

Fertile Ground

A mapping and analysis of
the vibrant ecosystem of
organisations across Europe
working to transform our
economic system

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Metabolic

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Our current economic system is driving multiple, interconnected crises.

Technological expansion is accelerating faster than governance can manage, privatising and concentrating benefits while socialising and distributing risks. Ecologically, we are transgressing planetary boundaries at an alarming rate, destabilising the very systems that sustain life. Economically, financialisation has inflated markets far beyond the real economy, fuelling speculation, fragility, and inequality. Socially, costs of living in housing, energy, food, and healthcare are rising much faster than wages, eroding basic security as well as trust in institutions. Meanwhile, extreme wealth is accumulating at the top, reinforcing both inequality and political capture.

The result is an economy that extracts value in the short term while generating instability and existential risks. **Increasingly, it is recognised that our economic system sits at the root of these challenges.**

In response, a growing community of practitioners, funders, and enablers are working not just to treat the symptoms of our current system, but to build a “new economy” – one that serves human wellbeing while operating within planetary boundaries.

About this study

Commissioned by Partners for a New Economy (P4NE) as a follow-on to Demos Helsinki’s Turning the Tide (2022), this study set out with the objectives to:

- **Conduct an updated mapping** of organisations within Europe working on the shared objective of economic systems change
- Identify and **synthesise shared challenges, needs, and structural gaps** across the ecosystem
- Develop a practical **typology framework to support navigation** and understanding of the field
- Surface **key trends, shifts, and emergent dynamics** over the past 5 years
- Identify where **points of cohesion, traction, and progress** can be further supported
- **Offer recommendations** to funders and the field itself on how to strengthen the field and support its objectives

Why Europe

While recognising the global nature of this challenge — and Europe’s colonial legacies — our scope is deliberately regional: Europe, taken together, remains one of the world’s largest economies, with a legacy of social welfare, multi-level governance, and cross-border cooperation that make it an important testing ground for alternatives.

Methodology in Brief

Our approach combined 35 interviews, a survey of 125 respondents, an advisory panel, and three field workshops with 75 participants, alongside extensive desk research.

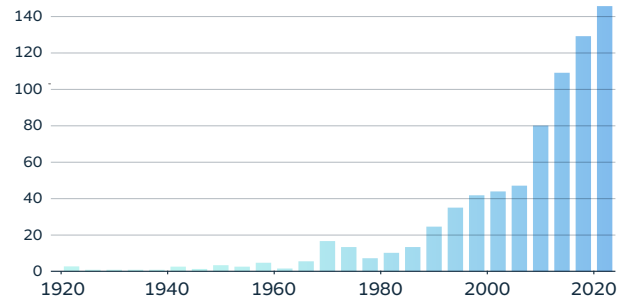
Typologies to Navigate the Field

An important part of this work also involved developing **typologies** that can offer a more comprehensive ways to navigate the field. Beyond typologies based on activities and themes, we surfaced **complementary lenses** – proximity to power, to policy, to implementation, and to different stakeholder groups – that identify where organisations sit in relation to influence, practice, and various actors. These typologies and lenses will form the basis of a **living directory** (launching January 2026), designed to make the field more legible, support collaboration, and invite further contributions as the ecosystem continues to expand.

