theories of change

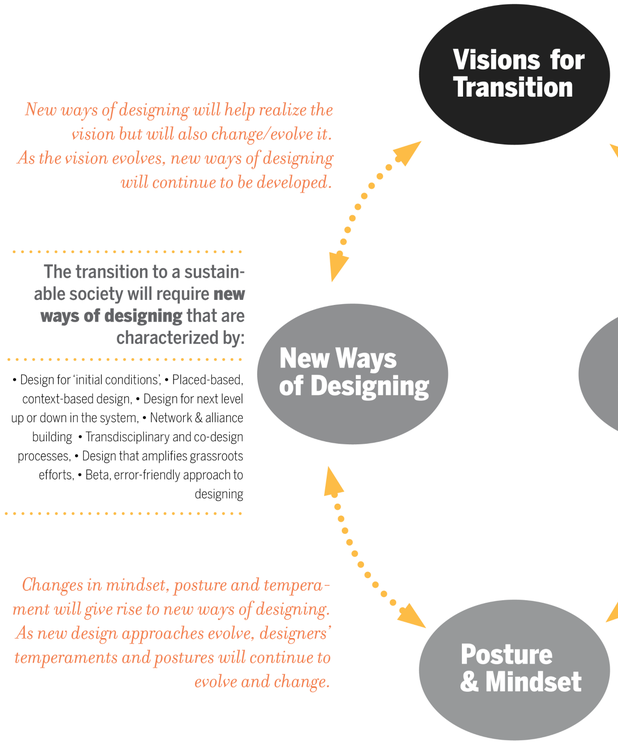
March 13, 2025

theories of change

TRANSITION DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Four mutually reinforcing and co-evolving areas of knowledge, action and self-reflection

Visions for transitions to sustainable societies are needed, based upon the reconception of entire life-styles that are human scale, place-based, but globally connected in their exchange of technology, information and culture. These visions are based upon communities that are in symbiotic relationships to the ecosystems within which they are embedded.



New ways of designing will help realize the vision but will also change/evolve it. As the vision evolves, new ways of designing will continue to be developed.

Transition visions must be informed by new knowledge about natural, social, and built /designed systems. This new knowledge will, in turn, evolve the vision.

The transition to a sustainable society will require **new ways of designing** that are characterized by:

• Design for 'initial conditions', • Placed-based, context-based design, • Design for next level up or down in the system, • Network & alliance building • Transdisciplinary and co-design processes, • Design that amplifies grassroots efforts, • Beta, error-friendly approach to designing

Theories from many varied fields and disciplines inform a deep understanding of the dynamics of change within the natural & social worlds.

• Living Systems theory, • Max-Neef's theory of needs, • Sociotechnical regime theory, • Post normal science, • Critiques of everyday life • Alternative economics, • Social Practice theory • Social pyschology research

Changes in mindset, posture and temperament will give rise to new ways of designing. As new design approaches evolve, designers' temperaments and postures will continue to evolve and change.

New theories of change will reshape designers' temperaments, mindsets and postures. And, these 'new ways of being' in the world will motivate the search for new, more relevant knowldege.

Living in & thru transitional times requires a **mindset and posture** of openess, mindfulness, self-reflection, a willingness to collaborate, and 'optimistic grumpiness'

• Shifting values: cooperation over competition, self-sufficiency, deep respect and advocacy for 'other' (cultures, species etc.)
• Indigenous, place-based knowledge, • Goethean Science/ Phenomenology, • Understanding/embracing transdisciplinarity, • Ability to design within uncertainty, ambiguity, chaos and contradiction,
• A committed sense of urgency (grumpiness) along with optimisim in the ability to change

https://miro.medium.com/max/10200/1*ldaDE47BGNkq5x4Qvn7V9w.png

theories of change from a designer perspective



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6PGRF0Wy_I

theories of change

- A theory of change is always present within a planned/designed course of action,whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not;

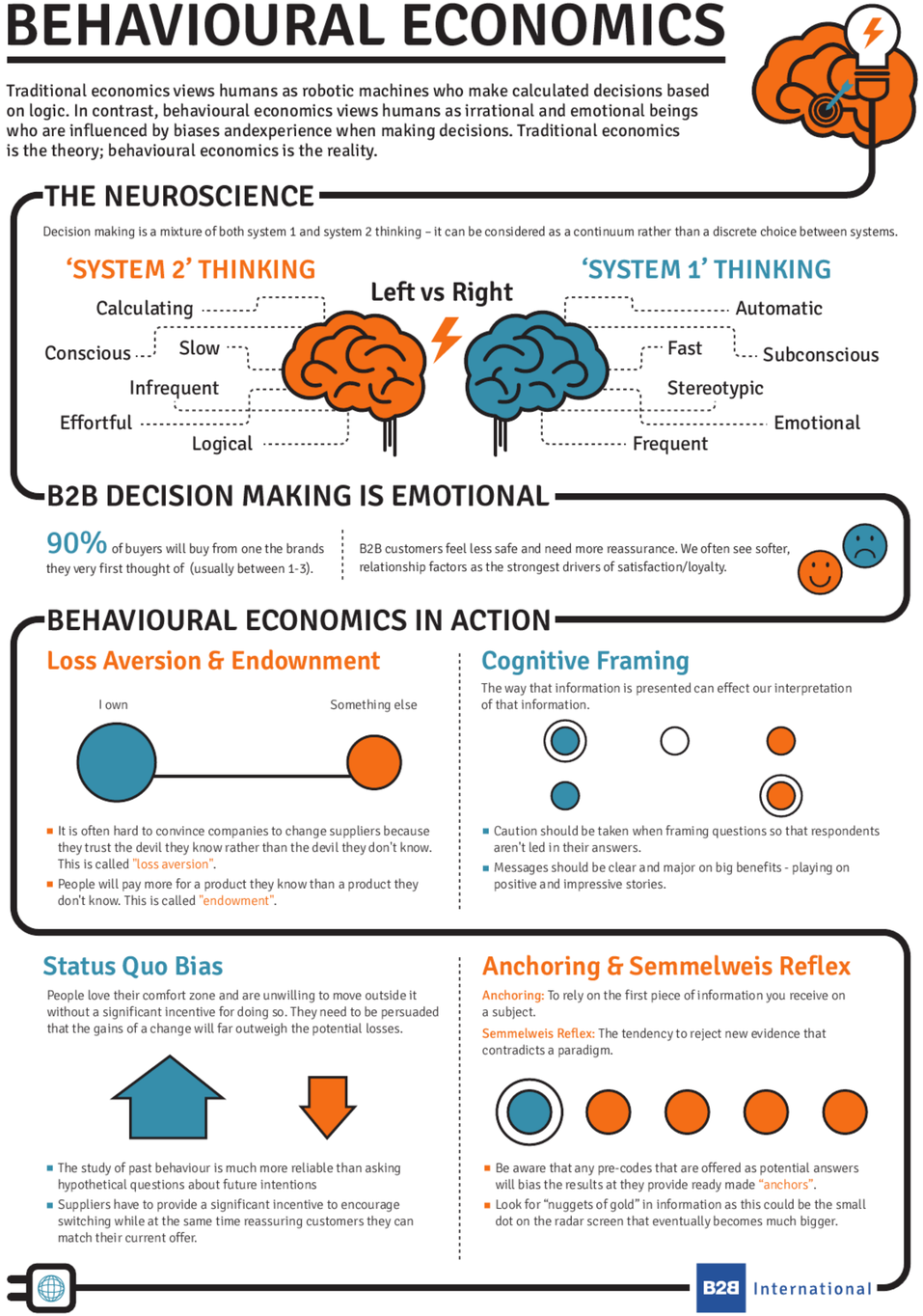
- Transition to sustainable futures will require sweeping change at every level of our society;

- theories of change can become out moded or superseded (the dominant, mechanistic paradigm views change as something that can be “managed” through centralized, top-down design processes that produce clear, predictable outcomes.

