

Higher Education in Times of Climate Urgency, Polarization and Psychic Numbing - Navigating Bildung and Activism

October 20th 2020 – University Alliance for Sustainability Conference

Arjen Wals

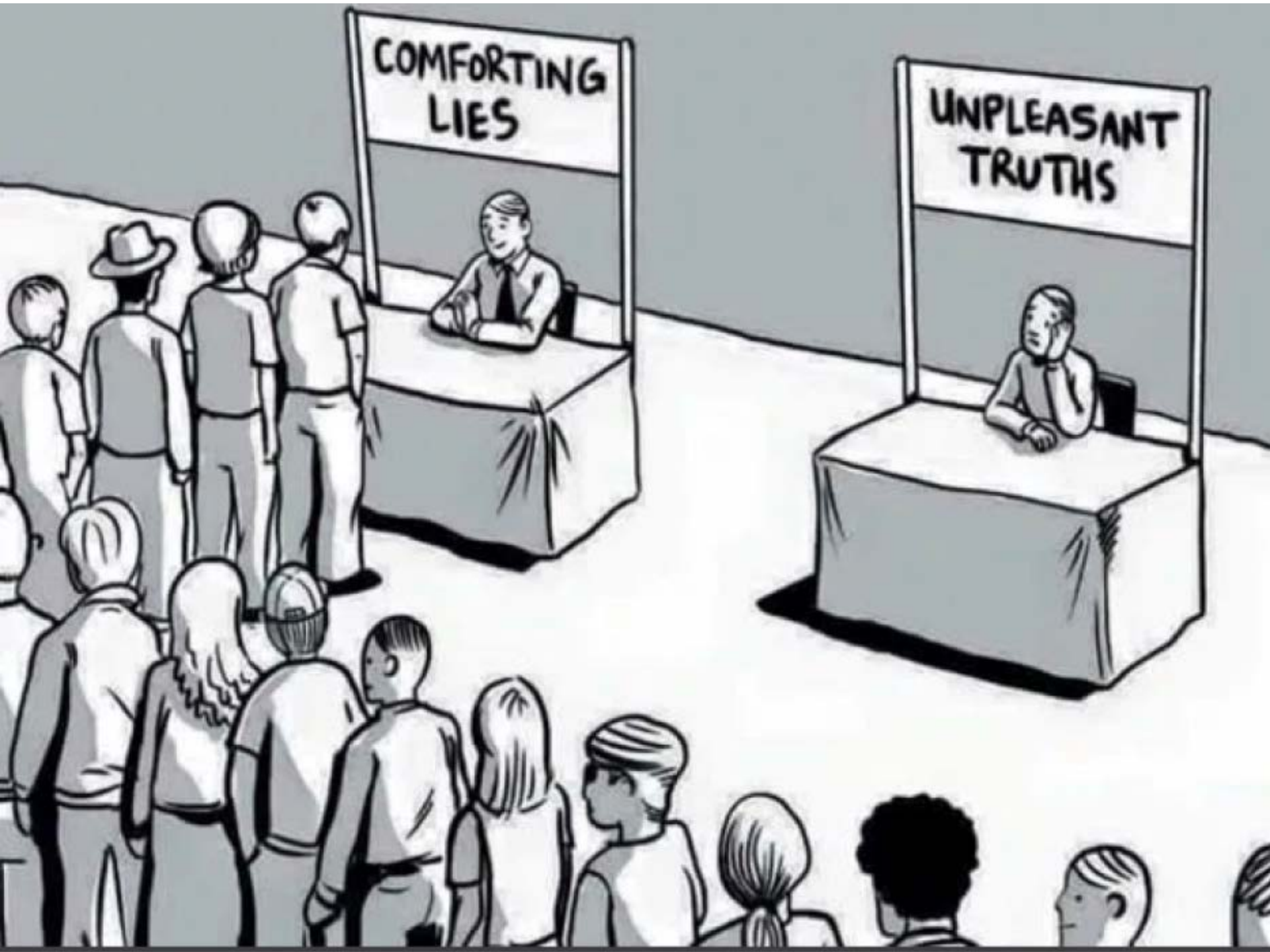






"I'm sorry, Jeannie, your answer was correct, but Kevin shouted his incorrect answer over yours, so he gets the points."







