BEYOND CARBON FIXATION

PATHWAYS TO REGENERATIVE FUTURES

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS - SUMMARY

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Context

Recent global crises—such as record-breaking climate events and rising inequality—are part of a broader system of interconnected social, political, and economic crises known as the metacrisis, which disproportionately affects the Global South despite being driven largely by the Global North. At the heart of this crisis is the anthropocentric capitalist system, prioritizing growth, profit, extraction, and private ownership over the well-being of both humans and ecosystems. Land ownership, central to capitalism and colonialism, is a critical lens through which to examine these issues. Climate philanthropy mirrors these extractive values, focusing on technological, market-driven solutions that often ignore the root causes of climate change. In response, various movements—including regenerative finance, Indigenous land defenders, climate activists, and agroecologists, community land trusts, ecocide movements, etc—are working to transform our relationship with land and challenge conventional ownership models. These efforts, however, are often underfunded due to philanthropy's focus on carbon-centric interventions. **This research explores emerging movements advocating for alternative systems with a focus on land.**

Background

Culture Hack Labs (CHL, a decentralized network of narrative practitioners) and *Ma Earth* (an organization whose mission is to create the enabling infrastructure to allow the flow of resources to regenerative land projects), collaborated to **understand the narrative landscape and map the ecosystem of actors converging around land regeneration and the redistribution of resources in service of Life.**

This inquiry emerges from and builds on two narrative research initiatives that CHL conducted this past year. First, explorations of the narrative space around land ownership. What emerged was an intervention calling for *land back to right relations*: the return of land from the enclosures of colonialism and capitalism to new patterns of deep relationality. The second body of work explores *wealth as a transition pathway*: means by which to transition from our current meta-crisis to postcapitalist realities that serve Life. Ma Earth sits at the intersection of these two inquiries, with the mission of creating enabling infrastructure for resources to flow toward the regeneration of lands, waters, ecosystems, and communities.

Through this exploration we aim to map the ecosystem and find where we can weave the connective tissue to highlight points of collective action to serve as a navigational tool for systems change. **The intention of this research is to find pathways to liberate lands, waters, ecosystems, and communities from the enclosures of capitalism and colonialism.**

CHL Approach

At Culture Hack Labs, we believe that **power rests on the ability to harness and control language; and that humans make sense of their world through stories.** They reveal how our struggles—from land to labor, biodiversity and even our very own bodies—are part of the same global system, one that prioritizes the production of capital, or growth, over Life. We must transition the global operating system so it is grounded in values that are post-capitalist (transformative, just, regenerative, anti-growth) and post-anthropocentric (ontologies of relationality and interdependence with nature). **Culture is at the root of shifting values and belief systems. Developing new social and cultural narratives is therefore a critical lever in this transition towards post-capitalist systems.**

CHL Methodology

Cultural narratives abound, but which ones are critical to understand in order to drive meaningful change? Culture Hack Labs has developed a methodology to help cut through the noise, identify who's saying what, why it matters, and how to reframe and change the narrative.

The *Culture Hack Labs methodology* comprises five components: **Ask, Listen, Understand, Recode** and **Intervene.** Through this method we define an inquiry, collect and analyze data in order to propose reframes that can then be tested as part of an intervention. This process is often conducted in collaboration with social movements and/or groups of activists who will shape strategies and organize around the set of reframes. **For this particular research, we are completing the first four stages of the CHL methodology: Ask, Listen, Understand, and Reframe.**

This research focused on small listening through interviews conducted with 28 participants. Interviewees were identified based on Culture Hack Labs' and Ma Earth's experience and engagement with these people as key actors in the space. Our interviews examined three key areas: the areas of expertise and practices of the participants, their ontological views (their worldviews and theories of change) and the points of convergence and opportunities for collective action.

Research Findings

There is a growing recognition of the inadequacies of current institutions that do not leave room for non-dualist and ecocentric ways of thinking, which makes cultivating alternative relationships with land beyond private property difficult. Interviewees identified new and greenwashed forms of capitalism and colonialism, such as the carbon market and carbon offset projects in Global Majority contexts, which continue to perpetuate the metacrisis through corporate land grabbing and dispossession. Interviewees asserted that the root causes of the metacrisis are not only material but ideological and spiritual: separation from nature and each other, due to worldviews born and perpetuated through Judeo-Christian, Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment, and Neoclassical ideologies. Therefore cultural and spiritual interventions are needed to transition beyond industrial capitalism. Interviewees highlighted the need for networks of local, place-based, community-based prefigurative experiments that offer inspirational "possibility models" for what regenerative living in post-capitalism might look like - and reclaim our imagination from the clasp of capitalism.

