

Exploring the contribution of grassroots social
innovations for the response to climate change

Climate KIC – Innovator Catalyst Course
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0. Aims of the session

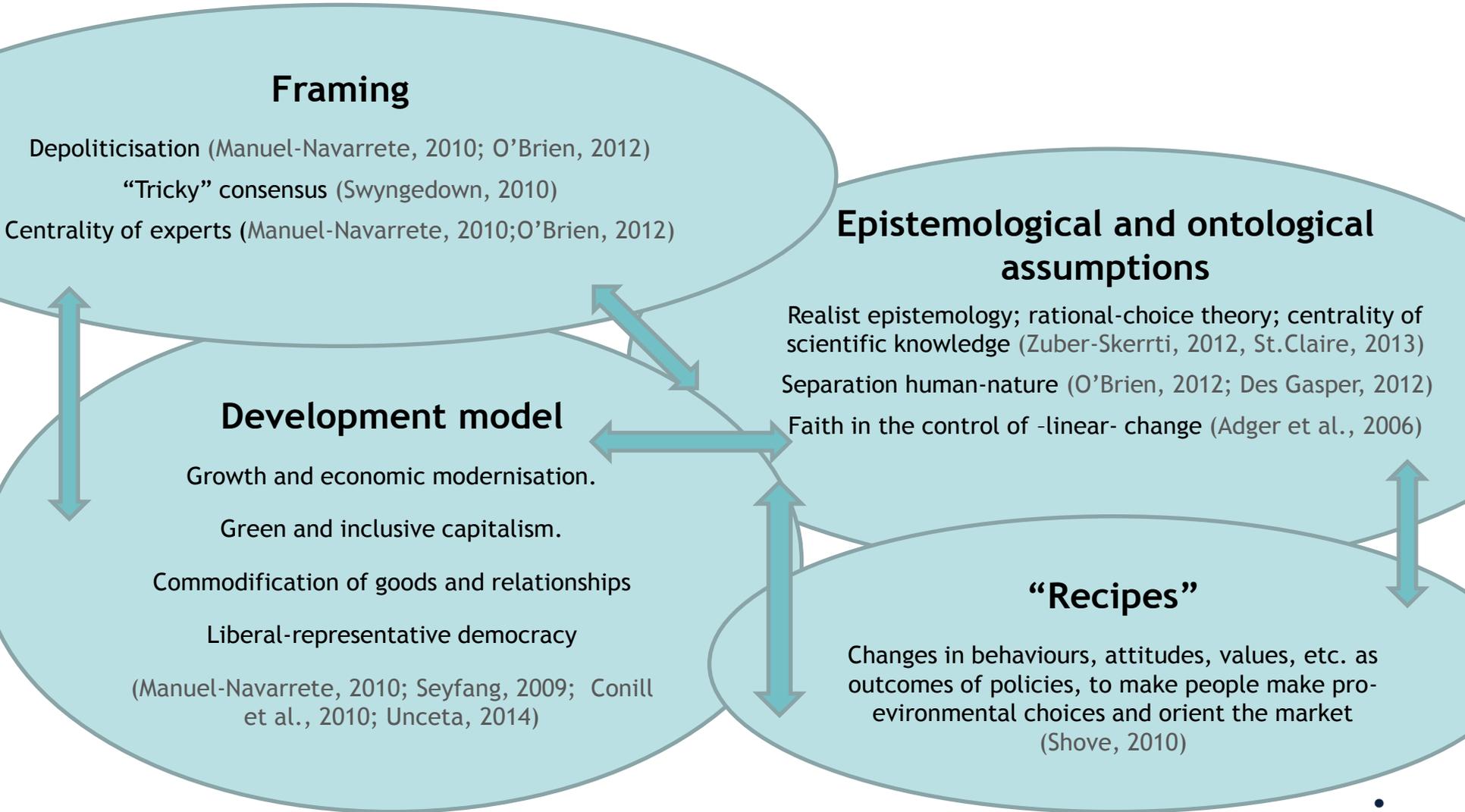


- Departing from current criticism to dominant perspectives on Climate Change (CC), justify the relevance of Grassroots Social Innovation (GSI) for transformation processes leading to more sustainable systems.
- Explain what GSI is, and how its relevance to address CC can be assessed.
- Explore the frames, attitudes and skills promoted by, and necessary for engaging with GSI.
- Explore a particular case study on access to energy in Spain

... TO DISCUSS, DRAWING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE, ON THE RELEVANCE OF THESE IDEAS FOR YOUR PRACTICE...

