




# **The state and outlook for the European environment: challenges and opportunities for sustainability transitions**

A close-up photograph of a leaf, showing the intricate network of veins. The veins are light green and stand out against the darker green of the leaf's surface. The image is slightly blurred, giving it a soft, ethereal quality. A semi-transparent white horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text.

# **Challenges of unprecedented scale and urgency**

# The vision

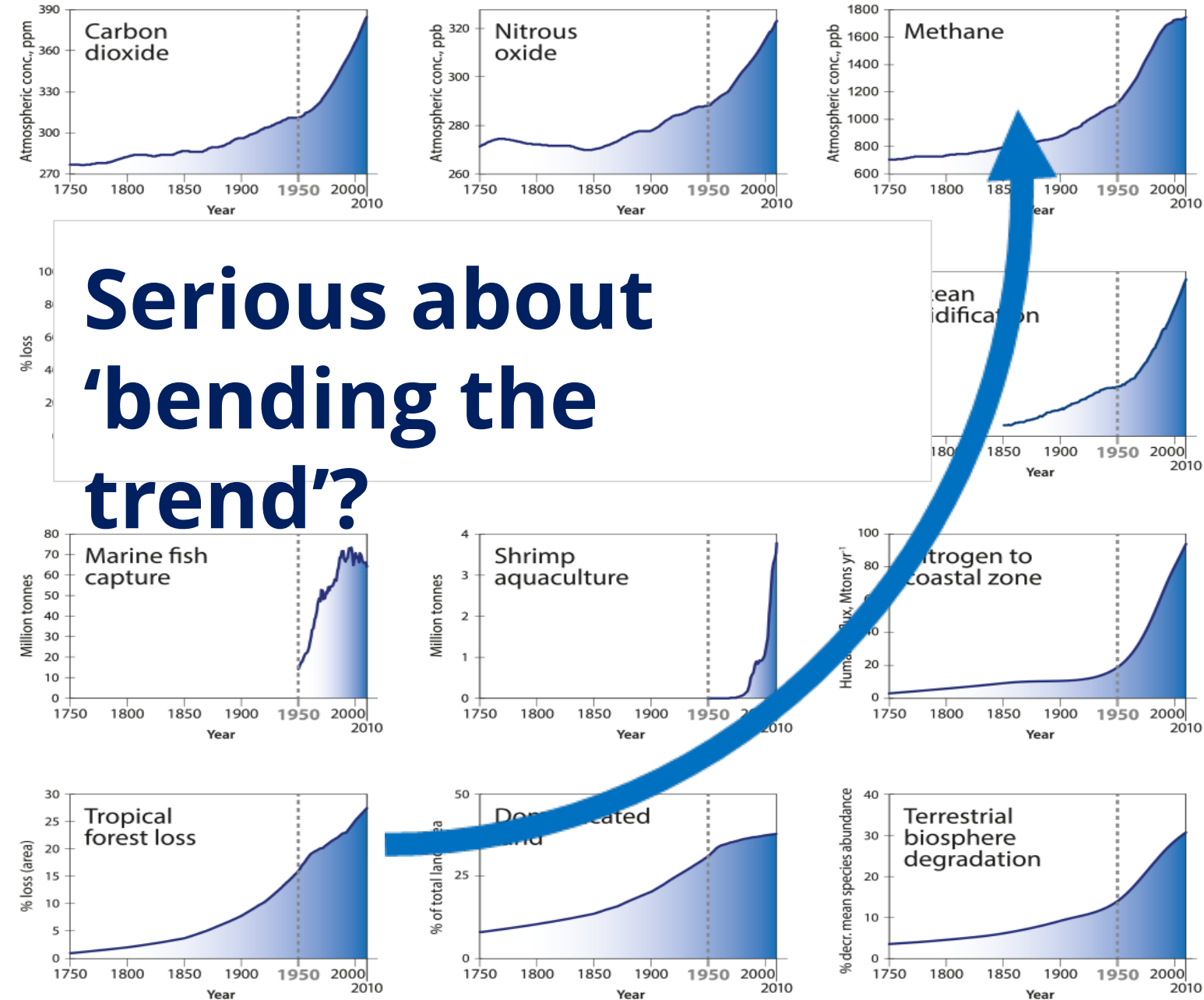


In 2050, we live well,  
within the planet's  
ecological limits



**Green Deal**  
**8EAP**





**Serious about  
'bending the  
trend'?**

Expectations/  
policy promises



OR

How credible?  
How feasible?  
What sort of  
policies and  
knowledge?

# Major challenges for established policy approaches

## Are EU policies addressing the underlying drivers of environmental degradation?

In **2001**, the EU set itself the target to halt biodiversity loss in the EU by **2010**.

In **2011**, the EU set the target to ‘halt loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by **2020**’.