From our data research and our list of insights, we then identified **12 narrative communities** (actors that are engaged in a similar conversation using similar narratives over a sustained period of time) and **placed them into 3 clusters.**

Cluster 1

Greenwashing: Development & Growth: land is a commodity or asset to be managed or offset, climate change can be mitigated while continuing development and growth agendas.

Greenwashing: Techno-Solutionists: a variation of the development and growth community with a focus on technological innovation. Land is a technical issue solvable through innovation, data, efficiency, and scaling of solutions. Tech is embedded in profit-seeking, development-oriented social structures therefore this community tends to be tech-deterministic and apolitical.

Liberatory Technology: interested in how new technologies (especially decentralized technologies such as blockchain, and web3) can be at the center of redistributing and redesigning systems. However, the community is not always imagining systems beyond traditional capitalist frameworks.

Cluster 2

Rights of Nature: focuses on unconventional but Western-based legal tools to protect land and hold accountability for environmental destruction, recognizing the intrinsic value of nature. It includes conversations around Rights of Nature and Ecocide.

Liberation & Justice: focuses on capitalism and colonialism as root causes of the metacrisis and most energy is spent fighting hegemonic narratives, oppressive forces, and calling out harms and corporate responsibility.

Centering & Uplifting the Marginalized: rather than focusing on dismantling, resisting, or uprooting explicit causes of our current systems, it endeavors to uplift Indigenous, Black, marginalized (e.g., BIPOC) and/or grassroots voices as embodied examples of pre-existing systems or systems change.

Cluster 3

Crisis of Relationality: focuses on human-centrism (resulting in greed, selfishness, domination, and control) and separation from nature as root causes of land extraction and climate crises today.

Community Land Trusts: focused on pursuing different models of land ownership, moving from enclosure of land to being entrusted with the care of land. Land is purchased so that it might be managed in an alternative way.

Bioregional Governance: promotes land management by ecological and geographical rather than political features (like the nation-state). It is both a philosophical movement and an empirical and experimental alternative.

Regenerative Foodways: focused on redesigning food systems toward systems that are regenerative. Various strains include regenerative agriculture, agroecology, and food sovereignty, which all recognize the fundamental right to control, decide and manage the means of producing the food we consume.

Possibility Models: focused building, nurturing and funding experiments in models of living that reflect alternative, regenerative, postcapitalist futures. This community is more of a framework and communities such as Bioregional Governance, Community Land Trusts, Regenerative Foodways are examples of what possibility models might look like.

Indigenous Lifeways: led by Indigenous communities, focusing on restoring their lifeways through rematriation, land reunion, and a "coming home" to right relations.

Attention, Network, Power Analysis

We assessed the attention (when/where the conversation is happening); network (actors/platforms) and power (size, dominance and potential for evolution) of the narrative communities. In this report, the power assessment is based on our interpretation of interviewee insights into the power dynamics of narrative space (rather than using social listening software to gauge the size of a conversation online). The interviewees implied, as expected, the hegemonic communities (Greenwashing: Development & Growth and Greenwashing: Techno-Solutionists) held the strongest influences on public ideas of solutions to the metacrisis. The Liberation and Justice community is also large, as much public discourse around land and the metacrisis tends to use the confrontational language of injustice and oppression that emphasizes countering the harms of the existing system. The Crisis of Relationality community seems to be growing more coherent and popular as the public seeks more ideological and spiritual reasons for the metacrisis. Community Possibility Models is also growing as people seek tangible examples of what alternative systems and land stewardship models might look like. While small, the communities Bioregional Governance and Community Land Trusts, Regenerative Foodways, and Indigenous Lifeways are becoming more popular as they are examples of "possibility models".

Frames and Linguistic Analysis

Most of the frames of the narrative communities (beyond the hegemonic ones) tended to be proactive frames in which communities were focusing on future resolutions and alternative systems in response to the crisis (e.g. Frames: Transition_to_a_state; Cause_change), with only one large community, Liberation and Justice, using reactive frames focusing on the fight against phenomena causing the compounding crises (e.g. Frame: Confronting_Problem). **This implies the conversation around land regeneration is oriented towards constructing the future rather than deconstructing the present.** We can infer that land is a fertile lever for reimagining just and regenerative systems and not merely getting stuck in critiquing the past.