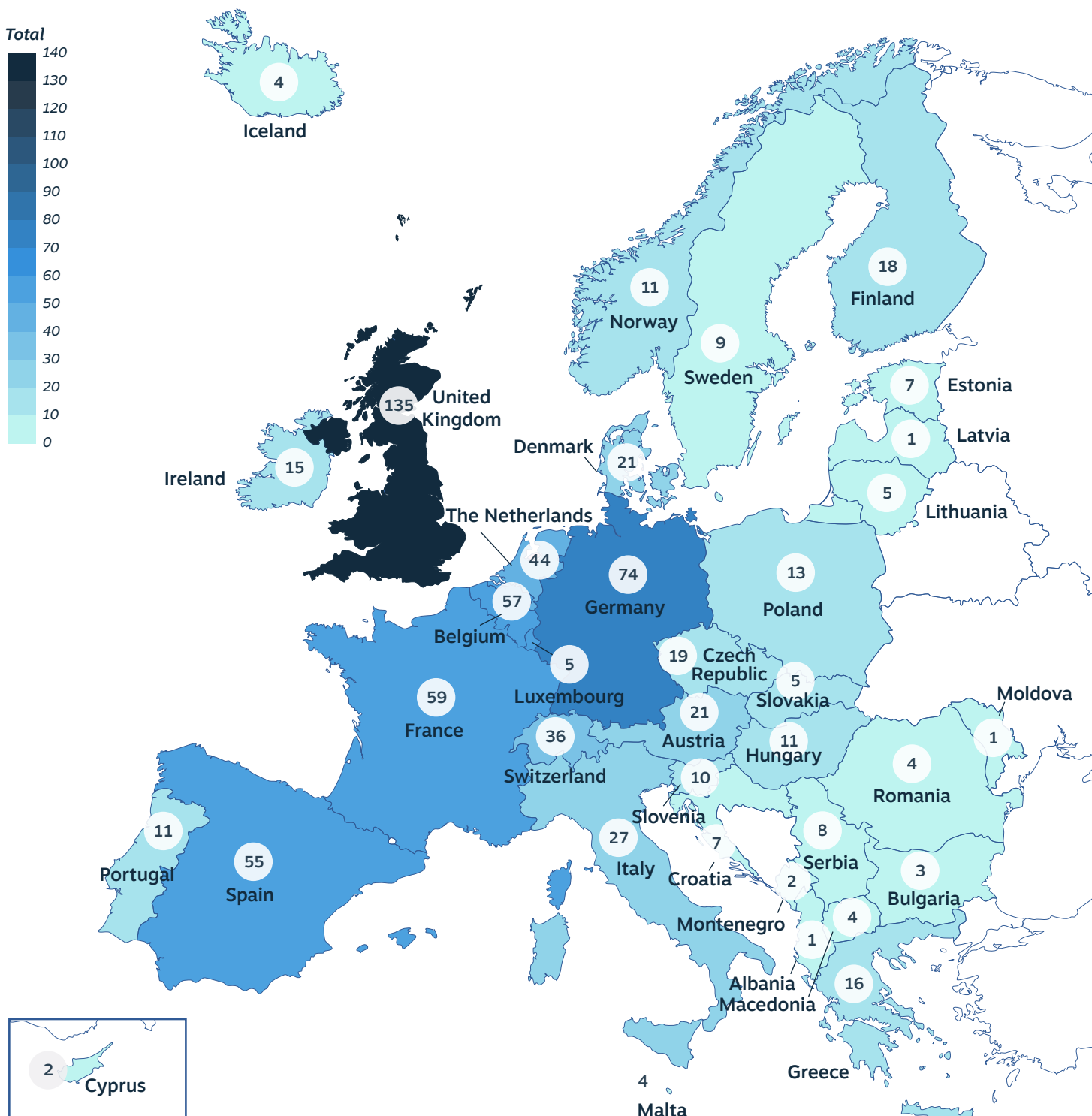
MAPPING THE FIELD

Our mapping surfaced **735 organisations across 35 European countries**. This is the clearest picture to date of a dynamic, diverse, and growing ecosystem.

The scale demonstrates that the new economy field is a broad and diverse constellation of actors – from advocacy groups and think tanks to unions, grassroots organisations, and practical cooperatives. The field is also new and emerging; roughly **half of organisations in our mapping were founded in the last decade**.

