

Transformative Cooperation: From Projects to Ambitious Partnerships

Innovation Project 'Transformative Impact'

Annette Lutz, Julia Mager, Christoph Mairesse,
Kathrin Beaufrère, Daniel Kehrer



Context and Working Question:

Integrated solutions?

Thinking in shared transformative missions?

Beyond projects?

Just Transitions?

Which **management paradigms**, structures, processes and methods allow us to effectively and efficiently increase our **transformative impact in very complex contexts?**

Partnerships on eye level?

VUCA problems

Transformation partnerships - but how?

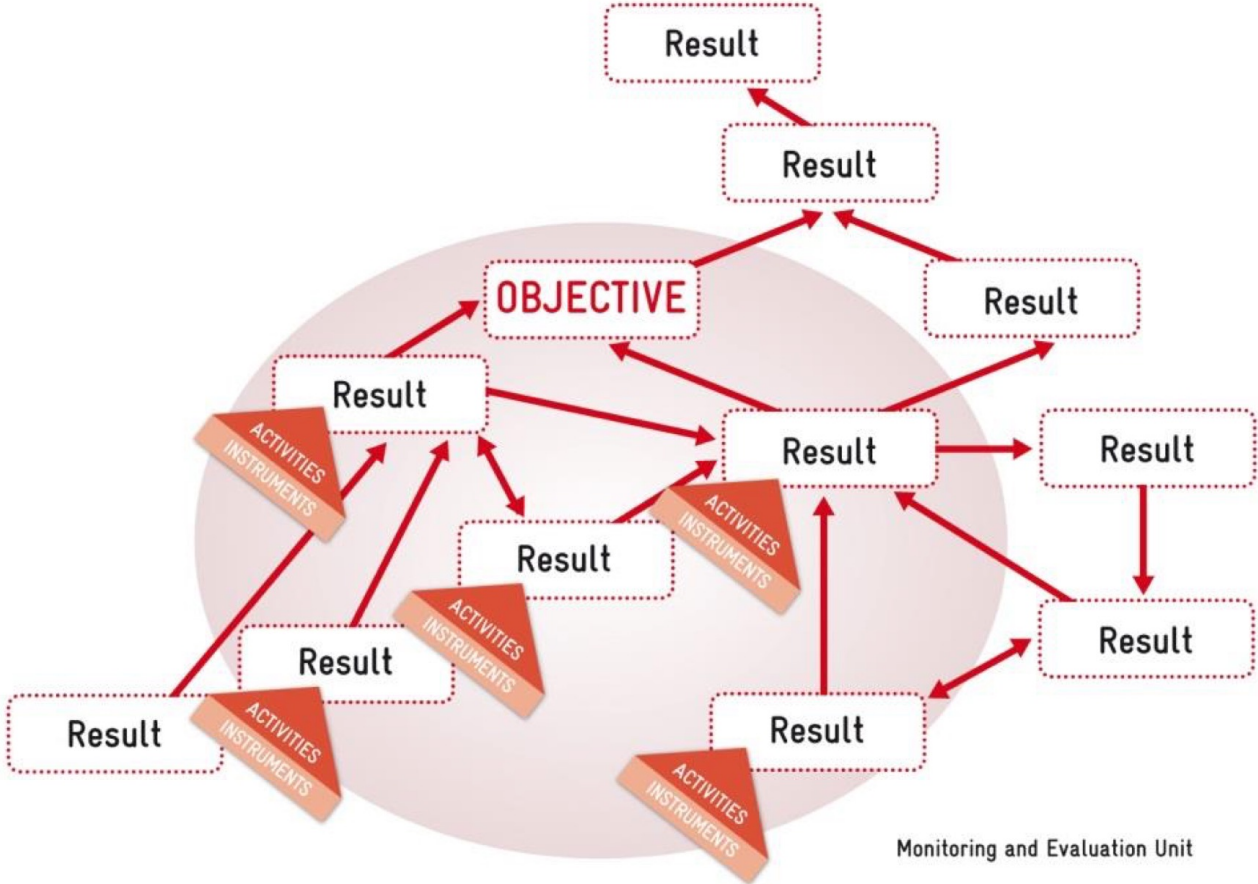
Democratic and geopolitical crises

Limits of planAbility

ComplexAbility



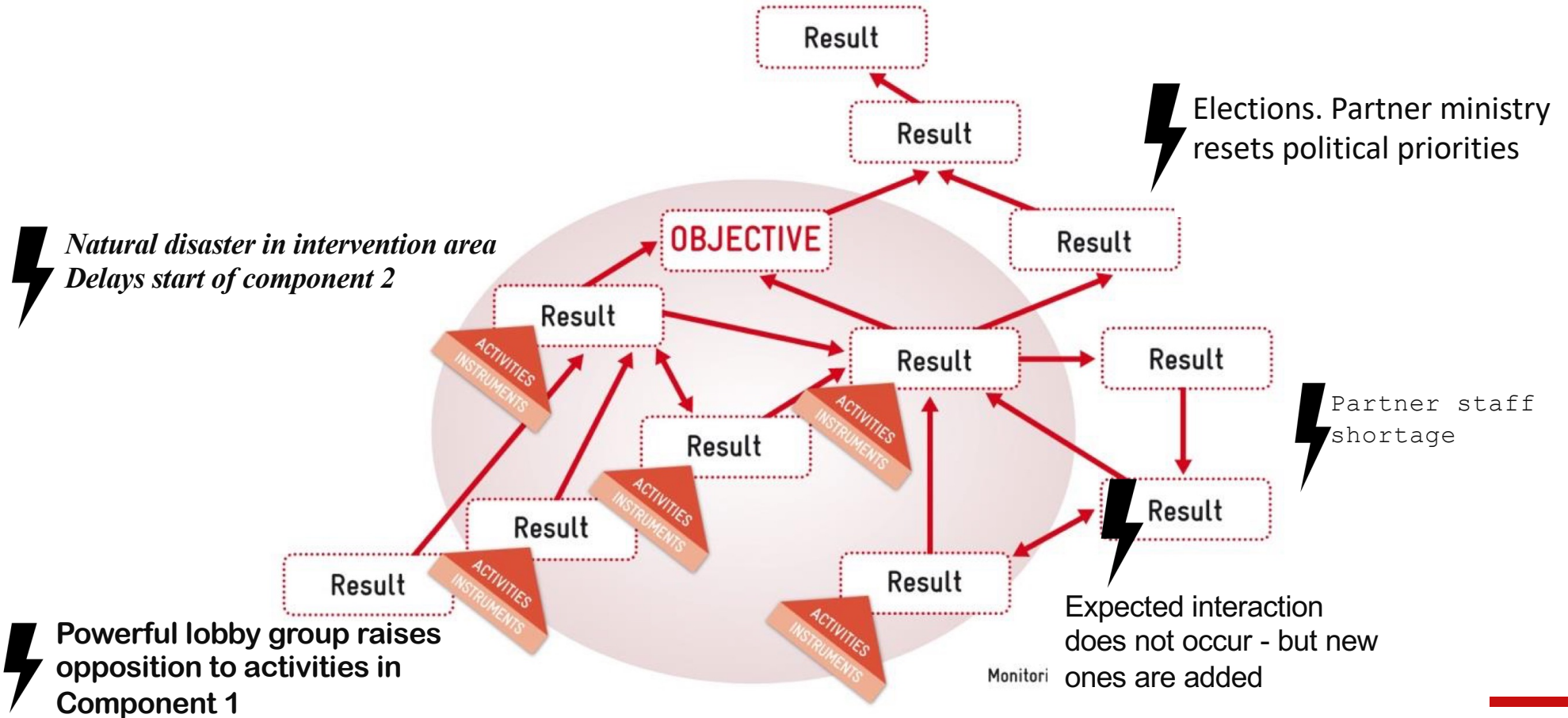
Classical' development cooperation projects assume that impacts are plannable to a major extent.



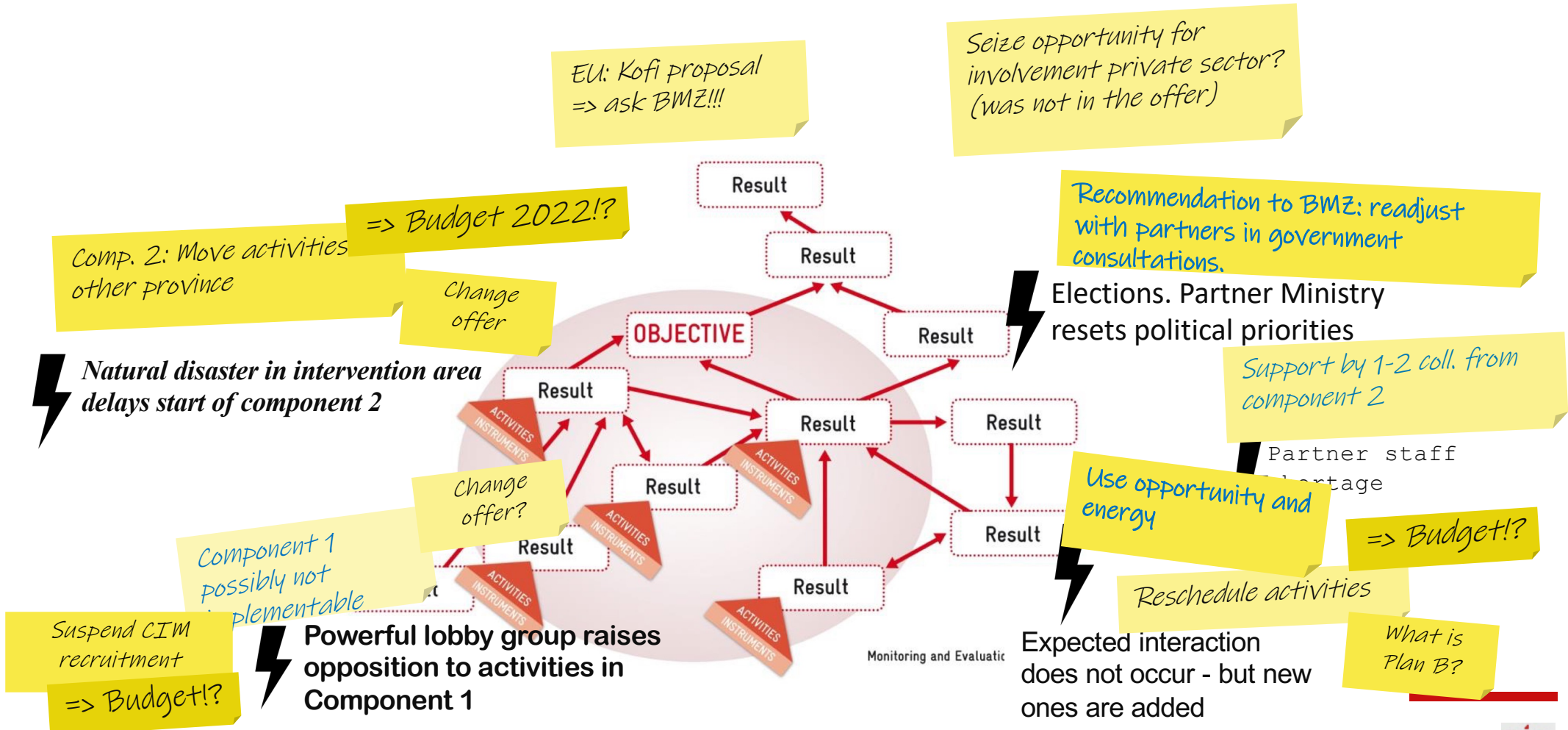
These projects are designed for issues where there is a broad consensus on what the problems are - and experience is available on how to find a suitable path to the goal.



