

# Sustain'ability' in higher education in times of crises

what needs sustaining? what needs disrupting? what abilities?

what kind of education?

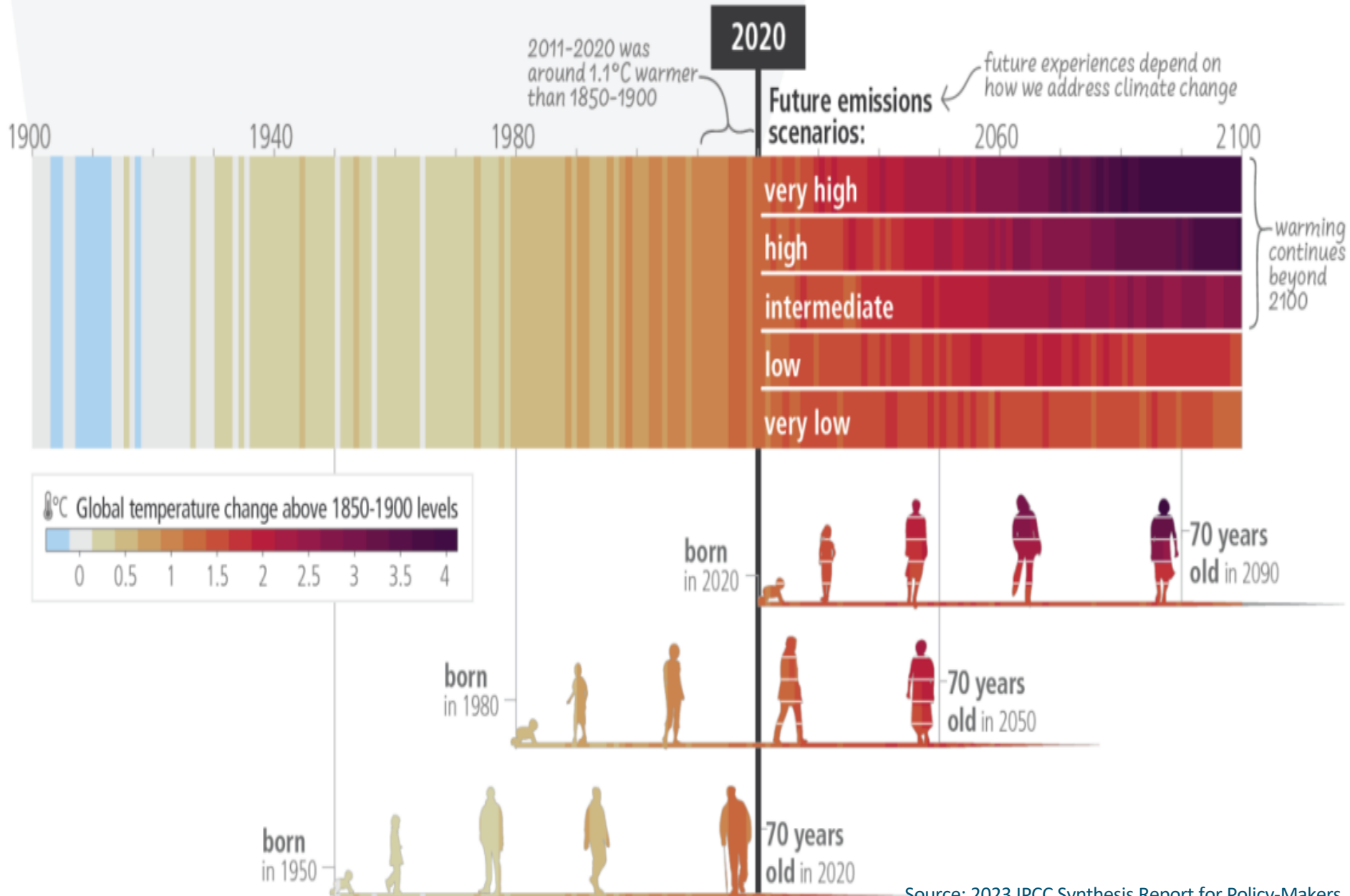
Conversation Starter VU Education Day (15-02-2024)

Arjen Wals

Wageningen University/UNESCO Chair/Norwegian Life Science University



### c) The extent to which current and future generations will experience a hotter and different world depends on choices now and in the near-term







