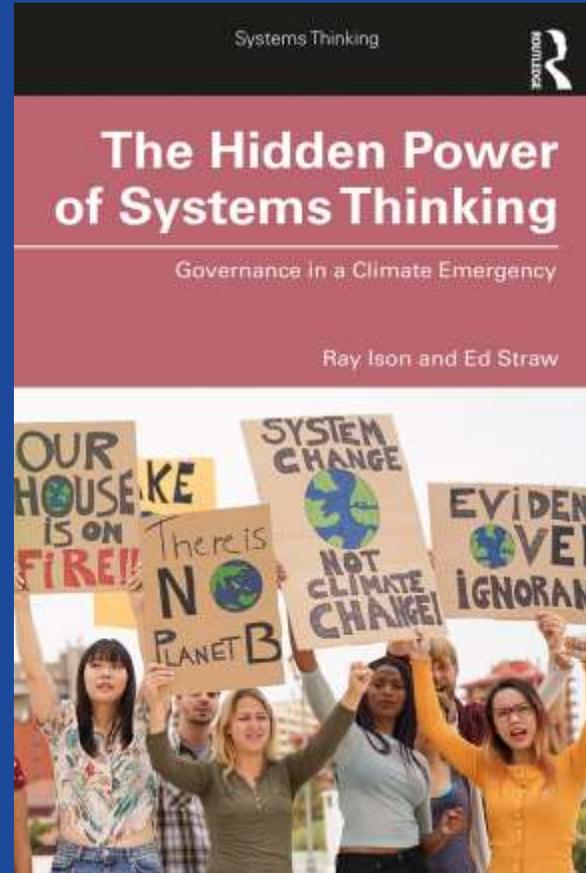


The Hidden power of Systems Thinking - governance in a climate emergency



Ed Straw & Ray Ison

Organisation of our book

- Our contention is that Systems Thinking in Practice (STiP) provides the means to understand and fundamentally alter the systems governing our lives, and that this will rescue and protect the planet for us and for all natural life.
- This may appear to be a big claim.
- We suggest revisiting that claim by reading the book.
- Our claim is also that the means to care for the planet are exactly the same means required to right the present imbalances in power, wealth and well-being, and to give us fresh meaning in life.

The Biosphere = That part of the Earth's crust that supports life of all forms

- George Bush (1992): **“The American way of life is not up for negotiations. Period.”**
- **We overvalue our agency at our peril**
- But, the Biosphere does not negotiate
- Does what it does dependent on internal dynamics and what we throw at it
- Doesn't listen to the morning's news, president's tweet...
- Has no interest in laws, policies, or even no platforming

We overvalue our agency at our peril

- If we continue to treat the biosphere as an infinite resource and infinite dumping ground, we are.....
- In effect, humanity is in a power battle with nature: only one winner
- Getting worse far faster than the forecasts
- It has sent plenty of warnings:
 - Australian and Californian bush fires
 - Famines of biblical proportions
 - Sinking cities
 - Mid Wales floods
 - Siberian arctic temperatures
 - Possibly covid-19