THE TECHNOLOGY THAT CONNECTS US ALSO CONTROLS US

TRAILER ▶

WATCH NOW | **NETFLIX**

THE DILEMMA

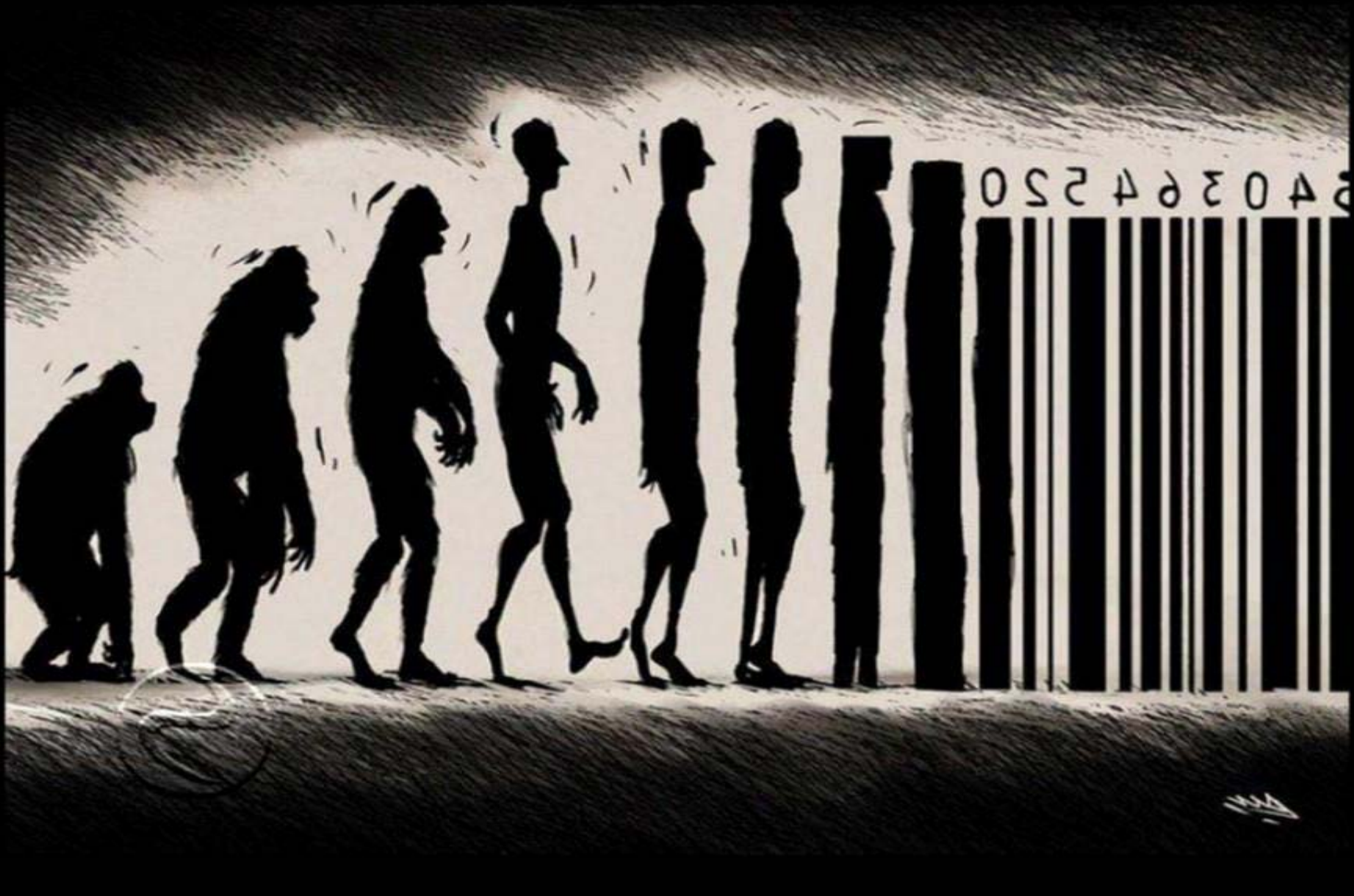
Never before have a handful of tech designers had such control over the way billions of us think, act, and live our lives.



