



Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group



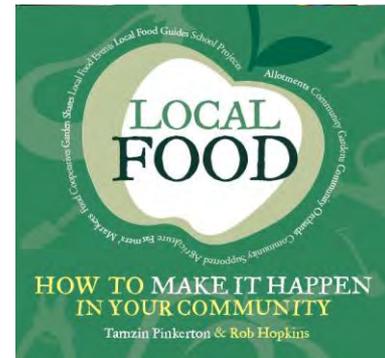
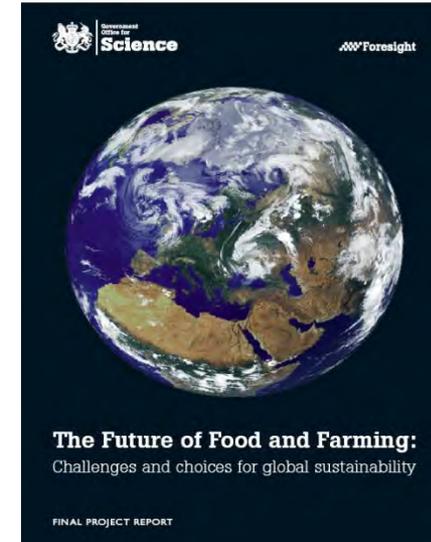
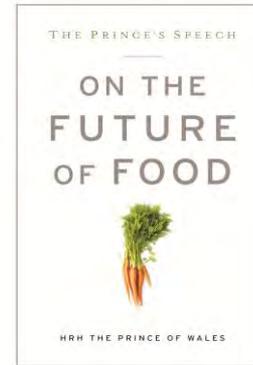
# CIVIL SOCIETY ROLES IN TRANSITION

Rachael Durrant



# Global problem

Mounting calls for transition to sustainable food from all sectors of society



...Attempts to create more sustainable systems remain marginal despite sustained efforts from civil society

# Policy context (UK)

- Long history of 'Productionism' in food and agriculture policy, coupled with Neoliberal trade policy and emerging global crises = **sustainable intensification**
- Lead roles for central governments, multinational business, high-tech science - **civil society/third sector viewed as delivery vehicle for top-down agenda, and/or „social conscience“**

## What about alternative/local food systems?

- **Disproportionate policy focus on quantity of food, of improved sustainability credentials, CSOs are involved in producing**
- **Ignorance of other important factors:**
  - **wider benefits** of ethical food consumption, civic involvement in food systems and related social activism
  - the different forms of **systemic innovation** through which CSOs influence food provision and contribute towards sustainabil

## Recent research...

£300–700 million/yr. spent on activities related to food and farming by c.10–25,000 CSOs

↪ Evidence of various strategic specialisations (e.g. awareness-raising; service provision; lobbying, etc.)

## But...

“The focus seems to be on filling holes left in a food system dominated by the private and public sectors, ahead of working to influence and change that system”