The frames of Becoming_aware and Social_connection are common among the narrative communities outside the hegemonic ones. **This implies that expanding one's consciousness/way of seeing and improving relationality are stressed as necessary for change.** We can infer that cultural and ontological interventions are important when shifting public and political discourse around land ownership models.
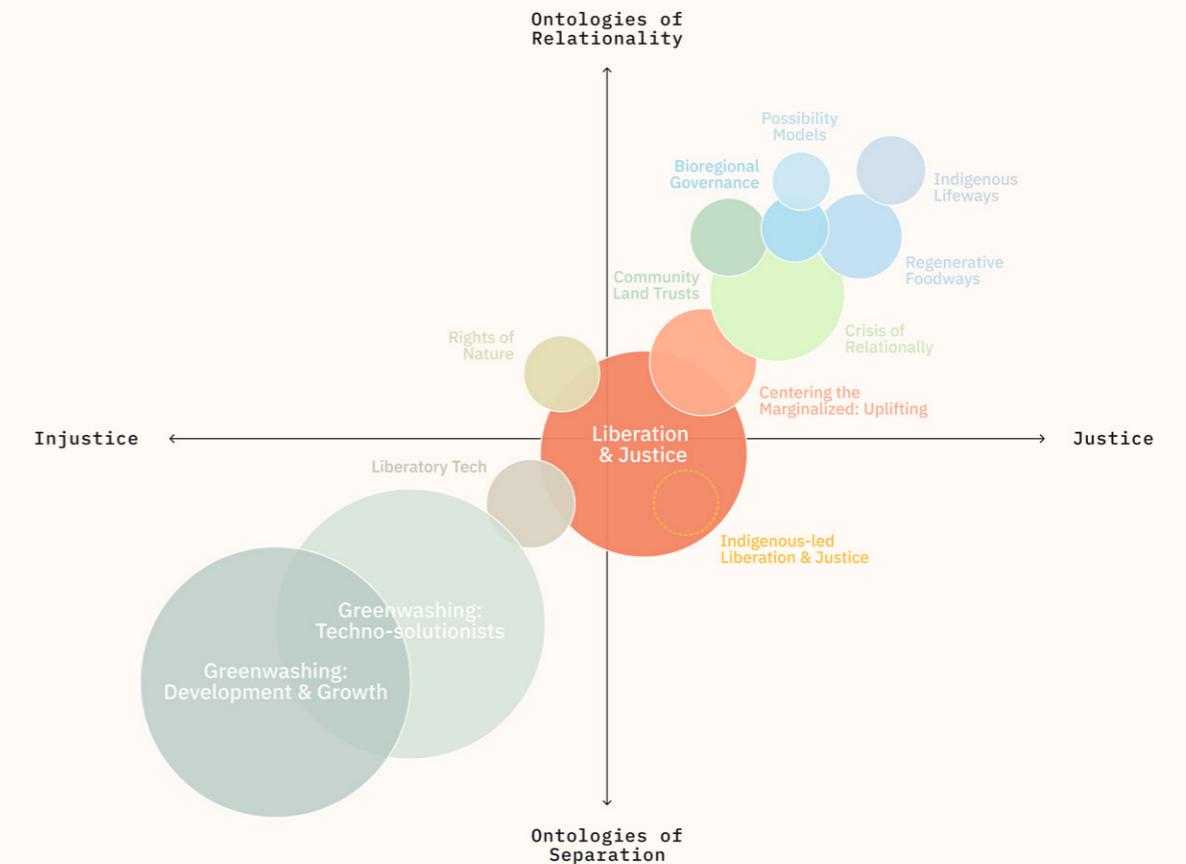
Narrative Mapping

From the data we collected and the insights we have established in relation to the 12 Narrative Communities, we created a map of the narrative space. Through the mapping, we assess narrative communities' potential for evolution. The potential for evolution of a narrative community refers to its capacity to bring the narrative space, and therefore culture as a whole, towards the desired social, economic and ecological transition that is needed to end exploitation, extraction and destruction of all forms of Life. Potential for evolution also means potential for achieving justice plus an ontological shift (the Culture Hack meta transition pathway, or "theory of change").

