

Catalysing mass commitment to transformational change

(An outline of Kitchen Table Conversations)

If we look at the big picture, it is clear that we have to change the operation of our whole society if we are to avoid the worst effects of global warming and other environmental trends.

This is an outline of how to introduce people to the idea of a *whole system change to a life-affirming culture*. It describes our innovative communication tool, *Kitchen Table Conversations*.

Kitchen Table Conversations are designed to be done face-to-face (however, the online version can be [downloaded here](#)). Physical markers pasted on cardboard are laid down one at a time to tell a story and connect the dots. They help people keep track of what could be a very complex conversation.

Many people like this presentation because it sets a positive intention. It is concise, it connects the dots with things they already know, and it makes sense. As a result, people become mentally and emotionally prepared to support leadership for large-scale transformative change, as well as pursuing their own local change initiatives.

Kitchen Table Conversations take place in the context of a larger movement to inspire thoughtful mainstream commitment to transitioning to a life-affirming culture, rather than continuing on our present course of ecological self-destruction.

This article has four sections:

- Steps to an effective movement for large-scale transformative change
- Big Picture Drivers of increased CO₂ emissions
- Connecting aspiration with practical action
(including a section on *partnership-respect relating* in contrast to *domination control relating*)
- Inspiring Transition



Steps to an effective movement for large-scale transformative change

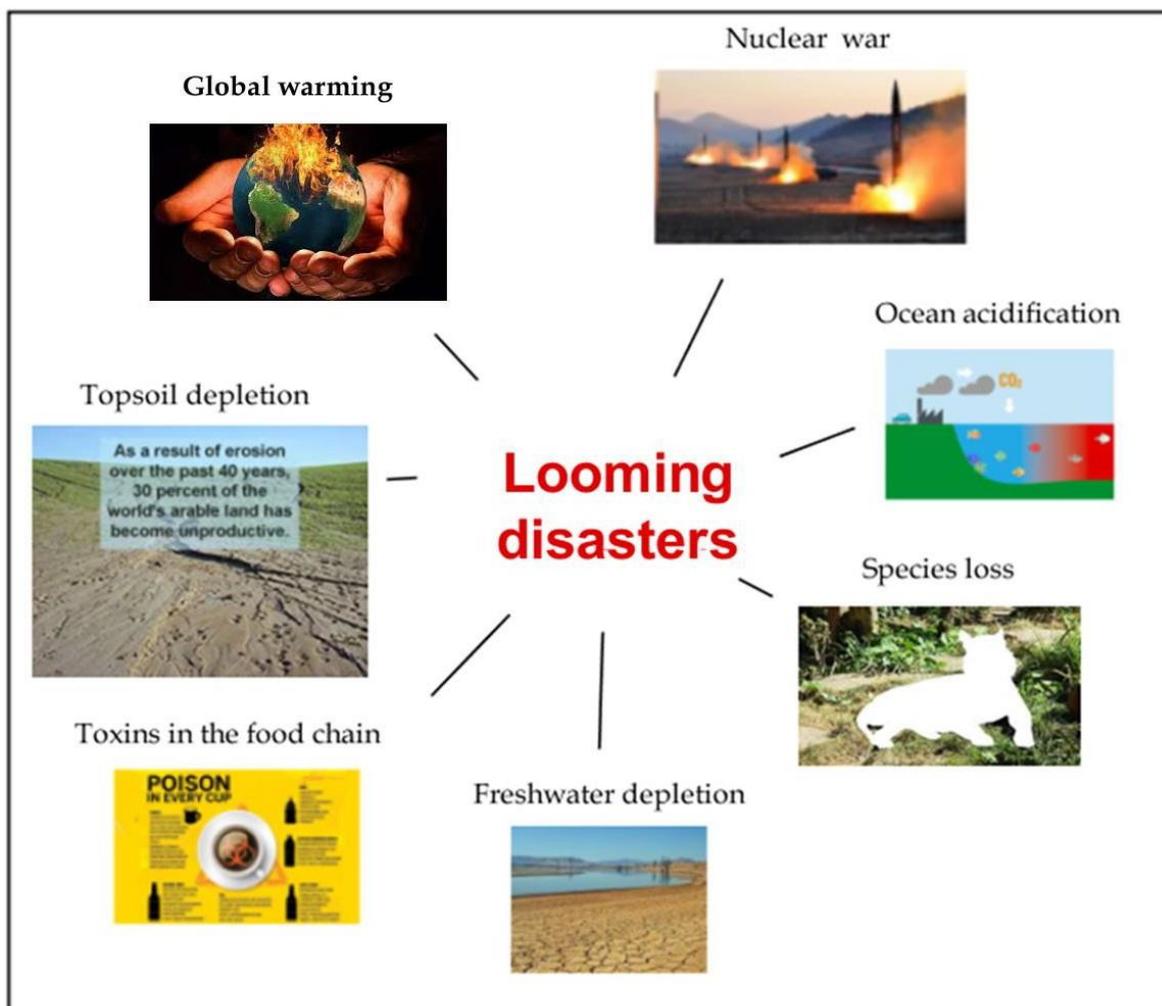
1. Raise the alarm!

The Extinction Rebellion and the School Strike 4 Climate folks are doing this through attention-getting actions.

We can also do it through quiet conversations.

