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Systems change in practice

Zeynep Falay von Flittner and Anni Leppänen

www.falaydesign.com

27 Oct 2025 - Webinar series:

Transformation through Social Innovation

Systems change in practice

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How can we move beyond individual projects or isolated solutions to question and transform the underlying structures, mindsets, and relationships that shape our systems?

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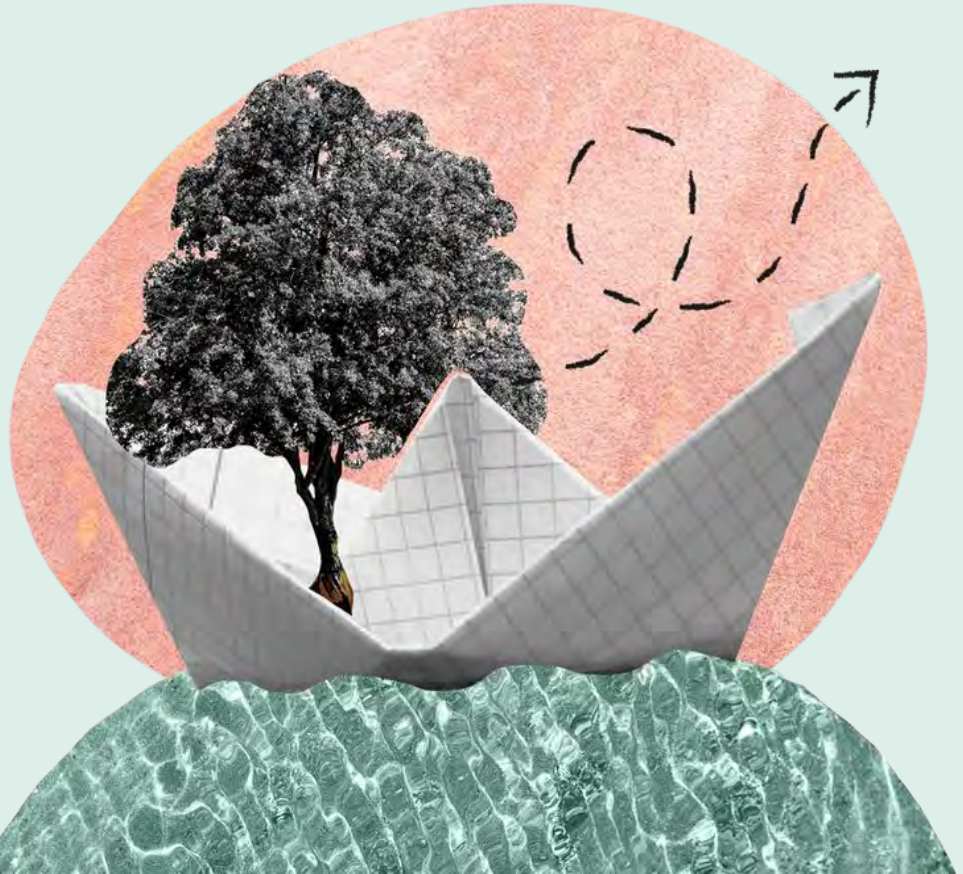
Case Latvia: How senior government leaders work with systemic challenges - *practical methods* to understand systems, envision futures and design impactful interventions.

FALAY TRANSITION DESIGN

We are a *mission oriented collective* of multidisciplinary changemakers

We are a collective of transition designers, creative practitioners, systems thinkers, futures thinkings, sustainability experts and researchers.

Together we use creative practices to explore and activate more regenerative futures.