> **Justice plus Ontological shift:** At CHL we believe that in order to transition out of the metacrisis, we need to marry demands of justice with a concurrent *shift in ontologies* —the very ways we view, understand, sense, relate and engage with the world. As Philosopher Bayo Akomolafe has argued: "Demands for social justice may get us a seat at the table, but they will never let us leave the house of modernity". To leave the house of modernity, we need new ontologies. We call this strategy "justice plus onto-shift".[1]

The map has two axes, each representing the spectrum of narratives that exist within this space. The horizontal axis represents a spectrum of how narrative communities relate to justice (moving from *injustice*, or non-acknowledgment of the breakdown/metacrisis and a reinforcement of the existing system, towards *justice*, or exposing problems and addressing injustices, towards a full transformation of the system at the most evolved end). The vertical axis represents the *ontology* (moving from a *singular ontology of separation* from the natural and more-than-human world and the production of monocultures; towards a plurality of ontologies of relationality and polycultures of knowing and being).
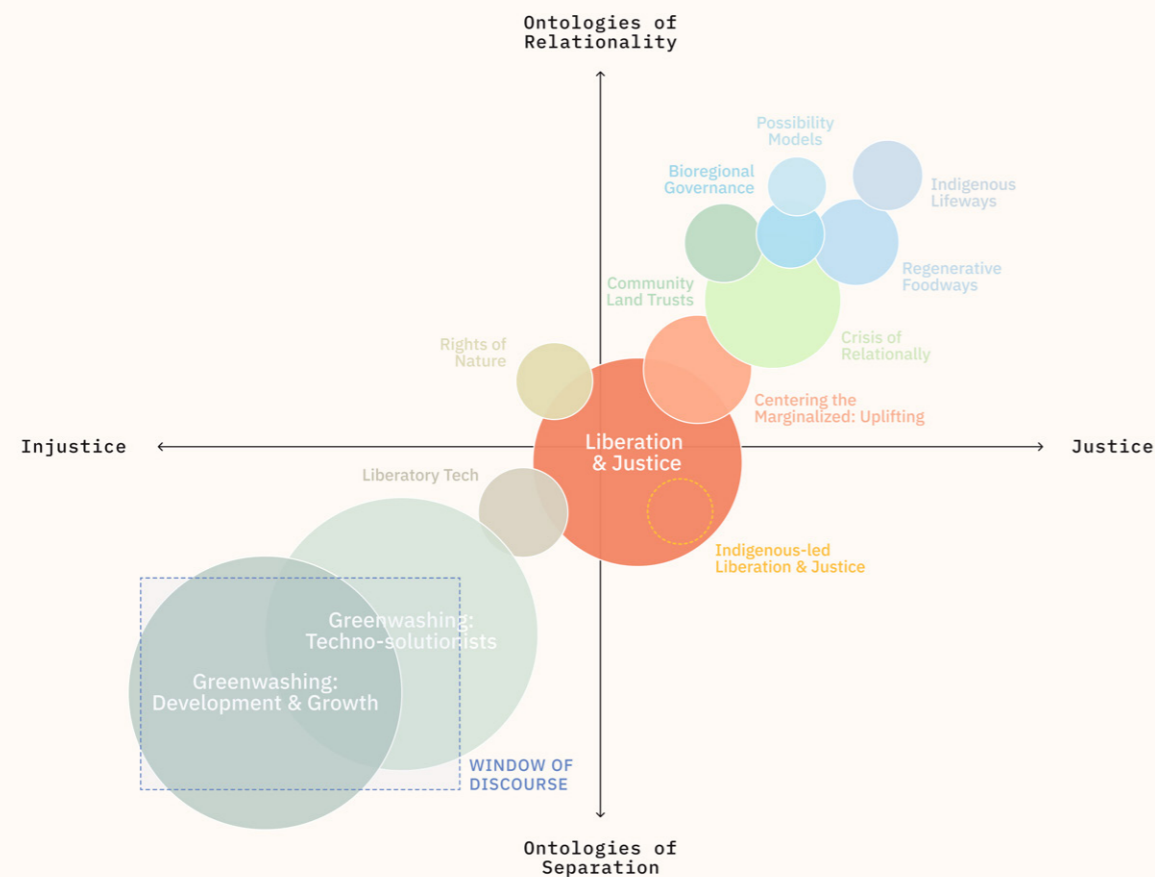

The Greenwashing communities are situated on the lowest end of the Justice and Ontology spectrum as they exemplify what is dominant in the current system (reinforcing injustices) and reinforce ontologies of separation and monoculture. The Liberatory Technology community is further along the justice axis as they are addressing injustices of the current system through decentralization technologies. However, for the most part, they are operating within traditional capitalist frameworks which may limit the extent to which current systems can be transformed. The Rights of Nature community counters injustices in the current system so it is placed in the middle of the injustice-justice axis - but uses Western logics and legal frameworks to influence change and therefore remains in the middle of the ontology axis. The Liberation and Justice community focuses on acknowledging injustices and calling out dominant narratives and remains in the center of the justice axes, as the narrative gravity tends to be around countering the existing system, not building new systems. Centering & Uplifting the Marginalized community is similar but slightly more evolved as the focus is on uplifting marginalized narratives, which tend to be more ontologically plural. The Crisis of Relationality community recognizes injustices and suggests the need to repair relations with human and more-than-human for change as a route for systems transformation and, hence, is situated toward evolved ends of the spectrum. Communities: Community Land Trusts; Bioregional Governance; Regenerative Foodways; and Indigenous Lifeways are all situated in the top right quadrant as they are all experimenting with alternative forms of land stewardship as means to directly transition beyond the metacrisis as well as cultivating a more relational ontology. This is also where Possibility Models sit as such models described by this community are needed and evolved on both ontology and justice spectrums.