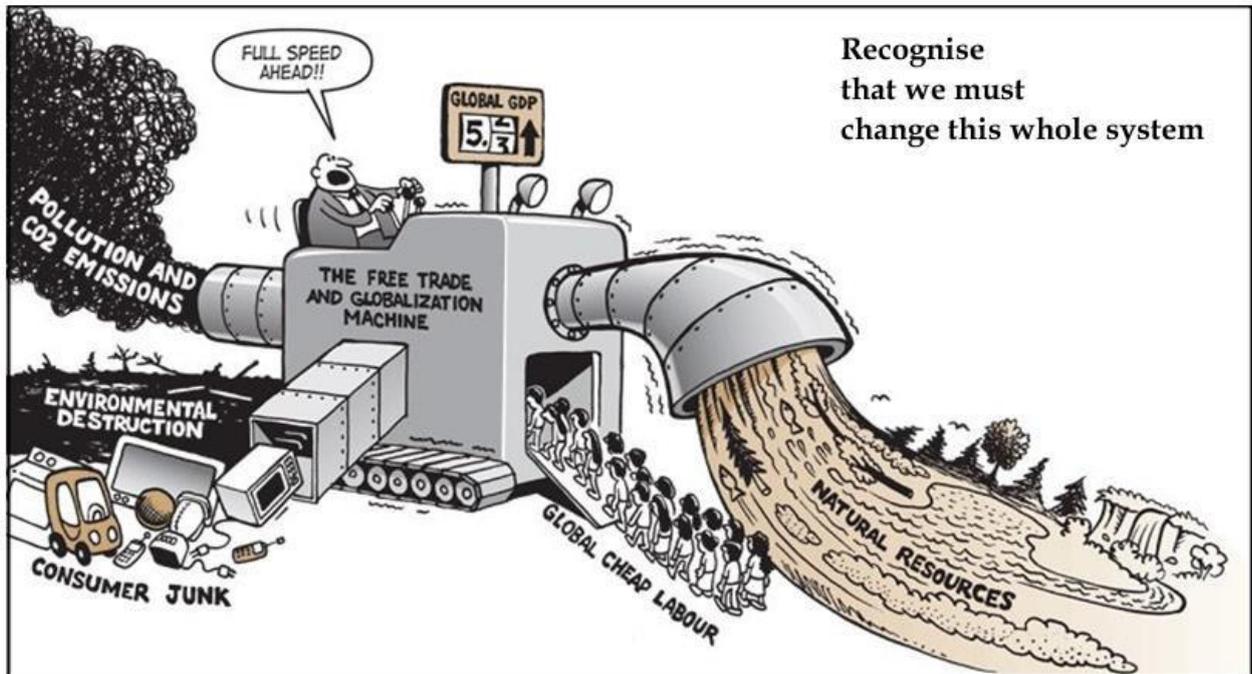


2. Recognise that there are a number of adverse trends and threats that threatens the survival of civilisation



3. Recognise that it is a systems problem

Our society as a whole operates in ways that make everything worse. This cartoon sums it up. Therefore we need to change the whole system.



4 Establish a positive goal

It helps to have a positive goal. Adapting a phrase from eco-philosopher Joanna Macy, we could say that

*The overarching goal of our time is to **transition to a life-affirming global culture.***



5 Seed this goal into mainstream culture

... and enable folks to understand what's involved.

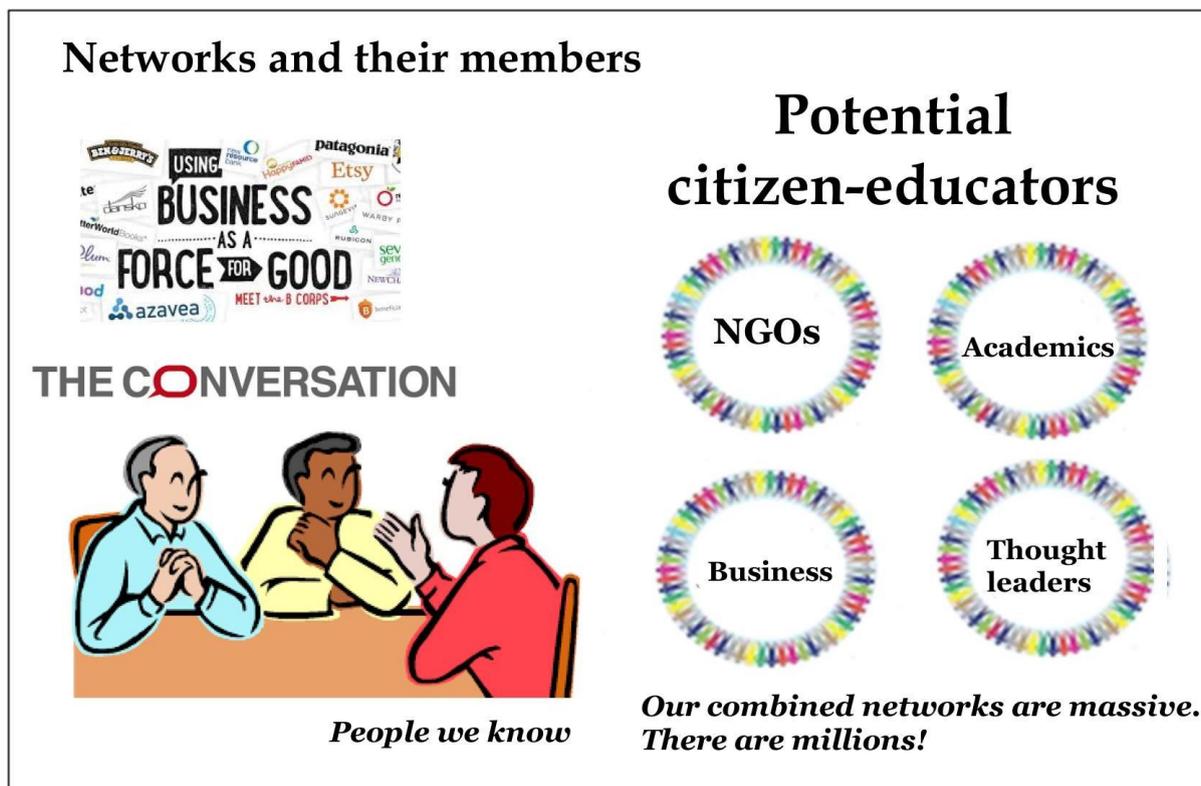
A major unsolved problem for the environmental, progressive and faith movements that care about a positive future is:

How might we get past preaching to the converted?

How do we go beyond our own thought bubbles?

We have a huge **untapped resource** for this: the *members* of the millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being. Mostly they pay dues and sign petitions. Given the right tools, they could become *citizen-educators* and thought catalysts.

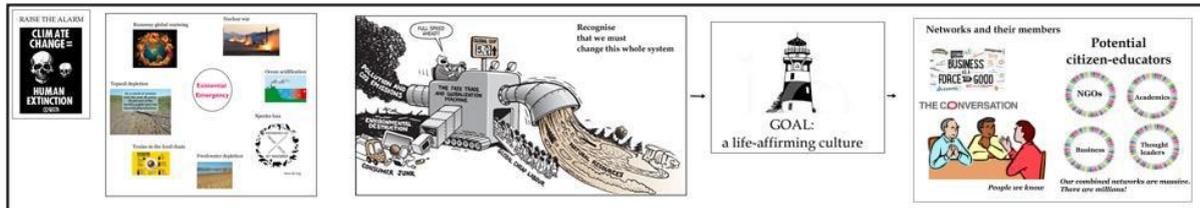
Each member of each group has their own personal network, including their friends, neighbours, business colleagues, and larger social networks. The combined reach these networks, if aligned towards a common goal, is enormous. We reach into every level of society.



