

Faculty of Design

2021

## Making Metaphors Matter within Systems Oriented Design (SOD)

Dudani, Palak

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*“..it is all towards one goal”*





*“..it is an icy  
slippery slope”*



*“..it is a statue of  
seduction”*









# *Making Metaphors Matter within SOD*

Palak Dudani  
Independent Designer - Researcher



# *Complex Systems*

Soft systems approach  
“..indeterminate, uncertain and  
constantly in-flux.”

# *My position: Complex Systems*

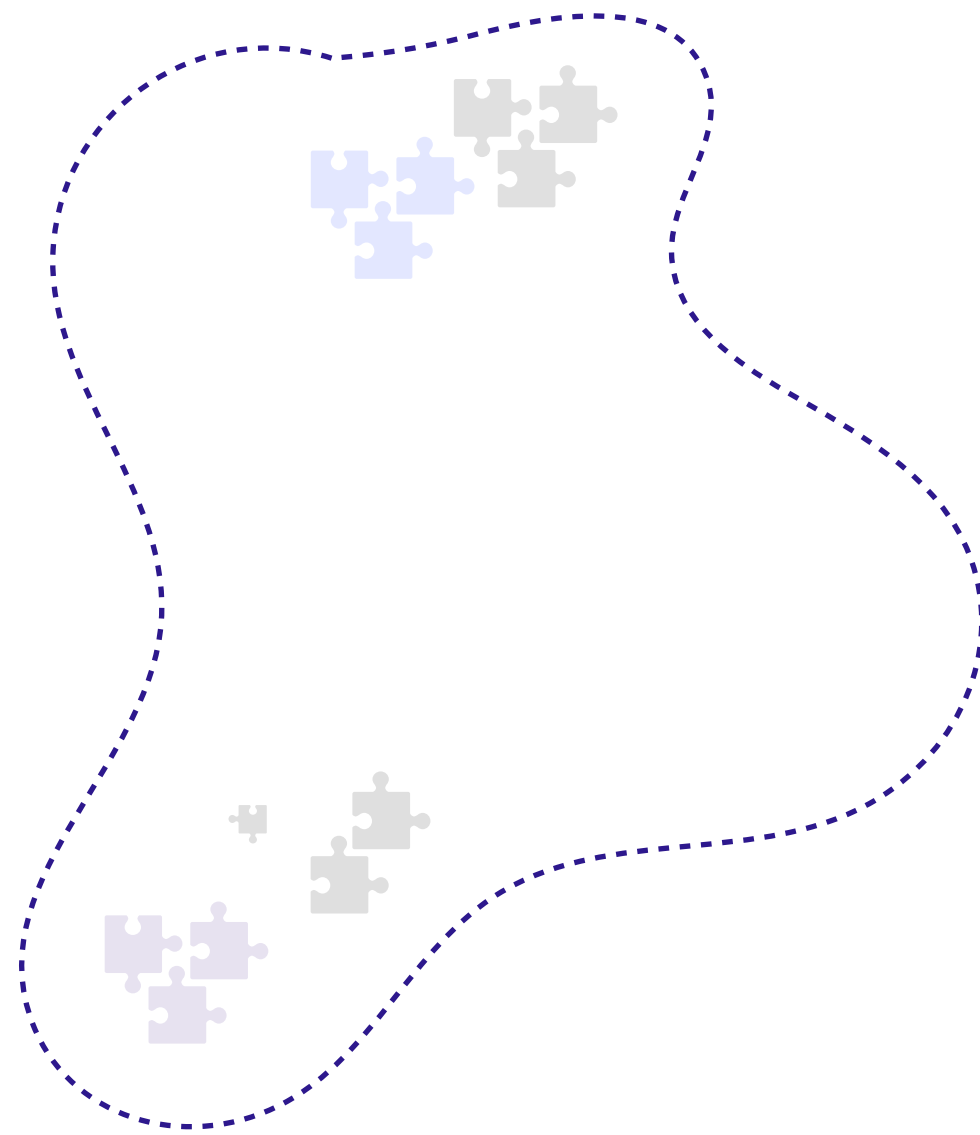
Decoloniality and pluriversality  
(Escobar, 2018)

Design as care  
(Vaughan, 2018)

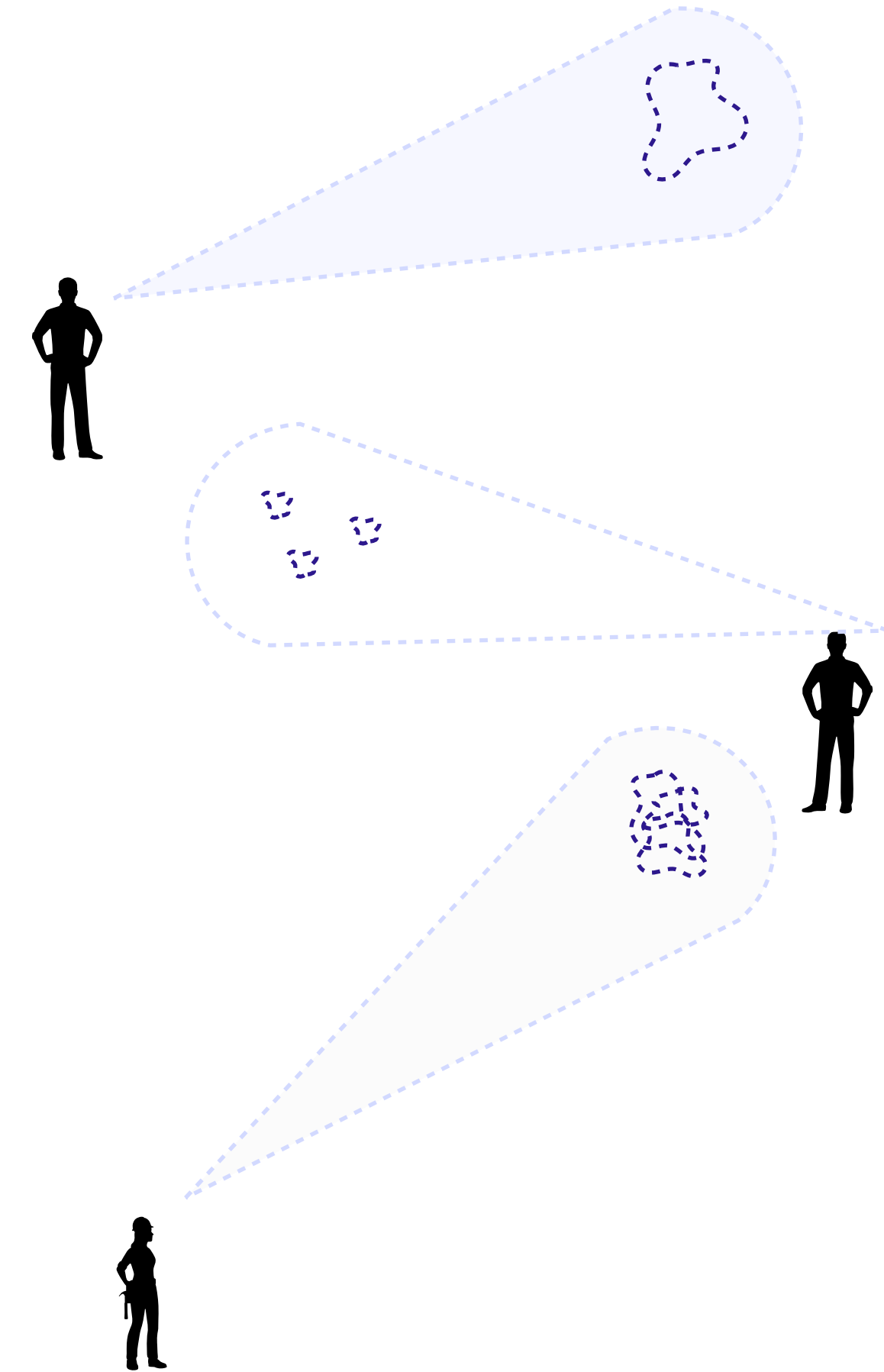
Anticipatory Design  
(Poli, 2013; Celi & Morrison, 2018)



# *My position: Complex Systems*



One system:  
Structuralist and Universalist  
(perspectives and worldviews)



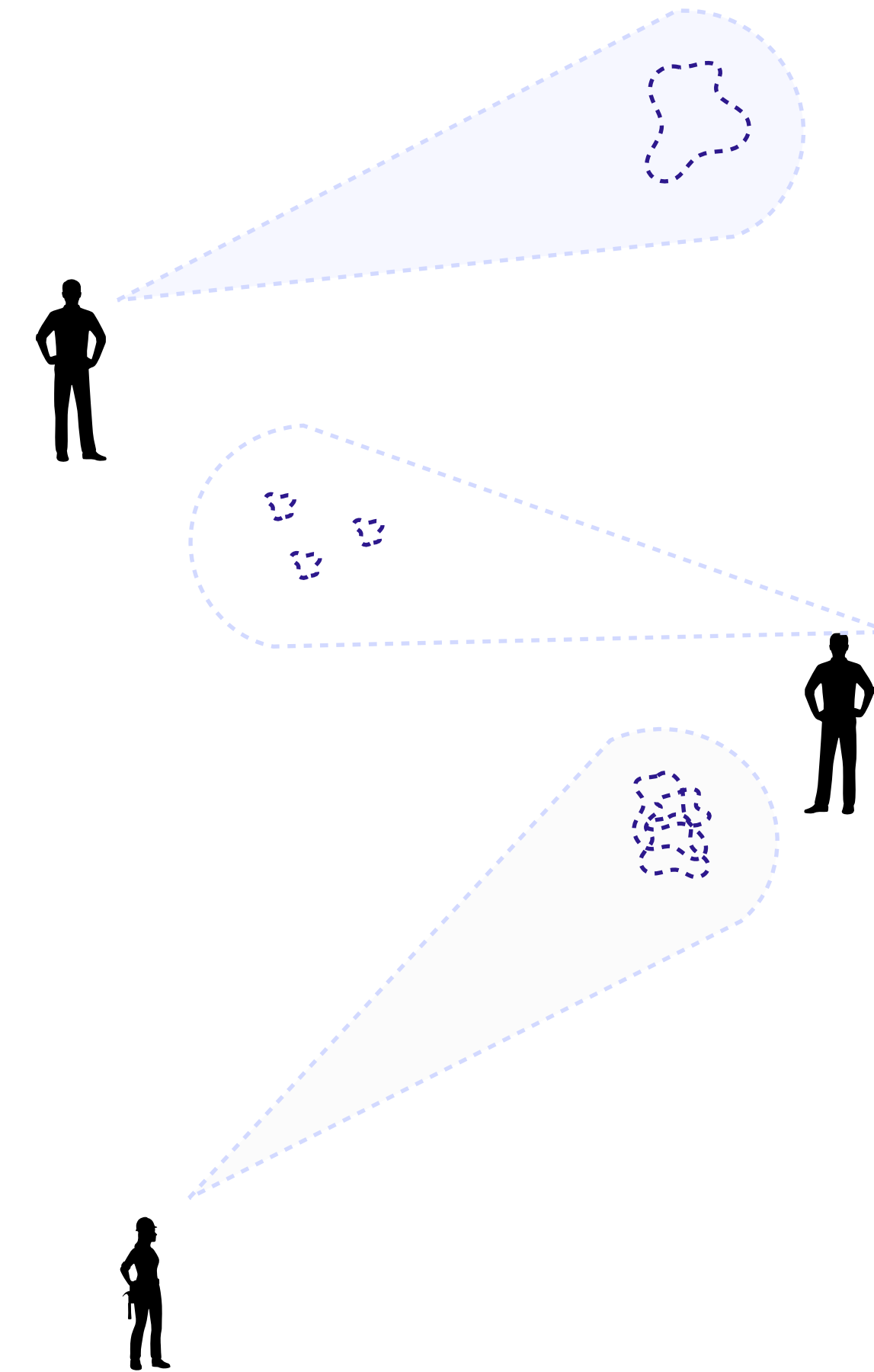
As many 'systems' as viewers:  
Multiplicity and Plurality  
(experiences and world-truths)

# *My position: Complex Systems*

If we approach systems as a thing that can be mapped, as something part of a bigger whole – in that sense systems don't exist.

