that traditional crafts and the ecosystems supporting them endure.

Through its commitment to Malasakit, HoliCOW fosters a reciprocal relationship in which both creators and consumers play essential roles. By viewing consumers as partners in cultural preservation rather than mere buyers, HoliCOW promotes a sustainable cycle of engagement where consumption actively contributes to cultural resilience, community support, and environmental sustainability.

### Imagining the future: consumers who do care

To address HoliCOW's challenges, we envision a framework centered on active consumer participation, making HoliCOW a curator of value for their consumers through bidirectional exchanges of values and information. This future-oriented model reframes HoliCOW as both a receiver and provider of knowledge, deepening its role as a dynamic hub for sustainability and cultural resilience.

Beyond HoliCOW individual consumers, HoliCOW's role as a knowledge resource extends to businesses and institutions (B2B) that may lack awareness or understanding of sustainable value chains and cultural resilience. In this envisioned future, HoliCOW takes on a role as "knowledge hub" or "knowledge broker," guiding these organizations toward a more ethically informed and sustainable approach<sup>3 4</sup>. In doing so, HoliCOW not only preserves cultural heritage but also inspires a broader movement for sustainability and responsible consumption.

### Building Bidirectional Consumer Relationships

The proposed new Knowledge hub role for HoliCOW is crucial to resisting the continuation of unsustainable and unethical economic growth, and the related need for more weavers, designers, and creators within the coalition. The collective knowledge of HoliCOW's network of creators becomes a core component of the value HoliCOW offers to consumers, allowing this expertise to be curated with intention and care. However, positioning HoliCOW as a "knowledge hub" could risk establishing a power imbalance among the broker, the knowledge holders, and the consumers. This potential hierarchy can be prevented by repositioning HoliCOW not merely as a "knowledge hub," but as a "Nexus" or "Exchange." This reframing encourages a collaborative, non-linear structure where relationships are fluid and reciprocal or bidirectional, breaking down power imbalances and fostering cultural exchange and learning<sup>5</sup>.

In this bidirectional nexus, besides curating expertise, HoliCOW also curates consumers. This entails that HoliCOW can prioritise which consumers to engage with based on their initial alignment with HoliCOW's values. HoliCOW may be able to identify potential consumers. Engaging these consumers might require more effort to establish a shared understanding, yet their inclusion enriches the cultural landscape HoliCOW seeks to preserve. Through these meaningful, intentional exchanges, consumers gain the agency to participate in cultural resilience.

The approach could be refined to focus on three key actions: **(1) Identifying and understanding consumer needs:** using a framework to pinpoint consumers' wants, needs, aims, and goals. This helps align HoliCOW's educational offerings and cultural storytelling with the knowledge gaps consumers may not know they have, creating a pathway for them to actively engage in cultural resilience, **(2) Redefining and revitalizing past consumer relationships:** By revisiting past, yet currently inactive, consumer relationships, HoliCOW can build on previously fruitful interactions, creating a foundation for more resilient connections, **(3) Prioritizing consumer engagement:** Curating which consumers to focus

4 Meyer, M. (2010). The rise of the knowledge broker. *Science communication*, 32(1), 118-127.

5 Svensson, G. (2003). Consumer driven and bidirectional value chain diffusion models. *European Business Review*, 15(6), 390-400.

on allows HoliCOW to strengthen relationships with those who are most aligned with its mission, creating deeper and more impactful connections that promote cultural sustainability.

By focusing on these practices, HoliCOW strengthens its role as a cultural curator, reinforcing its commitment to cultural resilience and ethical consumer engagement. Through this hands-on strategy, HoliCOW not only curates value but cultivates a mindful community, bridging creators and consumers in a shared mission of cultural resilience.

# APPENDING BIDIRECTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS A PERSON-DRIVEN FRAMEWORK

To accomplish the three previously mentioned actions for HoliCOW as a Knowledge Nexus, a framework is created. This framework can be used by HoliCOW to strengthen the imaginary where they function as a curator of value, identifying wants, needs, aims, and goals as well as developing bidirectional relationships described previously. This framework is built from the perspective of the three types of consumers (B2C, B2B, and proxy B2C). Three categories that encapsulate each consumer have been identified. These are Product Preference, Level of Knowledge, and Emotional State of Mind. To gain a better understanding of each category, fictional personas have been made to generate and understand certain key indicators<sup>1</sup>.

