How SharedAgendas.org works with artificial intelligence

Connecting distributed knowledge, systemic interpretation and collective action

Shared Agendas

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September 2026



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1. Why SharedAgendas.org works with AI

SharedAgendas.org works with complex social, environmental and economic challenges. These challenges involve many actors, different forms of knowledge and decisions that interact across organisations, sectors and places. Conditions also change over time, so understanding what is happening and deciding how to act requires continuous learning. No single organisation has a complete view of the situation, and relevant knowledge is often fragmented across research, practice, institutions and territories.

We use artificial intelligence (AI) because it allows us to work with much larger volumes of information and many more relationships than we could process manually. It helps us connect evidence from different sources, identify patterns, explore relationships and incorporate new information as our understanding of a challenge develops. For us, AI is mainly a tool for sense-making: we use it in research, in developing our frameworks, in analysing complex challenges and in digital environments that support collective work. We set the purpose, the questions, the criteria and the frameworks that guide the analysis. AI allows us to consider more information and relationships, while interpretation, validation and decisions remain with the people and organisations involved.

This is particularly relevant because the challenges we work with are shaped by developments at different scales. Knowledge about resources, capabilities, institutions and relationships is often highly place-based, while regulation, technology, markets, investment, environmental change or geopolitical developments may affect many places at once. Connecting these forms of knowledge helps us understand both the conditions of a particular place and how developments there relate to wider transformation dynamics. This relationship between place-based action and broader change is central to our work on Shared Agendas and Global Shared Agendas.

We see this work as a contribution to AI for the public good. Our focus is on how AI can strengthen the capacity of people, organisations and places to understand complex challenges, connect distributed knowledge and organise collective responses around issues that matter publicly. The following sections explain how this connects with our work on governance under complexity, how we develop frameworks that guide AI-supported interpretation, how we use AI in practice and the principles that guide this work.

2. AI-supported sense-making and governance under complexity

Working under conditions of complexity means acting while the situation is still only partially understood. Knowledge is distributed across organisations and people, relationships between causes and effects are difficult to establish in advance, and decisions taken in one area can change what becomes possible elsewhere. In our work on Shared Agendas, collective action is organised around these conditions: actors maintain a shared direction while coordinating initiatives, learning from practice and adjusting as circumstances evolve.

This requires continuous interpretation. Actors need to observe what is changing, relate different forms of knowledge, understand how initiatives and wider developments interact, and revisit previous assumptions in light of experience. Initial understandings provide a basis for action, but implementation generates new evidence and may reveal constraints, opportunities or relationships that were not visible before. Theory of change helps organise this learning in Shared Agenda processes by connecting the shared direction of change, system conditions, portfolios of action, assumptions about contribution, monitoring and learning. It provides a reference that can be revisited as collective work develops.

AI allows us to extend this sense-making across much larger bodies of information. We can relate evidence from different domains, compare developments across contexts, trace recurring relationships and connect new information with questions or assumptions already being explored. This becomes especially useful when relevant knowledge is dispersed across sectors, organisations and places, or when the number of interactions makes it difficult to maintain an integrated view manually.

Different actors may interpret the same evidence differently, some relationships remain uncertain, and others only become clearer through action and experience. AI allows more of these connections, differences and uncertainties to be considered together. This gives actors a richer basis for deciding what deserves attention, what needs further investigation and where experimentation or adjustment may be useful. Evidence generated through action can then be incorporated into subsequent analysis, allowing understanding to develop alongside action and learning.

3. Frameworks as the basis for AI-supported interpretation

Many Shared Agendas address challenges that are specific to a place but share broader transformation dynamics with other territories. Food systems, bioeconomy, health, mobility or climate adaptation take different forms in different contexts, but they are often shaped by comparable conditions, relationships and tensions. One part of our work is therefore to develop applied frameworks that capture these recurring dimensions and provide a common reference for working with Shared Agendas in specific places.

These frameworks provide a starting structure that can be adapted to local conditions, actors, capabilities, resources and priorities. A Shared Agenda can build on accumulated knowledge while grounding the analysis in the realities of the territory. Evidence and experience from specific places can, in turn, refine the framework and improve the basis available for work elsewhere. This relationship between a common reference and contextual adaptation allows knowledge to accumulate while recognising that transformation will take different forms in different places.