“We don't see the world as it is. We see it as we are.”

Anais Nin



**As many 'systems' as viewers:**  
Multiplicity and Plurality  
(experiences and world-truths)

# *Complex Systems and limitations of Design tools*

Gigamapping is identified as an extension of the Soft System Methodology (Sevaldson, 2011).

However, it's approach suggests that systems can be rationally analysed and explicitly mapped, which suggests the methods to be structuralist.

Nold, C. (2021). *'Towards a Socio-material Framework for Systems in Design'*. UAL Social Design Institute working paper no.2, March 2021

# *Complex Systems and Metaphors*

Metaphor is a conceptual tool for structuring, restructuring and even creating reality.

Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we Live by*.  
Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN:  
978-0-226- 46800-6

# *Complex Systems, Metaphors and Design*

Metaphors as negotiative and communicative devices that allow designers to engage with the fuzzy, indeterminate, relational, poetic, and emergent qualities of complex systems

*My paper:*  
*The five metaphor thematics*

Systemic design actions

Analysing

Locating

Network Finding

Mapping

Suggesting

Metaphor thematics

Associating

Embodying

Diversifying

Materialising

Probing

# *Master Thesis:* *Case study*

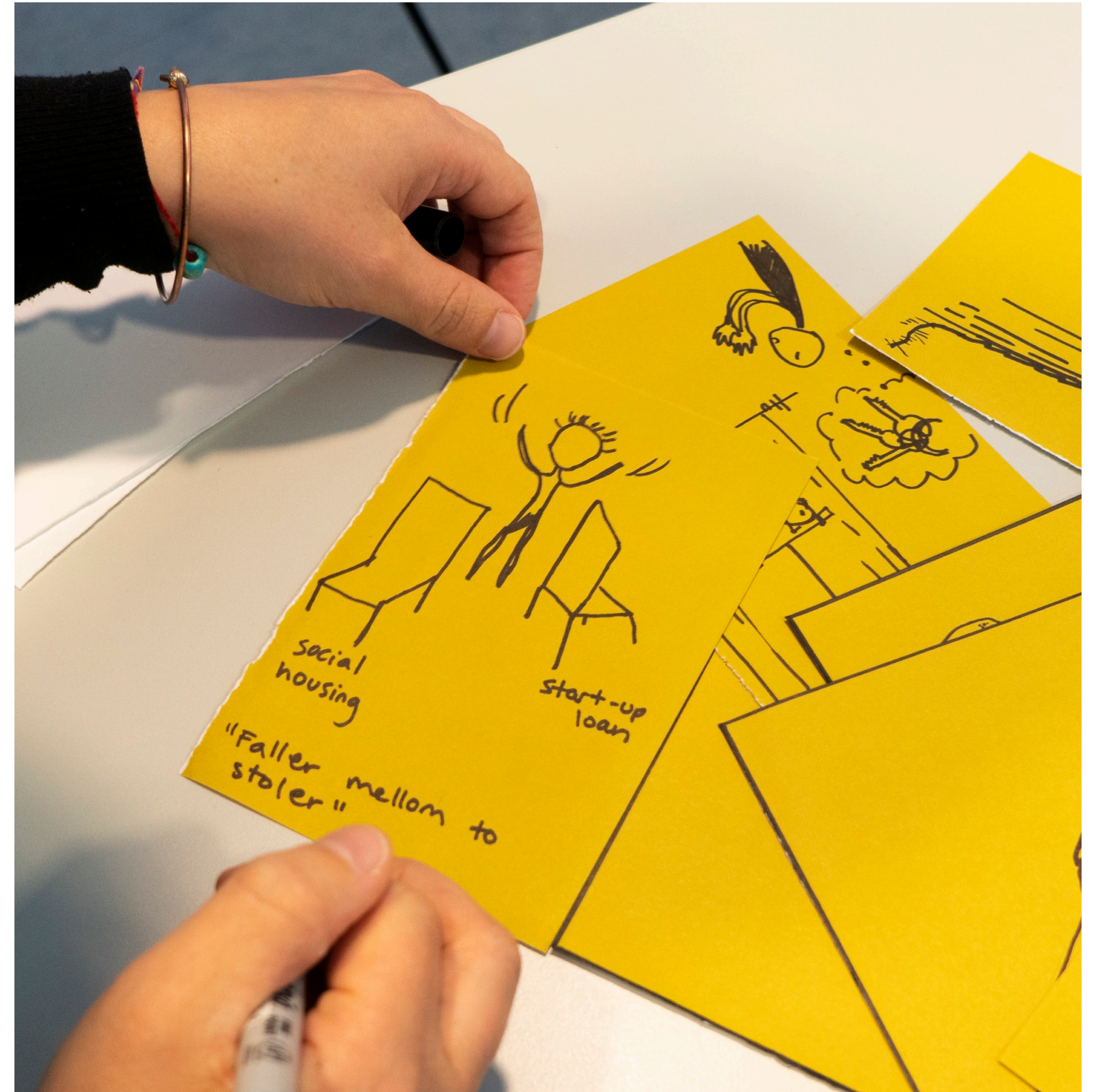
Norwegian housing system  
11+ diverse stakeholder groups  
SOD tools and methods

**#1**

*Analysing /  
Associating*



# *#1 Associating*





# #1 *Associating*

Brings forth socially and culturally rooted mental models of sense making, offering a richer understanding of complex systems.





#2

*Locating /  
Embodying*

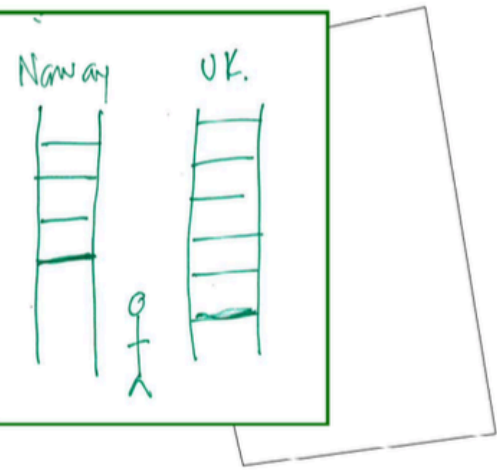


## #2 *Embodying*





# #2 Embodying



“In the UK you at least have rungs at the lower part of the ladder. In Norway it seems like its simply missing.”

Special Advisor  
Affordable housing and Area-based development,  
Oslo Kommune

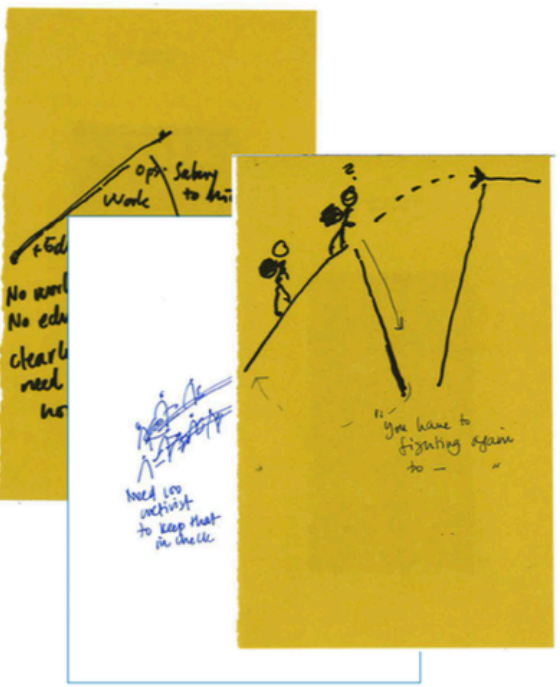
With social housing, a lot of the tenants feel like they fall between the chairs”

Anthropologist, Project Leader  
Boligenheten, Bydel gamle Oslo



“ Gentrification is like 10 wild horses which need 100 activists to keep it in check. ”

Resident Representative,  
Board Member, Tøyen Area Lift



One of my good friend lives in council housing right across the street [...] its like you're climb up, having worked all through, the education and found a job and instead of being rewarded for your hard work, you fall down the mountain - only to start all over again. There should be a way to continue to next step, even when its not homeownership. ”

Resident Representative,  
Board Member, Tøyen Area Lift

“ Jeg kan ikke bytte meg selv, eller g. og male meg gul foran andre folk”  
//I can't trade myself, or go and paint myself yellow in front of others

39 year old man, Wife and 4 kids  
Looking for a house  
translated from Norwegian. (Bratseth, 2019)

" The housing system is like a beautiful statue. We're seduced by it and we dont even realise that there is a lot of dirt collecting underneath it. ”

Program Director  
for "Partnership for Radical Innovation",  
KS - Research, Innovation and Digitalisation Area





## #2 *Embodying*

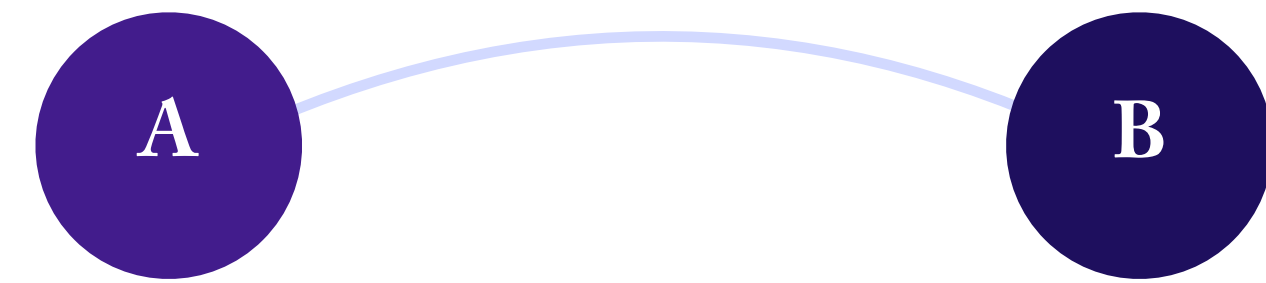
Metaphors are able to grasp lived experiences, elevating the embodied and uniquely place-based understanding of complex systems





