THE SEARCH FOR RADICAL
ALTERNATIVES:
KEY ASPECTS AND PRINCIPLES

**Framework of the
Vikalp Sangam Process**

7th Avatar

The Vikalp Sangam (VS) framework was first drafted in 2014, to stimulate dialogue in the VS process (www.vikalpsangam.org). It has continuously evolved since then, based on discussions at successive confluences, and written comments. This illustrated version is based on its 7th avatar (2024). For comments and correspondence: info@vikalpsangam.org

Illustrated and designed by Urvi Shah (urvishxh@gmail.com) with inputs from Shrishtee Bajpai, Ashish Kothari and Sujatha Padmanabhan.
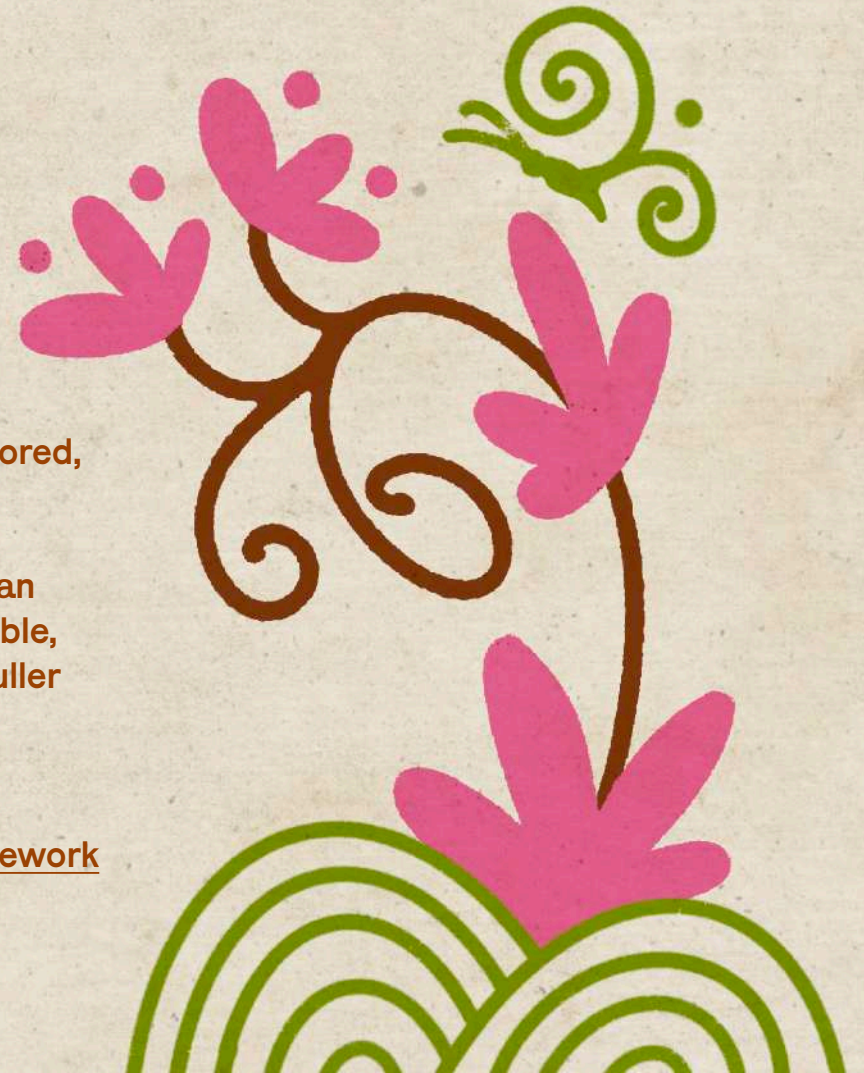
HOW TO GO THROUGH THIS DOCUMENT?

This document is designed to be a living, evolving note. It's meant to be explored, questioned, and shaped by those who engage with it.

As you move through the pages, you'll notice a few empty spaces. They are an open invitation for you to pause, reflect, and add your own thoughts. If possible, you could send us your inputs by email. Every contribution helps to build a fuller picture, sparking dialogue and a shared understanding.