In the implementation of projects - especially if they have ambitious goals - we often experience that the effects do not occur as planned.



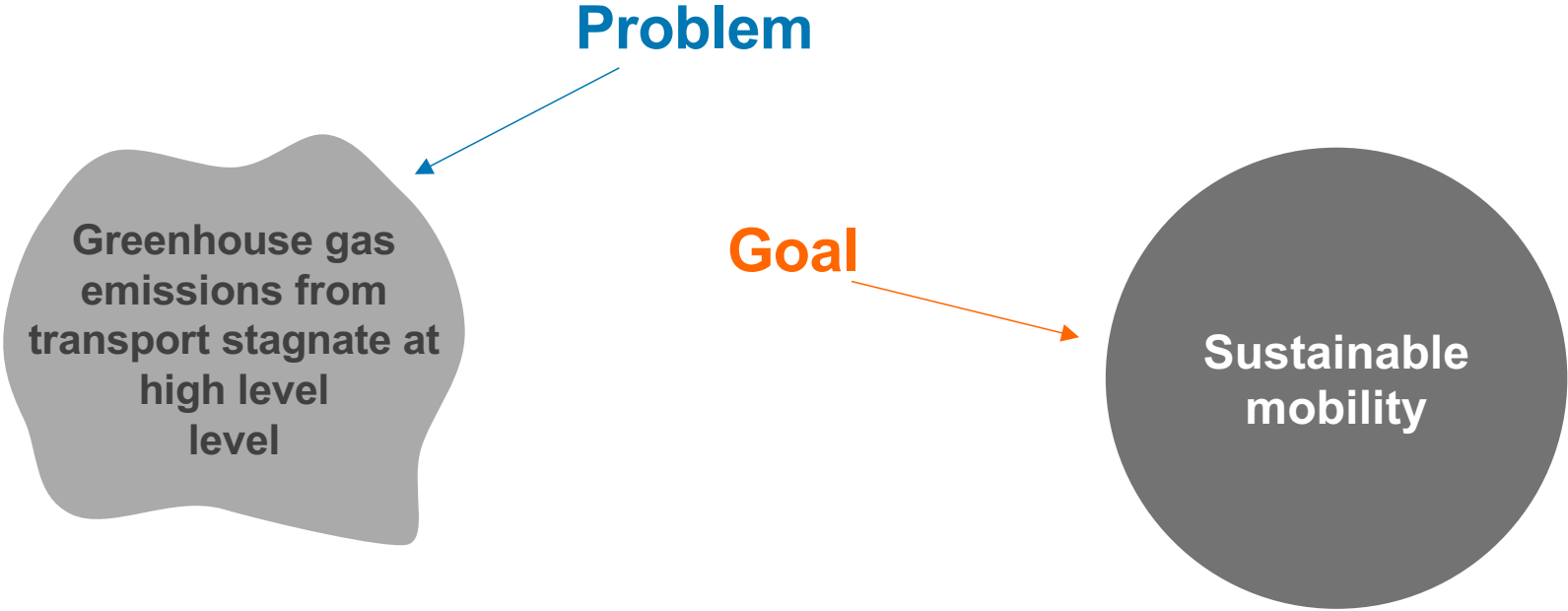
In these cases we adjust the planning - if necessary, again and again.



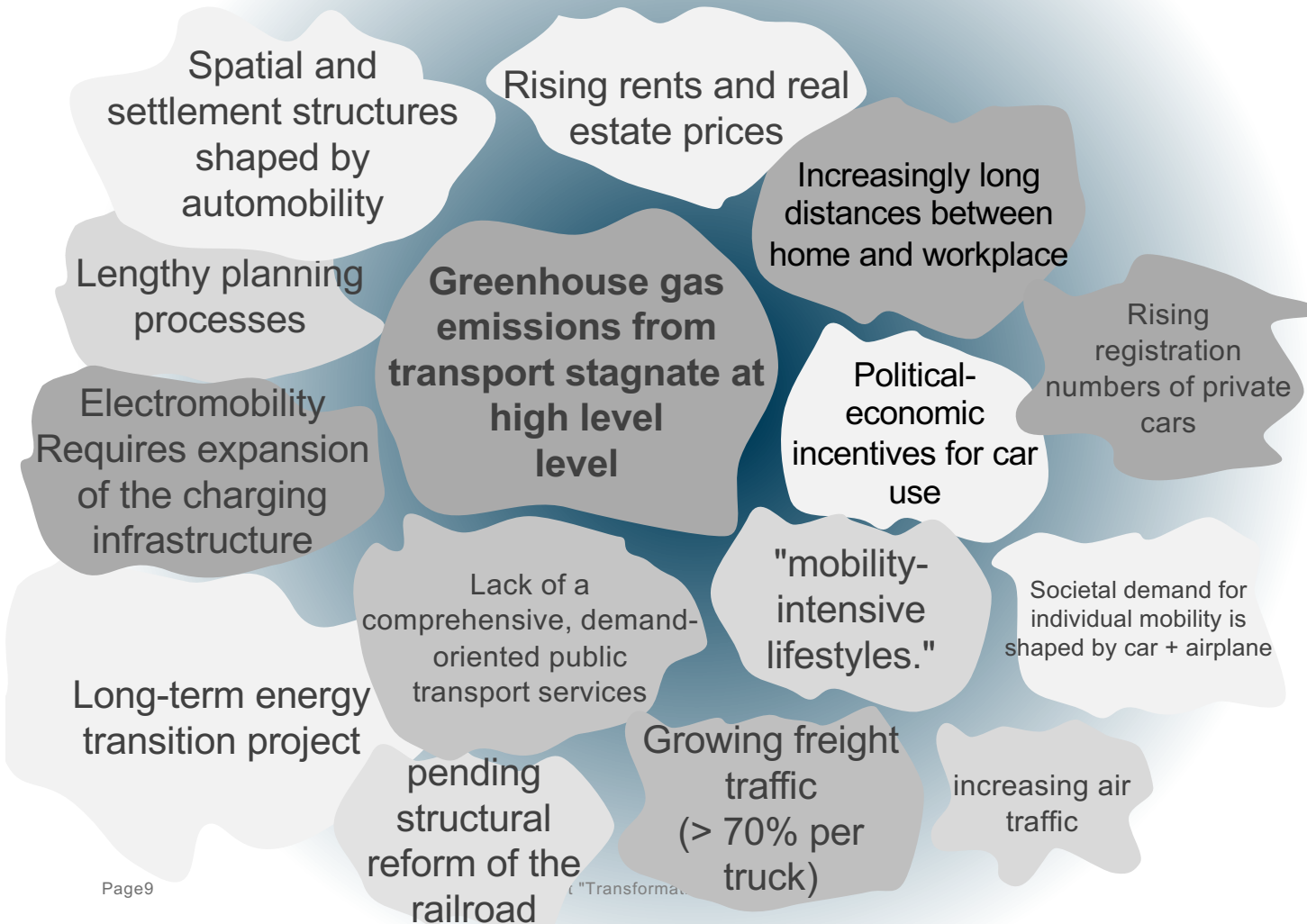
But what about questions where there is no consensus about the **way to the goal** (means) –