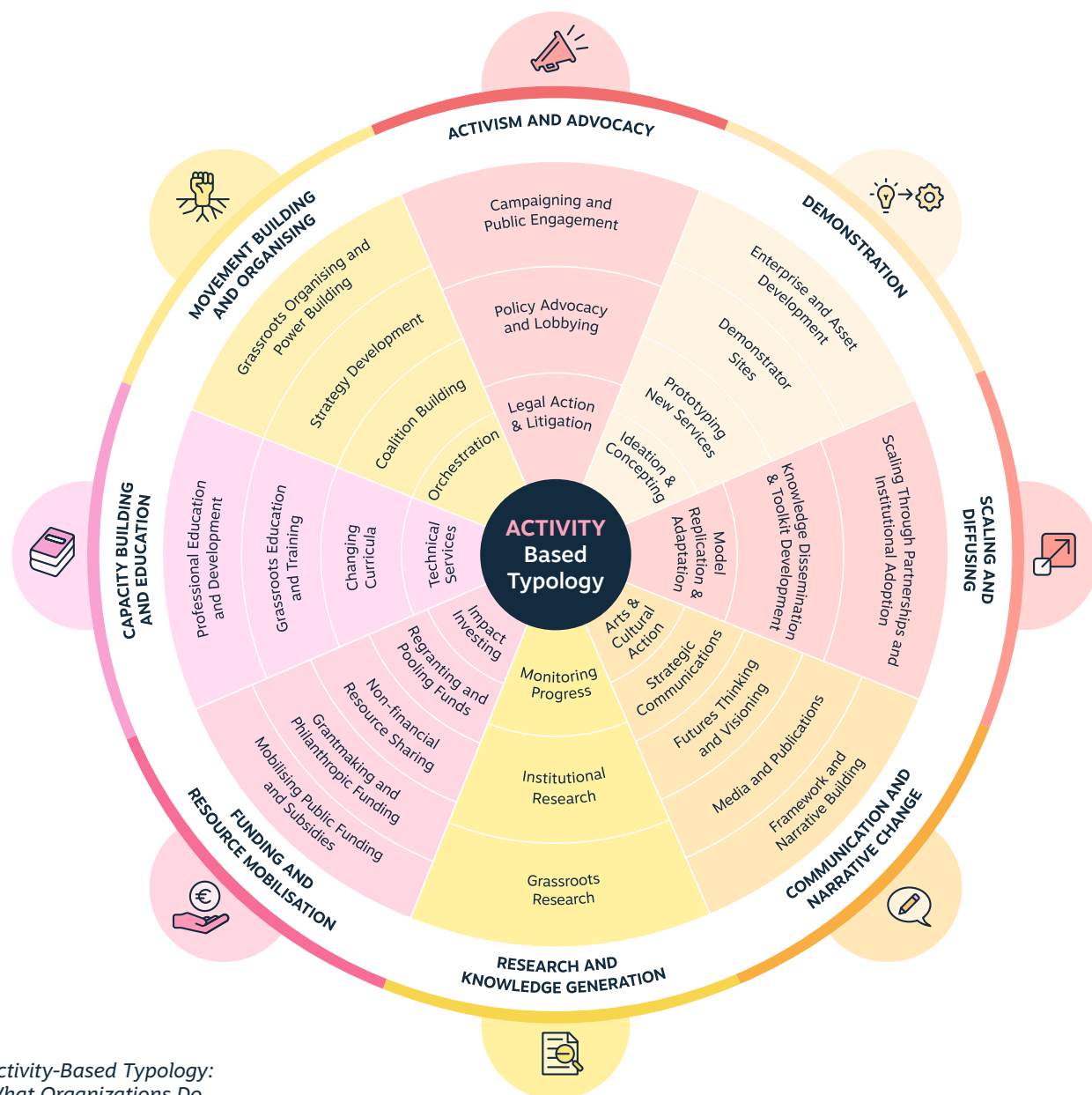


Number of organizations founded by year



NAVIGATING THE FIELD

To navigate the diversity of the field, we developed a **typology framework** that categorises organisations by **activities** (what they do) and **themes** (what they work on). This framework is not prescriptive but offers a shared language and navigation tool for practitioners, funders, and policymakers.