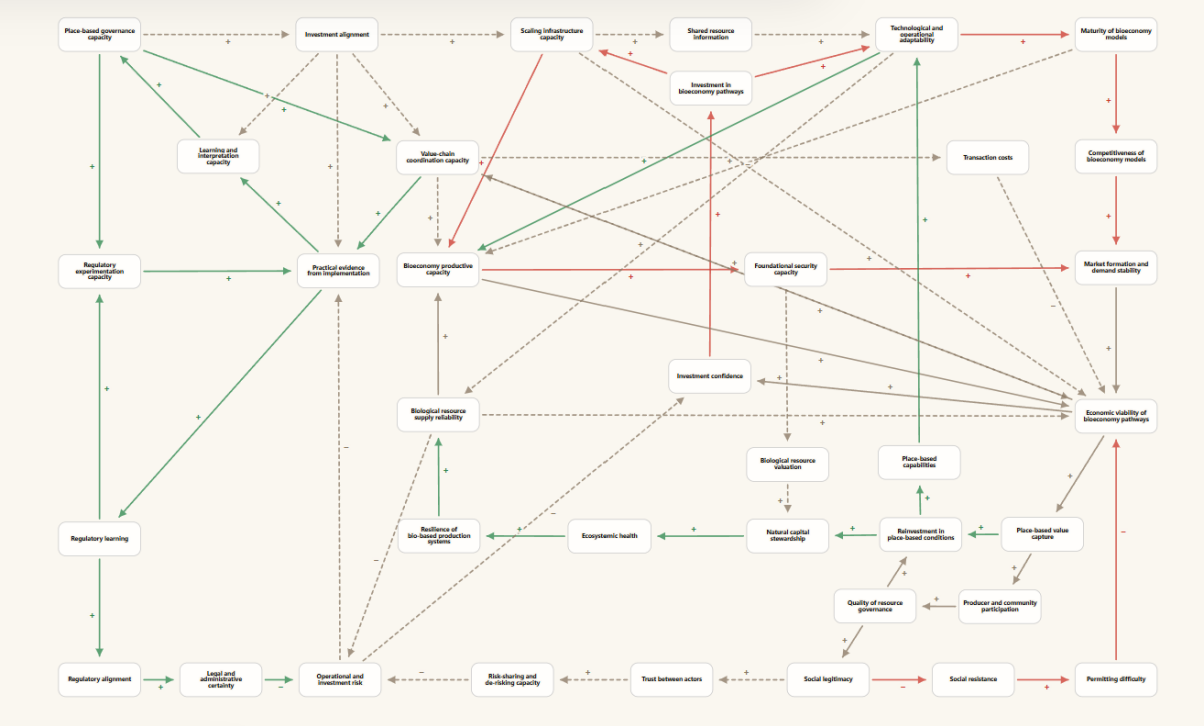
AI is particularly valuable in maintaining this relationship between frameworks and situated application. It helps us connect research, evidence from practice and learning from different contexts when developing a framework. When that framework is used in a particular territory, AI can help relate place-based information to the broader reference, identify which conditions and relationships appear especially relevant and examine where the local situation differs from patterns observed elsewhere.

For the transformation domains we work with, we develop systems maps as part of the analytical framework. These maps make explicit the main elements and relationships shaping transformation. Particular dynamics and broader configurations can then be used to examine how relationships combine and how different patterns of change may develop. The map provides an interpretative structure through which information that would otherwise remain dispersed across documents, datasets, projects, research and different places can be organised and related.

When the framework is used in a specific Shared Agenda, the systems map is interpreted in relation to the territory: some relationships may be particularly relevant, others less so, and additional contextual conditions may need to be considered. The shared structure makes comparison and learning across places possible while keeping these contextual differences visible. Global Shared Agendas follow the same logic, using a common interpretative reference to relate heterogeneous developments and distributed place-based processes.

