

SUFFICIENCY IN SWEDEN - WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT'S ON THE TABLE

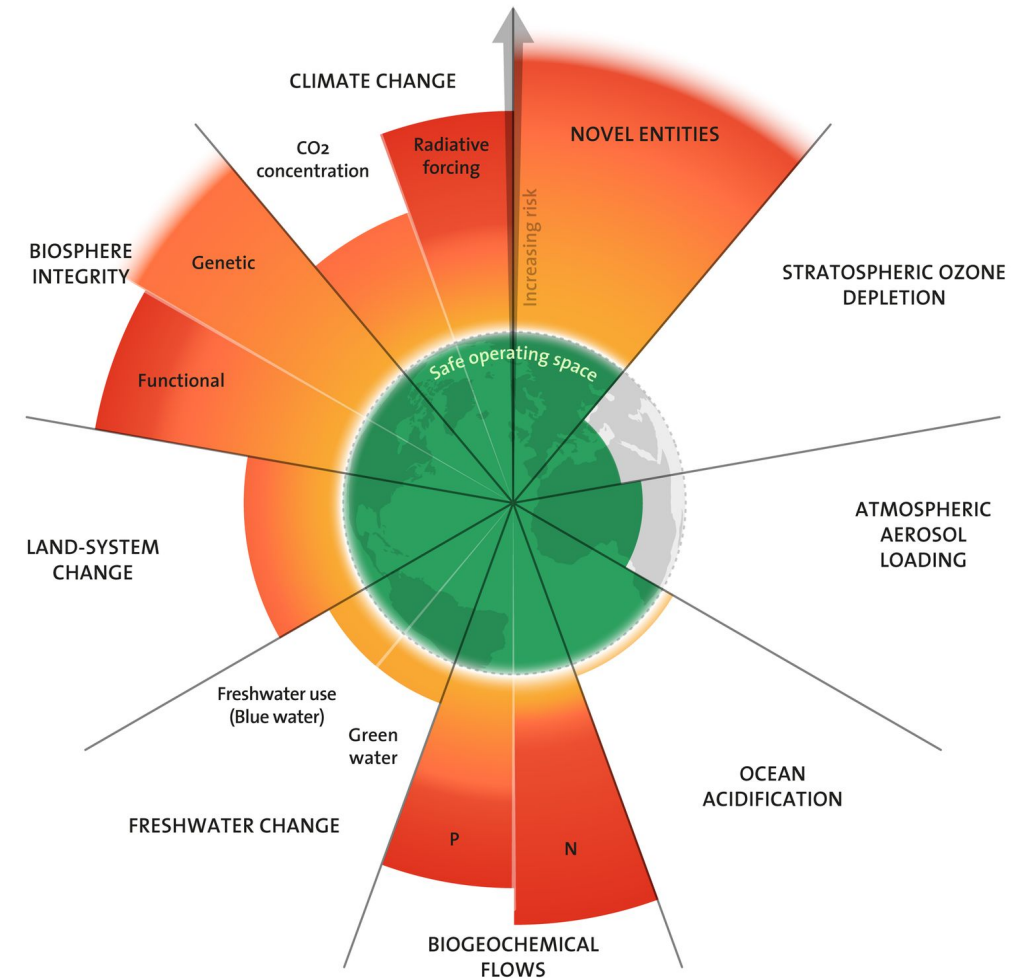
ANN-CHARLOTTE MELLQUIST, RISE

SEMINARIUM OM TILLRÄCKLIGHET, BACCHI SYRE
2026-05-11

Resource extraction is the main driver...