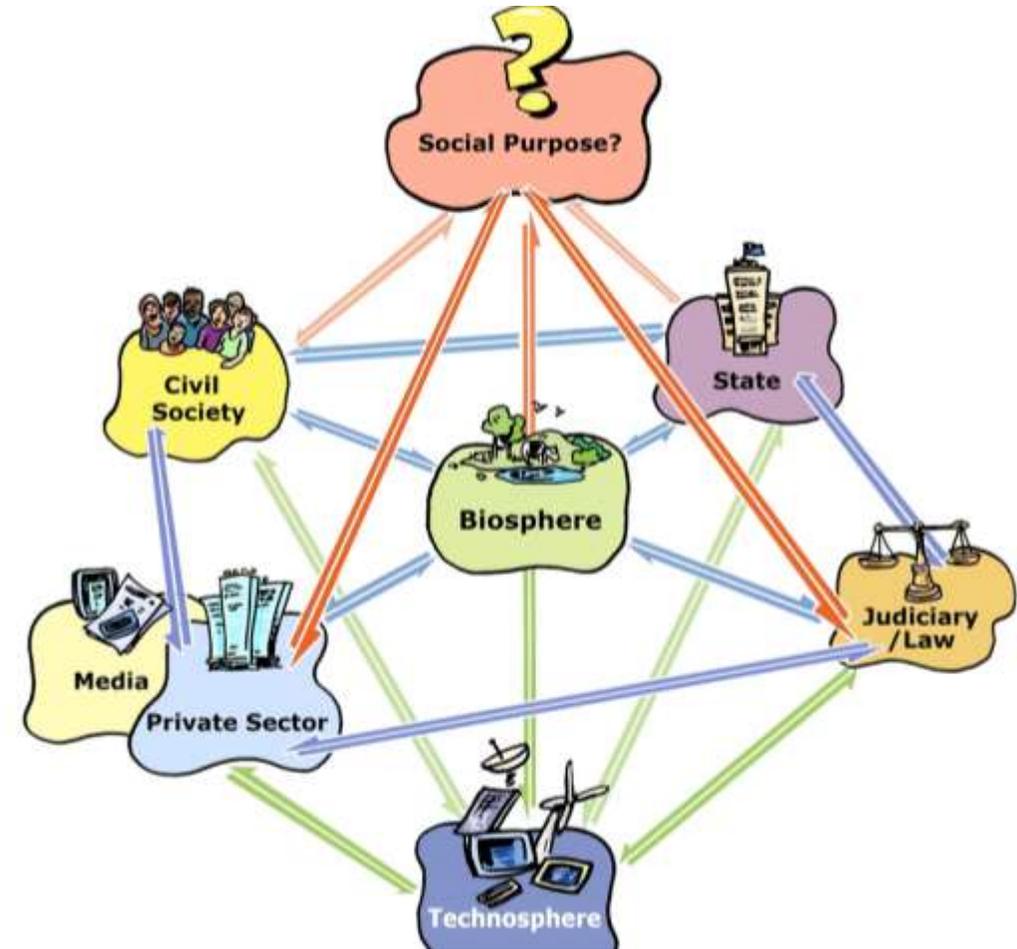
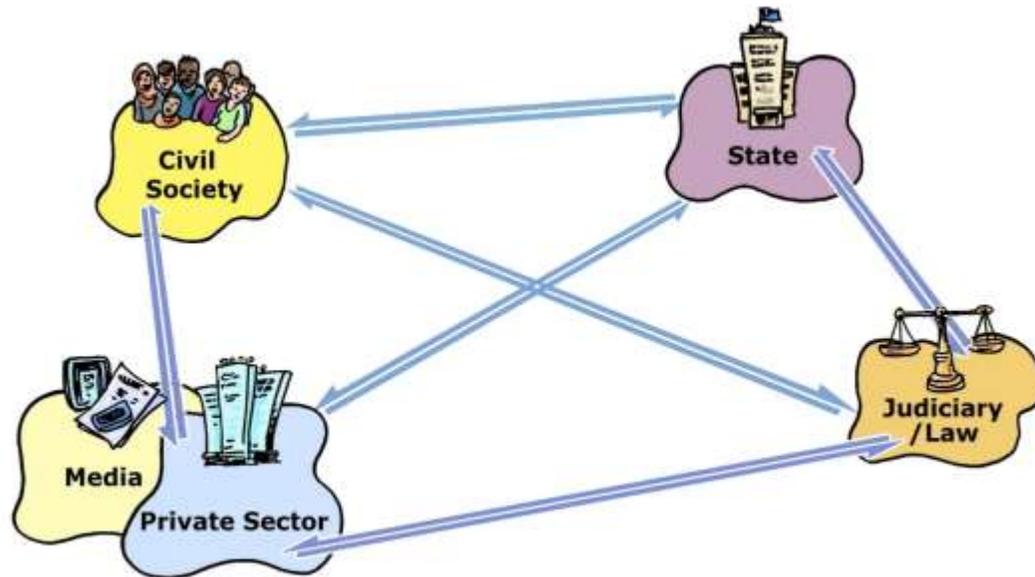
What to do?

- Ignore, avoid, deny – mental health
 - Boiled frog
 - Wallow in our collective incapacity to tackle these emergencies
 - Or...
- Take back control
 - Act positively
 - Gain agency
 - Get ahead, not catching up
 - To conserve our remarkable good fortune to live in this wondrous planet, we must stop polluting and start cleaning up our mess

HOW?