CONFIDENT REFRESH  
NATURAL  
CLEANSING & SOOTHE



CONFIDENT REFRESH  
UPLIFTING INVIGORATE  
ENERGISE  
RESTORE HAPPY



CONFIDENT REFRESH  
UPLIFTING INVIGORATE  
ENERGISE  
RESTORE HAPPY

Shampoo & conditioners

Shampoo & conditioners

15



£1.10 £1



£1.20 £1.50



£1.50 £2 £4 £3







# Organic food is also sustainable food – agree or disagree?



<https://www.sustainability-times.com/>



<https://www.naturespath.com/en-us/>

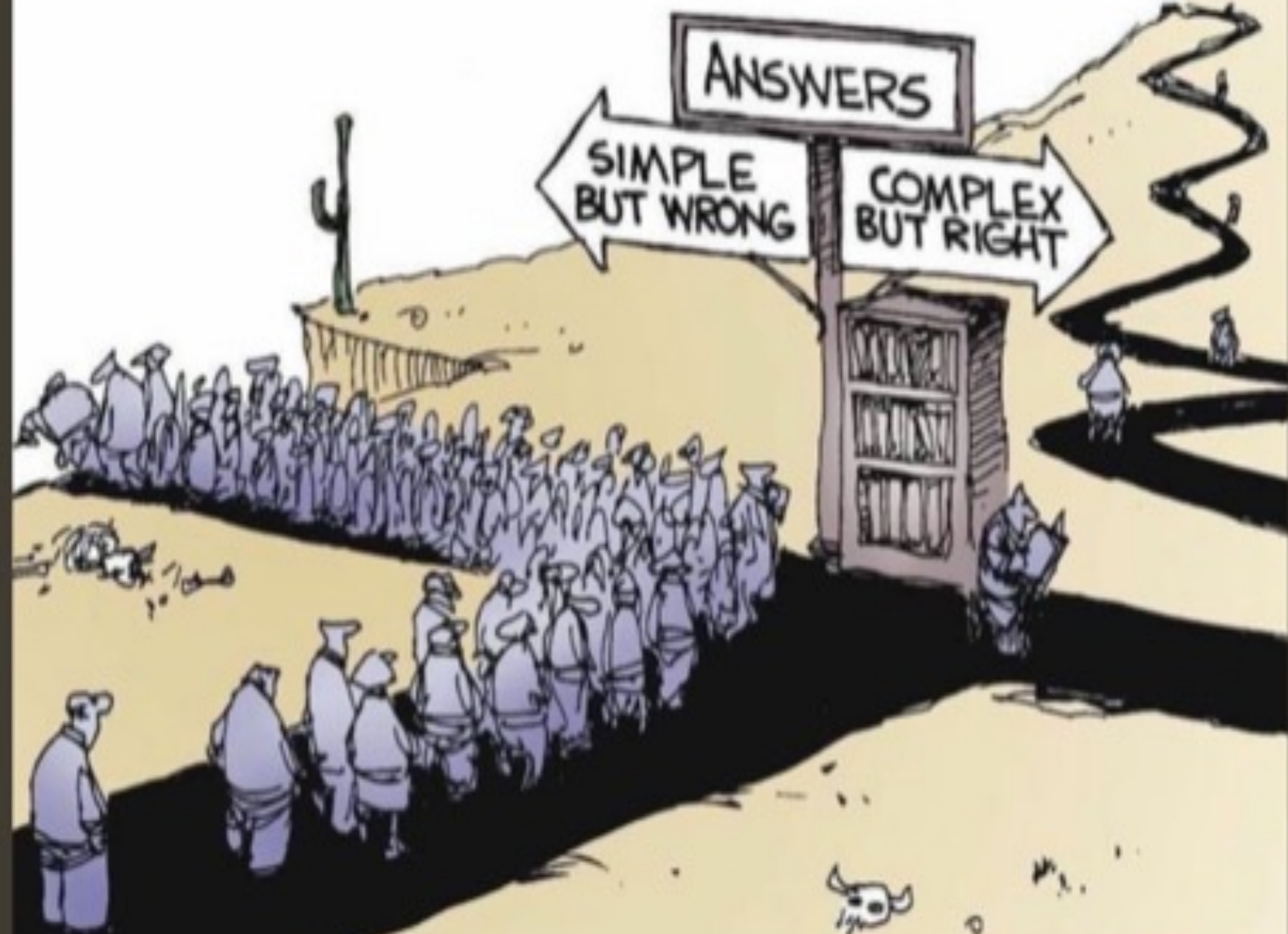
## Organic farming isn't all that sustainable, a new study says