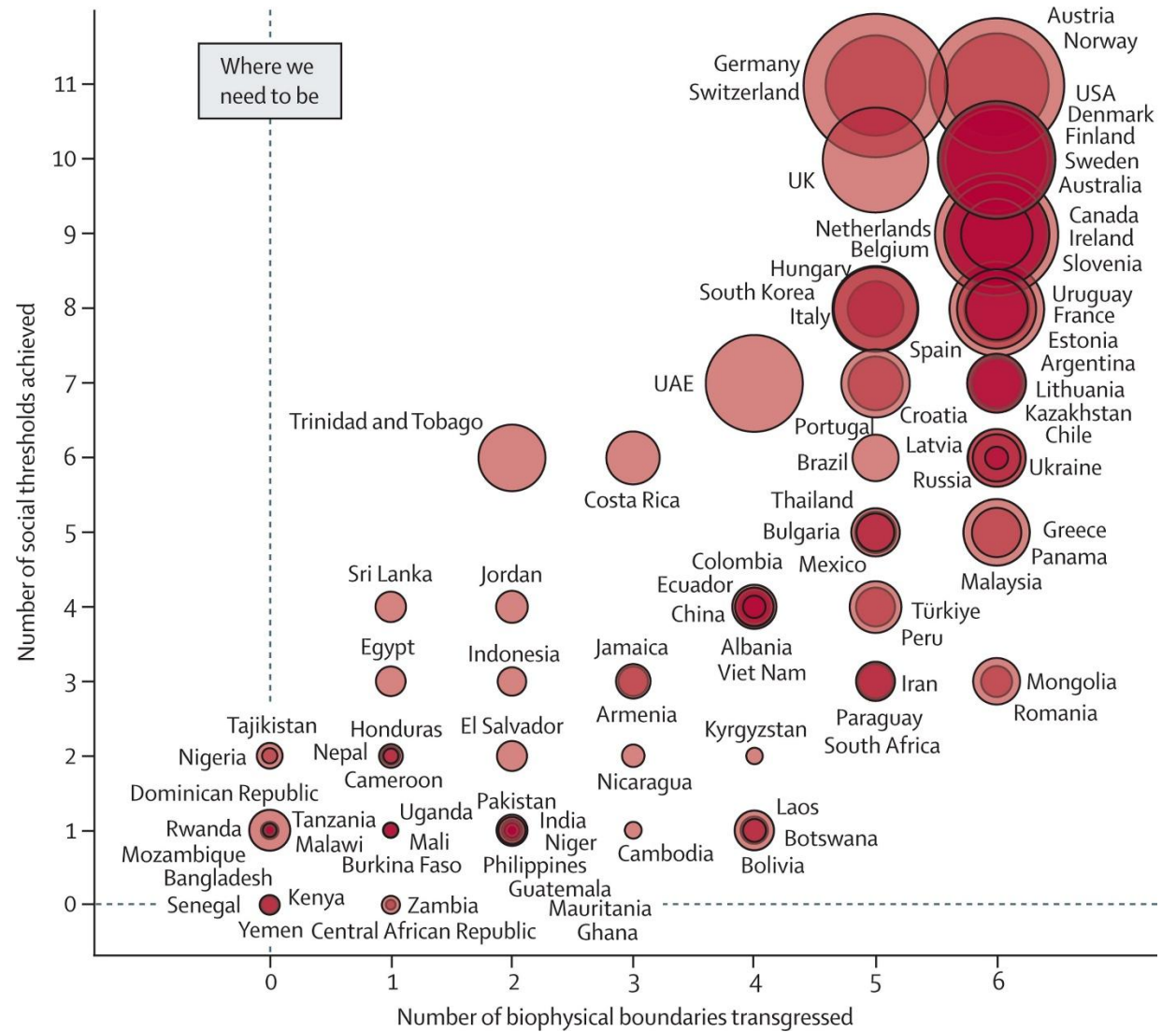
...of climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and water stress

- 7 of 9 planetary boundaries breached
- Resource use projected to grow 60% by 2060 if no action



“The relationship between humans, the economy and the biosphere is not working”

Anders Wijkman



Source:

Post-growth- the science of well-being within planetary boundaries. Kalis, Hickel et al, 2025.

I have worked 10+ years with circular
business model innovation

Together with hundreds of willing and eager
companies and organisations

But it doesn't scale.