For a more detailed version, please visit this link.
https://vikalpsangam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Alternatives-Framework-7th-Avatar-digital-v1.4.pdf

The earth, the womb of all life, is in trouble. Humanity, ridden with its own crises of inequality and exploitation, has mistreated its only home to the extent that life as we know it is itself imperiled. The coronavirus pandemic period (2020-22), which visiblized the cracks in the systems of the world, was a glaring symptom of the interconnected crises engulfing us. Do we have the wisdom and foresight to save ourselves and the diversity of life on the planet?

Can we take the urgent, widespread, and deep-rooted actions needed for this? A world that is built on respect, compassion, love, responsibility, freedom, diversity, and humility…not only in the relations among humans but also between humans and the rest of nature… surely we can not only dream this but also forge paths towards it?

This would entail a collective search for pathways and visions that are real alternatives to today's dominant economic, social and political system, taking us towards equity, justice, and ecological sustainability. How can such pathways and visions build on an existing heritage of ideas, values, worldviews, and cultures, and on past or new grassroots practices? How can they help meet the fundamental needs and aspirations of all, without exploiting the earth or privileging some at the expense of others? This note lays out some ideas, and is offered as one means to stimulate dialogue and visioning.

LOSS OF LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS

CAPITALIST CORPORATE CONTROL

REDUCTIONIST SCIENCE

CASTEISM

UNDEMOCRATIC KNOWLEDGE CONTROL

PATRIARCHY

CULTURAL INEQUALITY

DIGITAL HEGEMONY

ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION

MILITARY CONTROL

INTOLERANCE TOWARDS DIFFERENCES

INEQUITY & INJUSTICE

COLONIALISM

ALIENATION FROM OUR SPIRITUAL SELVES

HUMILITY

SELF-RELIANCE

JUSTICE

RESPECT

SUSTAINABILITY

AUTONOMY

RESPONSIBILITY

LOVE

FREEDOM

COMPASSION

EQUITY

CULTURAL XENOPHOBIA

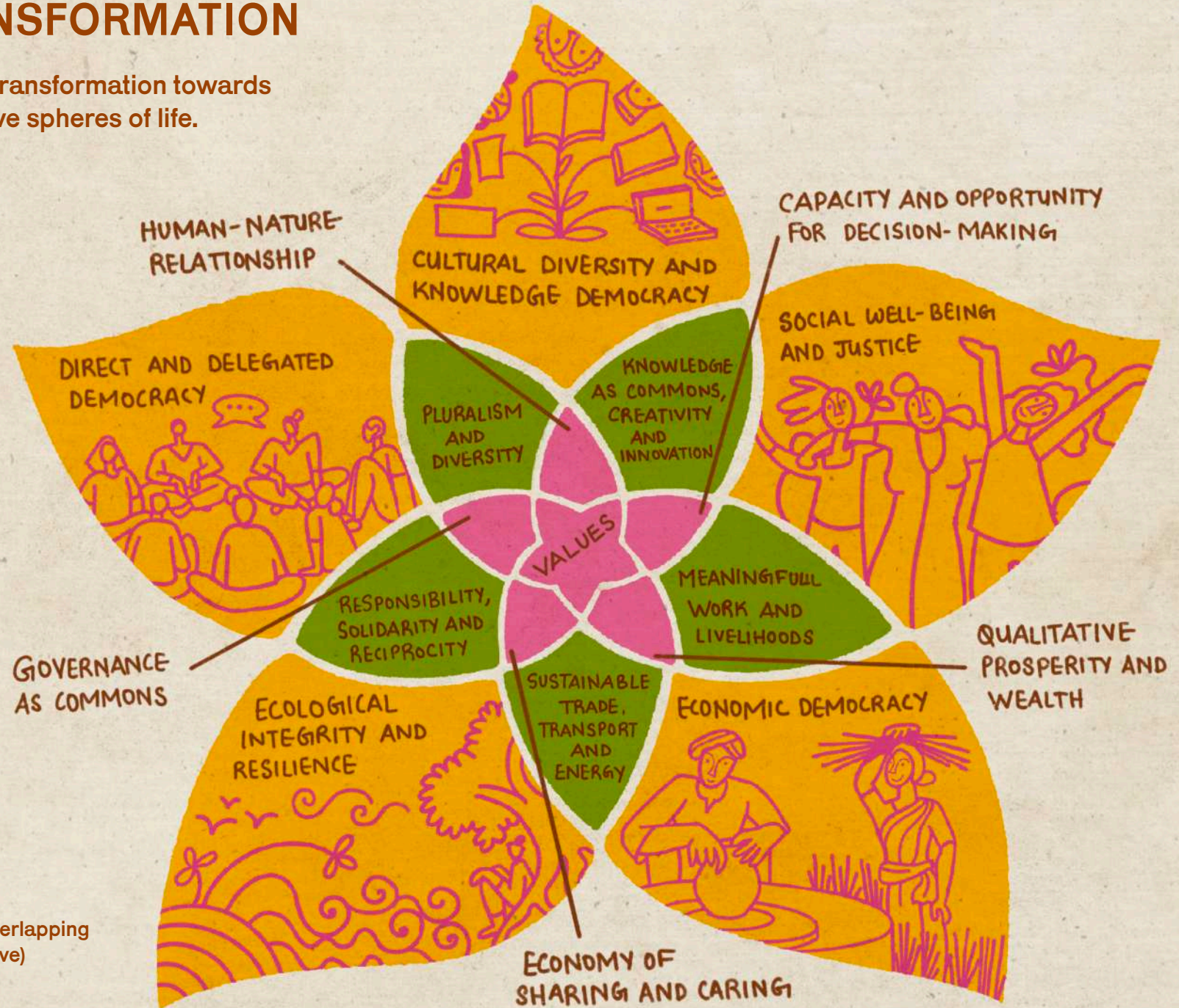BIG TECH

PRIVATISATION OF PROPERTY

ABLEISM

ALIENATION FROM NATURE

CENTRALISED & HIERARCHICAL STATE SYSTEMS

INDIVIDUALISATION

FLOWER OF TRANSFORMATION

Vikalp Sangam understands transformation towards justice as an intersection of five spheres of life.

HUMAN-NATURE-RELATIONSHIP

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND KNOWLEDGE DEMOCRACY

CAPACITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR DECISION-MAKING

SOCIAL WELL-BEING AND JUSTICE

DIRECT AND DELEGATED DEMOCRACY

KNOWLEDGE AS COMMONS, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

PLURALISM AND DIVERSITY

VALUES

GOVERNANCE AS COMMONS

RESPONSIBILITY, SOLIDARITY AND RECIPROCITY

MEANINGFULL WORK AND LIVELIHOODS

QUALITATIVE PROSPERITY AND WEALTH

ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY AND RESILIENCE

SUSTAINABLE TRADE, TRANSPORT AND ENERGY

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

ECONOMY OF SHARING AND CARING

(NOTE: The topics mentioned in the overlapping areas are only indicative, not exhaustive)

Many or most current initiatives may not fulfill all the elements of the aforementioned five spheres. As a rough thumb-rule, perhaps we can consider something an alternative if it addresses at least two of the above spheres (i.e. is actually helping to achieve them, or is explicitly or implicitly oriented towards them), and does not violate but rather is open to and considers adopting the other spheres.