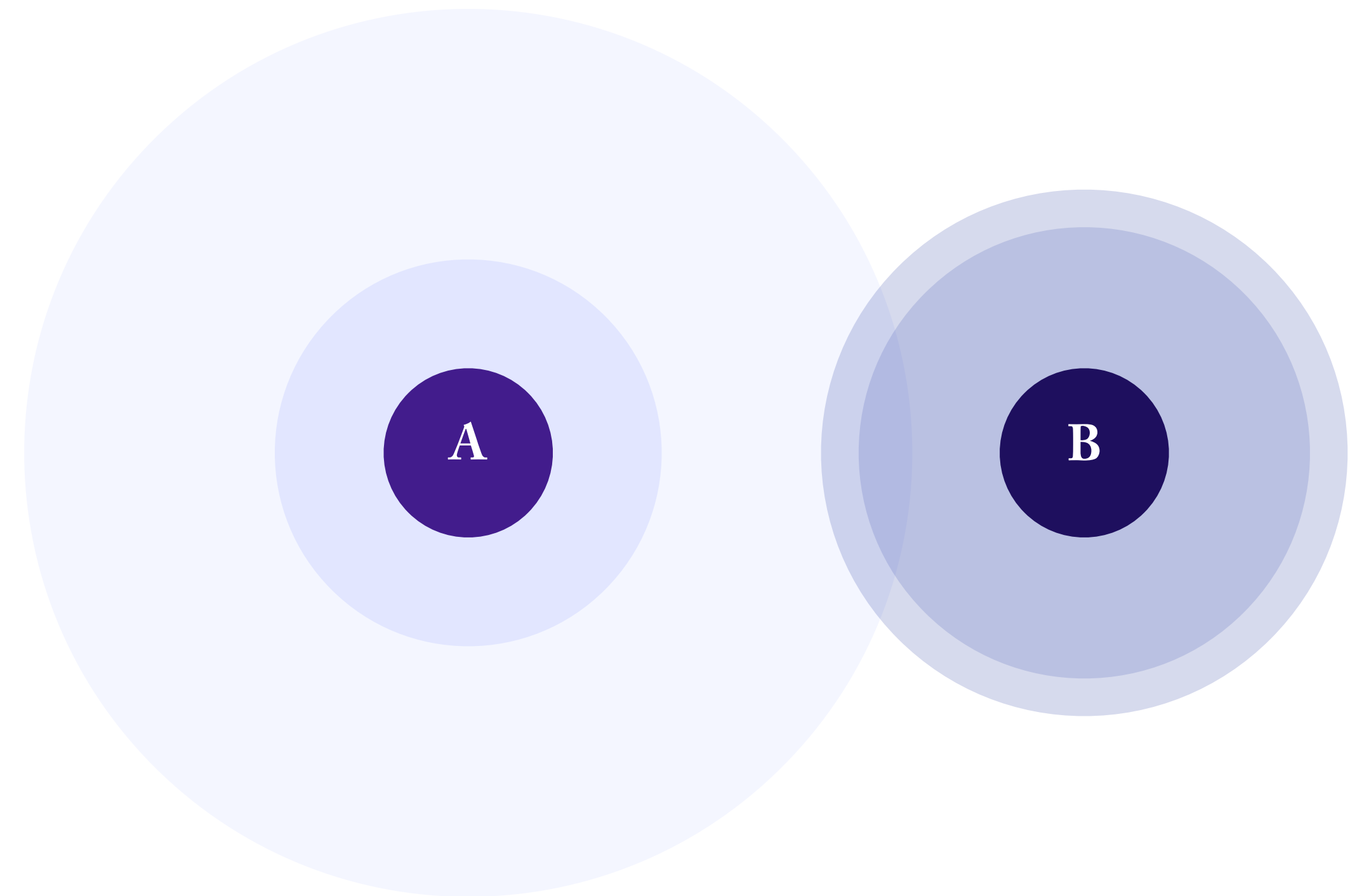
#3

*Network-finding/  
Diversifying*



#3

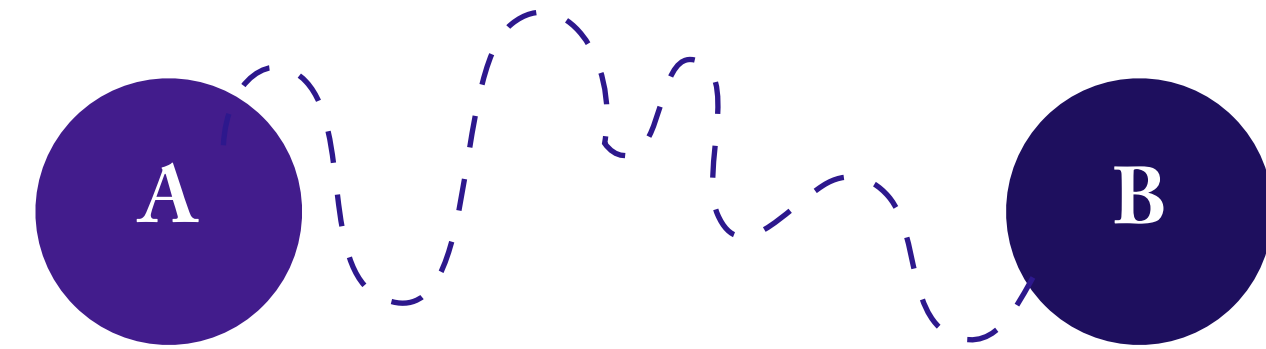
*Network-finding/  
Diversifying*





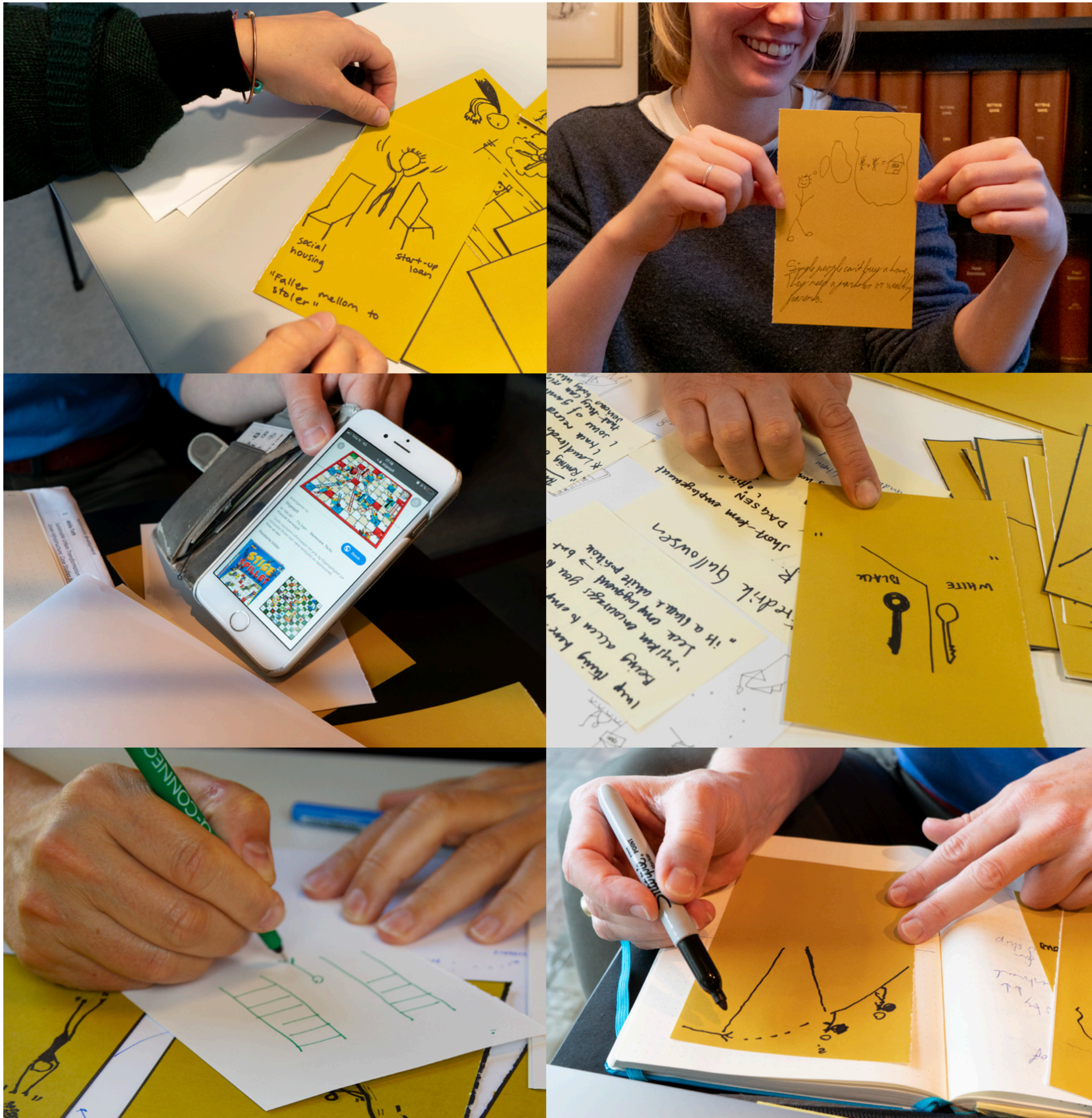
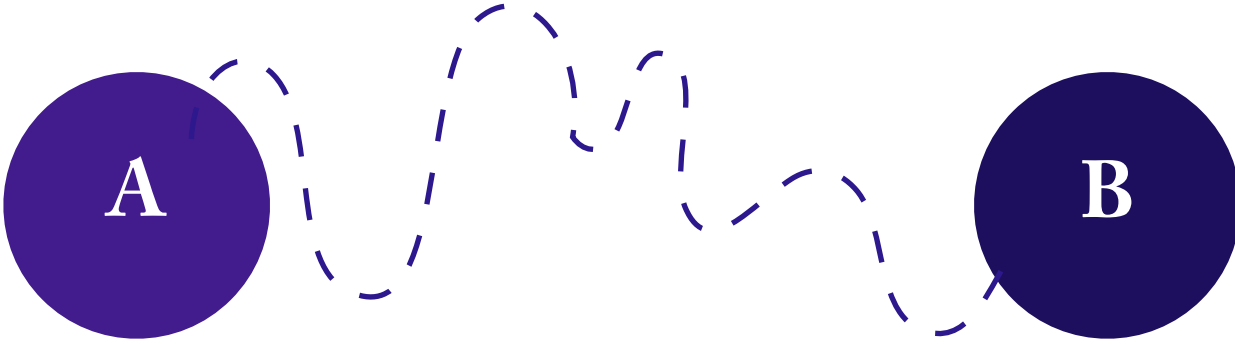
#3

*Network-finding/  
Diversifying*



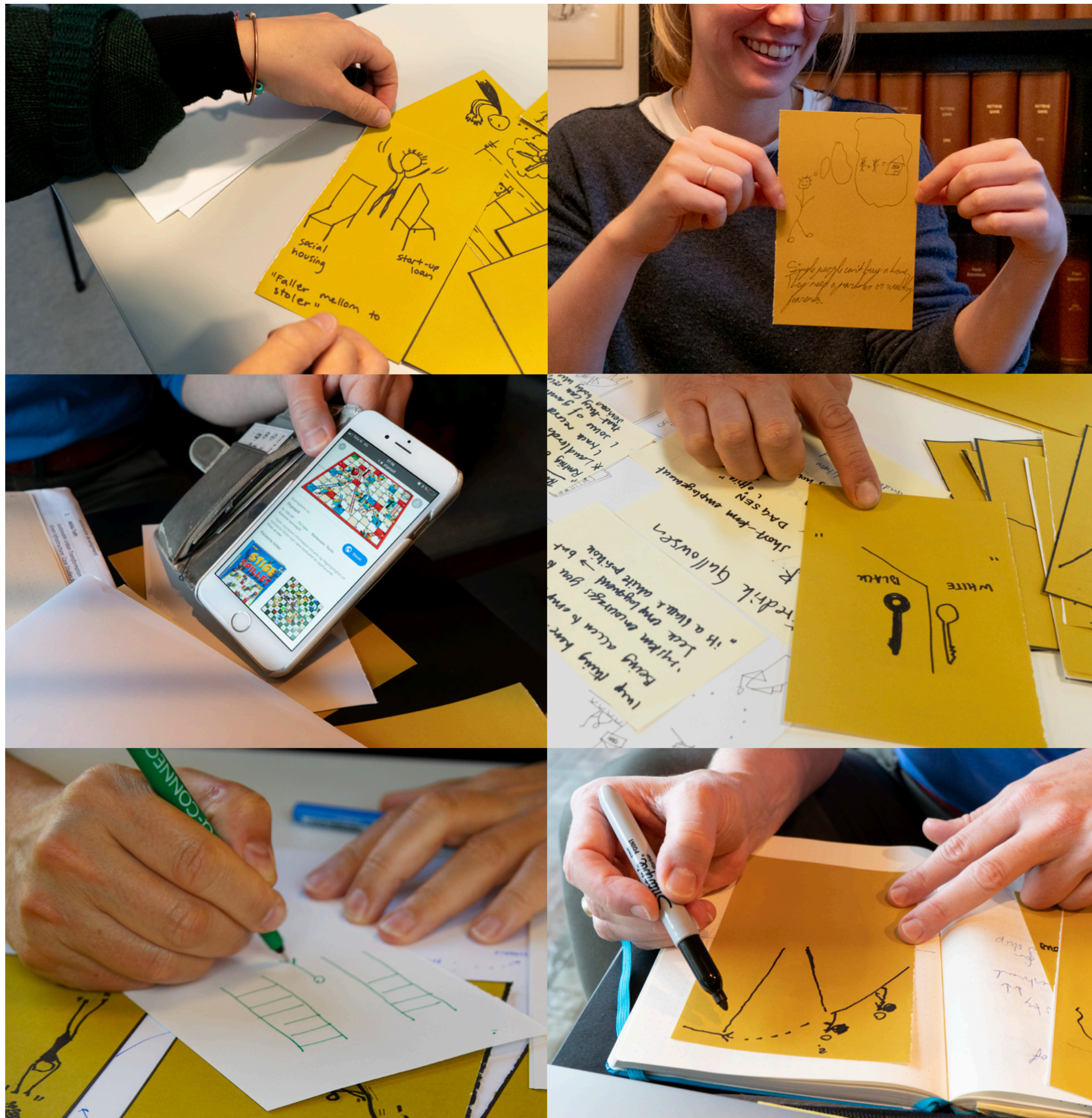
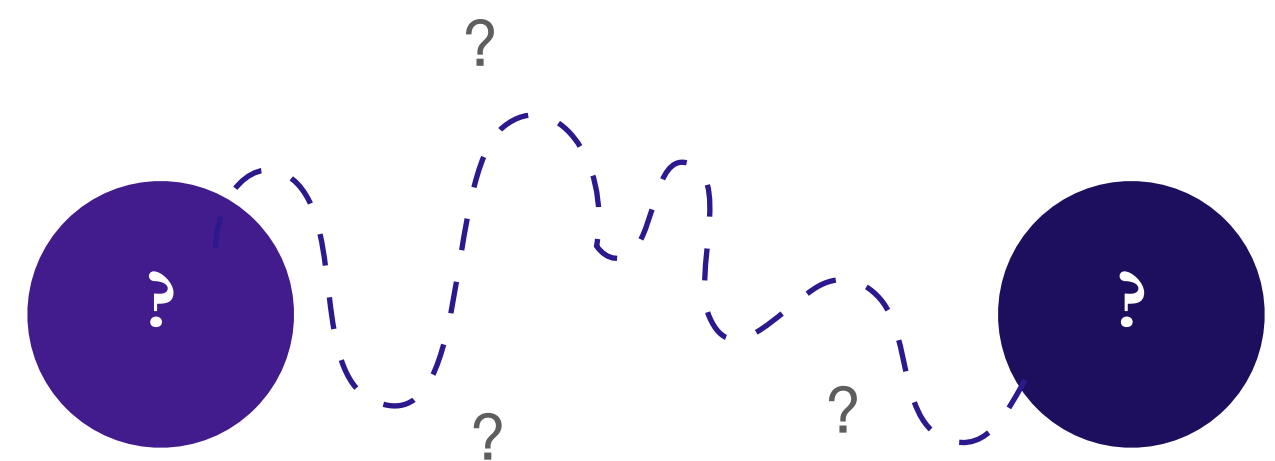


