


# Participatory Melbourne

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION TOWARDS A COMMON GOOD

October 2023





Regen Melbourne acknowledges the traditional custodians of Naarm  
Melbourne, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, Bunurong and Boon  
Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

We pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and we acknowledge  
their living connections to land and waterways, including Birrarung  
Yarra River and Naarm Port Phillip Bay. We pay our deep respect and  
gratitude for their continuing custodianship of Country.

## Foreword

How we collectively make decisions in urgent times will define our ability to effectively shape and adapt to our changing world.

*Participatory Melbourne* is an intervention designed to cultivate a place-based movement to foster new forms of leadership that create the conditions for a thriving civic life. Taken as an ecosystem of interconnected activities, we believe this can support the pursuit of the common good.

For us “the common good” refers to the shared pursuit of an ecologically safe and socially just future. This is a deliberately broad and inclusive framing that allows for many entry points for all social, cultural and political backgrounds. Just as a healthy ecosystem is made up of countless organisms, animals and plants living symbiotically, the principles of plurality, variance and adaptation govern our approach to “the common good”.

Indeed one of the insights raised during our work so far has been the key question: *“how do we walk side by side into the future without always seeing eye to eye”*.

Moving towards this future requires us to be able to subscribe and participate in a diversity of world views. This form of leading and engaging is a practice not an end state — we are not moving ever-closer to a shared singular view of the common good. Instead, we are nourished by a diversity of views (“the pluriverse”) and believe that it is only through this diversity that an inclusive, active, participatory city can be achieved, for people, and planet.

Over the past 6 months, we have hosted a series of conversations and workshops to build the foundations of this ambitious project. This report captures the insights so far and opportunity that we see ahead — thank you to everyone who was involved.

Kaj, Nicole, Caro, Omar & Willow



# Contents

Foreword	3	<b>Part 4: Model</b>	<b>27</b>
Executive summary	5	Creative pathways	28
<b>Part 1: Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>	Ecosystem activation	29
Project overview	11	A model for a thriving civic life	30
Our Journey so far	12	The actors in our democratic ecosystem	31
Participants	13	Cultural forces at play	32
<b>Part 2: Purpose</b>	<b>14</b>	Developing a portfolio approach	35
What are we here to do?	15	<b>Part 5: Beyond this report</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Part 3: Insights</b>	<b>16</b>	Where to from here?	37
What does participation do for us?	18	<b>Appendix: Workshops in detail</b>	<b>40</b>
Barriers and enablers	20	Workshop 1: Participation	41
The opportunity	25	Workshop 2: Areas of Action	42
		Design Forum: A Model for Activation	43
		Playback Forums	44
		About Regen Melbourne	48

## Executive summary

Without a shared sense of purpose, despite our many disagreements and differences, our ability to navigate these complex times is greatly diminished. The risk ahead is of further social fracture, fear-driven responses, an intractable status-quo and deep-seated division when faced with the multiple crises the next decade can expect.

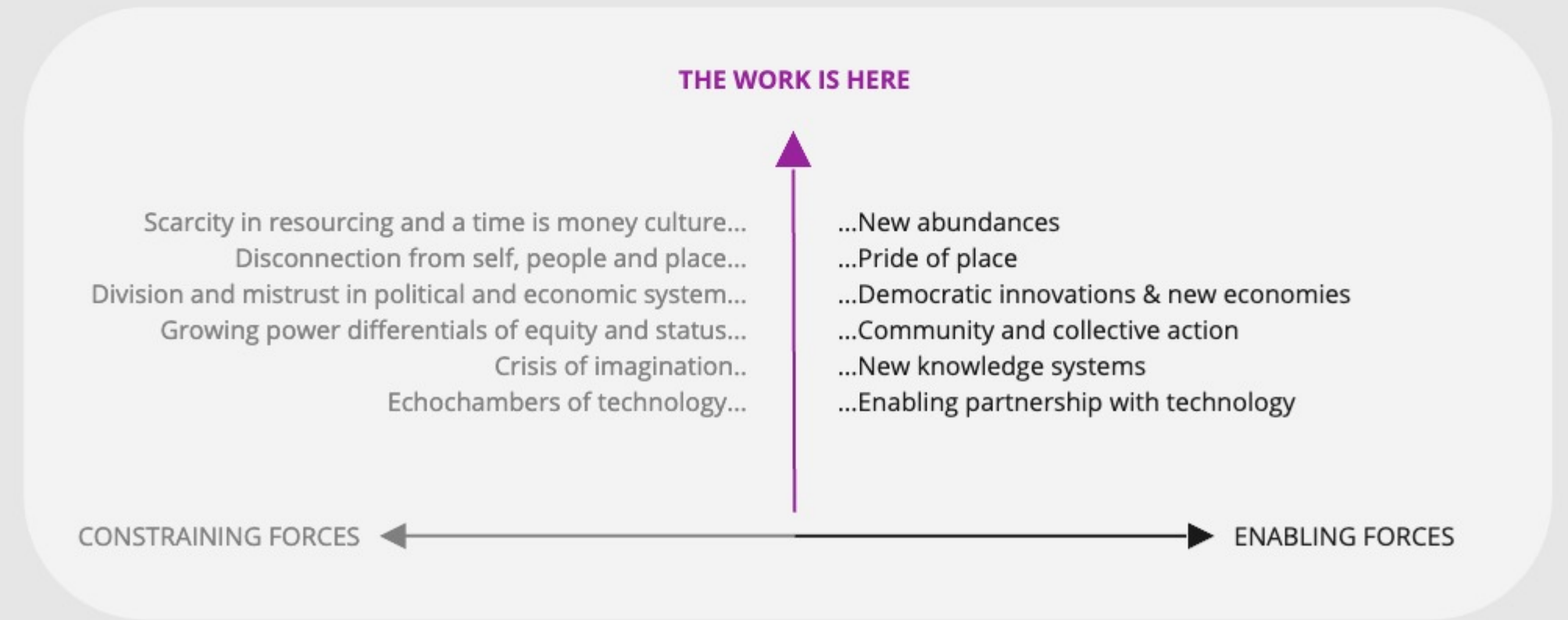
To prevent the worsening of our fragile civic health and move towards the best of our collective power, we need everyone to feel included in participating in our shared future. We need everyone to feel involved in the collective pursuit of the common good.

Over the last 6 months, in conversation with 40+ organisations and multiple individuals, we have explored what a participatory ecosystem is in service to, and what a thriving civic life means for Greater Melbourne.

*We heard that **a thriving civic life for all is about re-empowering publics to make their own active decisions across all aspects of their lives — including in their communities, their work and how they are governed.***

We heard that participation is a necessary component for us to heal, to reconnect, to walk side by side and to recreate our systems. And we heard that new forms of leadership are emerging, and need support to thrive, in order to foster the pursuit of a shared future.

None of this is without challenges, over the exploration phase repeated barriers and enablers emerged: forces that constrain and divide us and forces that enable our shared pursuit of a shared future.



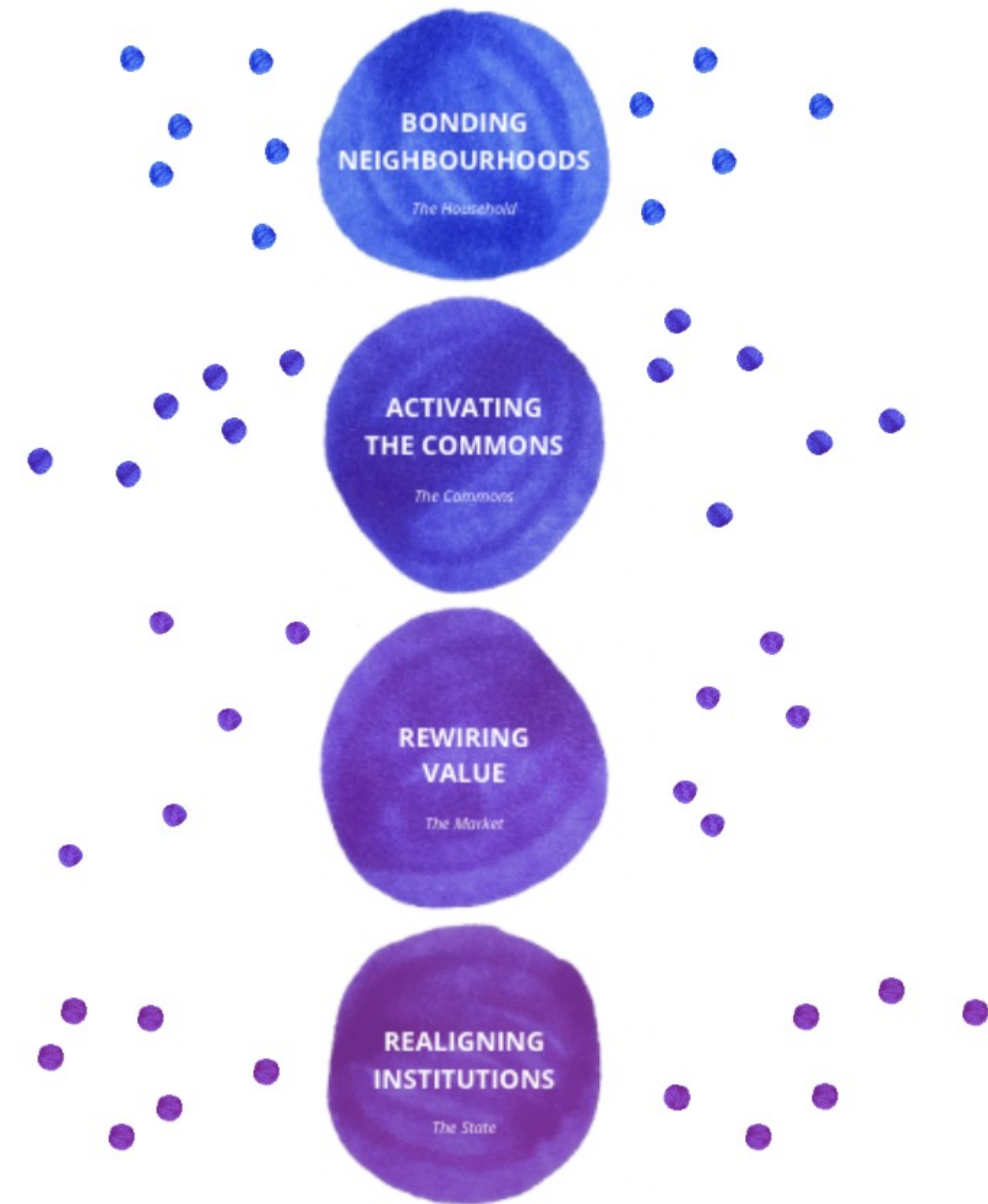
## Paving a different path

In order to move through these challenges, it was recognised that we needed 'creative pathways' — areas that can focus action through participatory activities across multiple domains of our lives; from how we negotiate with our neighbours through owners corporations, to how we design our businesses, how we value labour and each other as citizens of this place, and of course how we engage with our democratic institutions through our voting in elections and referendums.