## Meet Kees van der Zanden

To illustrate the consumer relationship of business-to-consumer, the persona of consumer Kees van der Zanden is described. Kees is a general practitioner (GP) in the Netherlands. His story entails one of a consumer who is still searching for a product that fully encompasses his wants and needs in preference. His level of knowledge on topics such as sustainability, or what cultural resilience might be, is not integrated into his lifestyle currently.

Emotionally, Kees began as a curious individual but has grown into a stoic, pragmatic figure. Brand loyalty is a defining trait for him, shaped by years as a GP. He consistently favors trusted brands over newer, unfamiliar ones - a preference reflected in his choices. From his electronic devices to his car, and even his daily coffee (either brewed at home or ordered from a barista with familiar beans), Kees prefers products within a well-established ecosystem. While his wife makes most choices for their home interior, Kees has full control over the design of his professional workspace - a space he has yet to fully conceptualize. He imagines a future of comfort in this environment but has not yet decided on the specifics of who will design it or what

If you are interested in learning more about the other consumers (B2B & proxy B2C), a luxury hotel in the Philippines and a doctorate of design at the University of Santa Catarina, check out this QR code!



it will look like. His vision centers on creating a work atmosphere that reflects his steady personality and enhances comfort and his daily routine.

## Key indicators

The three categories of product preference, levels of knowledge, and emotional state of mind have been explored using the persona approach and show certain specific key indicators that connect with the core identity of HoliCOW. These, however, are merely suggestive which gives HoliCOW the opportunity to add or change indicators. The indicators are measured using a five-star rating system: 0/1 star = not present and 5 stars fully present. For product preference, the indicators (see Persona Profile) connect back to HoliCOW's mission to overcome unsustainable use of products and a deeper appreciation of cultural heritage and craftsmanship.

The consumer's wants and needs on the indicators of sustainability, comfort, durability, and aesthetic design complement the functionality of the products HoliCOW's creators make. The indicator that might stand out is that of affordability. HoliCOW is inherently a commercial operating business, even though it openly resists economic business models that are built on growth through either economies of scale or scope<sup>2</sup>. However, understanding the positionality of the consumer on what is affordable and what is not, does create a broader understanding of the consumer in their preferences of product.

The indicators within the levels of knowledge that a consumer might have, are related to opportunities to build, share, and shape similar worldviews between HoliCOW and its consumer. On each topic, HoliCOW can invite curious consumers to

<sup>1</sup> Miaskiewicz, T., & Kózar, K. A. (2011). Personas and user-centered design: How can personas benefit product design processes?. *Design studies*, 32(5), 417-430.

<sup>2</sup> Christensen, C. M. (2001). Competitive advantage. *MIT Sloan management review*, 42(2), 105-109.

learn whilst inviting knowledgeable consumers to share. Opening the possibilities to bidirectional relationships on topics that stand closely to the core identity of HoliCOW. Understanding the levels of knowledge of a consumer opens up the positionality HoliCOW can take towards the consumer and the opportunity to care more deeply about the relationship. These indicators are provided in the persona profile image.

HoliCOW has shown the importance of sustainability throughout their process, the care about the creators and designers, as well as the story conveyed and sustained through the eyes of the indigenous creators and designers that capture the knowledge of cultural resilience. These are not self-evident topics that consumers might have knowledge on and could be found in either conversational or interview-type of extractational mechanisms to understand more clearly what level of knowledge the consumer might have.

Finally, different types of consumer mindsets reside in all of us at one point in time. The possibility of having a significantly different future where only “one type” of typical consumer mindset is present is something we cannot account for<sup>3</sup>. These different types of consumer mindsets help understand what indicators within the emotional state of mind connect to the mission and vision of a consumer “caring” about cultural resilience. These indicators are shown in the image of Persona Profile.

These indicators can be understood as follows. The capability of the consumer to be empathetic to the message of cultural resilience generates opportunities between HoliCOW and the consumer to connect on a deeper level. The consumer having a level of social responsibility to the morals and values of HoliCOW creates opportunities for communicating and safeguarding values that are shared. If the consumer can be empowered by newly attained products or knowledge, possible opportunities to reinforce messaging on culture and cultural resilience exist. The capabilities of the consumer to be open to receive new knowledge and to be transparent on how to use that knowledge, generates opportunities for HoliCOW to share knowledge and invite those who have knowledge, to connect these two.