- And, although change within such systems can be catalyzed and even gently directed, it *cannot* be managed or controlled, nor can outcomes be accurately predicted.

behavioural economics

- not simple rational econs, but emotional humans
- pain of paying
- nudging
- choice architects



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldw8hCTjQRM
Daniel Kahneman, Princeton, Nobel prize in economics 2002
Dan Ariely Professor at duke university

Comte Bureau



scale



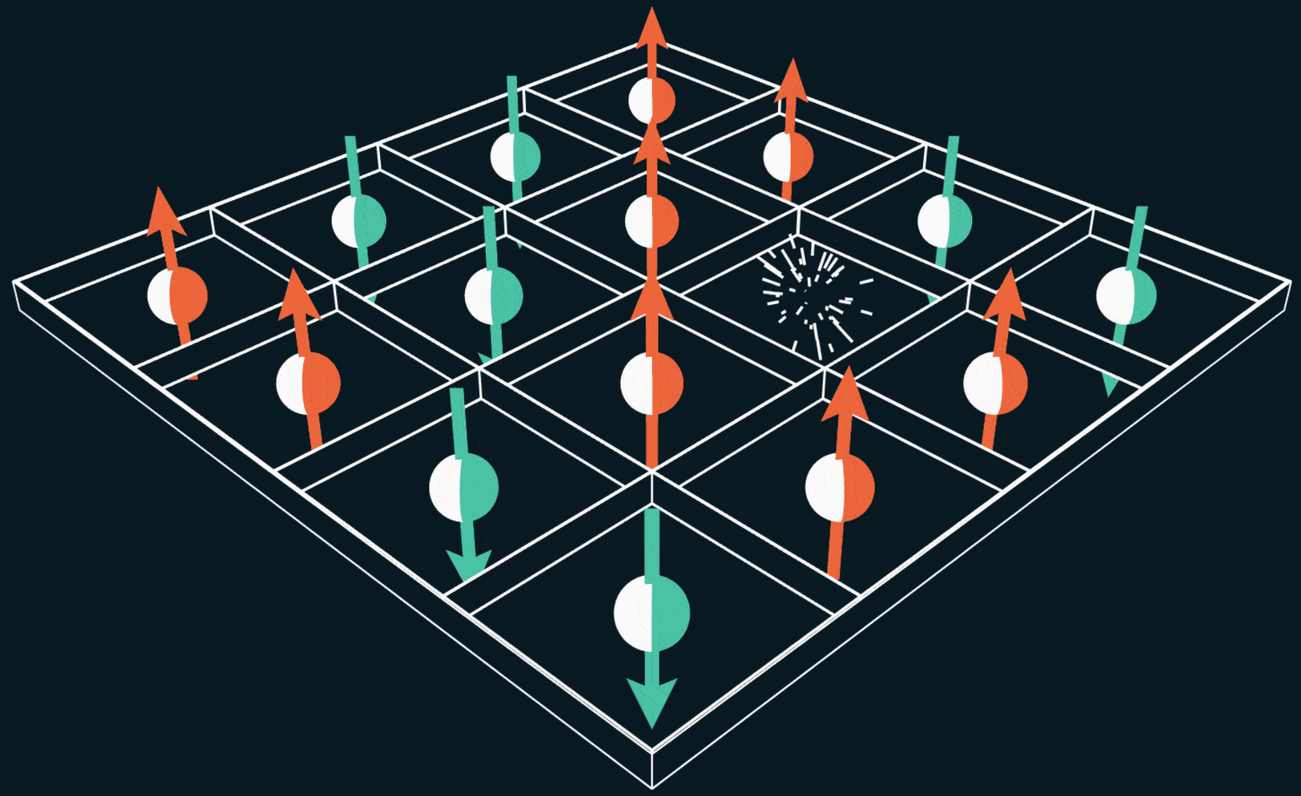
https://gph.is/2pC8mAL

emergent behaviour



https://thepartneringinitiative.org/news-and-views/tpi-blog/learning-from-starlings-how-and-why-we-collaborate-more-efficiently-during-crisis/

social physics



https://physicsworld.com/a/the-physics-of-public-opinion/

https://youtu.be/HMBl0ttu-Ow?t=2031

https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-childs-puzzle-has-helped-unlock-the-secrets-of-magnetism-20190124/