VINNOVA

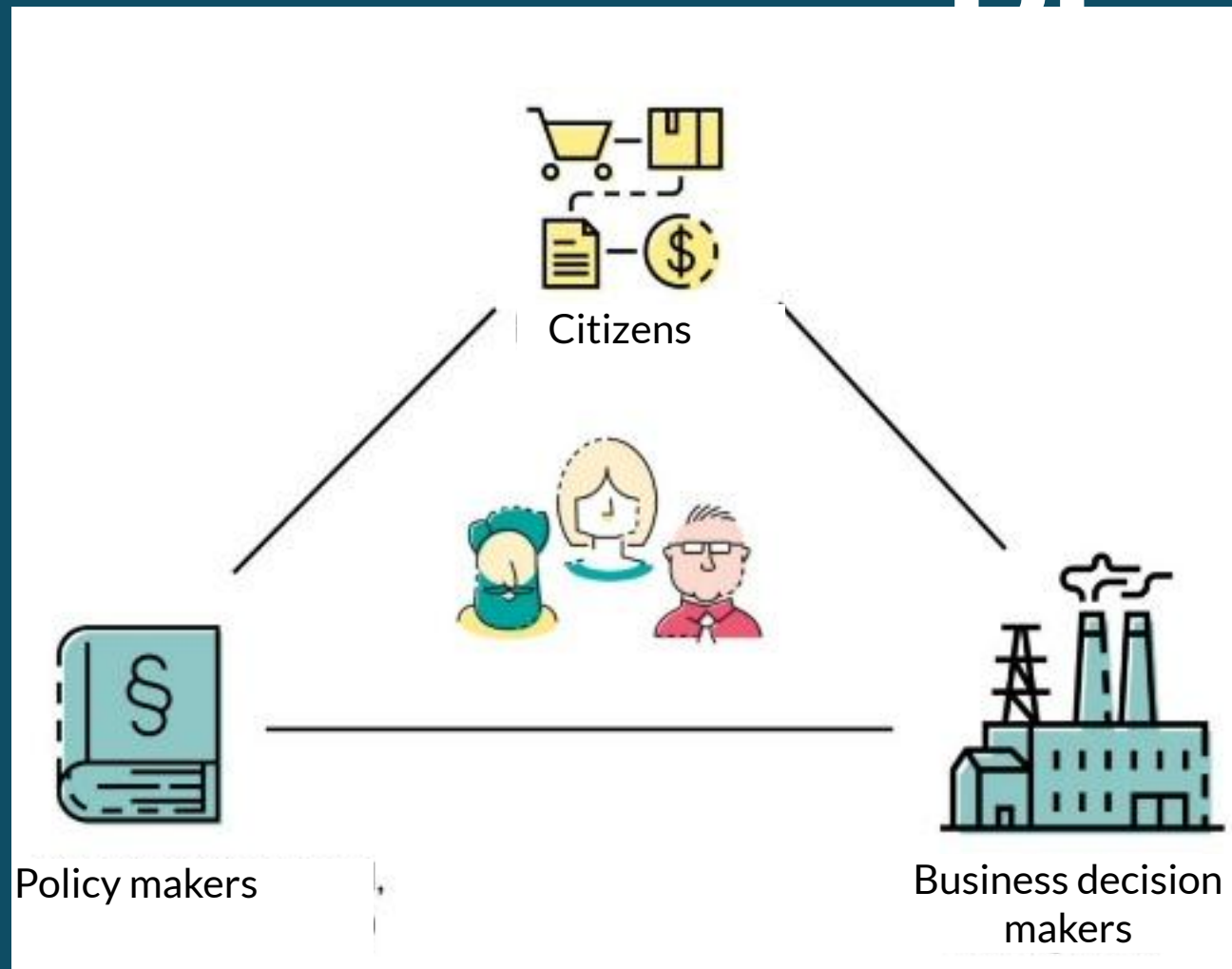
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Transforming Our Economic System

Policy levers for a redesigned economy

METHOD.

With this in mind, we explored problems and brainstormed solutions with **thought-leaders within business, academia, policy-making and spirituality** and grounded them in **literature**. We departed from the concept of planetary boundaries and potential action(s) of 3 actor groups (policy maker, citizen, business leader).



We identified 9
phenomena explaining
the situation we are in

- **Short-termism**, externality blindness and **anonymization of capital** and stock markets threaten planetary boundaries
- **Consumerism** driven by social factors rather than human needs cause resource overload and a growth dependency
- **Norms and practices of companies** drive only financial profitability
- **Short-termism in politics** undermines long term planning
- **Prices of natural resources** do not reflect all costs.
- **Innovation landscape is trapped** in existing unsustainable systems
- The transition to sustainability risks exacerbating social and global inequalities