- Discipline for us all
- Economics and economists
- Politicians and political parties
- Business and managements
- Capitalism and bankers
- Governments and administrators
- You and me

1. To do anything other than placing the biosphere at the centre of all governance models would be the worst decision in human history



Systemic Principles for Biosphere Governance

1 The biophysical world is incorporated as the central partner in our governing systems.

2 People and constitutional sovereignty: All political power resides in the people, who delegate a defined measure of that power to a government and other institutions.

6 Explicit democratic decisions shall be made as to what is in and what is out of the Commons.

22 Companies shall act in the interests of people and the biosphere.

23 End-to-end producer responsibility: Producers are responsible for all impacts of their activities and products, from raw material extraction to product recycling/disposal.

24 Company duty to inform: For each product or service, consumers shall be informed of the biosphere and human impact of its sourcing, manufacture, distribution and post-use treatment.

26 In transitioning from polluting to non-polluting activities, communities and companies shall be supported fairly.

2. New ways of thinking and acting

- UN, OECD, WHO all said Systems Thinking for complex problems (and which are not in government?) 2017
- Education and development eg Open University ASTiP programs
- The more of us there are, the more ST permeates every facet of life
- Systemic sensibility
- Systems literacy
- Systems thinking in practice capability

New ways in Governing

- Metaphors: sailing (cybernetic); orchestra, jazz band (social learning), co-evolutionary performance (quality of structural coupling)
- Systemic inquiry or co-inquiry – for ongoing exploration of uncertainty leading to systems design/co-design of institutions and ultimately systemic governance
- Systems thinking is/as the alternative to party politics

COVID-19 derived evidence for governance reinvention with cybersystemics

- 1. Initial starting conditions:
 - Wuhan – suppression of local evidence/explanations – delay of a month or more
 - Experiences of SARS – off to a good start – Taiwan, Singapore, China, Thailand etc - prior planning put into action especially Taiwan
- 2. Early border closings – overcoming global connectivity through closed system creation – NZ, Sri Lanka, Australia?
- 3. Misplaced theory – e.g. herd immunity UK, possibly Sweden
- 4.. Lack of focus on breaking critical connectivity – e.g. in care/nursing homes – a product of privatisation, casualization of the workforce, neo-liberal policies
- 5. Cultural/political blindspots and vulnerability of poor – guest workers in Singapore; rural people in urban centres India; cultural commitments to social gatherings – New York; Tower blocks and social housing Melbourne etc
- 6. Inadequate feedback processes (monitoring and control actions) – track and trace systems (US; UK, Victoria); failures of Aps (UK, Australia)