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Environmental Melancholia

PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATIONS

By listening more deeply and focusing on invitation, versus persuasion and fear-based appeals, we can build deeper coalitions and collaborations that cross political and ideological boundaries (Renee Lertzman, 2015)

Environmental Melancholia

Psychoanalytic dimensions of
engagement

Renee Lertzman



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PERSON *of the* YEAR

TIME

**GRETA
THUNBERG**

THE POWER
OF YOUTH



a day ago



**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?**

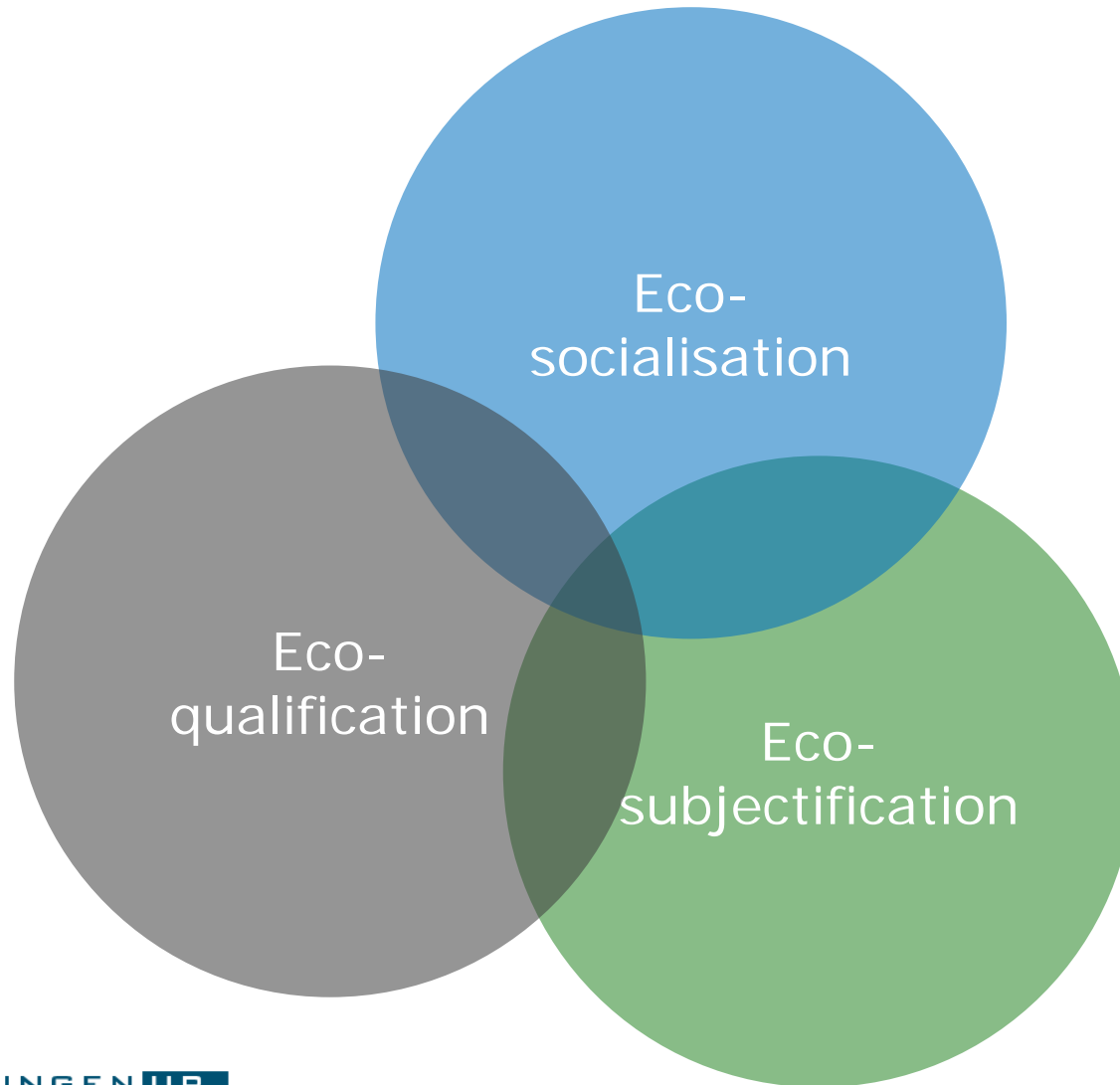