By Daniel T Cross on December 17, 2018

## WHY ORGANIC FOOD IS MORE SUSTAINABLE

Posted under [Organic News & Environment](#) by [Mary Wales](#) on May 1, 2018

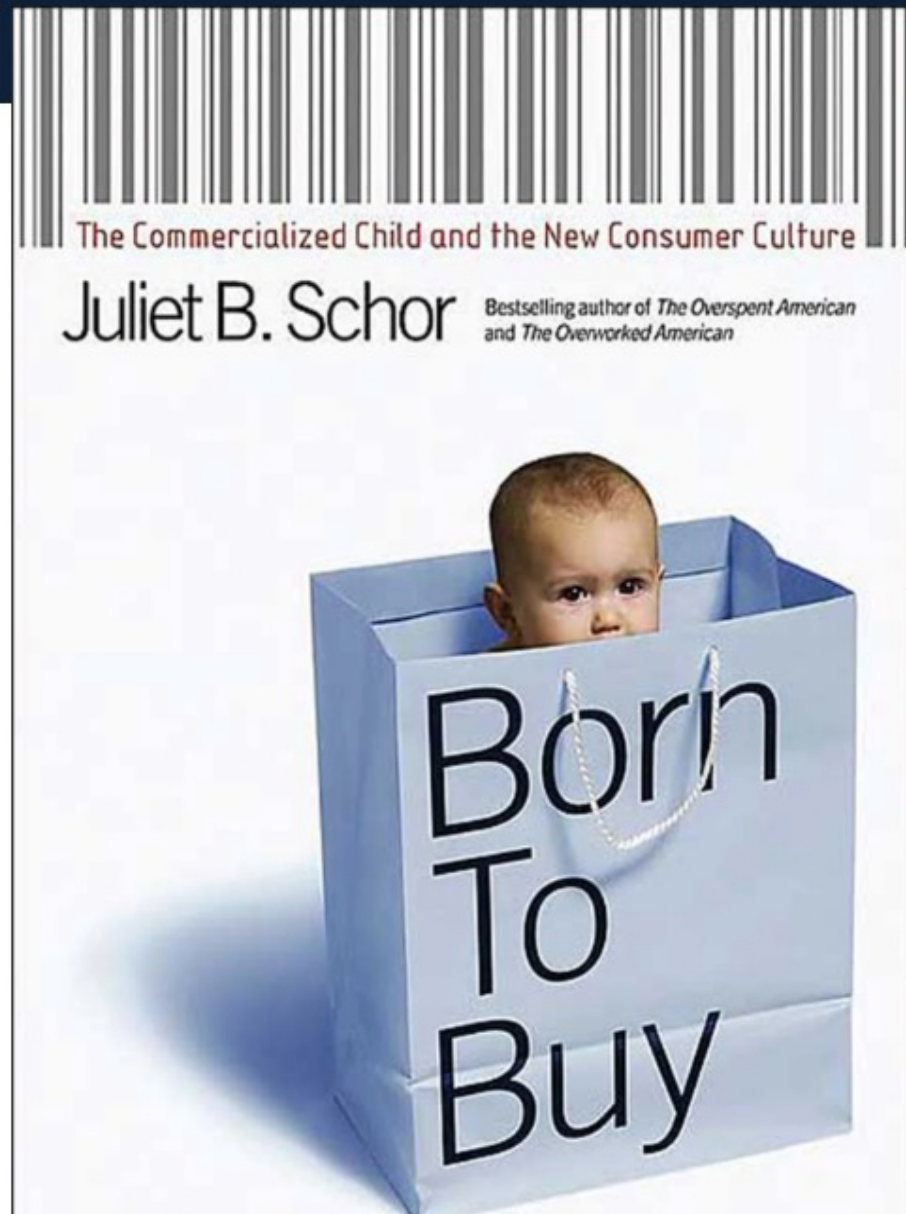






# Born to buy

Marketing targeted at kids is virtually everywhere – in classrooms and textbooks, on the Internet, even at Girl Scout meetings, slumber parties, and the playground. Product placement and other innovations have introduced more subtle advertising to movies and television. Read an excerpt of Juliet Schor's book 'Born to Buy.'



## THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair



### How children are being targeted with hidden ads on social media

Published: November 3, 2021 1.24pm CET

Stealth advertising is cropping up in children's social media feeds. BearFotos

Have you ever accidentally clicked on an advert while scrolling on social media because you didn't realise that's what it was? This is what advertisers call "content marketing".

Using funny memes, insider-driven stories or inspirational

# Anxiety about the future can lead to despair, depression and apathy

vårtland

ALLE REPORTASJER | MIN TRO | KULTUR | EKSISTENS | HOVEDSAK



## Klimakrisa gjev unge psykisk lidingar

Danske Isabella Seedorff (19) vart djupt klimadepremert. Ho er ikkje den einaste. No melder forskarar om at psykiatrien treng nye omgrep for å forklare kva som skjer med oss i klimakrisa.

AV DAVID SVILAND

APRIL 3, 2006 www.time.com AOL Keyword: TIME

## SPECIAL REPORT GLOBAL WARMING

# TIME

### BE WORRIED. BE **VERY** WORRIED.

Climate change isn't some vague future problem—it's already damaging the planet at an alarming pace. Here's how it affects you, your kids and their kids as well

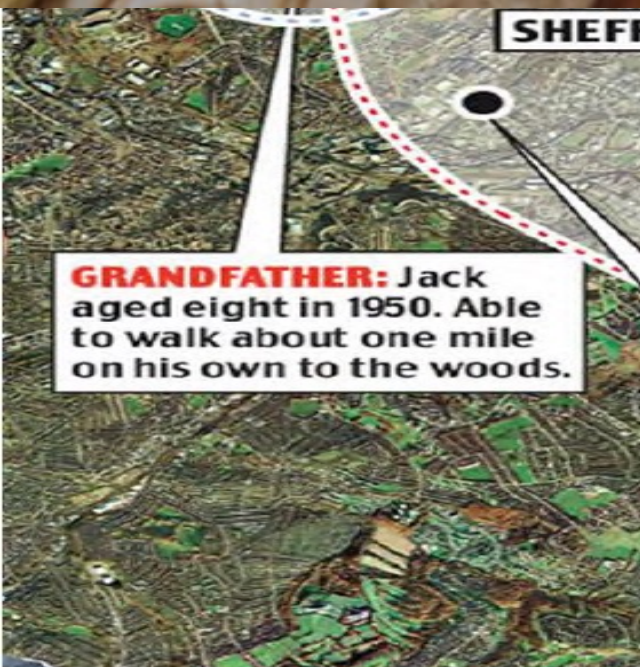
**EARTH AT THE TIPPING POINT**  
**HOW IT THREATENS YOUR HEALTH**  
**HOW CHINA & INDIA CAN HELP SAVE THE WORLD—OR DESTROY IT**  
**THE CLIMATE CRUSADERS**





# *Kids won't remember their best day of YouTube*

We believe that nature makes kids healthier, happier and smarter



## *More green, less screen*

We believe that nature makes kids healthier, happier and smarter



*Colonization of the mind through digital technologies and their underlying algorithms*



**DO SOMETHING, YOU BUNCH OF MANIACS!**

WELL! IT'S EASY TO JUST CRITICIZE, YOUNG LADY...