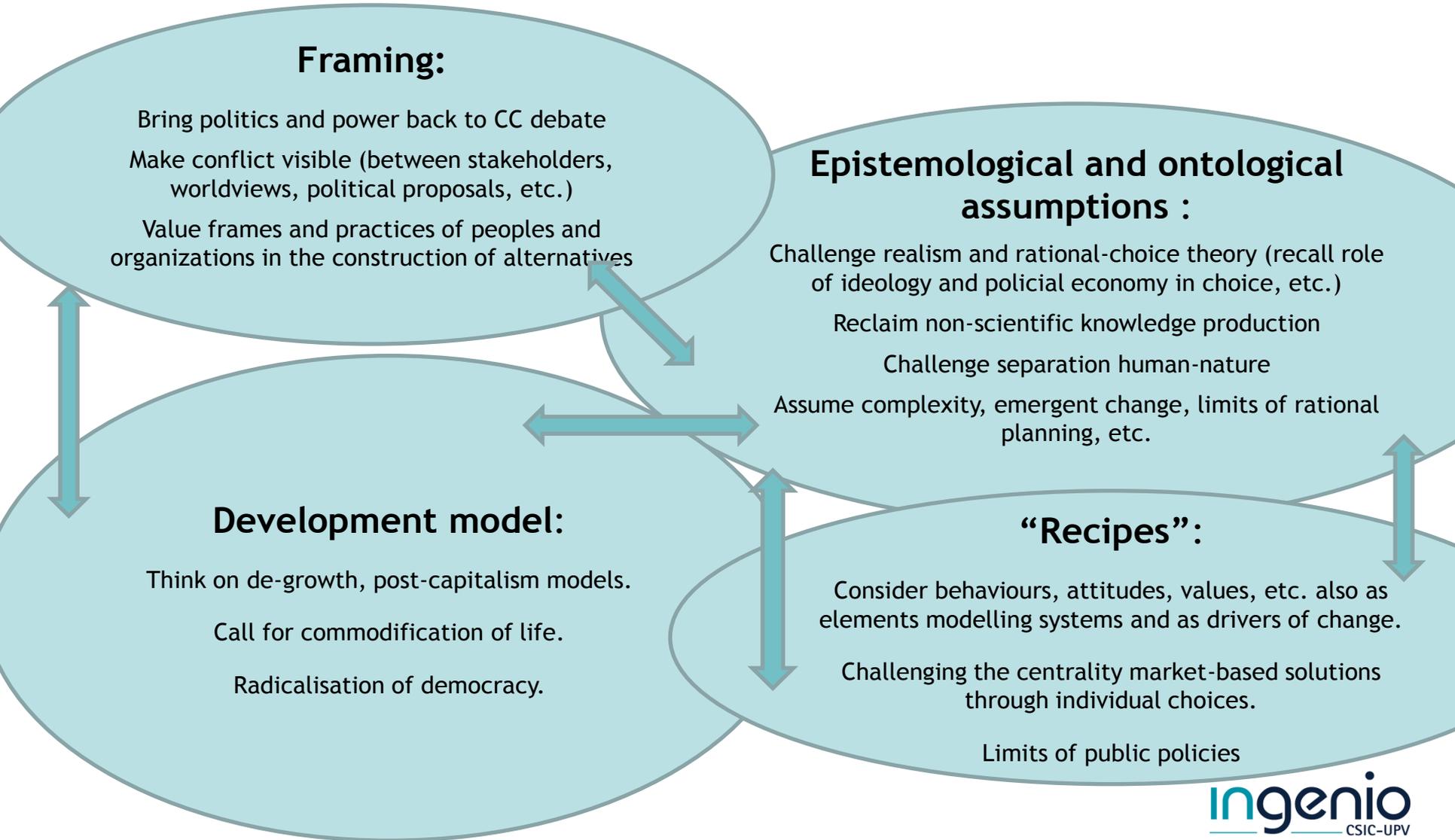
1. Need for rethinking current approach

“Constellation” of connected entry-points and criticisms to limitations of dominant CC discourses and practices. Overlappings and complementarities between them.