# #3 Diversifying



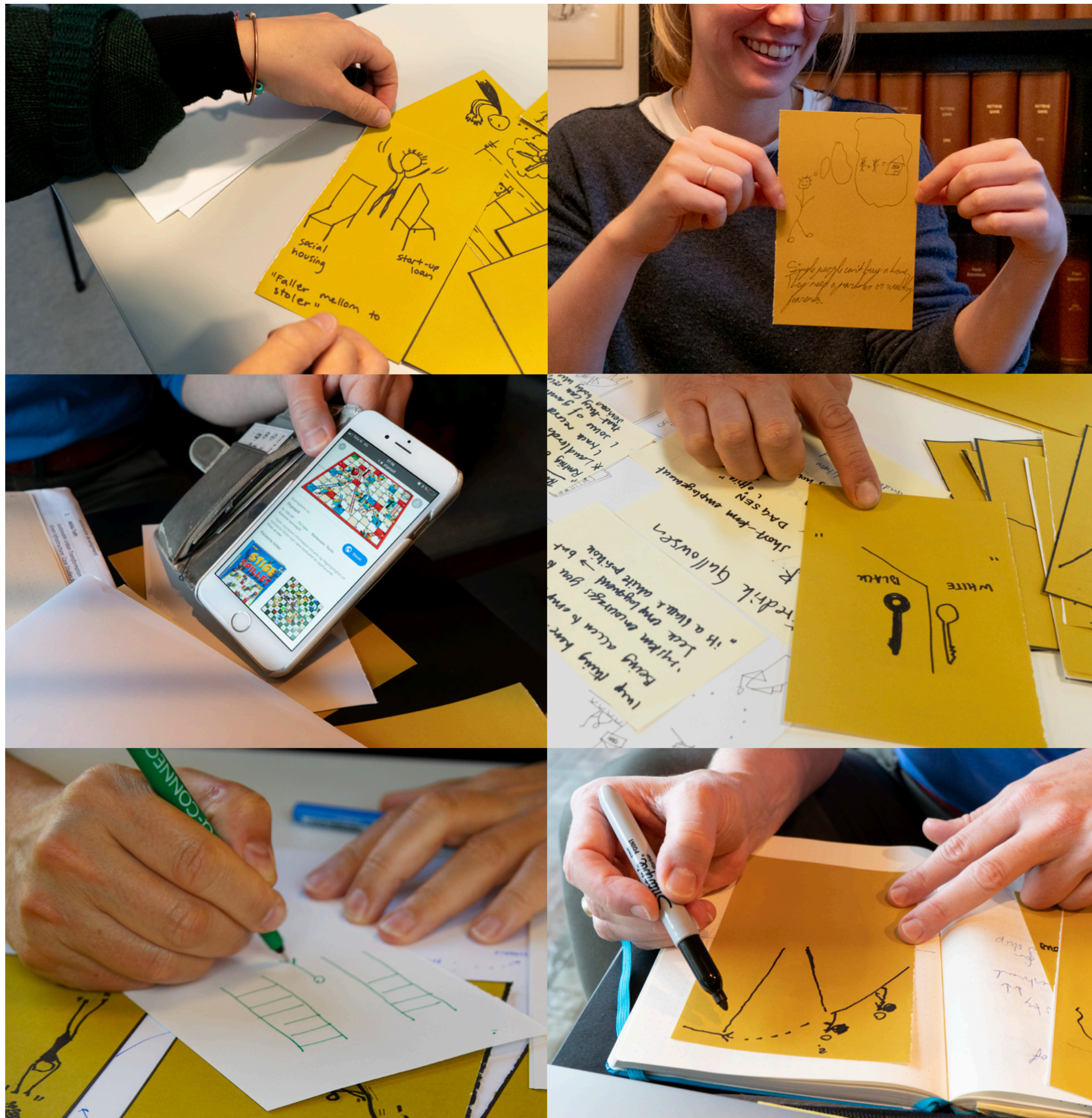
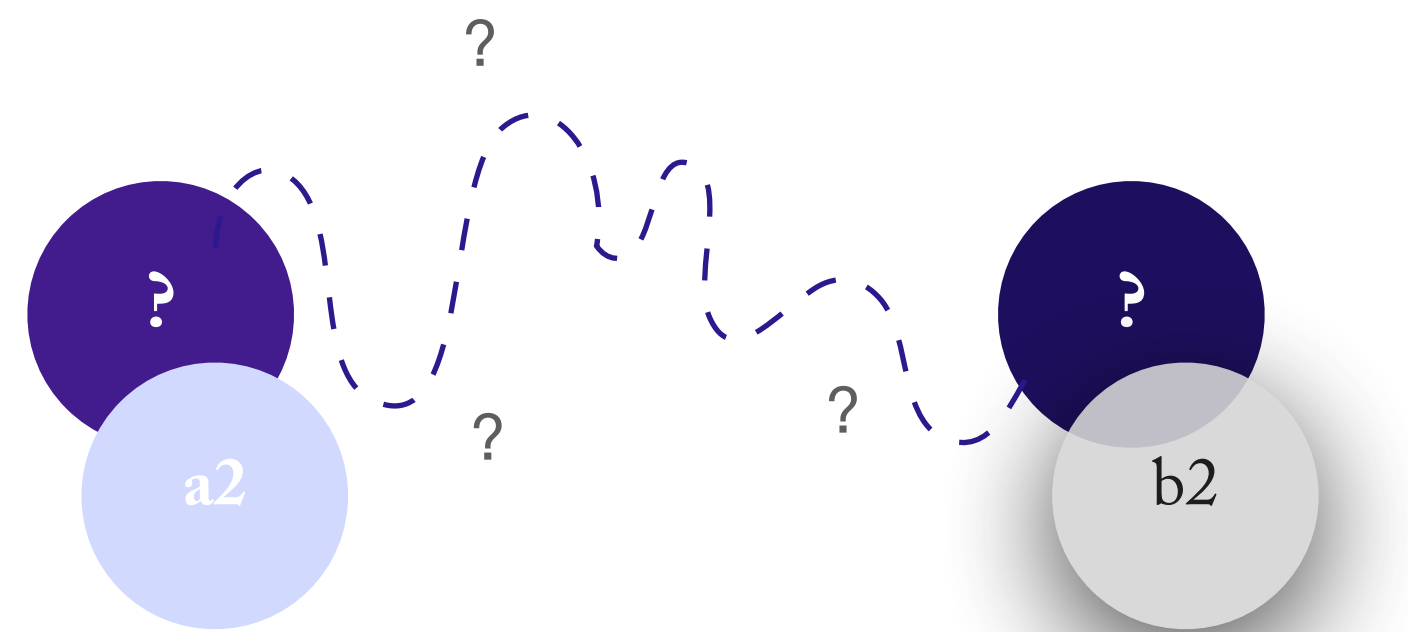