...AND I SUPPOSE YOU'VE GOT AN ALTERNATIVE ALL WORKED OUT, HAVE YOU?

HYSTERICAL ECO-FANATICS! ALWAYS TELLING PEOPLE HOW TO LIVE...

GET YOURSELF A PROPER JOB!

**\$\$ECONOMIC GROWTH**

'STEADY AS SHE GOES'





[www.polyp.org.uk](http://www.polyp.org.uk)



“There may be flowing water on Mars...  
But is there intelligent life on Earth?”

“While we marvel at Nasa’s discoveries, we destroy our irreplaceable natural resources – so we can buy pre-peeled bananas and smartphones for dogs”

George Monbiot,  
The Guardian, 30-09-2015



## OECD and Pisa tests are damaging education worldwide - academics

In this letter to Dr Andreas Schleicher, director of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, academics from around the world express deep concern about the impact of Pisa tests and call for a halt to the next round of testing





THE CLIMATE IS CHANGING  
WHY AREN'T WE?

IF THERE IS NO PLANET, WE

WE WANT TO LIVE

IF YOU WANNA  
BE MY LOVER  
YOU GOTTA FIGHT  
CLIMATE CHANGE

A DIPLOMA  
-BUT-  
NO FUTURE

THE FUTURE IS  
BETTER THAN  
THE PAST





KNOWLEDGE  
IS  
~~POWER~~  
RESPONSIBILITY



SUBSIDIES  
KRAAN OPEN  
PROJECT  
Transition for  
Industries

Current industry is a barrier to  
progressive innovation  
We will not allow this to happen



EDUCATION HAS THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM THE PLANET, BUT FIRST WE MUST TRANSFORM OUR EDUCATION SYSTEMS



[bit.ly/sdg4all](http://bit.ly/sdg4all)

#SDG4ALL





For quality of life

The Doughnut of social foundations and planetary boundaries (Raworth 2017)

# What is education for? (modified after Biesta, 2012)







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# From cosmetic reform to deep change

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## Degrees of response depends on institutional 'response-ability'

- (1) **no response** (conformative) - global precarities are absent or barely reflected in policies and practices
- (2) **accommodation** (conformative) - responses centre on campus greening and some curriculum in "obvious" disciplines
- (3) **reformative** - intentional re-thinking at a policy level leading to some shifts across much of the institution
- (4) **transformation** - a sustainability ethos drives purpose, policy, and practice, resulting in fundamental redesign, reflexivity, and organisational learning