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1   *https://www.postcapitalistphilanthropy.org/knowledge*

Narrative Evolution: Shifting the Window of Discourse

The "window of discourse" describes the range of ideas the public is willing to accept: what sits in the window is what is considered common sense. In other words, the window is where the narrative gravity is concentrated in the narrative space. It helps us visualize the mapping and evolution of the narrative space towards post-capitalism. When assessing the broader narrative space around land regeneration and the redistribution of capital, **we can see the window of discourse is located in the bottom left quadrant.** This is where the two hegemonic communities sit (Greenwashing: Development & Growth and Greenwashing: Techno-solutionists) whose **narratives of achieving economic growth alongside limited climate interventions (such as reducing carbon emissions) are setting the boundaries of political and public acceptability.**

The common sense narrative around land specifically, is that land is viewed primarily as a commodity or asset to be managed or offset in service of economic growth. This narrative endorses market-based solutions, such as carbon sequestration projects or land conservation initiatives.

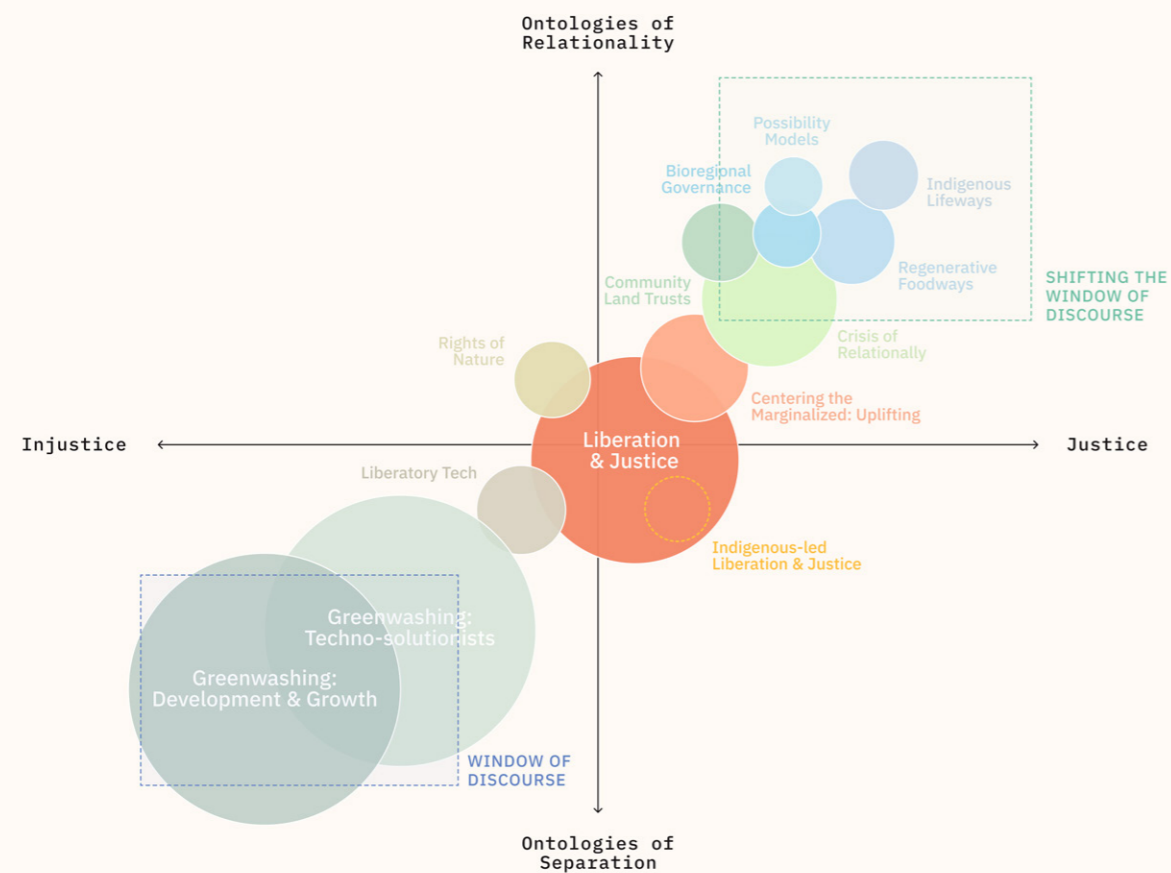## Shifting the Window of Discourse: From "carbon fixation" to "possibility models"