**HYSTERICAL
ECO-FANATICS!
ALWAYS TELLING
PEOPLE HOW
TO LIVE...**

**GET
YOURSELF
A PROPER
JOB!**

Polyp.org.uk



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





Developing Transformative Skills

- **Openness**

To meet situations, people, others' and own thoughts and feelings with openness, presence and acceptance.

- **Perspective-seeking**

To seek and bring in more perspectives for a larger understanding of myself, others and the whole.

- **Sense making**

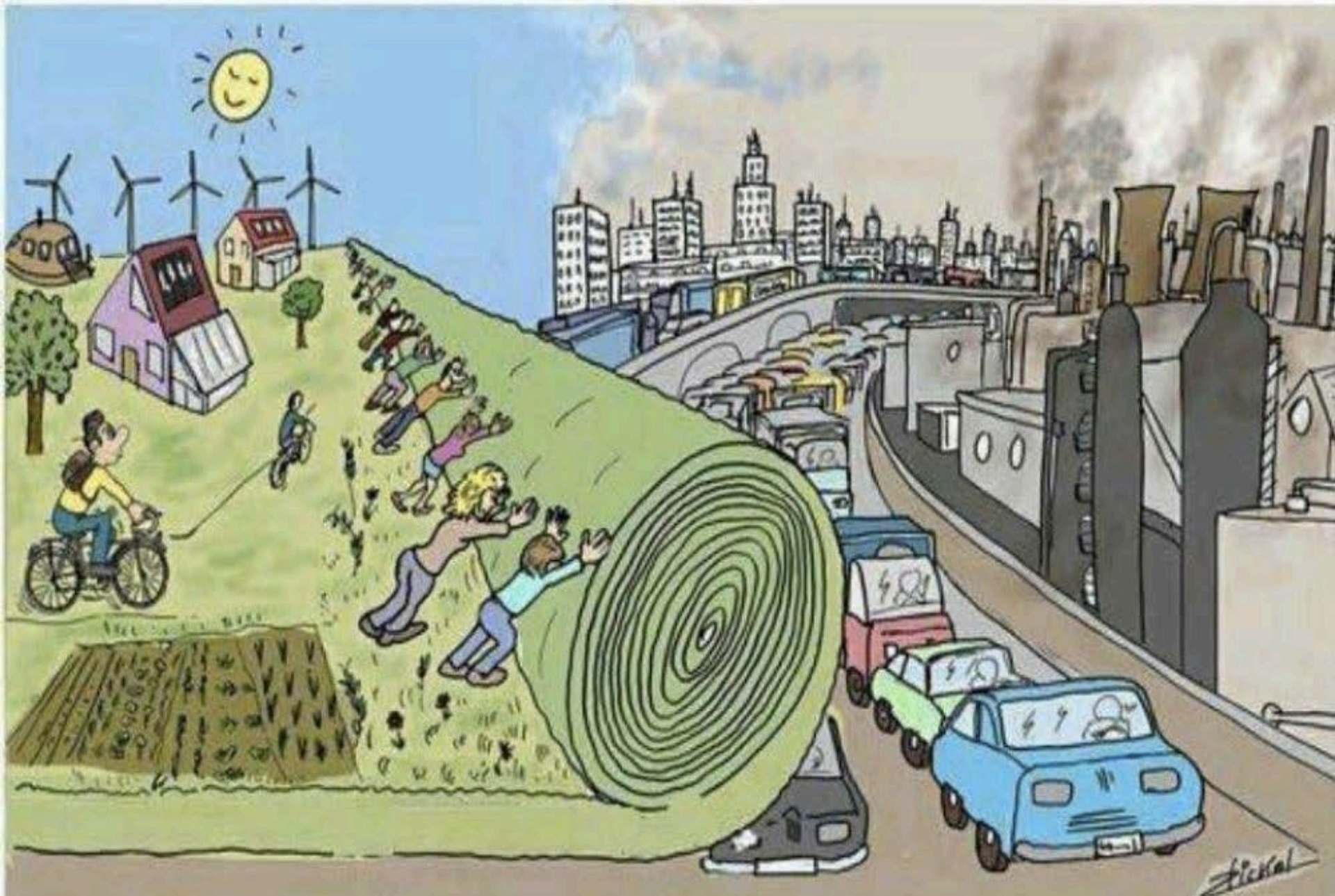
To see and understand the bigger and deeper patterns and my role in the world we create together.