1. Need for rethinking current approach

These criticisms have led to key questions for rethinking CC discourses and practices.



2. The relevance of grassroots experiences...



From these ideas, authors and practitioners have specifically pointed to the importance of...

...moving the site of interest in the search of inspiration for facing CC, to sites where alternatives are built - beyond market logics, mainstream policies, etc

For example, addressing discourses and practices regarding CC emerging at **grassroots and community level**, were «new framings emerge, (...) alternative ways of production of knowledge, alternative practices which respond to environmental change» (O'Brien et al., 2012:12).

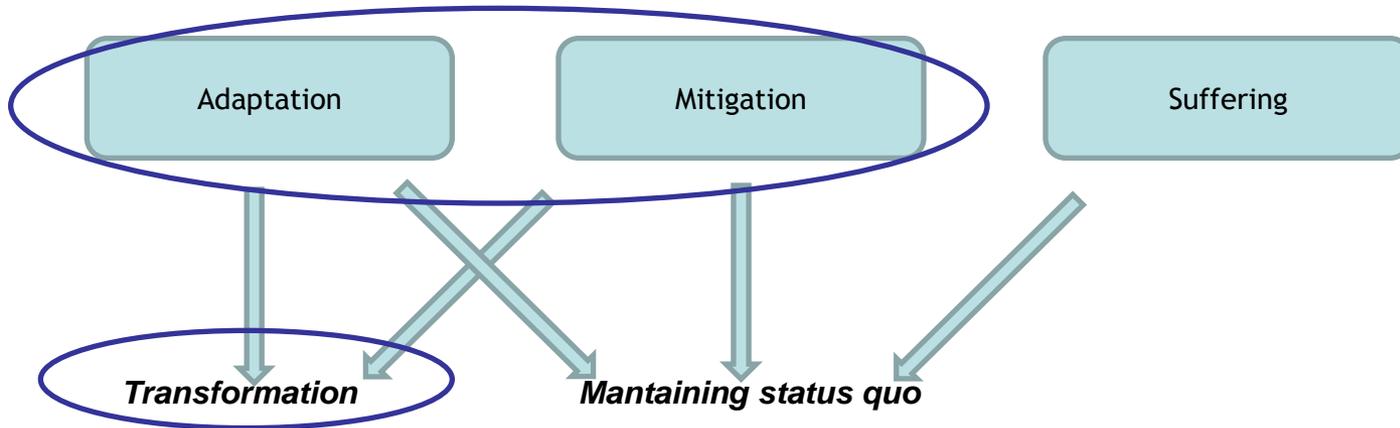
...considering alternatives which may be addressing structural change (political-economy issues).

Specifically, grassroots level **social economy practices of production and consumption of goods and services**, where socio-economic structures and development models are challenged, and new ones created, «new infrastructures for production and consumption, outside market rules» (Smith, 2007).

→ *This leads us to the importance of understanding, supporting and engaging **discourses and practices, emerging in grassroots driven alternatives of production and distribution of goods and services**, which can contribute to **transformative responses to CC challenges**.*

3. ...for transformation

Moving beyond/complement classic «choices» front of climate change (Kolbert, 2009):



Transformation is a debate were different ideas, notions, etc. coexist.

We draw on complementary ideas of different authors (O'Brien and Sygna, 2012; O'Brien, 2012), to define...

