

Faculty of Design

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## Lessons from the field: A first evaluation of working with the elaborated social dimension of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

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# Lessons from the field:

A first evaluation of working with the elaborated social dimension of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

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# Sustainability

‘Wicked Problem’

+

Unsustainability deeply imbedded in  
the design of many of systems

=

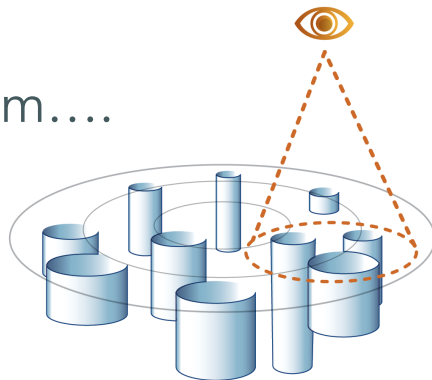
Strategic and systematic transformation + re-design  
needed

Sustainability science = a “science of design” (Miller 2011)  
how things should be rather than (only) how they are

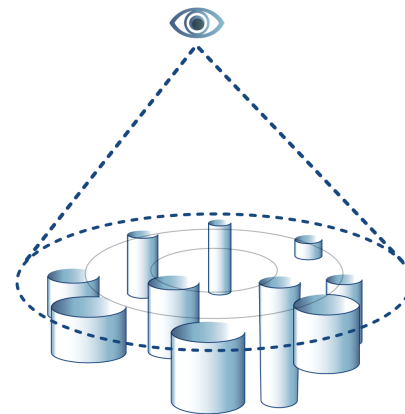
# Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

- Unifying structure
- Strategic planning framework
- 20-year consensus and peer-review process
- Based on a few key insights

Moving from....



to





# To plan in complex systems...

A clear differentiation between 5 different levels is helpful:

System	Overall functioning of the system;
Success	A definition of the objective;
Strategic Guidelines	Logical guidelines for how to strategically approach the objective;
Action	Every concrete action towards the objective assessed with the strategic guidelines and then implemented
Tools	Concepts, methods and tools that are required to, e.g., systematically monitor the actions



# To plan strategically...

## Purpose to guide system boundaries

- More knowledge about the system itself not necessarily helpful
- Robust definition of purpose/objective as a lens

## Backcasting

- Planning with the end in mind



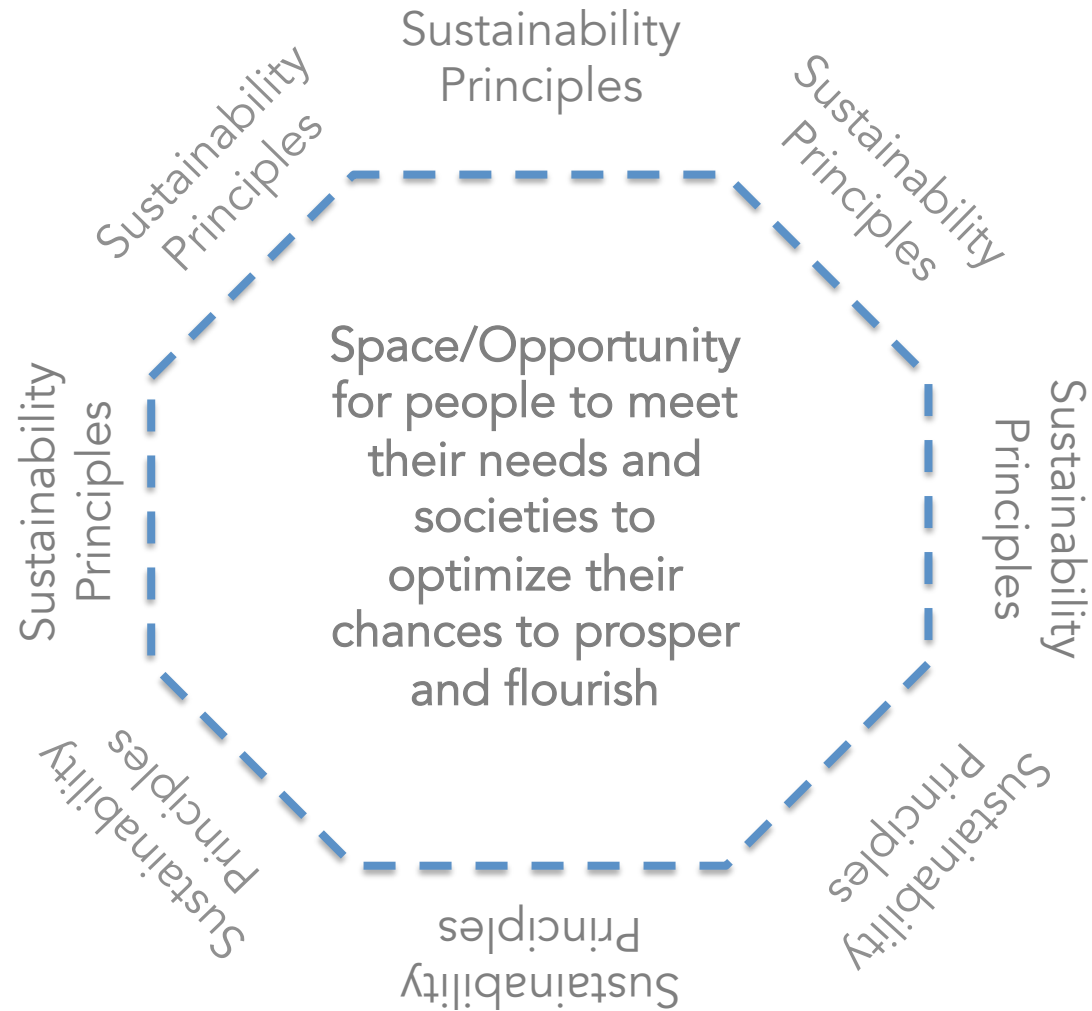
# To plan for sustainability...