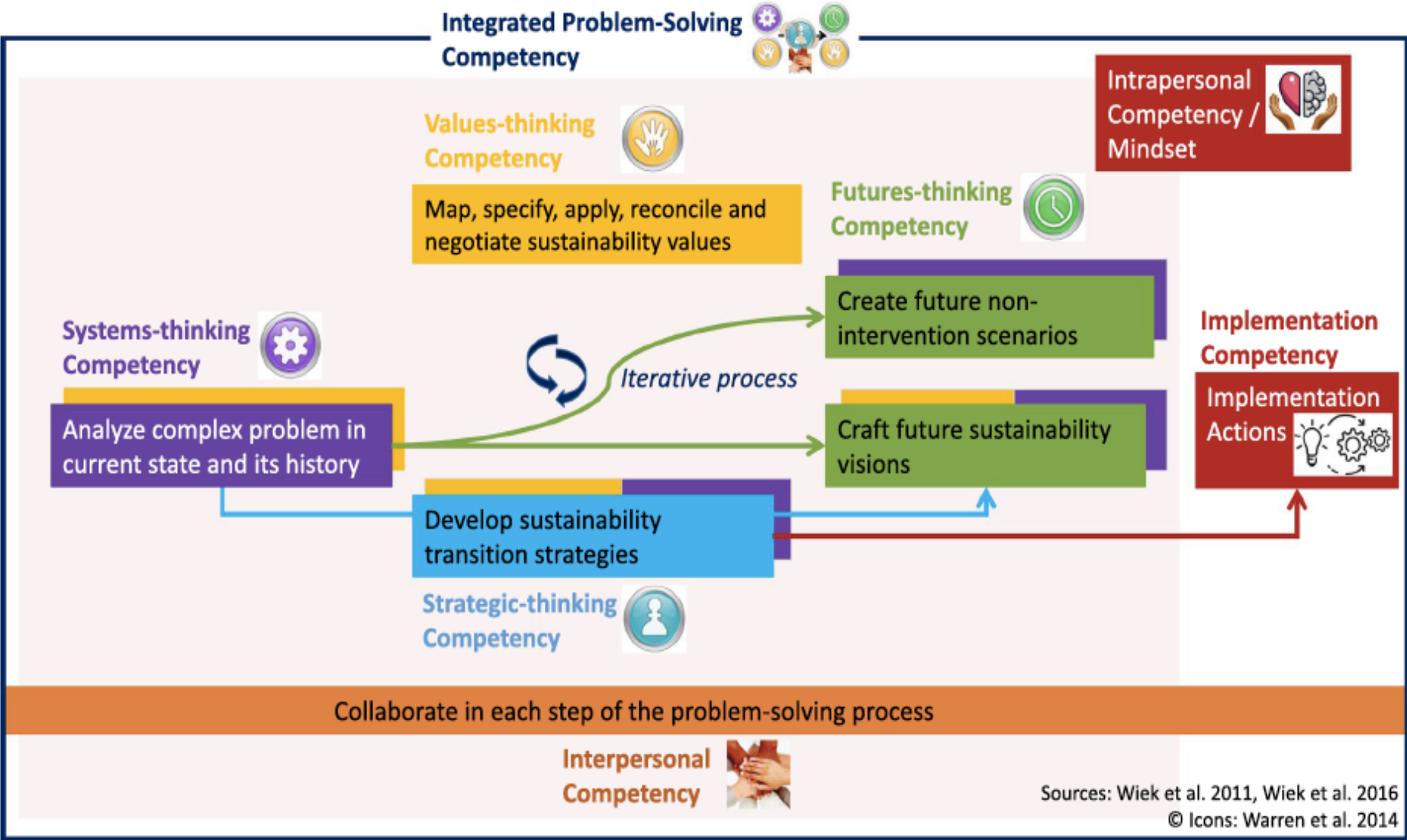
Denial

Bolt-on

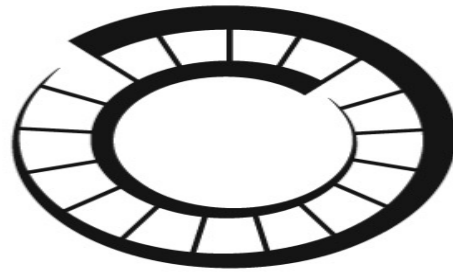
Build-in

Whole  
system re-  
design





# SDGs & IDGs



## INNER DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Transformational Skills for Sustainable Development

- 1 Being — Relationship to Self
- 2 Thinking — Cognitive Skills
- 3 Relating — Caring for Others and the World
- 4 Collaborating — Social Skills
- 5 Acting — Driving Change





Source: Wals, 2019

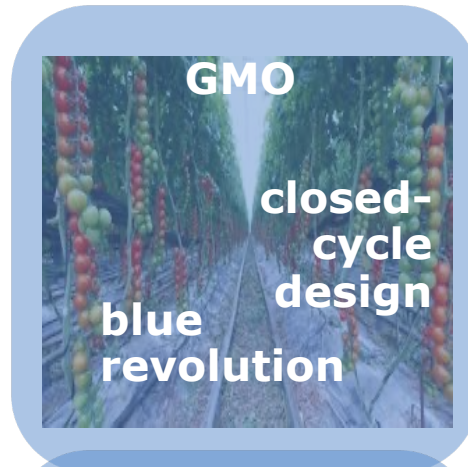
# Area 1: Understanding Change & Transitions