Our first six reference frameworks illustrate the scale of this approach. They cover bioeconomy, regenerative agrifood systems, living cities and territories, planetary health, systemic investment, and rebuilding the conditions for life. Together, their systems maps currently comprise 271 nodes and 470 directional relationships, organised into multiple dynamics and broader configurations. These frameworks are part of a growing family that will continue to expand into additional transformation domains. Figure 1 shows the systems map of the Bioeconomy Framework as one example of this wider architecture.

Figure 1. Systems map of the Bioeconomy Framework for Shared Agendas



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AI supports both the development and application of this kind of framework. In the bioeconomy work, it has helped us identify recurring concepts, consolidate overlapping formulations and maintain alignment between the nodes and the wider framework. Once a common reference exists, new evidence from research, wider developments or specific territories can be related to the elements and relationships already represented. Over time, learning from different Shared Agendas can be compared through the same reference, helping distinguish what appears to recur across contexts from what is specific to a particular place.

Shared Agendas can therefore start from a stronger analytical base, adapt that base to the context in which actors are working and accumulate knowledge across applications. AI increases our capacity to maintain this relationship between general knowledge and situated interpretation as the number of places, sources and relationships grows.

4. How we use AI in practice

AI allows us to work with information that is often fragmented across sources, organisations, domains and places. We use it to relate evidence, examine interactions, explore emerging configurations, compare developments across contexts and connect new information with questions that are already being explored. The frameworks described above provide the reference for interpreting these relationships and, where a systems map has been developed, the map provides a more detailed structure for examining them.

4.1 Integrating distributed knowledge

Knowledge relevant to complex challenges is usually dispersed across many sources. Publicly available material may include research, policy documents, datasets, regulatory developments, market information, technological developments and evidence from projects or programmes. AI helps us bring this material together and relate it to the concepts, conditions and relationships identified in the relevant framework, so evidence from different domains can be considered together rather than reviewed as separate streams of information.

Other knowledge comes from our direct work with organisations and Shared Agendas in specific places, including workshops, interviews and the experience of people involved in a particular context. This material can also inform AI-supported analysis when it has been aggregated and anonymised, following the same standards we use in research practice. Public information, research evidence and knowledge generated through direct engagement can contribute to the same analysis while remaining distinguishable.

As new information becomes available, AI helps us relate it to what is already being examined. A regulatory development may affect several conditions, experience from implementation may challenge an earlier assumption, and evidence emerging in one place may shed light on a relationship observed elsewhere. Keeping these connections visible becomes increasingly valuable as the amount and diversity of information grow.

4.2 Using systems maps to interpret information

Where a systems map has been developed, new information can be related to the elements and relationships represented in it. This makes it possible to understand an individual development as part of a wider set of interactions. AI helps us trace these connections across the map, examine how relationships combine within relevant dynamics and configurations, and identify where new evidence supports, challenges or suggests revisiting the current interpretation.

The Bioeconomy Systems Map shows how this can work in practice. Policy, regulatory, technological, market, investment, environmental or geopolitical developments can be linked to the conditions and relationships they may influence. A regulatory change, for example, may affect legal certainty, operational risk, investment confidence and implementation through several connected relationships. Evidence emerging from a particular territory can be related to the same map, allowing changes in place-based conditions to be interpreted alongside wider developments. The monitoring structure developed for the bioeconomy map already connects wider developments and observable evidence with the relationships and dynamics to which they are relevant.

The map can also support different questions without requiring everyone to work with the complete representation. One analysis may focus on a particular condition, another on how several developments interact, and another on the factors influencing an emerging opportunity. Digital tools can provide views adapted to these purposes while keeping the selected information connected to the wider map. Visualisation serves the same function by bringing particular relationships into focus while retaining their connection to the broader representation.

4.3 Exploring opportunities and possible configurations

Some opportunities only become visible when several developments are considered together. A change in regulation may coincide with a new technology, shifts in demand, available investment and capabilities that already exist in an organisation or territory. AI allows us to explore a wider range of these combinations and examine which ones merit closer attention.

We apply this logic in our work on strategic opportunities and white spaces. By white spaces, we mean areas of opportunity that emerge when external developments are considered together with an organisation's assets, capabilities, knowledge, relationships, strategic priorities and values. AI helps us explore possible combinations across these dimensions, while the people involved assess their relevance and contribute knowledge that can refine the analysis. Digital environments can support this work by allowing participants to examine opportunities, add information, indicate where they see potential and identify what remains unknown.