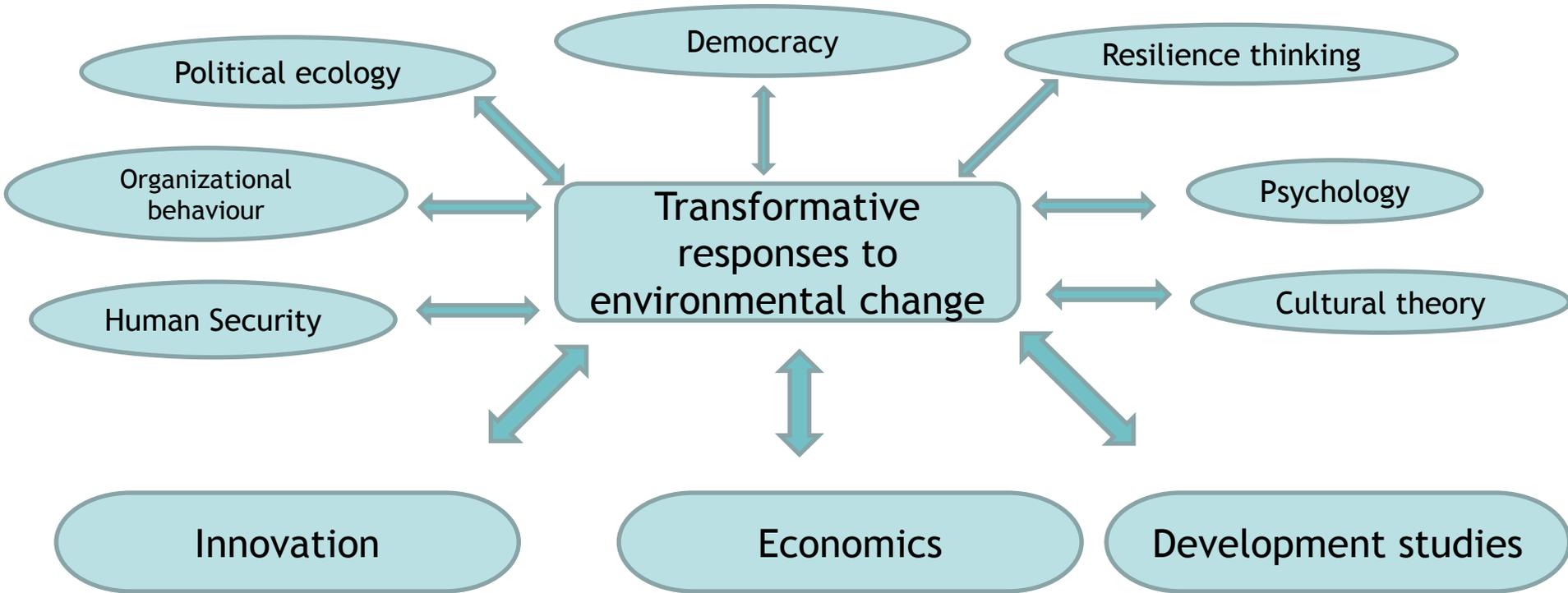
...**What is transformation?** The **altering of fundamental attributes of a system**, including value systems, regulatory, legislative and bureaucratic regimes, technological or biological systems (IPCC, 2012), but also political, economic and social structures (Manuel-Navarrete, 2010).

...**Who runs transformations?** Deliberate transformations are often **initiated by small groups of committed individuals** operating in the shadow (Pelling et al., 2008, in O'Brien, 2012).

...**What is transformed?** Transformations may occur in **multiple dimensions and scales**, in different contexts and setting. Include transformations of **systems of provision** -energy and agricultural, financial, transport etc.-; governance regimes; development paradigms; power and gender relations; production and consumption patterns; lifestyles; knowledge production systems, values and world-views, etc. (O'Brien, 2012). They occur at the practical, political and personal sphere (O'Brien and Sygna, 2013)

4. Analyzing transformation from innovation and more

Many disciplines, theories and approaches have provided insights on transformative responses to global environmental change (Bhaaskar et al., 2010).



- Approach which new frames, procedures, values, etc. Emerge in these processes, considered as *processes of innovation*.

- Provide normative and evaluative frameworks to approach innovation processes and outcomes for the transformation of systems.

5. What is grassroots' social innovation?

Innovation



Social innovation

- Refers to **innovative activities and services** that are motivated by the goal of **meeting social needs** and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social (Mulgan et al., 2007: 8)



Grassroots social innovation

- Describe **networks of activists and organizations** generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development and consumption. Respond to the local situations and to the interests and values of the communities involved.
- In contrast to mainstream business greening, they operate in **civil society** arenas (no market logic).
- Develop **new conceptualizations, organizational arrangements, relationships and tools** for sustainable development.
- They are **niches of innovation**. Can go into the dominant **socio-technical regime**.
- Develop **alternative provision systems** -infrastructures of consumption --> new institutions and socio-technical infrastructures for a more sustainable production and consumption.
- Examples: Wide quantity of initiatives (energy or housing cooperatives, organic food purchasing groups, etc.), in different sectors, legal forms (cooperatives, community-based associations, social enterprises, informal groups or movements, etc.) and forms of organization (more democratic or centralized)

(Seyfang and Smith, 2007)

4. How can be assess these innovations?

We draw on ideas coming from new economics and human development to address the impact of these experiences....