A simple organising approach is to inspire as many groups as possible to espouse the goal of transitioning to a life-affirming culture, and provide ready-to-use tools their members can use to communicate with their personal networks.

The [Inspiring Transition](#) is our support platform for this.

This is what this sequence looks like when it is laid out in a conversation; it is a flow of thinking.



Inspiring Transition is a platform to support citizen educators and thought leaders in communicating through their networks. We provide sample emails, guerrilla marketing tactics, and Kitchen Table Conversations.

Two of the key Kitchen Table Conversations modules are below.

Big Picture Drivers of CO₂ emissions

This is a module for conversations on the topic: *What makes CO₂ emissions go up?*

Its purpose is to take people out of silo thinking, and enable them to systemically grasp the big picture drivers that make global warming worse. The same drivers apply to many other aspects of our current ‘situation’, as political comedian Steve Bhaerman puts it.

This conversation equips people mentally and emotionally to support leadership for large-scale changes in economics, trade agreements, undue corporate influence on governments, and the like.

Here is what the model looks like, but we don’t start with the complete model:



Conducting the conversation

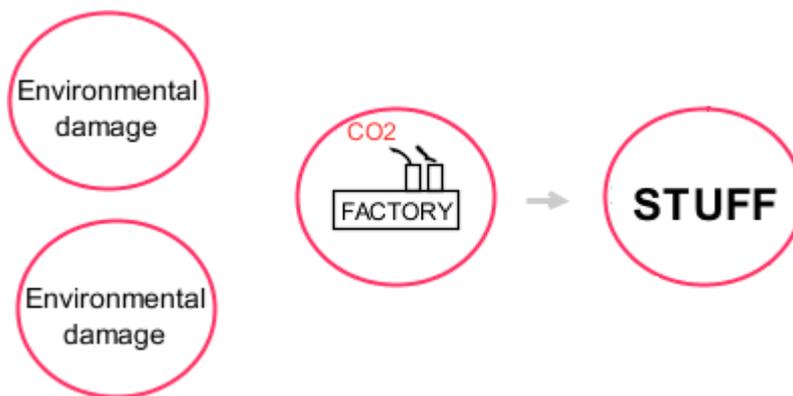
This is a cross between a conversation and a presentation.

It assumes that the person we are talking with is already aware that global warming is an issue. If not, [Looming Disasters](#) is a module for a conversation to make people acutely aware of the many trends that put our present and future well-being in jeopardy. The point of *Looming Disasters* is to bring people to a sense of, "My gosh, this is real; we'd better do something."

The focus of our module on the Big Picture Drivers is the question:

What major factors in the way our society operates tend to make CO₂ emissions go up?

We start by laying out four markers that show the connection between *stuff* that is manufactured and *environmental damage*, including CO₂. It works as an equation: The more *stuff*, the more the associated environmental damage.



NOTE: On the back of the two *Environmental damage* markers we have *animal agriculture* and *industrial agriculture*, as well as *ocean acidification*, *freshwater depletion*, *toxins in the food chain*, *deforestation* and *species loss*. They are all part of the pattern.

So, our enquiry is about ***What factors in the way our society operates make the amount of STUFF go up***, as a proxy for CO₂ emissions.

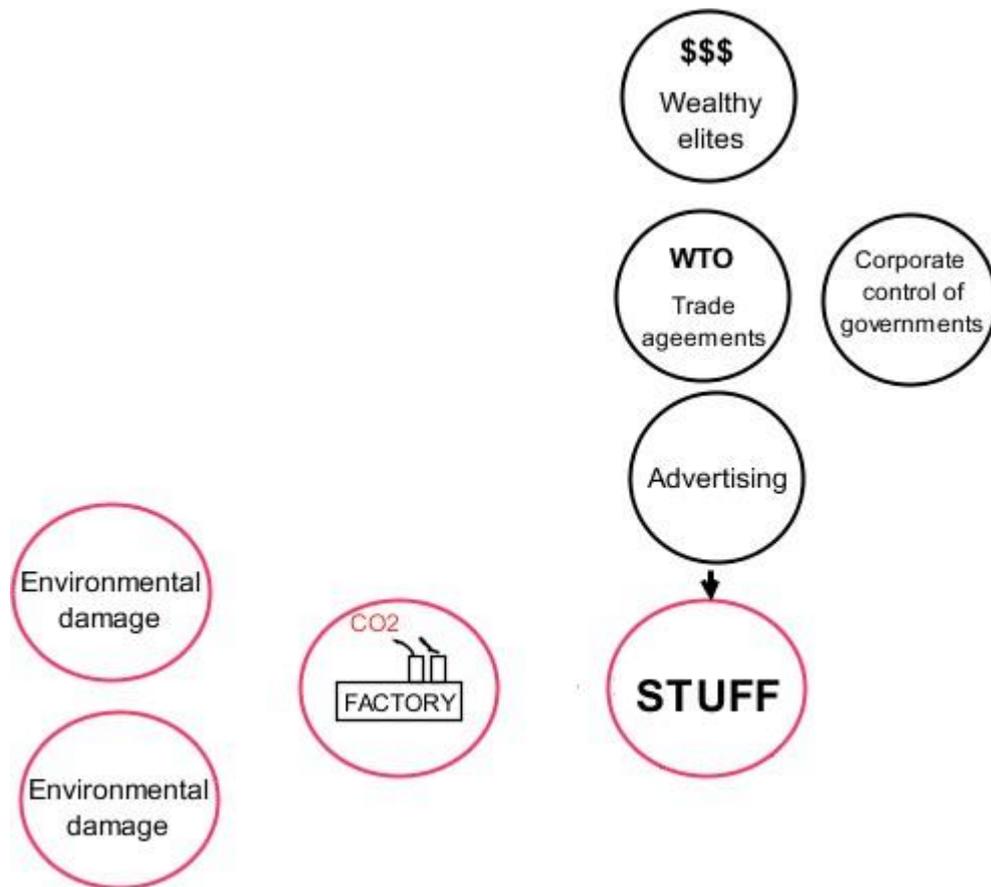
We ask this as an open question.