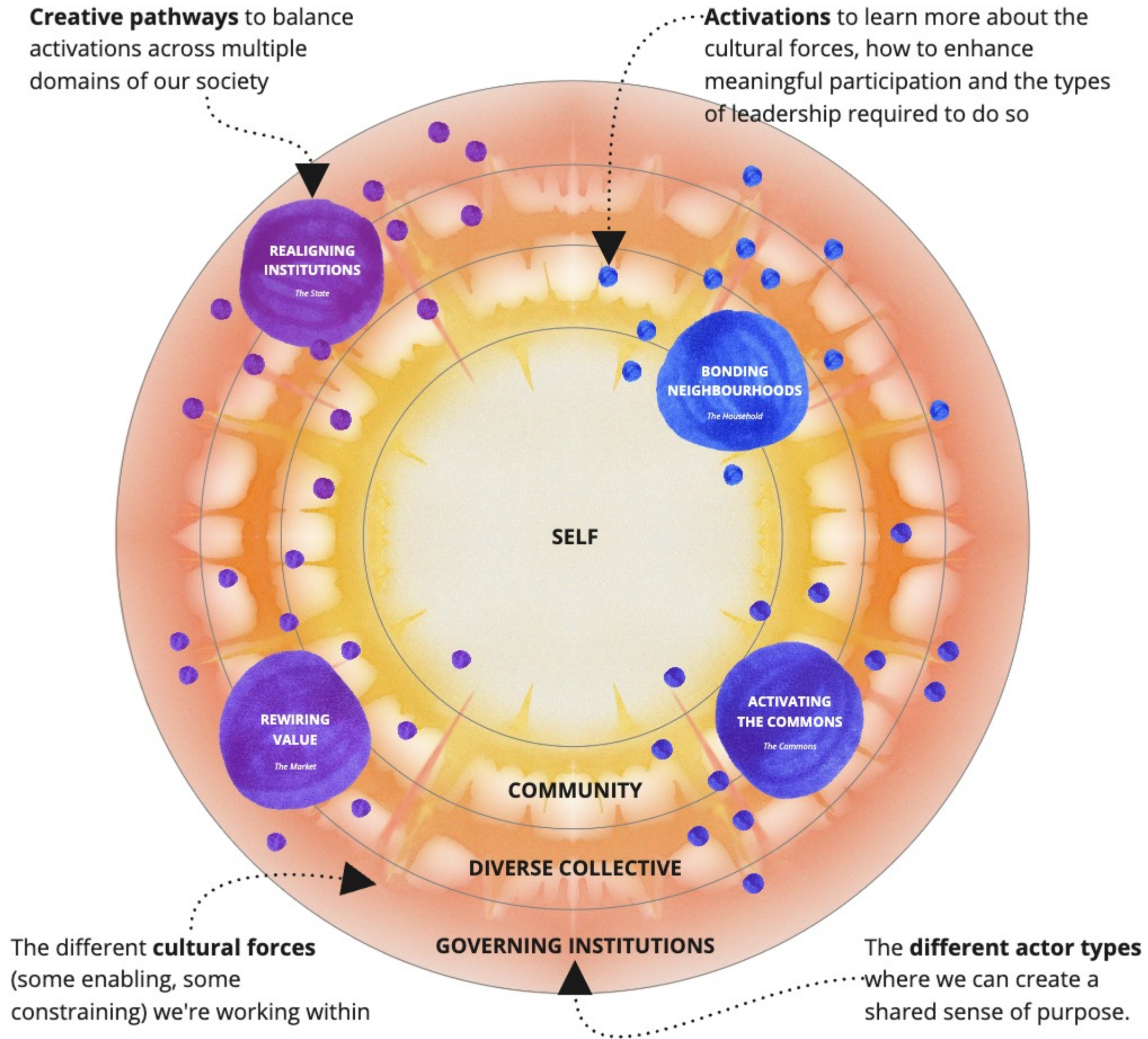
Participatory Melbourne recognises that in order to cultivate the conditions for *a thriving democratic life* we need to recognise and support the many actors working towards this goal — as well as recognising that these diverse actors make up a definable ecosystem.

We believe in order to nourish and strengthen our democratic life we need to strengthen this participatory ecosystem; the interconnected, interlocking projects and activities that work towards collective decision making in urgent times.

It is not enough to have a plethora of siloed and segmented activities. We need to move towards a more coherent ecosystem of activity, acting in concert, with both power and precision.



**CREATIVE PATHWAYS** and their associated string of activations



Participatory Melbourne Ecosystem  
**MODEL FOR ACTIVATION**

*Participatory Melbourne, as a collective research and action project, is a response to these systemic gaps and opportunities.*

Through a **model of activation** and a culture of experimentation, we believe we can take strides towards a thriving civic life.

From here, our next phase is designed to validate our findings and insights from Phase 1 with a wider audience (Greater Melbourne), bring rigour and evidence to the model via quantitative methods and active validation, and set up for a rollout of potent experiments in 2024.

All the while continuing to strengthen the bonds between organisations working in this space already and paying attention to the emerging forms of leadership alive and well in Greater Melbourne.

*We look forward to your participation, in whatever form that may be.*

### A Note on Language

In this report we refer to complex concepts like democracy, participatory democracy, participation, active citizenship, community, culture, the public good and the common good (many of which can be defined in [this useful glossary!](#)). These terms have technical meanings within certain disciplines that we acknowledge and respect. However, herein these terms are used to capture sentiments and insights developed from a collective research process. Part of our work includes finding the right language for the new paradigm that we need and this is an inherently emergent process. As such, we'd love your help in creating shared meaning to most potently activate this work. Most importantly, we use the term "civic life" as a way to describe the myriad of ways we use collective decision making processes throughout our lives.

### A Note on Certainty

This work is experimental and exploratory in nature. The terrain we're walking on is constantly shifting, and we believe that ambitious work in urgent times requires an action orientation and learning by doing — and we ground our work in knowledge, research and insights developed in partnership with organisations and institutions across Greater Melbourne. This will include broad population surveys as well as deep insight development through action. Thanks for joining in!





PART 1

---

# INTRODUCTION

# Project overview

Participatory Melbourne was conceived and brought to life by the Menzies Foundation, the Coalition of Everyone, the Australian Leadership Index (Swinburne University) and Regen Melbourne. We are joined together by a shared belief in the importance and power of participatory and collective leadership as a way to navigate a pathway to a safe and just future.

Over a period of two years we'll be moving between research and action, working towards a portfolio of interventions for a participatory ecosystem in Greater Melbourne.

This report captures our findings and next steps for the validation phase.



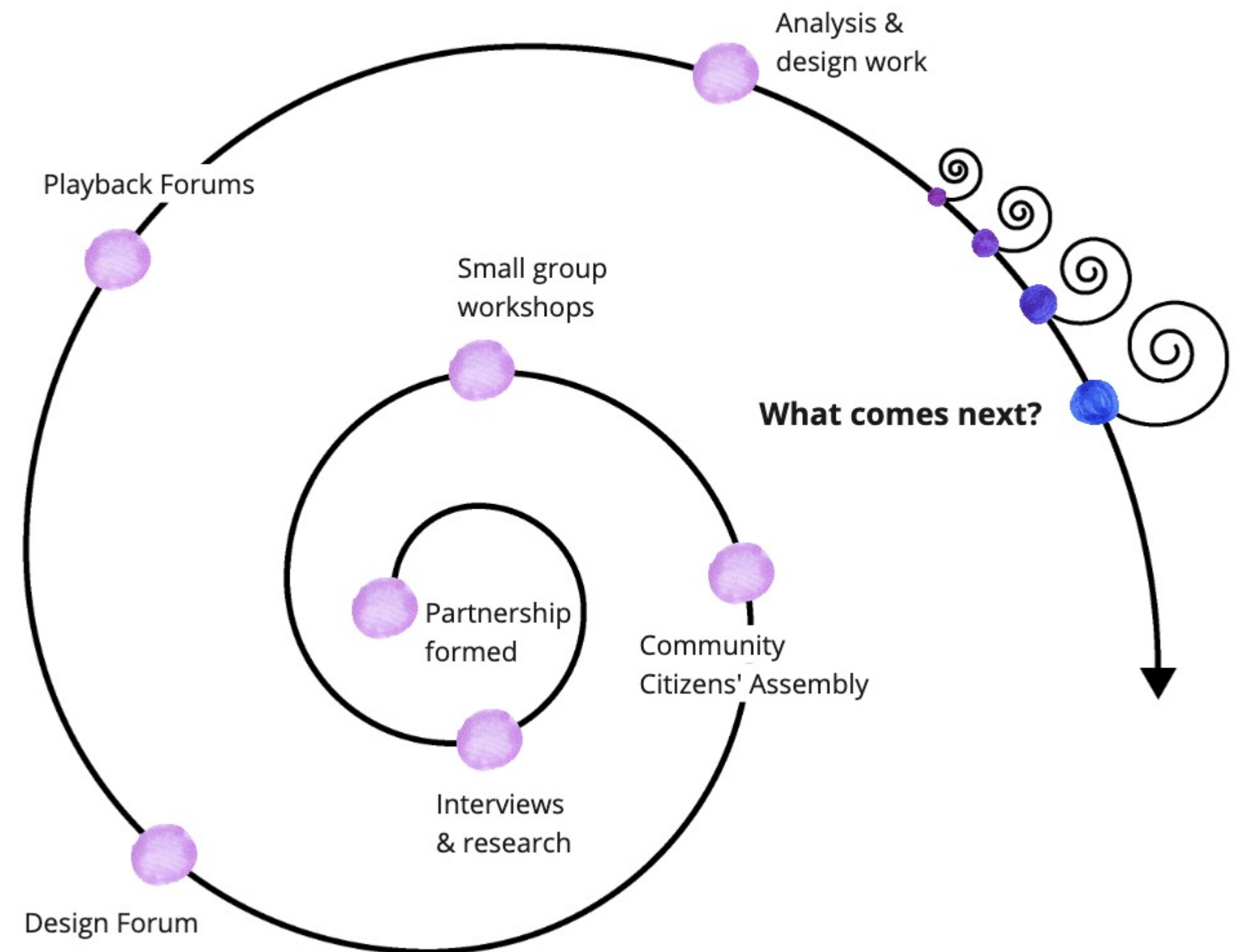
## Our journey so far

Phase one of the project was designed as a sensemaking, research and insights process — exploring a number of questions:

- *How is active citizenship and participation relevant to a regenerative future?*
- *What are the barriers to a thriving civic life across our economic system?*
- *What are the major forces at play, either accelerating or preventing the emergence of a thriving civic life?*
- *What relevant project and research work is currently being undertaken by actors in Melbourne?*
- *What are the most potent angles of intervention for the Regen Melbourne Alliance to pursue together?*

We explored these questions through:

1. Interviews and research;
2. Small group workshops;
3. A community Citizen's Assembly;
4. A Design Forum;
5. Playback forums;
6. Analysis and design work



See the *Appendix* for workshop details and design.