- Only relevant as a consequence of humanity's systematic contributions to un-sustainability
- Sustainability = not systematically degrading ecological and social system
- What are these mechanisms of degradation/destruction?
  - Identifying the various overriding mechanisms by which society is systematically eroding the social and ecological systems
  - Put a "not" in front of them
- Sustainability principles as Constraints for re-design

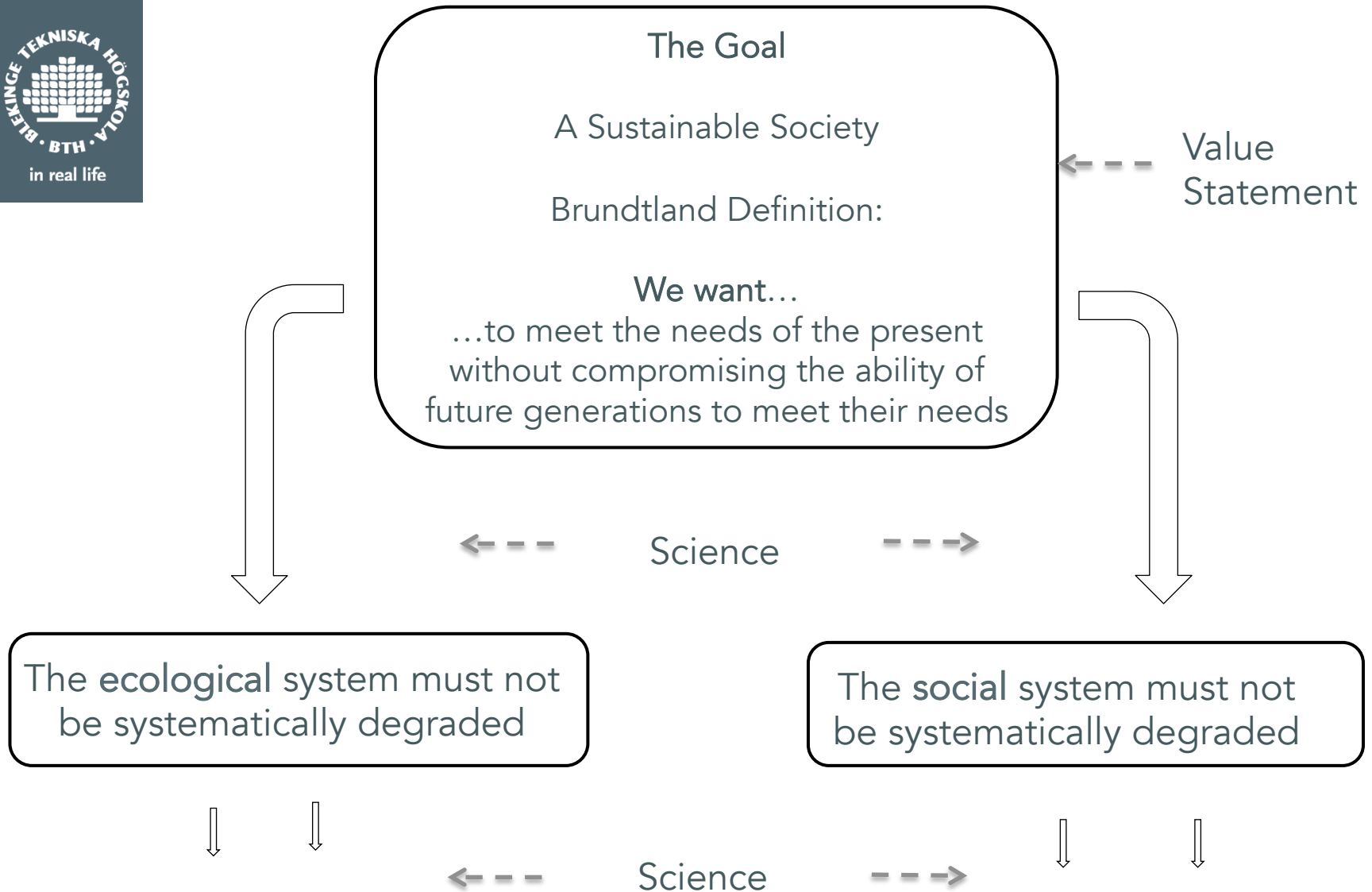
# Definition: Sustainability

Sustainability is about the basic conditions that are necessary for the the system to continue

- Boundary within which the system continues to function, outside of which it does not
