

SUMMARY REPORT

EQUINOX WORKSHOP ON SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

11 DECEMBER 2025
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

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Lid (RCN)

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The Equinox Workshop on Societal Transformation in the Face of Climate Change, held in Brussels on 11 December 2025, brought together researchers, policymakers, funders, and practitioners to explore how social sciences and humanities (SSH) can support effective, inclusive, and legitimate climate action.

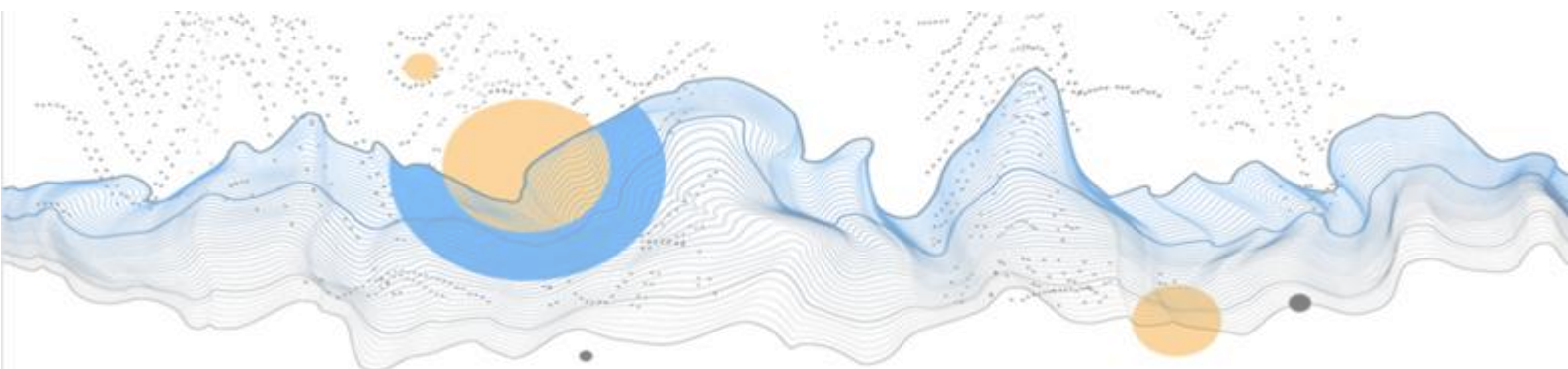
A central conclusion was that climate change is not only a technical or economic challenge, but fundamentally a societal one requiring systemic change. While climate knowledge is well established, a critical gap remains in translating this knowledge into action that is meaningful, trusted, and embedded in everyday decision-making. Societal transformation therefore requires systemic shifts in governance, economic structures, social norms, and public engagement, rather than incremental policy change alone.

Participants emphasized that trust, legitimacy, and fairness are essential for successful climate action. Public resistance often reflects concerns about equity, transparency, and inclusion, rather than lack of awareness. Climate policies must therefore be designed and communicated in ways that resonate with people's lived realities and align with broader societal priorities such as wellbeing, security, and economic stability.

The workshop also highlighted the importance of bridging the gap between research, policy, and practice to enable the embedding of existing knowledge into policy decision-making, design and implementation. Despite advances in interdisciplinary knowledge, barriers persist in translating research into implementation. Transdisciplinary approaches that enable co-production of knowledge, long-term collaboration, and closer engagement with stakeholders and communities are needed to support uptake and impact.

Participants also stressed that context-specific and inclusive participatory approaches are critical. Effective solutions must reflect local socio-economic and cultural conditions and different forms of knowledge, while research and funding frameworks should better support transdisciplinary collaboration, experimentation, and long-term partnerships.

Overall, the workshop underscored that enabling climate action at scale depends on empowering diverse actors, strengthening societal trust, and ensuring that climate transitions are not only effective, but also equitable and socially grounded.



Key messages from the workshop:

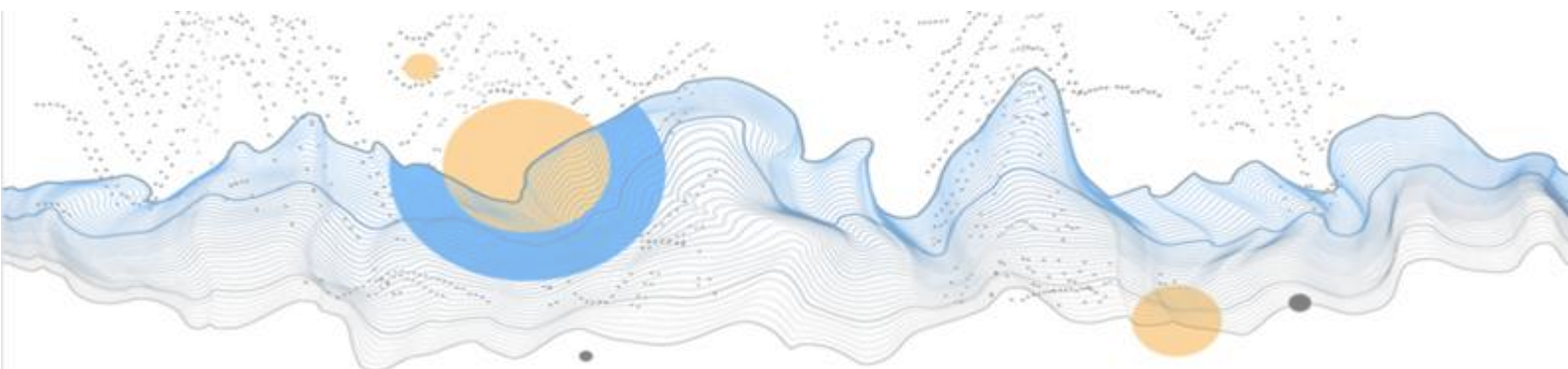
- Societal transformation and system change is essential for effective climate action
- Trust, legitimacy, and fairness are essential for public legitimacy towards climate policies
- Social sciences and humanities are critical for insights into human behaviour, governance and justice dimensions needed to translate climate knowledge into climate action
- Embedding existing knowledge into policy decision-making and practice remains a major challenge
- Context-specific, participatory and inclusive approaches (including diverse and marginalised perspectives) are key to effective transformation
- Research funding and governance frameworks must support long-term transdisciplinary collaboration that enable experimentation, learning across contexts and sustained impact beyond research project lifetimes

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The Equinox workshop *Societal Transformation in the Face of Climate Change* held in Brussels on 11 December 2025 brought together researchers, policymakers, research funders, NGOs, international organisations and practitioners to explore how Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) can support transformative climate action. Against a backdrop of accelerating climate impacts, geopolitical instability, democratic backsliding and declining public trust, the workshop focused on how climate mitigation and adaptation can be advanced in socially legitimate, inclusive and effective ways.

The workshop addressed three guiding questions:

- How should governance and policy be designed to enable effective and legitimate societal transformations for climate action?
- How can broader public engagement and changes in practices among citizens, businesses and institutions be enabled?
- What trade-offs and co-benefits arise between climate policy and other policy domains such as competitiveness, security, agriculture, health and biodiversity?



The workshop was organized under the framework of the Equinox Process, operated by JPI Climate and supported by the MAGICA project. The workshop was organized by CICERO Center for International Climate Research in partnership with the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO), Research Council Norway and the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change (CMCC).

The workshop included presentations and two roundtable discussions with experts and was held at BELSPO's premises in Brussels.

SETTING THE SCENE: CLIMATE ACTION, RESILIENCE AND SOCIETAL READINESS

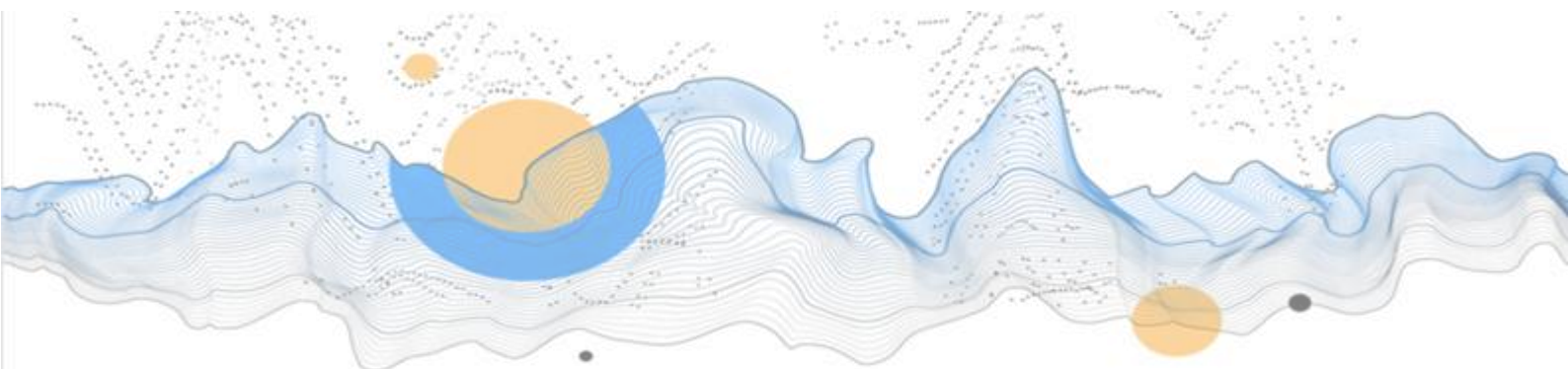
CICERO Deputy Director Frode Longva, Research Council Norway and JPI Climate ExCom Member Ingunn Borlaug Lid and JPI Climate Executive Director Petra Manderscheid opened the workshop.