# Participants

The Participatory Melbourne project has brought together a community of individuals and organisations with an active interest in collective decision making in urgent times. This group is a cross section of sectors and actors, and yet of course only represents a sample of the participatory activities and viewpoints across Greater Melbourne. This report marks the end of the first phase of exploration, from which a series of broader validation exercises will follow.

*All content in this report builds on the contributions of these organisations. However, Regen Melbourne takes responsibility for conclusions drawn, ideas proposed and any errors within.*



PART 2

---

# PURPOSE

## What are we here to do

*After 6 months of exploration, interwoven layers of work have emerged that suggest a pathway towards acting on the systems and conditions around us rather than single interventions. These layers are described below and provide the scaffolding for our future work.*

Walking towards a better future, for people and planet, requires a new embrace of the notion of the **common good**. Without a collective, shared sense of purpose, despite our many disagreements and differences, our ability to navigate complex times and coming crises will be greatly diminished.

Pursuing the common good calls for the emergence of a new **leadership paradigm** that embraces collective decision making across the spectrum, from the household to the commons, and from the market to the state. This requires both a bottom up movement of action and the nurturing of new forms of leadership. We experience the current system as being propped up and protected by centralised leadership, encouraging management over enablement — preventing meaningful participatory action in how decisions are made and enacted.

**Our project inquiry lens is exploring new leadership paradigms that foster a new sense of the common good across Greater Melbourne.**

So how can we do this? In order to take steps towards a new re-connecting with the “common good” we must pursue **a thriving civic life for all**. Without this, any discussion of a “common good” will rightly be pilloried as the expression of a narrow and privileged view.

Civic life in this framing does not only include living within a healthy, representational government. Rather, a thriving civic life for all is about re-empowering publics, to make their own active decisions across all aspects of their lives — including in their communities, their work and how they are governed.

This is an ambitious purpose in a culture where decision making and power is largely centralised and economic inequality prevents many from thriving. However, achieving a civic life for all is critical in order to reverse the accelerating decline of trust in institutions, the polarisation of discourse, increased tribalism and community apathy.

**Our project goal is a thriving civic life for all.**

Finally, in order to enable a thriving civic life, we need **enhanced participation** across all aspects of our lives. What we mean by participation is the ability for everyone to be actively involved in decisions and actions that affect our lives, our community, our workplaces and how we are governed through our democratic infrastructure. It strengthens the cultural layers between the different parts of our society and builds trust and connection to a common good. Meaningful participation goes beyond consultations and engagement, and instead reorients power and decision making.

**The focus of our project activities is enhanced participation, across all aspects of our lives.**

Participatory Melbourne is an ambitious and experimental collective project that builds on these layers:

- **Inquiry lens:** new leadership paradigms fostering the common good
- **Goal:** a thriving civic life for all
- **Activities:** enhanced participation

Through research, systems mapping, experiments and projects, we are here to cultivate resilience and adaptability, build stronger communities and find ways to walk side by side into the future, despite not always seeing eye to eye.



PART 3

---

# INSIGHTS



# What does participation do for us?

**Across our different activities in this first phase of work, we heard four recurrent, interlocking themes underpinning why participation is a crucial pathway to a thriving civic life:**

## **1. To Heal**

At the *individual* level, meaningful participation has the ability to move someone from a feeling of apathy to a feeling of agency. This has a profound effect on mental health and burnout, creates a sense of belonging, contributes to healing and reconnection to place, creates empowerment and a sense of self-determination, and ultimately contributes to the taking of responsibility rather than externalisation or learned helplessness. Collectively, this effect can result in a repair of the damage wrought by an economic system that often disconnects and disempowers.

## **2. To (Re)Connect**

At a *community* level, meaningful participation serves as a pathway to a shared sense of custodianship or stewardship of a place. This connection leads to collective action, increased social cohesion,

community resilience and a better navigation of inevitable tensions and conflict. Meaningful participation also leads to greater visibility of the interconnections and interdependence of our streets, neighbourhoods, communities and greater world. This visibility is a virtuous cycle that creates further pathways and encourages ever increasing participation, contribution and shared responsibility.

## **3. To Walk Together**

There is increased understanding of the need for participation that encourages individuals, communities and organisations to walk together despite not always agreeing. The times we're in and the times ahead require meeting points, common ground and shared purpose. Creating spaces and developing capacities for more diverse perspectives and lived experiences across generations and communities, creates intersections for people to be truly *seen* and *heard*. This fosters stronger allyship, mutual understanding or at a minimum mutual respect through exposure to difference and diversity. Platforms that give voice to multiple forms of wisdom are key to unlocking participation that isn't othering, but instead builds on the strengths of multiplicity.

#### 4. To (Re)Create

At a *systemic* level, meaningful participation creates opportunities for us to collectively remake the world around us. This starts with the collective creation of (multiple) visions of the future, a broad rethinking of the nature of leadership, breaking down structural silos and reorganising relationships for systemic change. Systemically these elements are the foundation for civic renewal.

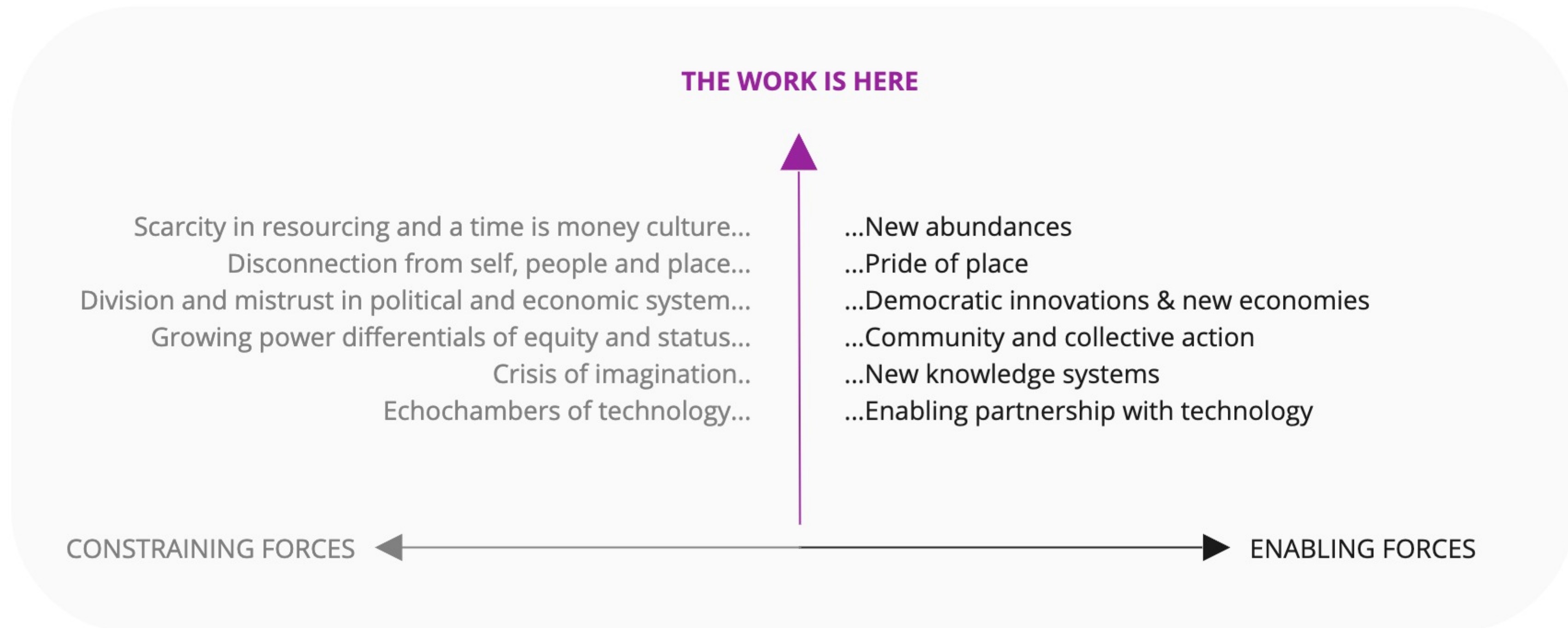
Through our conversations and workshops we heard that active and meaningful participation creates the ability for citizens to break down the individualisation of our economic system. We can move beyond a view of ourselves as individual, self-interested consumers and towards a diverse collective, which gives us systemic power. Hence, the themes identified above are all interconnected; our individual healing creates the ability for reconnection, which in turn gives us the power to recreate the systems around us through working across difference.



## Barriers and enablers

While the potential of active participation to heal, to reconnect, to walk side by side and to recreate is clear there are barriers that stand in the way. Similarly, we recognise that even in our challenging times, there is hopeful and progressive activity that is moving us towards our desired future state.

We have integrated our insights from the research phase to demonstrate how we might leverage those things that propel us forward to overcome the things stand in the way — moving from barriers to unleashed potential. *Recognising of course, that much of the work ahead is in the messy threads in between.*



## CONSTRAINING FORCES ◀▶ ENABLING FORCES

### **Scarcity in resourcing & a time is money culture...**

The most commonly referenced obstacle to active participation is the role of entrenched capital systems and the cultural effect this has on individuals and organisations. The commodification of time and the “busyness” culture creates an inability for individuals to zoom out and find perspective. This also creates a necessary short-term rather than long-term focus, most potently evidenced in the current cost-of-living crisis across Australia. The current conditions around capital, resourcing and time-constraints means that meaningful participation and community building is the exception rather than the norm. This leads to limited examples and success stories that demonstrate alternative possibilities.