- Boundary conditions lead to creativity within constraints









# Sustainability Principles

In the sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...

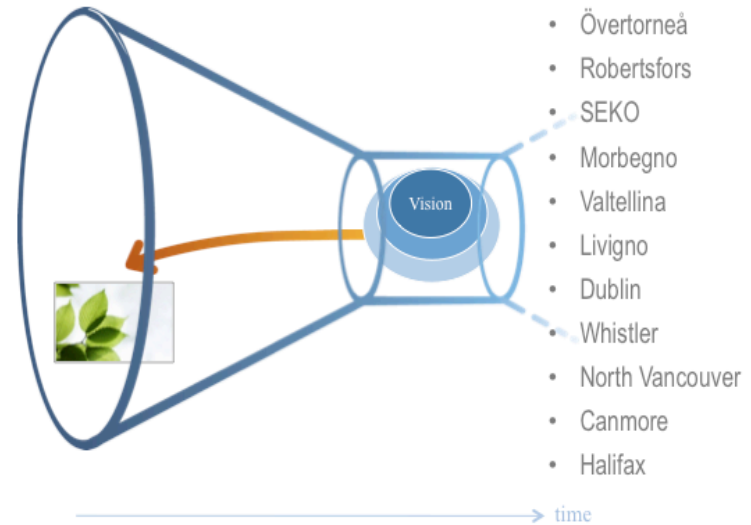
1. ...concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust,
2. ...concentrations of substances produced by society,
3. ...degradation by physical means

And in that society...

4. ...people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs

# Testing

Hundreds of municipalities/Cities



- Övertorneå
- Robertsfors
- SEKO
- Morbegno
- Valtellina
- Livigno
- Dublin
- Whistler
- North Vancouver
- Canmore
- Halifax





