



Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group



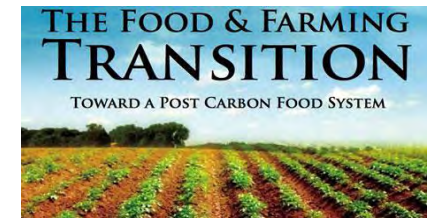
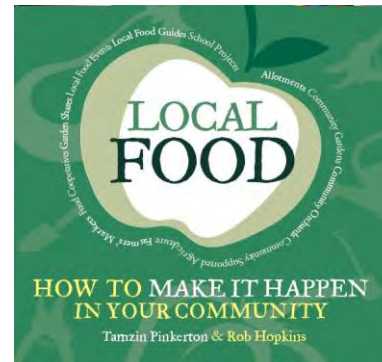
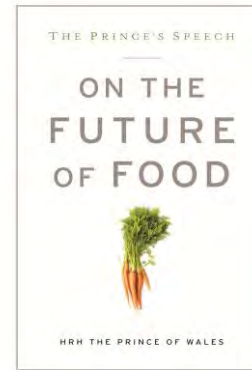
CIVIL SOCIETY ROLES IN TRANSITION

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/>

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Is this really the case?

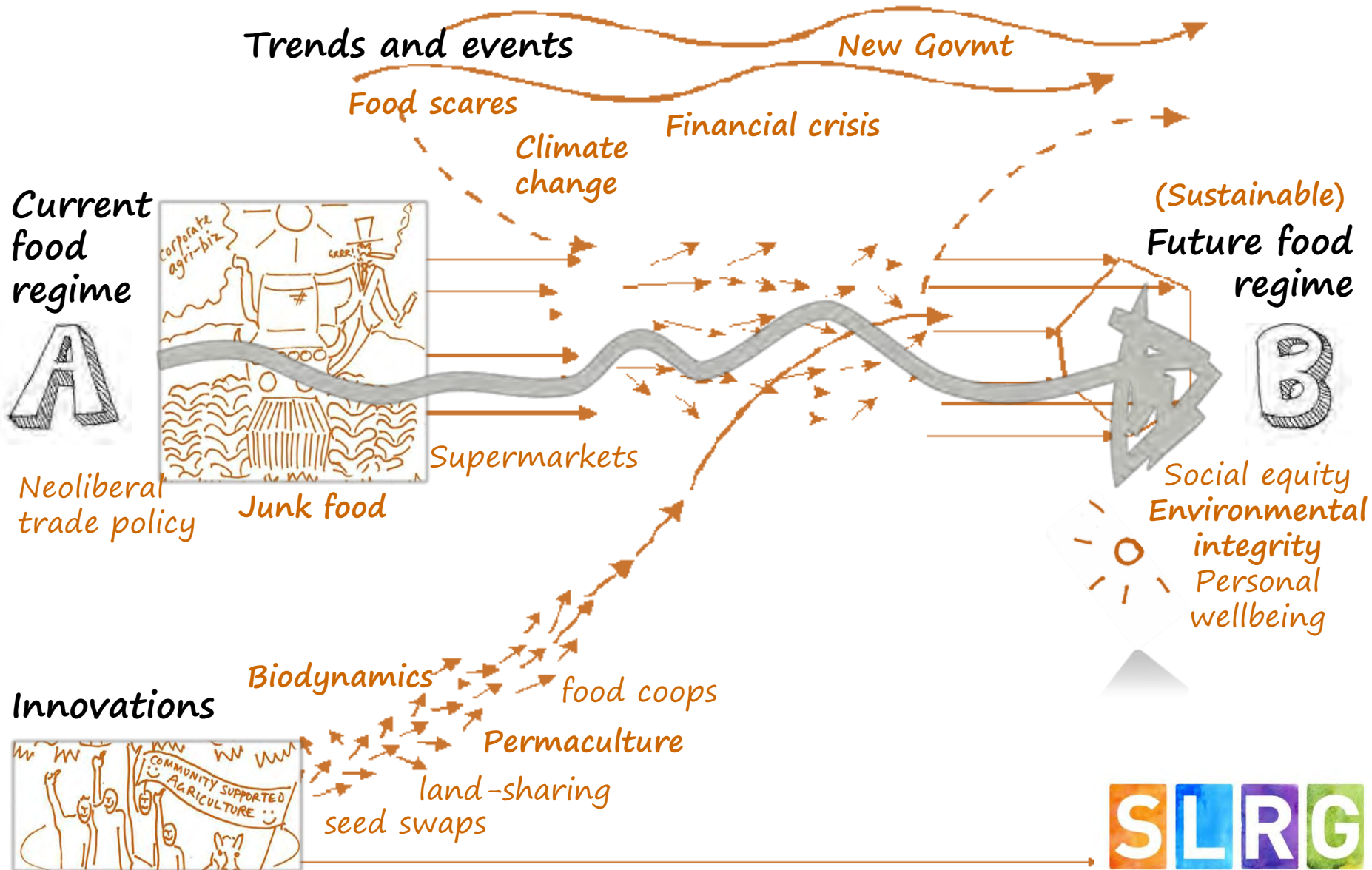
If so, why?