EU Biodiversity Targets (2020)	Progress at mid-term
<b>2020 Headline Target</b> Halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020 and restore them in so far as is feasible, while stepping up EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.	No significant progress towards target On the basis of the 2019 State of the Environment and Outlook report. This is consistent with the implications for the capacity of ecosystems to provide ecosystem services in the future. While many local successes on the ground delivers positive outcomes, these have not been scaled up to have a measurable impact on the overall EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.

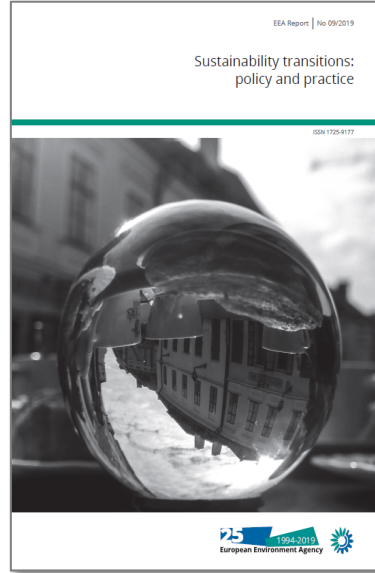
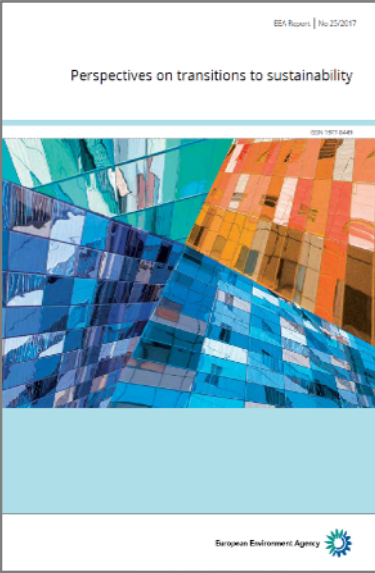
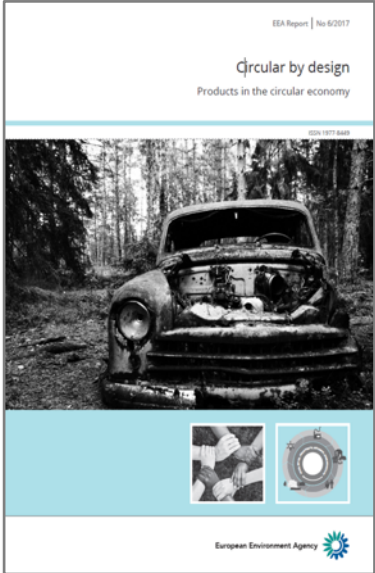
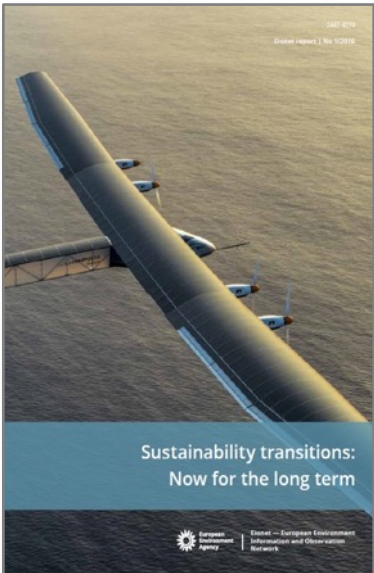
**Next? ‘2030’?  
Or, addressing the  
fundamental drivers?**