People may say *advertising*. I put down a marker for this.

I might add the *World Trade Organisation (WTO)* and *Free Trade Agreements*.

People nod their heads when I mention *corporate influence on governments*. And This whole system is designed to support the *wealthy elites* who set it up.

In pointing these things out, we are not trying to be 'original'. Rather, we are aiming to state the obvious and help people connect the dots so that they develop a big picture overview of what's going on.

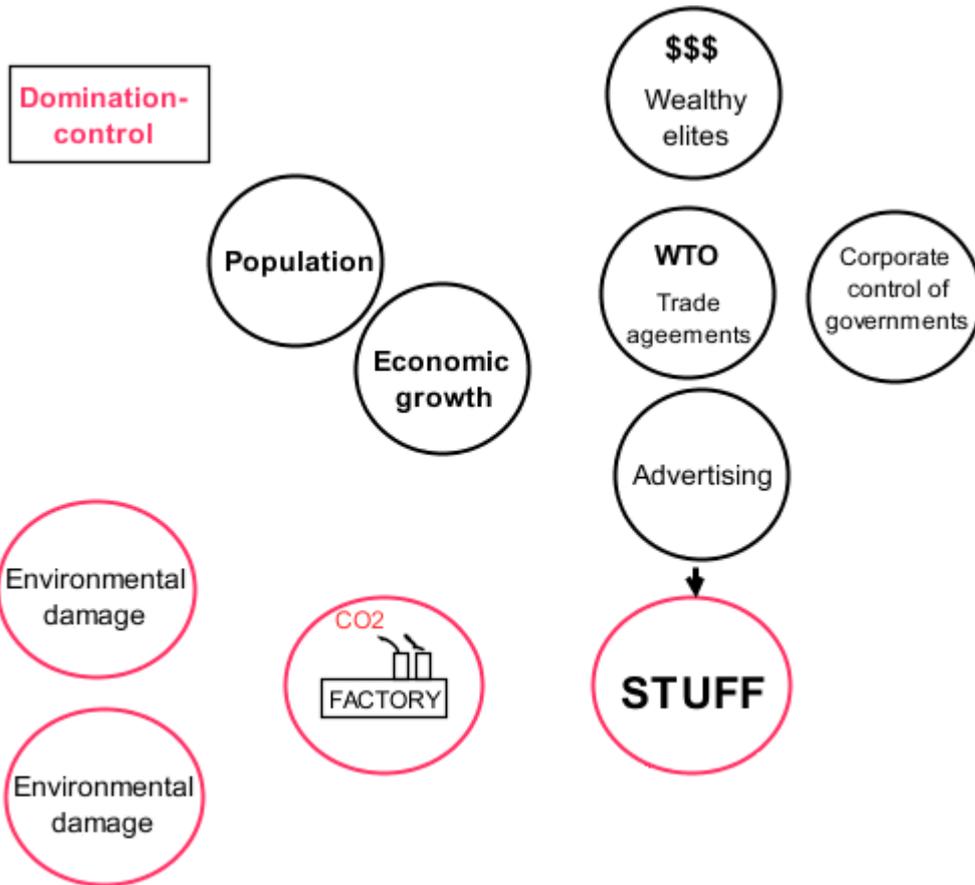


This whole system is driven by devotion to *economic growth*. So we have an important conclusion: *economic growth* is a major driver of environmental destruction.

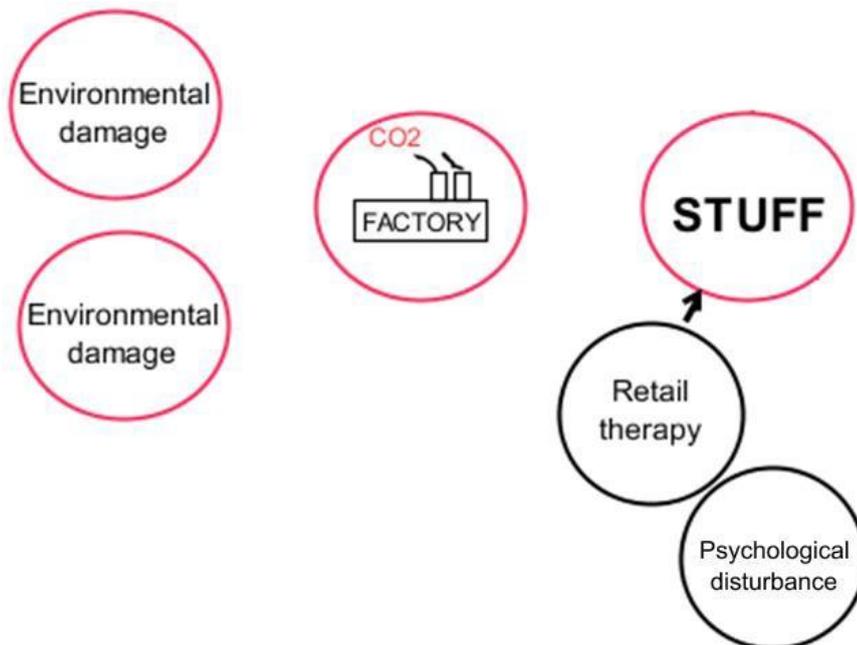
Population growth amplifies everything.

And at a metalevel, this system operates on an ethos of *domination-control relating*, willingly destroying people and the planet for the sake of profit and power.

We add these to our model.