# #3 Diversifying



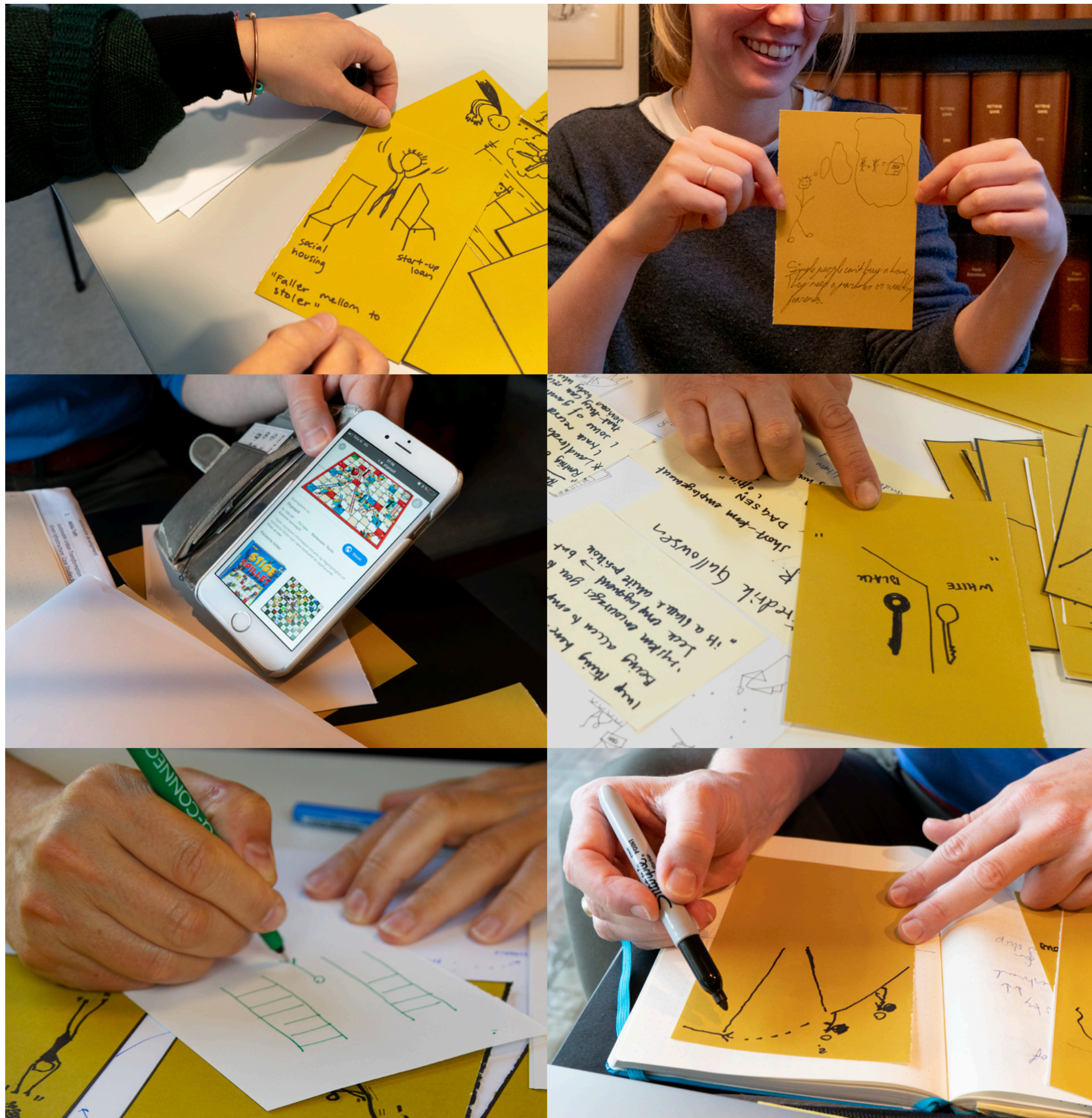
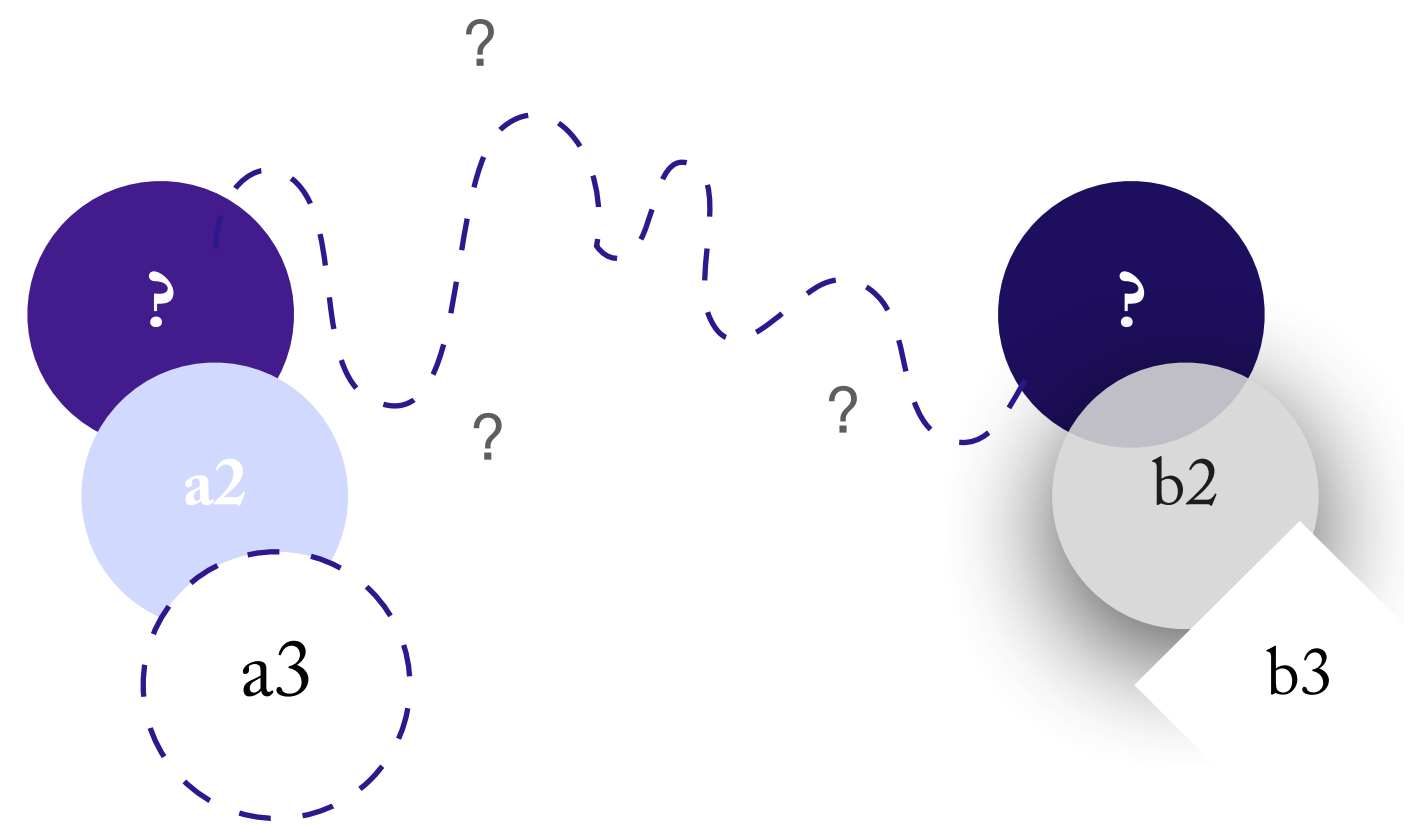


#3 Diversifying





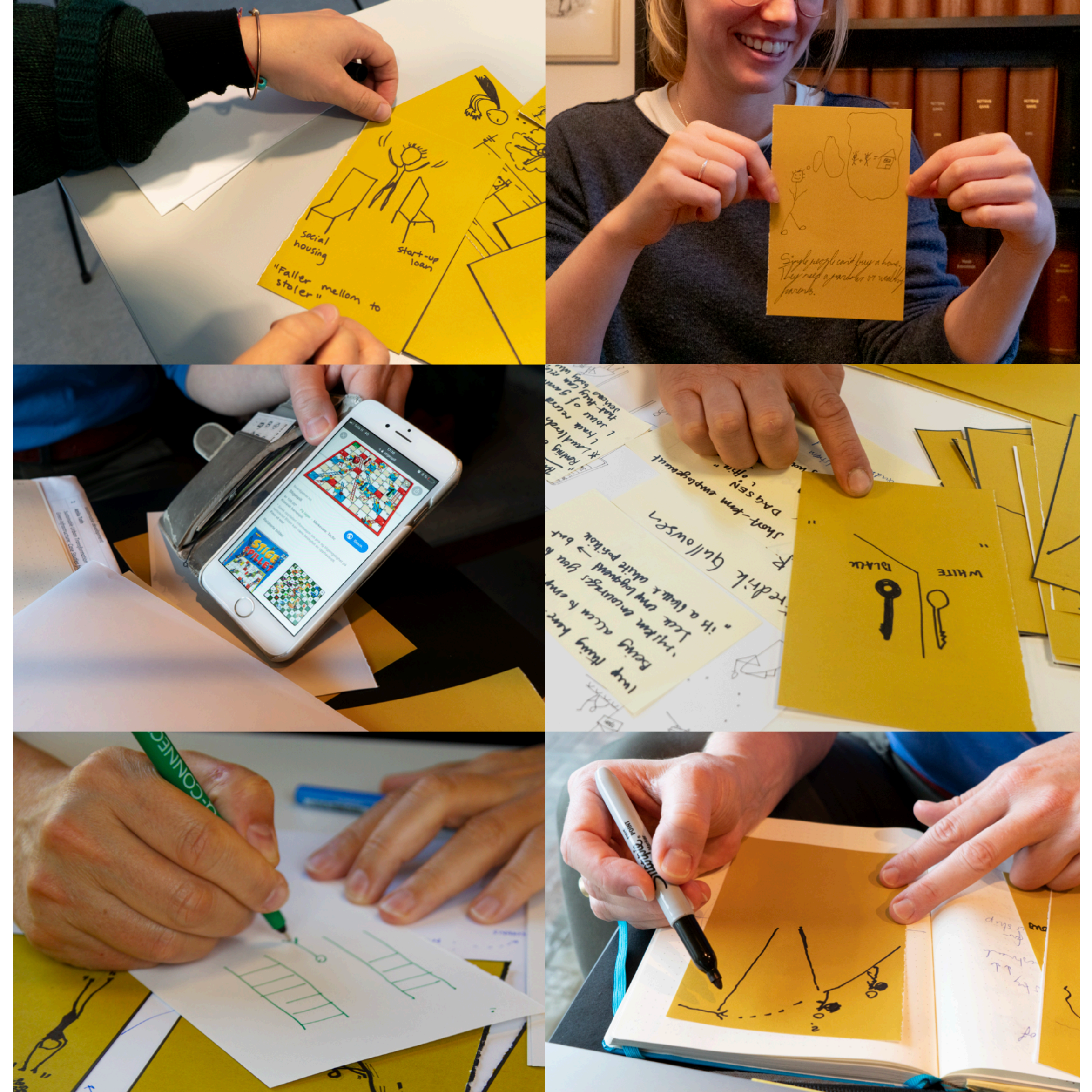
# #3 Diversifying





## #3 Diversifying

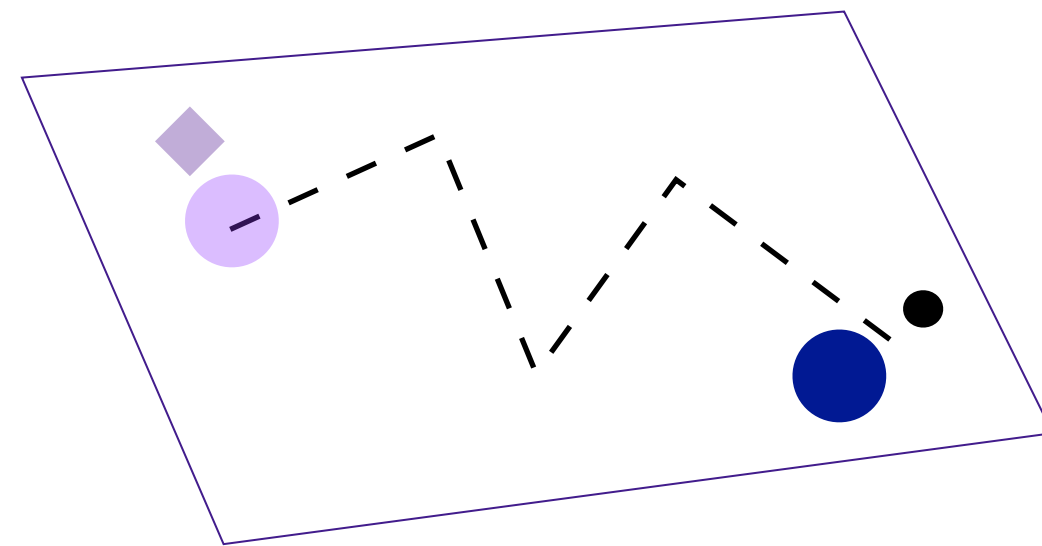
Metaphors for building awareness of the co-existing versions of realities (as experienced by different stakeholders) and its situatedness within a complex system.