As well as a descriptive tool, the "window of discourse" is also a strategic tool to help us see where we want to evolve the narrative space and shift public norms and culture. **We want to shift the window by strategically pushing the far edge of what is considered acceptable - towards the top right quadrant where interventions are post-capitalist (transformative, just, regenerative, anti-growth) and post-anthropocentric (grounded upon ontologies of relationality and interdependence with nature).** In other words:

1. **We want to disrupt the public, political, and philanthropic fixation on carbon[2] as a transition pathway out of the climate crisis.** Carbon fixes - while important - when not tethered to post-capitalist ambitions, are inherently non-transformative, non-systemic, and perpetuate the issues they apparently try to resolve. Carbon solutions remain forms of greenwashing unless they attempt to address the root cause of the crises.

2. **We want to make common sense a pursuit of climate solutions that do address root causes of the crises:** post-capitalist, post-extractive alternatives that prioritize justice, equity, regeneration and biodiversity restoration. Narrative communities around land-based initiatives attempting to move beyond the carbon fixation sit in the top right quadrant. We want to shift the window of discourse here.

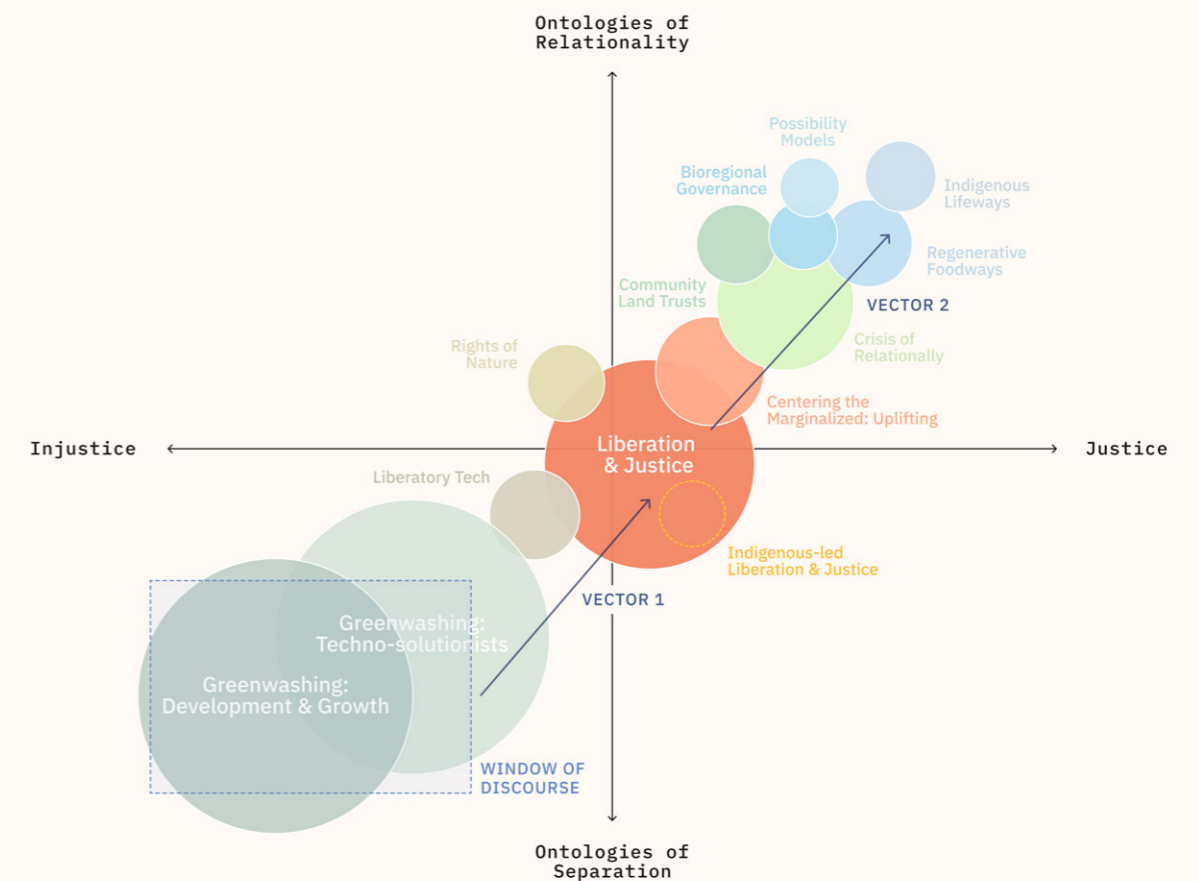2   https://www.culturehack.io/issues/issue-06-the-carbon-fixation-how-philanthropy-and-aid-miss-the-real-crisis/