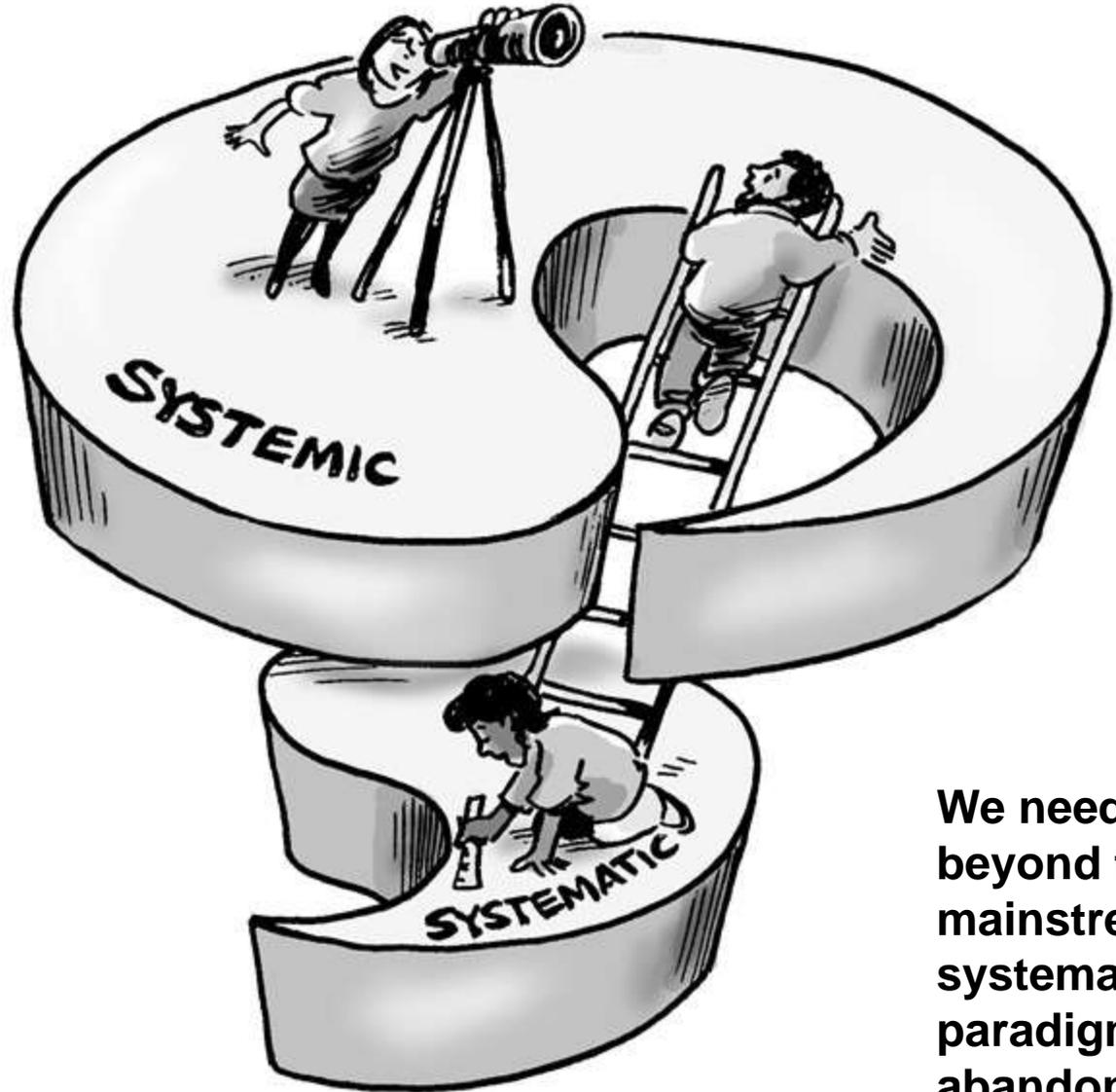
Cybersystemic innovations: Colac, Victoria and Frome Somerset UK: Ashby's Law

- “The people of Colac had a simple approach when they prepared their town for the pandemic. Rather than counting on their state government to trace every coronavirus infection, they trusted their community to do the work faster and better. “If you give trust, you get trust back,” says SV, chief executive of ...one of the biggest employers in the town, about 150 kilometres west of Melbourne.”
- *David Crowe, The Age, Friday 11th Sept 2020 <https://www.theage.com.au/national/contact-tracing-is-not-just-a-victorian-failure-20200910-p55ufl.html>*
- *An example of breaking away from command & control*
- *Frome, Somerset – see Chapter 5 Ison & Straw – lessons for the systemic co-design of viable health service.*

Systems thinking in practice (STiP) combines Systemic + Systematic praxis

Transformational change requires thinking and practice that is systemic + systematic

Together these constitute an holistic response (a DUALITY not a DUALISM)