Activity-Based Typology:
What Organizations Do

Activism & Advocacy: Driving social and policy change by raising public pressure, influencing decision-makers, and holding power to account.

Demonstration: Testing innovative solutions in real-world contexts to validate feasibility, learn, and refine before wider adoption.

Scaling & Diffusing: Expanding proven solutions to reach broader communities, sectors, or markets, and sharing them for replication or adaptation.

Communications & Narrative Change: Shaping public discourse, perception, and understanding through storytelling, media, framing, and cultural expression.

Research & Knowledge Generation: Creating new insights, evidence, and ideas through participatory, academic, and foresight methods to inform action & policy.

Funding & Resource Mobilisation: Securing and directing financial and non-financial resources to support transformative initiatives and shared goals.

Capacity Building & Education: Equipping individuals and institutions with the skills, tools, and knowledge needed to lead and sustain transformative change.

Movement Building & Organising: Strengthening collective power by developing leadership, aligning actors, and coordinating efforts for systemic change.



*Thematic-Based Typology:
What Organizations Work On*

Market Governance & Oversight: Redesigning rules and oversight of markets and industries to ensure democratic accountability, public interest, and ecological integrity.

Democratic Participation & Economic Democracy: Expanding people's collective agency in shaping decisions, policies, and institutions through inclusive governance, organising, and participatory democratic infrastructure.

Alternative Finance Systems: Building new financial models and institutions that operate outside the logic of mainstream finance to prioritise sustainability, democratic control, and the common good.

Alternative Economic Models: Exploring economic paradigms that reorient economies toward ecological balance, collective wellbeing, and justice — challenging dominant assumptions of growth, competition, and extractivism.

Public Finance & Financial System Reform: Transforming the rules, institutions, and governance of the public and private financial system to promote stability, equity, and alignment with long-term public and ecological goals.

Socio-Economic Security & Justice: Ensuring everyone has the security and resources to meet their basic needs, live with dignity, and participate fully in society.

Sectoral System Transformation: Transformative changes across the essential sectors that underpin daily life to ensure that basic societal functions are delivered in ways that are sustainable, equitable, and resilient. These shifts focus on deeply restructuring systems of provisioning and infrastructure to serve people and planet over the long term.