# Optimizing versus Transitioning

technological developments  
transition  
incremental



incremental transition  
societal developments

Adapted from Wageningen UR

# Area 2: Engaging in values and ethics



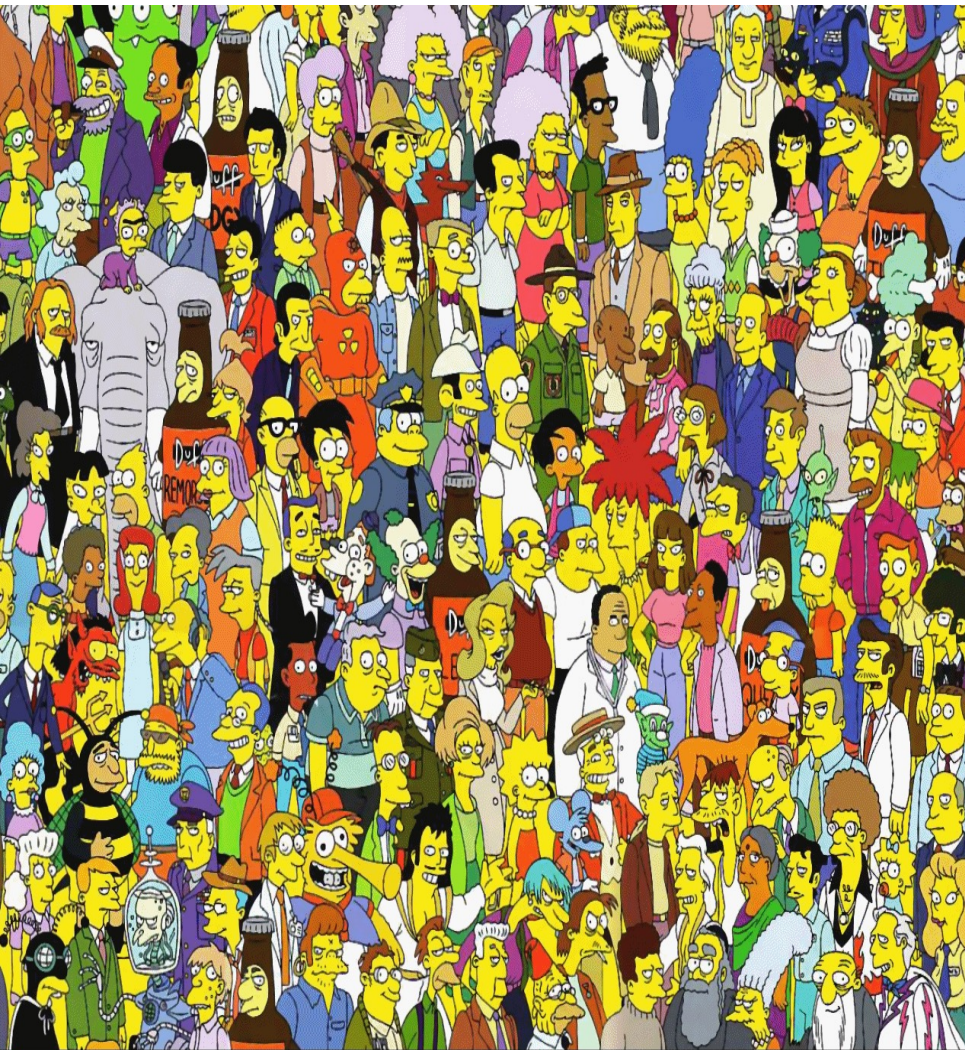


# Area 3: Learning to Make Change





# Area 4: Utilizing Diversity and Dissonance



SimpsonCrazy.com

Always Real. Always Simpsons.

Scott E. Page

## THE DIFFERENCE

HOW THE POWER OF DIVERSITY  
CREATES BETTER GROUPS, FIRMS,  
SCHOOLS, AND SOCIETIES



# Resistance Pedagogy – going against the grain



# Area 5: Boundary Crossing & Systems Thinking





# Sustainability is not just something to learn, it's something to live!

**STUDENTS SHOULD LEARN ABOUT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THE WORLD THEY LIVE IN**

**SCHOOL GARDEN PROGRAMMES CAN TEACH HEALTHY EATING AND HELP BUILD AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION WITH THE NATURAL WORLD**

**EDUCATION IS THE BEST TOOL FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AWARENESS**

**SCHOOLS SHOULD BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY ISSUES**

**STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND THE COMMUNITY SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN SCHOOL DECISIONS.**

**THE WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY BRINGS TOGETHER WHAT IS TAUGHT, HOW IT'S TAUGHT, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, TEACHER TRAINING, DECISION MAKING PROCESSES, THE PHYSICAL BUILDINGS, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY.**

**SCHOOL BUILDINGS SHOULD BE SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE, CONSERVING WATER AND ENERGY AND REDUCING WASTE**

**THE WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH ADDRESSES THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS**

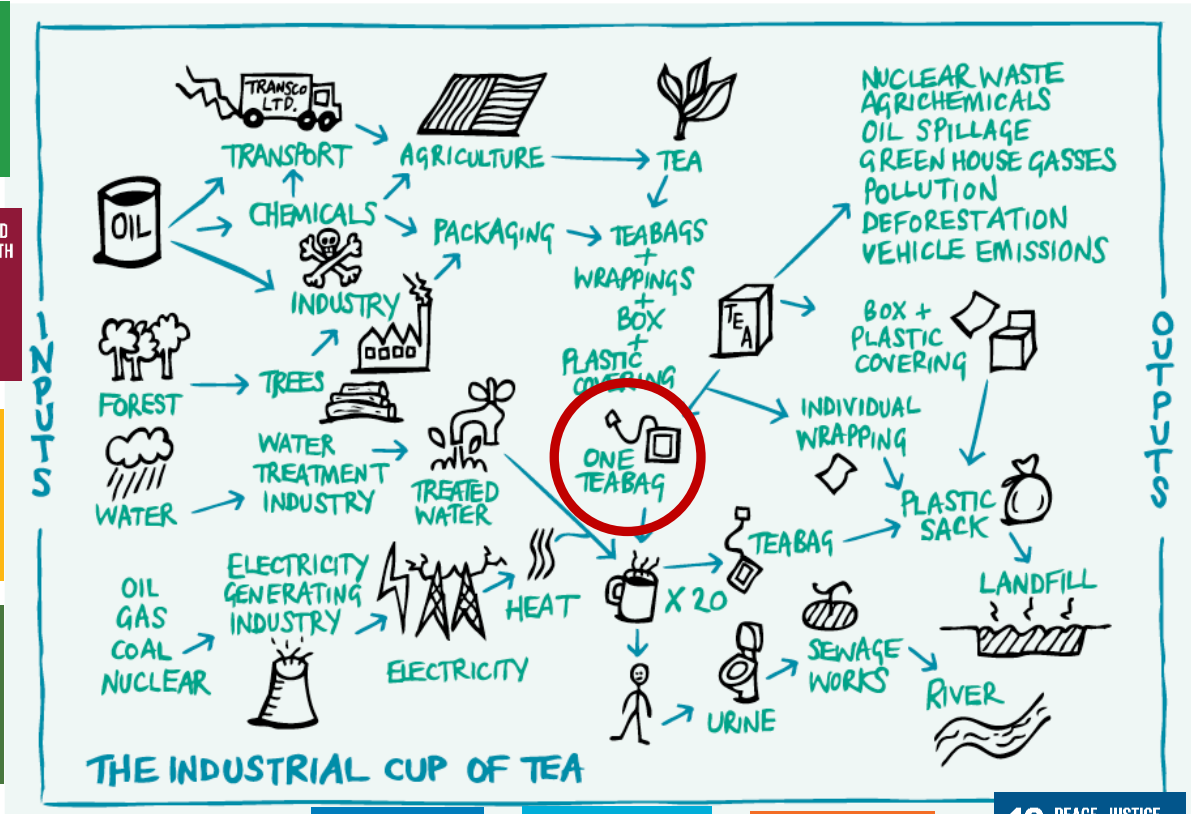
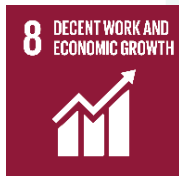
**1 NO POVERTY**  
**2 ZERO HUNGER**  
**3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**  
**4 QUALITY EDUCATION**  
**5 GENDER EQUALITY**  
**6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION**  
**7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY**  
**8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**  
**9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES**  
**11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES**  
**12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION**  
**13 CLIMATE ACTION**  
**14 LIFE BELOW WATER**  
**15 LIFE ON LAND**  
**16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**  
**17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS**