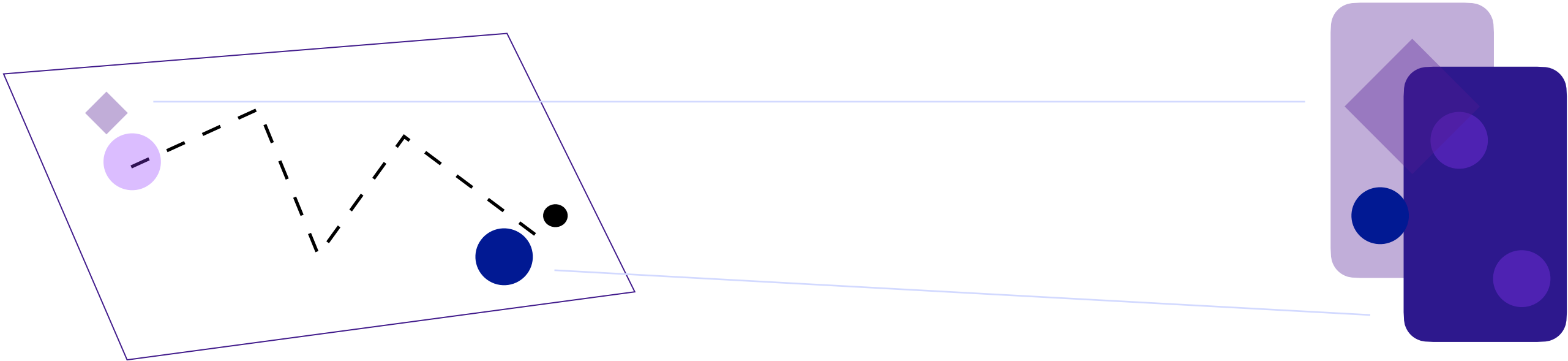


#4

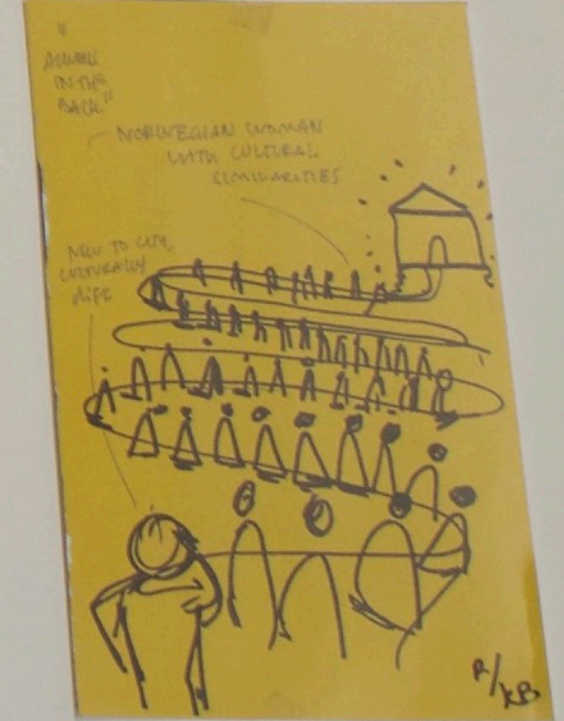
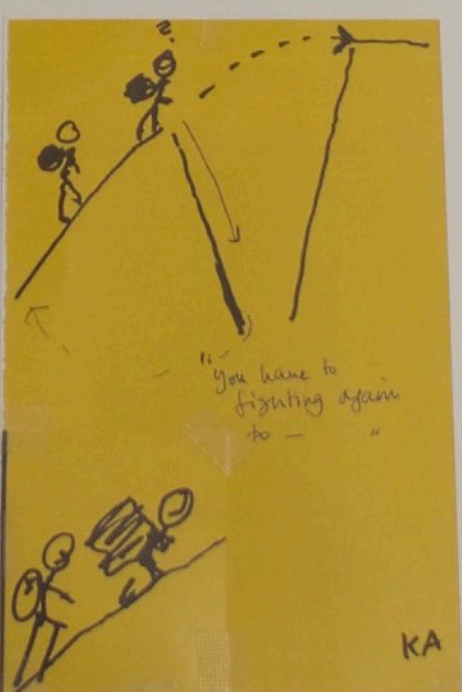
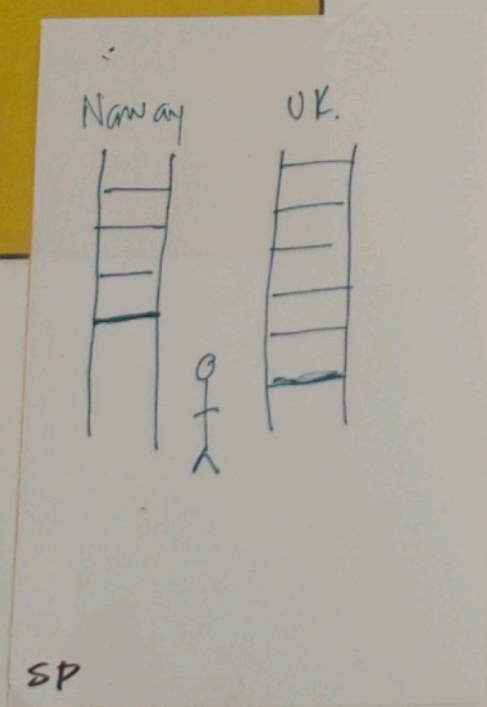
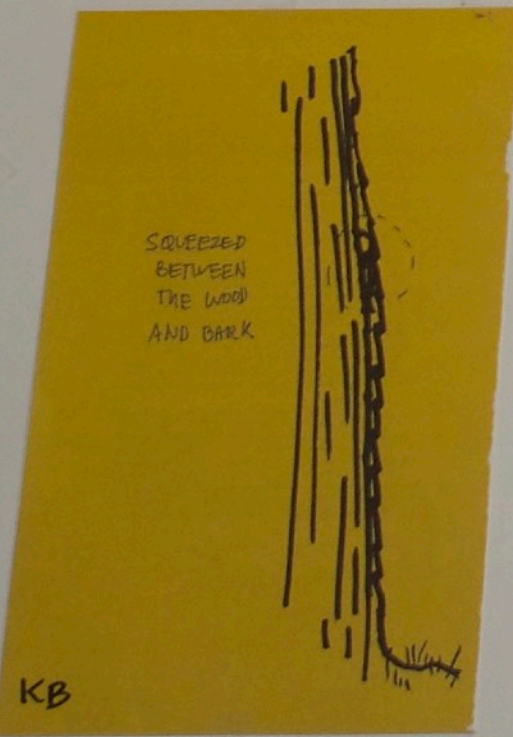
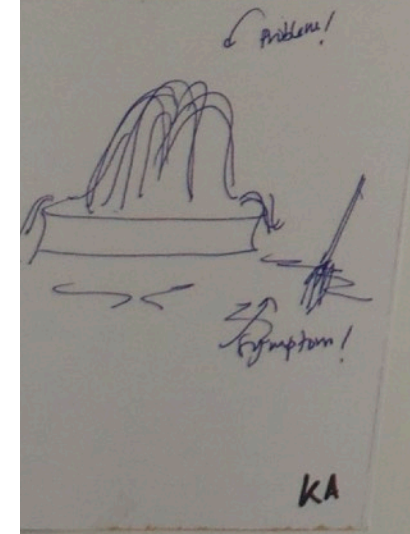
# *Mapping / Materialising*



#4 *Materialising*



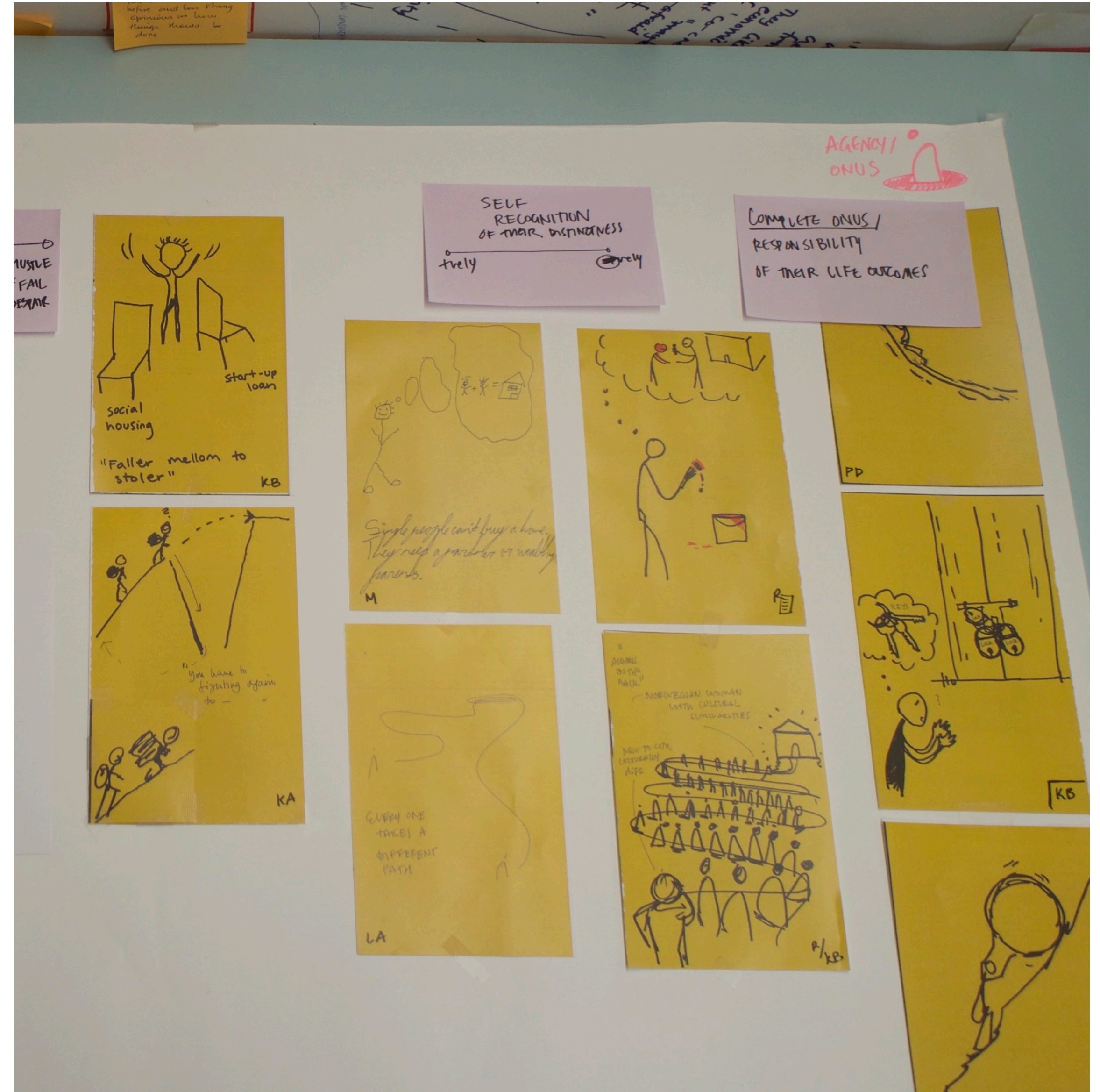






## #4 Materialising

Metaphors can make tangible the otherwise intangible qualities, making it possible for systemic designers to deliberately bring the softer, fuzzier and the poetic into the (too often) logical or pragmatic systems visualisations and framings.