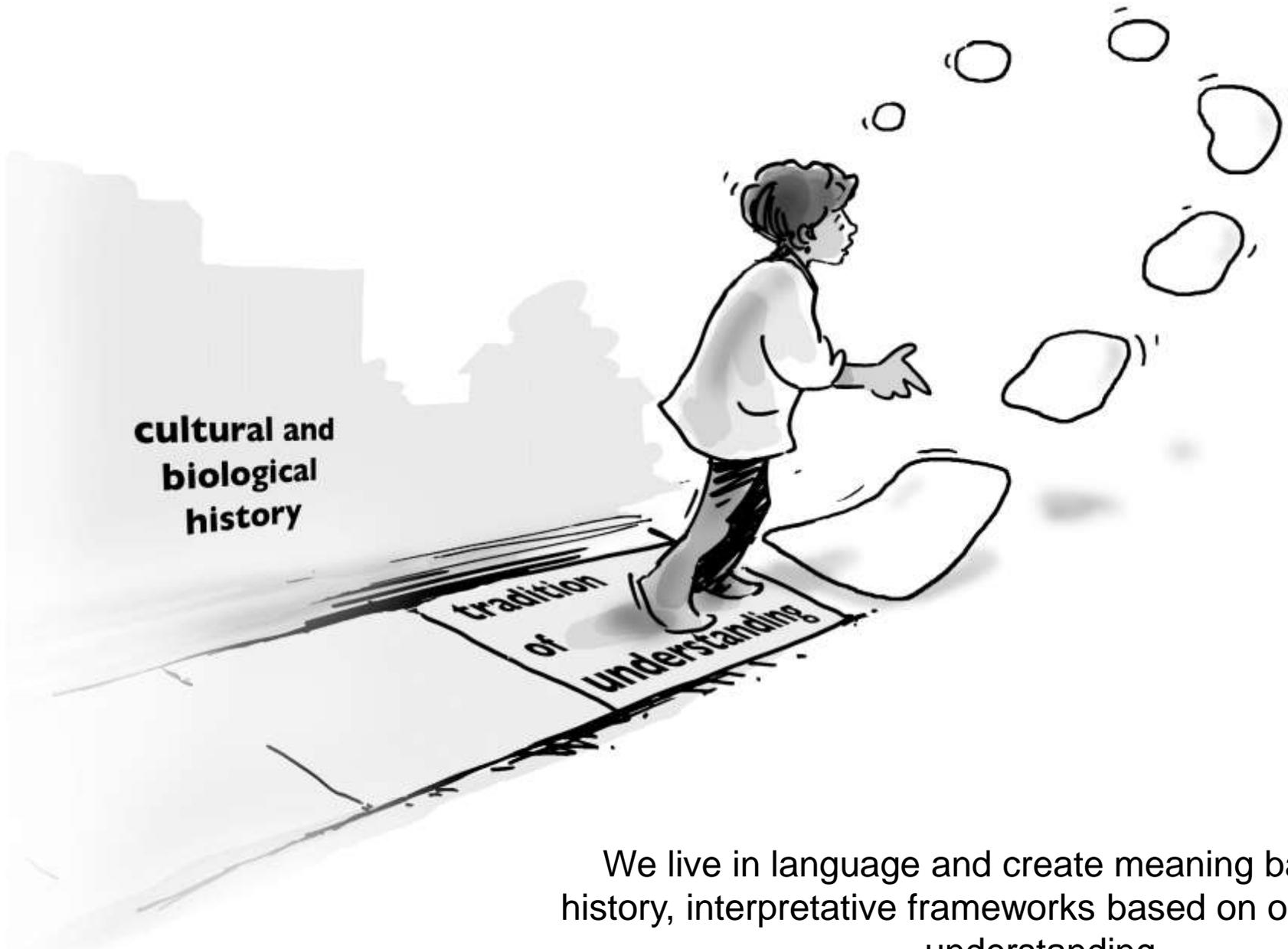
We need to climb beyond the mainstream, systematic paradigm but not abandon it totally

3. New Constitutions, now

- Can't be done?
- Groups of concerned citizens have always cohered – locally and nationally
- Mount the intellectual counter revolution
- Why did Sweden and New Zealand do what they did for the virus?
- Its always been done
- The US in 17th century to Estonia, Iceland, Uruguay, Switzerland
- Political pressure by an active citizenry
- e.g. Lyndon Johnson and civil rights