Food Ethics Council, Brighton, 2011

 The Food Issues Census

<http://www.foodissuescensus.org/>

# CIVIL SOCIETY ROLES IN TRANSITION

*Is this really the case?*

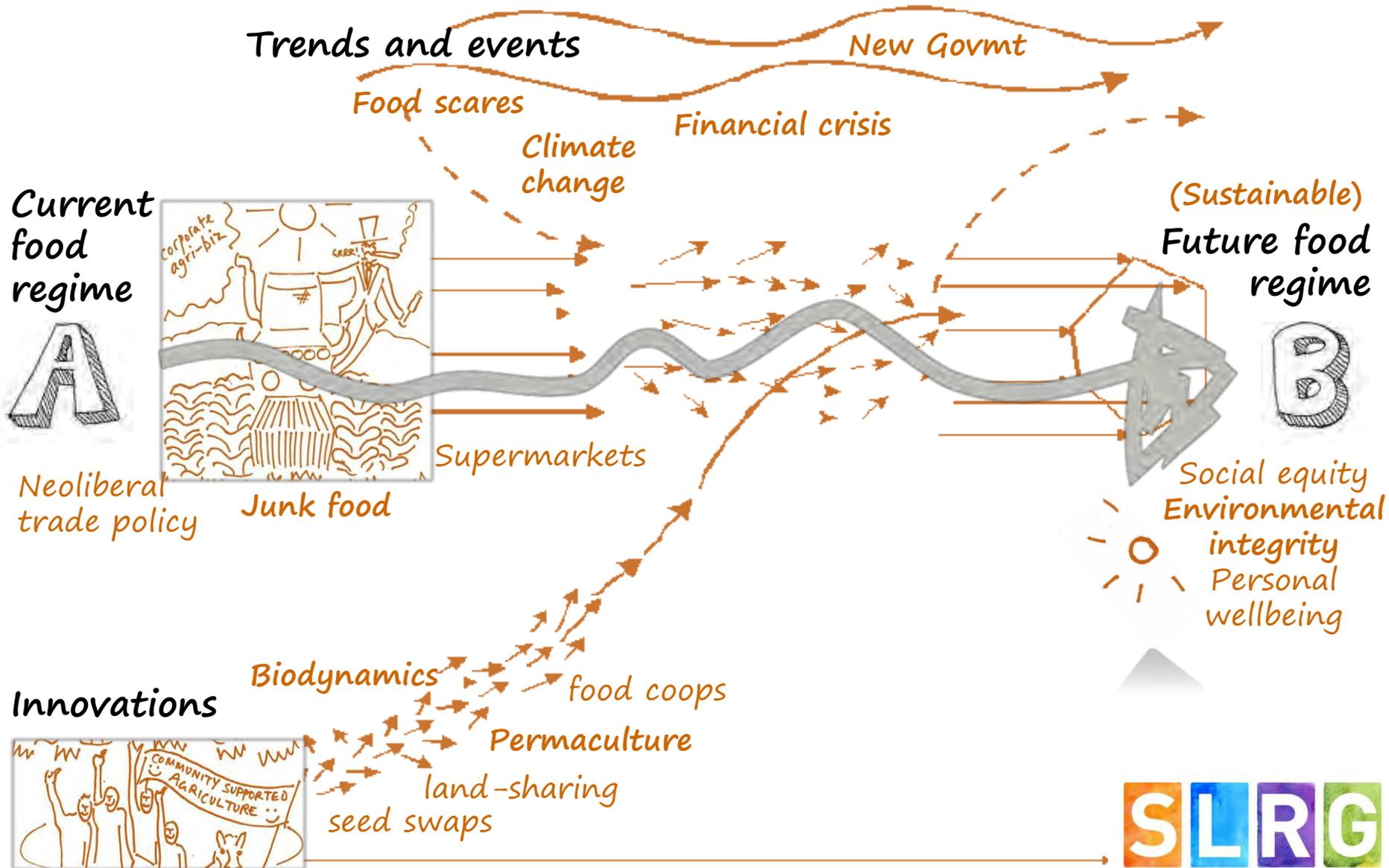
*If so, why?*

*What kinds of roles are being  
played by civil society in a  
transition to sustainability?*