theory of needs



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyT9TMlzC6s

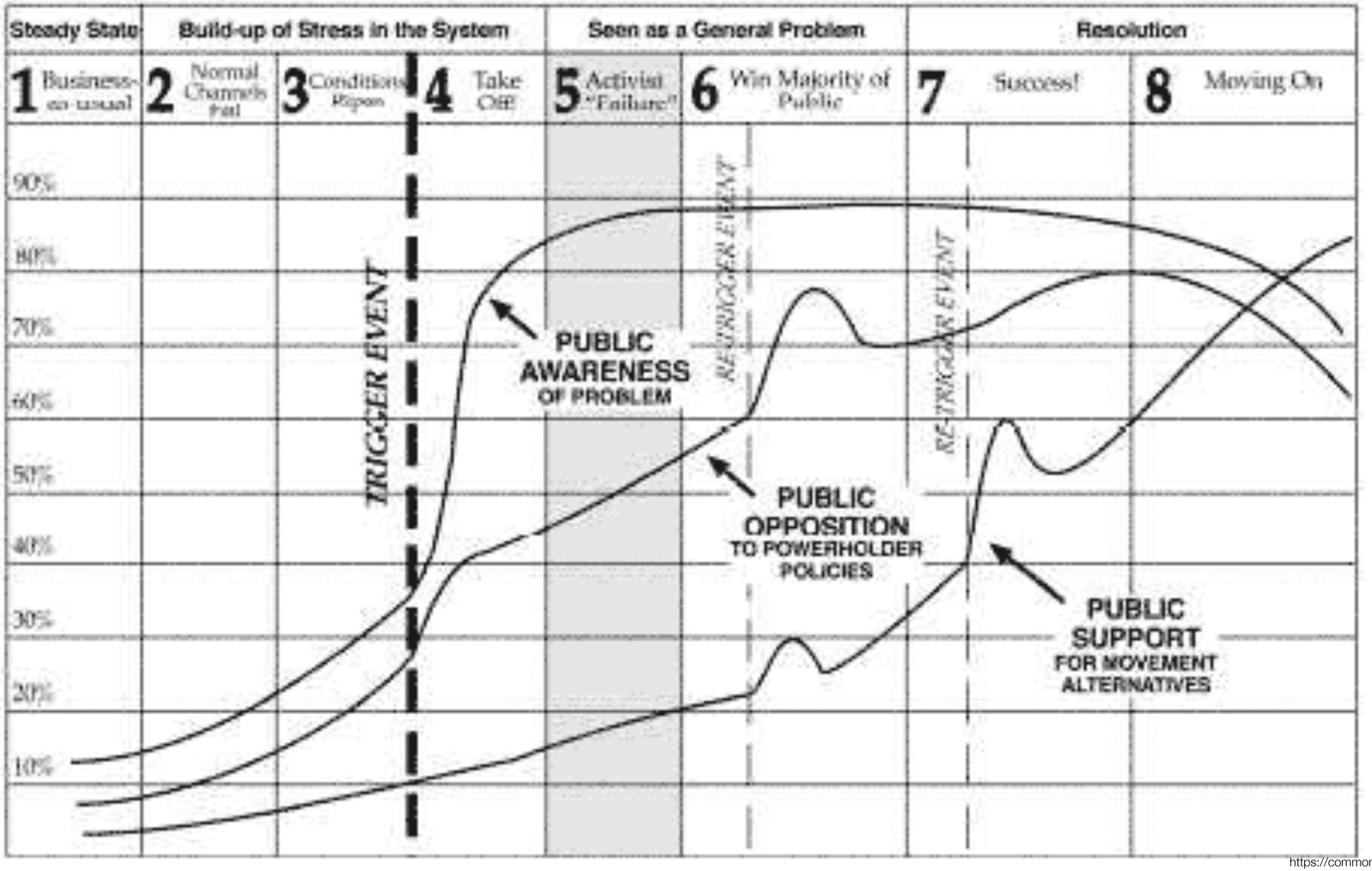
non violent resistance

3.5%

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHkzgDOMtYs

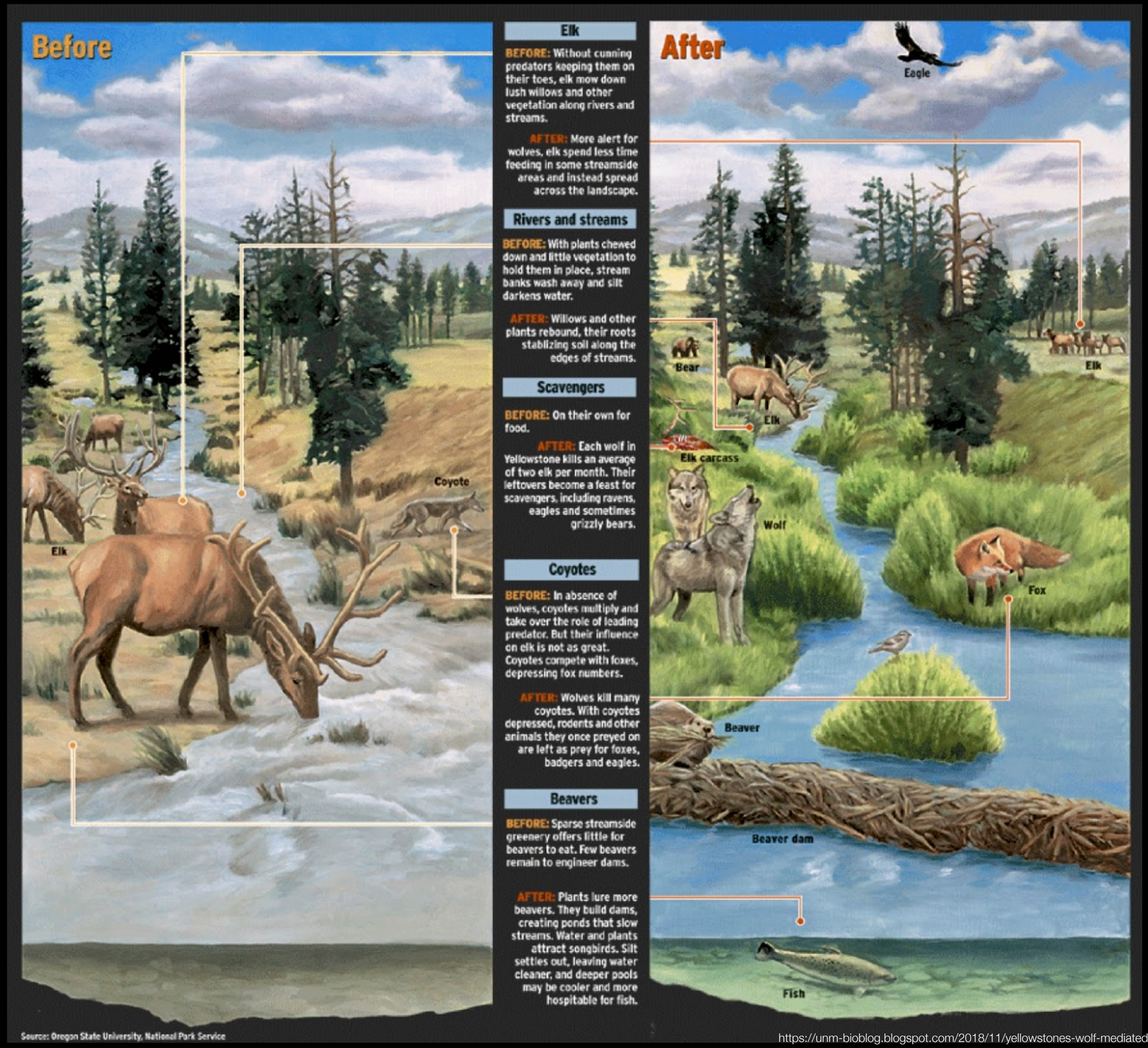
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHkzgDOMtYs

Movement Action Plan (MAP)



https://commonslibrary.org/resource-bill-moyers-movement-action-plan/

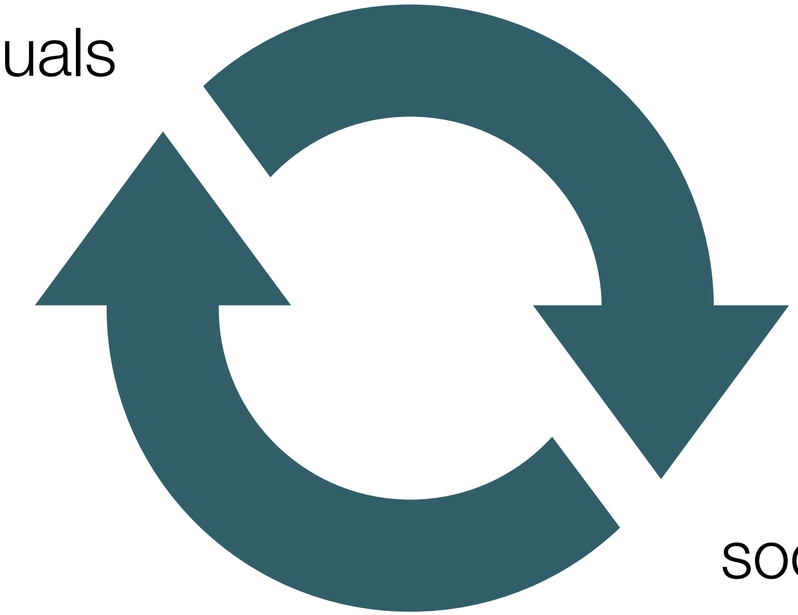
trophic cascade



https://unm-bioblog.blogspot.com/2018/11/yellowstones-wolf-mediated-trophic.html

social practice theory

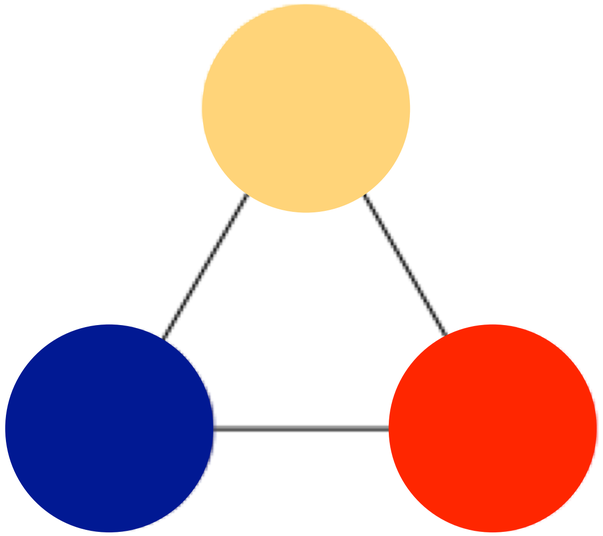
Everyday actions of indiviuals
social practices



social structure or norms

social practice theory

Meaning: cultural conventions, expectations and socially shared meanings



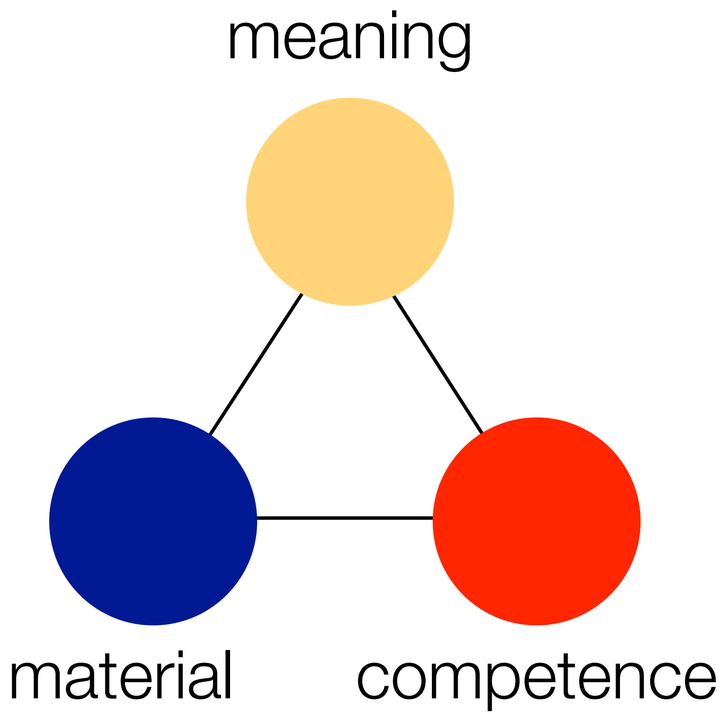
Material: objects, tools, infrastructures

Competence: knowledge and embodied skills

Figure 2. Elements of practice. Adapted from Shove et al., 2012.