... maybe not even consensus about what the **core problem** actually is and what exactly the **goal** (ends) should be?

Example: Mobility transformation in Germany
(Simple one-sided description)



Example: Mobility transformation in Germany (appreciating complexity)



The problem is complex.

It is inextricably linked to other problems, which are complex in themselves.

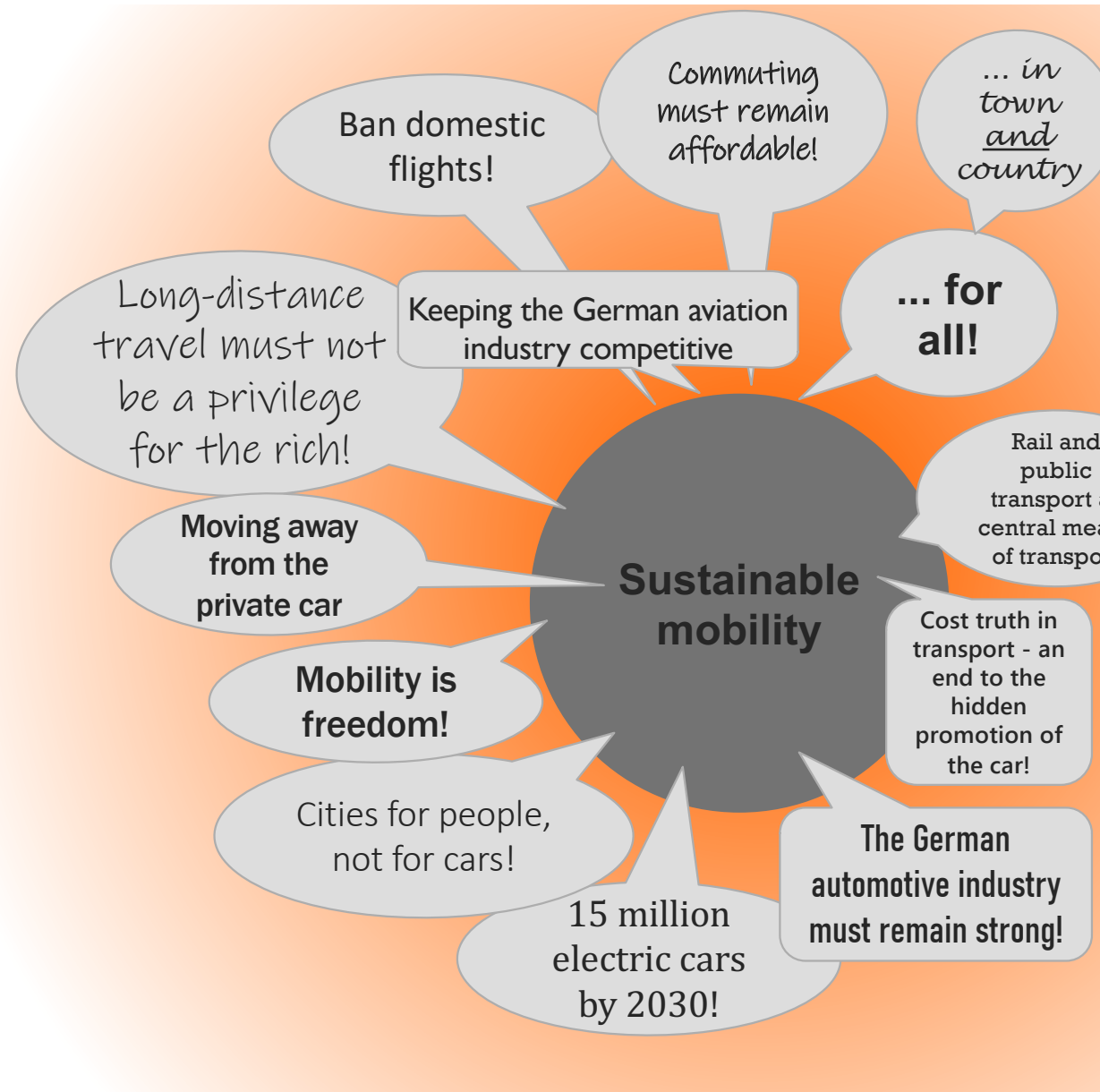
What all these problems have in common is that they are associated with diverse and distinct interests and values, some of which are in conflict with each other.