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Working with Systems Change

Transition Design Framework

Zeynep Falay von Flittner

27 Oct 2025

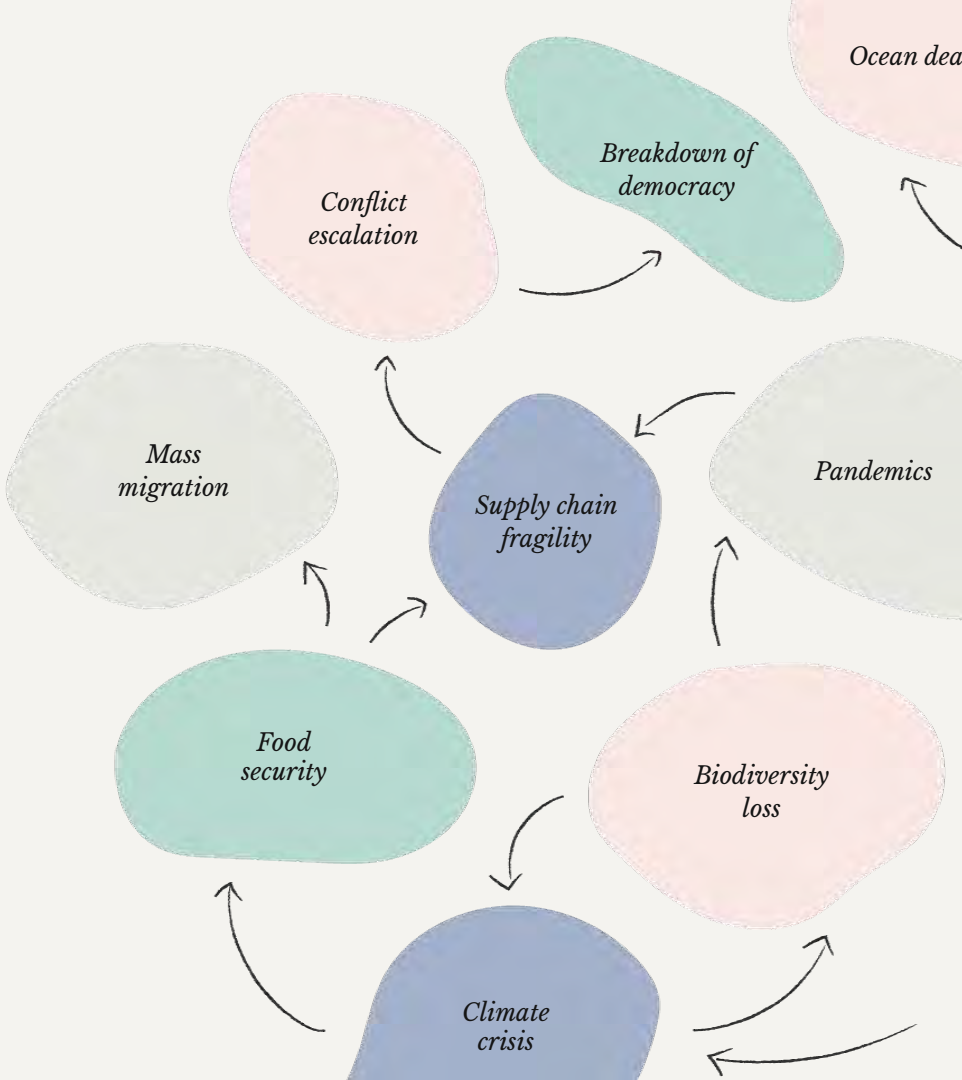
We live in a world of uncertainty and transformation, our *choices now and in the near term* will define the quality of life for future generations.

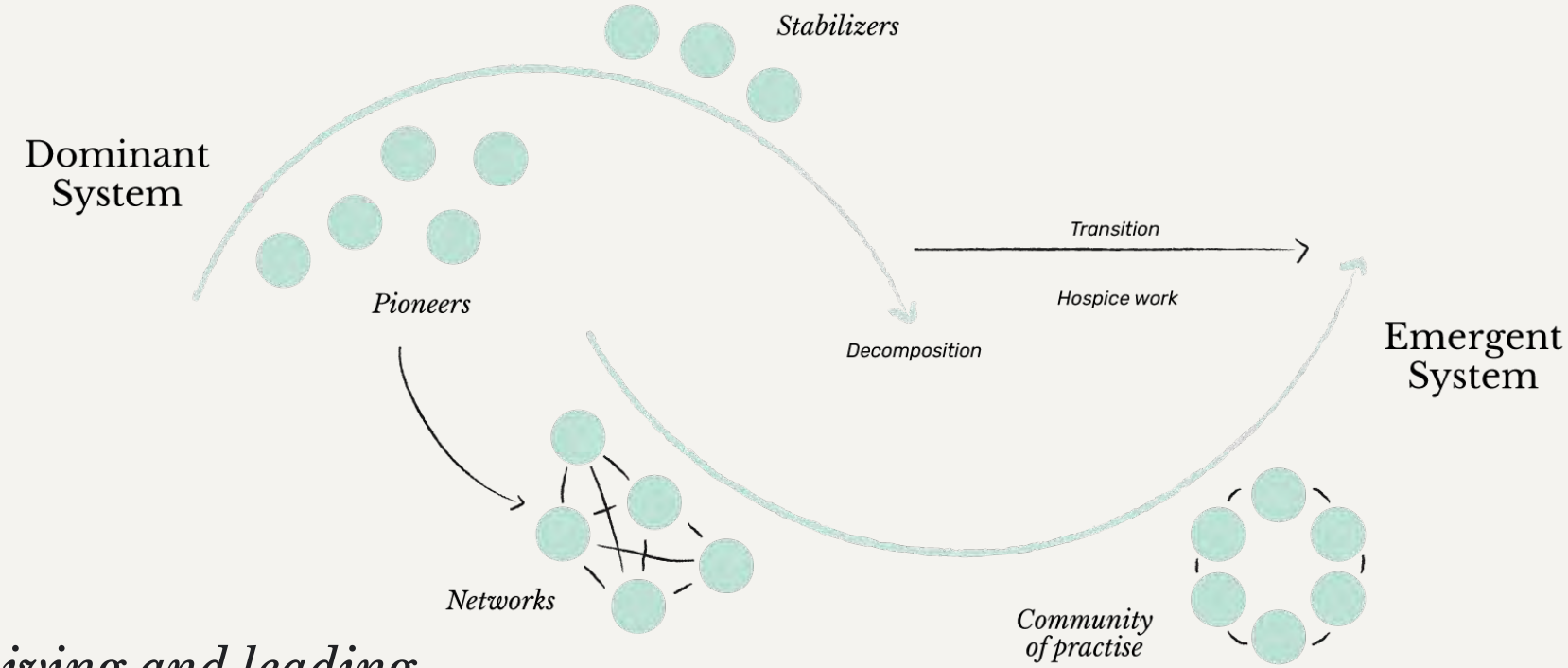
Organizations Struggle to Step Up

- *Silo organizational structures*
- *Short-term pressures*
- *Risk-averse, fear-driven decision making*
- *Extraction and efficiency*
- *Normalized externalization*
- *Policy lags. Society absorbs the fallout.*

Wicked problems are systemic, interlinked and embedded within each other.