## Shaping bidirectional relationships and reflexivity

With the potential outcomes of understanding which consumer scores best in which category, we identified several reflexive questions that consider the positionality HoliCOW can take a stance. Understanding the consumer on the levels of the proposed categories still leaves the question “What lessons can we learn from the desirable futures of these consumers?”. Are there any experiences or visions of the future that consumers can share with HoliCOW, and which potential lesson would HoliCOW take up? This connects to the relationship of shared understanding and alignment of visions of the future.

Furthermore, HoliCOW could consider if every consumer feedback is necessary to incorporate into the design and production process. The focus on creating interactions between consumers and HoliCOW can lead to lessons on ways to shape future products or the way knowledge is shared. To enable consumer interaction with either products or knowledge, another question can be raised: “What forms and formats of knowledge provision are appropriate, and can the consumer interact with?”. The use of social media platforms, blog posts, information booklets, celebratory and informational events, or even “peer-2peer” workshops comes to mind. Finally, what perspectives are included? Engaging and curating the consumer might lead to certain biases that pick and choose only consumers that score a certain way. The challenge for HoliCOW in that regard is to question themselves on the range of each indicator what worldviews, perspectives, values, and priorities might be missing in the output that still could deliver value towards making the consumer care about cultural resilience. What can still be learned from these excluded perspectives if there are any?

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, R., & Karmarkar, U. R. (2017). The 4 minds of the customer: a framework for understanding and applying the science of decision making. Marketing Science Institute Working Paper Series, 17-109.

Do the visions of a desirable future align?


Shared understanding of (importance of) knowledge indicators

Providing knowledge on 'indicator gaps'

Share meaningful interaction with product and message of HolicoW

Incorporate consumer wants and needs in design

Lessons from desirable futures of consumers

<b>PERSONA: NAME</b>			
Description of persona			
<b>PRODUCT PREFERENCE</b>			
Sustainability	★★★★★	Affordability	★★★★★
Comfort	★★★★★	Aesthetic design	★★★★★
Durability	★★★★★		
<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>		<b>EMOTION</b>	
Sustainability	★★★★★	Empathy	★★★★★
Rights/Wellbeing	★★★★★	Social Responsibility	★★★★★
History of colonialization/ decolonization	★★★★★	Empowerment	★★★★★
Cultural Resilience	★★★★★	Openness	★★★★★
		Transparency	★★★★★
<b>VISIONS OF THE FUTURE</b>			
Description of the persona's desirable future			



# FROM EXPERT TO OPEN DESIGN PARADIGM

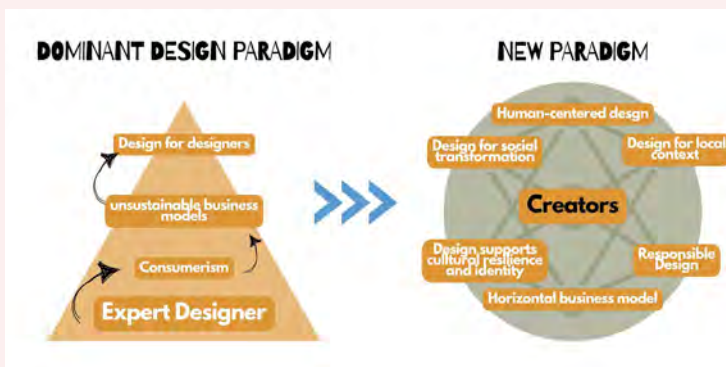
## What are the dominant imaginaries we are trying to counter?

We are in a time of radical transformation in nearly every domain of human and non-human life. Standing at the cross-roads between the dominant system of limitless economic growth and unlimited planetary boundaries, and those who imagine worlds otherwise, there are choices to be made that propel us toward desired futures. How then, can design be used to not only solve the diverse problems our societies are and will face, but produce and embody the values, and qualities needed for a new civilisation<sup>1</sup>?

It is within these dominant neoliberal and unfettered, market-led globalisation imaginaries that our question; “how to make “them” care?” is situated. Within this world of profit and growth-oriented actions, the relationship between creator and outcome has been co-opted. The dominant design paradigm that accompanied industrialism in the 20th century is characterised by its utility in promoting consumerism<sup>2</sup>. With this, the idea of circularity and a non-linear temporality of the “product” has subsequently been removed and placed as a secondary consideration, when values happen to

align with feasibility within a growth economy<sup>3</sup>. As scholar Arturo Escobar writes (2018) “[...] *design is central to the structures of unsustainability that hold in place the contemporary, so-called modern world*” (p.1).