### **Disconnection from self, people and place...**

We heard that burn out, grief, scarcity mindset, fear (both real and imagined), loneliness and disconnection from community and place create significant barriers to meaningful participation. These conditions of course emerge from a range of factors, including a lack of safety, a loss of social infrastructure (faith, ritual, community activities), a disconnection from nature, the equating of difference (of all kinds) to division, trauma, the reduction of attention spans, media narratives, a lack of meaning/purpose (spiritual voids), and broader hopelessness at the state of the world.

### **...New abundances**

In an era of scarcity of time and resources, where busy-ness is the norm, meaningful civic participation can be incredibly challenging. However, there are emerging approaches that create new abundances that recognise different forms of value. Interventions like a universal basic income, a 4-day work week, and even flexible working arrangements (working from home) structurally create an abundance of time for participation. Another example is the rise in urban gardening (see 3000 Acres) and the concept of edible cities which create both an abundance of community and connection, alongside a resilient alternative to the scarcity of fresh, healthy food. Further, a rise in BCorps, cooperatives, social enterprises (see STREAT and SENVIC) and purpose-led businesses create a new abundance of participatory workplaces.

### **...Pride of place**

While our Australian identity is a constantly adapting and adjusting one, when it comes down to what really matters, our sense of mate-ship runs deep; rolling up our sleeves and getting good shit done together. Even as there is much from our history and present state to reconcile, we can build a new sense of belonging and shared identity to who we are and how we perceive ourselves in the 21st Century. At the city scale, in the tongue in cheek competition between Sydney and Melbourne for example, Melbournians take pride as being a culture capital — we may not have the weather or the harbour (dammit!), but we take our coffee very seriously and have world class food/wine/art/music scene. Through the first years of Covid, Greater Melbourne also experienced the world's longest lockdown, we chose to cocoon our most vulnerable and saved lives, even if at great cost, loss and sacrifice. We have a new shared story, about how much we care for each other and the common good. A social fabric and resilience to be celebrated that is an enabler for new narratives about this place we call home. Through all of this, we know there is more that unites than divides us.

CONSTRAINING FORCES ◀▶ ENABLING FORCES

**Division and mistrust in political and economic system..**

Mistrust and division in both our political and economic systems are a barrier to meaningful participation in Greater Melbourne. Politically this came across both as a mistrust in decision makers (“decision makers don’t actually want to listen”) as well as institutions and bureaucratic systems (“we are stuck in old inherited systems”). We heard that a lack of consequences for political leaders, paternalism, and an overt focus on short-term political wins rather than (long-term) community benefit has eroded trust that participation will have any meaningful impact. In terms of our economic paradigm, the perpetual pursuit of growth, the primacy of financial capital over all others, competition as the primary organising mechanism, the culture of individualisation and the nexus of wealth and power.

This paradigm results in a set of conditions that obstruct active citizenship and meaningful participation, including increasing wealth inequality, distrust in well-meaning collaborative processes, top-down inauthentic “partnerships” with community, unequal access to education, shareholder primacy over a broader set of stakeholders, the externalisation of social and environmental costs, a hidden “true cost” of business and policy settings, and ultimately a lack of agency and empowerment of citizens. This set of conditions in turn results in a lack of long-term or systemic thinking across the economic spectrum, from non-profits with a scarcity mindset, businesses with short-term profit cycles, governments with short-term electoral cycles and households with time and cost-of-living pressures.

**...Democratic innovations & new economies**

The emergence of democratic innovations in Melbourne and around the world provide evidence that democracy is not static, it is an ever evolving set of conditions that we influence and shape by our individual and collective actions. These innovations include citizens assemblies, sortition to participatory budgeting and the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria. Other local examples include think (and do) tanks like the Coalition of Everyone, the rise of cooperatives like CoPower, introducing new models of democratic engagement to traditional sectors like energy, and technological innovations like Our Voice. These processes and new institutions create more inclusive democratic systems, enhancing individual agency, building participatory capabilities and shifting power across the city.

As above, the emergence of new abundances is creating new economies as an antidote to the division within our current economic systems. Again, we see this in the rise of BCorps, cooperatives, social enterprises (see STREAT and SENVIC) and purpose-led businesses. We also see experiments in creating new currencies and increased recognition of the value and importance of community connection and activations as a binding force of our participatory life (more below).

## CONSTRAINING FORCES ◀▶ ENABLING FORCES

### **Growing power differentials of equity and status...**

Power differentials across our society have a significant impact on participation and decision-making. From the noticeable entrenched power and elevated voice of high-wealth groups and individuals through to access to education being a fuel for exacerbating privilege, we heard that the obsession with hyper growth and maintaining the status quo was a key barrier to decision-making truly representing the collective society of Melbourne. Similarly, the networks, connections and resources accessible to a small, privileged few, sees the same voices and context being represented in decision-making incongruent with the lived experiences and needs of a much wider and diverse many. Further, the need to adjust the goalpost of equality of opportunity to a more appropriate requirement for equitable and just opportunity were also raised.

### **Crisis of imagination...**

These barriers come together in a more philosophical challenge around perceiving the possibility of a different paradigm or the shared pursuit of a better future. The constraints explored across the 6 months result in a broad lack of imagination which in turn contributes to cynicism, a lack of hope and sense of apathy. When attempts are made to build alternative visions, these efforts can be perceived as being “lofty”, “academic” and “hard to action”. Furthermore, attempts at creating new visions for the common good can fall into a paradigm where consensus is the goal, rather than walking together side by side into the future, whether or not we agree on all things. Ultimately, the forces at play in our current system narrow the field of what is possible, moving us further away from the systemic transformation we need.

### **...Community and collective action**

The rise of community-led projects and place-based organising is a visible wave across our city. This includes everything from street-parties, local energy groups, pop-up parks, community art projects, political action groups and holistic regeneration projects. Examples include Village Zero and Hot House Projects, amongst many, many others. This work builds deep relationships and achieves meaningful and long lasting social and environmental impact. This work also acts as a way to build connections in diversity, contributing to an individual and collective healing, as well as creating a basis for powerful organising. Within this collective action we are seeing an increase in appreciation of the importance of intergenerational exchange. This includes the weaving across generations in participatory processes, empowering young people and providing opportunities for engagement with elders. The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)'s Young Mayors program, Victoria's Youth Parliament and intergenerational care programs are great local examples.

### **...New knowledge systems**

We live in an era of complexity and crisis and yet our dominant knowledge system, our educational process, and how we manage organisations and communities is often grounded in a static view of knowledge and a quest for certainty. The enabling force is in the current embrace of a diversity of cultural knowledge systems, moving beyond binary thinking, embracing a more systemic lens of exploring the world and creating a culture that embraces uncertainty, paradox and nuance. Leadership and development organisations like Menzies Foundation, Leadership Victoria, Cornerstone and Small Giants Academy are working to develop new leadership capabilities that meet this urgent moment. Think (and do) tanks like the Centre for Public Impact are developing new models that respect and build on this new knowledge paradigm.

CONSTRAINING FORCES ◀▶ ENABLING FORCES

**Echo-chambers of technology...**

Technology and social media can amplify social disconnection, increase the strength of echo chambers, increase misinformation, create conditions for increased levels of hostility and abuse and foster distrust in participatory processes. These dynamics further amplify a mainstream media culture that sensationalises division, reinforces the consumer and self-interested narrative, focuses on simple measures of growth as success, undermines pockets of potential change, creates echo-chambers and reinforces the status quo.

Addressing the acceleration of technology is not centred around the technology itself, rather the conditions of our current economic system which seek to individualise and separate.

**...Enabling partnership with technology**

We recognise that (like any tool) technology has the ability to enhance connection, community and enable participation. For this to consistently occur outside the pockets of experimentation (often led by artists), the social, economic and political paradigm needs to change to introduce both hard guardrails (regulations, incentives, taxes etc) and soft cultural changes that address much of the disconnection people are experiencing.

Similar to the othering of people, technology has been othered. Organisations like [Robotics Australia](#) who are showing the capabilities of robotics for a greater good, or [Coviu](#) a Telehealth business in collaboration with CSIRO and others, who are leading the development of an AI digital toolkit for managing wound care in the aged care sector, are showing how engaging with emerging technologies as a partner in action can elevate our ability to have meaningful and scalable impact.

We see great opportunity in exploring ethical AI, DAOs and other emerging experiments, for example [Hypha Dao](#) and one of the alternatives to ChatGPT in [Pi.ai](#), which position emerging technology as providing an opportunity to participate with rather than be consumed by.

## The opportunity

As we move into thinking about the “so what” of this research, we have identified five opportunities to build the systems infrastructure and capabilities for a thriving civic life across our city:

- 1. Existing activity needs further amplification.** Projects that create opportunities for inclusive, collective decision making are endlessly inspiring. However, in light of the structural challenges, many examples remain local in nature and their potential for systemic influence is low.
- 2. Connectivity between initiatives can deepen impact.** Unique alliances across sectors can enhance the ability for participatory activity to have meaningful systemic impact. And there is a need to build collective power across participatory activity.
- 3. New resourcing is required to unlock the potential.** The convening and collaboration required to support systemic work is rarely resourced well. This is the case in the participatory ecosystem too.
- 4. There is a need for a model that connects and expands** the *diverse* range of participatory activity across the economic spectrum (household, commons, market, state). The idea of a thriving

civic life speaks to a systemic reset of how we organise and govern the commons, the market and the state, while shifting how we value household activity. There is a need to build collective power across participatory activity.

- 5. We need to identify new collective and potent intervention points** to tilt the system towards participatory engagement in pursuit of the common good. In a noisy system and a culture of busy-ness, it can be difficult to identify the most potent work required.

Participatory Melbourne, as a collective research and action project, is a response to these systemic gaps and opportunities. Through a model of participatory activation and a culture of diverse experimentation and evidence-based action, we believe we can take strides towards a thriving civic life and a culture of collective decision making for the common good.







## PART 4

---

# MODEL

*AKA: an abstracted theoretical model to help us organise and understand the systems we're trying to rally and intervene in. This means action can become potently oriented towards a thriving civic life, not just feel good participation.*

## Creative pathways

Building on the themes gathered over 6 months, our synthesis showed us that there were four overarching clusters of intervention that would allow us to move from insights to action. We're calling these *Creative Pathways* and we intend to use these to navigate the new model for activation we've created.

**Each of these *Creative Pathways* holds various points of intervention, which act as a starting point for focused work to be done.** In this way, the model acts as a diagnostic tool that allows us to surface the points of intervention that hinder civic life for the common good.

It is worth noting that each *Creative Pathway* centres action around a core sphere of economic activity, as identified through the Doughnut Economics methodology: the household, the commons, the market, and the state. We recognise that a thriving civic life intersects and weaves through *all* aspects of our economy.