# MY FOCUS: SOCIAL DIMENSION

Further develop the social dimension of the FSSD

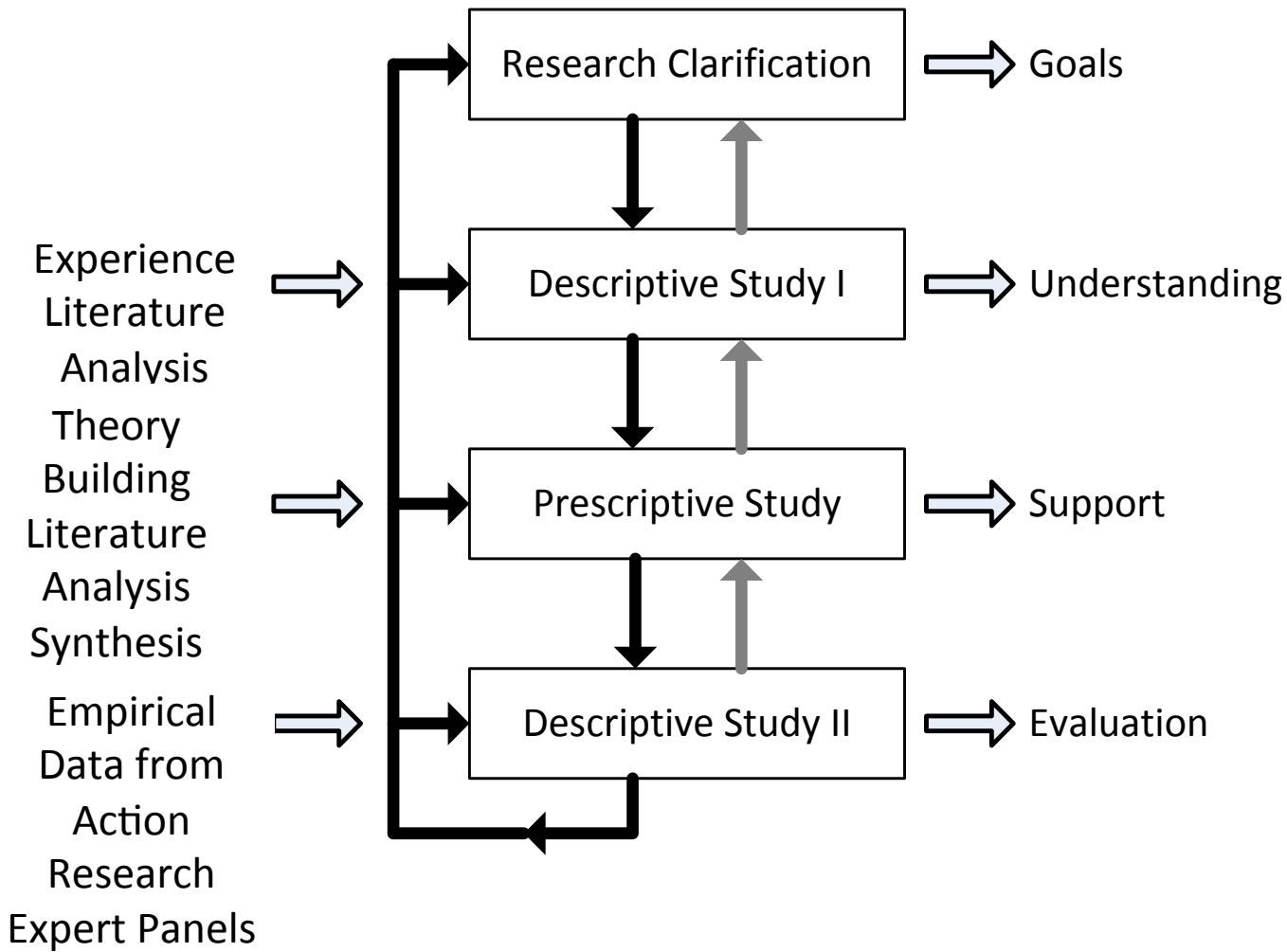
*Based on the assessment of the underdevelopment of the social dimension, both in general and specifically within this framework*

# Design Research Methodology

Basic means

Phases

Main outcomes





# Methods

## *Phase 1*

General Understanding of the field and the way practitioners currently work with the social dimension

## *Phase 2*

Theory building based on extensive, transdisciplinary literature studies + conceptual modelling sessions

→ deriving an appropriate definition of 'the social system' and a zero-hypothesis for social sustainability principles.