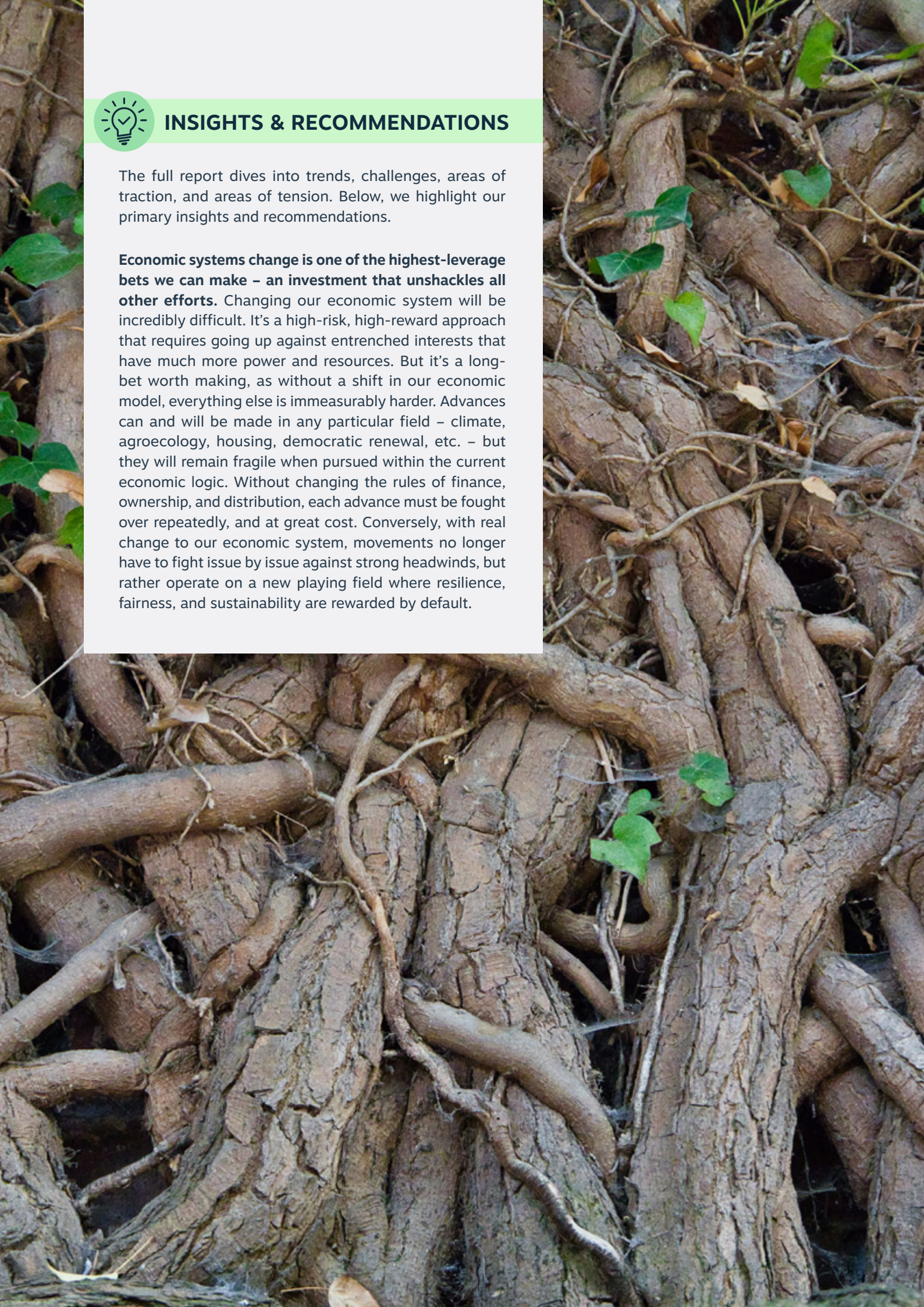
Place-Based Resilience: Place-based strategies that strengthen ecological integrity, climate adaptability, and community self-determination — ensuring territories are restored, resilient, and governed for long-term sustainability and justice.



INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The full report dives into trends, challenges, areas of traction, and areas of tension. Below, we highlight our primary insights and recommendations.

Economic systems change is one of the highest-leverage bets we can make – an investment that unshackles all other efforts. Changing our economic system will be incredibly difficult. It's a high-risk, high-reward approach that requires going up against entrenched interests that have much more power and resources. But it's a long-bet worth making, as without a shift in our economic model, everything else is immeasurably harder. Advances can and will be made in any particular field – climate, agroecology, housing, democratic renewal, etc. – but they will remain fragile when pursued within the current economic logic. Without changing the rules of finance, ownership, and distribution, each advance must be fought over repeatedly, and at great cost. Conversely, with real change to our economic system, movements no longer have to fight issue by issue against strong headwinds, but rather operate on a new playing field where resilience, fairness, and sustainability are rewarded by default.



A window of opportunity: A growing field with strong momentum worth seizing



FINDING #1:

The ground is fertile, with hunger for alternatives entering the mainstream

What marginalised groups long knew – that “the system is rigged” – is now widely felt. Across Europe, frustration with rising living costs, insecure livelihoods, and a sense that political and economic institutions no longer serve them is fueling urgency and openness to new ideas. People are asking existential questions about their future and showing greater appetite for bold alternatives.