They cannot be addressed in isolation.



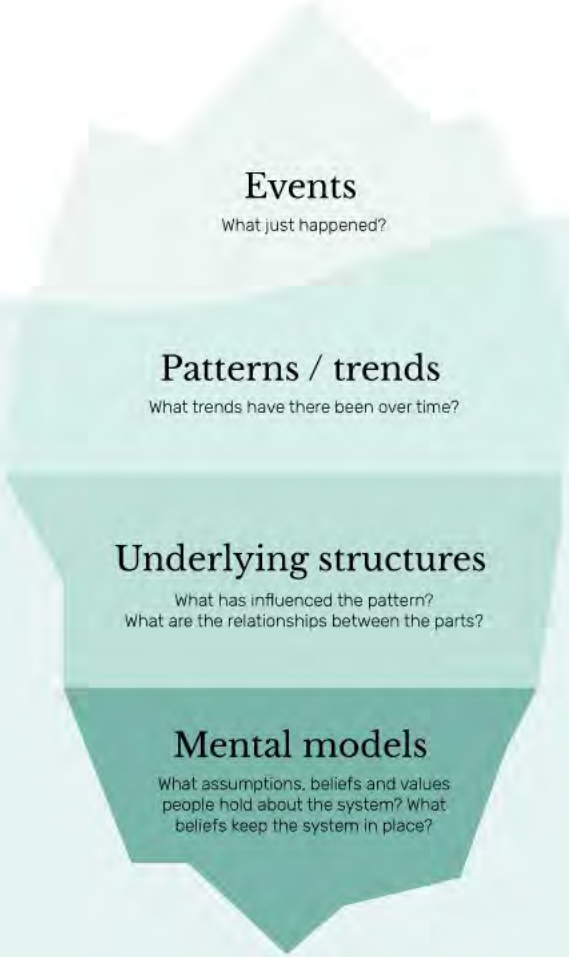


Living and leading in between worlds

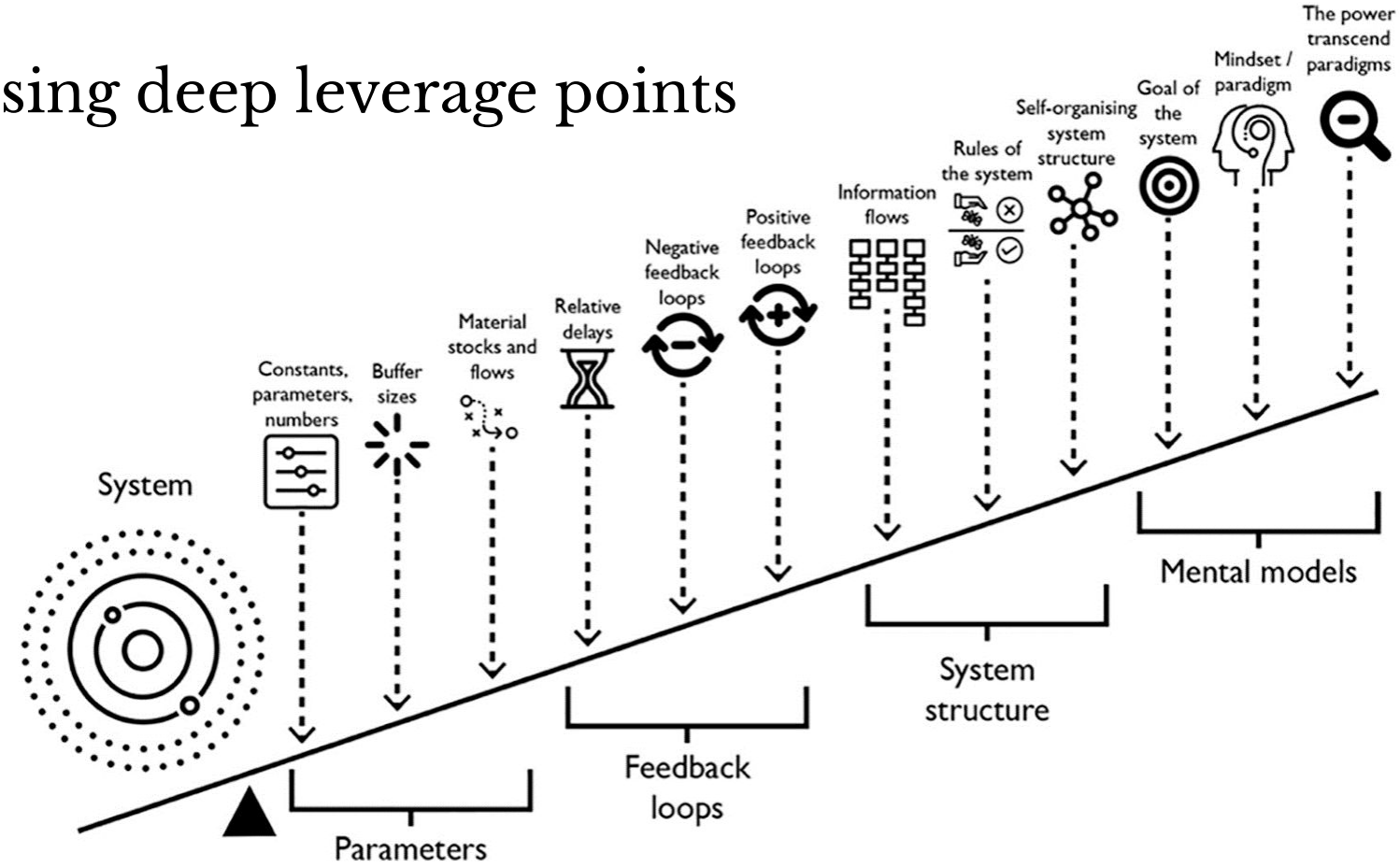
Bergana Two Loops Model, Robinson, 2011

Understanding the *mental models* that impact our structures

- Challenging own values and mindsets
- Questioning existing paradigms



Addressing deep leverage points



Donella Meadows, Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System

Transition Design proposes
that we can *intentionally seed*
and catalyse transitions
toward more sustainable futures.

Transition Design process

1. System knowledge

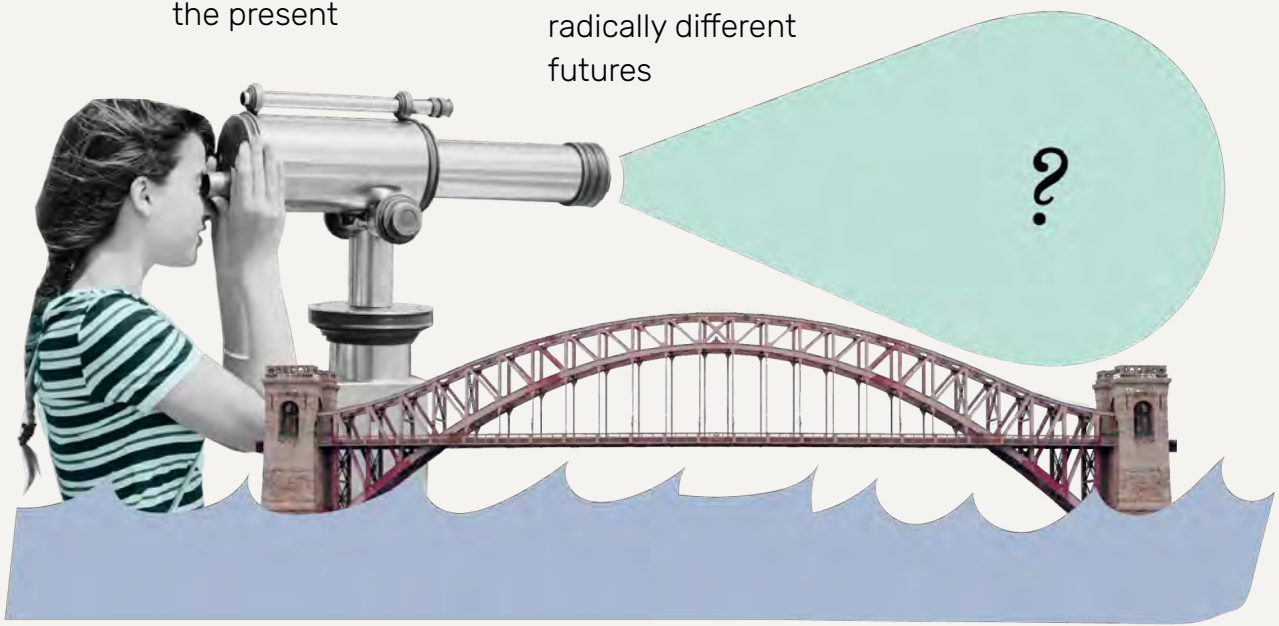