It is important to stress that this is not a judgemental or moralistic process of exclusion, but a practical one to enable some kind of distinctions for the purpose of collaboration, visioning, and dialogue. One outcome of the Vikalp Sangam process, based on this Framework note, is the Alternatives Transformation Format, a tool to help initiatives and organisations to self- assess how holistic and integrated (or conversely, inconsistent and fragmented) their actions and transformations are, and where they may want to make changes.
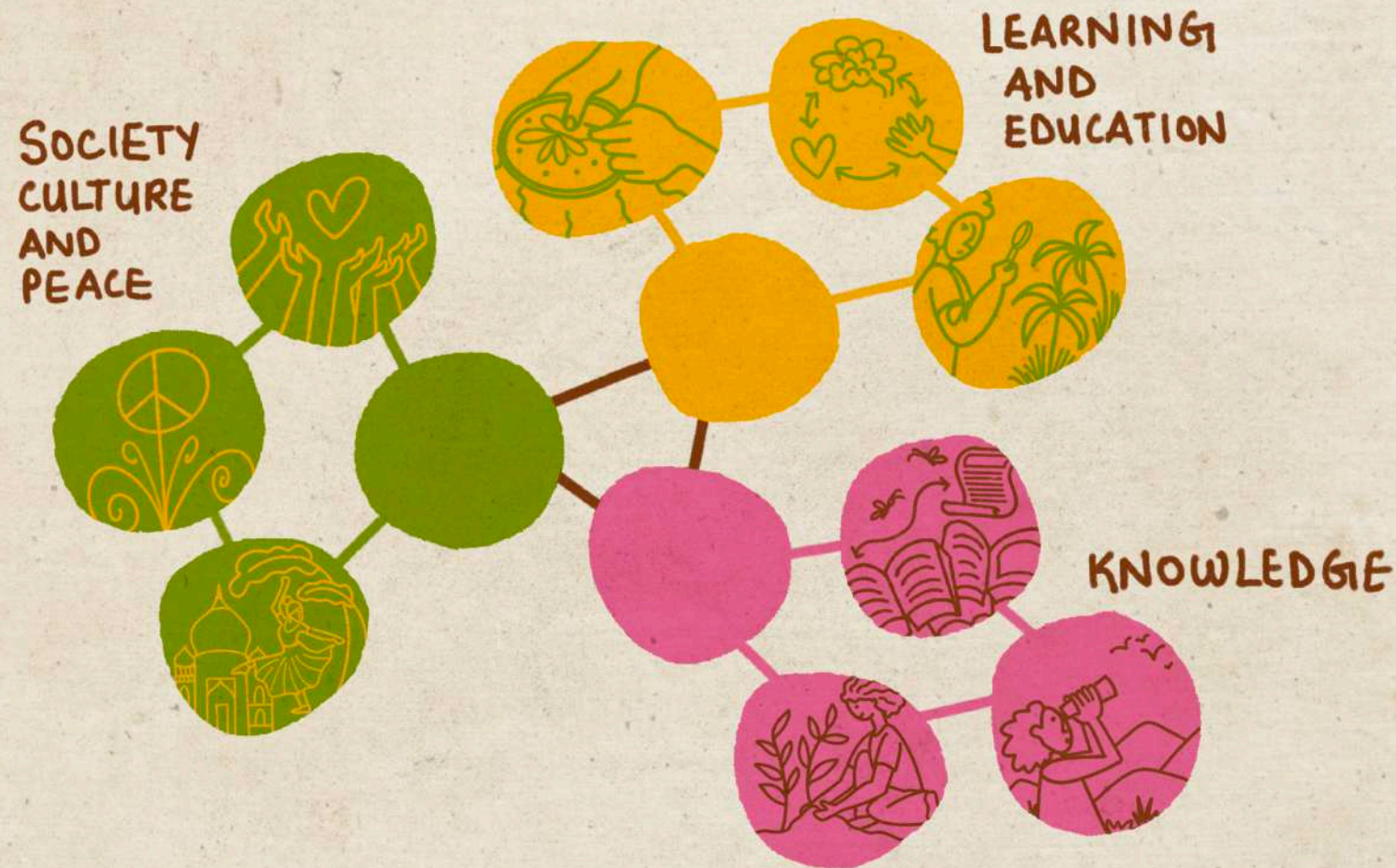
We note that both the above spheres, and the principles/values described below, are subject to differences of scale (local to global, personal to community and species level, etc) and time (short and long-term, and even the different perceptions of time, linear, circular, spiral).

What principles and values are expressed in Alternatives?