Source: *Mid-term review of the EU biodiversity strategy*

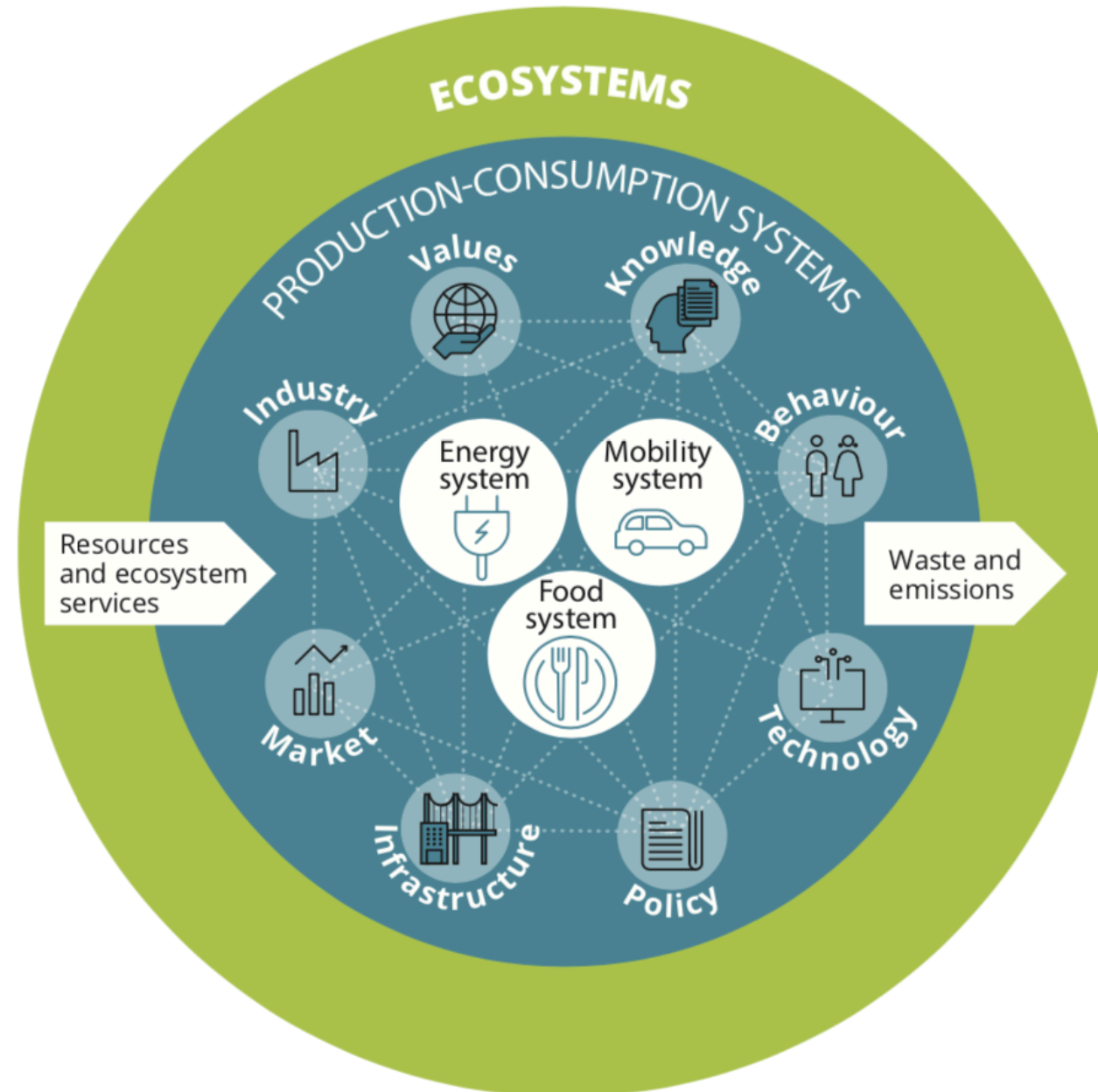


# Sustainability transitions

# Sustainability transitions: novel concepts and uncertain implications

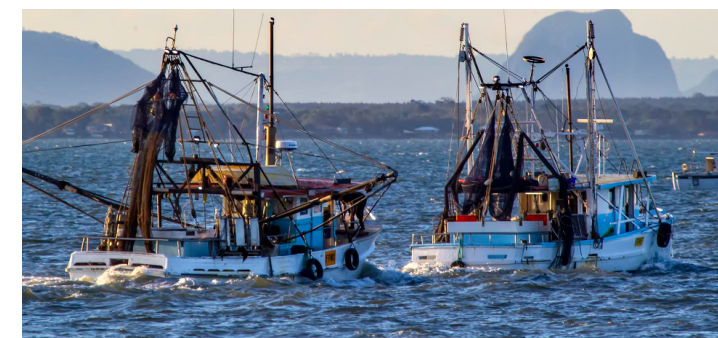
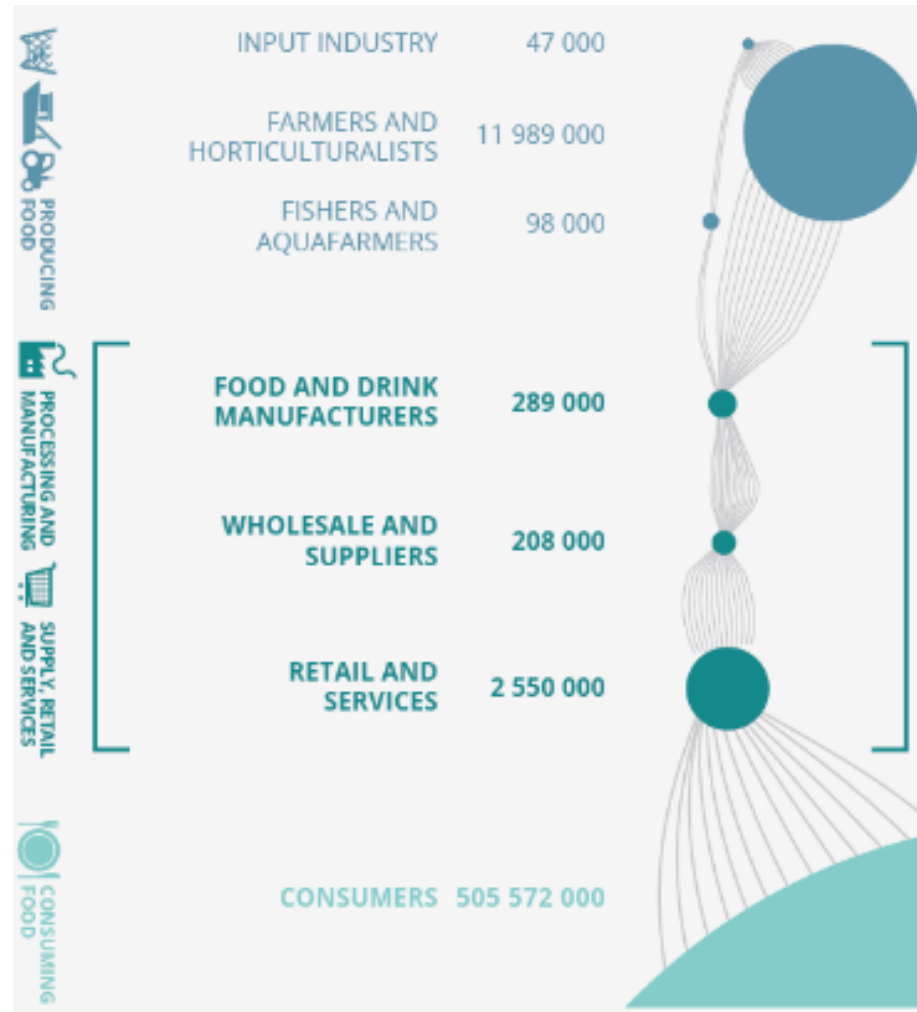
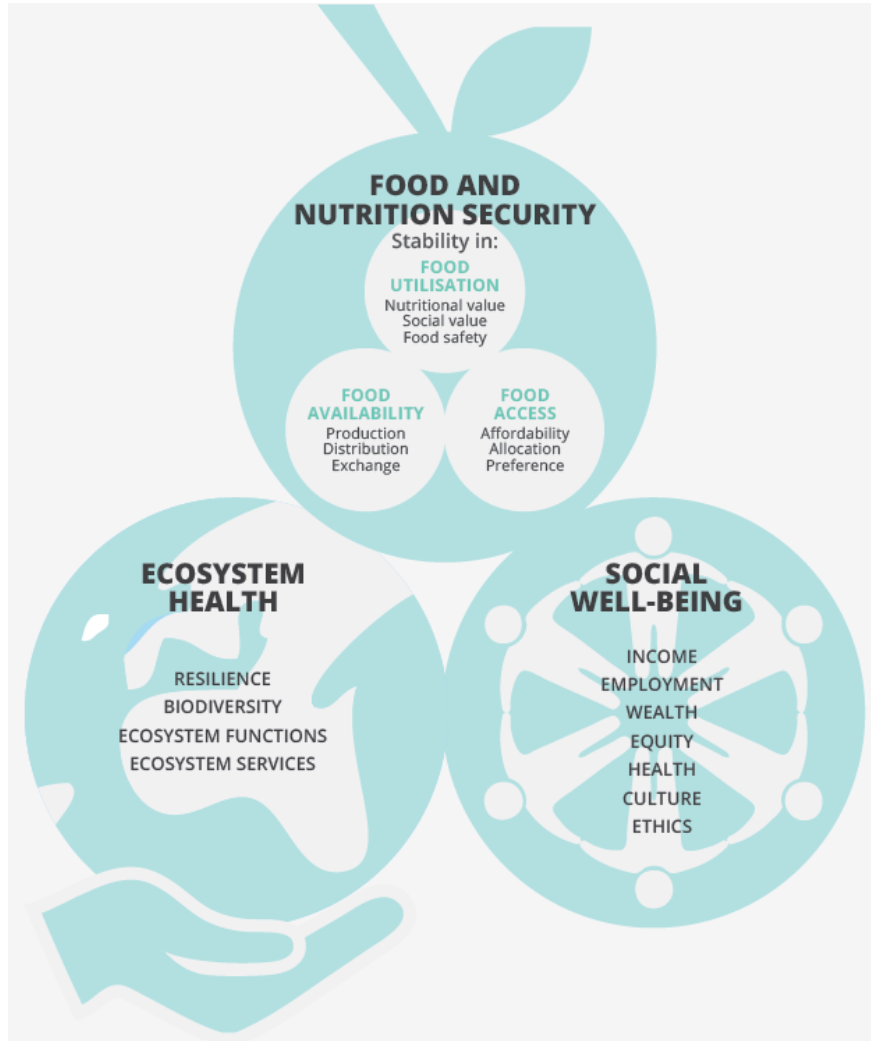