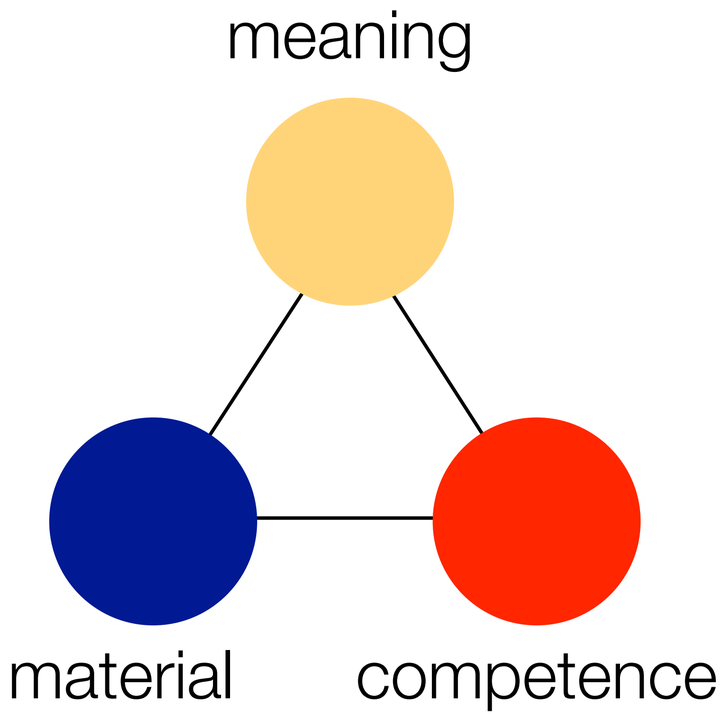
https://www.plateconference.org/understanding-consumer-influences-product-lifetimes-individual-practice-framework/

proto practice



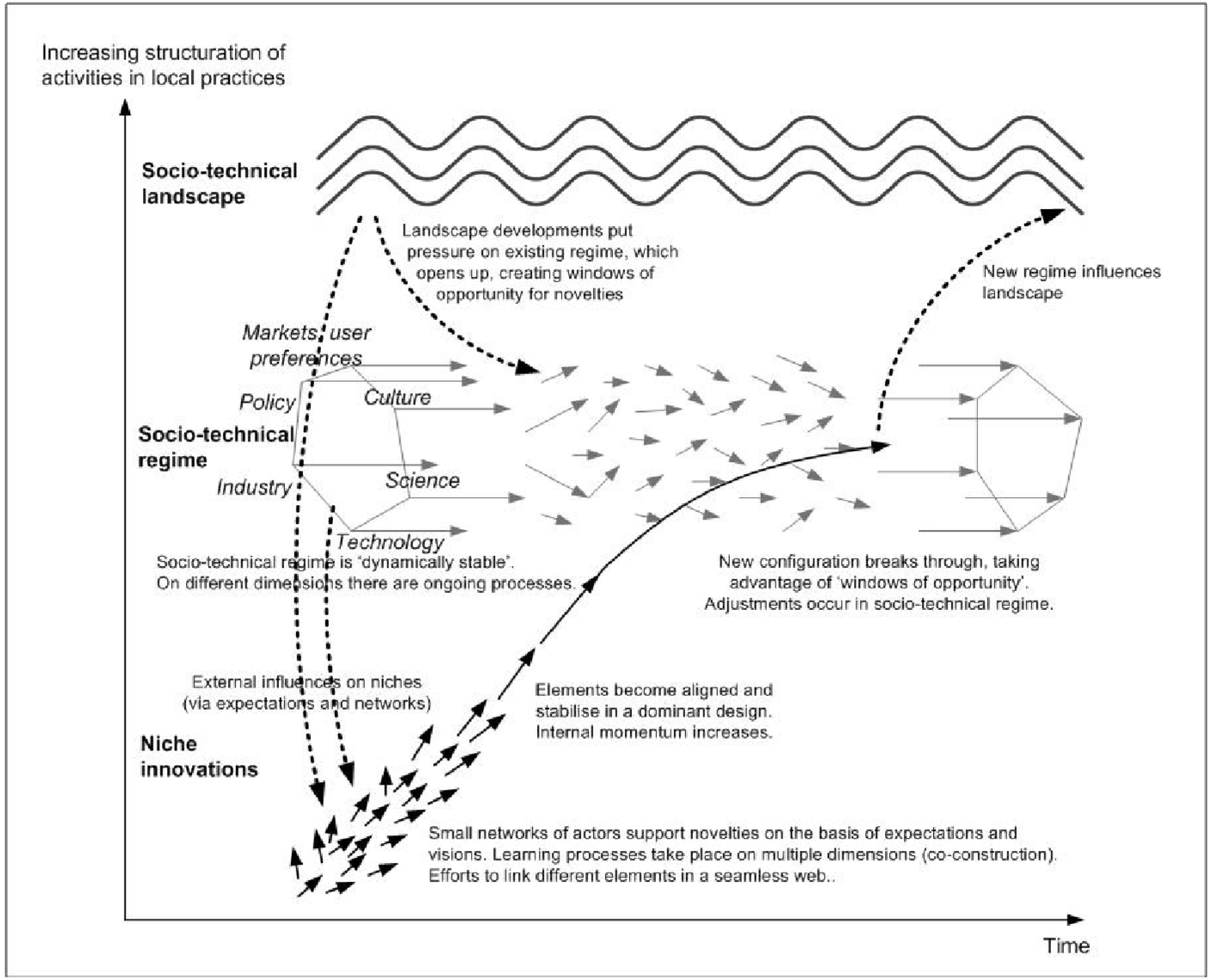
https://www.plateconference.org/understanding-consumer-influences-product-lifetimes-individual-practice-framework/

Ex practice



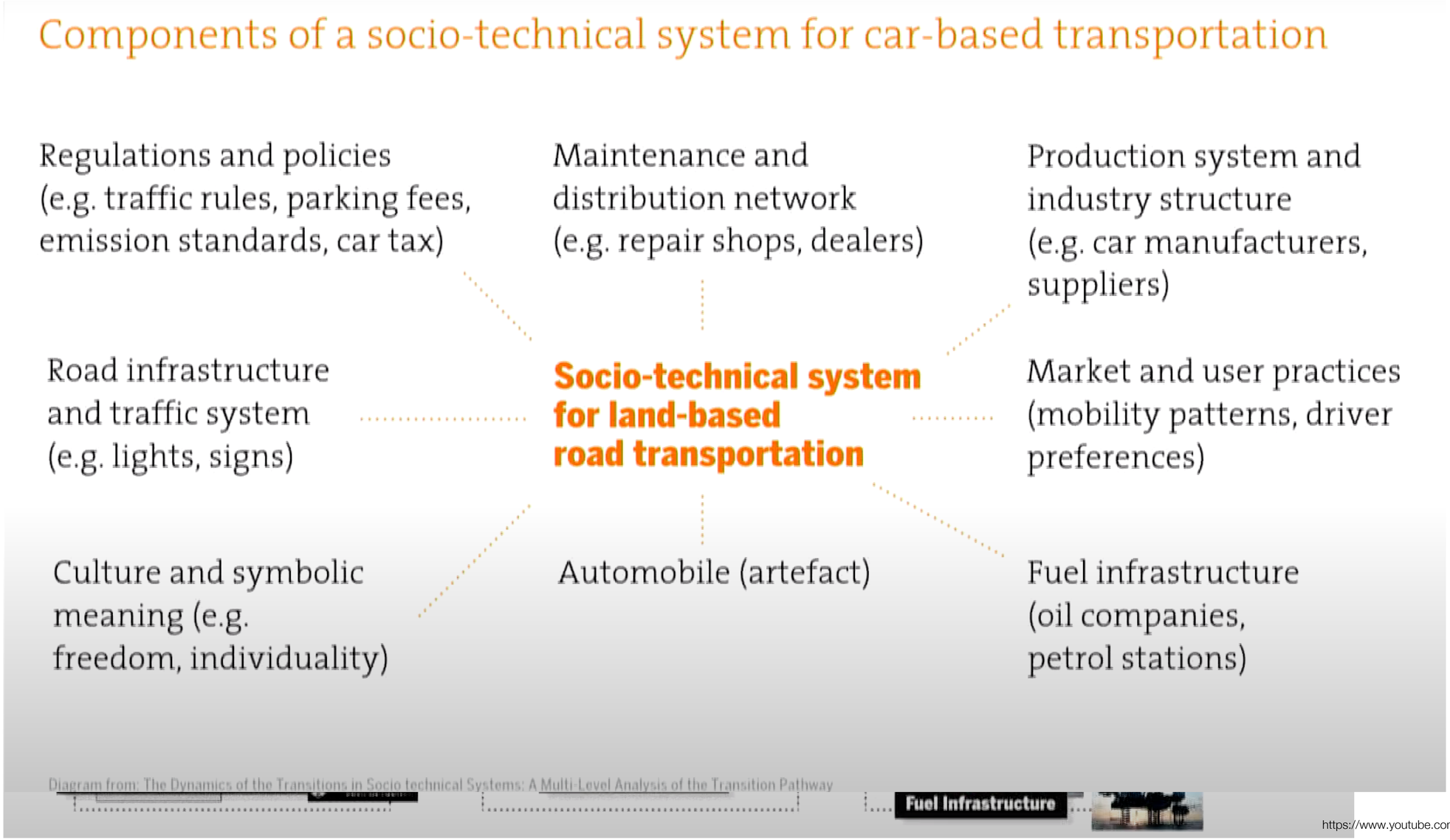
https://www.plateconference.org/understanding-consumer-influences-product-lifetimes-individual-practice-framework/