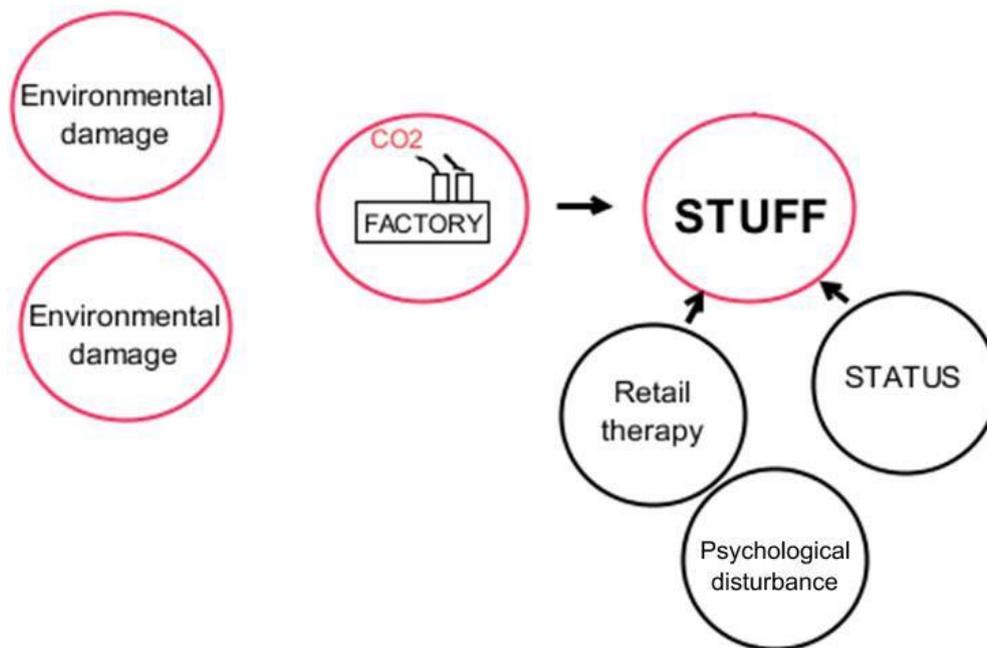
There are psychological factors as well that drive excess consumption. We have a name for it: *retail therapy*. People buy stuff as compensation for not feeling happy. In other words, there is some kind of *inner malaise* and disconnection from community, nature, spirit...



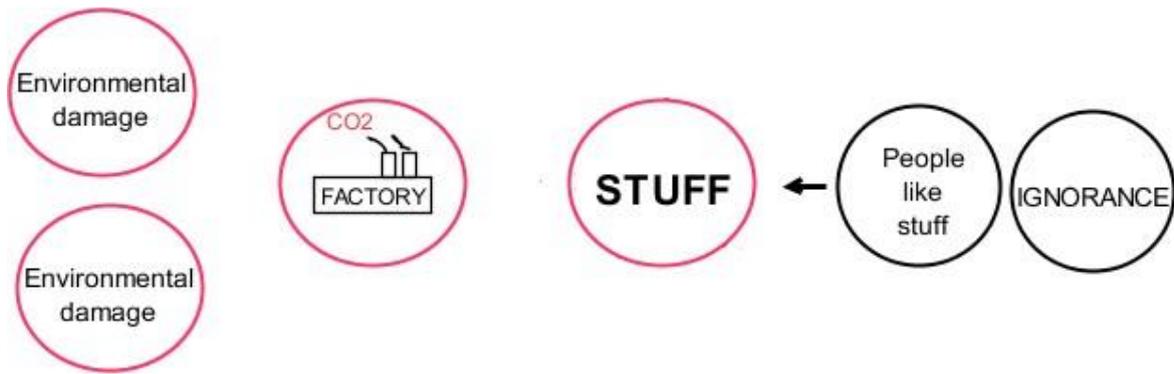
Psychological disturbance – a huge topic, with many causes. Domestic violence, child abuse, rape, economic stress and racism all affect brain functioning, feelings and behaviour.

Positive levels of intervention include gentle birth, coaching new parents to bring out more of their nurturing side than their punitive side with their children; schools that support children’s innate curiosity and initiative; and respectful workplaces ... along with insight meditation; psychotherapy and energy psychology techniques to resolve our personal emotional issues. All these are important aspects of transitioning to a life-affirming culture.

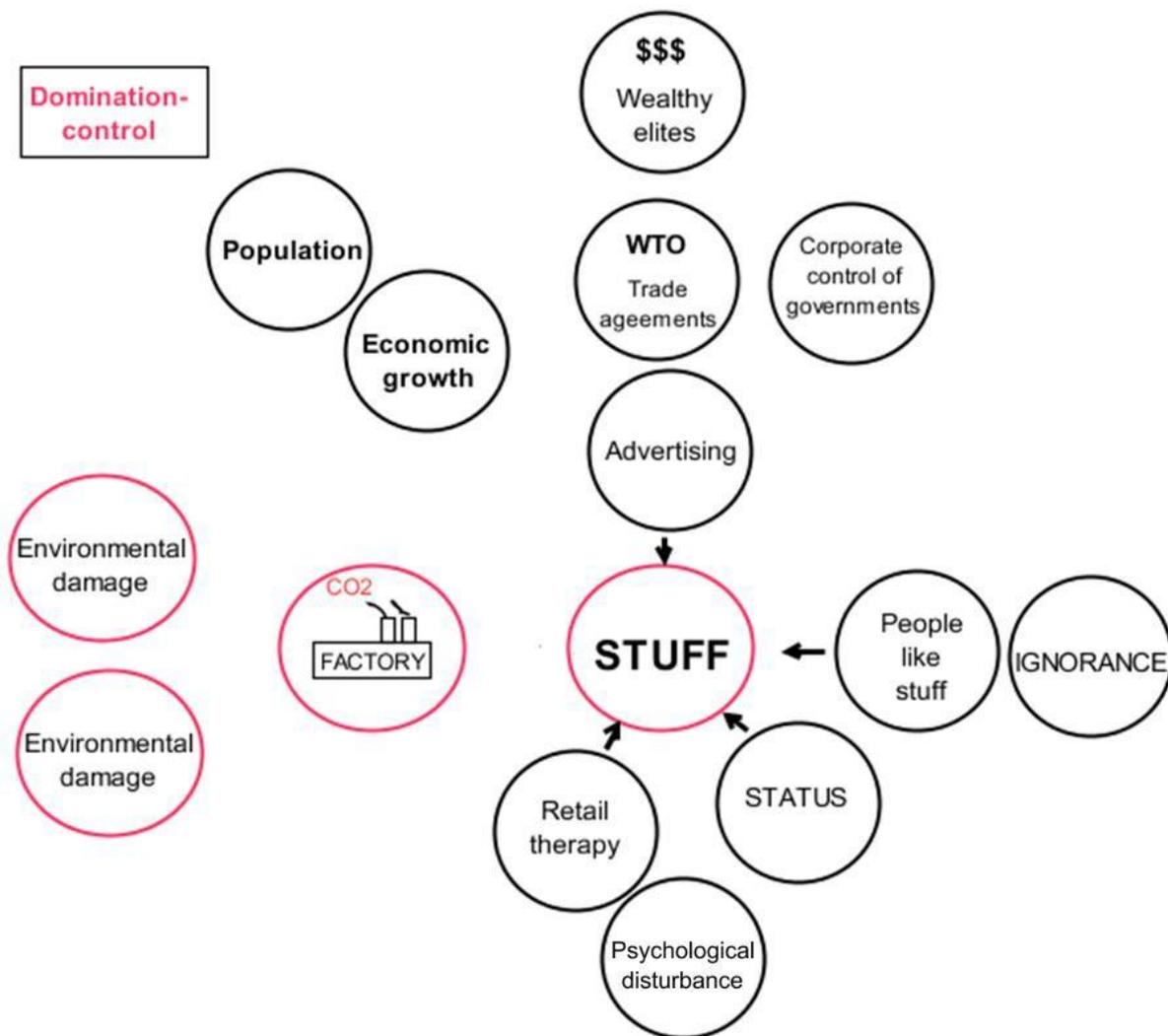
Psychological disturbance also shows up as the compulsion to appear important – i.e. *status*.