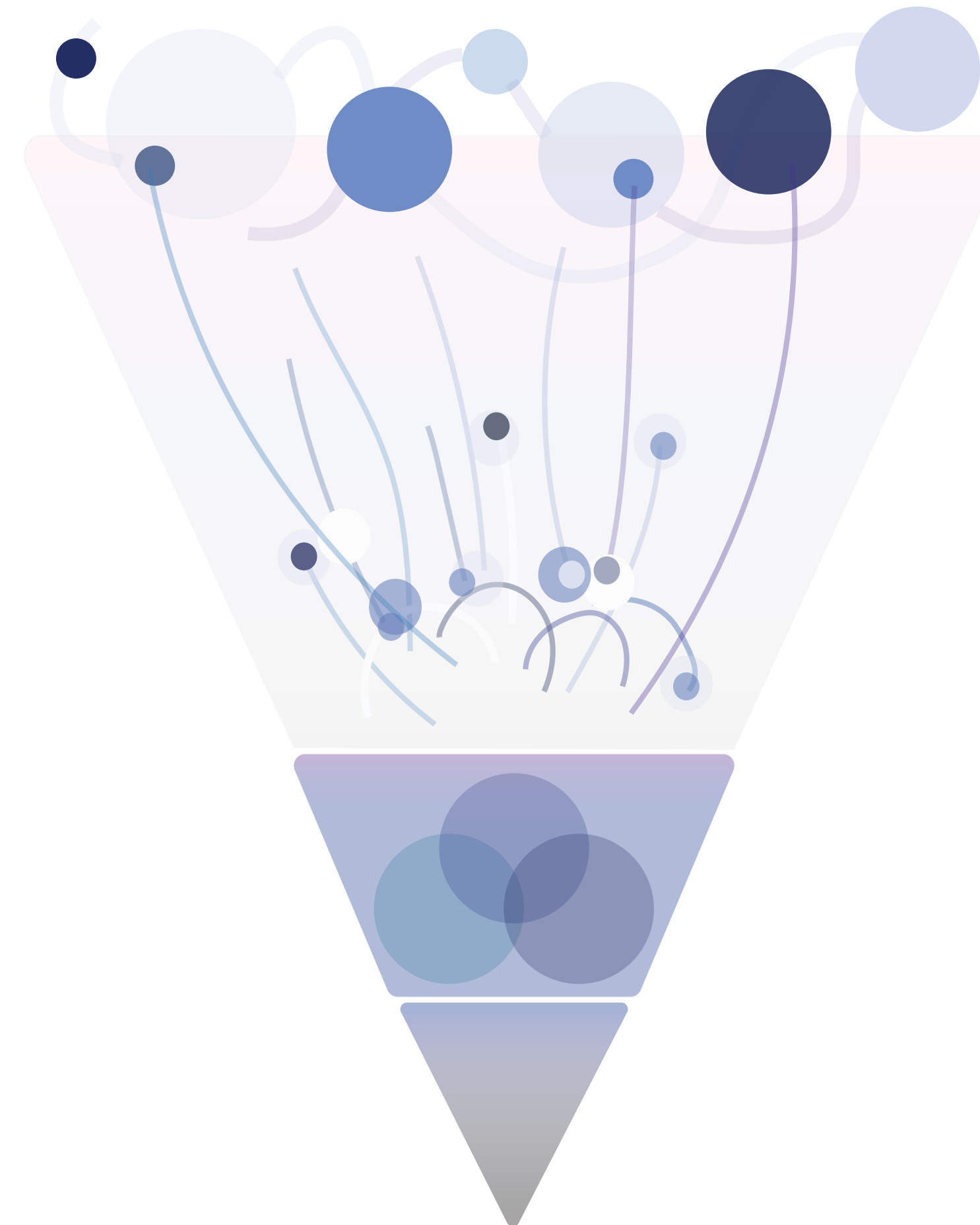
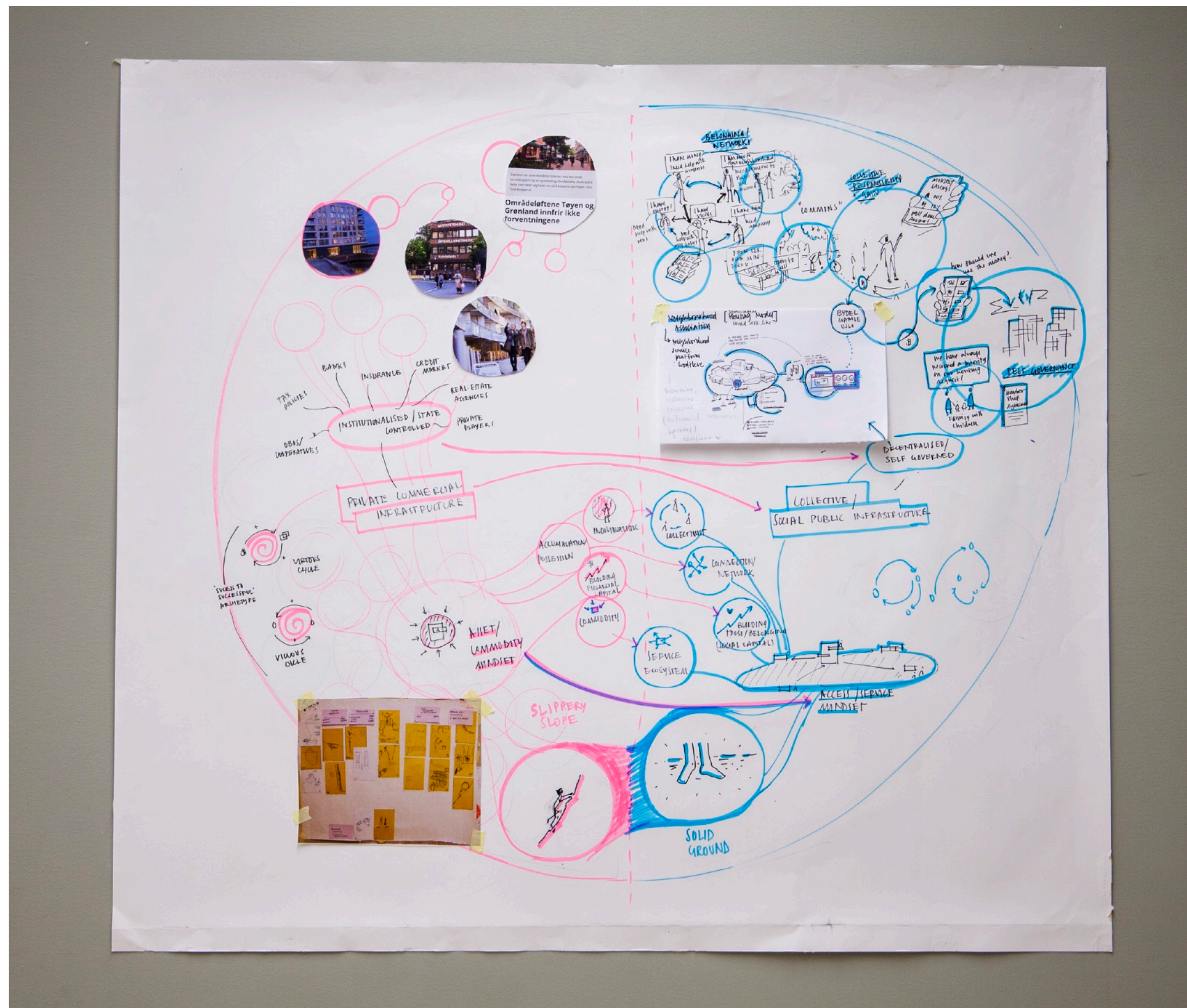
#5

*Suggesting /  
Probing*









*Everyday experiences  
via services*

*Service  
providers /actors/  
stakeholders*

*System Structures  
(political, legal, financial  
forces)*

*Values*

*Mindset*

*Metaphors*

Dudani, P. (2019). *Wealth to Wellbeing: A Systems Exploration in Imagining Alternatives Within Housing in Norway*. MA Thesis. AHO.

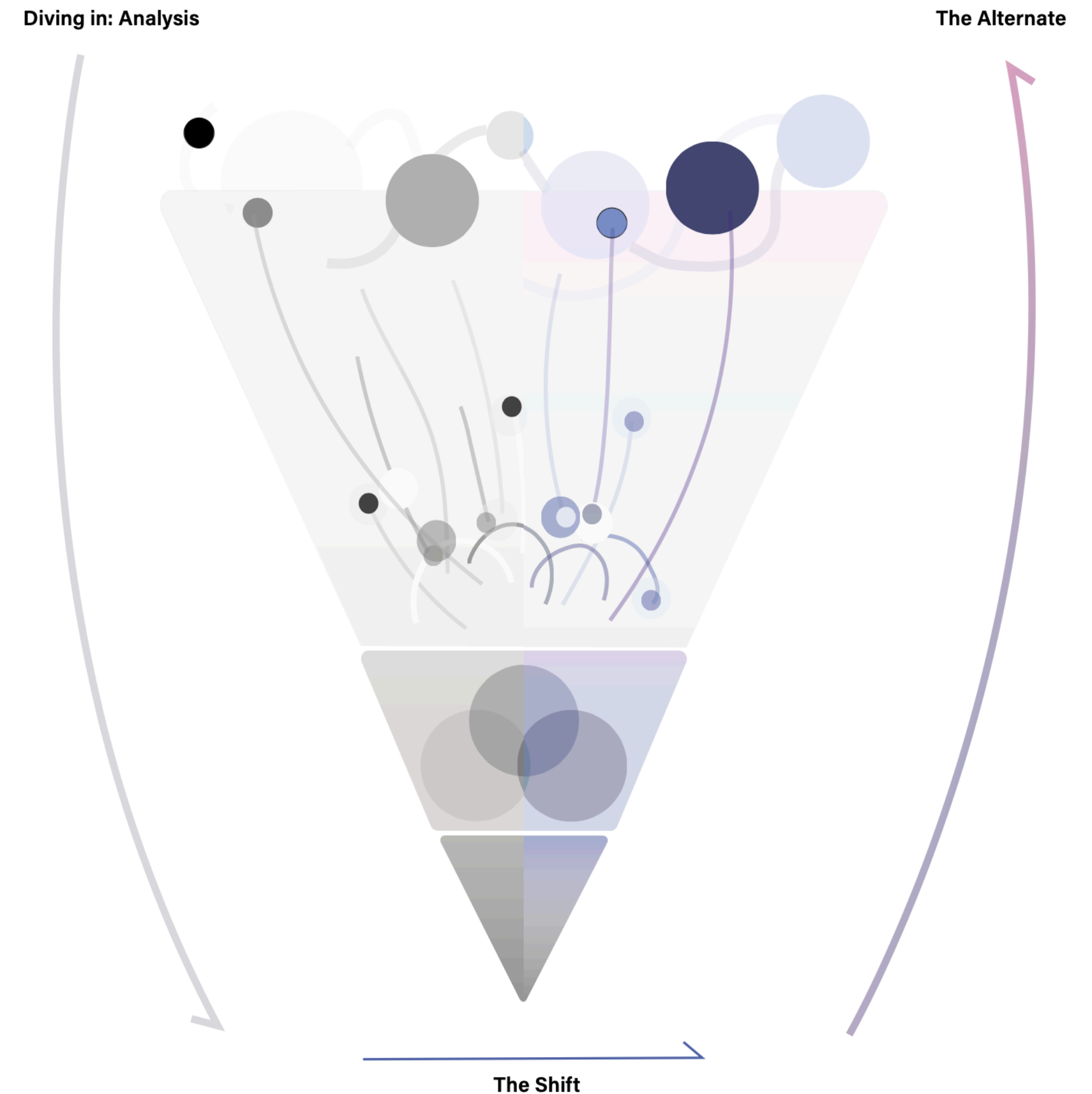


## #5 Probing

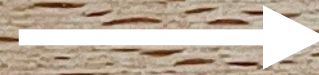
“What if we flipped the metaphor at the root of the system?”

The new metaphor can be translated to new values and mindsets, which can influence alternatives system-structures, materialised through speculative design.”

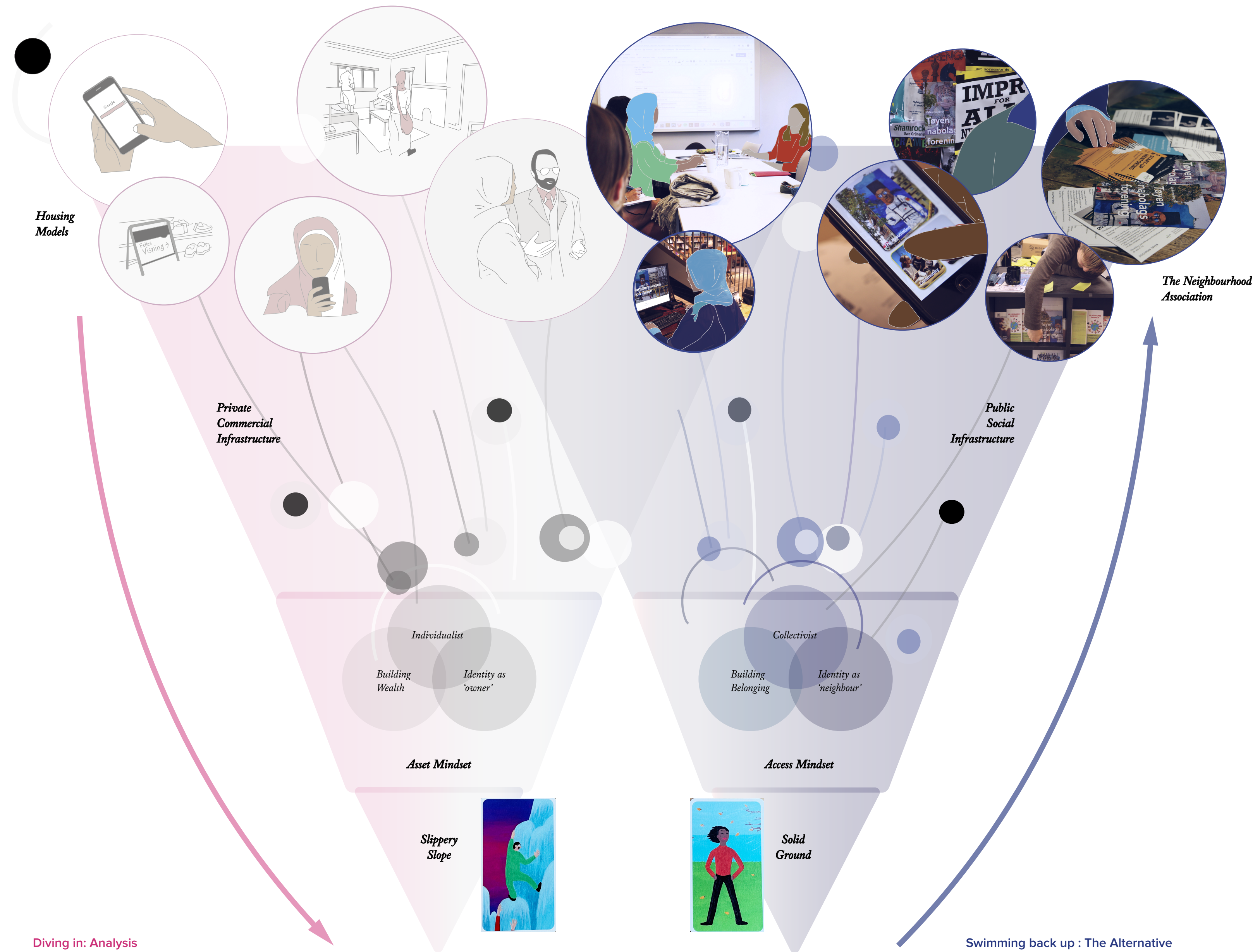
Dudani, P. (2019). *Wealth to Wellbeing: A Systems Exploration in Imagining Alternatives Within Housing in Norway*. MA Thesis. AHO.