Multi Level Perspective (MLP)



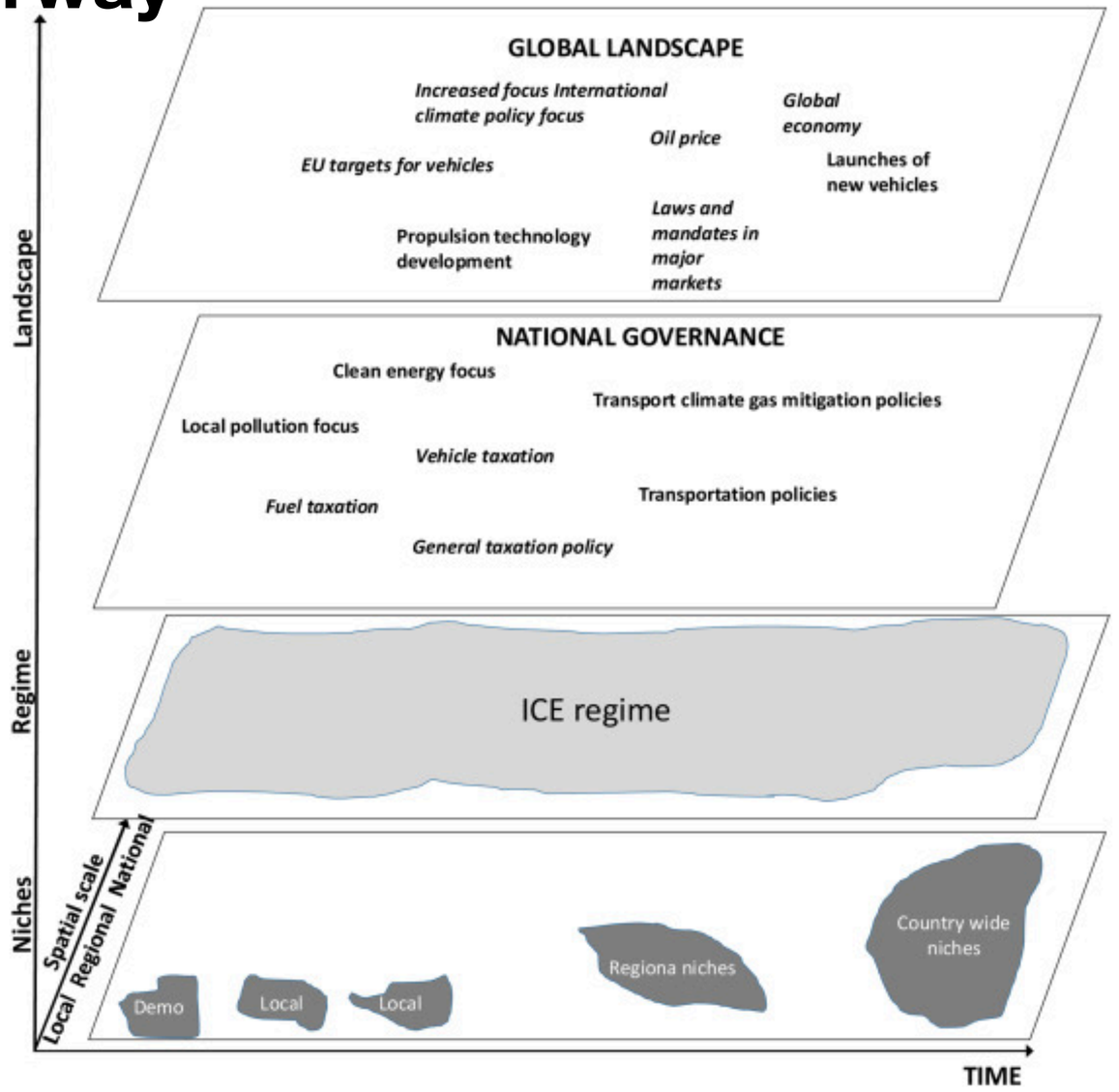
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/A-dynamic-multi-level-perspective-on-technology-transition_fig2_337085400

Multi Level Perspective (MLP)



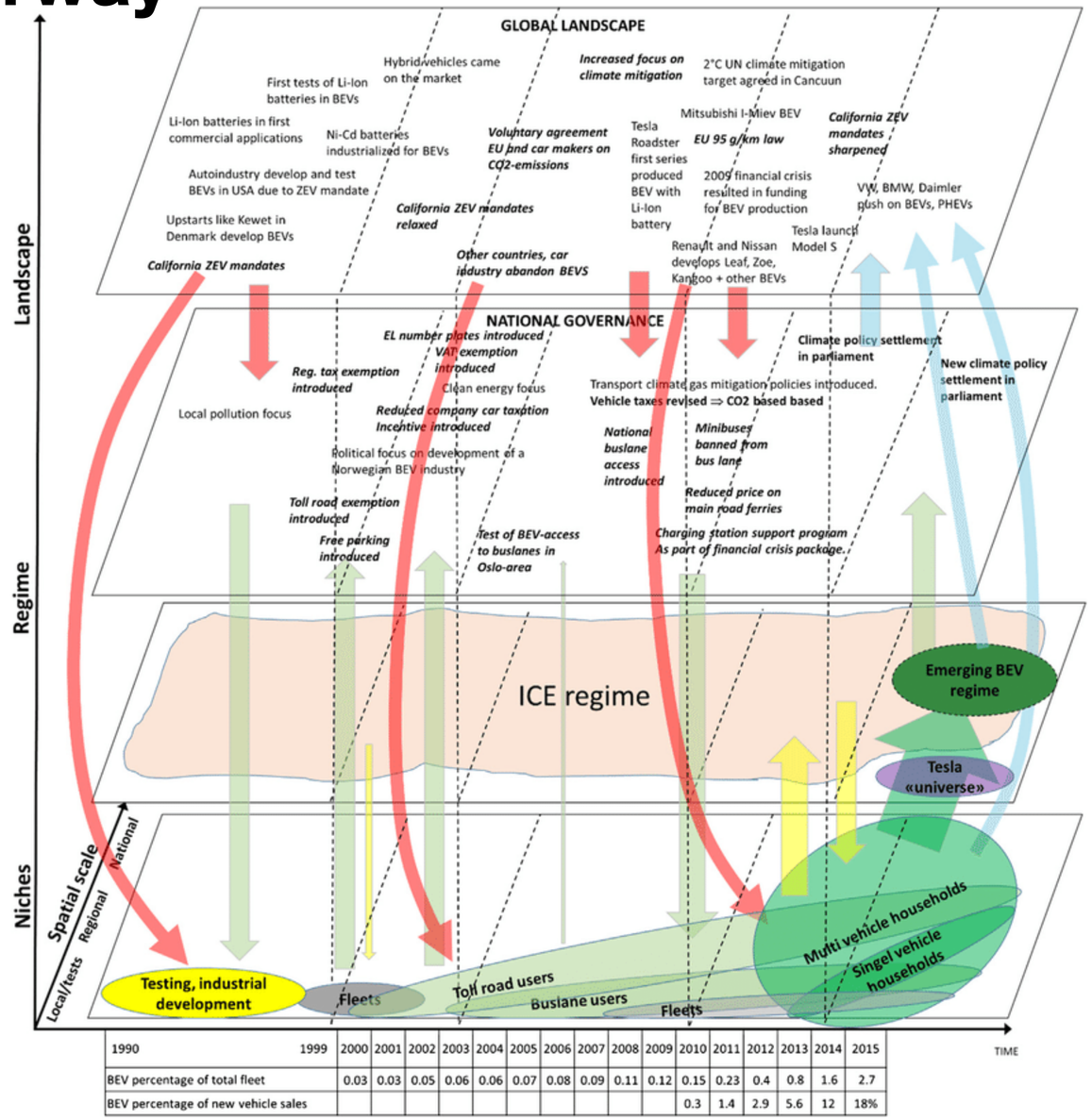
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDmBXxRqsW8