VALUES

FLOWER OF TRANSFORMATION

ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY & RIGHTS OF NATURE

RIGHT TO RESPONSIBLY PARTICIPATE

EQUITY, INCLUSION, JUSTICE, ACCESS

NON-VIOLENCE, PEACE, HARMONY

SIMPLICITY & SUFFICIENCY - NEED OVER GREED

COLLECTIVE COMMONS & SOLIDARITY

CO-EXISTENCE & INTERDEPENDENCE

TRUST

CARE

JOY

BIOCULTURAL CONNECTIVITY

DIGNITY OF LABOUR

DIVERSITY & PLURALISM

LOCALISATION & SELF-RELIANCE

RESILIENCE & ADAPTABILITY

AUTONOMY & SOVEREIGNTY

What are the Alternatives in various sectors/fields/aspects of life?

SOCIETY CULTURE AND PEACE

LEARNING AND EDUCATION

KNOWLEDGE

SOCIETY, CULTURE AND PEACE

- Safeguard and revive arts, crafts, languages, and cultural diversity; nurture ecological and social harmony.
- Remove inequalities (caste, class, gender, ethnicity, literacy, race, religion, location) while fostering dignity, inclusion, and justice.
- Promote dialogue, ethical living, and tolerance; encourage approaches rooted in equity and shared humanity.
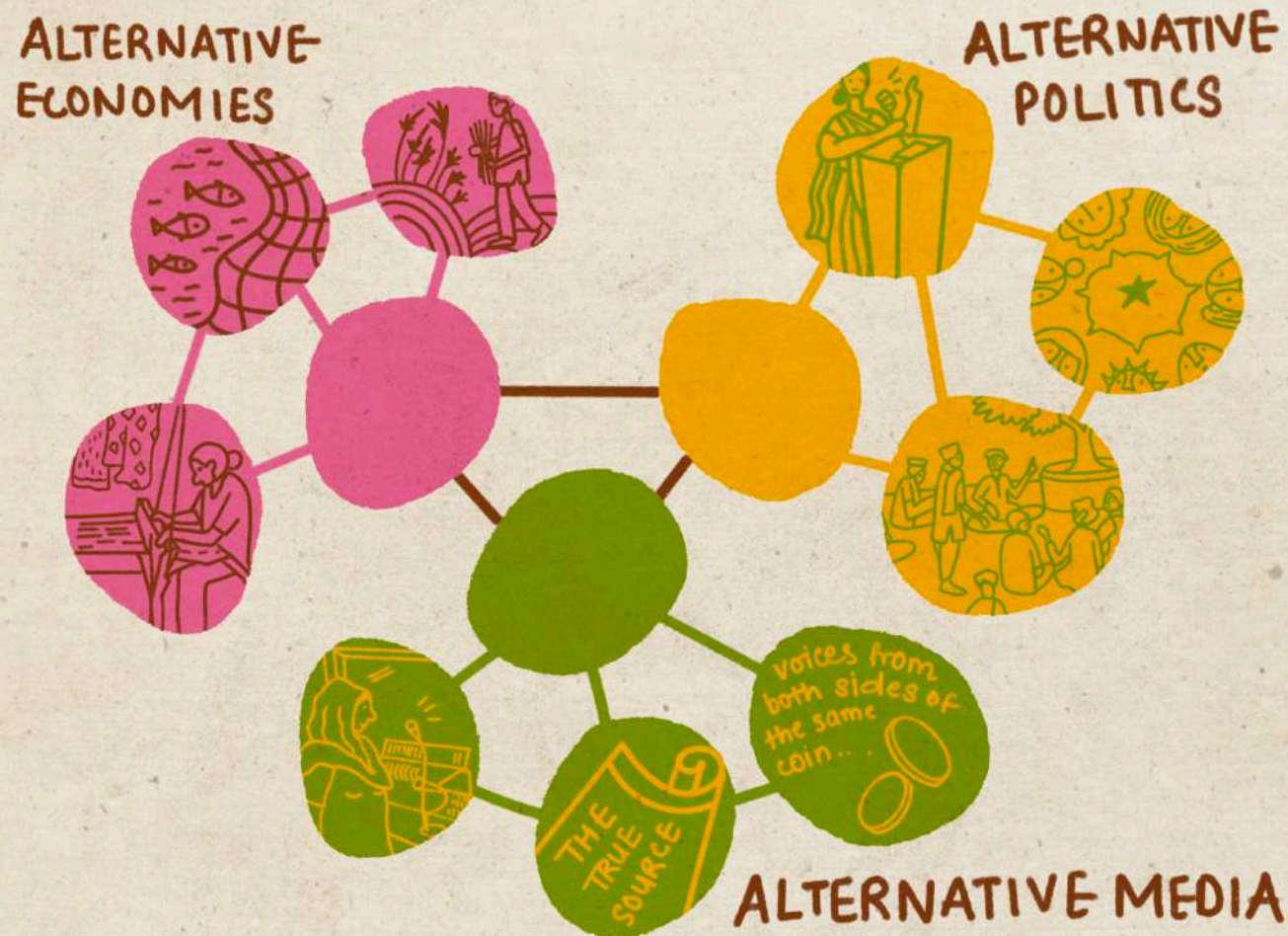
LEARNING AND EDUCATION