## *Phase 3*

Evaluation

# Evaluation from field work

## Success criteria for the prototype:

- level of scientific rigor of the new approach
- the viability of use/usefulness of the new approach (assessed by practitioners)

## Data:

Workshops with professionals who use the FSSD

3 workshops in 3 different countries

1. Presenting the new work and answering any lingering questions.
2. Apply the principles in a case study format to various scenarios, e.g. the lifecycle of a cup of coffee, community work or another relevant case study.
3. Reflections by and interviews with the professionals assessing the usability of the new principles

# Field work process

Group 1: 8 individuals, ranging from having worked with the FSSD for just a few months to over a decade of experience.

Group 2: 3 individuals. One of them had 2 years, another 4 years and the third had 10 years of experience working with the FSSD.

Group 3: 8 practitioners, with a similar range of years of experience as group 1. The average was around 7 years.





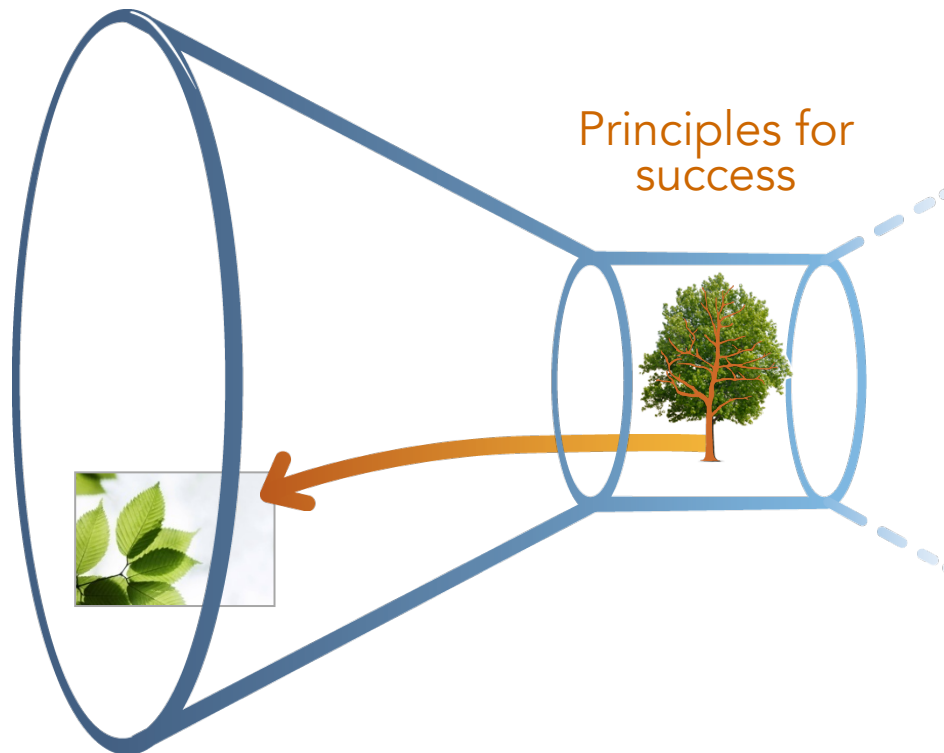
# PROTOTYPE

# Complex Adaptive System



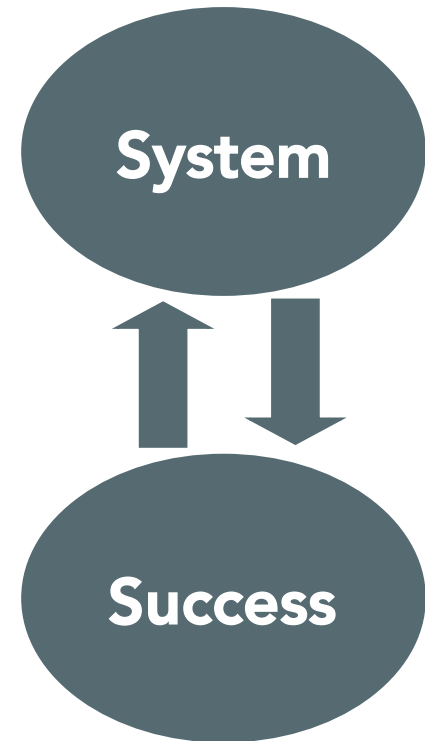
# Translating into Principles

What are the mechanisms of destruction?