Narrative communities representing post-capitalist climate solutions include Bioregional Governance; Community Land Trusts; Regenerative Foodways; and Indigenous Futures. They represent "possibility models" or "prefigurative experiments" for land-based transition pathways out of the meta-crisis. Prefigurative politics refers to models of living in the present that reflect (or "prefigure") the alternative futures we wish to usher in. They offer "possibility models" for what post-capitalism can look like, inspire the transition, and build confidence among the public that another world is possible. **This is where the public, political, and philanthropic common sense should evolve towards.**

When thinking about post-capitalist alternatives, it is also vital to cultivate space for alternatives that *remain unknown and emergent*, rather than imposing or predefining prescriptive solutions for the future as these might unintentionally perpetuate the same systemic harms that are pervasive today.

Narrative Vectors

Plotting the narrative communities on the map enabled us to see patterns of the narrative space and compare the evolutionary capacity of each narrative community. **Narrative Vectors** are a descriptive tool that enables us to further map the current narrative space, by identifying specific pathways between narrative communities or clusters of narrative communities. These vectors enable us to see what is happening and if communities have a potential to evolve or not.

Vector 1: From Greenwashing to Liberation and Justice

In the bottom-left quadrant of the narrative landscape, we find the communities Greenwashing: Development & Growth, Greenwashing: Techno-solutionists, and Liberatory Technology. These communities - especially the former two - dominate much of the attention and power in the narrative space, shaping resource flows and determining the trajectory of outcomes. Their focus is typically on carbon reduction and sustainable development within the growth paradigm, but often without addressing the deeper systemic structures. A shift towards a more holistic understanding of the system and root causes is both necessary and inevitable. **These communities must evolve towards Liberation and Justice, by understanding that justice and ecological regeneration are inseparable and that true systemic change cannot occur without addressing both simultaneously.**

Vector 2: From Liberation and Justice to Possibility Models

The Liberation and Justice and Centering and Uplifting the Marginalized narrative communities play a crucial role in the transition landscape by addressing historical and ongoing injustices. Their work to challenge entrenched systems of power and amplify marginalized voices is not only necessary but forms an essential capacity for systemic transformation.

This justice-oriented focus is inherently responsive, addressing immediate injustices while holding space for broader transformation. Yet, to fully realize systemic change, there is a needed shift toward proactive, preparative approaches that envision and build new structures. While the communities have a systems approach, they often lack the ontological reimagination needed to envision and build entirely new systems.

Together, these justice-oriented and possibility-driven approaches form a cohesive transition capacity. By addressing past and present injustices while constructing regenerative systems, they create a grounded response to the metacrisis, integrating justice and renewal into every step of the process.

The emerging Crisis of Relationality narrative community has the potential to catalyze this shift, encouraging a movement toward new ways of seeing and being. **By fostering essential "ontological shifts," Crisis of Relationality can support the Liberation and Justice efforts in evolving from critique to the active creation of new systems, rooted in interdependence and relationality.** This integrative approach ensures that justice-oriented work is not only reparative but also generative, paving the way for systemic transformation that is holistic, interconnected, and life-affirming.

Narrative Objectives

Our narrative objective is to create a high-level semantic framework that enables narrative communities to locate themselves within the broader transition landscape as well as see where the window of discourse should shift. This framework helps narrative communities evolve from partial, reformist solutions to justice-driven approaches, and from oppositional critique to the creation of new systems that integrate new ways of knowing and being.

Reframe

The reframe "Transforming Breakdowns into Possibility" centers on the core semantic frame of Possibility Models[3], emphasizing that to address today's crises, we must go beyond reform and engage in bold, lived experiments that reimagine our ways of being, relating, and governing.

The reframe is broken into the frame, the underlying logic, theoretical grounding and vivid conceptual metaphors that bring the frame to life. Together, the elements form a cohesive and compelling narrative to shape the future of climate philanthropy and broader conversations on transitions out of the metacrisis.