**1. Bonding Neighbourhoods:** elevating the role of *the household* by creating capacity for citizens to contribute to the best of their abilities, revitalising a feeling of belonging and encouraging the acknowledgement of our collective responsibility to each other.

**2. Activating the Commons:** activating *the commons* to create capacity for participation through evolving our ideas around how collective assets are nurtured in order to support a collective flourishing life, encouraging social cohesion, trust and belonging.

**3. Rewiring Value:** reorienting *the market* by shifting conceptions of value away from solely financial capital, seeing that market flows truly demonstrate a transfer of what our society values in a regenerative manner.

**4. Realigning Institutions:** holding *the state* to account by deepening innovations for the plurality of decisions we need (and the citizenship we want), so that the voice of citizens can be seen in the actions and decisions carried out by our institutions.

## Ecosystem activation

**Collective decision-making requires participation and influence to be enacted across several interlocking levels of our democratic system simultaneously.**

Our Community Citizens' Assembly affirmed that we need a combination of individual action, community action and civic action to enable the world we seek to create. For action across these levels to be possible, actors need the resources to facilitate action and the agency to navigate the forces at play. They also need to understand and be able to navigate the cultural forces at play.

Any collective is made up of individuals who seek to contribute to a common good they've aligned with or seek to contribute to. Active participation requires these actors to have confidence in themselves to influence the system around them. For a thriving civic life to exist, active participation of individuals within their communities, and the diverse collective of communities that make up our society, is needed.

The model of activation we are introducing helps us understand the fullness of our democratic system, the cultural forces at play and the layers of influence within it that need to be navigated for enhanced participation to occur.

Our framing of culture, and how it influences how we engage with the world, assumes:

- There is no single “culture”, nor is culture understood in the same way by everyone.
- In this model we consider culture in its simplest form: the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people, community or collective in society.
- Our work and research has shown us that culture is not just one “thing” that wraps around our system but instead exists at various intersection points within our system as different parts of the system interact.
- Cultural influence is bi-directional, meaning that communities, collectives and institutions can be influenced by individuals as much as individuals can be influenced by each of them.

# A model for a thriving civic life

In this model we have depicted two key components that influence a democratic system:

1. The different **actors** that interact and influence each other in our democratic system (the self, their direct community, diverse collectives, governing institutions).
2. The **cultural forces at play** that exist between these different “layers” of actors in our system that also influence their participation and engagement in our democratic system.

## ● Self <> Community

The cultural forces at play as individuals form community. Experiences of trust, belonging and connection emerge.

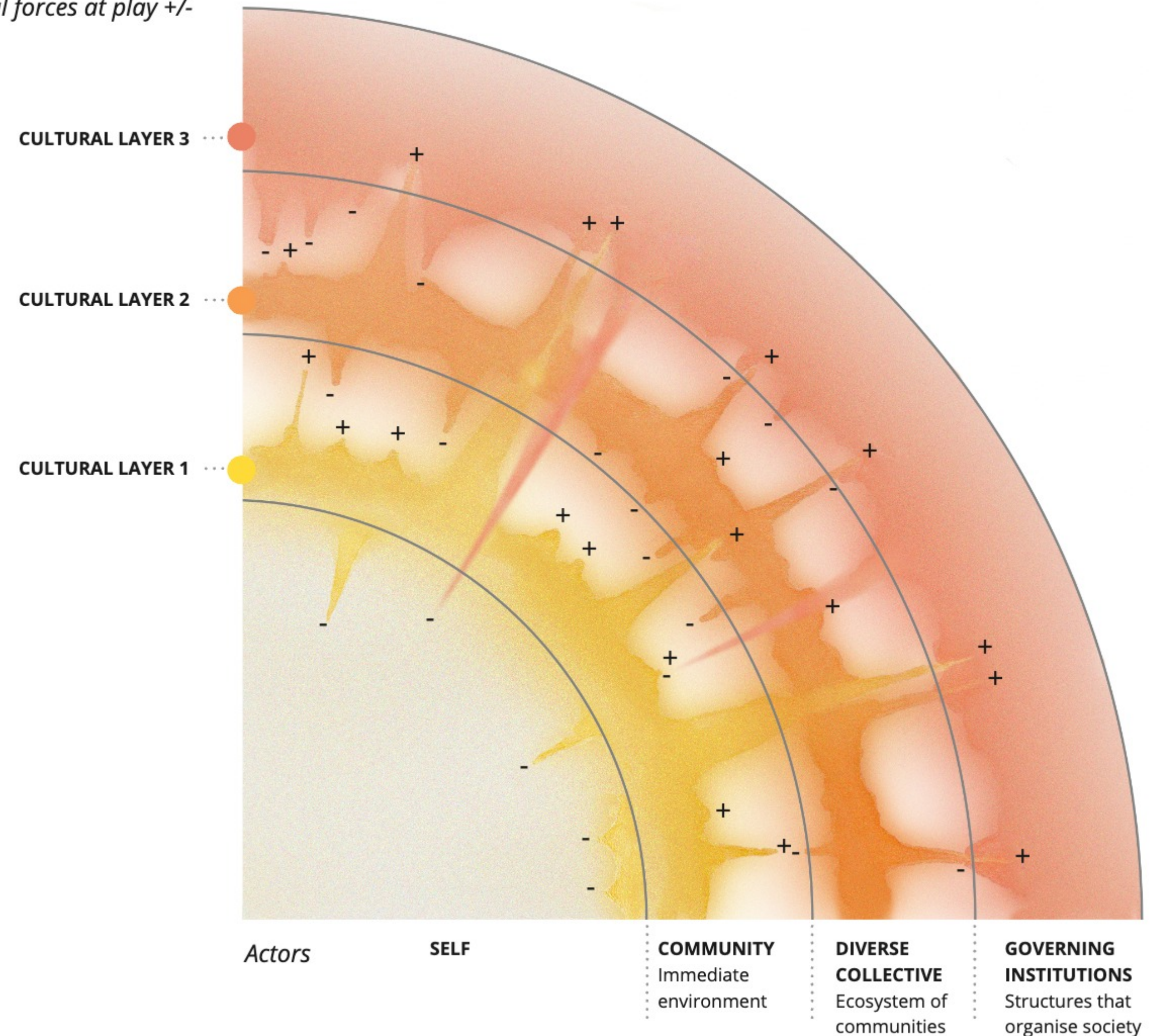
## ● Community <> Diverse Collective

The cultural forces at play amongst systems of communities. Exploration of partnership, cooperation and advocacy emerges.

## ● Diverse Collective <> Institutions

The cultural forces at play as governing structures seek to represent the collective. Engagement with the customs, ideology and politics of collective belief emerges.

Cultural forces at play +/-



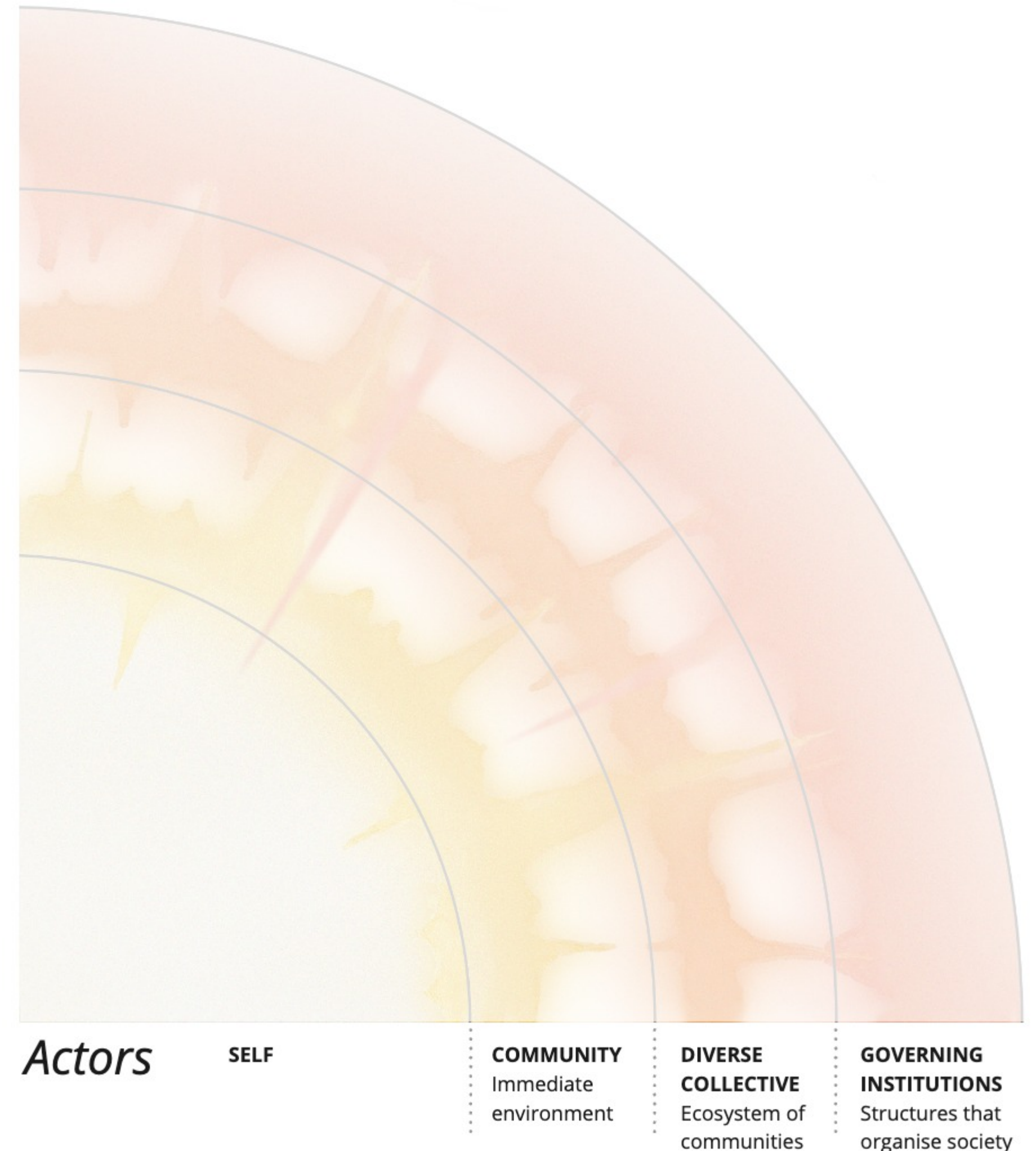
## The actors in our democratic ecosystem

**Oneself**, where individual participation starts. Requiring inner work and awareness. Being able to articulate one's needs and have the individual agency to act towards having those needs met; recognising that individuals might have multiple motivations for engaging that are not grounded in the self or self-serving.