As a result, a range of (un)intended consequences emerge from the dominant design paradigm which attempts to facilitate a destructive neoliberal worldview, which HoliCOW also identified. These consequences are manifested as unsustainable business models driving design, where the law of supply and demand has become the primary force for production. Additionally, design has become hierarchical, where the creative force lies primarily with a formally educated expert, creating designer-centred design rather than human-centred design processes. Furthermore, if design belongs only to the realm of experts, it creates a binary between expert and non-expert, therefore risk excluding “non-expert” design approaches and knowledge that might perhaps be even more appropriate to apply to a certain context. Cultural appropriation, a global indigenous political discourse<sup>3</sup>, is an important entry point into broader concerns surrounding hierarchical structures in design. Defined as a set of actions that misrepresents, exploits, and adopts indigenous communities and their knowledge, cultures, and practices



1 Manzini, E. (2015). *Design, when everybody designs: An introduction to design for social innovation*. The MIT Press.

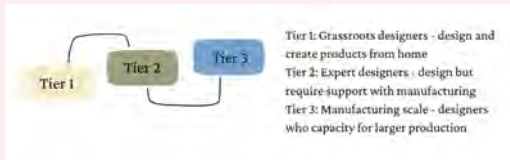
2 Stebbing, P., & Tischner, U. (2015). *Changing paradigms: designing for a sustainable future*. Aalto University.

3 Kramvig, B., & Flemmen, A. B. (2018). Turbulent indigenous objects: Controversies around cultural appropriation and recognition of Difference. *Journal of Material Culture*, 24(1), 64–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183518782719>

4 Coombe, R. J. (1993). The properties of culture and the politics of possessing identity: Native claims in the cultural appropriation controversy. *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence*, 6(2), 249–285. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s084182090001922>

outside one's own, cultural appropriation risks marginalising indigenous voices and undermining authenticity of indigenous cultures and traditions[14]. How, in what ways, by and for whom, and under what conditions, can the traditional weaving knowledge and practices of the Visayan communities in the Philippines be ethically and responsibly preserved and sustained through design?

While this paradigm of design still very much persists, a new paradigm of design is emerging, consequently redefining what design is<sup>2,5</sup>. In this new paradigm, what does it mean to “design”? And who are considered “designers”? First, there is no one definition of what design is, but generally, design is everywhere, from the largest and most intricate structures to aspects of everyday life<sup>5</sup>.



So, who designs? Ezio Manzini, in the book *Design, When Everybody Designs*<sup>1</sup>, envisions design not merely as the domain of trained professionals, but as an open, collaborative, and participative activity that everyone can engage in. However, professional designers can still play an essential role in connecting diverse grassroots innovations for social transformation. What Manzini emphasises is that design should become a blend of contributions from both professionals and the community to achieve social innovation<sup>1</sup>.

And most essentially, Manzini<sup>1</sup> emphasizes that **everyone designs**. Inviting new imaginaries of design to be participatory, plural, and collaborative, which indeed rethinks the entire concept of design. The idea that the designer is the central force is changing, where design is increasingly recognised

to happen within complex systems, with active participation of “non-designers”<sup>15</sup>. It is within this new design imaginary that the vision of HoliCOW oriented. Therefore, the question “how to make them care” focuses on how to make designers care about the important relationship between design and social transformation for sustainability.

### Who is “them”?

In the context of HoliCOW, the lines between designers and artisans are blurred. HoliCOW incorporates not only those experts traditionally seen as designers, but local indigenous artisans as well. Within HoliCOW there are three tiers of designers, breaking down the traditional idea of who is considered a designer. The tiering system allows for the encompassing of those who in some cases may not be deemed designers as they are not “experts” Additionally, the relationship between artisans and designers at all tiers is characterised as a process of co-creation, where all play an essential role in both the designer and production of the product.

Given the ambiguity between designer and artisan, we propose the word creator, a holistic word that encapsulates this broader definition of what it means to design and be a designer. Using this approach responds to Escobar’s<sup>5</sup> challenge of reimagining design to serve beyond the dominant paradigm of design, to look “toward other ontological commitments, practise, narratives, and performances?” and “could design become part of the tool kit for transitions toward the pluriverse?” (p.15). HoliCOW creates space for this kind of transition by beginning to break down the dominant design paradigm, but the previously mentioned hierarchy can still arise as there are differences in power between and within tiers.

