

BROKEN INSTITUTIONS USEFUL INSTITUTIONS

It is impossible for us to do what we need to with the institutions we have. Either we build coherent alternative possibilities or hack existing institutions to achieve agile collective action.



We know we are facing a collapse. We have most of the technology and knowledge we need to support a global population of 10 billion people, but we are not using it. Why? When you get into the organisations and institutions dominating our world, you find well-intentioned people trapped inside perverse incentives and zombie methodologies. We are iterating on a broken system.



— Government – we are cleverer in technology and in complexity science than in the institutions that organise people. This is the tragedy of the commons, the underlying nature of the problem we have: how to translate scientific understanding of the nature and the scale of the risk and impending scale of disaster into responsive policy when policy makers and institutional decision makers have little time and risk appetite for any of the issues. It is disastrous that climate has become political.

— Nation states – as the urgency of doing things together increases, we are reverting to a zero-sum narrative of nation states competing and fending for themselves. How do we get back to the imperative of collective action for the common good at a time when we are fragmenting in unhelpful ways?

— Cities and regions are becoming drivers of positive change and should be empowered. We need language change: from 'global' to 'planetary'. We are not telling the greater story.

— Multilateralism – the UN is trapped in competitive nationalism, ego and growing polarisation – a theatre for powerful vested interests to play a long game. What would it take for the UN to pull the world together in the way it was intended?

— Capitalism – is hurtling us towards destruction fuelled by financialisation, an economic model and a political economy that are all root cause problems.

— It is time to rethink the commons. Property law, for example, has led to \$352 trillion worth of land in private hands, exercising the right of freehold. Fairhold, as an alternative, would create a deep and distributed understanding of responsibility and stewardship.

— Education – has created a normalisation of climate change into obsolete, small, non-complex discussions, resulting in a critically low level of awareness about how much climate change will cost and the scale and pace of change needed.

— Educational institutions are teaching answers rather than questioning; with little debate, deep resistance to entering into change, with a focus on evidence-based reasoning that creates an excuse for not acting. Innovation of the education system is the next frontier: to re-open creativity, reintegrate art and science, and teach people how to act.

— Innovation – entrepreneurs have become trapped in the passion to get rich and find lucrative quick wins rather than work together to build functioning ecosystems.

— Communications and media – we are dealing with a loaded deck. Deliberate, strategic misinformation and the lobbying of a self-interested few is entrenched. The power of who controls global narratives determines whose crisis and what crisis we think we face.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF NATURE

Notwithstanding successive decline in human rights protection, an enormous bottom-up push in the opposite direction is coming from cities, the private sector, students and communities. The UN General Assembly has acknowledged human interdependence with nature, recognising the right to a healthy environment and therefore respect for the rights of nature.

Global legal empowerment is gaining traction, with positive interactions occurring in the interface between global and local, creating a vital and useful community of practice. From an institutional perspective, a shift is now needed from rights to participation to engagement to create ownership and local listening, working with states and regions. Delta management in the Netherlands, new policy drafted in Sierra Leone on land rights, legal personhood of rivers in Colombia show the way.

THE POWER OF CASCADING UP

Local empowerment initiatives are taking root exponentially and connecting up, grounded in what people can do in their daily lives, in places that matter. A movement is afoot: to give ourselves the means to do what is needed with shared vision and platforms to exchange experiences and experiments at all scales, powering individual and collective action to a global scale.

The internet, video, social media, gives us a shared neural network to awake consciousness and knowledge across the world – the system is ready to cascade up; a COP for the people. Alternative social currencies are providing the incentives for behavioural change and movement building, despite institutions, and eventually in partnership with them. Finding the avantgarde, the explosive idea working at the edges is key.

EIT Climate-KIC is Europe's leading climate innovation agency and community, supporting places and industries bridge the gap between climate commitments and current reality.

This is one of ten insights derived from a series of conversations hosted by EIT Climate-KIC. Thinkers and practitioners from multiple disciplines discussed emerging trends, challenges, possibilities and implications for climate actions.

“Our current situation is individually totally understandable but collectively catastrophic. The worse things get, the more we hold on to systems and institutions that don't work.”

“The last thing we need now is the world's largest nuclear power and the world's largest market economy becoming aligned in opposition to 'techno-democracy'.”

“If you have trained all your life to achieve one thing, the plan cannot change – that is the problem we face: change in only one generation.”

“The economy is our choice. It is not God-given. We can change it if we want. We need to move from economic gain to ecological civilisation.”



INNOVATE EDUCATION

Some institutions hold the keys to rewiring human understanding. How could organisations transform education to bridge the gap between thinking and acting, making imagination, and intergenerational, interspecies collaboration and co-creation a key part of that? Linking up with other networks and engaging in dialogue with scholars and practitioners from global south who come with completely different solutions would be a critical role to play given the impact of the EU in the world.

TAKE RISK TO MANAGE RISK

How could the climate movement play an instrumental role in creating a space for a more honest and rigorous discussion about funding: helping money get more comfortable with the long term and with meaningful, systemic impact. Philanthropy thinks it knows better than government. Investment and venture capital is ripe for re-education. How might we build the capability to take risk in public innovation and systems innovation, enabling collaboration, so that funding covers all the issues and invests in network effects.