This creates a critical window of opportunity. If new economy actors can channel this discontent into constructive, systemic solutions, the field can gain traction well beyond its current reach – before climate change and biodiversity loss become unmitigatable, and before disillusionment is channelled even further by far-right populism.



FINDING #2:

Crises are key turning points, and the field should prepare for the next rupture

The field has often grown in response to rupture – environmental movements in the 1970s, neoliberal pushback in the 1990s, the 2008 crash, Covid-19, and today’s cost-of-living and climate shocks. Such moments jolt awareness, open new narratives, and mobilise actors.

Transformation rarely happens gradually, but rather accelerates in moments of disruption. The challenge is to build infrastructure that can seize these windows – networks that meet core needs during shocks, and macro-level policy infrastructure that chart a systemic alternative. More ruptures are inevitable, from AI-driven unemployment to converging climate, financial, and geopolitical crises that are already testing the limits of our institutions.



FINDING #3:

The field is expanding fast, and is increasingly diverse

Our mapping of 735 organisations across 35 European countries shows that the new economy ecosystem is relatively young, increasingly diverse, and growing. Roughly half of these organisations have been founded in the past decade, underscoring a surge of activity catalysed by the worsening impacts of our current system. As our mapping deliberately excluded hyper-local projects such as regenerative farms, community energy cooperatives, and land trusts, the true scale of the movement is even larger and more vibrant on the ground.

Established NGOs such as Oxfam and Greenpeace are now linking their missions to systemic economic change, joining grassroots pioneers and emerging think tanks. The result is a maturing ecosystem that spans advocacy, research, campaigning, community ownership, and practical experimentation – across themes from climate transition and digital commons to community wealth and post-growth. This diversity creates many possible entry points, but also a need for stronger connective tissue.

Challenges of a field that remains fragmented and under-resourced



FINDING #4:

Funding is the binding constraint — especially patient and flexible capital

There is an acute need for long-term, trust-based philanthropic capital, helping organisations break out of short-term funding cycles and stressful bootstrapping. Interviewees converged on two needs: (a) long-horizon, trust-based grants that allow organisations to escape short-term project cycles and (b) flexible small grants that help grassroots actors survive and adapt.

The bigger issue is scale. Neoliberal philanthropies invested hundreds of millions annually in the 1970s–1990s to build lasting infrastructure – including university departments, journals, fellowships, and litigation vehicles. Today's new economy field operates at roughly one-tenth that scale. The lesson from neoliberal philanthropy is that it is possible to transform the economic system, but that durable idea-ecosystems consistently outperform episodic projects. The new economy field needs a step-change in funding to compete at the level required for it to win.



FINDING #5:

The field remains fragmented, but bridges can unlock potential

Pluralism is an asset; fragmentation is a tax. The new economy is rich with models – from doughnut economics to degrowth, wellbeing, and solidarity frameworks. This diversity offers many entry points, but too often organisations work in parallel or compete for attention instead of amplifying one another.

Geographically, the divide is especially visible. In Eastern and Southeastern Europe, mainstream NGOs often carry new economy values in the absence of specialist field-builders, while cooperatives face cultural resistance rooted in memories of the communist era. Without stronger east-west bridges, the field risks deepening inequalities in capacity, leaving large parts of Europe excluded from shaping and benefiting from key shifts. Investing in translation, trust-building, and shared platforms across regions could unlock a far broader base of legitimacy and power.

Interviewees repeatedly stressed the lack of connective tissue that would allow plurality to compound into power – not just in shared infrastructure and bridging functions, but through a collective rallying cry that moves beyond criticism of the existing system and towards a shared vision of what a viable alternative can look like. The field is gaining sophistication, and there is certainly some of this bridging work being done in places like the UK, but it is still far from the scale and coherence needed to contest dominant economic narratives or to set the agenda in moments of crisis.