# A word on Method

- Dynamic and iterative dialogue between the systems level, which describes the system of study, and the success level, which describes the goal or purpose of the system
1. Deriving principles from Trust
  2. Then check against other essential elements (sufficiency)





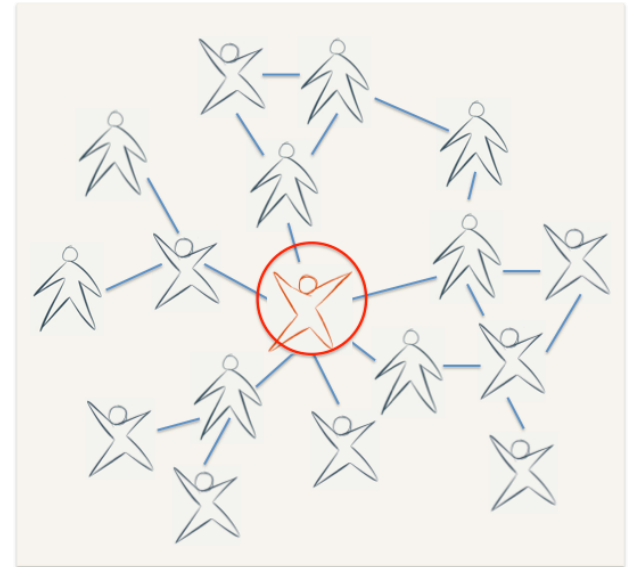
# NEW SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES

## People are not subject to systematic barriers to ... *integrity*

**What?** This is about not doing direct harm at the individual level; physically, mentally or emotionally.

### **Why?**

- If individuals in a system are systematically harmed, there are no healthy individual parts to make up the whole



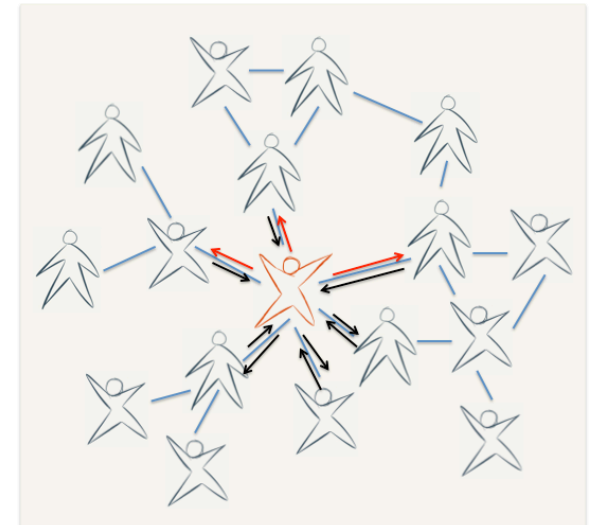
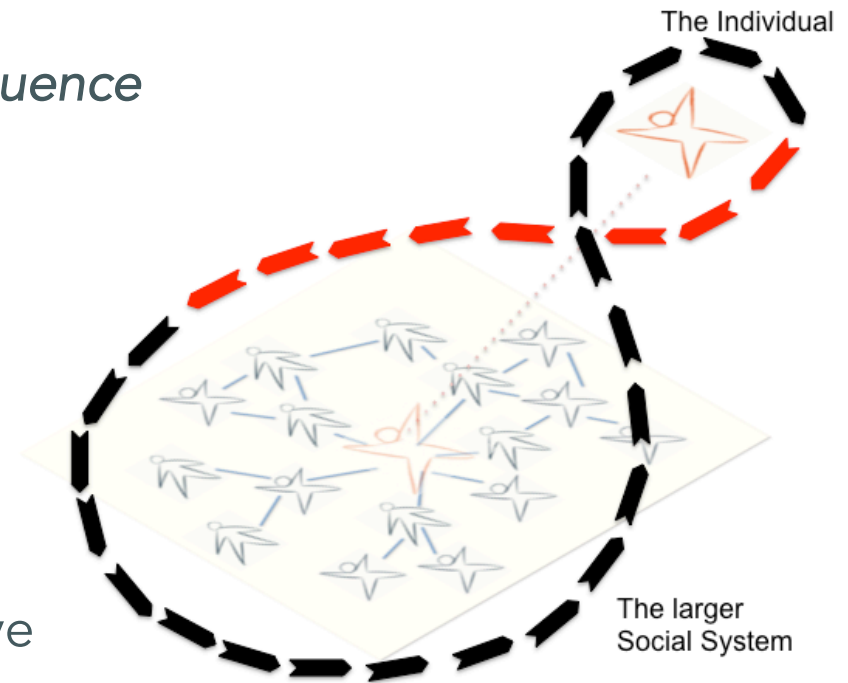
People are not subject to systematic barriers to