Reframe the 'biosphere' as God: the power of metaphor

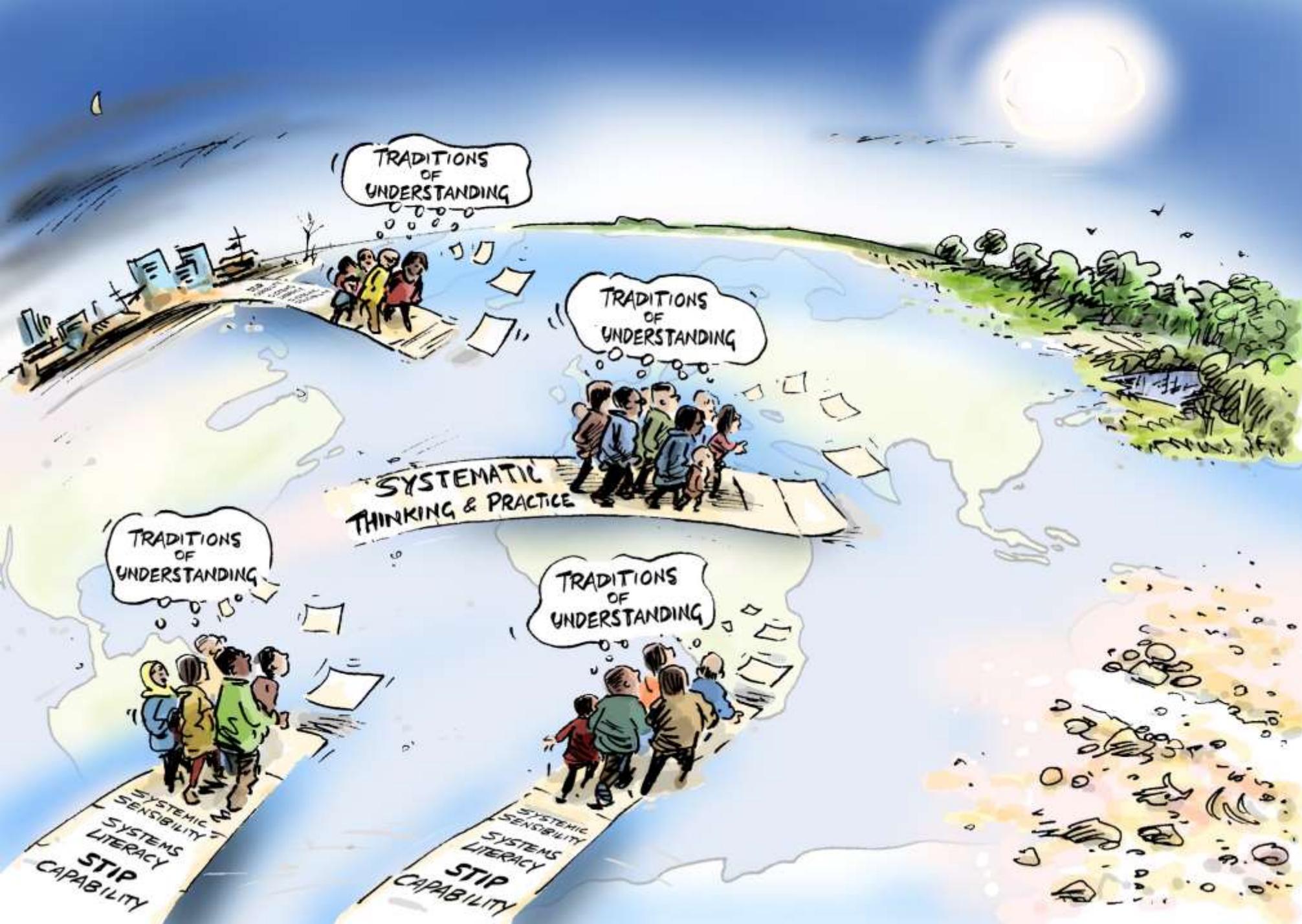
- What would so elevate the significance of biodiversity loss in people's minds that effective broad-based action would be both demanded and would happen?
- Myths and metaphors have forever been used forever to construct meaning for humans. Destructive root metaphors have been at the heart of biodiversity loss – notably human-nature separation and that the natural world is here for its use and exploitation by people.
- We proposes communicating the centrality to human existence of biodiversity through the metaphor: 'The Biosphere is God.'
- In Systemic 'Biodiversity' Governing, biodiversity conservation would be addressed most effectively through its framing within governance of the biosphere as a whole.



**We humans
lay down the
path of our
own walking**

**There are not
pathways
ahead to be
chosen**

We live in language and create meaning based on our history, interpretative frameworks based on our traditions of understanding



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Selected Links

<https://oecd-opsi.org/systemic-governing-applied-systems-thinking-in-practice/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3Q-YLKoIQ8>