Example: Mobility transformation in Germany (appreciating complexity)

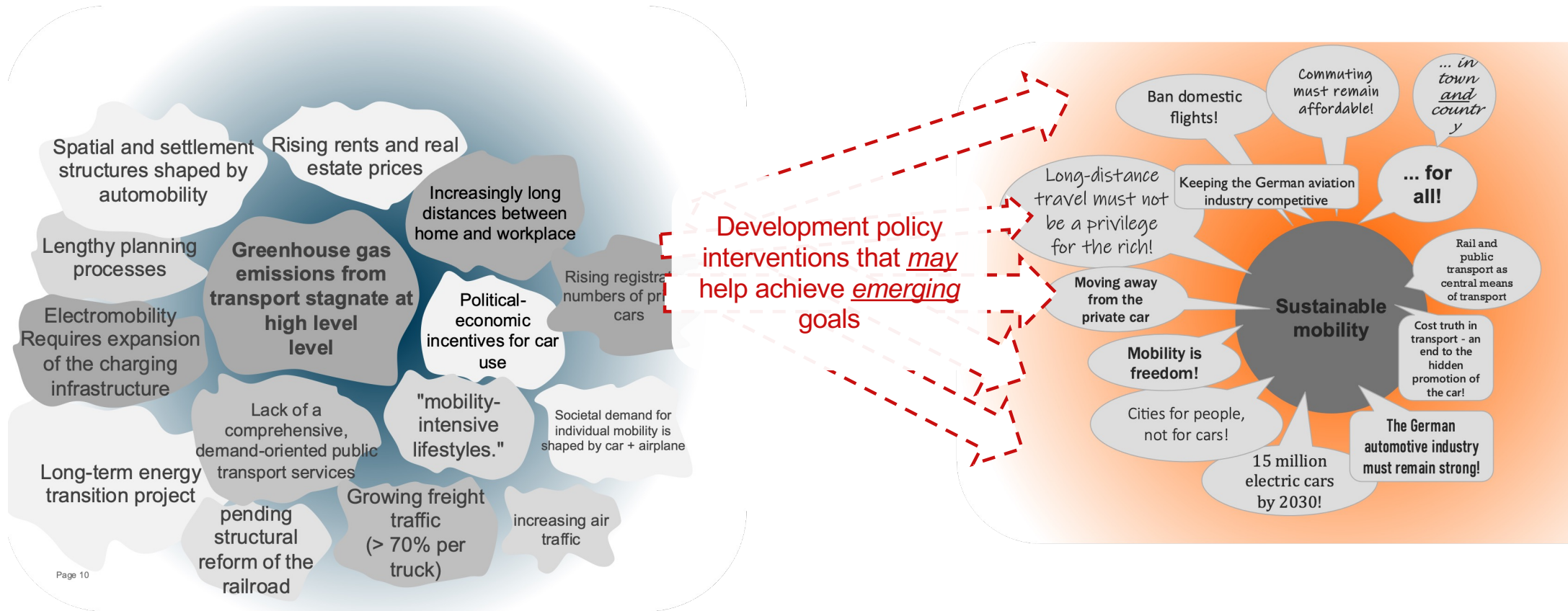
Due to the wickedness of the problem, the objectives are also diverse.

They are partly in conflict with each other.

The different objectives are being vigorously championed by various interest groups.



In such a context, our paradigm of planning impacts finally reaches its limits.



**The goals and visions of the future evolve over time and debates.
Openness is necessary on all sides.**

From TINA ...