We use the iterative learning spiral to guide the process of challenging this issue of hierarchies arising and other (un)intended consequences and envisioning new imaginaries through a futuring approach. The futuring will be further explained, but it is important to understand how these elements are part of iterative learning practice. Focusing on the spiral and embracing an iterative process allows for a constant examination and alteration of the futuring approach. This encourages the return to ideas repeatedly, deepening the understanding and meaning of them. By looking at concepts iteratively, there is also an opportunity for inclusive participation as new perspectives emerge and space is given to them.



<sup>5</sup> Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press.

# MAPPING FOR CULTURAL RESILIENCE – THE CREATOR'S ROLE

## Mapping

With the aim to preserve and transmit indigenous Visayan traditions into resilient relationships and practices, we propose a mapping exercise, as the futuring approach. It seeks to engage creators to interrogate their design processes, and therefore form new imaginaries of design, through reflecting on their own practices and contesting dominant narratives. We hope that the mapping exercise can be a tool for creators to imagine a culturally resilient future, where design is to be more conscious and responsible in regard to what constitutes a design process, such as materials, patterns, techniques, and labours, beyond simply making a product.

To manifest this mapping exercise, we suggest the launch of an annual Mapping workshop, a collaborative “kin-making” gathering, where members of the creator community come together to share and learn from one another, through embracing the value of co-creation and reflexivity.

In the workshop, rather than handing down fixed rules and guidelines for creators to follow, we hope to cultivate a space, in which creators

spontaneously nurture their senses of care and responsibility in engaging with natural materials, indigenous weaving practices, and cultural lives that these practices sustain. This embodiment of respect for the craft, the material, the land, and each other requires an iterative process, echoing the spirit of the spiral, that can open up chances for fostering cyclical patterns of continuous reflection, learning, and refinement of knowledges and practices across time and space. We imagine this endless circle encouraging creators to collaboratively revisit and deepen their understandings on the meaning of co-creation and their responsibilities to the weaving tradition that inspires their work and life, forming the basis for ethical, respectful, and reciprocal creativity that dissolves the binary between the past, present, and future, through constant conversations and reflections.

Storytelling is central to this Mapping workshop, for everyone in this community to claim a safe and collective space to be heard, recognized, and empowered<sup>1</sup>, through sharing and listening to one another's feelings, passions, successes, struggles, and disconnections in designing processes experienced respectively in the past year. Translating

## WORKSHOP ELEMENTS



<sup>1</sup> Halder, S., & Michel, B. (2018). Editorial-this is not an Atlas. This Is Not an Atlas, 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839445198-001>



their personal experiences, situated in diverse places and moments, into shared languages for creators to understand one another, sensorially strengthens a more interactive engagement and intimate connection among the creator community, to establish a collective cultural identity that is essential for cultural resilience<sup>2</sup>. This act of communal sharing, without external narratives that intervene and dominate the (re)presentation of indigenous weaving traditions and practices, serves as a powerful mechanism for maintaining the authenticity of indigenous cultural heritage, and fostering a staying ownership and agency to pass on Visayan indigenous weaving memories and knowledges through generations.

We also envision such a dialectical process of storytelling and sharing as a form of resistance against potential cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and estrangement between the creator community and the origin of Visayan weaving. This is to say, creators are also encouraged to contemplate their implicatedness in their everyday design practices, and the care, ethics, responsibility, and reciprocity needed throughout the process, for the transmission of the cultural heritage of weaving, thus preserving and sustaining Visayan cultures and practices alive.

### **What are possible elements of the workshop? Who is going to organize the workshop?**

The annual workshop can include presentations about the materials and patterns used in the current designs/collections. This element offers a tangible and immersive experience to the workshop as it allows the members of the creators' community to engage with the materials and patterns used in their designs. The creators can each showcase the materials that are at the heart of their designs, discuss their origins, production and manufacturing methods but also discuss the ecological and cultural impact that is ingrained in their works. Adopting this approach aligns with the circular design mindset, which recommends "to make smart material choices by asking the right questions" which can "help you make better choices about what materials go into your products as well as their impact on the wider system"<sup>3</sup>. To follow a more guided approach for activities that can be carried out, have a glance at Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2024's methods in the "Circular Design Guide"<sup>4</sup>.