# Summary

## Systems Design Actions

Analysing

Locating

Network Finding

Mapping

Suggesting

## Work that metaphors can do

Associating

Embodying

Diversifying

Materialising

Probing

## Qualities that come through

Reveals other domains of knowledge (cultural, social)

Elevates the experiential

Makes the intangible, tangible

Highlights facets of complex systems by place-based views

Support critical questioning and searching for the invisible



# *Implications for practice*



miro

Singular and Shared – Exploring metaphors and systems

undo

redo

eraser

boards might have when they're young

Share

PD

MA

18

Meeting

Mike




The word you've chosen is:

system

To your friend who's not in your department

A ten year old child

Use visuals to communicate (photos, drawings, etc—your own or others)



Use words to communicate

a 'system' does not exist, it is a way of looking at the world as with a pair of glasses which shows what the boundaries are and what to focus on and what not to focus on. The flock of birds I often use to show that systems are essentially about relationships and about the impact of relationships on the bigger whole.

a system is a way of looking at things in the world. You can look at a hockey team as hockey players that each have to do their best to make the team win. Or, if you look at them as a system, you also look at how they play together to make them win.

What are some of your assumptions here?

that people understand that it is just a metaphor. A human social system does not behave exactly like a flock of birds, because people are not birds.

that some people might NOT understand that they understand what it is to work in a team and have experience playing in a sport team.

Joanna



The word you've chosen is:

emergence

To your friend who's not in your department

A ten year old child

Use visuals to communicate (photos, drawings, etc—your own or others)



Use words to communicate

Something new arises out of the interaction of components

Something new comes into being from a combination of different elements. [this does not relate to the image though so this is unideal]

What are some of your assumptions here?

The friend will know what a network looks like and will assume that the arrow up is growth.

The child will know this magic trick. That the child will know the word elements.

Linda



The word you've chosen is:

System

To your friend who's not in your department

A ten year old child

Use visuals to communicate (photos, drawings, etc—your own or others)



Use words to communicate

How people use structure (e.g. the rules of a game) is the system

"Systems can be seen as the relationship between structure and behavior" D. Meadows

What are some of your assumptions here?

A friend is an anthropologist and is also interested in relationships as the investigation of how a system works.

Kids are experts on toys and candy.

Howard


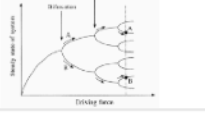
The word you've chosen is:

time

To your friend who's not in your department

A ten year old child

Use visuals to communicate (photos, drawings, etc—your own or others)



Use words to communicate

cyclical, deconstructionist, progressive, emergent+contingent

young+old; spring-summer-fall-winter

What are some of your assumptions here?

historical perspectives/narratives

lived experience paradox

Martha

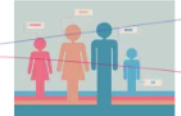

The word you've chosen is:

Structure

To your friend who's not in your department

A ten year old child

Use visuals to communicate (photos, drawings, etc—your own or others)



Use words to communicate

A structure is the fundamental makeup or arrangement of parts.

A family made up of grandparents, Grandparents gave birth to your parents, Your parents gave birth to you. That is what we call a structure.

What are some of your assumptions here?

The friend is a Mechanical Engineer.

Most kids are familiar with their family structure.

David



The word you've chosen is:

structure

To your friend who's not in your department

A ten year old child

Use visuals to communicate (photos, drawings, etc—your own or others)



Use words to communicate

system made of parts with holistic performance

organisation of elements that works together

What are some of your assumptions here?

A friend is a sociologist who relates it.

Children might play with Lego or

Enter your name


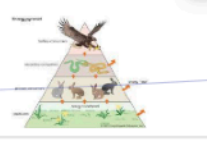
The word you've chosen is:

System

To your friend who's not in your department

A ten year old child

Use visuals to communicate (photos, drawings, etc—your own or others)



Use words to communicate

something that is going on in your head (pattern making) in order to understand complexity and communication

a way to understand people animals and nature. For example, why you and your classmates behave as you do

What are some of your assumptions here?

That people in general finds systems to be existing things and therefore treat them as changeable entities

That kids typically understand dynamics and feedback loop thinking because the thinking is not filtered by own cognitive dissonances

duplicate this ^ somewhere on the board

Instructions ( 2x)

1. Choose one word

2. Use words and visual/s to communicate the meaning of the word as you understand it.

3. This is an opportunity to think creatively so there are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to go beyond the conventional ways of describing the word and come up with new and interesting ones!

4. When answering, keep your audience in mind.

Structure

Time

Uncertainty

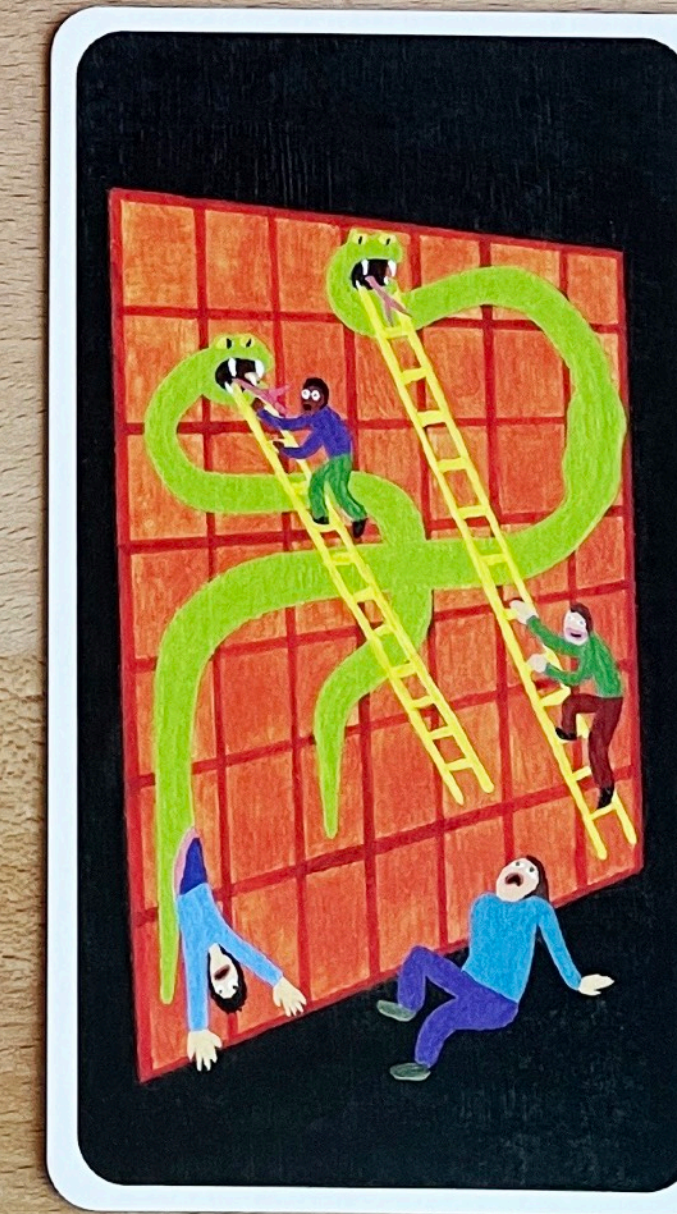
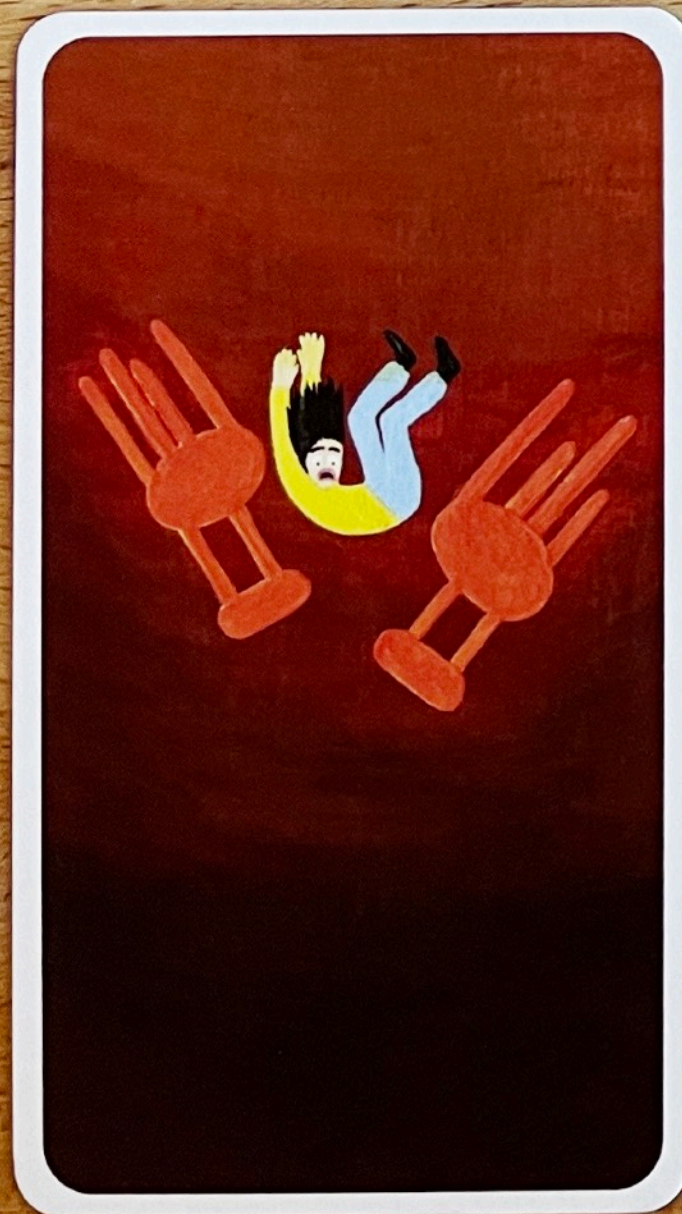
System

Add your own 'systemic design' word

4%

palakdudani@gmail.com / Palak Dudani







*Inviting discussions on:  
Implications for practice*

*Palak Dudani*  
*[www.palakdudani.com](http://www.palakdudani.com)*