- **Developing an inner compass**

To navigate myself and the world with insight based on what is really important to me and have the courage and willingness to act on this.

- **Compassion**

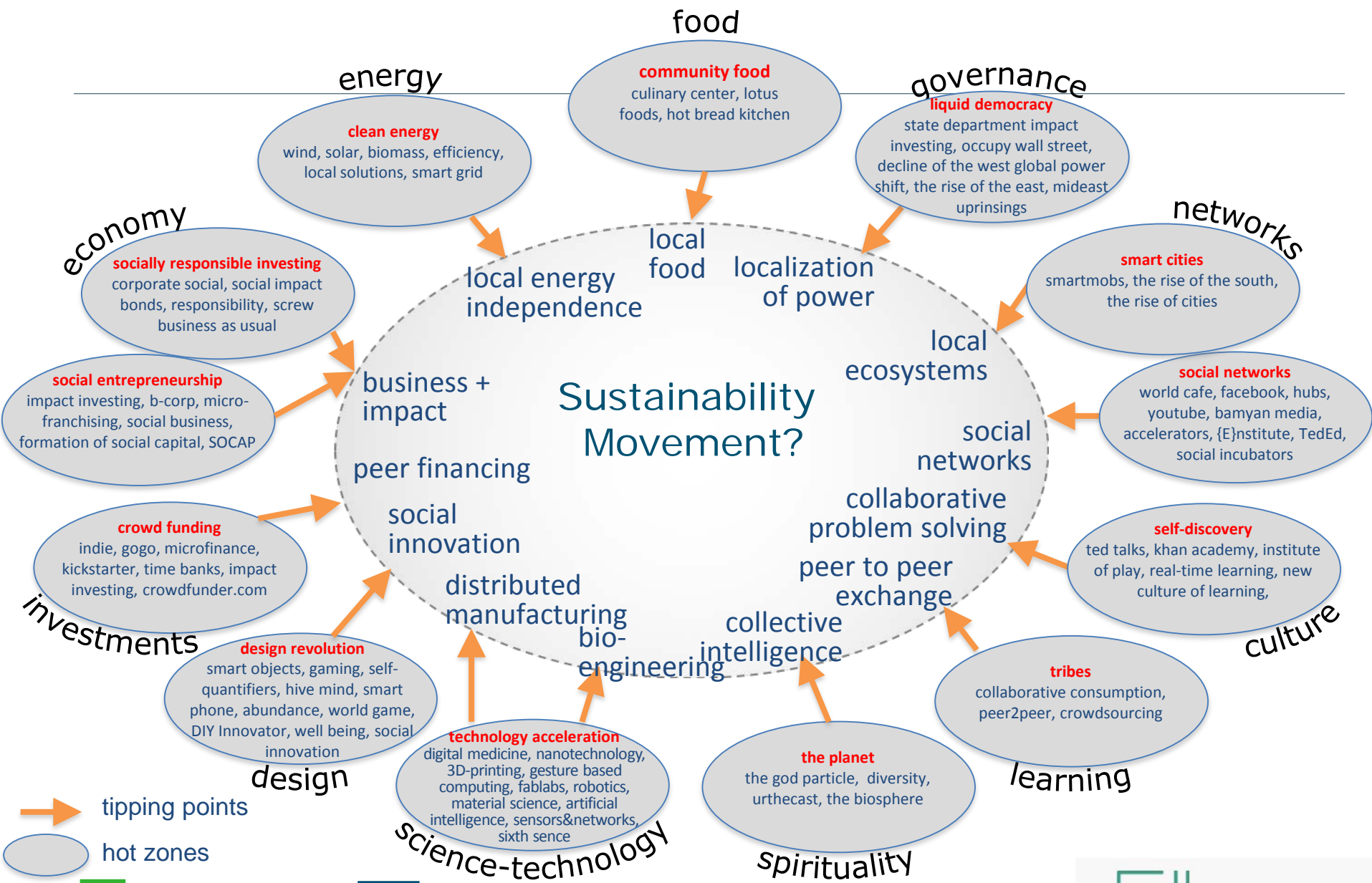
To see and meet myself and others with warmth, caring, humility and integrity.



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Urban Living Labs

A living lab
way of working



AMSTERDAM
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SOLUTIONS



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www.ams-amsterdam.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/AMS-Living-Lab-Way-of-Work-print.pdf