# Key systems driving persistent sustainability problems

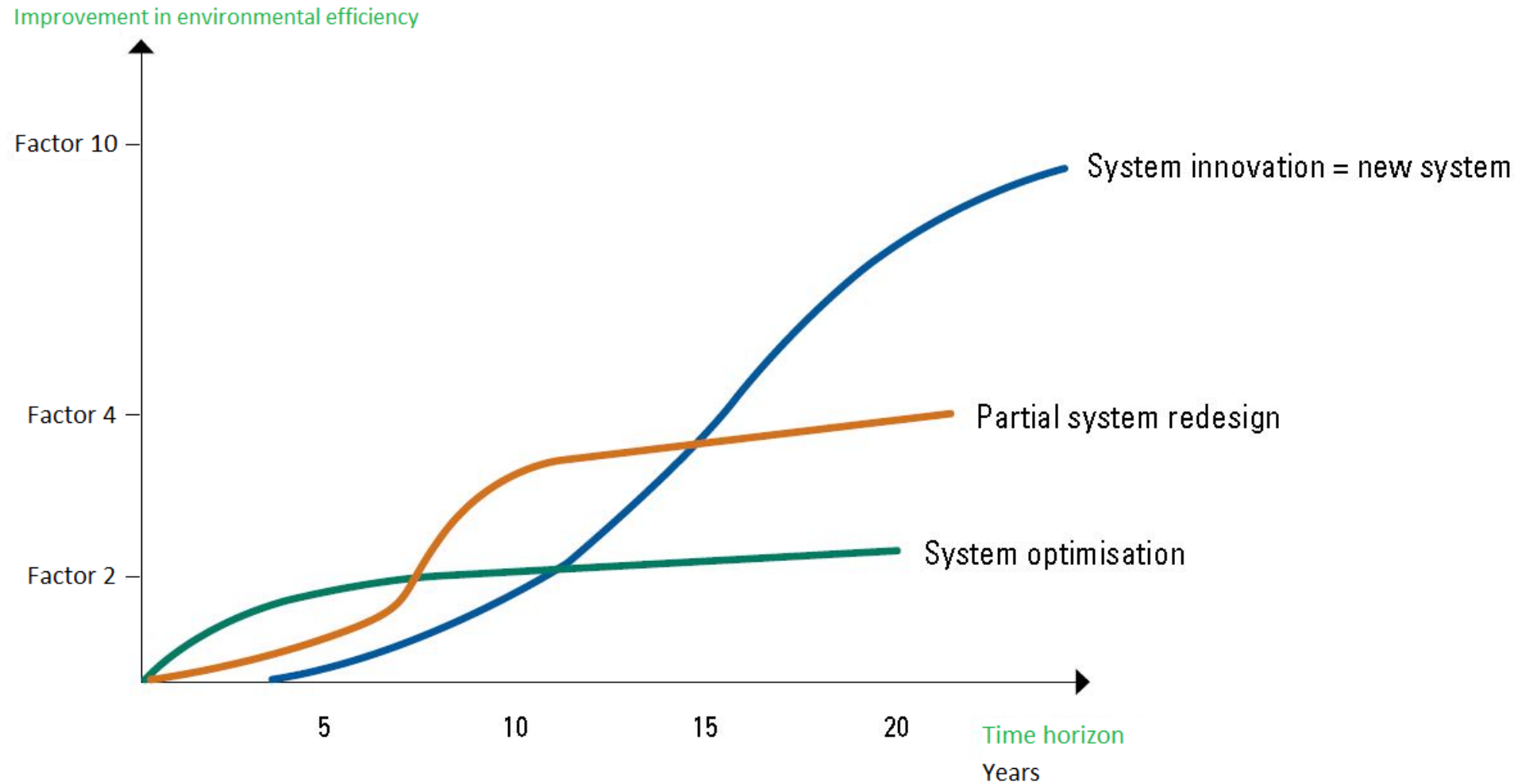




# Complex, multifunctional systems, diverse lock-ins



# The scale of needed change requires system innovation



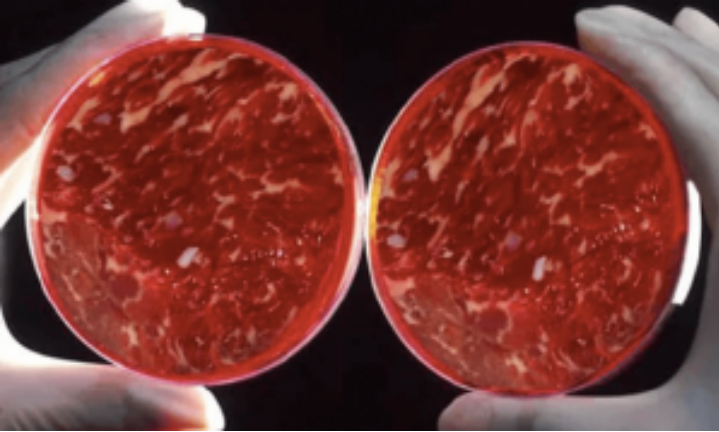
Source: UNEP