... *influence*

**What?** This is about being able to participate in shaping social system(s) one is part of and dependent on.

**Why?**

- The link between ind. and collective is important to allow for
  - diversity to manifests itself in the system
  - individuals to self-organize and contribute their knowledge and learning, which allows the system as a whole to self-organize and learn.

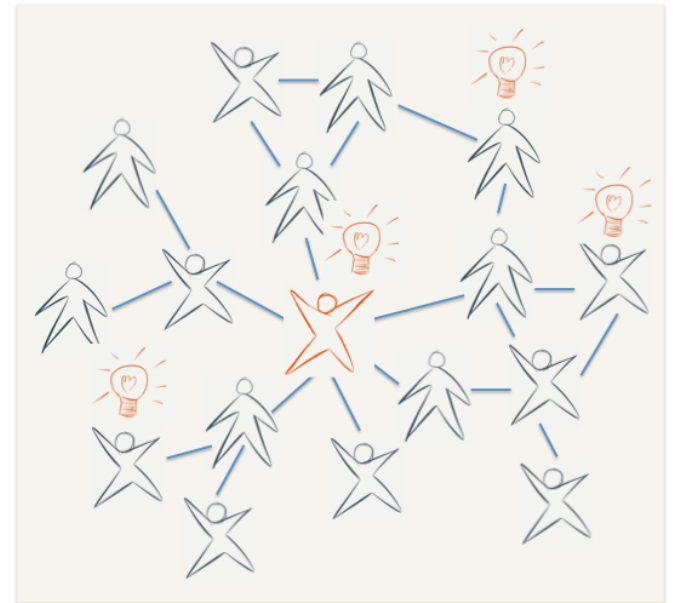


## People are not subject to systematic barriers to ... *competence*

**What?** This is about safeguarding that every individual (and group) has the opportunity to be good at something and develop to become even better. This also includes the ability to learn in order to remain adaptable and therefore resilient.

### Why?

- To allow learning, growth and development (Resilience)
- Supported by literature on trustworthiness





# People are not subject to systematic barriers to

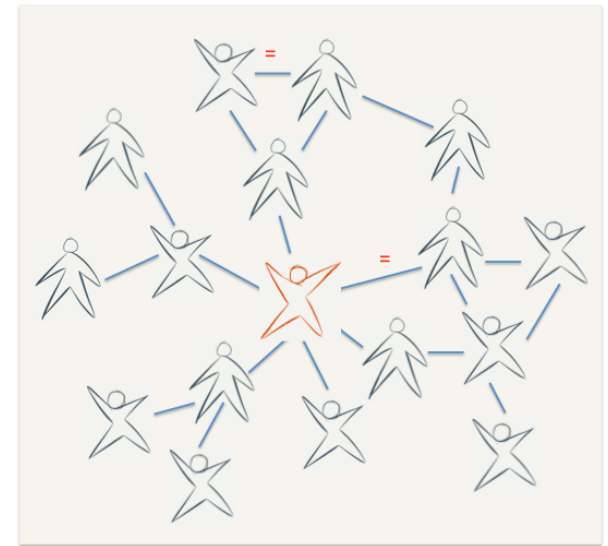
## ... *impartiality*

### What?

People should treat each other equally, both between individuals, and between individuals and organizations such as in courts, authorities, etc. It is about acknowledging that all people have the same rights and are of equal worth.