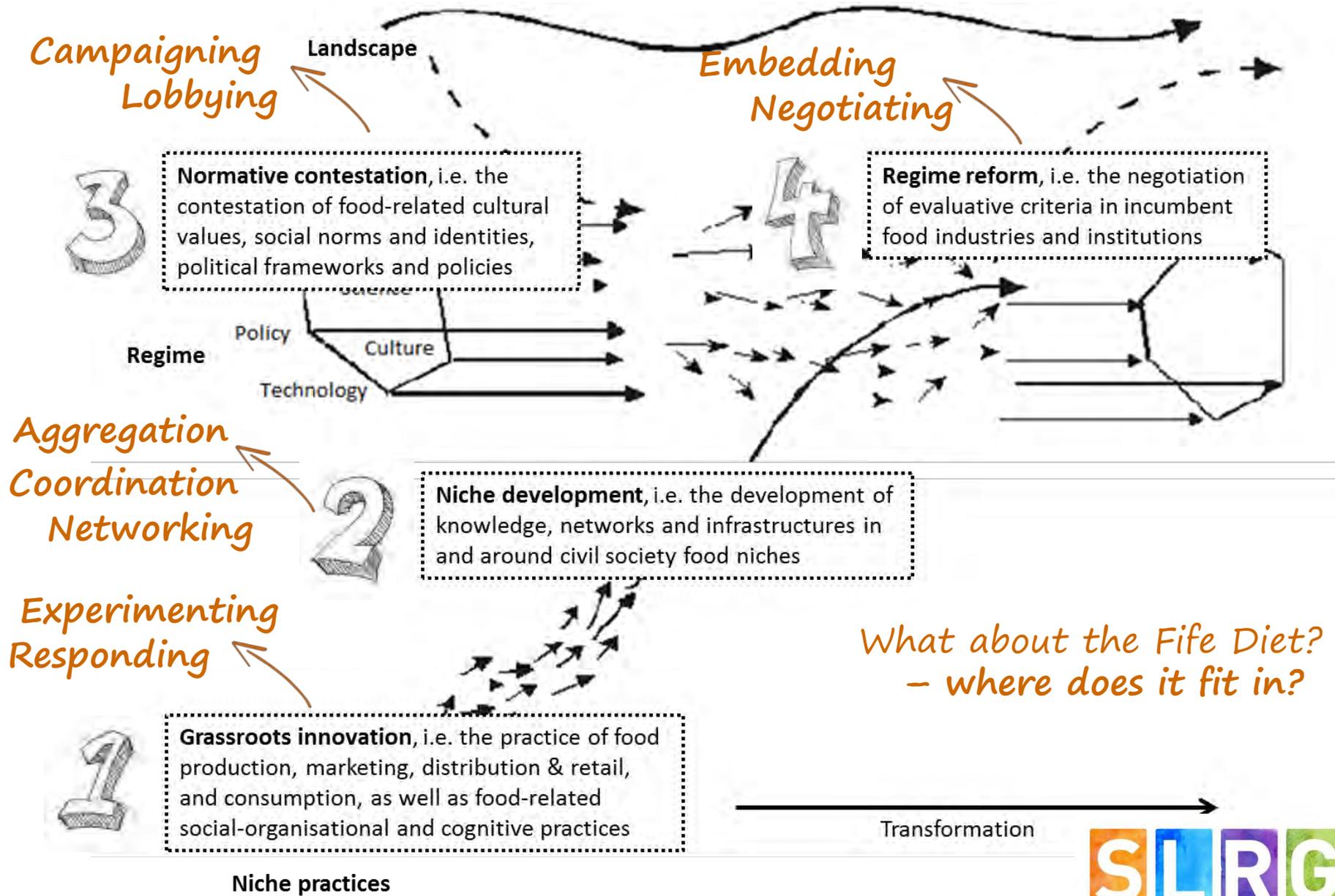
*What roles could be played?*

# Underlying