Possibility Models - Transforming Breakdowns into Possibility	
Frame	**Possibility Models** are real-world experiments in new ways of being, knowing, and governing that challenge existing systems. They embody the future we seek by creating actionable, lived alternatives in the present, showing us how systemic change can emerge through practice, not just theory.
Logic	We can no longer depend on growth-oriented paradigms to address the complex crises of our time. Instead, we must actively cultivate new possibilities—**a radical reimagining of ways of knowing, being, and doing that can guide us forward.** This approach calls for a transformative, experiential epistemology, one that embraces uncertainty not as an obstacle but as a necessary element of transition. Only by stepping into the unknown can we begin to create systems that truly respond to the interconnected challenges we face.
Grounding	**This frame incorporates the following key aspects:** Possibility Models are grounded in prefigurative politics, emphasizing that meaningful transformation begins now. Through actionable, lived practices, these models embody the values and systems we aspire to create, insisting that future ideals must be reflected in present actions. These communities recognize that true systemic change requires **addressing the root drivers of crises, including capitalism, colonialism, and systemic exploitation.** By moving beyond surface solutions and carbon-centric reforms, they challenge communities to confront these foundational issues directly. Therefore transformation cannot be achieved without **linking social justice with ecological regeneration.** They advocate for solutions that address social and ecological crises together, understanding that tackling one without the other perpetuates the structures of harm. This semantic frame encourages a shift away from anthropocentric and hierarchical worldviews, advancing **relational and ecological consciousness that values interconnectedness.** This reimagined ontology fosters care and reciprocity across human and non-human communities, expanding possibilities for regenerative futures.[4]
Metaphors	**Connecting Islands of Coherence:** These models act as stable, life-affirming "islands" within a turbulent sea of breakdowns, offering prototypes of resilience and regeneration that can gradually coalesce into broader systemic change. **Making the Path as We Walk It:** This metaphor underscores the experimental, iterative nature of Possibility Models, highlighting that the path forward emerges only through committed practice and ongoing adaptation in real-time contexts.

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3   *Gratitude to Sohrob Nabatian from the Kalleopia Foundation for using this framing when talking about local experiments in land reunion.*

4   *https://www.culturehack.io/curriculum/curriculum/module-1-the-culture-of-the-anthropocene/module-1-notes-culture-and-the-anthropocene/*

A potential metaphor that brings this reframe to life is islands of coherence—spaces where new systems are emerging, growing, and thriving within the body of the old. Ilya Prigogine proposed, "when a complex system is far from equilibrium, small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos have the capacity to shift the entire system to a higher order." In the context of this report, these islands can be seen as seeds of transformation—spaces where the future post-capitalist world is being prefigured or prototyped within the capitalist system itself. Rather than waiting for the "right conditions" or a complete systemic overthrow, regenerative, biodiversity-based, and community-driven solutions are emerging, even when surrounded by broader unsustainable or destructive forces of the complex adaptive system of capitalism.

The evolutionary capacity of these islands of coherence is that they are already embodying the change in the system. They are akin to imaginal cells - the specialized cells found in caterpillars that play a crucial role in their transformation into butterflies. When we look at that evolutionary process in nature, it is when the cells start to connect with each other and shift from acting as discrete individual cells to a multi-cell organism, that the process of metamorphosis occurs. These islands, through connection and expansion, have the potential to shift the entire system at scale.

These islands of coherence, or pre-figurative experiments, become the building blocks for a future that is still in formation but actively unfolding in real-time, and so we can also see that we must make the path as we walk it - the second proposed metaphor.

In sum, the reframe of Transforming Breakdowns into Possibility ties together the vectors and narrative objective by outlining how communities can move from surface-level, reformist interventions toward deep, systemic change. At the core of this transition are Possibility Models, real-world, grounded experiments that embody new ways of knowing and being, breaking away from the failing paradigms that perpetuate crises. **Possibility models aren't abstract; they're being built right now, through grounded, lived experiments in transition.**

The Pathways to Regeneration Are Interwoven

In this narrative direction, and through our interviews and analysis, we've detailed how this shift occurs in practice. The *Systems Capability Matrix* offers a blueprint for how this change is already happening, and thereby offering a set of heuristics for these possibility models. This framework highlights five interrelated pathways that define the journey from crisis to possibility. Together, these capacities chart the process of building Possibility Models and prefigurative experiments that not only challenge the old systems but actively create the future we want to see—one where justice, ecological health, and new ontologies of interdependence flourish.

1. Restoring Justice, Restoring Life

2. Economies of Regeneration

3. Land Back to Right Relationship

4. Bioregional Community Governance

5. Healing the Spirit, Healing the Earth