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

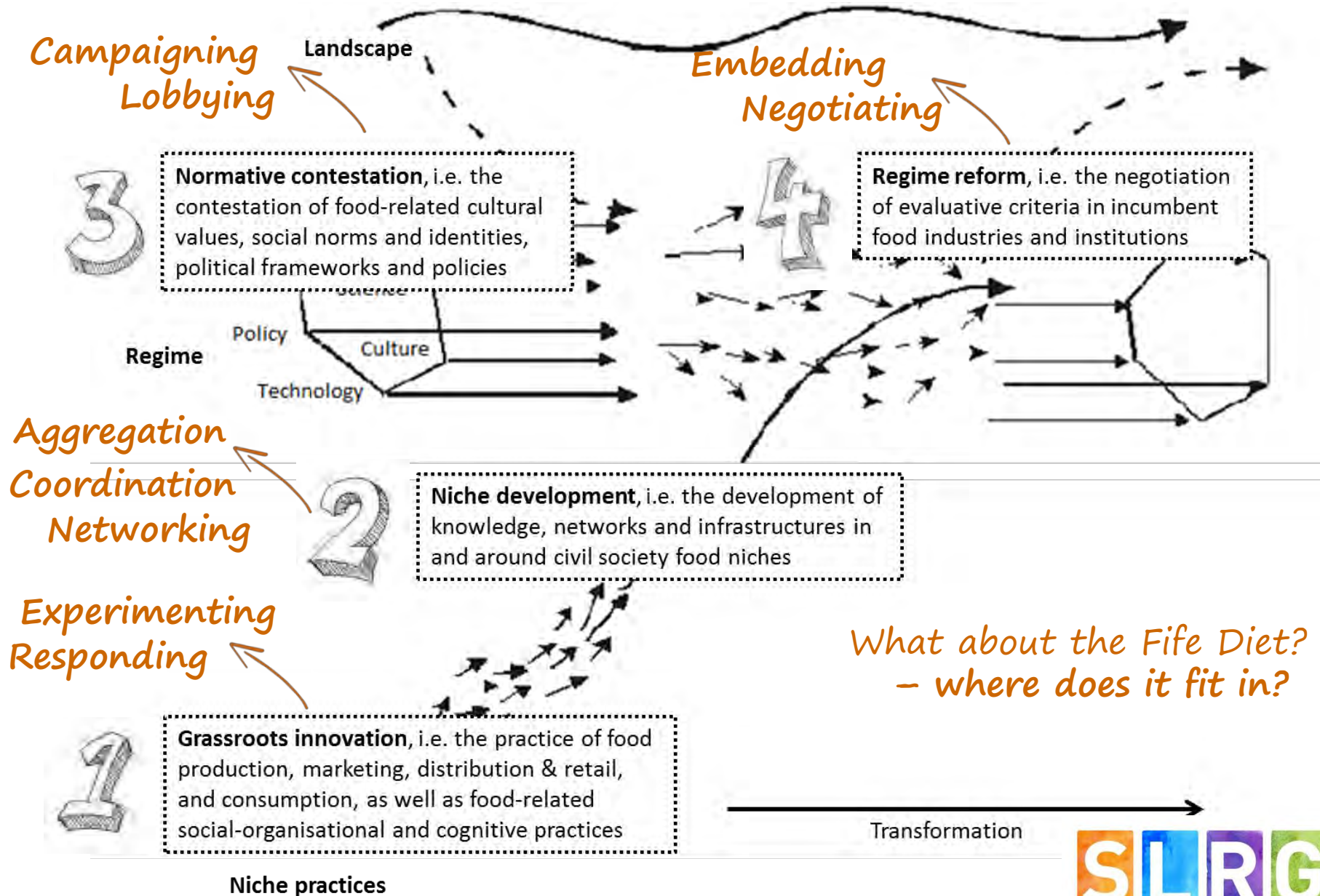
What roles could be played?