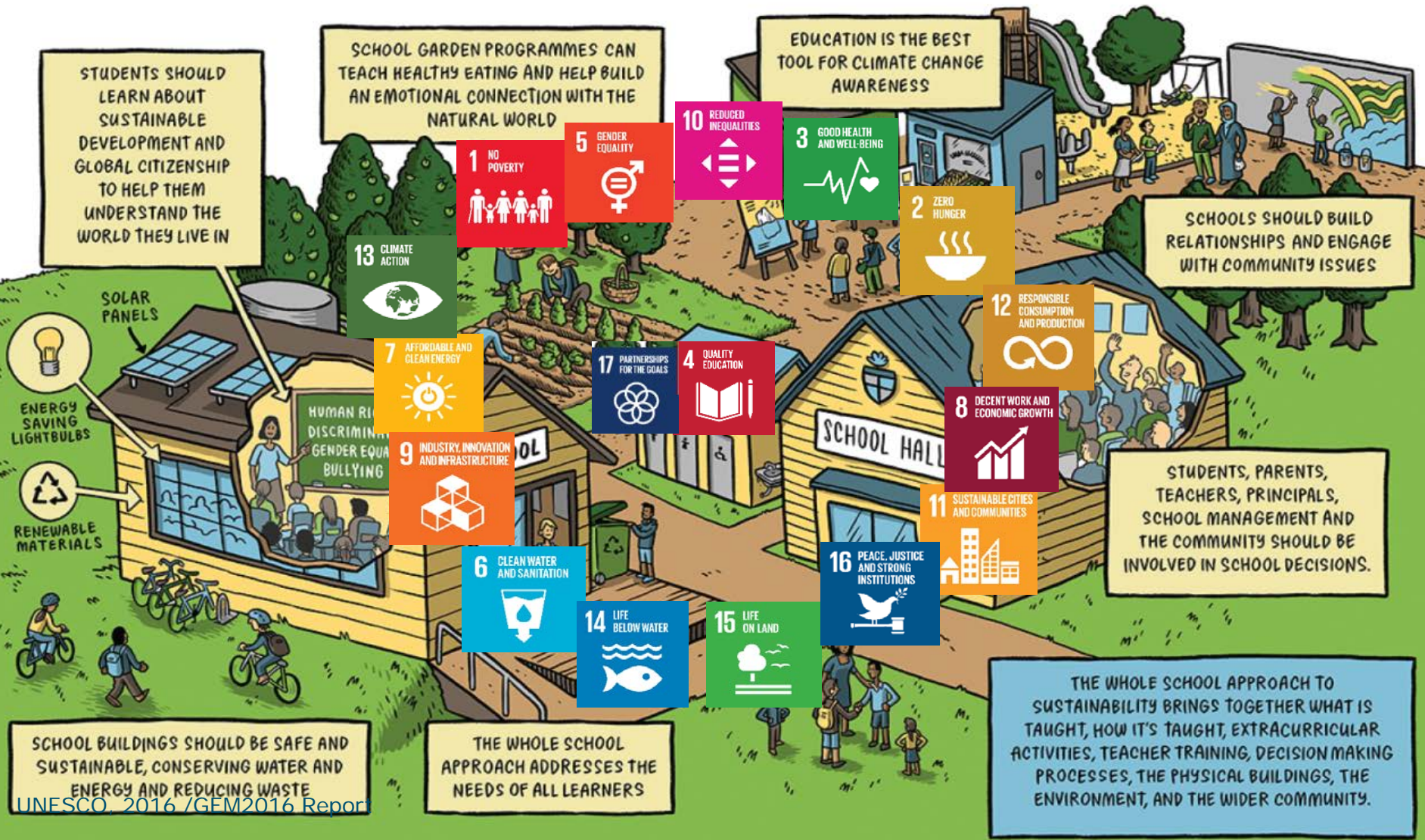


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Living-Labs for Sustainable Development (LL4SD)s are:

experimental, often temporary, “ecologies of learning” that engage multiple stakeholders in the co-creation, testing and evaluating of solutions to sustainability challenges in a real-world setting.