**SOLAR PANELS**  
**ENERGY SAVING LIGHTBULBS**  
**RENEWABLE MATERIALS**

**HUMAN RIGHTS  
DISCRIMINATION  
GENDER EQUALITY  
BULLYING**

**SCHOOL HALL**

UNESCO, 2016 /GEM2016 Report





# Whole University Approach to Sustainability



(Based on Mathie & Wals, 2022)

# Urban Living Labs

A living lab  
way of working

RESEARCH

EDUCATION

SOCIETAL  
OUTREACH

AMS

AMSTERDAM  
INSTITUTE FOR  
ADVANCED  
METROPOLITAN  
SOLUTIONS



WAGENINGENUR  
*For quality of life*

[www.ams-amsterdam.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/AMS-Living-Lab-Way-of-Work-print.pdf](http://www.ams-amsterdam.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/AMS-Living-Lab-Way-of-Work-print.pdf)



Norwegian University  
of Life Sciences

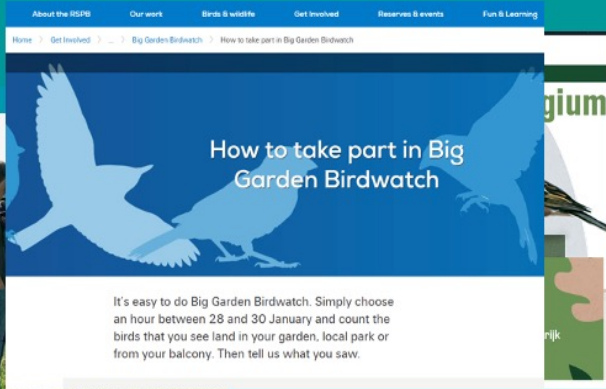


# Citizen Science Strands

science-driven



Expanding knowledge/expertise



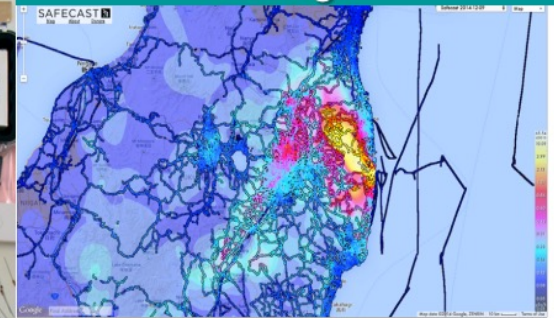
interest-driven

(adapted from: Dillon et al, 2016)

Closed/  
pre-determined goals



policy-driven



concern-driven

Open/  
co-determined goals



# (Re)conceptualizing research

|                               | Research as evidence  | Research as co-learning                                     | Research as activism   |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Modus of understanding</b> | Empirical analytical<br>Reductionist<br>Objective                           | Hermeneutic-interpretive<br>(Inter)Subjective               | Socially-critical<br>Transformative<br>(Inter)Agentic              |
| <b>Nature of inquire</b>      | Universal Cybernetic  | Relational Entangled  | Transgressive Disruptive   |
| <b>Roles of researcher</b>    | Good tester/modeller<br>Passive-detached<br>Intentionally neutral<br>Expert | Good listener/interpreter<br>Active-connected<br>Co-learner | Good ally<br>Active-committed<br>Explicitly partisan<br>Co-creator |
| <b>Role of 'participant'</b>  | Passive source of data  | Agentic beings and materials                                | Participant – learner – change agent                               |
| <b>Noble purpose</b>          | Improved efficiency, models, predictability, 'truth-finding'                | Improved sensitivity<br>ethic of care                       | Transformation, systemic change, transition                        |
| <b>Language used</b>          | Exclusive, scientific – but simple and clear towards 'target groups'        | Exclusive, scientific but also narratives & stories         | Inclusive, contextual – co-created.                                |





**EDUCATION**

New studies,  
courses &  
forms of  
teaching &  
learning

**RESEARCH**

New tools,  
methods &  
methodologies

# Arts-Based Methods for Transformative Engagement

## A TOOLKIT

By Kelli Rose Pearson, Malin Bäckman, Sara Grenni,  
Angela Moriggi, Siri Pisters, Anke de Vrieze