Roundtable discussions can also be integrated in the workshop as a collective space for practical, goal-oriented dialogues to occur. These discussions are an invitation for members of the creator community to collectively brainstorm for ways to tackle issues surrounding ethical practices,

## **EXAMPLES OF REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

*"How do people report the role of co-creation in feeling ownership, agency and control over the creative practice?"*

*"What pre-existing notions about the world are being challenged, integrated, or adapted?"*

*"Whose perspectives are included and not included?"*

*"Has the co-creative process led to new connections among people?"*

2 Wilmott, C. (2020). *Mobile Mapping*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx8b7zc>

3 Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2016). *Smart material choices. How to Build a Circular Economy*. <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/smart-material-choices>

4 Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2024). *Methods. How to Build a Circular Economy*. <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-design-guide/methods>

sustainable and user-centred design choices and cultural resilience. This process should be an active a participatory practice where it is a “conversation among individuals and groups who set design initiatives rolling at the nodes of the networks they are part of: a social conversation in which different actors interact in different ways (from collaborating to conflicting) and at different times (in real time or off-line)”<sup>5</sup>. Through these discussions the members of the co-creators can draw upon their shared knowledge and narratives to establish practical standards about how to carry out ethical and sustainable design practices.

For example, the CreaturesFramework has reflection questions for creatives to ponder how their practices reflect care, imagination, and co-creation, that can help guide a more reflexive process of design and creation<sup>6</sup>.

We highly suggest that there is a diversity in creators from each tier to volunteer and help organise the annual workshop, and strongly emphasise that the indigenous creators from the tiers take ownership and agency of the Visayan weaving when it comes to facilitating the workshop. The notions of transparency and inclusivity should be

at the forefront of the planning process to ensure all the participants can address questions freely and collectively manage resources. Please also note that the elements described above are not an exhaustive list of but rather a suggestion of ways the workshop can be carried out and can differ based on the main topics or themes that arise during discussions of the year.

The workshop aims to be grounded in the core principles which are co-creation, reflexivity, temporality and of course staying true to the Filipina concept of *malasakit* (care and compassion).

### What will potentially come after the Mapping Workshop?

As we recognize that cultural resilience cannot be stitched by the hands of a few, but instead requires a collective societal effort, beyond the enclosed circle of creators, we also envision opening the work and sharing the fruit of the annual Mapping Workshop with the broader public in Cebu. It is an invitation for those who might feel relatively unsure and unfamiliar to the matter of preserving traditional Visayan weaving knowledges and practices to touch, see, and hear what have been

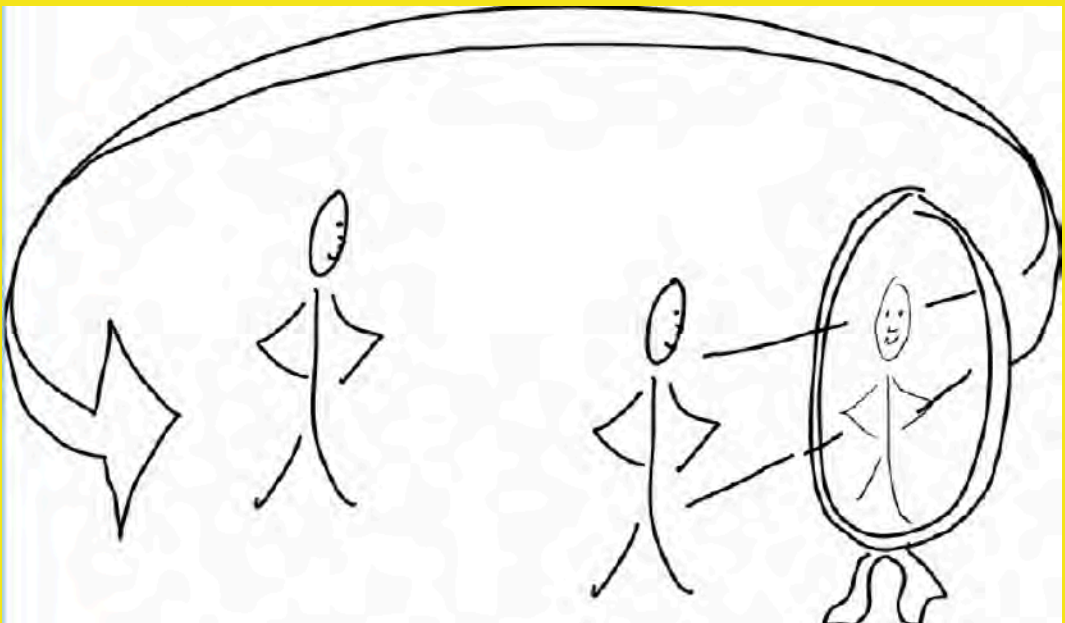


Image: Markham (2017)