**Communities**, where one has a place they feel heard and understood. Often these places are made up of shared interests and shared connections. Going beyond just the geographical, somewhere they can be involved and contribute to — building shared responsibility and self-determination.

**Diverse collectives** that emerge as systems of communities coalesce. They are interconnected and interdependent; interweaving in discourse, perspective and priorities pertinent to the community they represent, all while seeking a greater common good. Often at this layer we see bigger differences of cultural beliefs and worldviews.

**Governing institutions** that organise our society. As different facets of our society emerge, we find ways to make sense of them and put shape around what they mean for our collective decision-making. These structures then represent our collective intelligence and build the institutional fabric that nurtures our society.



# Cultural forces at play

As we've explored, cultural forces are at play throughout our entire system. In particular, we see these forces at play as different parts of the system interact.

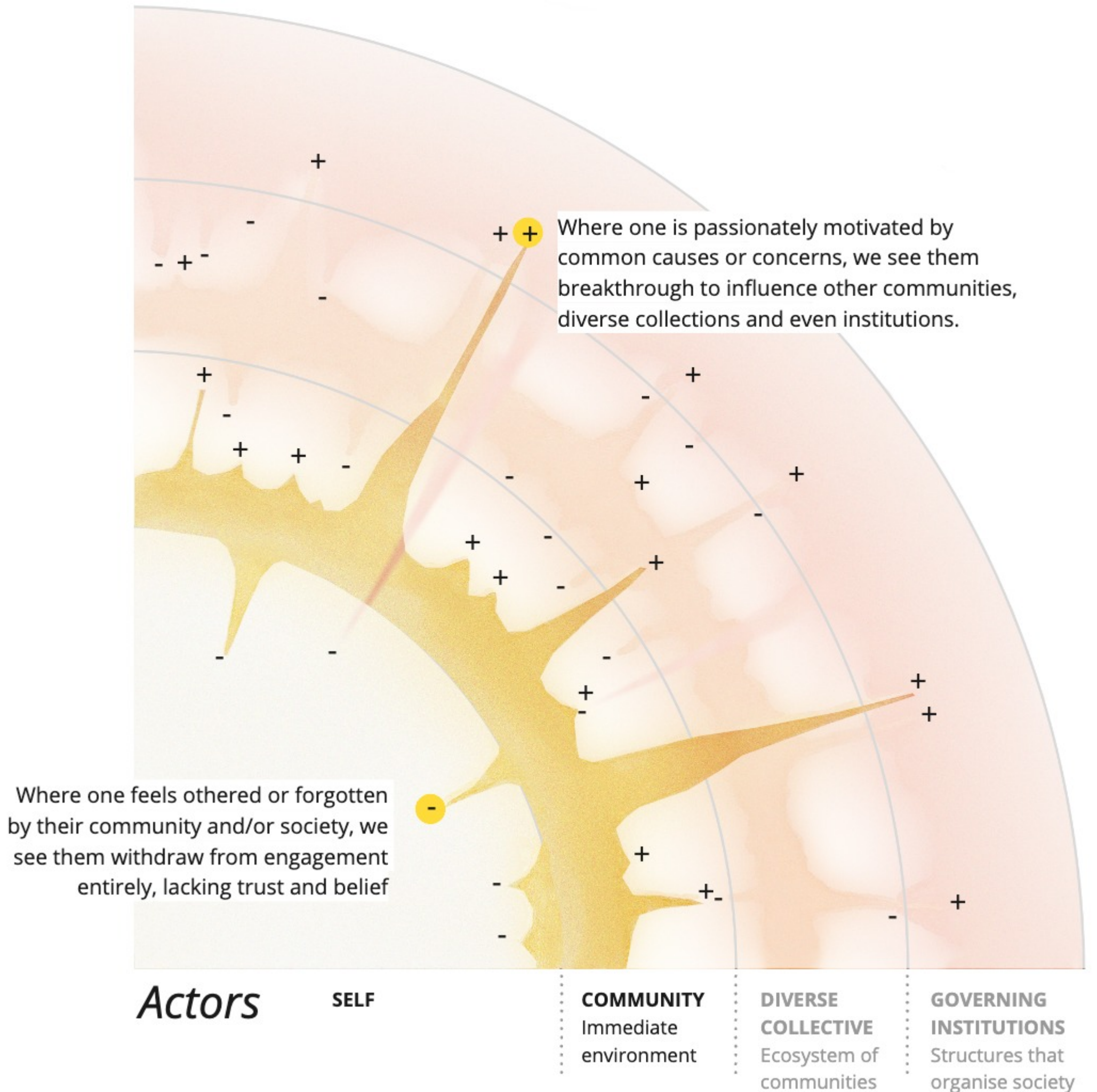
## CULTURAL LAYER 1

### Interactions between oneself and their community/s

There are the cultural forces at play as individuals explore and form community. This cultural layer highly influences one's experiences of trust, belonging and connection.

+ Where cultural forces at play are **positive**, we see self-determination and shared responsibility emerge. Active participation is propelled by these feelings of being heard and understood, and wanting to represent and advocate for common values.

- Where cultural forces at play are **negative**, feelings of isolation, loneliness and apathy emerge, greatly reducing one's motivation and confidence to participate and engage.



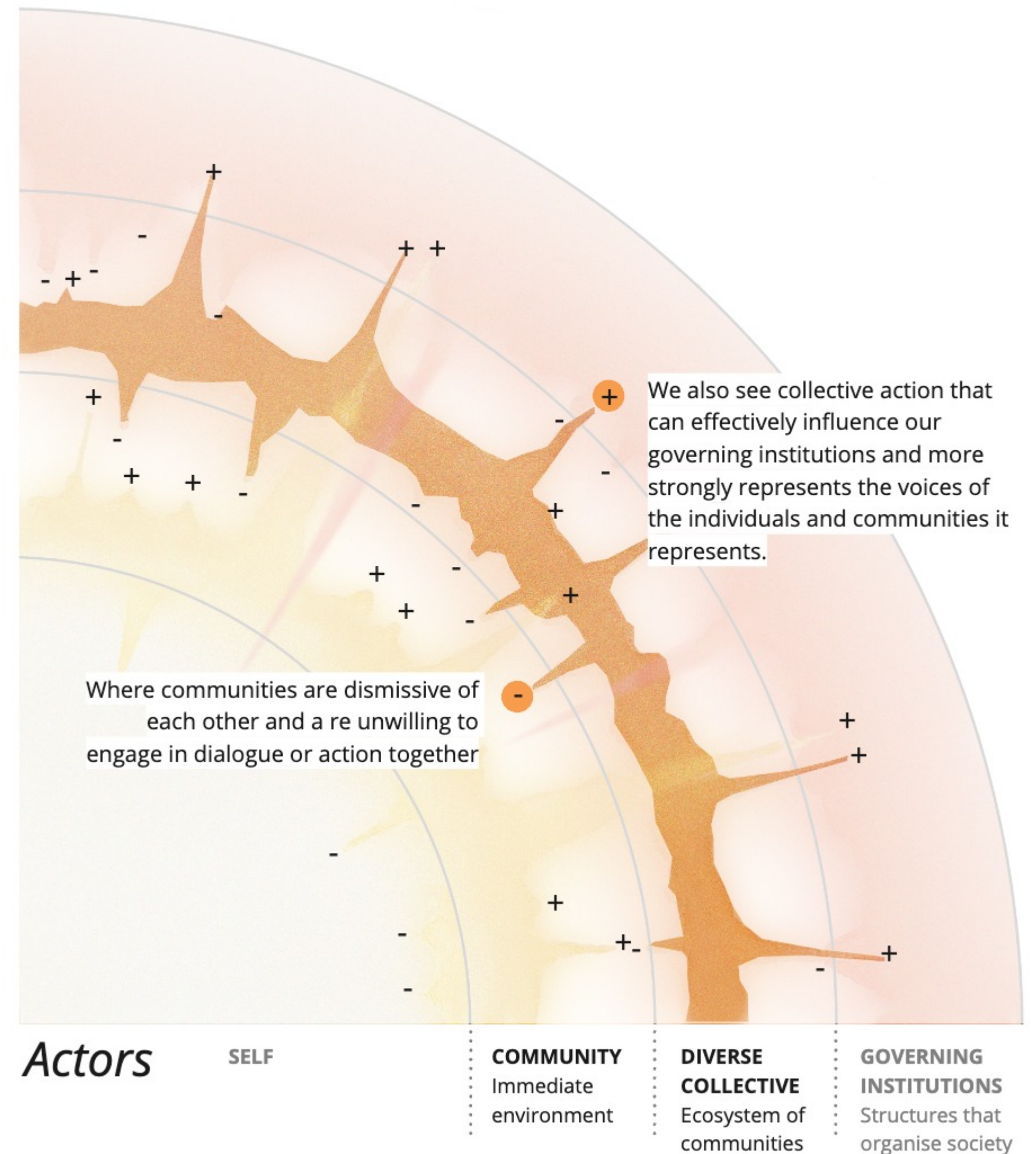
## ● CULTURAL LAYER 2

### Interactions between a community and the diverse collective

There are various cultural forces at play amongst systems of communities. They emerge as different communities explore what it means to partner, how they might cooperate and they feel they need to advocate for.

+ Where we see the **positive** influences of cultural forces amongst communities, we see emerging alignment around shared values, allyship and collective decision-making. We see different groups learning from each other, new ways of being and doing emerging that leverage different forms of wisdom across generations and strengthen our social, emotional and environmental capital.

- Where cultural forces are **negative**, we see marginalisation and segregation emerge. We see engagement and participation centred around “protecting your turf” and competing for the sake of competing. Sensationalism tends to play a central role in creating divides, and cynicism is rife.