Understanding the wicked problem in the present

2. Future knowledge

Envisioning desirable and radically different futures

3. Transition knowledge

Designing interventions/ pathways



Identify interventions

Implement interventions

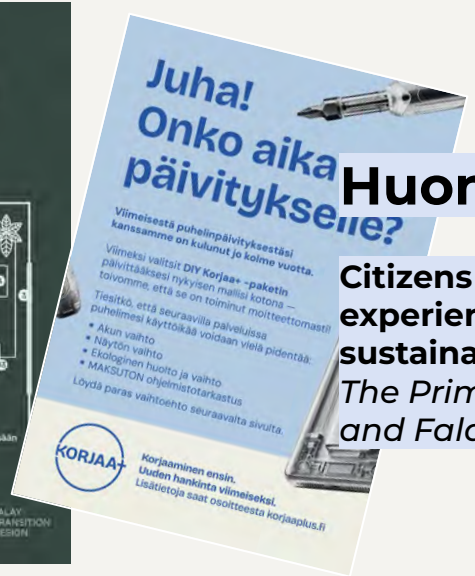
Observe and learn

Imagination of Hopeful Futures

THL ANTI-RACISM ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

Imagination in practice

Imagination for Inclusive and Participatory Governance



Huone 2050

Citizens and experts co-designing experiential prototypes of sustainable futures for Finland 2050.
The Prime Minister's Office of Finland and Falay Transition Design