A similar logic applies to place-based transformation. In bioeconomy, for example, a new value chain may depend on the combination of biological resources, processing capabilities, infrastructure, technology, demand, regulation, investment and organisations able to connect these elements. Their interaction differs between territories according to local resources, capabilities and constraints. AI helps us examine which combinations are becoming viable, what conditions already support them, what is still missing and where

experimentation, partnership or investment may contribute to their development.

4.4 Learning across places and connecting wider transformation dynamics

The applied frameworks described in Section 3 allow knowledge generated through different Shared Agendas to be related through a common reference. Each application remains grounded in its own context, while enough common structure is retained to compare what is being observed across places. AI helps us work with this accumulated evidence, identify conditions or relationships that recur and examine why similar developments may take different forms in different contexts.

Global Shared Agendas extend this logic by relating place-based transformation processes to wider developments such as regulatory change, market dynamics, investment patterns, technological shifts and environmental pressures. AI helps connect heterogeneous information, identify patterns across contexts and make relationships visible that would otherwise be difficult to observe.

This can reveal complementarities between places. One territory may have relevant resources, another technological capabilities, another experience with a regulatory change, while others contribute productive capacity, investment, demand or implementation knowledge. Bringing these developments into the same analysis can show how different place-based contributions relate to a wider transformation challenge, while decisions and actions remain grounded in each context.

4.5 Connecting evidence, action and learning over time

The information available to a Shared Agenda changes as actors take action. Projects and experiments generate new evidence, relationships between actors evolve, and developments outside the territory may alter the conditions in which they are working. These changes may affect how the original challenge is understood and which actions or opportunities deserve attention.

AI helps us relate this new material to the questions, conditions and relationships already under examination. Evidence from implementation can be connected to previous assumptions, wider developments can be linked to the parts of a framework they may affect, and changes observed over time can be compared with earlier interpretations. This is consistent with the way theory of change, monitoring and learning are used in Shared Agenda processes, where evidence is related to the shared direction, system conditions, actions and assumptions as work evolves.

Evidence from specific Shared Agendas can also contribute to the frameworks described in Section 3. Experience across places gradually provides a stronger basis for understanding which conditions and relationships recur and which depend more strongly on local circumstances. General frameworks provide a starting reference for place-based work, while place-based experience adds to and refines the knowledge available for future applications.

5. Principles guiding our use of AI

The uses described above depend on clear choices about purpose, interpretation, responsibility and information. We therefore apply a set of principles across our research, framework development, digital tools and work with organisations and Shared Agendas. These principles allow us to make use of the analytical possibilities of AI while keeping judgement, responsibility and the basis for interpretation explicit. Together, they provide the basis for trustworthy AI-supported sense-making, in which the sources, assumptions and interpretative processes informing AI-supported outputs remain visible and open to examination.

1. **Purpose guides the use of AI.** We start from the question, challenge or task we are trying to address and use AI where it adds relevant capacity. The purpose of the work determines what information is needed, which framework is appropriate and what role AI should play.

2. **Human judgement and responsibility remain central.** We use AI to organise information, identify patterns, explore relationships and possible interpretations or combinations. People assess the relevance of these outputs, bring contextual knowledge to their interpretation and decide how to act. Responsibility for decisions remains with the people and organisations involved.

3. **The basis for interpretation is explicit.** AI-supported analysis is guided by frameworks, criteria, concepts and relationships that we make visible and can revise. This is particularly important when working with complex challenges, where different ways of framing a problem can lead to different interpretations of the same information. Keeping the interpretative basis explicit allows assumptions to be discussed, challenged and improved. It also supports explainability by making visible the frameworks, concepts and relationships through which information has been connected and interpreted.

4. **Evidence, interpretation and uncertainty remain distinguishable.** We seek to preserve the connection between an interpretation and the evidence on which it is based, including the provenance and context of relevant sources, and to make clear where conclusions depend on assumptions or incomplete information. AI-supported inference remains distinguishable from source evidence. Differences between sources or perspectives can themselves be relevant to the analysis and remain visible where they matter to the analysis.