- Create learning spaces connecting people with nature, communities, inner awareness, and humanity.
- Blend formal and informal, traditional and modern education to nurture holistic growth and critical thinking.
- Ensure public accountability, inclusive teaching methods, and education that fosters joy, creativity and collaboration.

KNOWLEDGE

- Treat knowledge as a shared commons, enabling exchange between diverse traditions and disciplines.
- Share knowledge through respectful, inspiring methods such as storytelling, oral traditions, and modern media.
- Integrate different ways of knowing to advance equity, sustainability, and creativity.

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES

ALTERNATIVE POLITICS

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

voices from both sides of the same coin...

THE TRUE SOURCE

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES & TECHNOLOGIES

- Build localised, decentralised, democratically controlled economies supporting diverse livelihoods, cooperatives, and gift exchanges.
- Guide production, trade, and technology with ecological integrity, cultural respect, and well-being as alternatives to GDP growth.
- Focus on solutions addressing root social and political issues, centering justice and sustainability.
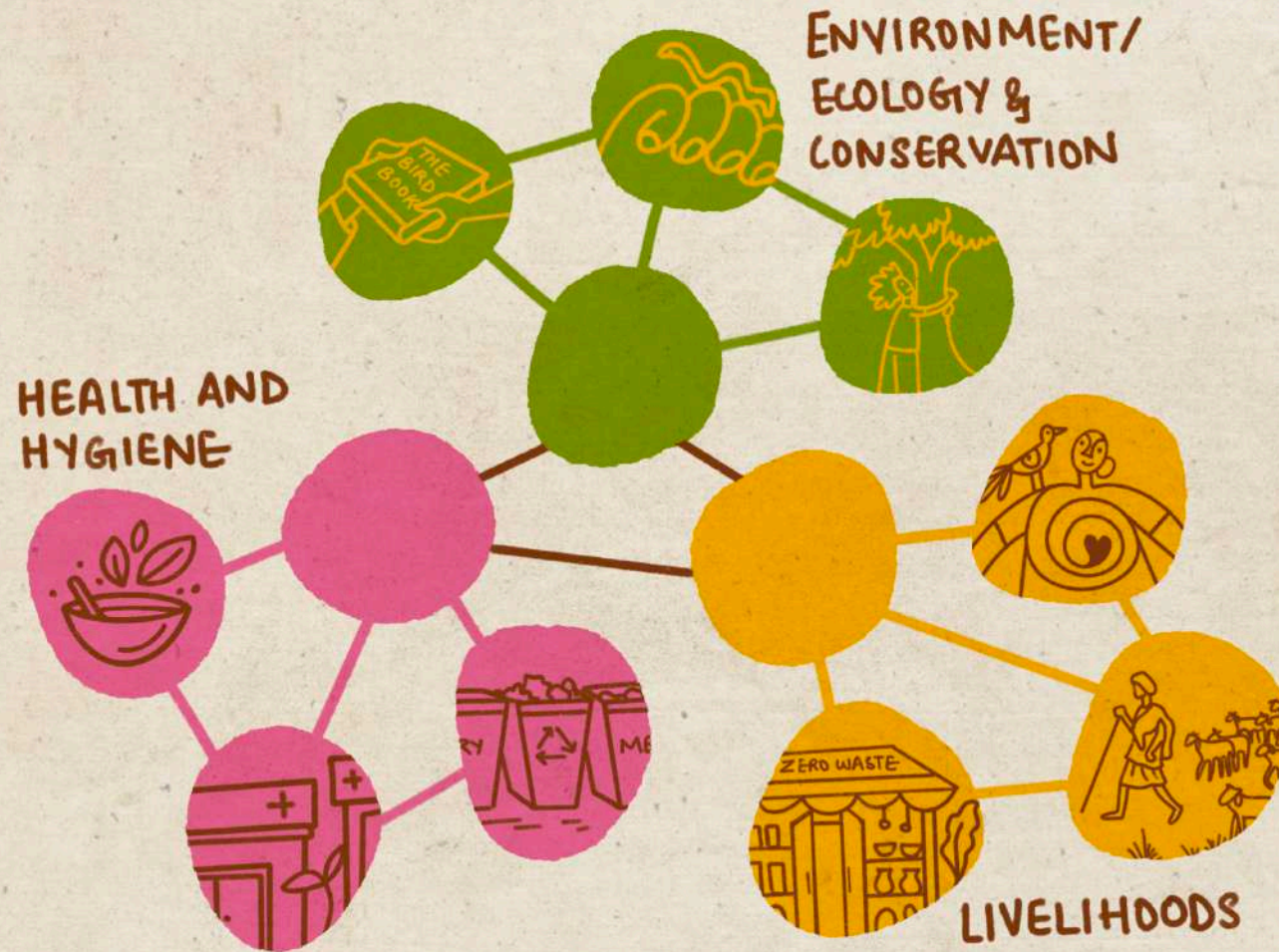
ALTERNATIVE POLITICS