5 Manzini, E. (2015). *Design, when everybody designs: An introduction to design for social innovation*. The MIT Press.

6 CreaTures. (n.d.). CreaTures: Creative practices for transformational futures. CreaTures Framework. <https://creaturesframework.org/>

crafted and stories behind, to resist the structural loss of cultures and identities as time passes by.

It is up to the creator community engaging in the Mapping Workshop to brainstorm and shape the form of the annual presentation and showcase of the ancestral weaving patterns, place-based materials, enduring weaving techniques, and how creators implicate themselves in creating a tangible repertoire of embodied weaving knowledges and practices in history of time, to reconstitute their interconnectedness to the past and a sense of cultural identity. One potential form of further engaging the wider societal engagement is to create a weaving festival to celebrate the indigenous knowledge and techniques of weaving, where raw materials, weaving methods and patterns, and aesthetic forms speak of close connections to the land, to the people, and to time itself.

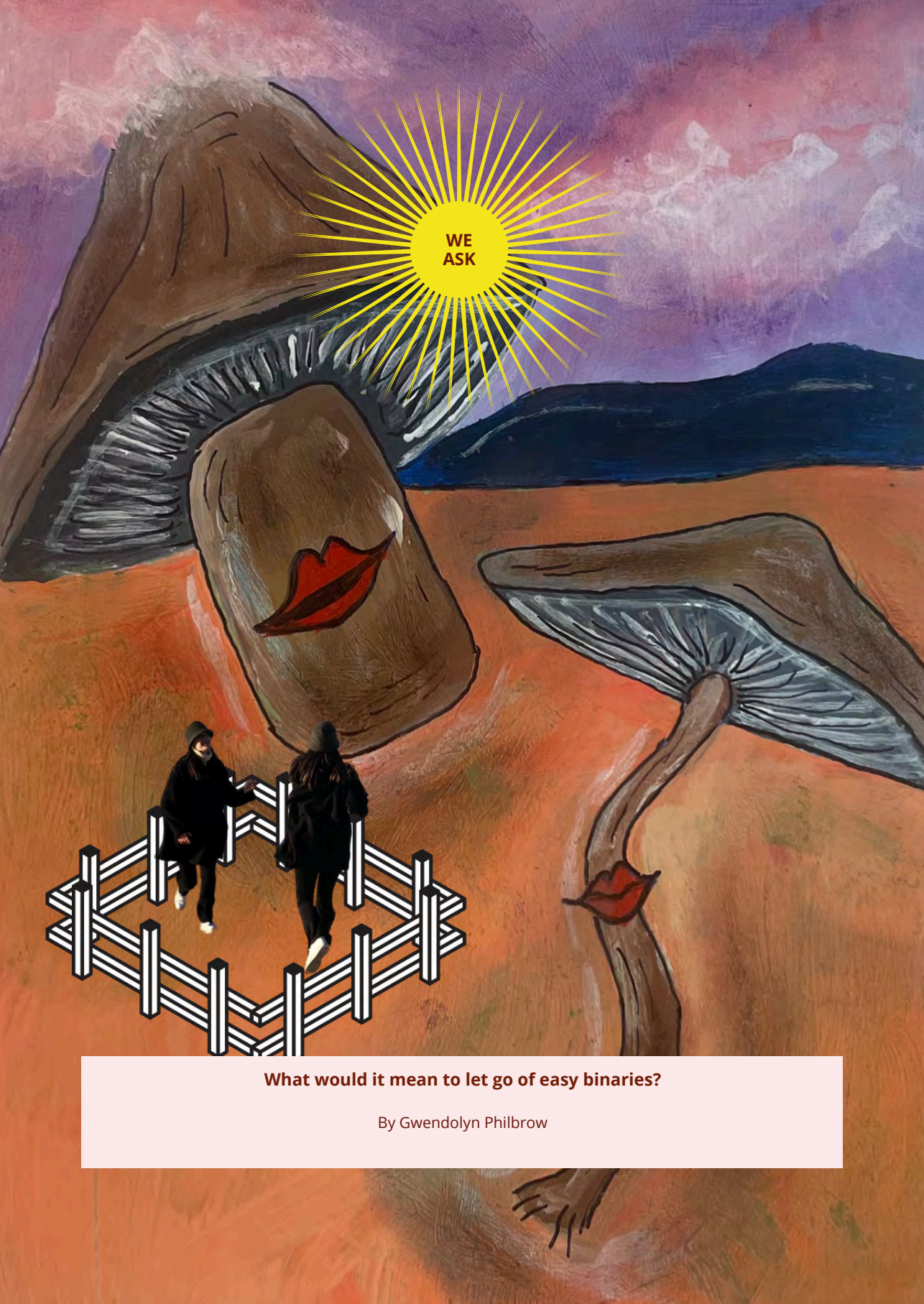
In this way, the Mapping Workshop becomes a borderless gathering, in which the society as a whole is tied up to the land and history of Visayan weaving, emotionally attaching various generations together and therefore cultivating a sense of belonging and identity to their shared stories and cultures. The materiality of memorization can then organically foster a communal solidarity and responsibility that enhances the visibility of indigenous weaving and thus strengthens cultural resilience.