Underlying theory of transition

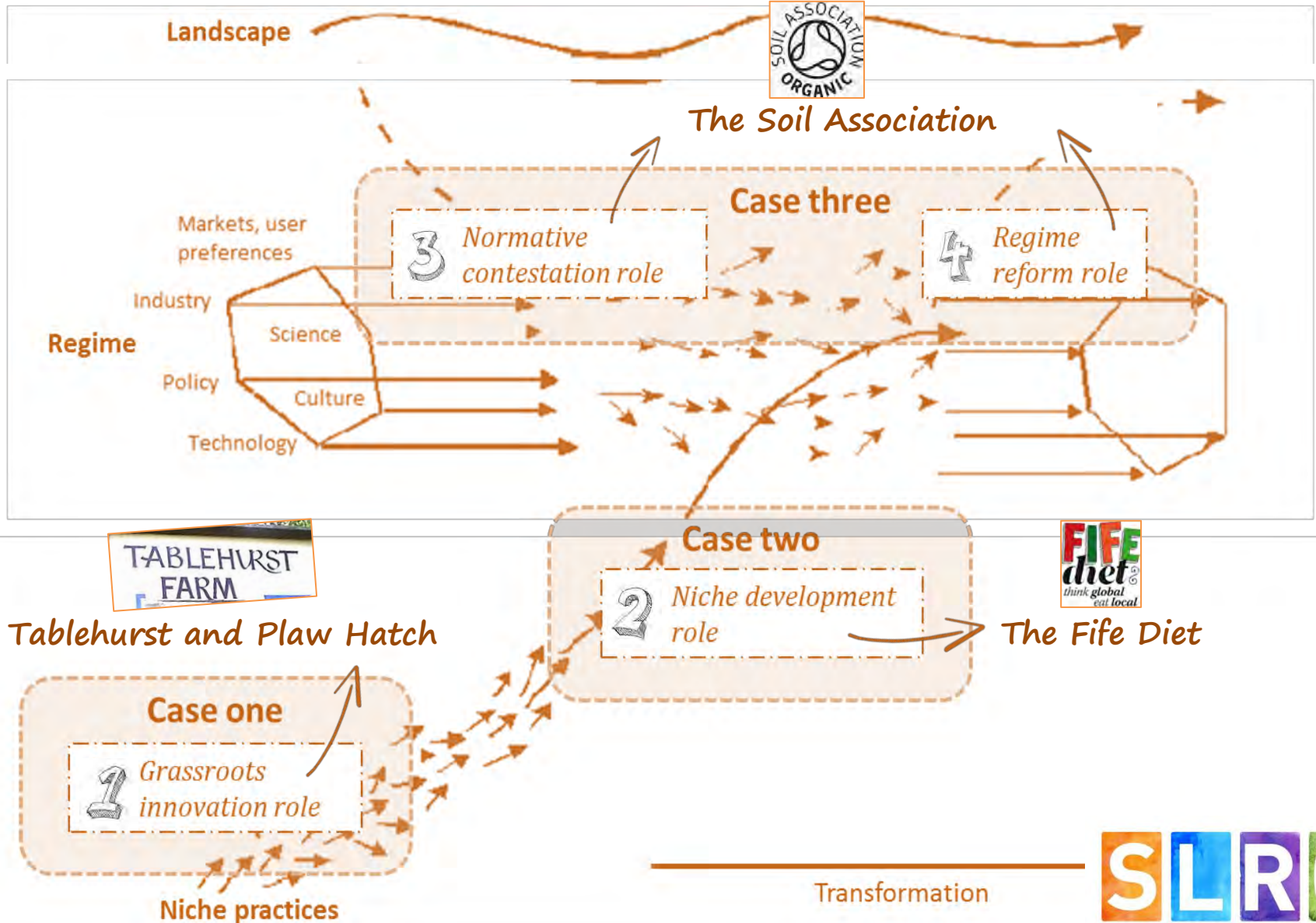
Adapted from Geels (2002)