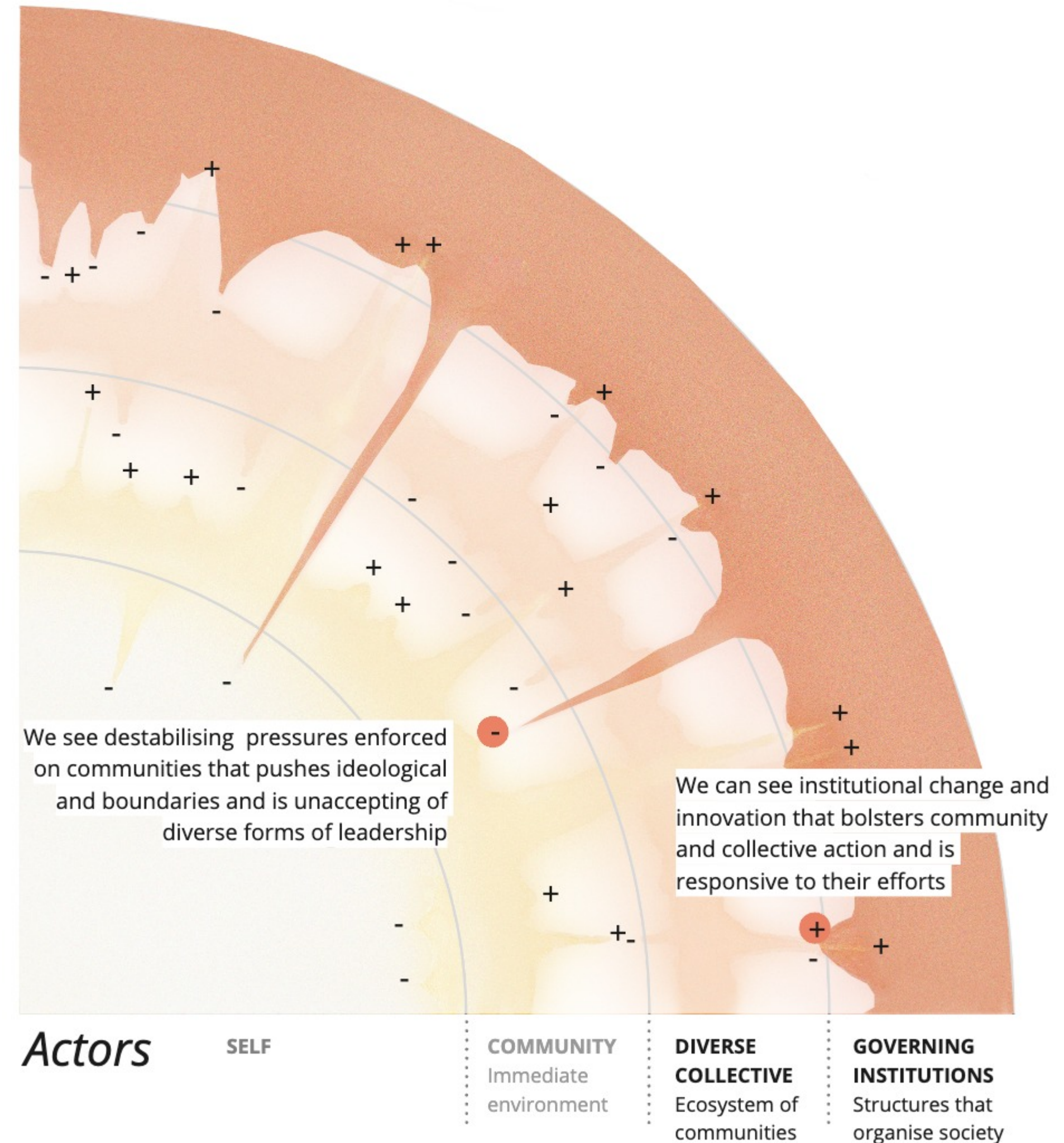
● CULTURAL LAYER 3

**Interactions between the diverse collective and its governing institutions**

As governing structures seek to represent the diverse collective, cultural forces begin to intersect with the central norms, ideology, and politics of collective belief. Our governing institutions put shape and structure around how we engage in society and are a product of collective decision-making.

+ Where cultural forces **bolster** these interactions, we see collective decision-making at a societal level that truly represents the voice of the people and their various knowledge systems. We see the emergence of democratic innovations that evolve as conditions change, enhancing agency and participatory capabilities that lead to active engagement in our system by a diverse range of citizens.

- Where cultural forces **work against** the diverse collective, we see growing power differentials that impact the equity and justice of our society, and an underlying division and mistrust in our economy and political systems.



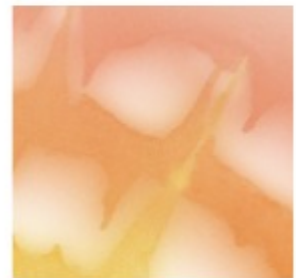
# Developing a portfolio approach



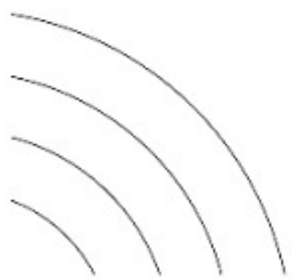
**Creative pathway** to balance experiments across multiple domains of our society



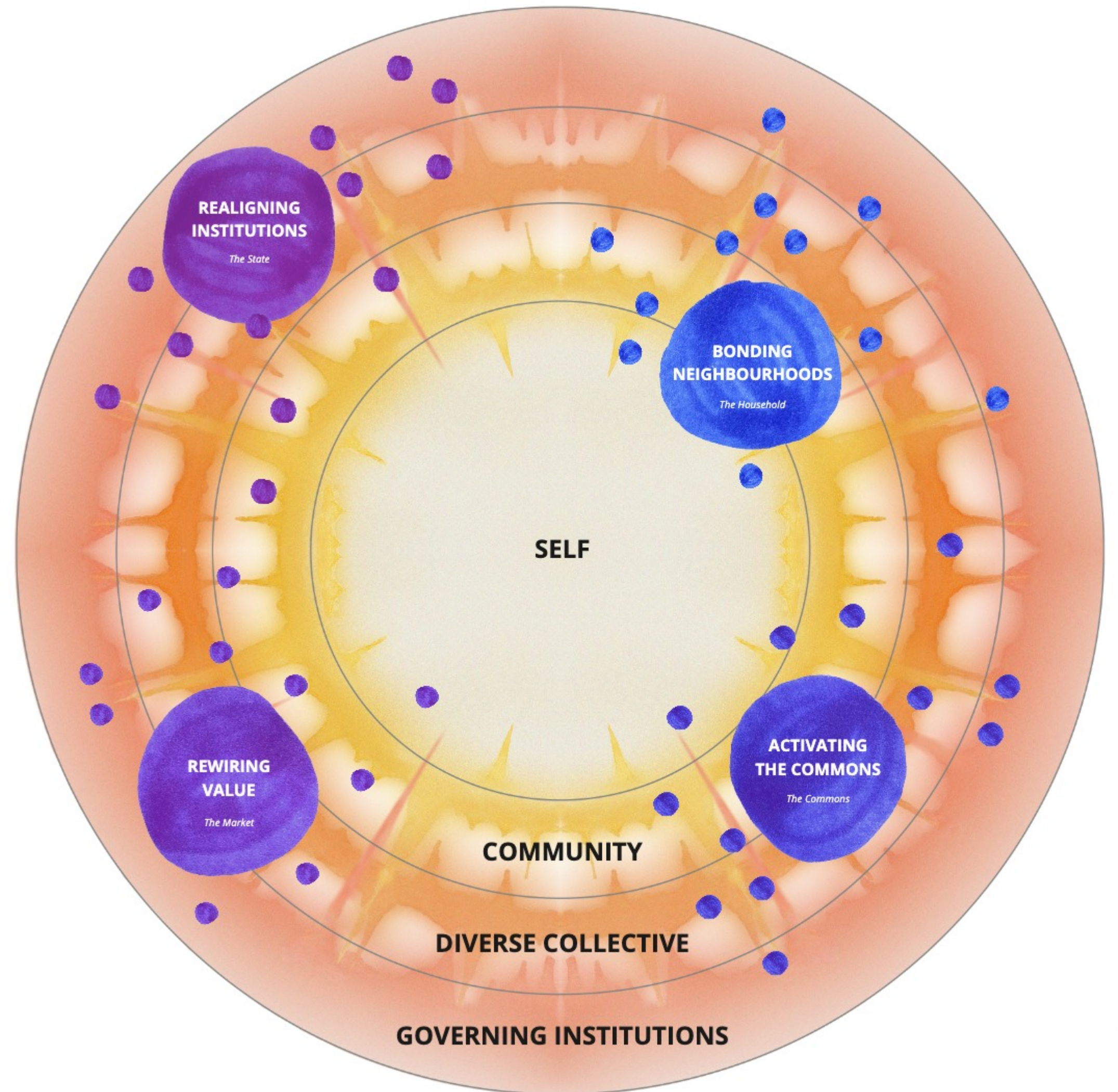
**Experiment** to learn more about the cultural forces, how to enhance meaningful participation and the types of leadership required to do so



The different **cultural forces** (some enabling, some constraining) we're working within, with the ultimate goal to shift them towards enhanced participation



The **different actor types** we're working with to collectively create a shared sense of purpose.