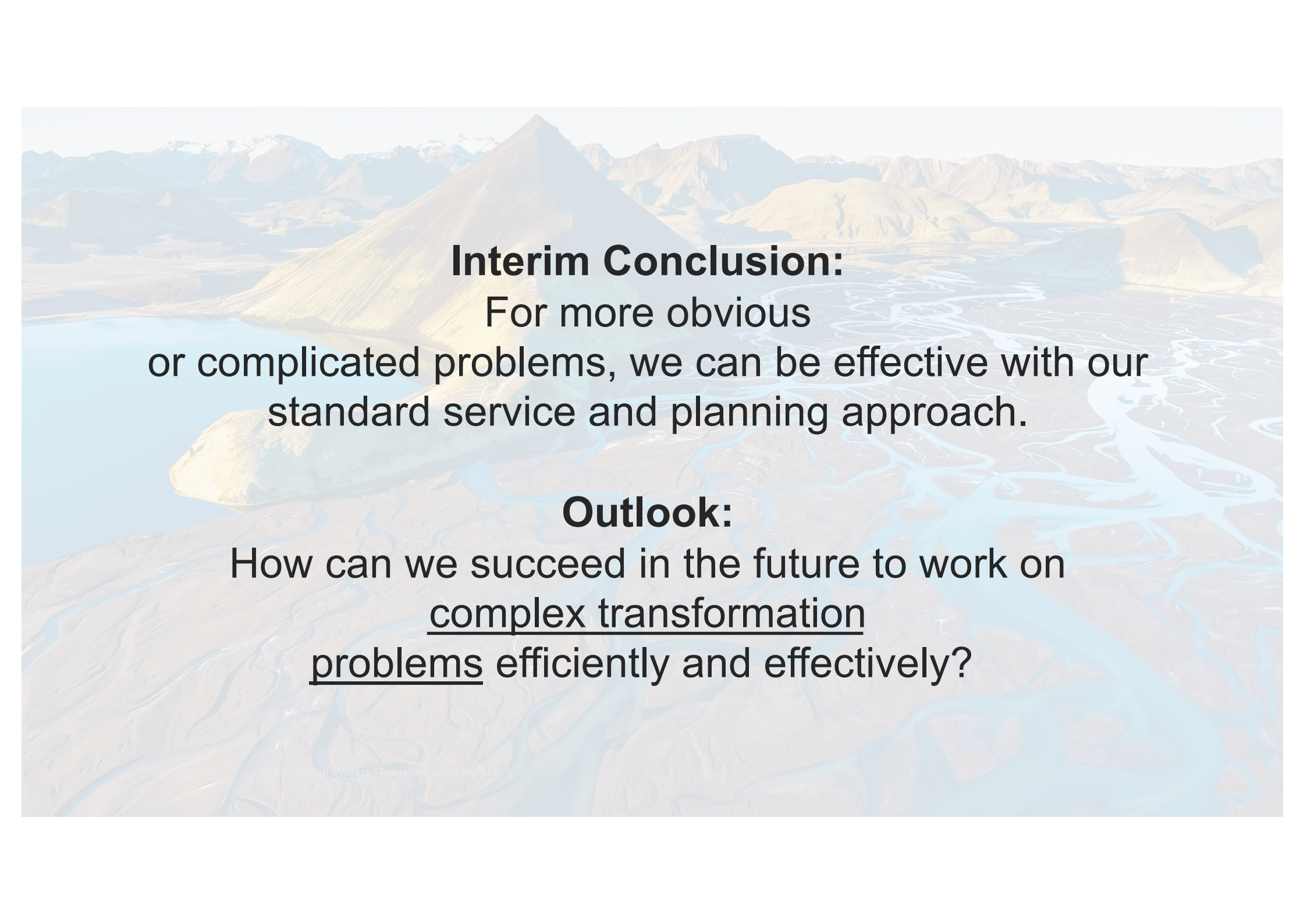
... to TAPAS!



For transformations, suitable paths to the goals are not fixed from the outset. They have to be found in the course of the transformation.



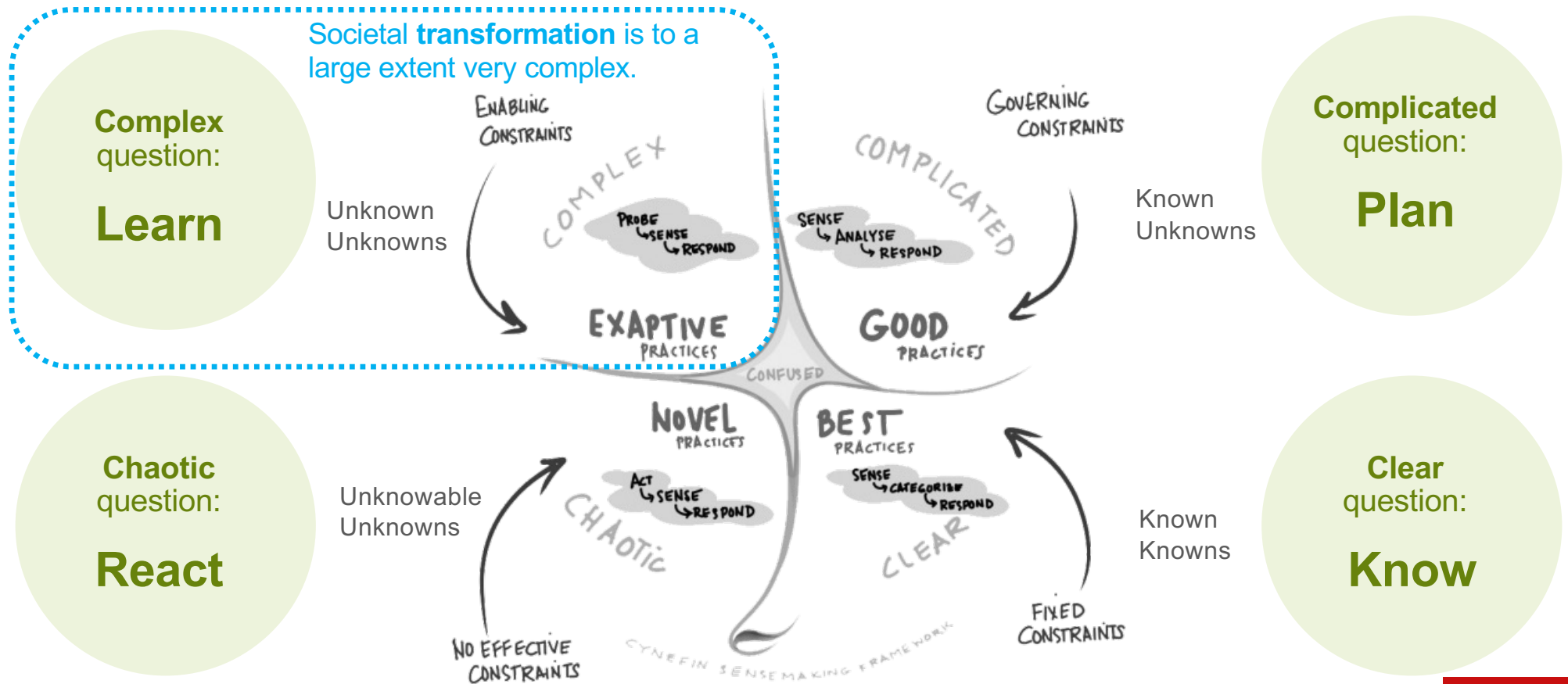
Image source: [Branched river course](#) | [Bieler Tagblatt](#)

An aerial photograph of a mountain range. In the foreground, a large, prominent pyramid-shaped mountain peak stands out. To its right, a river delta with multiple channels flows across a flat, brownish landscape. In the background, a range of mountains with snow-capped peaks stretches across the horizon under a clear sky.