ROOM 2050
HUONE 2050

SHOWCASING THE **ROOM 2050**

KESTÄ VYYS PANEELI

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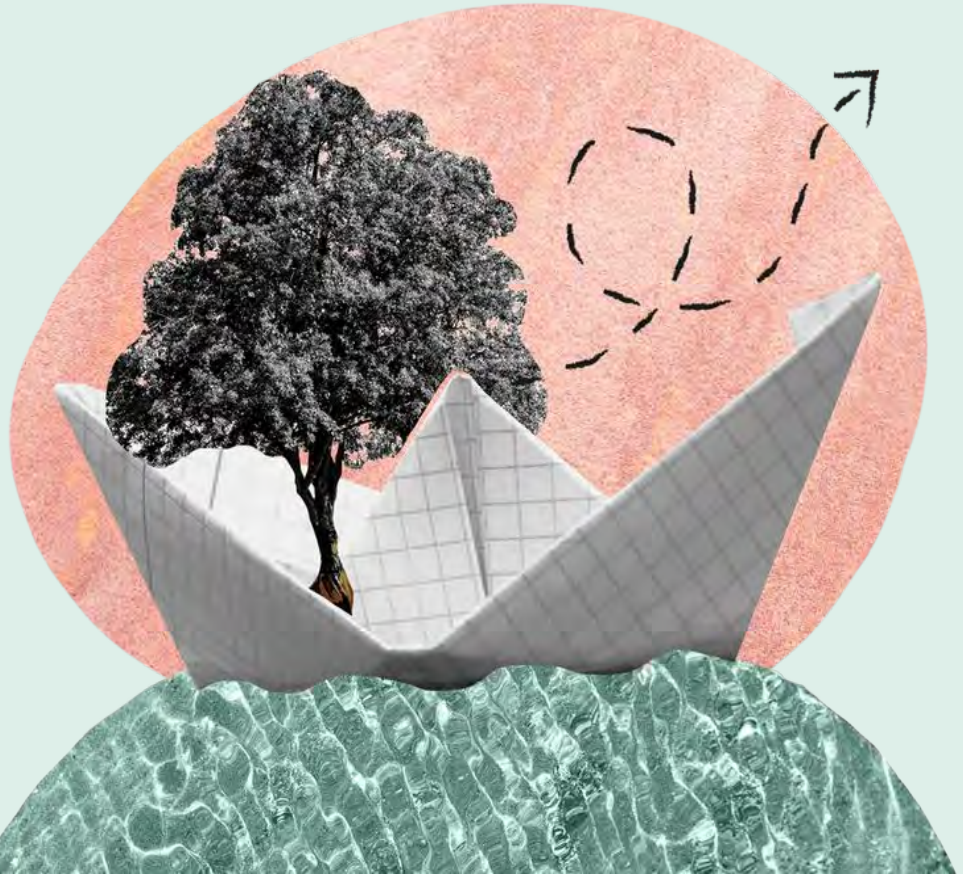

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How do senior government leaders work with systemic challenges?

Practical methods to understand systems, envision futures and design impactful interventions.

Anni Leppänen

27 Oct 2025

Systems change in practice: *case Latvia*

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State Chancellery
Republic of Latvia

Latvia 2050

10 societal challenges

60 senior government leaders

Workings with systems change:

1. Understand systems
2. Envision futures
3. Design impactful interventions

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Latvia 2050 strategy

Why a strategy to 2050?

- Latvia's current long-term strategy *National Sustainable Development Strategy* ends in 2030.
- A new strategy is needed to guide sustainable development beyond 2030.
- The current *National Development Plan* will end in 2027, with an upcoming mid-term evaluation.
- The 2050 strategy will become **the top-level policy document**, shaping and aligning all national and sectoral development plans.

Strategic Purpose

- Provide a **unifying long-term vision** and set long-term national development **priorities**.
- Ensure continuity and coherence across political cycles and policy domains.
- Strengthen Latvia's capacity to respond to global and domestic challenges, to preserve national identity and improve well-being of its population.