## Diary Entry Week 4: *Sickness of the West*

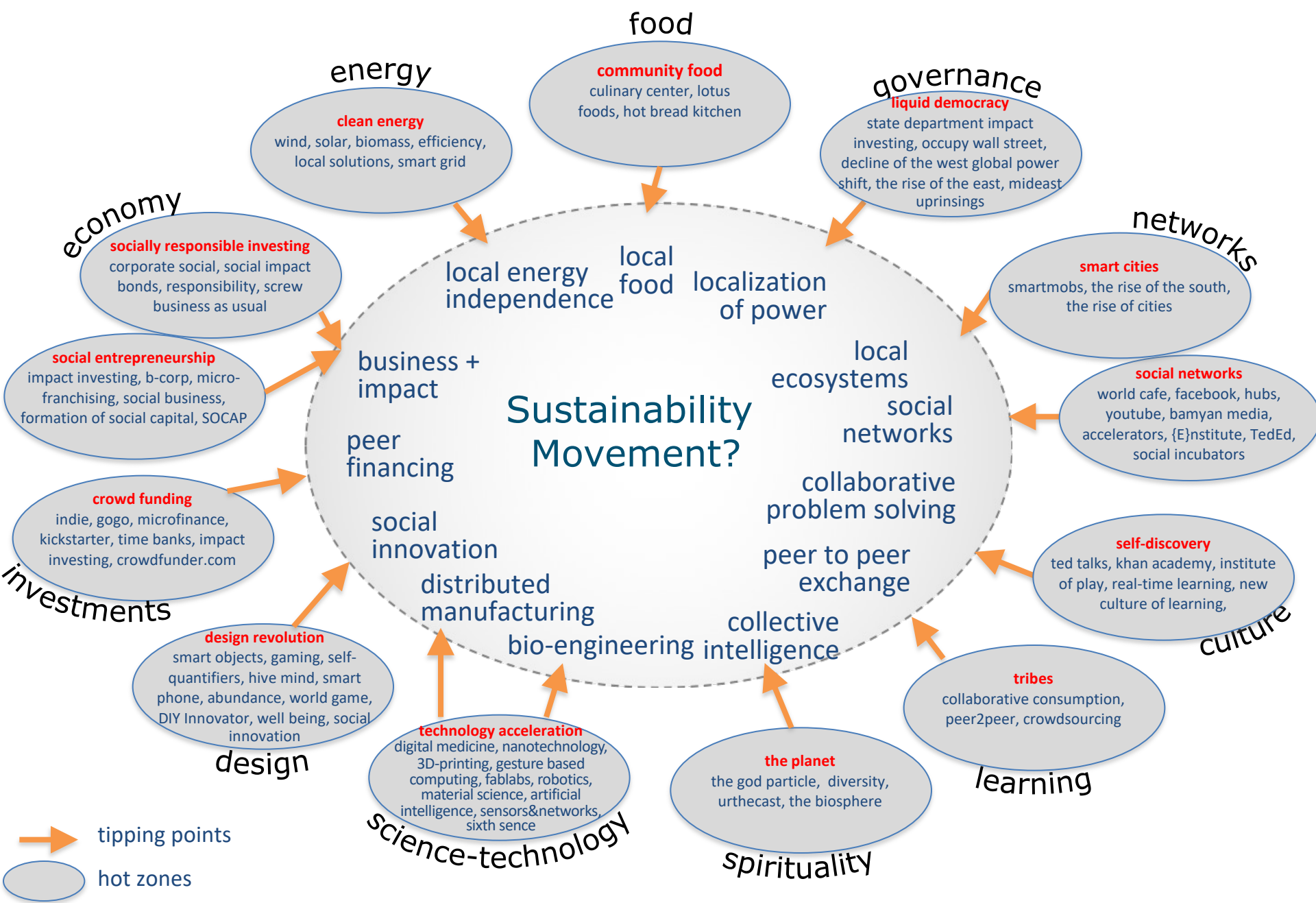
I have mixed feelings on the concept of *sustainability*. I do agree on conserving nature, for the little we have left. However, I do believe it is us as Westerners that have to make the biggest effort in this. We have the largest consumption patterns, and we are the greatest producers of rubbish. The blood of the plastic soup in our oceans, is on our hands. Instead of imposing sustainability sanctions on 'underdeveloped' countries, we should regulate our own consumption use here in the West.

For my project I gathered the plastic waste of a household of two, for just a couple of days. This conceptual artwork portrays the plastic soup in our oceans, and shows that if nature suffers, we suffer.



Source: Linda Dobson, Course diary  
ELS31806, Wageningen UR, 2020





redrawn from "the world we all want project"  
 (Mark Beam)

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# Some closing suggestions

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- Look for synergies between all petals of the WIA flower – move from 'add-on' to 'build-in' and redesign
- Create space for boundary crossing opportunities - adopt a systems approach – e.g. by linking with SDGs
- Ask: what are we strengthening in society, what might we be ignoring or weakening? What needs sustaining? What needs disrupting?
- Engage in ethics, inner-conflicts, and the tough value-laden questions, becoming uncomfortable **together!**
- Engage in active hope, regenerative actions and co-designing attractive futures for all
- What are the implications of the above for professional development of teachers and researchers?





Dare to transgress!  
Thank you for your  
attention



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Email: arjen.wals@wur.nl  
Blog: www.transformativelearning.nl

Source: Banksy