The Double Bind

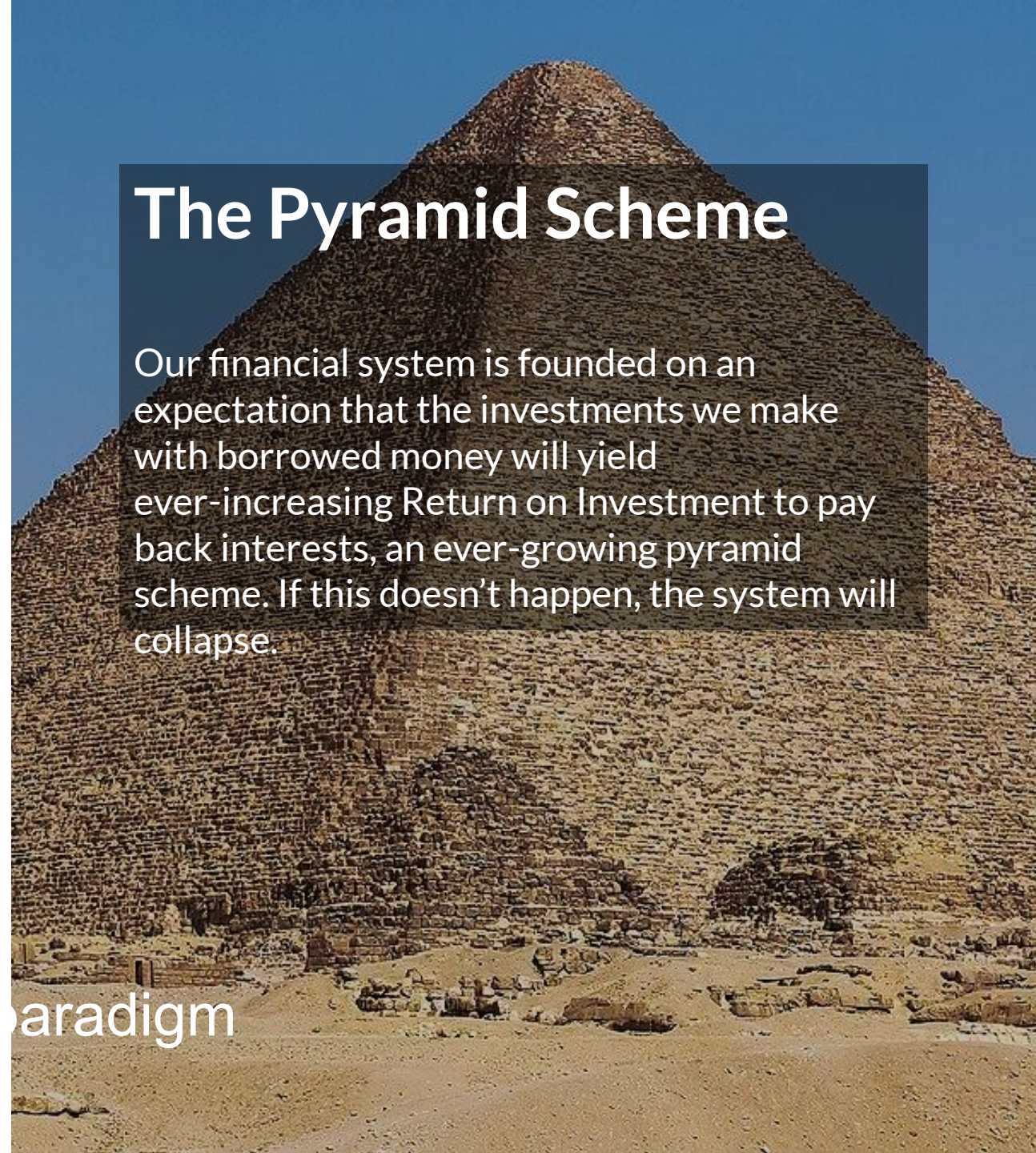
The economy is designed to expand and - if it does not - financial markets wobble, unemployment rises, tax revenue decreases and governments panic and we can not finance social services. **If – on the other hand - conventional growth continues, extraction deepens, emissions rise, global warming accelerates and ecosystems are further disrupted.**

We are stuck in a double bind. There is no safe direction within the logic we have built. Thus, one can say we have failed because the economic system we live within does not offer a survivable way forward.