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Senior leaders

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Programme modules

Systems thinking

Futures thinking

Imagination

Policy prototyping

Resilient organisations

Inner development

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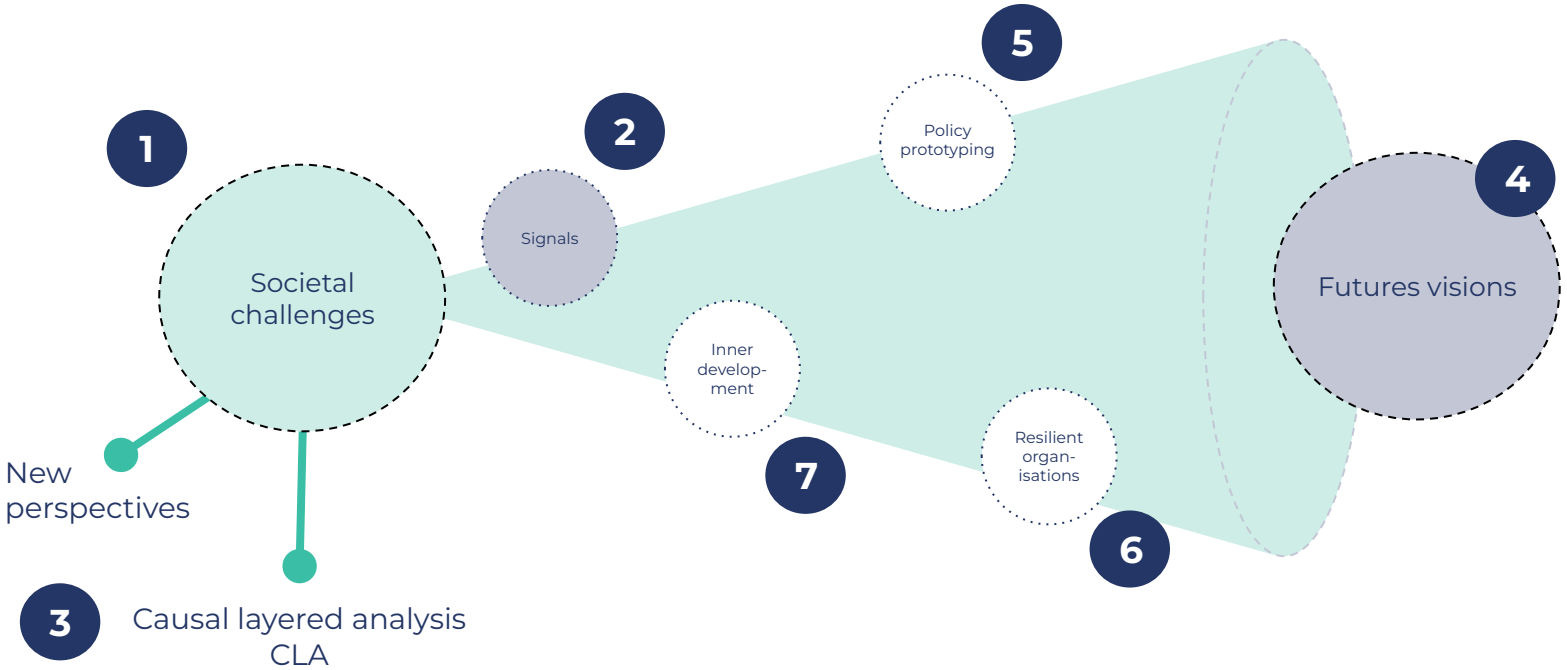
Theory of change



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10 societal challenges

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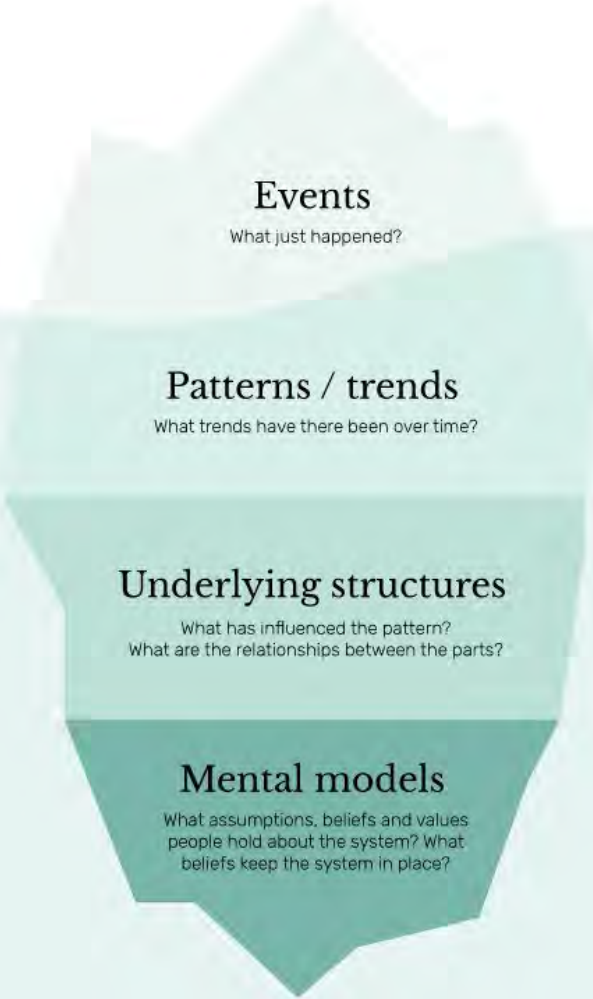
Understanding systems:

The iceberg and Causal Layered Analysis



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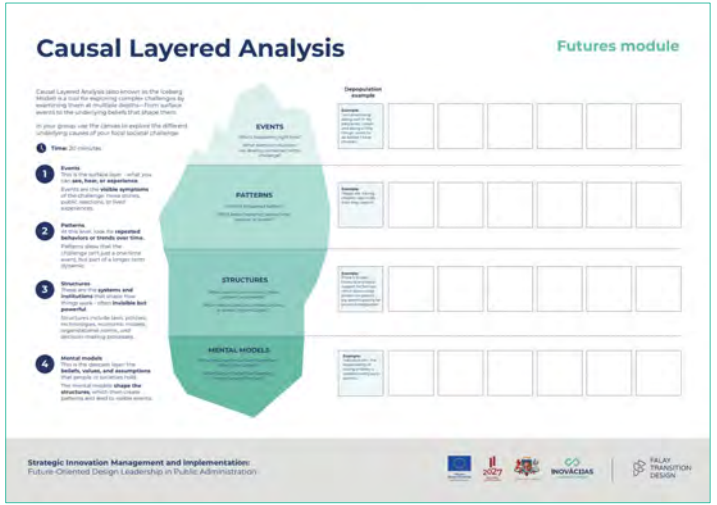
Understanding systems