Addressing gaps to build power and unlock further momentum



FINDING #6:

The field must elevate macroeconomic planning

The new economy field excels at vision and experimentation, but lags in the structural tools that make systemic transformation viable. Macroeconomic planning is a critical gap. Progress has been made by ecological economists and post-growth thinkers, but practical models remain thin. The field needs to more clearly be able to answer questions about what happens to jobs, debt, pensions, and public budgets if GDP stops growing, and how states can ensure stability and wellbeing in a post growth era.

Without credible models, it is difficult to counter the mainstream narrative that growth is the only path. This leaves policymakers, unions, and even sympathetic economists without credible tools to work with. Interviewees repeatedly stressed that governments and major institutions are actively looking for alternatives but find the field's outputs too fragmented or theoretical.

Elevating macroeconomic planning is therefore critical. This means investing in applied research, building interdisciplinary teams that combine ecological economics with labour, fiscal, and financial expertise, and developing real-world scenarios that show how transitions could work in practice. Filling this gap could give the field the credibility and influence needed to more effectively influence policy.



FINDING #7:

The field risks staying in a bubble unless it roots more of its work in everyday life

Think tanks and advocacy groups are indispensable for shaping ideas and policy, but ideas alone don't build power. Respondents repeatedly warned of the danger of technocratic isolation – an “ivory tower” disconnected from basic needs. People judge change by what they experience directly – whether they can afford rent, keep the lights on, or rely on local services. Rising costs and precarious livelihoods demand visible alternatives that meet those needs directly: housing co-ops, community energy providers, remunicipalised utilities, land trusts, local food systems, and other bottom-up mechanisms that build agency, sufficiency, and wellbeing.



FINDING #8:

A “missing middle” constrains replication and systemic scale

Local initiatives show what's possible, but they remain scattered and often inaccessible to the average citizen. What is missing is a “middle layer” – a connective layer of organisations that can translate grassroots successes into financeable, repeatable models and connect them to national and EU agendas. This layer is what makes community initiatives legible to public and private capital, proactively enables replication, and embeds practical solutions into broader policy frameworks. Without this middle layer, the ecosystem risks remaining a patchwork of inspiring but isolated projects. With it, the field could turn community-based initiatives into systemic pathways that make resilience, fairness, and sustainability mainstream.



FINDING #9:

The field needs an explicit and dual-track political strategy – both to govern and to enable broader coalitions

Pluralism is rightly seen as a strength of a young and diverse field seeking common ground across movements. Yet its breadth – spanning from neo-socialists to green growthers – can become a weakness without a proactive strategy. The risk is either vague “all of the above” messaging or the fragmentation that has stalled many past progressive projects.

A stronger path is to pro-actively build two complementary wings. One is *explicitly political*: forging parties, leaders, litigation functions, media platforms, and coalitions to embed new economy ideals in governance – much as neoliberalism once did by investing in durable infrastructure. The other is *explicitly cross-partisan*: advancing policy shops, think tanks, and civic institutions that defend and pursue new economic principles across the spectrum, echoing the formative years of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and its UK counterpart Liberty UK, which safeguarded core rights and principles regardless of political ideology.



FINDING #10:

Building new wealth should be seen as critical infrastructure

The neoliberal shift of the 1970s–1990s showed that lasting change requires major financial resources. Most current efforts focus on redirecting existing flows of capital towards more impactful initiatives – through philanthropy, public budgets, or blended finance. These are important efforts, but they rely on *outside capital*. To build real independence, the field must also generate new forms of wealth – created and managed in line with new economic principles – to power the movement from within.

Community wealth building shows both the limits and the promise. Local initiatives alone won't produce the resources to shift whole systems, but the field needs a *macro-level strategy* for community wealth creation. Relevant models already exist: steward-owned enterprises reinvesting surpluses into collective missions, perpetual purpose trusts holding assets in the commons, or non-profits spinning out revenue-generating ventures. If scaled across the field as a coordinated effort, such models could provide the long-term financial muscle needed to sustain a growing movement to succeed.



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