The growth paradigm

The Pyramid Scheme

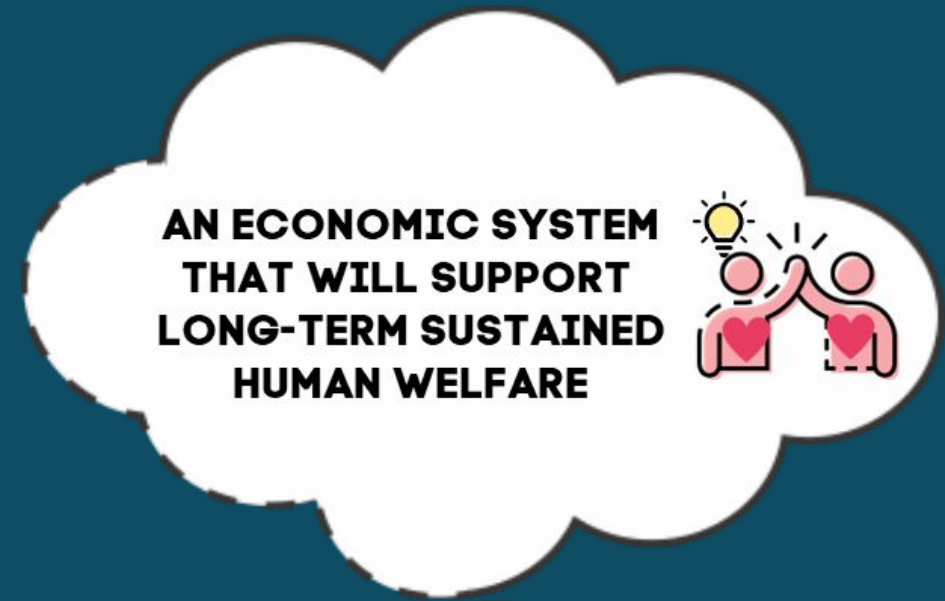
Our financial system is founded on an expectation that the investments we make with borrowed money will yield ever-increasing Return on Investment to pay back interests, an ever-growing pyramid scheme. If this doesn't happen, the system will collapse.



AN ECONOMIC SYSTEM THAT WILL SUPPORT LONG-TERM SUSTAINED HUMAN WELFARE

We don't know what the system will look like, but we have defined three basic conditions. The system need to:

- Function within the planetary boundaries
- Provide sufficient social welfare for all
- Sustain a constant or decreasing global population