Ah – but *people like stuff!* True. It can seem cheap and temporarily interesting. Plus people have a sense of entitlement (‘You deserve it!’). And people are ignorant of the larger pattern and its consequences that we are all part of. So we add *ignorance* as a major driver of global warming.



Putting the whole pattern together, we have a rough but integrated overview of the **major factors that must change** if we are to have any chance of pulling out of our ecological nosedive.



This module has two purposes:

- Enabling activists to get out of silo thinking, because critical to long-term viability is combining local action with the big picture drivers.
- Enabling everybody to develop a rough but comprehensive framework for grasping the systemic drivers of environmental destruction.

So that

- People are mentally and emotionally prepared to support leadership for large-scale transformative change, including at the level of economics, reducing military expenditure, and undue corporate influence on governments.

Connecting Aspiration with Practical Action

We champion the goal of transitioning to a life-affirming culture.

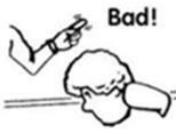


Obviously, we have to unpack what this means. There are two core operating principles of a life-affirming culture:

- It must be ecologically sustainable, which means it operates within planetary boundaries. If we undercut our ecosystems' capacity to support us, civilisation will collapse. We are well down that track already.
- And it must operate on what systems thinker Riane Eisler calls *partnership-respect* values rather than *domination-control* values.

Perhaps partnership-respect relating needs some explanation. Systems thinker Riane Eisler noted that we have two primary ways of relating, which she calls *partnership-respect* and *domination-control*. One is based on caring, the other is based on power over others.

This graphic contrasts partnership-respect relating with *domination-control* relating.

Partnership-respect	Domination-control
 	 
<p data-bbox="279 571 414 627">Birth without violence</p> 	
 <p data-bbox="510 996 742 1142">Aikido uses circular movements that enable advanced practioners to take care of their attackers</p>	 
 <p data-bbox="534 1288 750 1489"><i>Government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Lincoln.</i></p>	

Comments on the images

The image in the upper left corner is of an infant who was born using the approach to 'birth without violence' pioneered by French obstetrician Frederick Leboyer. Infants are aware, responsive human beings.

After presiding at many births, Leboyer realised that the normal practice of holding an infant upside down and slapping it to stimulate its breathing was a form of assault. He asked: *What would be a gentle way to greet a newborn?*

His answer: dim down the lights, keep the birthing room warm, immediately put the baby on the mother's body, and, importantly, do not cut the umbilical cord until the blood stops pulsing (typically 6-8 minutes after birth). This gives the infant time to adjust to the experience of oxygen contacting delicate lung membranes for the first time.

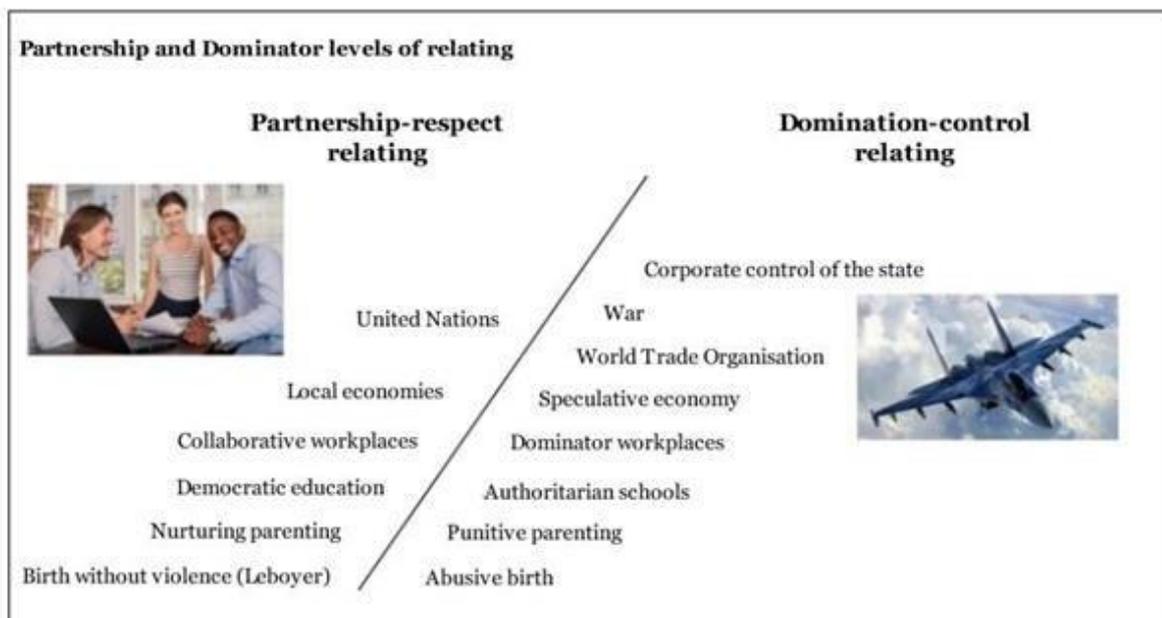
After a typical birth children are in shock for about six weeks. As this picture shows, after a gentle birth a child can be at peace within a few hours.