theory of transition

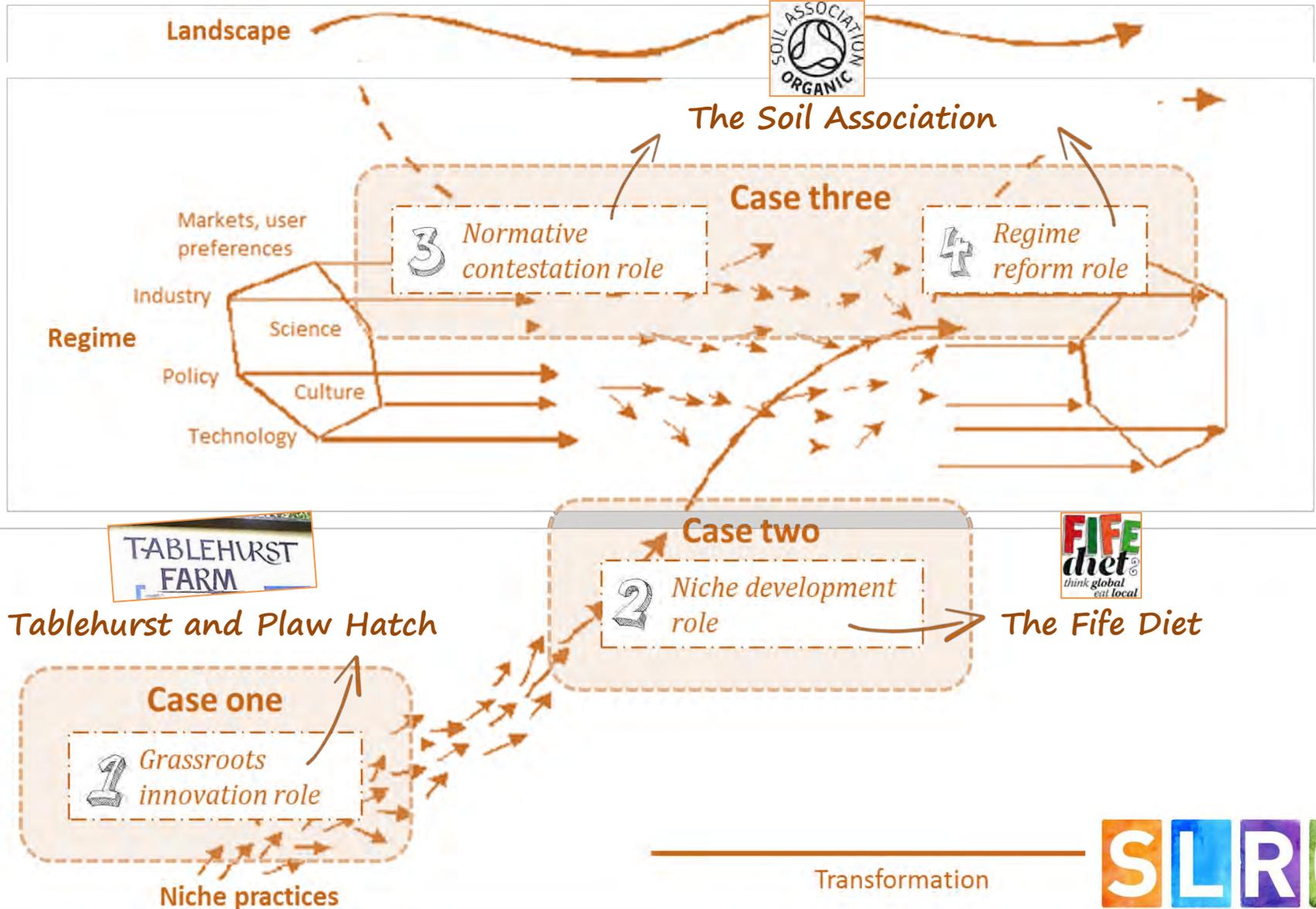
Adapted from Geels (2002)