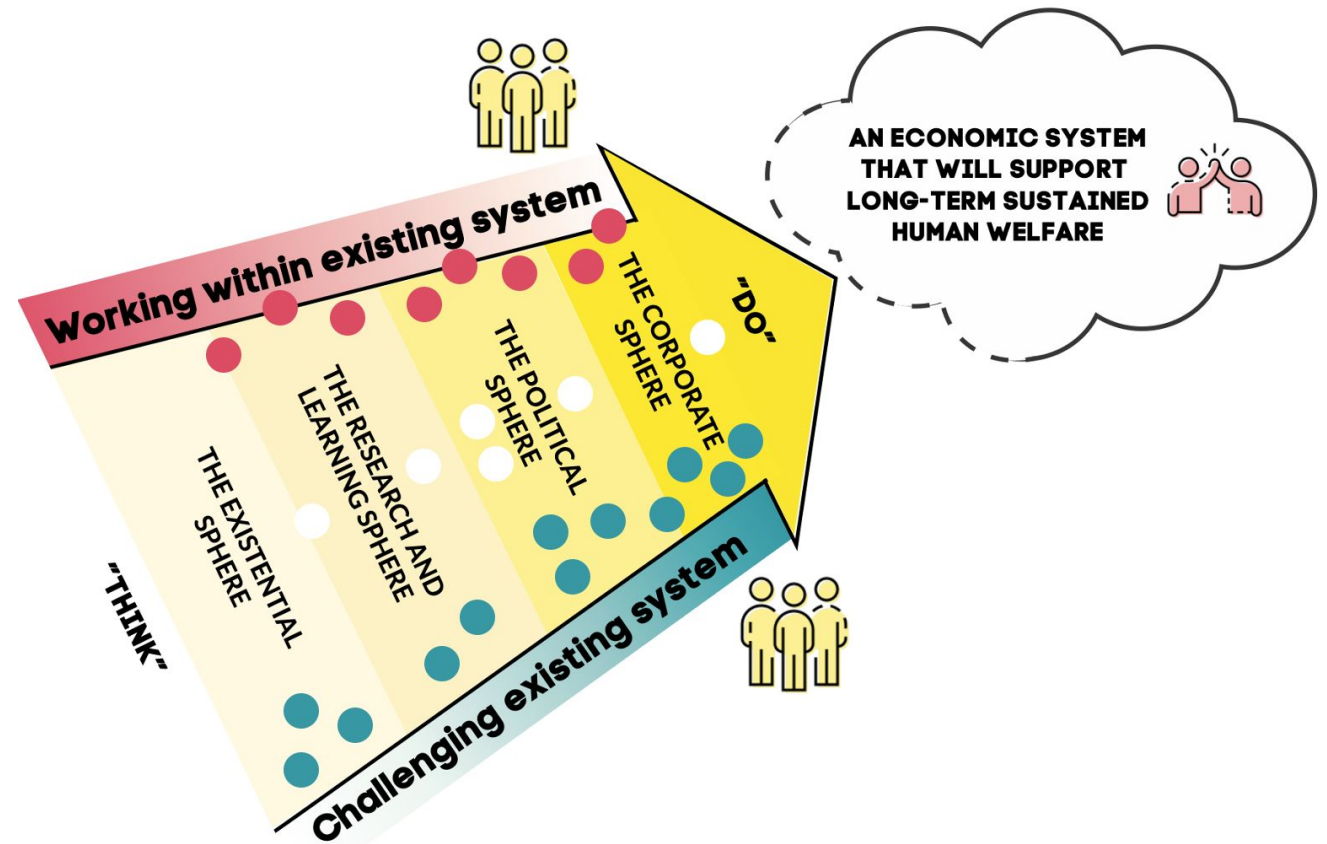


We focused on the how rather
than to where

We identified 26 levers for
change

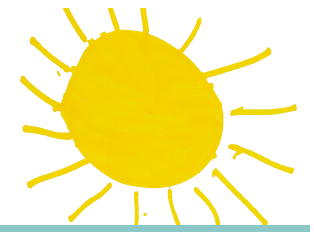
There are no fewer than 26 levers for transition

We have identified 26 levers for transition and mapped them in **four spheres**. The levers are organized in relation to **two perspectives of change**: What we can do *within the current system* and how we can act to *challenge the current system*.



LEVERS

Corporate sphere



WORKING WITHIN EXISTING SYSTEM



CHALLENGING EXISTING SYSTEM

Promote Patient capital

Move away from quarterly earning pressures towards patient capital that supports genuine transitions. This requires securing strategic funding from institutional investors willing to accept longer payback periods, government guarantees for transition investments, and new analyst frameworks that reward long-term value creation over short-term extraction

Natural resources as budget entities

Treat natural resources and energy as budget categories, requiring companies to account for environmental impact and risk as carefully as financial performance

Sustainable technical innovation as norm

Technical innovations from the wheel through the steam engine to electricity and computers to AI have revolutionised humanity during the years. Move away from giant tech-monopolies to open protocols, steered by everyone.

Redefined Corporate Purpose

Legally embed sustainability and social responsibility into corporate founding documents - as binding commitments that guide all business decisions.

Circular economy dominant business logic
Based on sufficiency, high value retention, high utilization and regeneration of natural systems.

Profit recirculated for humanity

Accepting lower profit margins when investments benefit society and environment. This means abandoning quarterly earnings obsessions, promoting cooperative ownership structures, and strengthening connections between sustainability performance and long-term profitability. Profit above the ceiling is recirculated and reinvested for greater good into circular and sustainable businesses in the real economy.

LEVERS

Political sphere

WORKING WITHIN EXISTING SYSTEM

Material Authority

Responsible for research and knowledge development in the material/resource domain (in the same way that the Energy Authority is responsible for the energy domain.)

Tax shift

Reducing income tax and introducing the taxation of consumed materials through VAT or similar.

(Public) Procurement Standards

Leverage government's massive purchasing power to create demand for sustainable products and services. When governments - often the largest buyers in any economy - require circular, low-carbon goods, they create markets that private companies can scale.



CHALLENGING EXISTING SYSTEM

Localised alternative economies

Strengthens resilience through local alternative currencies (holding a new definition of wealth) circulating within communities rather than extracting it to distant shareholders. This includes that those with more resources shouldering greater transition burdens.