Development



Human development

- Human development as the process of **expansion of real choices people have**, to achieve the kind of life they have reasons to value (Sen, 1990)
- implies a certain **normative proposal**. Development model based on (Ul Haq, 1995):
 - Equity and diversity
 - Productivity: guaranteeing livelihoods.
 - Sustainability
 - Empowerment

Economics



New economics

- **Localisation**: Making progress towards more self-reliant local economies; reducing supply chains.
- **Reducing ecological footprints**: reduce social and environmental impacts on others; reduce inequity of current patterns: cute resource use, etc.
- **Community building**: nurturing inclusive and cohesive communities, encouraging participation.
- **Collective action**: enabling people collaborate and decide on issues affecting their daily actions.
- Buiding **new institutions and infrastructures** of provision others can use (Seyfang and Smith, 2007)

- *Does the idea of grassroots social innovation make sense for you? Is it new and relevant to you?*
- *What about transformation of systems of provision to address climate change? Is it new and relevant to you?*
- *Do you agree with the criteria to assess transformation of systems, emerging from human development and new economics approaches?*



6. New frames and skills for GSI

These process of innovation are related to new frames and skills:

- Different **frames on development and citizenship**: more sustainable and human ideal of development; an **idea of citizenship deeply democratic**.
- **Respect and acknowledgement** of the environment and life within it. Will to consider the future generations and act in a responsible way.
- **Critical awareness**; researching and **non-conformist** attitude.
- **Commitment to social justice and equity**: Concern for global issues. Commitment to justice and disposition to work for a fairer world.
- Sense of efficiency and that **we may impact other people's lives**. Optimism for social transformation.
- Ability to **negotiate and compromise**; to **influence** other people and exert a shared leadership; to **communicate and cooperate** with other people; to **deliberate**, have a voice and **listen**; to imagine and make projects oriented towards the common good.

Brief description of SOM ENERGIA

- Spain's first **green energy cooperative** (born in 2010 in Catalunya). Goals: Providing clean energy; developing small-scaled renewable energy projects, owned by all cooperative's members.
- A cooperative system (1 person, 1 vote).
- Evolution: it starts in 2010 with 350 members to 2014 with 16.643 members.

Transformative contribution of Som Energia through:

- Promoting a new culture of energy consumption, based on renewable energies, energy efficiency and savings (**reducing ecological footprints**).
- The cooperative's expansion has been done through "local groups" who organize conferences, debates and regular meetings around the country to engage and raise awareness about sustainable energy. They make possible the participation of all members of the cooperative, in their own cities or towns (**community building**).
- The cooperative system promotes an active participation of all member and active decision making (**collective actions**) and it allows thousands of people to power their homes using daily electricity from renewable energy sources (**providing new infrastructure of provision**).
- However, an alternative **supplying energy chain** has not been addressed yet.

7. Case study: Som Energia. Developing new frames and skills



About frames and skills...:

- The cooperative has helped to change attitudes in Spain, transforming passive consumption and investment into something more **responsible**.
- Som Energia is not only a provider or producer of clean energy; the goal of this cooperative is also to build a wide social movement supporting renewables and public participation (related with the idea of **citizenship deeply democratic**).
- Apart from promoting measures for energy saving and reasonable consumption among their members and beyond (**respect and acknowledgement of the environment**), it also offers every citizen the opportunity to participate and expresses a growing grassroots demand for sustainable forms of energy (**imagine and make projects oriented towards the common good**).
- Those members who are more actively implicated develop a more **critical awareness and a non-conformist attitude**.
- Nevertheless, it is not so much expanded on the cooperative's discourse the **concern for global issues**, and how local actions may impact other people's lives in the global level.

- *Does our proposal of new frames and skills add something new to your practice?*
- *It is relevant for you?*
- *In what sense can be the case of the Energy Platform inspiring for you?*



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Thank you!