# Typology of roles in transition (RIT)

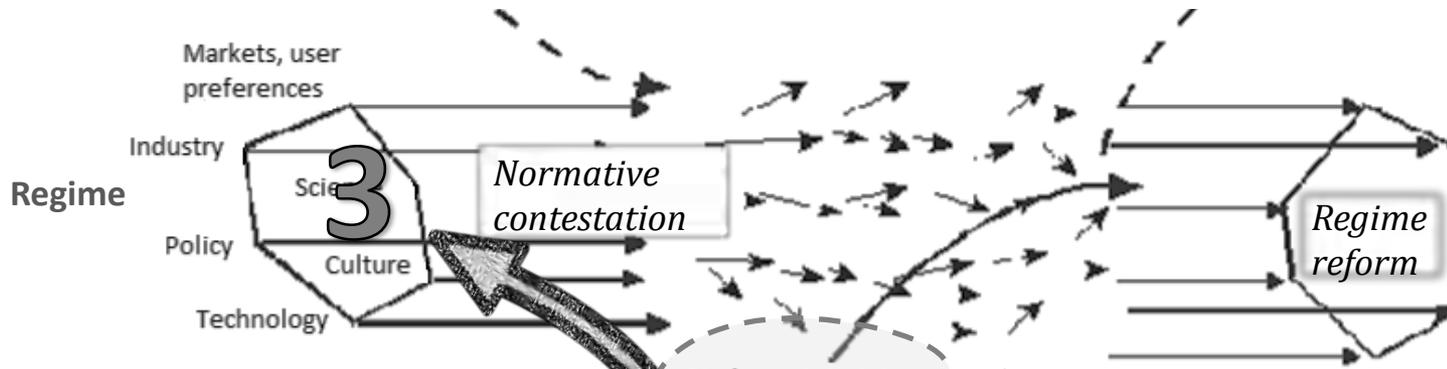


# Selection of case studies



Landscape

# Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch



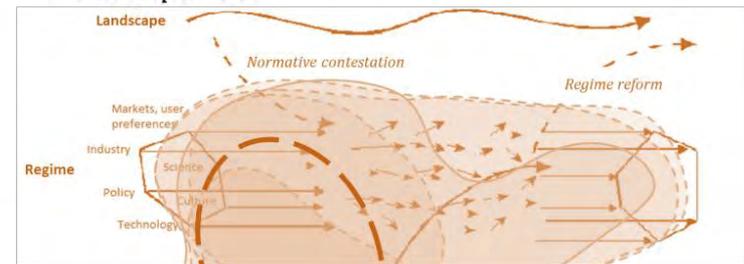
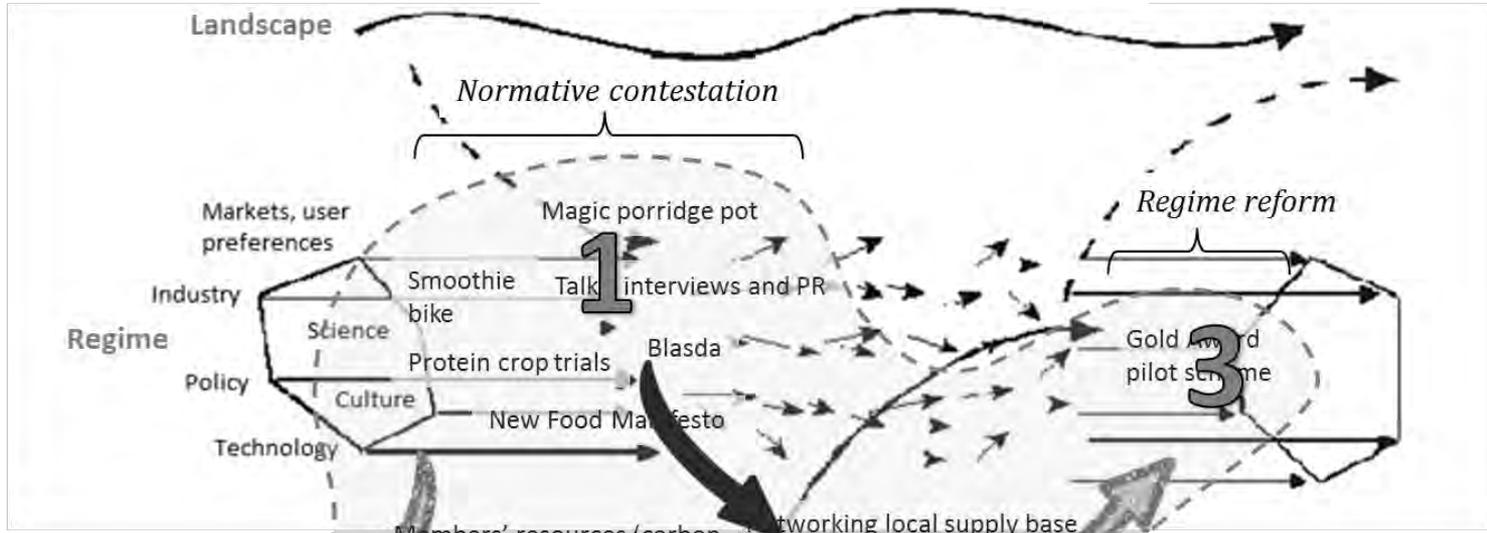
Grassroots innovation