- Create people-centred governance through direct participation, consensus, and fair power distribution.
- Link local democratic institutions across ecological and biocultural regions, rethinking boundaries for justice and sustainability.
- Strengthen transparency, accountability, and inclusive political spaces balancing individual and collective priorities.

KNOWLEDGE

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ENVIRONMENT/ECOLOGY & CONSERVATION

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

LIVELIHOODS

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

- Ensure provision of adequate nutrition, water, sanitation, clean environment, and safe mobility, thus preventing illnesses.

- Guarantee equitable healthcare through accountable public systems blending modern and traditional approaches.

- Encourage community-led health systems and shared responsibility for hygiene, ending caste-based division of work.

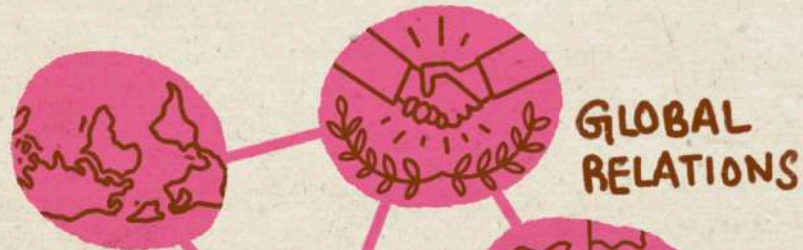## ENVIRONMENT, CONSERVATION, AND ECOLOGY

- Conserve land, water, and biodiversity using local and modern knowledge, linked to livelihoods and regeneration, and community decision-making.

- Reduce pollution and waste, deepen understanding of nature, and respect the rights of species and ecosystems.

- Choose restoration-focused solutions over superficial or symbolic measures.

LIVELIHOODS

- Support dignified, sustainable, fulfilling work, including eco-regenerative traditional occupations in farming, crafts, and fisheries.

- Promote manufacturing and services where people have equitable control and share fairly in revenues.