EV take up in Norway



https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210422416301162

EV take up in Norway



1990	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
BEV percentage of total fleet		0.03	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.12	0.15	0.23	0.4	0.8	1.6	2.7
BEV percentage of new vehicle sales												0.3	1.4	2.9	5.6	12	18%

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210422416301162

case studies

Multi-Level Perspective Modeling—Transition Design Spring 2017

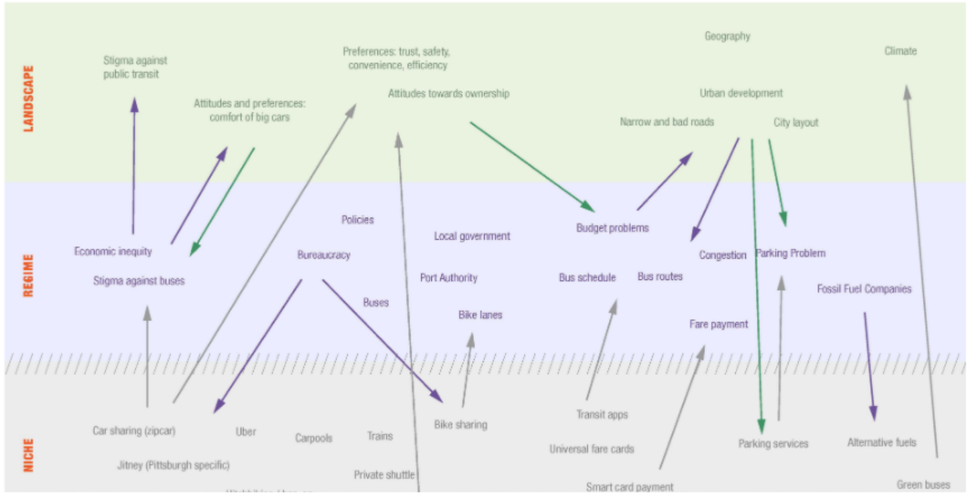
A collection of multi-level perspective models from...

Follow

1

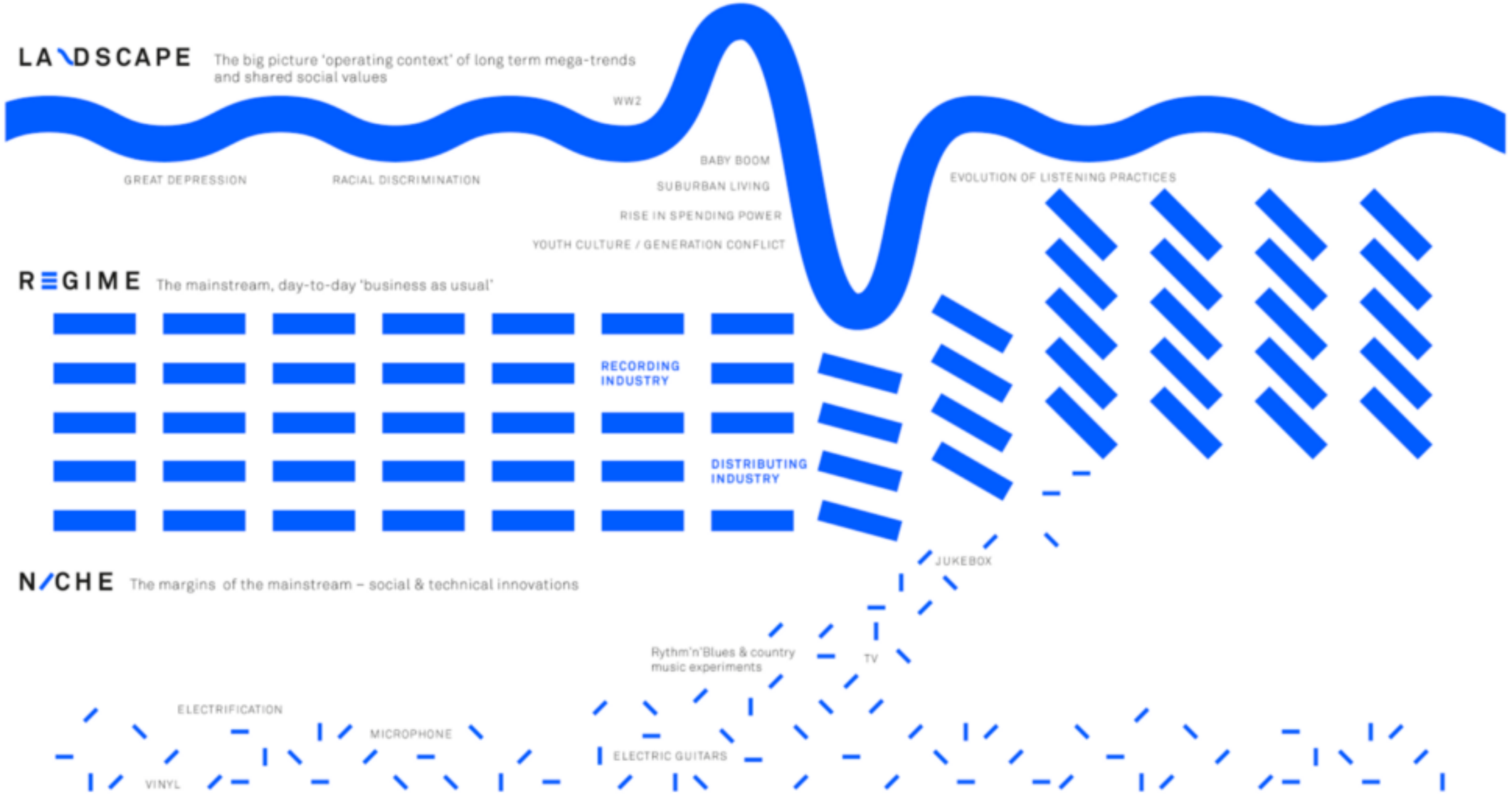
Using MLP and SPT to map the issue of lack of access to public transportation in Pittsburgh

Having gone through an initial wicked problem mapping of the issue of access to public transportation in Pittsburgh, our next step as a class was to use Multi Level Perspective (MLP) and Social Practice Theory (SPT) to map out the issue in terms of factors at the landscape, regime, and and niche levels. While our initial wicked problem map helped situate the issue in terms of environmental, social, infrastructure, geographical, and economical factors, our MLP map helped extrapolate these factors into a broader socio-technical context. Using SPT to further detail this map with relevant practices helped unveil new insights into possible points of intervention.



https://medium.com/multi-level-perspective-modeling-transition-design/multi-level-perspective-modeling-public-transportation-in-pittsburgh-236977a13844

history of rock’n’roll



https://www.forumforthefuture.org/stories-of-change

history of rock’n’roll

Systems do change: the story of Rock 'n' Roll

Watch later Share



02 ICEBERG MODEL + THE RISE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The Iceberg Model, typically used in systems diagnosis, can help us explore blindspots, question assumptions and challenge mental models underneath pivotal events, such as Rosa Park's arrest in 1955 in the Civil Rights Movement. Only 10% of an Iceberg's total mass can be seen above water—the remaining 90% exists below the waterline. As a society, the majority see and respond to events, happening at the tip of the iceberg.



Additional resources

ICEBERG MODEL Facilitator's Pack

Provide feedback on the Facilitator's Pack

ICEBERG MODEL Webinar Recording

ICEBERG MODEL Insights & Questions from 13 Oct 2020 Webinar

03 LEVELS OF PARADIGM FRAMEWORK + THE REGENERATION OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN MEXICO CITY

Regeneration, as a mindset, is focused on building the capacity and capability in people, communities, and other natural systems to restore, renew or revitalize. How can regenerative design help us understand the whole systems to shift toward resilient and equitable systems that integrate nature?

YouTube NO

Search



Webinar - Systems do change: a story of the civil rights movement

225 views • Oct 20, 2020

4 1 SHARE SAVE ...