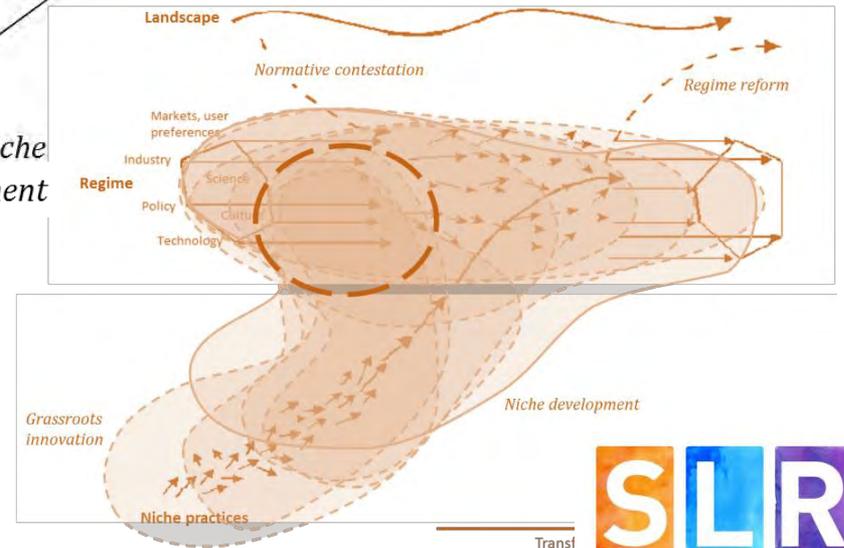
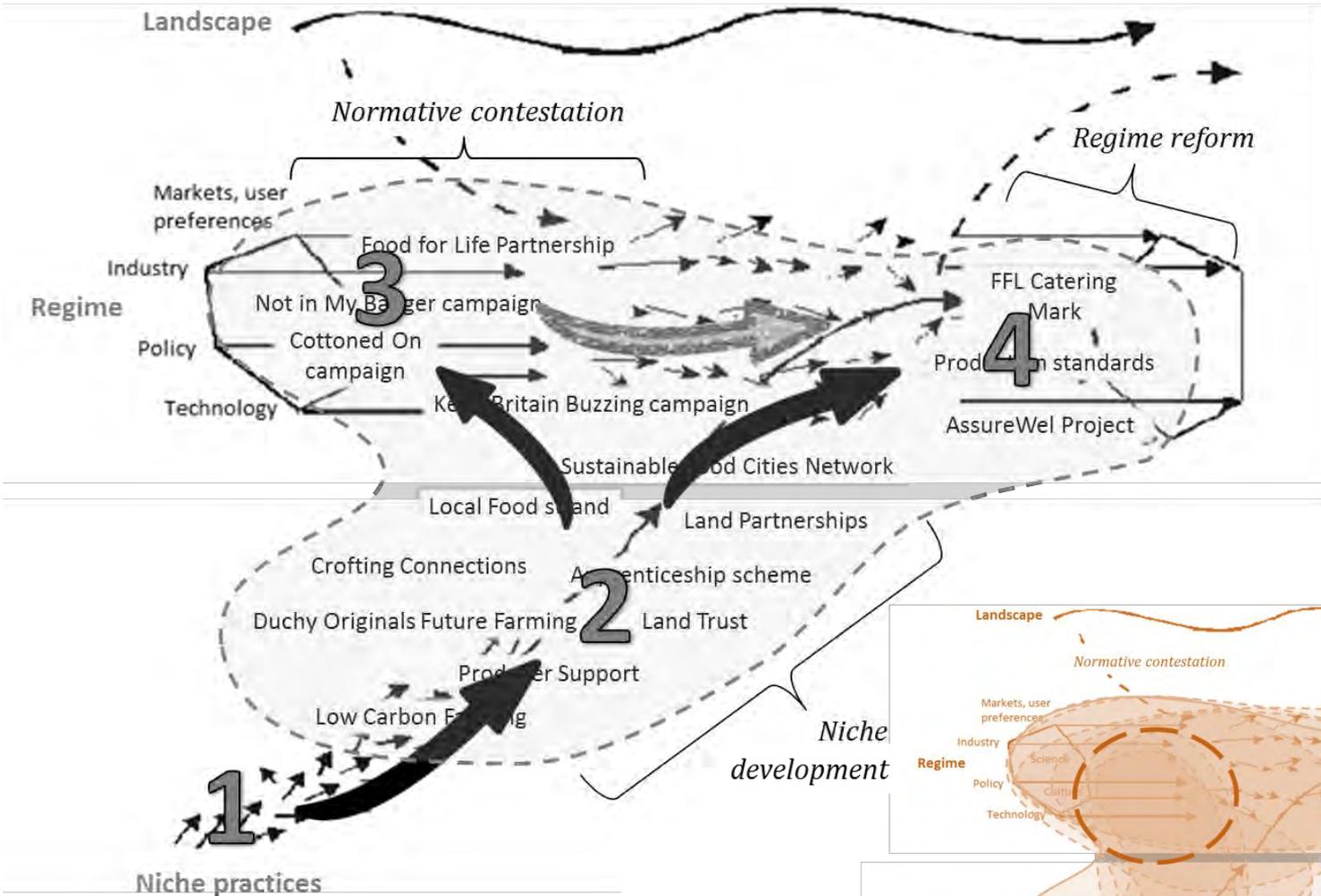
Niche development