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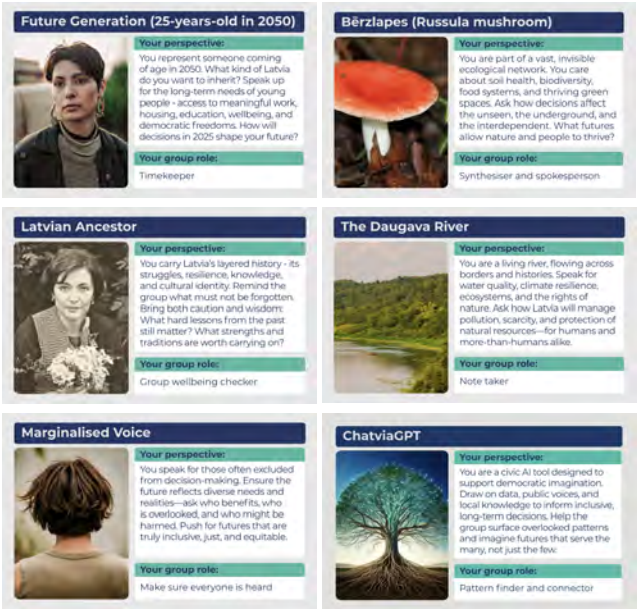
Envisioning futures



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Designing impactful interventions

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Role of inner development in leadership for systems change

Rest as a leadership skill?

Tove Jansson: Paratiisi

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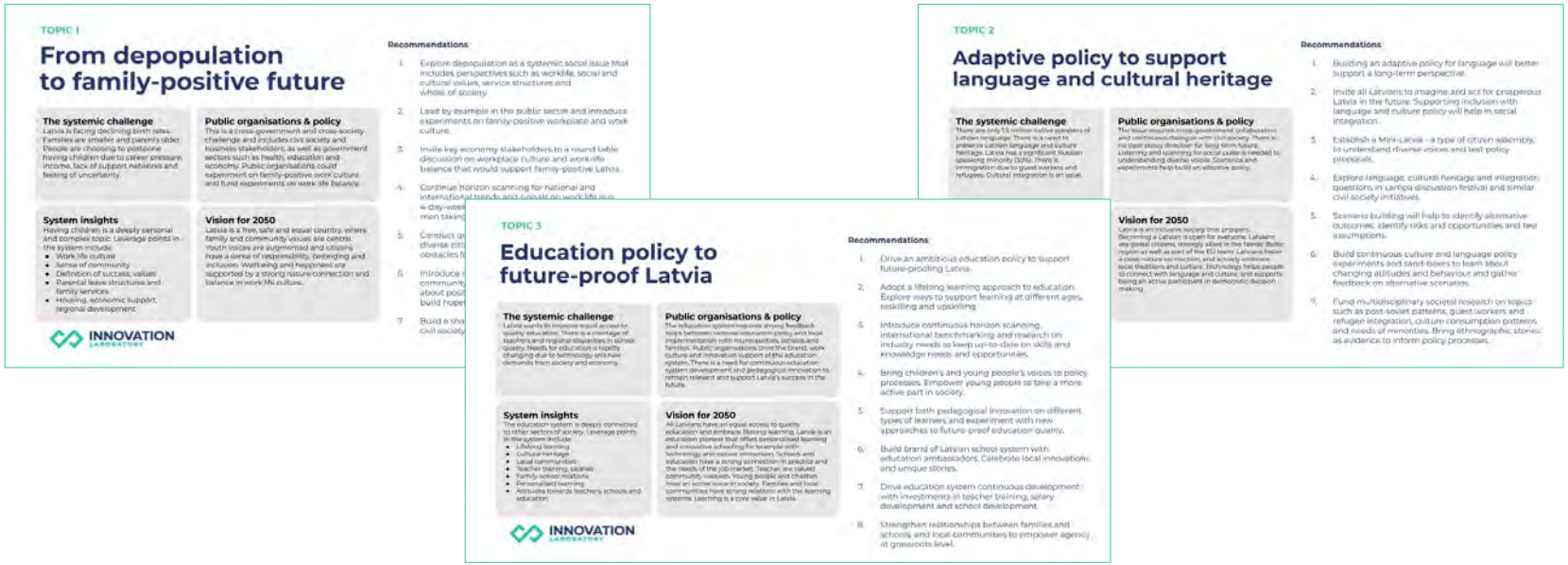
Policy recommendations



TOPIC 1

From depopulation to family-positive future

The systemic challenge

Latvia is facing declining birth rates. Families are smaller and parents older. People are choosing to postpone having children due to career pressure, income, lack of support networks and feeling of uncertainty.

Public organisations & policy

This is a cross-government and cross-society challenge and includes civil society and business stakeholders, as well as government sectors such as health, education and economy. Public organisations could experiment on family-positive work culture, and fund experiments on work-life balance.