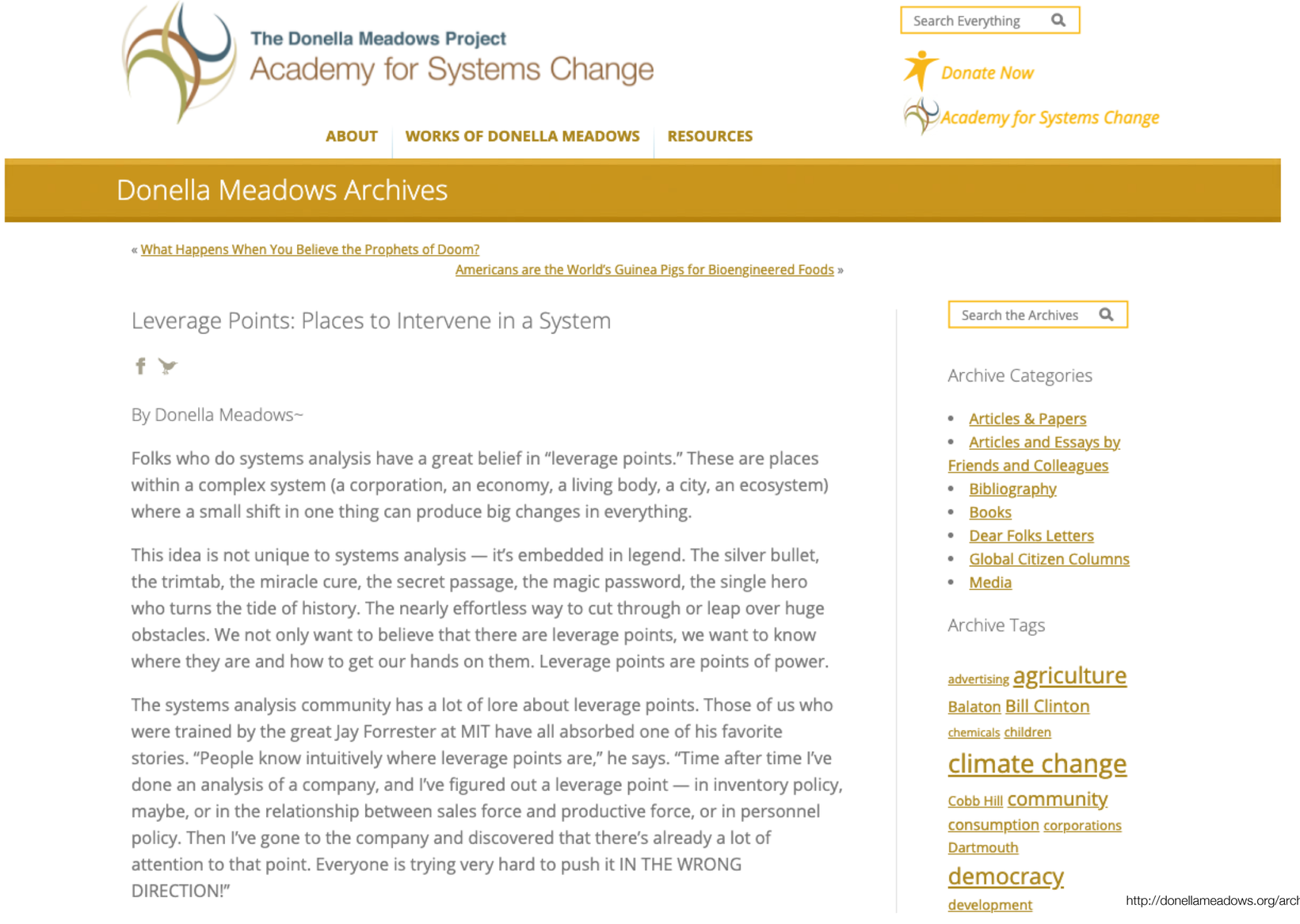
Forum for the Future
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This interactive webinar held in October 2020 is part of a three-part series from the Stories of Change.

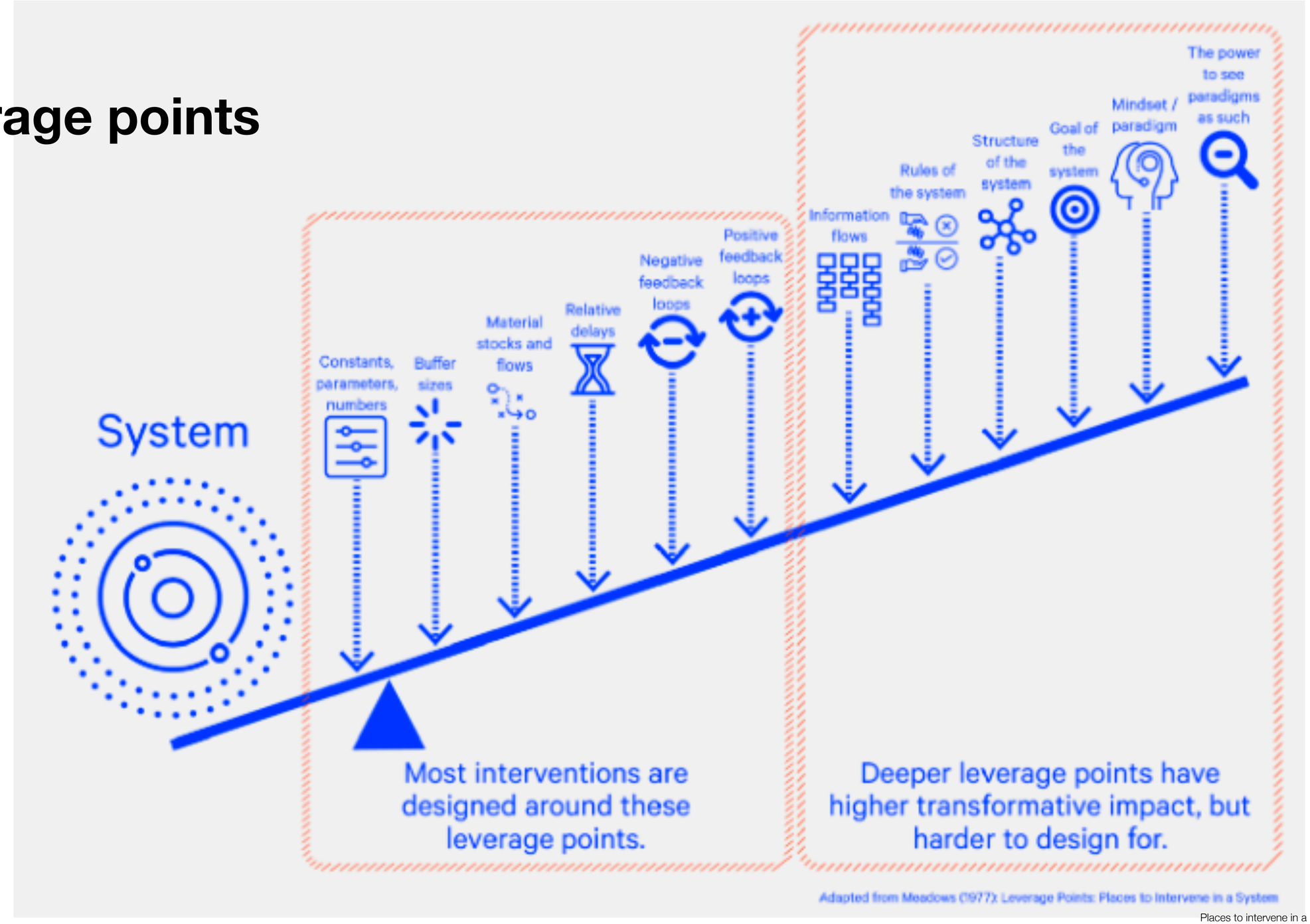
https://www.forumforthefuture.org/stories-of-change

leverage points



http://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/

leverage points



Places to intervene in a system — Corina Angheloiu

your own theory of change…

- Behavioural economics
- Social physics
- Max neef theroy of needs
- 3.5%
- MAP
- Trophic cascades
- Social practice theory
- Mutli Level Perspective
- Icebergs model
- Leverage points