# The Fife Diet



# The Soil Association



# Analytical summary

How do individual groups enact the roles?

- (1) multiple roles simultaneously
- (2) different roles favoured at different times

→ **Multivalency**  
→ **Dynamism**

What are the consequences?

- (1) synergies and tensions, both internally and in their interactions
- (2) internal structures through which tensions can be managed
- (3) complex patternings of networks and alliances to harness benefits

↑ **Responsiveness**

Do the roles correspond with their intentions?

- (1) generally speaking, no
- (2) what's more, they don't share a common vision of transition

↘ **Complexity & interdependency**

So what's going on?

...they're engaged in a plurality of intended transformations

↗ **Plurality**



# Policy implications

*Policy-making would be more effective if it:*

- Acknowledged the collective efforts of CSOs to innovate sustainable systems
- Viewed innovation in terms of **system dynamics**, rather than focussing on discrete projects/technologies
- Recognised the **mutually reinforcing** nature of the roles that CSOs play
- Accepted that there is no silver bullet instrument for supporting CS innovation

*Therefore policy should aim to:*

- **Enable**, rather than control, CS innovation
- Support a **diversity** of approaches

*When it comes to evaluation:*

- Support for CSOs should not be linked to measures that might suppress innovation through reinforcing homogenisation (e.g. centrally-controlled outcome-based assessment using generic indicators and metrics)
- On-going and **adaptable process-based assessment** by groups of peers may be more appropriate



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