Typology of roles in transition (RIT)

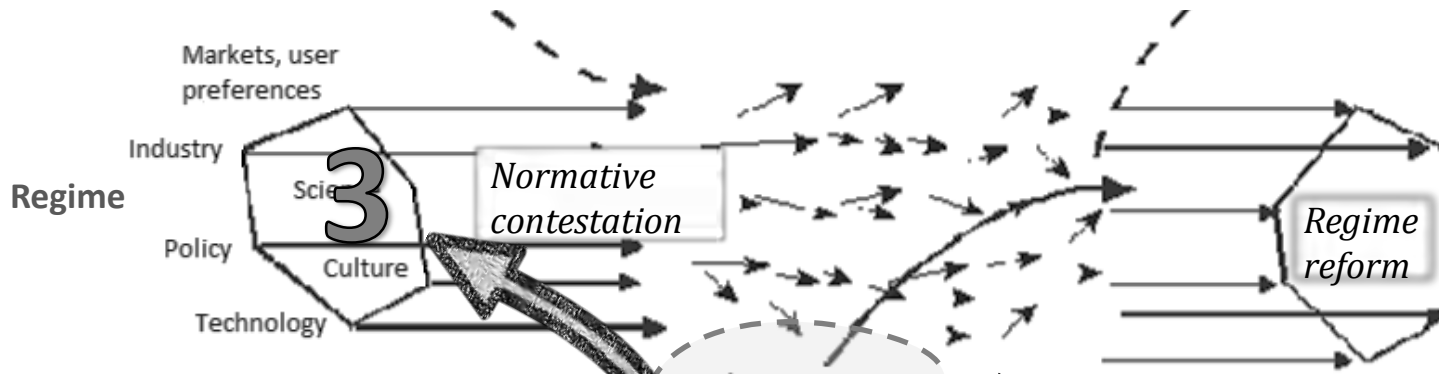


Selection of case studies



Landscape

Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch



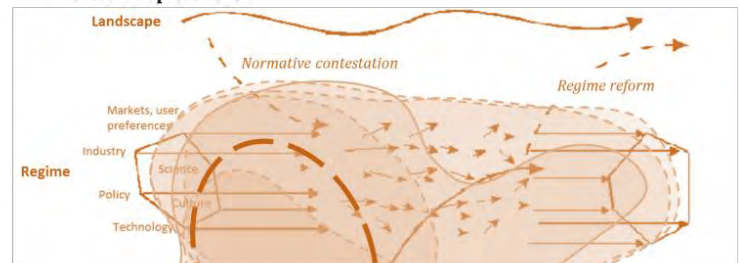
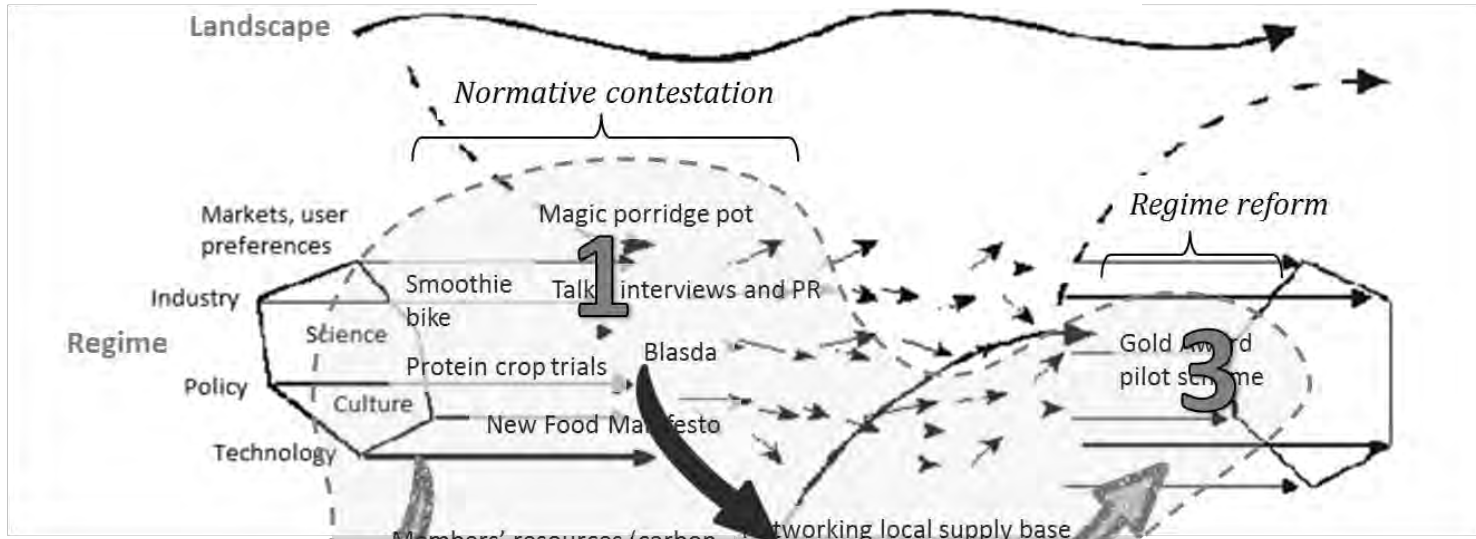
Grassroots innovation