System insights

Having children is a deeply personal and complex topic. Leverage points in the system include:

- Work-life culture
- Sense of community
- Definition of success, values
- Parental leave structures and family services
- Housing, economic support, regional development

Vision for 2050

Latvia is a free, safe and equal country, where family and community values are central. Youth voices are augmented and citizens have a sense of responsibility, belonging and inclusion. Well-being and happiness are supported by a strong nature connection and balance in work/life culture.

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Recommendations

1. Explore depopulation as a systemic social issue that includes perspectives such as worklife, social and cultural values, service structures and whose of society.
2. Lead by example in the public sector and introduce experiments on family-positive workplace and work culture.
3. Invite key economy stakeholders to a round table discussion on workplace culture and work-life balance that would support family-positive Latvia.
4. Continue horizon scanning for national and international trends and signals on work life (e.g. 4-day-week men taking
5. Conduct a diverse citi obstacles f
6. Introduce community about posi build hope
7. Build a sha civil society

TOPIC 2

Adaptive policy to support language and cultural heritage

The systemic challenge

There are only 1.5 million native speakers of Latvian language. There is a need to preserve Latvian language and culture heritage. Latvia has a significant Russian speaking minority (30%). There is immigration due to guest workers and refugees. Cultural integration is an issue.

Public organisations & policy

The issue requires cross-government collaboration and continuous dialogue with civil society. There is no clear policy direction for long term future. Listening and scanning for social cues is needed to understanding diverse voices. Scenarios and experiments help build an adaptive policy.

Vision for 2050

Latvia is an inclusive society that prospers. Becoming a Latvian is open for everyone. Latvians are global citizens, strongly allied in the Nordic Baltic region as well as part of the EU team. Latvians foster a close nature connection, and actively embrace local traditions and culture. Technology helps people to connect with language and culture, and supports being an active participant in democratic decision making.

Recommendations

1. Building an adaptive policy for language will better support a long-term perspective.
2. Invite all Latvians to imagine and act for prosperous Latvia in the future. Supporting inclusion with language and culture policy will help in social integration.
3. Establish a MIH-Latvia - a type of citizen assembly, to understand diverse voices and test policy principals.
4. Explore language, cultural heritage and integration questions in Lampa discussion festival and similar civil society initiatives.
5. Scenario building will help to identify alternative outcomes, identify risks and opportunities and test assumptions.
6. Build continuous culture and language policy experiments and sand-boxes to learn about changing attitudes and behaviour and gather feedback on alternative scenarios.
7. Fund multidisciplinary societal research on topics such as post-soviet patterns, guest workers and refugee integration, culture consumption patterns and needs of minorities. Bring ethnographic stories as evidence to inform policy processes.

TOPIC 3

Education policy to future-proof Latvia

The systemic challenge

Latvia wants to improve equal access to quality education. There is a shortage of teachers and regional disparities in school quality. Needs for education is rapidly changing due to technology, and new demands from society and economy.

Public organisations & policy

The education system requires strong feedback loops between national assessment policy and local implementation with municipalities, schools and families. Public organisations drive the brand, work culture and innovation support of the education system. There is a need for continuous education system development and pedagogical innovation to remain relevant and support Latvia's success in the future.

System insights

The education system is deeply connected to other sectors of society. Leverage points in the system include:

- Lifelong learning
- Cultural heritage
- Local communities
- Teacher training, salaries
- Family-school relations
- Personalised learning
- Attitudes towards teachers, schools and education

Vision for 2050

All Latvians have an equal access to quality education and embrace lifelong learning. Latvia is an education pioneer that offers personalised learning and innovative schooling for example with technology and nature immersion. Schools and educators have a strong connection in practice and the needs of the job market. Teacher are valued community stewards. Young people and children have an active voice in society. Families and local communities have strong relations with the learning systems. Learning is a core value in Latvia.

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Recommendations

1. Drive an ambitious education policy to support future-proofing Latvia.
2. Adopt a lifelong learning approach to education. Explore ways to support learning at different ages, reskilling and upskilling.
3. Introduce continuous horizon scanning, international benchmarking and research on industry needs to keep up-to-date on skills and knowledge needs and opportunities.
4. Bring children's and young people's voices to policy processes. Empower young people to take a more active part in society.
5. Support both pedagogical innovation on different types of learners and experiment with new approaches to future-proof education quality.
6. Build brand of Latvian school system with education ambassadors. Celebrate local innovations and unique stories.
7. Drive education system continuous development with investments in teacher training, salary development and school development.
8. Strengthen relationships between families and schools, and local communities to empower agency at grassroots level.

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International development

Social sciences

2005-2013
Policy officer, UK Science and Innovation Network
National Institute of Health and Welfare, Finland
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland
SOAS, University of London & Uni. of Sussex

Design in government

Strategic design & service design

2014-2019
Aalto University: strategic design and sustainability transitions

Service designer at Tax Administration, Finland
Lead Experimentalist at State Treasury, Finland

Founder, Finnish government design community

Cities

2019-2024
Design lead at Strategy Department, City of Helsinki

Chair of International Design in Government Conference

Sustainable futures

Policy design

2024-
Founder, Futures mundane
Policy designer, Falay Transition Design
Agent member, Puistokatu 4

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Let’s build a better future *together*

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