Interim Conclusion:
For more obvious
or complicated problems, we can be effective with our
standard service and planning approach.

Outlook:
How can we succeed in the future to work on
complex transformation
problems efficiently and effectively?

Disciplinary base complexity theory: different types of questions



Ideas for working on transformative / complex issues:

Identify the nature of the problem

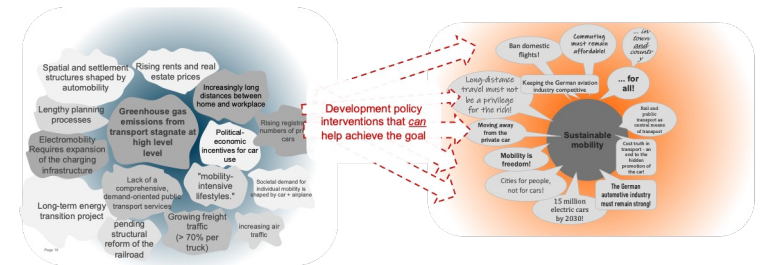
We need continuous distinction mechanisms and culture:

Is it a clear or complicated problem?

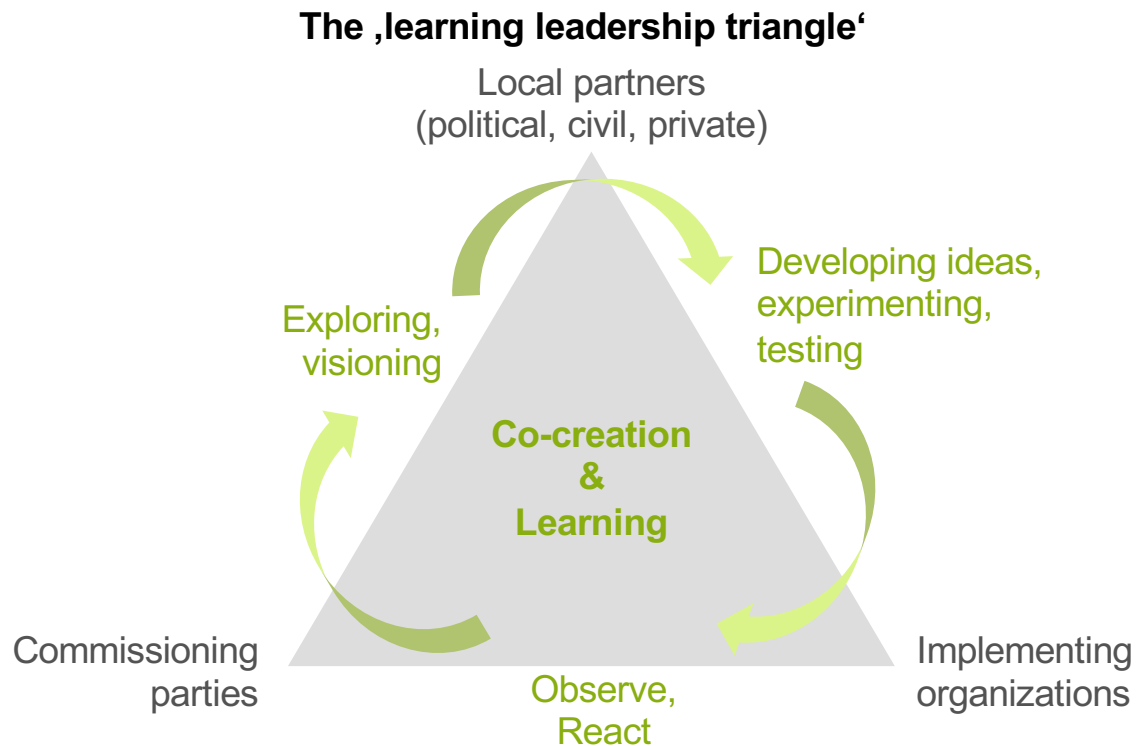
Project planning and implementation according to the **common model**: impact promises against the background of empirical knowledge and *best or good practices*

Or are we dealing with a complex problem - such as supporting the mobility, energy or agricultural transformation in country x?

new form of cooperation (see following slides)



Partnership with shared responsibility for transformation goal X



- Instead of working towards a project proposal (knowledge to action), building a **partnership** (action to knowledge).
- Different **roles**, shared responsibility
- Joint exploration (compare project mission) already understood as **implementation**
- Shared transformation **vision** emerges