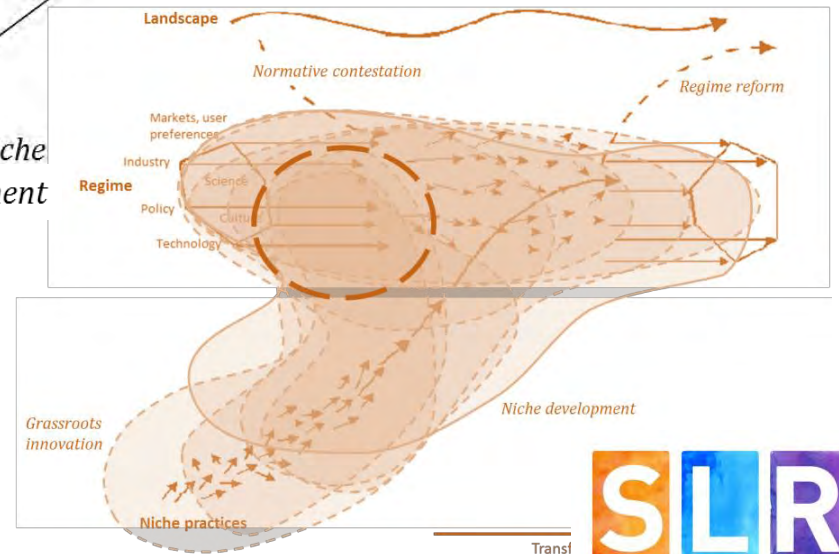
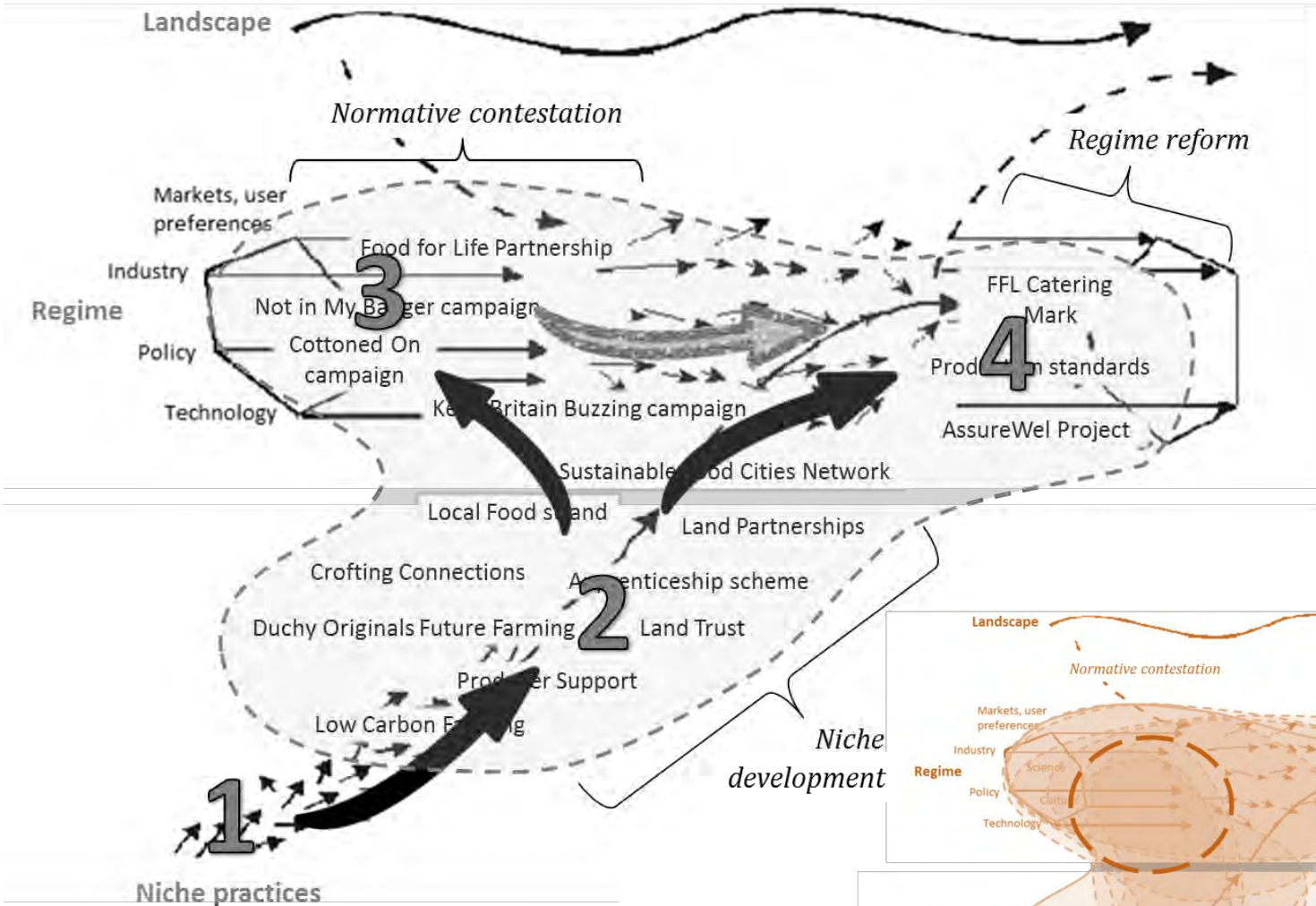
Niche development



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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