### **Limitations**

The capacity of the proposed futuring approach of mapping is constrained by the lack of opportunity for us to get to know and have conversations with creators engaged in the design process in the Philippines, to thoroughly understand and embody their feelings, needs, and struggles along the way into our considerations and motivations. While we intend to position this mapping approach as a means of bringing creators and their perspectives together, for encouraging co-creation and forming solidarity, that are considered crucial for building shared understandings and collective efforts for cultural resilience, the absence of substantial involvements and voices from the creator community in the process of shaping the mapping exercise and workshop is a critical limitation. Without their direct and active participation, our approach is insufficient for the presented 'co-creation' with those central to the work, that risks imposing our external vision, without reciprocity and shared agency needed for

meaningful cultural collaborations.

Furthermore, potentially overlooking challenges, such as power relations, social hierarchies, and contextual situatedness, that the creator community, particularly indigenous creators, might encounter, we might simplify or misinterpret their needs, but merely assume our vision for the future of cultural resilience aligns with theirs, therefore overstepping their own ways and ongoing efforts that they have invested in preserving and sustaining the Visayan weaving tradition. In doing so, we might inadvertently limit the space for the creator community to pursue and preserve the weaving knowledges and practices in ways that are in line with their values and indigenous cultural contexts.



WE  
ASK

**What would it mean to let go of easy binaries?**

By Gwendolyn Philbrow

# IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF TRANSFORMATION PLAYLIST



<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2pPfU8SnBDvHys8hsr6wGa?si=633b5f767d1c4711>

*“Through its capacity to communicate that which is not (yet) utterable, music is uniquely capable of conveying and effecting a better world; it invokes, as well as prefigures, that world.”*

— Ruth Levitas

WE ASK

Dear reader,  
I am so glad that you have found this message. I want to talk to you about the future, the present and the past. As I am writing this, my now is your past and when you are reading this, your now is my future. The past, present and future are entangled and we will see here what that means for us when imagining the future. Are you ready to think about the future?

The widespread vision of the future is becoming increasingly grey and hopeless, marked by catastrophic and despair. It becomes harder and harder to imagine a way out of the steadily growing pile of problems. Our future is becoming increasingly uncertain, society is changing and we have no control. It's scary, isn't it? We have reached what Malgon (2020) terms the crisis of the imagination. If I am honest to you, I have reached their same crisis. I was losing sight of a better life, thinking that my idea of the future wouldn't materialise. Until I learned how much our imagination influences the past, present and the future. So, I want to share with you some things that I have learned about futuring. I want to show you how important our imaginations are and how our imaginations from now will materialise in the future. Let's create a future that gives hope.

orientation, creation and dissemination of images of futuring, relationships between past, present and future. Inquiries of 'Futuring' are practices that come to share particular ways that our future is an integral part of imagination is (Becker, 2008). There are many different approaches. The predictive approach which are often used in relation to do so.

If you wrote a letter to the future, what would you say?

By Chiara Holtschneider



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*Visions of Better Worlds* is a zine created by students of the 2024 master's elective 'Imagining the Future for Transformation', organised by the Urban Futures Studio.



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