- Ensure collective access to land, water, forests, urban spaces, resources, technology, and knowledge.

What are the Alternatives in various sectors/fields/aspects of life?

SETTLEMENTS & TRANSPORTATION

GLOBAL RELATIONS

LAW / CUSTOM

SETTLEMENTS AND TRANSPORTATION

- Design rural–urban settlements that are sustainable, equitable, and fulfilling, with accessible housing and green architecture.
- Localise water and energy generation, protect biodiversity, and minimise waste using safe, toxin-free materials.
- Foster community-driven planning, equitable transport systems, and public spaces that prioritise people and non-motorised travel.

GLOBAL RELATIONS

- Promote diplomacy based on collective well-being, trust, and respect, addressing historical grievances.
- Support global disarmament, bans on harmful trade, and a multi-polar world without superiority claims.
- Encourage universal citizenship and greater roles for non-state collectives in global governance.

LAW AND CUSTOM

- Shape norms and laws through democratic, equitable processes grounded in dignity, diversity, and fairness.
- Address harm through empathy, redress, and rehabilitation rather than punishment.
- Promote values as shared daily practices, not just imposed rules.

What are the Alternatives in various sectors/fields/aspects of life?

ENERGY

- Advance community-run renewable energy with equitable access, replacing harmful large-scale sources.
- Support traditional and modern non-electric options, efficiency, and fair distribution of costs and benefits.
- Prioritise relevant, affordable technologies that uphold ecological and social well-being.

FOOD

- Ensure safe, nutritious, culturally diverse food, with communities in control of production and distribution.
- Promote organic farming, agro-biodiversity, and strong producer–consumer connections.
- Value slow, local, and traditional foods over unsustainable or elitist trends.

WATER

- Manage water sustainably, efficiently, and equitably, keeping it as a shared commons.
- Promote decentralised conservation of wetlands through democratic governance.
- Focus on community-governed, accessible water solutions for all.

INTEGRATE ART & CREATIVITY INTO DAILY LIFE

UNDERSTAND ROOTS OF CURRENT CRISES & CO-DEVELOP SOLUTIONS

NURTURE PARTICIPATORY PEOPLE-LED PROCESSES

SHARE RESOURCES & SKILLS COLLECTIVELY

CELEBRATE NATURE-BASED TRADITIONS AND PLURALISTIC SPIRITUALITY

LEARN FROM DIVERSE TRADITIONS & THINKERS

RAISE CONSUMER AWARENESS & PRODUCER ACCOUNTABILITY

RESPECT RIGHTS OF NATURE

PRACTICE SUSTAINABILITY, EQUITY, INTEGRITY AND SELF-AWARENESS IN PERSONAL LIFE

PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL PROCESSES FOR TRANSFORMATION

ENCOURAGE INNOVATION, EXPERIMENTATION AND NETWORKING OF ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

SUPPORT NON-VIOLENT DIALOGUE AND HEALING

CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES & BIASES

EMBRACE CULTURAL & LIFESTYLE DIVERSITY

DECOLONISE MINDSETS, EDUCATION & INSTITUTIONS

PROMOTE ALTERNATIVE, VALUE-BASED LEARNING

RESIST UNSUSTAINABLE & UNJUST SYSTEMS

AMPLIFY MARGINALIZED VOICES IN DECISIONS

ENABLE DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCES

RECLAIM, RESTORE & PROTECT THE COMMONS

HOW TO ACHIEVE SCALE?

HOW TO RETHINK ACADEMICS / 'DISCIPLINES' / EPISTEMOLOGIES?

WHAT WOULD BE THE NATURE OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE (BEYOND THE UN)?

WHO WILL CATALYSE THE TRANSFORMATION? MASS MOVEMENTS? NGOs? WORKER UNIONS? POLITICAL PARTIES?

WHAT WOULD BE THE NATURE OF THE BUSINESS SECTOR?

WHAT CHANGES WOULD BE NEEDED IN INDIVIDUAL LIFESTYLES?

WOULD THERE BE A STATE? IT'S FORM AND ROLE?