In Aikido, a Japanese martial art, we 'go with' an opponent's attack, rather than resisting it. We guide the attack into a graceful spiral that ends in a throw or a pin. The aim – if you are advanced enough – is to actually take care of someone who is so misguided as to think that you are their enemy.

Aikido, Improvisational acting, Non-Violent Communication and other methods are ways of training to become more skilful at partnership-respect relating.

Both partnership-respect and domination-control relating operate at every level from birthing to global governance

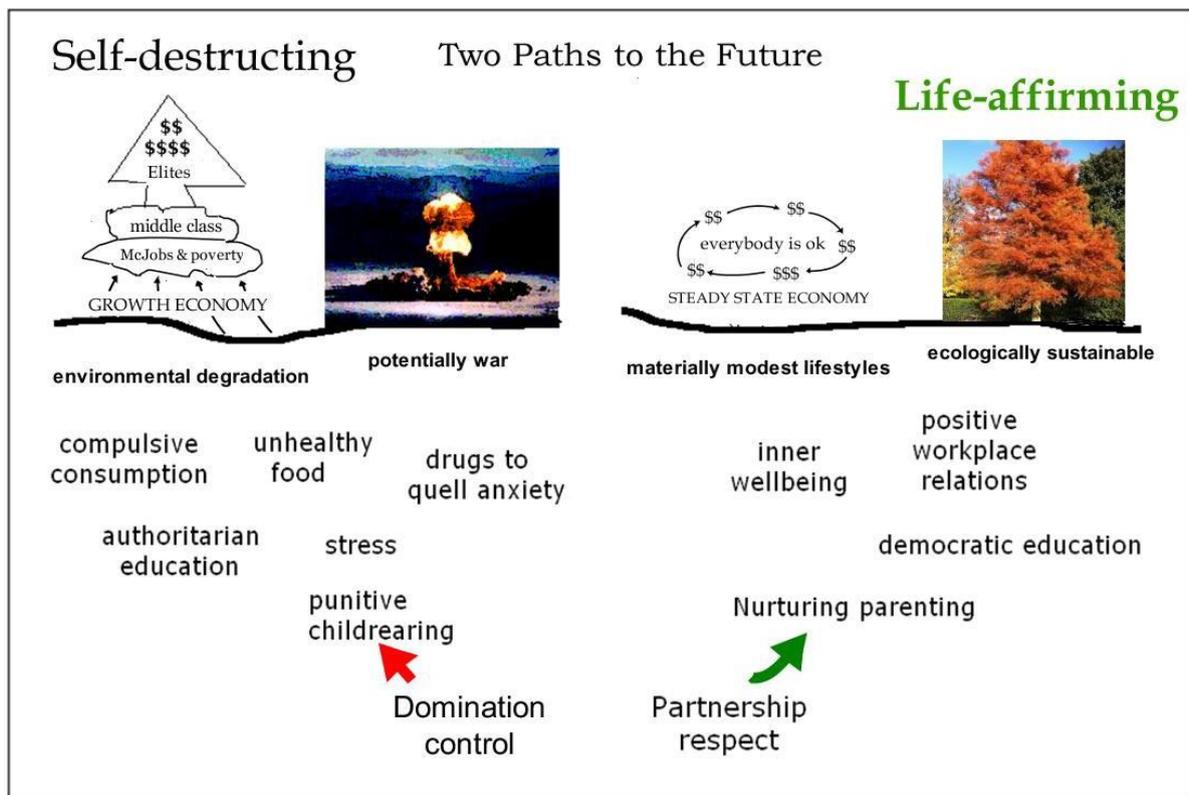


There are two paths to the future

Futurist Arthur Clarke noted that any technologically advanced civilisation that develops nuclear weapons will destroy itself unless it evolves modes of collaboration for mutual well-being. Humanity is at this critical point now.

So there are two paths to the future. One is the continuation of domination-control economically, militarily, and as a mode of relating at every level. On this trend, the odds are that humanity will destroy itself.

The other path to the future is to embody partnership-respect relating at every level. This is the path of hope.

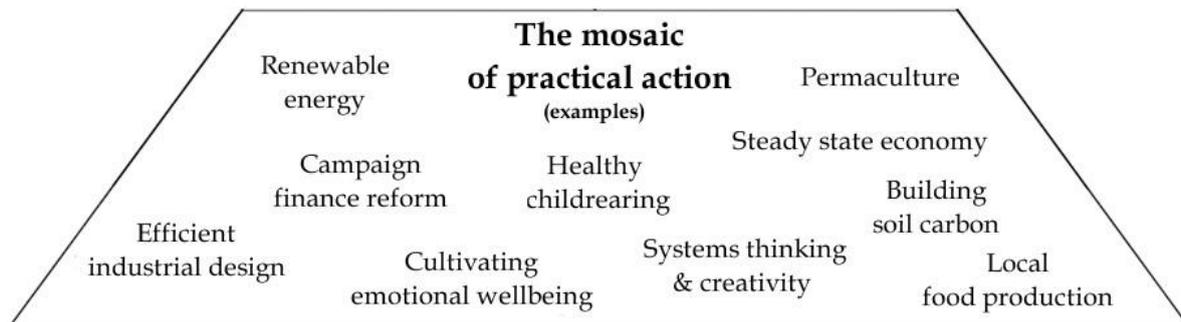


Our future depends upon partnership-respect relating setting the tone.

This diagram puts the two principles of *ecological sustainability* and *partnership-respect* relating together. Cultivating psycho-social maturation and technological changes are equally important for pulling out of our ecological nosedive.