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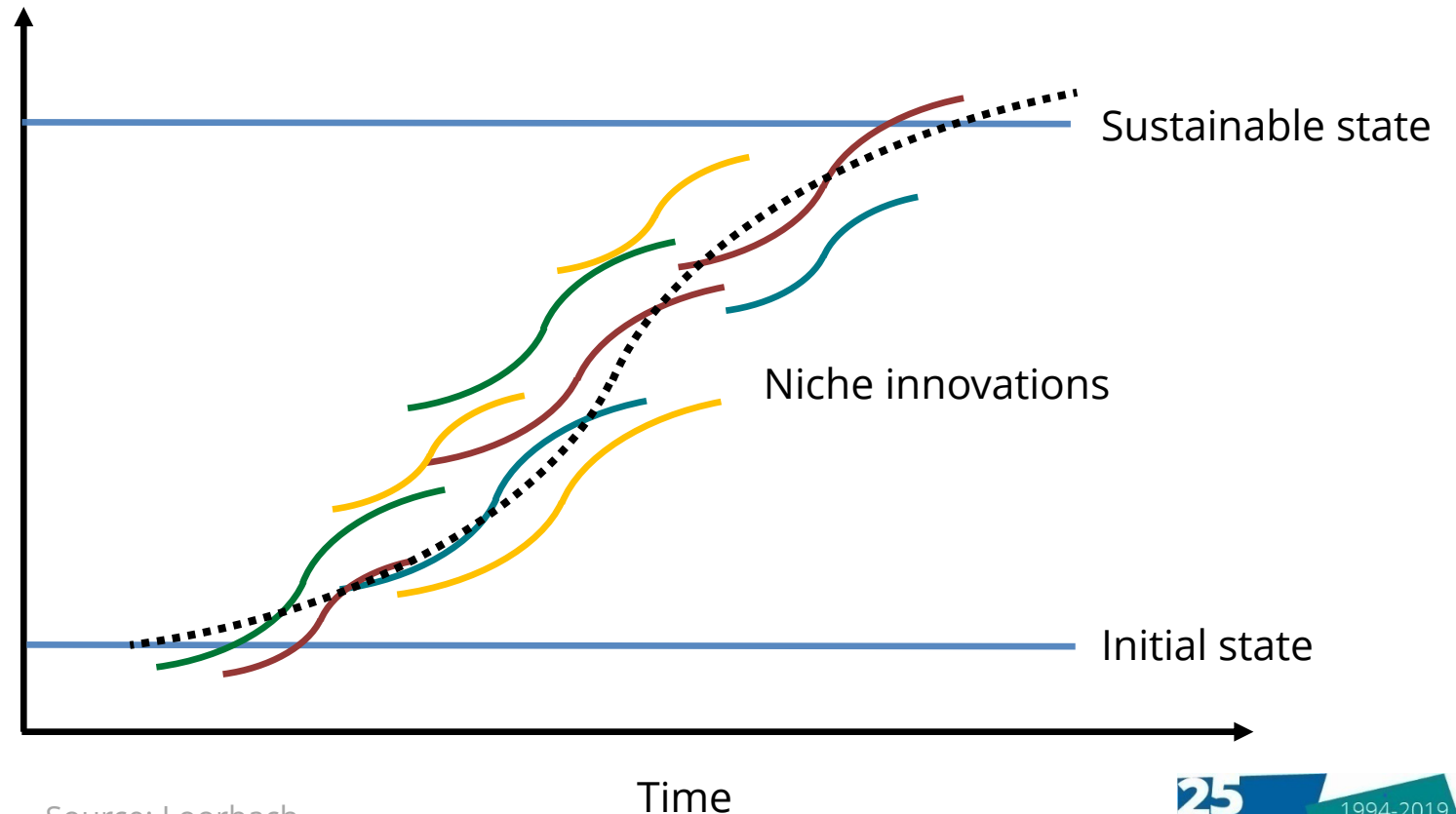
# **Implications for European policy, knowledge and action**

# Rethinking how we meet societal needs

Systemic change involves multiple innovations – entailing a fundamental rethinking of how to perform societal functions