### Why?

- To allow for diversity
- Supported by trustworthy institutions research



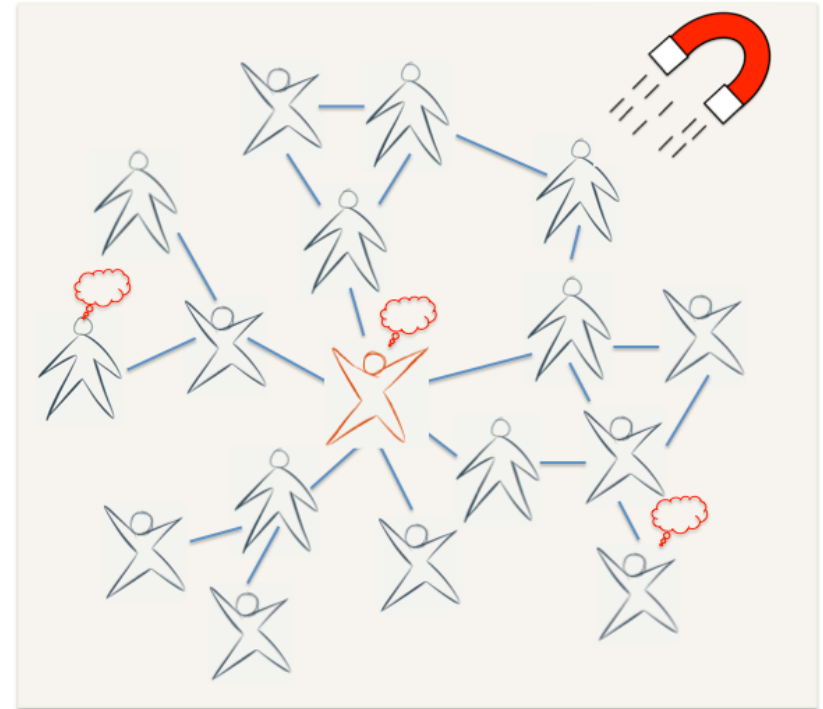
People are not subject to systematic barriers to

*...meaning*

**What?** Speaks to the reason for being an organization or system. How does it inspire its members, what does it aim to do and why?

**Why?**

- Common meaning and purpose creates trust (espoused values)
- Acts as a motivator for self-organization
- Because humans are meaning-making creatures they create purposeful systems





# New SPs

In a sustainable society,

nature is not subject to  
systematically increasing...

1. ...concentrations of  
substances extracted from  
the Earth's crust,

2. ...concentrations of  
substances produced by  
society,

3. ...degradation by physical  
means

and

people are not subject to  
systematic barriers to

4. ... integrity

5. ... influence

6. ... competence

7. ... impartiality

8. ... meaning

# Evaluation

All groups successfully used the new approach in the exercise

2 most experienced practitioners had already used the new approach

- felt that the new principles were intuitive to people, overall very useful
- waiting for this “forever”; earlier approach was “just stabbing in the dark”/did not provide any concrete guidance.
- at this point there were more questions than answers/ some unease – felt ok with that

Another senior practitioners

- a question “of how they would work with them, not if”.
- they could clearly see the pattern of the principles in many of their projects.

Many others did not feel ok with the unease

- acknowledged that they didn't feel particularly strong on this social aspect of sustainability in general.
- new approach did not give them the ease they were looking for.
- They considered it complex....
- Desire for a clearer narrative/logic
- All: Language tricky

did not necessarily  
bring up the most  
material issues

Vs.

they did lend themselves  
to exactly that

- science was solid; perspective had been missing

- Unsure about how to use the new SSPs in practice (despite practice exercises throughout the workshop)

valuable addition; social sustainability was now much better addressed

Vs.

- Unsure about science

- Usable in practice, also with various tools that are commonly used within the FSSD.



concerns about the complexity of the approach for users

not convinced that this new approach would replace the old one,

# Reflections from authors

- Using the new SSPS vs. how they felt about it (unease)
- Reactions often related to how willing people are to engage with uncertainty and risk
- Practitioners “teach” about complexity and change, but some are uneasy themselves with uncertainty and the new (understandable and...)
- Process of change/learning new approach
  - Ecological side has had 20 years of logic/narrative development
  - The usefulness and use of the prototype is not about the prototype itself, but the support with the implementation; varied support needed
  - Science vs. engaging story





# Thank you + Questions?