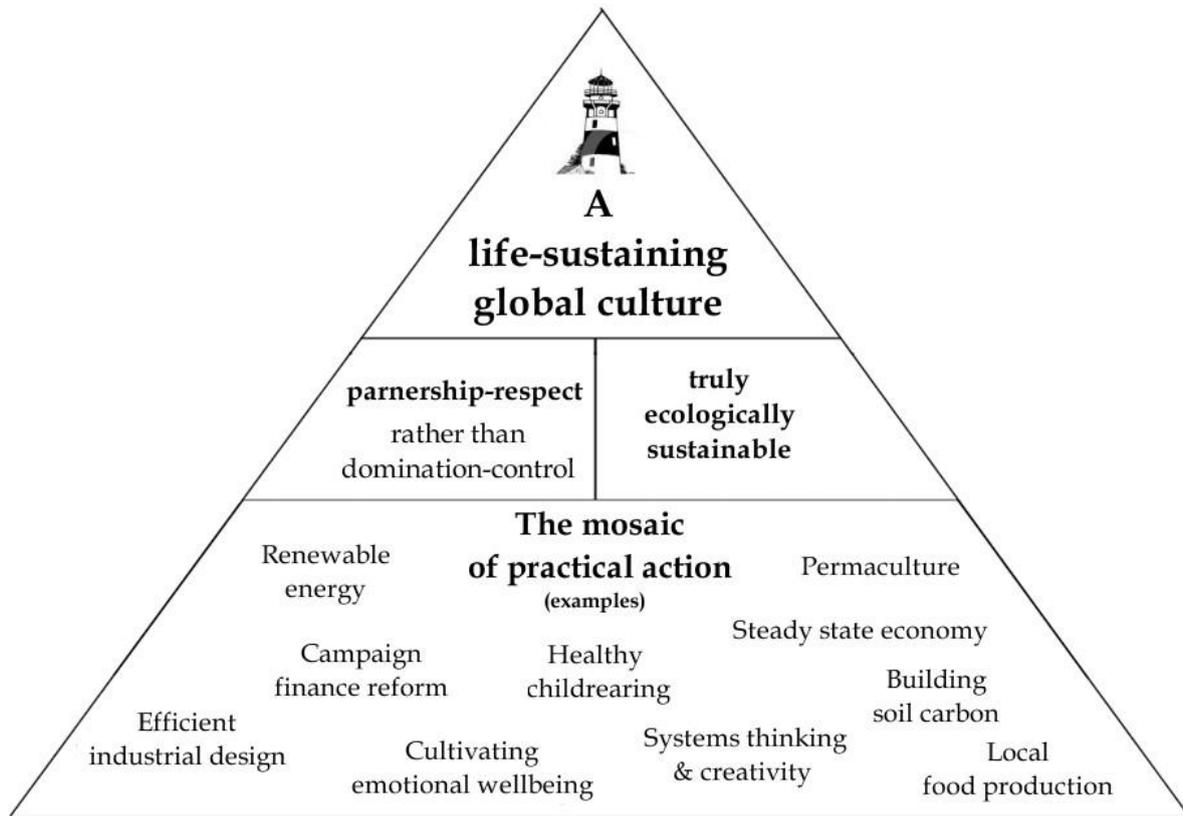
These two principles manifest as large-scale changes in economic policy, trade agreements, and the role of money in politics. They also manifest as a multitude of practical actions that we want to ramp up. We indicate these in our *Mosaic of Practical Action*:



So, there is a connection between the goal of a life-affirming culture and practical action. It is all of a piece.

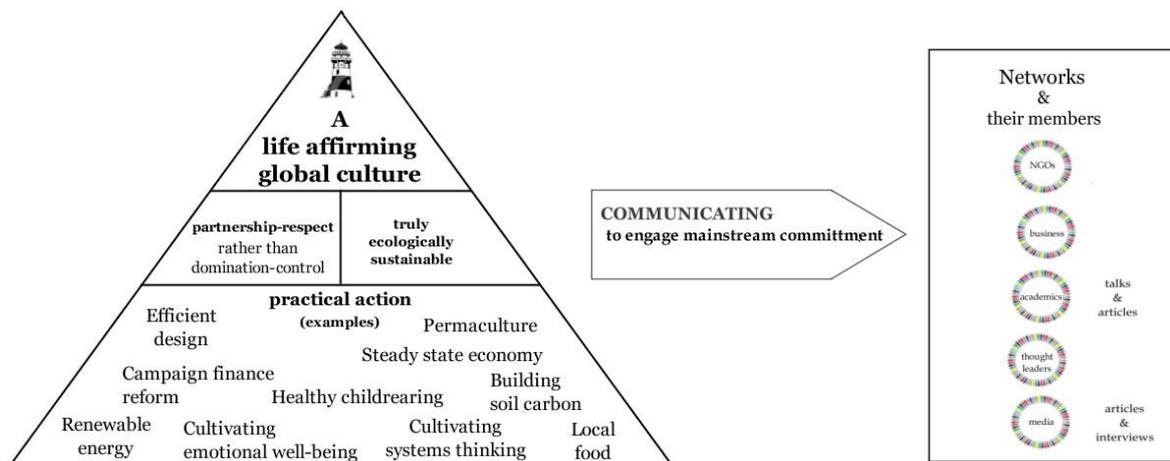
People doing practical action can frame their work as a contribution to the evolution of a life affirming global culture. From a marketing standpoint, this is a useful thing to do. Marketers know the value of having your meme seen everywhere; and a *life-affirming culture* stands in contrast to *economic growth* as a guiding goal for our future. We want people to see the goal of *transitioning to a life-affirming culture* everywhere.

Here is how it all fits together:



Something else is essential in addition to ramping up practical action. That is ***communicating to inspire mainstream commitment to turning things around.***

We can do this by inspiring the members of the millions of groups that care about environmental and social well-being to act as citizen educators / thought catalysts. By talking about the goal of transitioning to a life-affirming culture with our friends, neighbours and business colleagues, we can bypass the mainstream media, and catalyse the shift in thinking that will lead into changing our culture operates.



Inspiring Transition

[Inspiring Transition](#) is a support platform for communicating about transitioning to a life-affirming culture.

It is not an organisation in the usual sense. There is no central individual or group that directs what other people do. This is not needed.

All we need to do is to align around the goal of *transitioning to a life-affirming culture*, and get on with communicating about that through our own initiative. Individuals and groups can do this while still pursuing their own projects.

This makes the project administratively simple. However, it obviously calls for a high degree of individual self-responsibility.

We have an international network. Climate scientists Michael Mann and Will Steffen are two of our most prominent colleagues. Please, lend your influence to this.

TO BE IN THE LOOP, [register here](#).

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Accelerating the transition to a life-affirming culture