High ambitions, small steps

The partnership is being defined



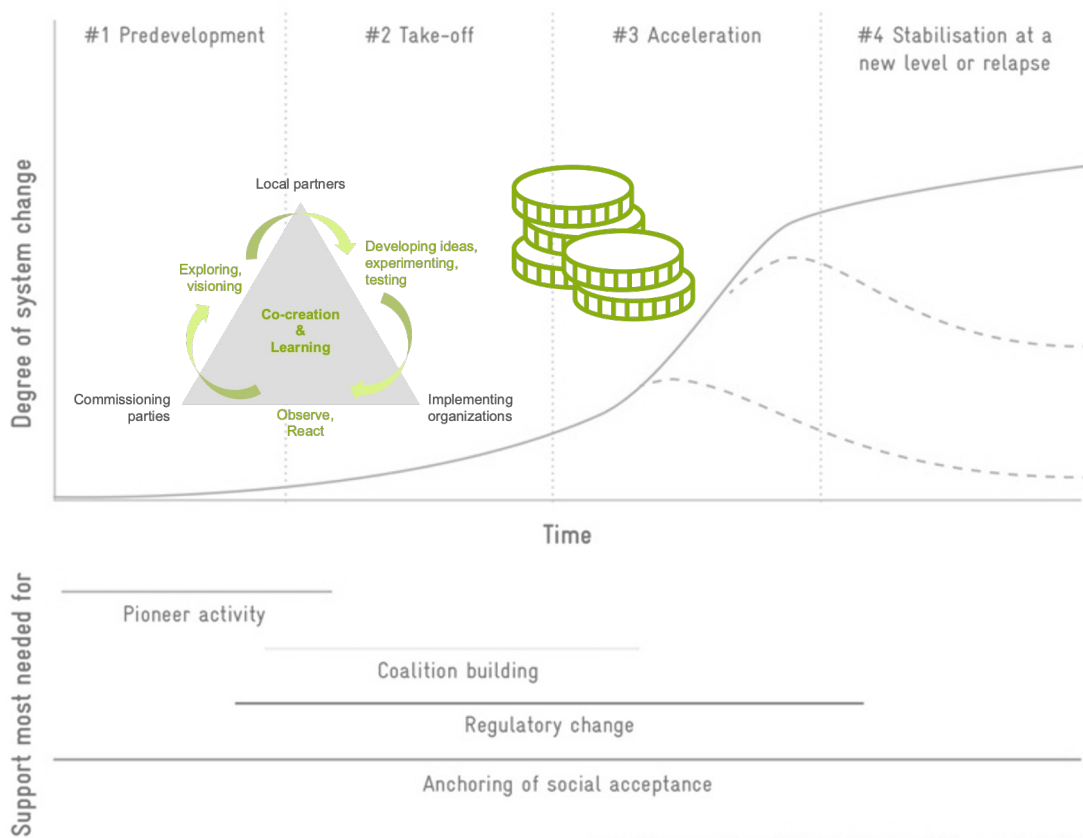
Partnership, goal and process promise
instead of funding and impact promise

- Vision, ambition and partnership can **develop**
- Important **steps** are defined together and **progress** is documented
- Significantly reduced **investment and accountability risk** with small iterative steps
- **No Regret**, opportunity- and transaction costs reduced > Cost effectiveness
- **Rapid entry** (or exit, if ‘energy’ does not suffice)

Growing ambitions, growing funds

Joint transformation funds

Figure 4: The course of transformations over time

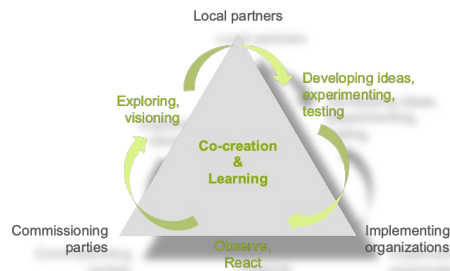


From Mersmann, Olsen, Wehnert, & Boodoo, 2014, own illustration

- In addition to smaller start-up funding, including structural funding if necessary, a joint transparent & flexible **funding mechanism** is established, provided ambition is confirmed by all sides.
- Joint effort and investment strengthens trust and local **ownership**
- Fund used to seize **opportunities**, respond quickly to needs
- **Relevant** use of funds (and thus accountability) strengthened.

Task teams for action fields

Work flexibly on common tasks



- Coordinated **action fields** in the transformation field emerge e.g. for surveys, studies, dialogue processes, communication campaigns, legal framework, economic incentives, etc.
- Respective **task teams** used flexibly, self-organized and moderated with clear rules when involvement of leadership triangle
- **Projects** can emerge from task teams when, a threshold of plannability is reached

Democratic Participation 2.0

Expanded network



- **Expanded network of stakeholders** develops between society, science, business and politics
- **Formats**, such as future councils, townhall workshops, citizens' decisions, surveys are used
- It helps to define and co-create concrete **lines of action**
- It valorizes different **perspectives** and creates broader **acceptance**

Learning and transformative capacities

From action to learning to competence



Regularly recorded **success criteria** (*relative progress*):

- **Learning progress** (1st to 3rd order)
- **Perceptions** of legitimacy, relevance and credibility, ownership...
- Progress with transformative **visions** and ‘tipping potential’
- Jointly defined absolute quantitative and qualitative indicators for progress of transformation as such (e.g. type and share of renewables)
- ...and its influence at highest goal level (ends like SDGs, social and environmental wellbeing, common good...)

Goals remain focused, indicators adjust.

Rapid learning loops > increasing transformational capacity > exponential impacts over time (compare diffusion of (transformative) innovation curve).

See also [NDC Cluster \(2020\): Knowledge management - from bottleneck to success factor: Concepts & practical guidance for co-learning systems in international development cooperation](#) and [Pablo Yangas/DIE \(2021\): What have we learned about learning? Unpacking the relationship between knowledge and organizational change in development agencies](#)

The approach at a glance:

	Projects so far (for all types of questions)	Proposal: Working in the complex transformation context
Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project with detailed pre-planned activities and budget (impact promise) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership triangle: partnership with shared responsibility for transformation goal X in country Y (partnership-, goal- and process promises).
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear separation of programming, preparation phase and implementation - Long time until implementation - Partners consulted a few times during preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation starts early, - explore and learn together - associated with continuous exchange between commissioning parties, partners and implementation agencies
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total volume per project determined at the beginning, distribution planned in detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modular allocation of funds in tranches, based on short-term needs (e.g. fund model with action lines)
Control/ Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fixed personnel - Requirement for AV: reconcile scheduled implementation with requirements of complex reality - major changes as an exception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint governance structure of the partnership: commissioning parties, partners and implementation agencies - Better assessment of the need for action, faster response (adaptive management) - Work in action fields, holocratic, flexible personnel
Documentation, communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual progress reports - fixed cycles of communication between client and partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous documentation during exchange - Accountability reporting on demand

**We are sure this
can fly.**