5. **Plural and situated knowledge forms part of the analysis.** Publicly available research and data are only part of the knowledge needed to understand a

complex challenge. Professional experience, local knowledge, participant perspectives and evidence generated through practice may be equally important. We incorporate these forms of knowledge where relevant and avoid treating what is easiest to retrieve digitally as inherently more important than what is known through direct engagement with a place or organisation.

6. **We use information responsibly.** We use information in AI-supported work only when its use is appropriate to the purpose and consistent with the context in which it was generated or shared. Material generated through workshops, interviews and other participatory or research activities may be incorporated when it has been aggregated and anonymised, following the same standards we use in research practice. Personal or identifiable information is not introduced into general-purpose AI systems, and confidential client or partner information is not processed in open AI environments. Where AI forms part of a tool developed specifically for a client or project, information is processed within a controlled, access-restricted environment designed for that purpose, with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality, access and use.

7. **AI-supported work remains reviewable and under human control.** The people involved need to be able to examine, question and revise the interpretations generated through AI-supported analysis. This includes being able, where relevant, to trace an interpretation back to the evidence, assumptions and relationships on which it is based. The same applies to the frameworks and systems maps on which that analysis is based. As new evidence becomes available or the purpose of the work changes, the analysis can be adjusted accordingly.

Where knowledge belongs to SharedAgendas.org and can legitimately be shared, we favour openness and circulation. Much of our methodological work is intentionally developed as open knowledge, and we see value in allowing it to contribute to wider learning, including the development of more capable AI systems. This openness sits alongside clear boundaries around personal, confidential and restricted information.

These principles also shape how we understand our contribution to AI for the public good. Our contribution to AI for the public good concerns both responsible use and the purposes AI serves. Our focus is on strengthening the capacity of people and organisations to understand complex challenges, work with distributed knowledge and organise collective responses around issues that matter publicly.

6. Developing the digital infrastructure

As this work expands, we need to keep frameworks, systems maps, evidence and the digital tools built around them connected over time. Different applications generate new information and learning, while the frameworks and maps themselves continue to develop. Maintaining these connections becomes increasingly important as we work across more places, domains and applications.

SHADIA is the digital architecture supporting this work. It is designed to connect the frameworks and systems maps we develop with evidence, AI-supported analysis and the digital tools used in specific applications. The same architecture can support work across domains while allowing each framework or systems map to retain the concepts and relationships required for its own purpose.

As the architecture develops, it will allow us to relate new evidence to existing systems maps, trace connections across relationships, compare developments across places, examine how relationships combine within relevant dynamics and configurations, and explore possible pathways around particular questions.

Where several frameworks are relevant, connections between them can also be maintained without reducing them to a single representation. Related concepts can also be identified across frameworks, allowing users to extend a pathway, examine a dimension in greater depth or broaden the perspective while preserving the structure and logic of each framework.

Purpose-specific digital tools can then draw on these connected structures in different ways. An organisation exploring strategic opportunities may work through an environment centred on external developments, capabilities and possible pathways or combinations. A Shared Agenda in a specific territory may use another to examine changing conditions, evidence from implementation and relationships between areas of action. Work connecting several places may focus on similarities, differences and complementarities across territories. Each tool can provide access to the information and relationships relevant to its purpose while remaining connected to the wider body of knowledge.

SHADIA is being developed progressively alongside these applications. The frameworks, systems maps and criteria that guide interpretation remain the result of our methodological work. The digital architecture will allow us to apply them across growing bodies of information, maintain connections between evidence and systemic relationships, and carry relevant learning from one application into another. New evidence can be incorporated as it becomes available and previous interpretations revisited as knowledge develops. It will also preserve the connections between source evidence, the framework elements and relationships through which it is interpreted, and the AI-supported analyses that build on them, so that users can trace the basis of relevant interpretations,

distinguish evidence from inference and revisit or challenge them when new evidence or contextual knowledge becomes available.

SHADIA will connect systemic analysis, AI-supported sense-making and digital environments for collective work. It will also provide the infrastructure for relating place-based knowledge to wider developments and carrying learning across Shared Agendas and domains. The principles set out in the previous section guide how we develop this infrastructure, how information is used and how human judgement and responsibility remain embedded in its application.