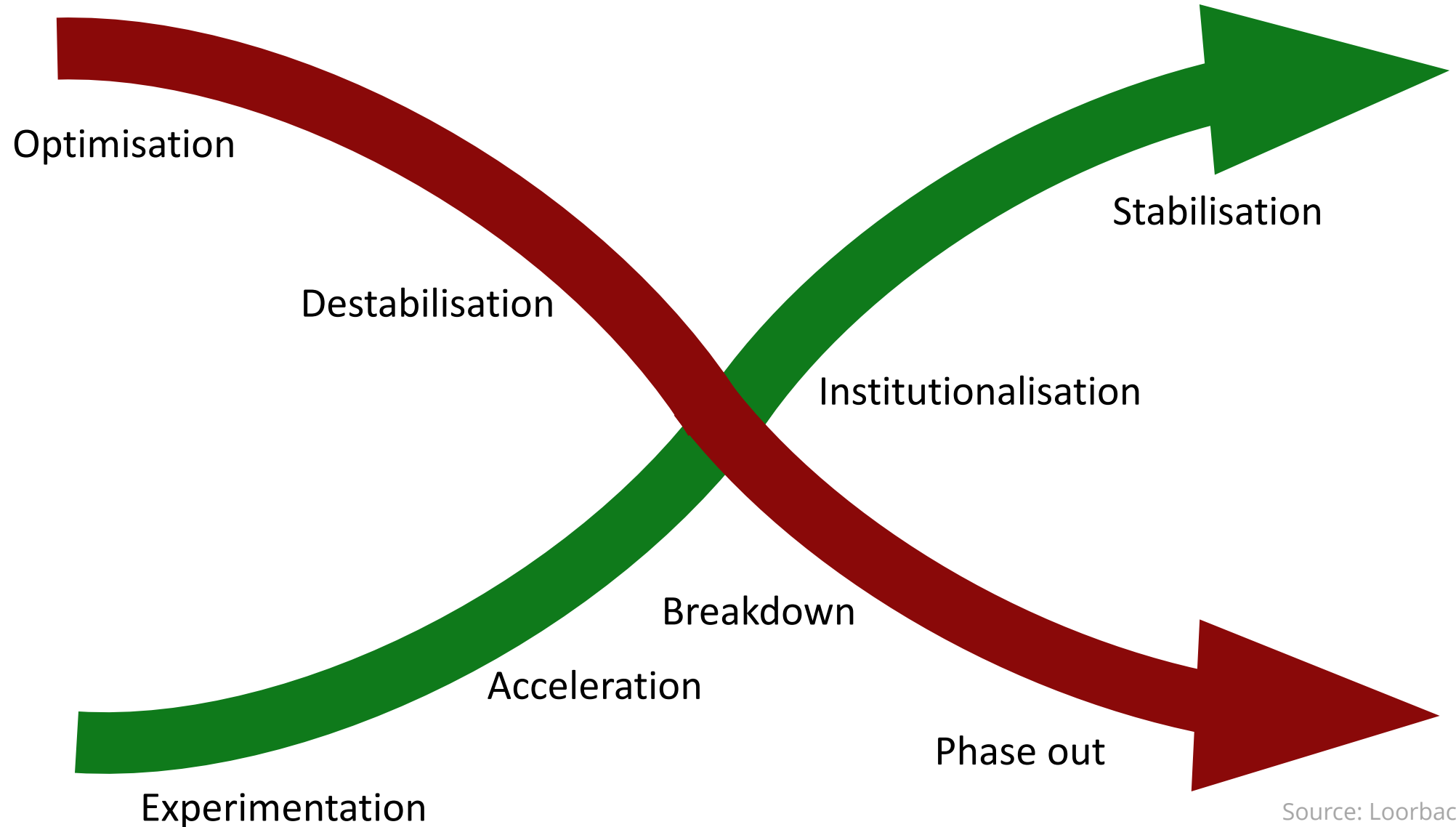


Environmental performance

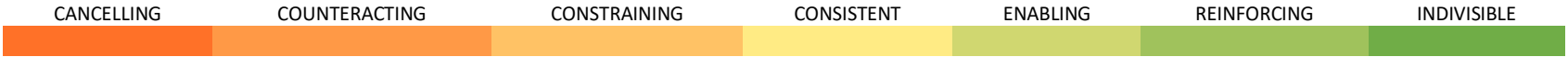
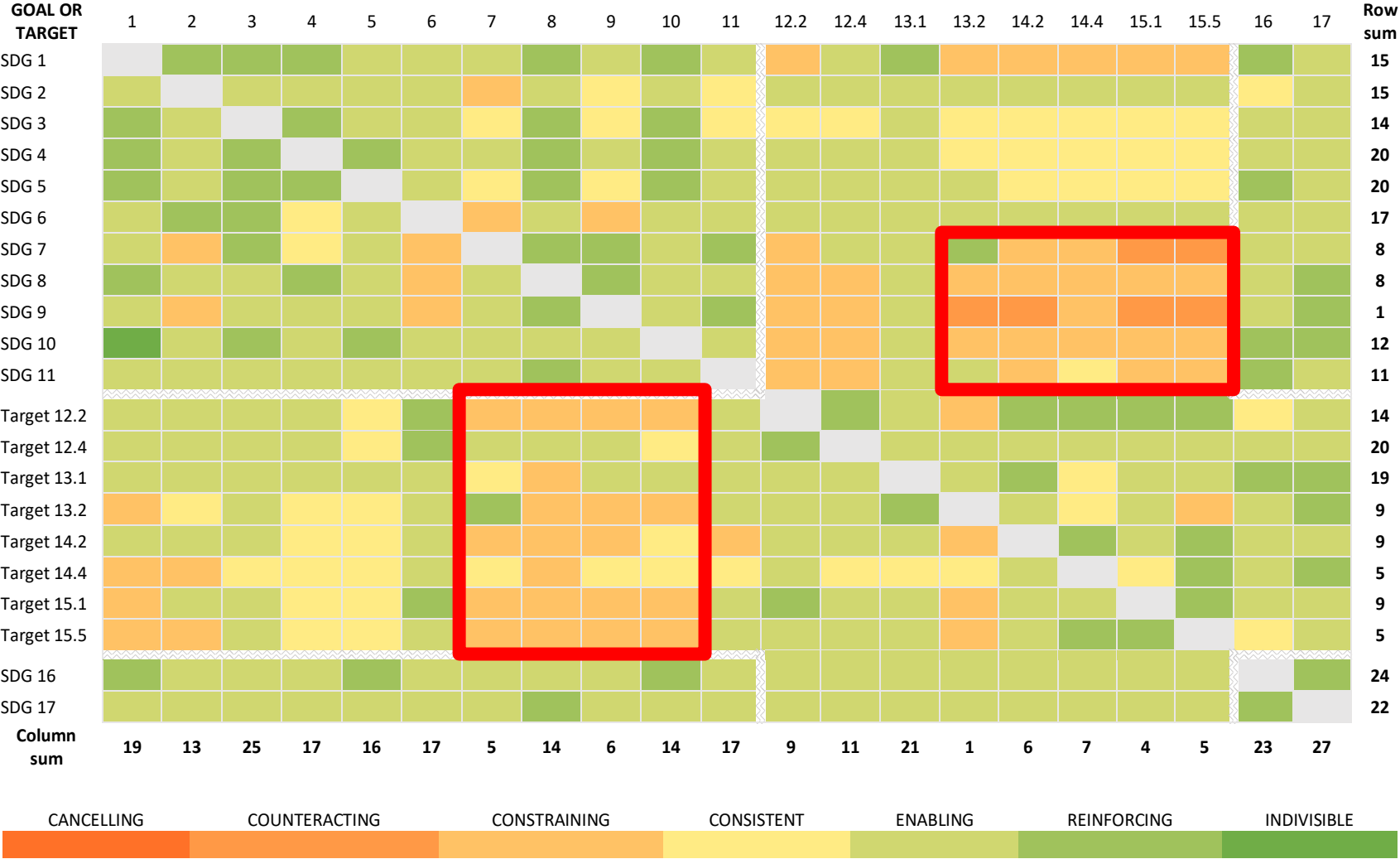


Source: Loorbach

# Systemic change is disruptive: the 'x-curve'



# Trade-offs between sustainability outcomes



# Guiding systemic change

- Promote clear direction of change through ambitious visions, targets and missions
- Transformative policy frameworks
- Aligning policies between different domains
- Promoting coherence of actions across European, national, regional and local governance levels



*I want Europeans to build the future of our Union. They should play a leading and active part in setting our priorities and our level of ambition.*

Ursula von der Leyen, Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024

# Enabling innovation and system change

- Many seeds for transitions exist: technologies, social practices, business models, institutions, etc.
- Innovation policy needs to promote diversity, explore impacts and build coalitions of stakeholders
- Diverse policies can help new innovations and practices to spread and compete with established approaches
- Cities as hubs of innovation and networking with the potential to transform systems at local scales
- Governments can promote networking, learning, knowledge sharing





# Enabling society wide action and a 'just transition'



Transitions bring surprises, trade-offs and unintended consequences

Requires governance that is anticipatory and adaptive

Diverse policy areas are needed to enable socially fair transitions: sectoral, education, employment, welfare, regional, etc.

# Mobilising finance for systemic change

- Aligning public budgets with sustainability goals
- Reorienting the financial sector
- Predictable pathways and incentives – getting price right
- Support for experimentation, innovation, upscaling, diffusion



#SusFinEU

# Sustainable finance



European  
Commission

# Developing knowledge and skills for transitions



An EU knowledge strategy could help create, organise and use diverse knowledge:

- societal systems – actors, lock-ins, trends, etc.
- big data, artificial intelligence
- practice-based evidence: innovations, impacts, successes, failures
- early warning: harms and opportunities
- new skills, infrastructures, institutions

# In conclusion



- Europe has opportunities to transform its economy to make it fit for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Sustainability needs to become the overarching principle guiding coherent policies and actions across society.
- Environment and climate policies alone cannot deliver needed change. Enabling transitions requires coherent actions across all levels of government to unleash the creativity and power of citizens, businesses and communities.
- Building on the ‘Political guidelines for the European Commission 2019-2024’ the EU can take global leadership in achieving transitions if it seizes the opportunity.