Nesta

TSIP
The Social Innovation Partnership

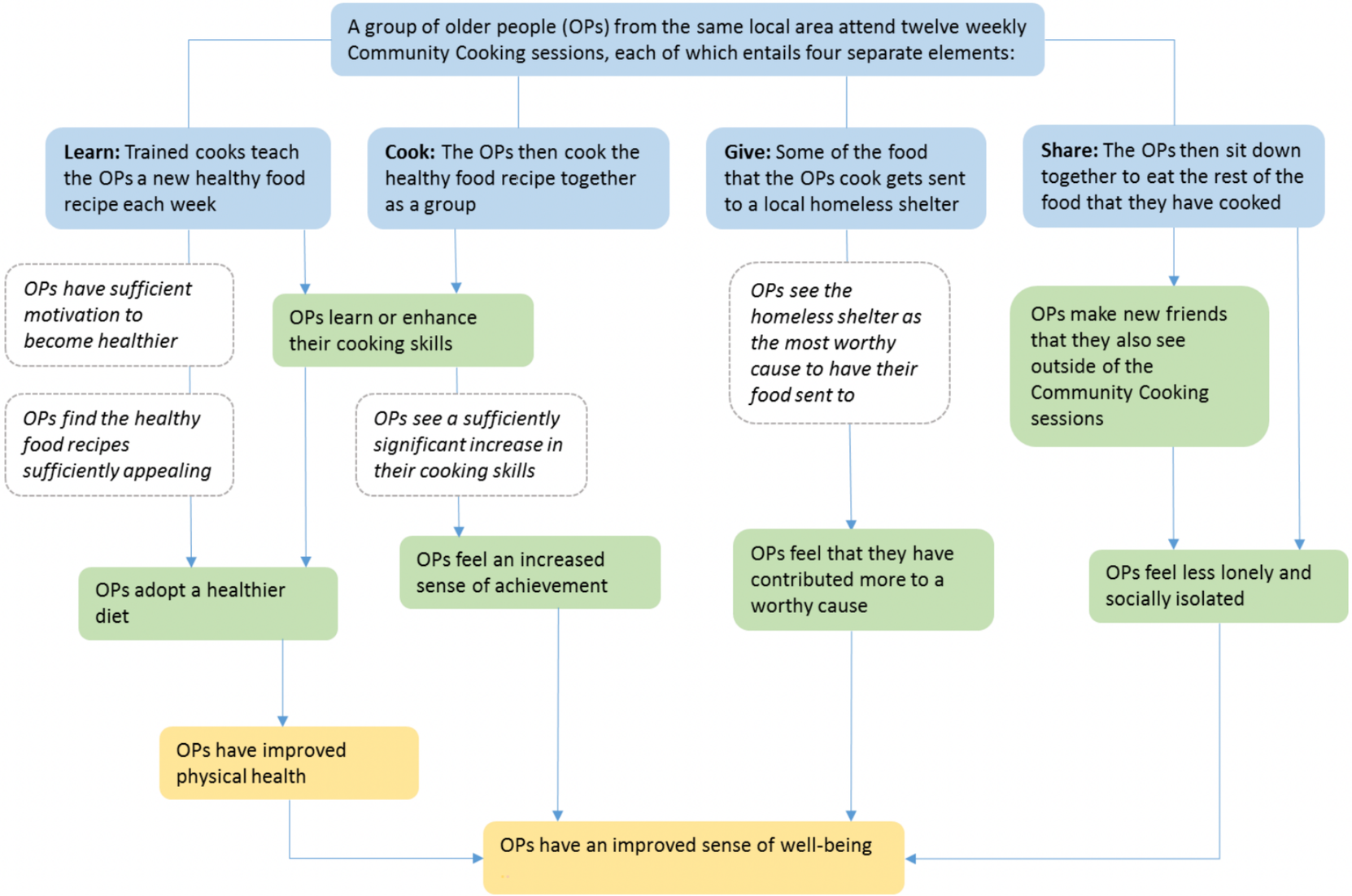
Example Theory of Change – Community Cooking

Activities

Assumptions

Intermediate Outcomes

Ultimate Goals




1. Identifying your **ultimate goal(s)**
2. Identifying your **intermediate outcomes**
3. Identifying your **activities**
4. Showing the **causal links**
5. Examining your **assumptions**

Step 1: Identifying your ultimate goal(s)

- **Definition:** The primary impact that your programme aims to have on its beneficiaries.
- You should normally have just one or two ultimate goals, and very rarely more than three.
- They should be measurable.
- They should represent the direct and immediate impact of the programme, rather than the more long-term impact that happens because of it.

Step 1: Identifying your ultimate goal(s)

- **Example**
  The UK's population is ageing, and people are living for longer. As public services become increasingly stretched, they will find it more difficult to meet the needs of older generations - needs that relate both to physical health and mental well-being. A new programme, Community Cooking, wishes to address this – their ultimate goals are therefore improved physical health and an improved sense of well-being amongst older people.

Step 2: Identifying your intermediate outcomes

- **Definition:** All the separate changes in the beneficiaries that lead to the ultimate goal.

- Intermediate outcomes should be measurable.

- They should be comprehensive enough to reflect the complexity of the programme – their aim is to explain in detail all of the changes that happen to beneficiaries during the programme.

Step 2: Identifying your intermediate outcomes

- **Example** Though a large number of different elements can contribute to physical health and a sense of well-being, the Community Cooking programme targets four specifically – a healthier diet, an increased sense of achievement, reduced social isolation and a feeling of contributing to a worthy cause. These therefore form four of the key intermediate outcomes in their Theory of Change. Other intermediate outcomes are then included to explain exactly how those key intermediate outcomes are achieved.

Step 3: Identifying your activities

- **Definition:** All the things that a programme does directly for its beneficiaries, or that the beneficiaries do as part of the programme.

- Activities should only include the things that impact on the beneficiaries directly, not the more operational things that are done prior to those activities or that impact on the beneficiaries more indirectly (e.g. the referral process, the training of staff etc).

- They should be sufficiently detailed, so that someone unfamiliar with the programme can understand what each activity entails.

- They can be quantified to explain ‘dosage’ i.e. to explain exactly how much of the activities each beneficiary receives (as opposed to explaining how many beneficiaries the programme currently works with).

Step 3: Identifying your activities

- **Example** Community Cooking involves twelve weekly sessions in which a group of older people from the same local community get together to i) be taught a healthy recipe by a trained chef, ii) cook the recipe in groups, iii) sit down to eat what they've cooked together, and iv) give away some of that food to a local homeless shelter.

Step 4: Showing the causal links

- **Definition:**Arrows that explain the causality of your programme in more detail. More specifically, causal links should show which activities lead to which intermediate outcomes, which intermediate outcomes lead to which other intermediate outcomes, and which intermediate outcomes lead to which ultimate goal (if there is more than one ultimate goal).

- Causal links should reflect the complexity of the programme – generally speaking it is likely that some activities will lead to more than one intermediate outcome, some intermediate outcomes will have more than one activity leading to them, and many intermediate outcomes will lead to other intermediate outcomes (rather than simply linking an activity directly to the ultimate goal).

- However, complexity should also be balanced with clarity – if the number and complexity of causal links are making the Theory of Change difficult to follow or digest, you should consider removing some of the less integral causal links from the diagram.

Step 4: Showing the causal links

- **Example** Community Cooking's Theory of Change argues that sitting down together to eat the food that the older people have cooked leads to them feeling less socially isolated. However, the Theory of Change makes it clear that this happens in two different ways: i) directly, due to the time that the older people spend together during the sessions, and ii) indirectly, due to the older people making friends that they then spend time with outside of the sessions too. It is probable that doing the cooking itself also reduces social isolation in the same way, but Community Cooking have chosen not to represent those causal links on their Theory of Change as i) this is only a secondary effect of that particular activity, and ii) those causal links would have to cross over other causal links, which would reduce the clarity of the Theory of Change diagram.

Step 5: Examining your assumptions

- **Definition:**The assumptions that underpin each causal link. Tips
- The purpose of assumptions is to proactively identify reasons why some of your causal links may not hold true in practice.
- Assumptions should focus on your most contestable causal links i.e. the sections of your Theory of Change that someone might challenge as being less plausible or convincing..
- They should be the very last step in creating your Theory of Change.
- They should always sit on top of a specific causal link, rather than ‘floating’ elsewhere on the diagram.

Step 5: Examining your assumptions

- **Example** Community Cooking's Theory of Change argues that that learning new healthy food recipes will lead to the older people adopting a healthier diet. However, Community Cooking rightly acknowledge that there are some important assumptions that underpin this claim. They are assuming i) that the older people will have sufficient motivation to become healthier, and ii) that they will find the healthy food recipes sufficiently appealing. If either or both of those assumptions do not hold true in practice, it is likely that the older people will not adopt a healthier diet, even if they have learned a number of recipes that would allow them to. Identifying these assumptions may lead to Community Cooking altering their programme to add extra emphasis on the value of a healthier diet, or to change the menu of recipes to make them even more appealing.