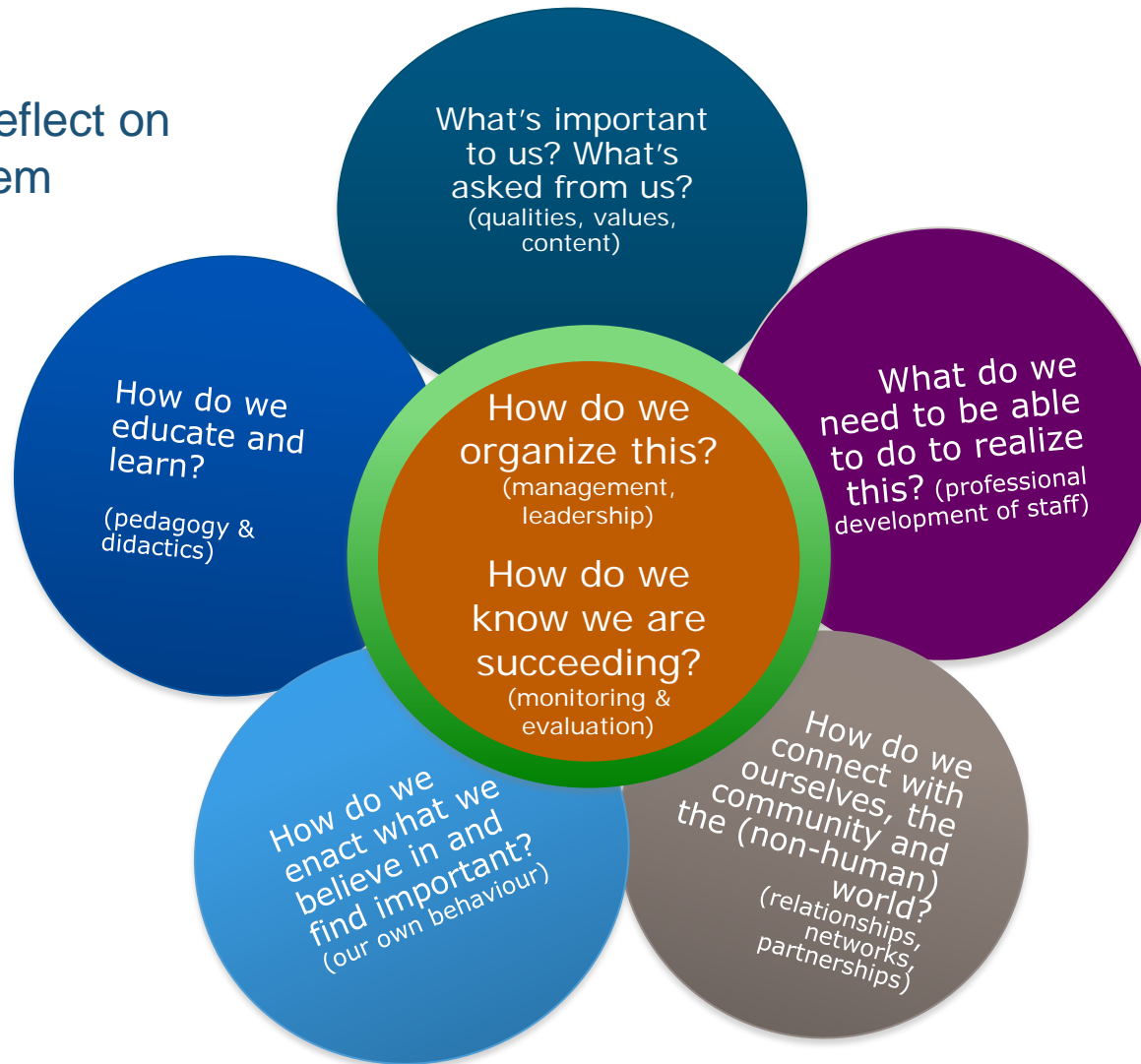
Sustainability is not just something to learn, it's something to live!



UNESCO, 2016 / GEM2016 Report

Using starting questions to reflect on a Whole System Approach to Sustainability

Arjen Wals, Sept. 2020



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Key Points

- We need to break the logic of efficiency, growth, innovation and accountability: it is killing the spaces for transition and the freedom to learn, dialogue and explore. Instead, it cultivates values of competitions, self-interest, instant rewards and short-term gain.
- A more radical response – no longer ‘add-on’ or even building-in – a whole system redesign is necessary that allows for a critical relational way of teaching, learning and investigating.
- Working with niches in universities (sit-spots, i-week, foodforests, but also Xtinction rebellion, BLF-matter – critical groups rising – mindfulness, veganism, quest for meaning and justice, etc.) Students are self-organising – which is great – but where is the university in all this?
- A culture of fear and polarization needs to make way for a pedagogy of hope and concrete utopia’s that energize and inspire.

Key Questions

- How can systemic and transitional forms of education for sustainability best be designed, organised, supported and evaluated?
- How can universities and the key actors within them, become more relational? (connecting to place, people, other species and matter) What does a more relational pedagogy entail/require?
- How can ICT and 'small data' support learners in investigating sustainability issues (role of 'civic science')
- How can universities connect with transition niches and vice versa?

Questions...?



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Source: Banksy