Replace GDP with wellbeing indicators

Measure what actually matters for human and planetary health. New accounting methods would track the resilience and structural health of economic systems, returning to the original meaning of "economy" -i.e. managing our shared household.

Reform of work organisation

Shorter work weeks (recognizing that technology should reduce necessary labour not eliminate jobs), exploring maximum income ratios that address extreme inequality.

Commercial space limitations

Limit advertising and consumption messaging that dominate public environments (including social media, dominated by commercial tech giants and consumption-focused influencers), creating room for other values.

Broad and consistent political action

(Bans, caps, trading systems, taxes, mandates and more) to reduce resource use. Clear signals to all spheres

Just & Inclusive Transition

Ensures that necessary economic changes don't harm vulnerable populations. This includes legal tools to represent future generations in today's decisions, social dialogue processes that include affected communities, and citizen assemblies that bring ordinary people into complex policy decisions. Global trade rules need reform to support developing countries rather than extracting their resources. Secure people's income during the process.

Initiate a Two-Chamber System

Initiate a "first chamber" with 10-year mandates for more long-term politics. The responsibility of this chamber would be to ensure continuity and expert competence across political cycles.

LEVERS

Research and learning sphere



WORKING WITHIN EXISTING SYSTEM



CHALLENGING EXISTING SYSTEM

Knowledge & Awareness Raising among Politicians, Finance and Business Education
Politicians and economists often lack fundamental knowledge about our ecological crisis. K&A raising would encourage both and if to invest in more knowledge about natural science, biosphere and systems thinking and thus, facilitating a long-term clear vision.

Micro-Economic Models Based on Human Behavior
Integrating socio-behavioral price mechanisms into microeconomic models to reflect human decision-making beyond rational utility maximization.

Strengthen transition research, not only technology-based incremental research including ecology- and social-based economic models, natural sciences, planet monitoring and fundamental visions and ethics.

Comprehensive Ongoing Sustainability Education
Education must reach citizens, corporations, investors, and politicians, focusing on planetary boundaries (environmental limits for human activity) and systems thinking (understanding interconnections between economic, social, and environmental systems).

Alternative Narrative
A transition paradigm focusing more on “to where” than on “more”. The current system in a destabilization phase. Use it to create a third alternative. When the neoliberal and free-trade system is breaking down, and the only current alternative seems to be a zero-sum game based on protectionism and a “we and them” narrative.

Include Externalities in Macro-Economic Models
Incorporate nature, energy and social systems into our economic system, not just as external factors. This includes exploring economic systems built on trust rather than debt-based money creation.

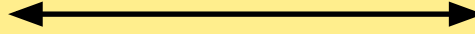
Break siloed academic and research structures
Replace current academic and research siloes by new cross-disciplinary work supporting nature and social science for the well-being of future generations.

LEVERS

Existential sphere



WORKING WITHIN EXISTING SYSTEM



CHALLENGING EXISTING SYSTEM

Humans as guardians of the creation:
Make sustainability a moral imperative
Frames environmental action not as technical policy but as fundamental questions of justice, care for future generations, and our responsibilities to each other.

Nature as common heritage

Nature as an asset shared by humanity, and all living beings on earth. Present and future generations.

Existentialism and spirituality

fundamental part of our system

Many people suffer from bad existential health.

Religion and spiritual belief systems can be a lever for the sustainability transition and a broader movement towards sufficiency and living in symbiosis with the planet.

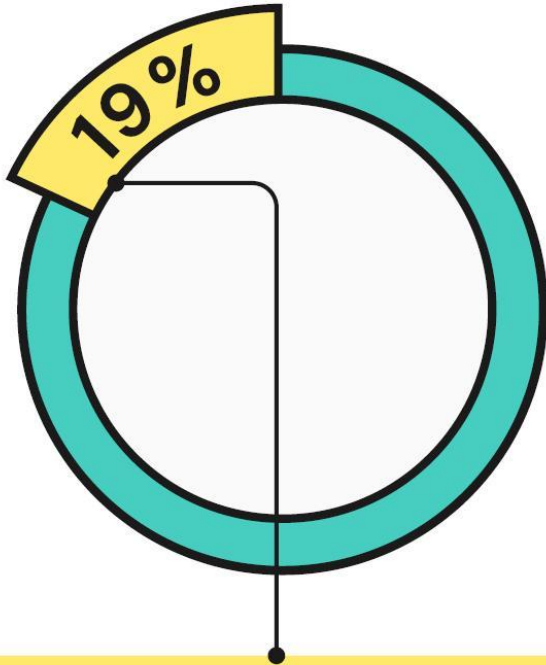
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Circularity Gap Report (CGR) The Value Gap: Sweden