PART 5

---

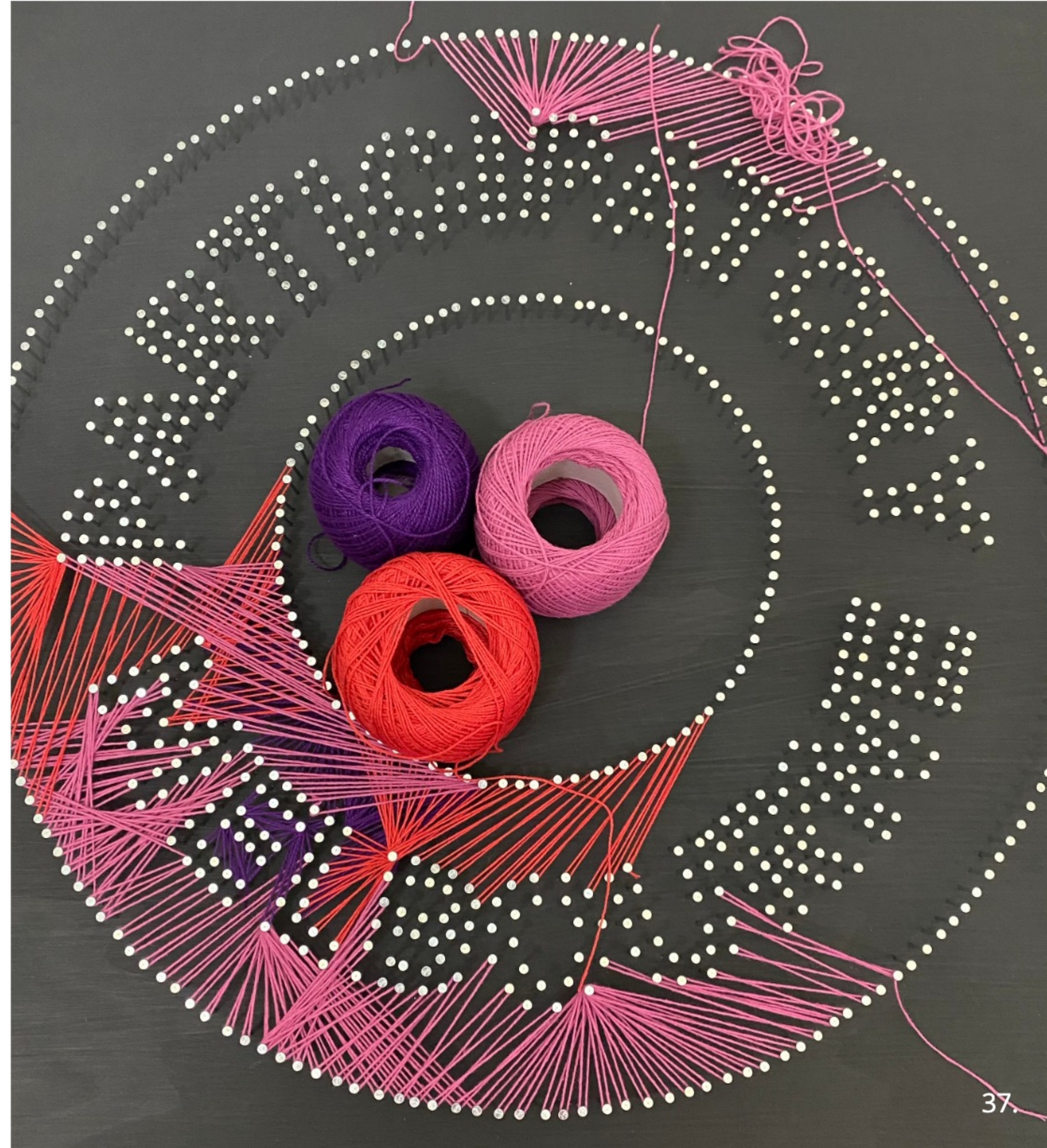
# BEYOND THIS REPORT

## Where to from here?

Our work so far has surfaced valuable insights, created the scaffolding for continued research and informed an emerging model of activation. Our work now turns to deepening our understanding by interrogating assumptions, developing the project scaffolding further and experimenting with the activation model. This can be summarised as a validation and action-learning phase.

This phase of work will be made up of three components:

- **Further research** to reach and engage with a wider sample across Greater Melbourne
- **Systems mapping** to ensure our future activities are in connection with existing actors and initiatives
- **Developing a portfolio of activations** to learn more about what enables enhanced participation systemically and the leadership styles required in practice





# Thank you

## CONTACT

Caroline Sanz-Veitch

Participatory Melbourne Lead Convenor

[caroline@regen.melbourne](mailto:caroline@regen.melbourne)

[regen.melbourne](http://regen.melbourne)



APPENDIX

---

# WORKSHOPS IN DETAIL

## Workshop 1: Participation

**Date:** 5th April 2023

**Location:** Regen Melbourne Head Office (The White House, St Kilda)

**Participants:** 28

In our first major gathering of Regen Melbourne partners we explored three fundamental questions relating to the concept and practice of *active participation*:

- Why is active citizenship and participation important?
- What are the systemic possibilities for active citizenship and participation?
- What are the systemic barriers to active citizenship and participation?

The workshop involved a facilitated conversation around each of these core questions, including opportunities for solo-reflection, group conversations and collective sensemaking. We explored the idea of participation at a philosophical level before grounding it in the current state realities in Melbourne and how this affects our understanding of both barriers and opportunities. We concluded the session with two conversations that catered for differing mindsets in the room:

1. Imagination: exploring the potential of our city if active citizenship and participation was fully realised.
2. Current state barriers: what is missing in the current system or what is blocking active citizenship and participation?





## **Workshop 2: Areas of Action**

**Date:** 27th April 2023

**Location:** Regen Melbourne Head Office (The White House, St Kilda)

**Participants:** 35

Building on the insights from our first major workshop, our second gathering was an example of collective deliberation using a community-citizens assembly model. We began by exploring the idea of citizens assemblies, conducting a mock-assembly, and then breaking into small tables. Each table explored one of four areas of action, identified through the first workshop, research and interviews:

1. Individual action
2. Community action
3. Democratic action
4. Resources to facilitate action

Through this exploration challenges were identified, context was explored and specific and tangible projects were proposed and prioritised. Finally, after each area of action was distilled and presented to the broader group, each participant was provided with voting tokens that were used to prioritise pathways of action.



**Design Forum: A Model for Activation**

**Date:** 15th June 2023

**Location:** The Immigration Museum

**Participants:** 45

Our research and insights phase culminated in a large Design Forum held at the Immigration Museum. We began our forum by creating new connections in the room and setting the scene by outlining a range of historical place-based examples of active citizenship in Greater Melbourne. We then revisited the cross-cutting forces at play that either support or block progress towards collective decision making. This process surfaced a range of mega-trends, cultural challenges and economic realities. We then shifted “above ground” and considered the three major themes that have emerged through our research and insights phase:

1. **Revitalising Community:** building social cohesion, trust and belonging
2. **Rejuvenating Democracy:** deepening innovations for the plurality of decisions we need (and the citizenship we need)
3. **Redefining Work:** creating capacity for participation in the next economy

We documented existing projects, surfaced opportunities for action and importantly how each of these “above ground” opportunities intersect and amplify each other.







# CO-CREATION WORKSHOP INSIGHTS

April 5th

## BARRIERS

THE AFFECTS OF OUR CURRENT SYSTEM

### RESOURCES

Lack of models & stories

Lack of knowledge of the alternatives

Lack of community as antidote to isolation & loneliness

Entrenched Capital

Not enough clean air/landscapes

### SOCIO PSYCHOLOGICAL

Equating difference with division

Inability to regulate anxiety of difference

Interpersonal deficits

Intergenerational trauma

Fear/avoiding discomfort/uncertainty

Attention span reduction

No rites of passage to responsibility

Hopelessness/overwhelm

Scarcity mindset

Nihilism, lack of meaning/purpose, spiritual void, fatalism

### POLITICAL/SYSTEMATIC

Political of technological change

Loss of agency

Lack of long term OR Systems thinking

Adversarial political system

Narratives → Negative

Ecological collapse

Bureaucracy

Excessive reliance on institutions that support the status quo

Growth & productivity over everything else

## PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY MAPPING THE SYSTEM

TO HEAL TO (RE)CONNECT TO (RE)CREATE

### MOVING TOWARDS ABUNDANCE

WHAT SHOULD OUR PRIORITIES BE TO ENSURE EQUITABLE ABUNDANCE?

- ↳ Universal basic income
- ↳ Food safety, urban farming, edible cities
- ↳ Bcorp/for purpose businesses/Social enterprise
- ↳ More time
- ↳ Conscious consumer choice
- ↳ capacity
- ↳ Enabling forces (individual & Market)

### SITTING WITH UNCERTAINTIES TOGETHER

### KNOWLEDGE

HOW DO WE THRIVE?

- ↳ Black & white thinking
- ↳ Difficulty sitting with paradox
- ↳ Dynamic knowledge & uncertainty as future state - inner & outer work required to do that

### HEALING

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES FOR HEALING?

- ↳ Trauma is viewed as a strength not weakness
- ↳ Rebuilding relationship with community across Age - culture differences
- ↳ Connection to the place

### INTERGENERATIONAL STRENGTHS

HOW CAN CHILDREN/YOUTH TAKE AGENCY IN THEIR FUTURES?

- ↳ Weaving different generations into participatory process
- ↳ Young people with agency
- ↳ Intergenerational exchange
- ↳ Children taking major role in decision making
- ↳ Uncovering lineages

## OPPORTUNITIES

### DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS

HOW DO WE BUILD OUR SYSTEMS, AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES TO BE FIT FOR PURPOSE?

Trust & safety to make decisions  
Delegated, rotational leadership  
Citizens assemblies & sortition

Practice different models of government  
Reclaimed power/agency by individual  
continuum of agency with youth

Constitutional conventions

More land custodianship

Democratic lottery

More inclusive practices

Enhancing local decision making

Moving towards understanding not dissolving difference

### COMMUNITY & SHARING

HOW DO WE SHIFT TO A SYSTEM THAT PRIORITISES COMMUNITY OVER INDIVIDUALISM?

Arts & culture to share stories

Worker cooperative employee ownership model

Global Identity

Building stronger communities

Street dinners

Accepting that we're shaping as we go  
community connectedness



Graphic Recorded by Angharad Neal-Williams

#ParticipatoryMelbourne

**WE ARE NOT  
PART-TIME  
VOLUNTEERS,  
WE ARE FULL  
TIME CITIZENS**



**LEADERSHIP  
WITHOUT  
TITLES**



**DEMOCRACY  
ISN'T A  
SPECTATOR  
SPORT**



**REMEMBERING  
TOGETHER**



**REBALANCING  
THE ECONOMY  
BACK TO THE  
HOUSEHOLD AND  
THE COMMONS**



**"THE MOST IMPORTANT  
UNIT OF ANALYSIS IN A  
SYSTEM IS NOT THE PART  
(EG. INDIVIDUAL,  
ORGANISATION, OR  
INSTITUTION), IT'S THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
THE PARTS"**

BRENDA ZIMMERMAN, SYSTEMS THEORIST



**TO HEAL  
AND REPAIR,  
TO BELONG**



**RADICAL  
IMAGINATION  
THROUGH  
MEANINGFUL  
ACTION**



# About Regen Melbourne

**Regen Melbourne is an engine for ambitious collaboration, in service of our city. We host bold projects that raise our collective ambition and transition us toward a safe and just future.**

Regen Melbourne began as a way to reimagine a safe and just future for Greater Melbourne. When Regen Melbourne was formed - our city was experiencing the aftermath of the Black Summer bushfires and was in the midst of COVID-19 lockdowns. It was an intuitive response to safeguarding our place in a time of global metacrisis, bringing together the multiple overlapping and interconnected problems that our planet is facing, and translating them into our local context.

Now more than ever, we need a new way of defining our aspirations for the city.

The Melbourne Doughnut acts as a guide for exploring, developing and actioning projects with the potential to enable our vision for Melbourne, but it is not a roadmap. We are convening people with the knowledge, skills and influence to drive systems level change. We are creating spaces for play, connection and collective action.

[regen.melbourne](https://regen.melbourne)