THE TOTAL VALUE GAP OF SWEDEN



- This analysis demonstrates that Sweden is missing out on substantial economic value
- **SEK 600 billion** (appr. half of the Swedish national budget)

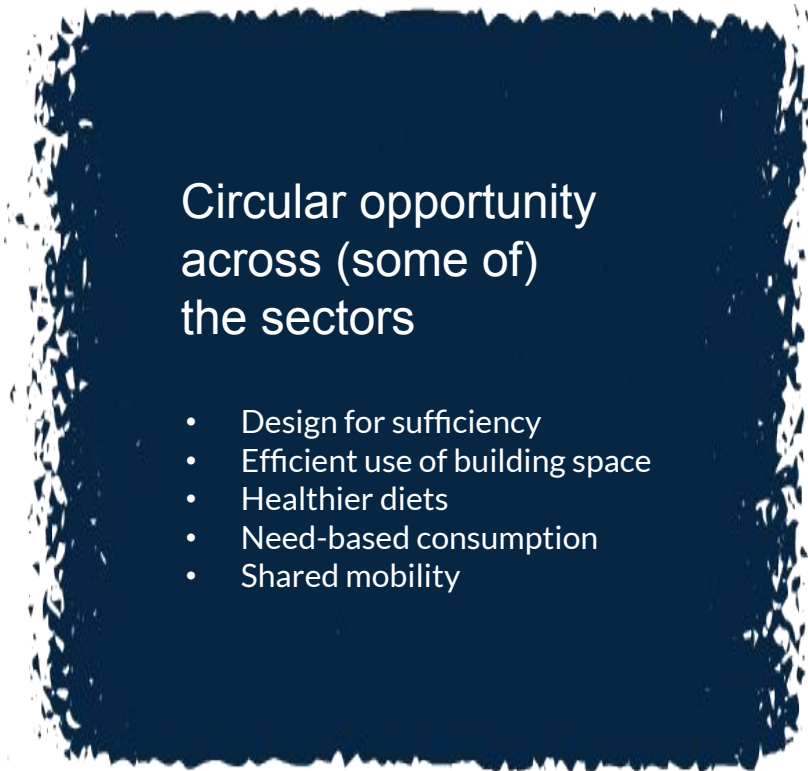
$$\text{VALUE GAP} = \frac{\text{value not created} + \text{value lost} - \text{value recovery}}{\text{consumption} - \text{overconsumption}}$$

OVERCONSUMPTION REDIRECTS VALUABLE RESOURCES

Overconsumption adds another layer to the challenge and amounts to **200 billion SEK annually**, which includes:

- Underutilised floor space and easthetic renovations
- Food consumption beyond nutritional needs
- Oversized vehicles

These are usages that redirect resources from more meaningful contributions to well-being.



Circular opportunity
across (some of)
the sectors

- Design for sufficiency
- Efficient use of building space
- Healthier diets
- Need-based consumption
- Shared mobility

RECOMMENDATIONS/ CALL TO ACTION

1. Leverage data to inform circular solutions by standardising definitions, improving statistics, and supporting further methodological research.

HOW?

- Extend ISO
- Government assignment to SCB
- Research funding

2. Expand value definitions and correct market failures through policies that recognise environmental and social value, such as repair subsidies, tax incentives for reuse, and circular procurement rules.

HOW?

- Research funding
- Apply and implement the Swedish Circular Economy Action Plan

3. Foster cross-sectoral collaboration to scale circular business models like product-as-a-service, reuse platforms, and industrial symbiosis, supported by research on data- and value-sharing mechanisms.

HOW?

- Business initiatives, supported by policy
- Research funding

4. Promote need-based consumption by embedding sufficiency and circularity into education, culture, and regulation, while making reuse, repair, and sharing more attractive through incentives and campaigns.

HOW?

- Government-led initiatives, regulation and oversight
- Business initiatives, supported by policy

THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?

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