In her keynote address, Elina Bardram (DG Climate Action, European Commission) emphasized that climate action cannot be delivered through single disciplines or sectors, but requires integrated solutions that bring together diverse communities of knowledge and practice. Today's challenges require systemic and structural change and shared understanding of risks, public trust, legitimacy, and a sense of ownership of climate risks among different societal actors.

She highlighted that behavioural and societal change takes time and depends on awareness, education and trust. Public resistance to climate policies often reflects shortcomings in communication, legitimacy and fairness, rather than a lack of concern. Human Sciences and humanities are therefore essential for understanding the human dimensions of climate action, including risk perception, social norms, identities and justice.

Bardram highlighted the concept of “resilience by design” that includes embedding climate risk awareness into decisions and planning from the outset. Anticipation and prevention were presented as far more cost-effective than reactive repair, with major implications for public budgets, insurance systems and macro-fiscal stability. Bardram also highlighted the EU Mission on Adaptation as a powerful engine for knowledge exchange and local action, underlining the importance of stakeholder engagement and learning from existing innovation and local knowledge. Moreover, she highlighted the emerging partnerships on cultural heritage and social transformations that will bring together SSH researchers, climate science and others in co-creation.

A recurring message was the need to frame climate action in ways that resonate with people's everyday realities. Climate policies should not be perceived as “only” green or environmental, but as contributing simultaneously to wellbeing, security and prosperity. Building such dual-purpose narratives can be essential to bridge divides, reduce perceived conflict between climate action and



everyday concerns, and strengthen societal ownership of the transformation.

RESEARCH LANDSCAPE AND EMERGING INITIATIVES

Presentations by Petra Manderscheid (Executive Director JPI Climate), Malwina Gębalska (National Science Centre in Poland) and Alexandre Caussé (Executive Director of JPI Cultural Heritage).

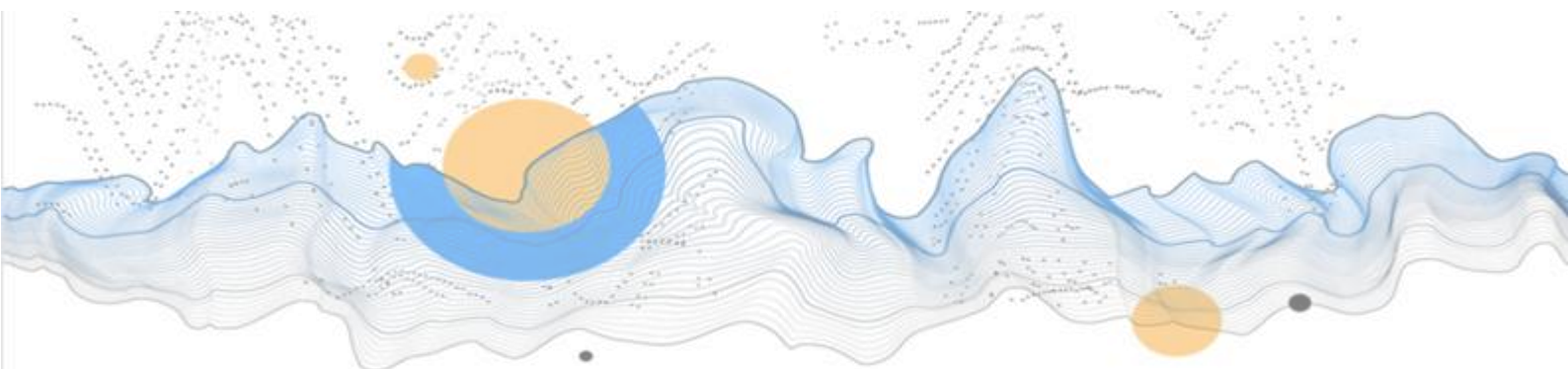
Petra Manderscheid (JPI Climate) presented outcomes from JPI Climate's transnational SOLSTICE call (Enabling Societal Transformation in the Face of Climate Change), which placed SSH in a leading role. The funded projects addressed themes such as social justice and participation, sense-making and cultural meaning, and the societal implications of digitalisation and decarbonisation. SOLSTICE demonstrated the value of transdisciplinary collaboration and stakeholder engagement, while also revealing persistent challenges related to governance complexity, trust, and maintaining long-term engagement beyond project lifetimes.

Malwina Gębalska (National Science Centre, Poland) introduced the upcoming European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience (STR). The partnership aims to build resilience, fairness and social cohesion in the face of climate, environmental, technological and demographic change. Four priority impact areas were outlined: social protection, future of work, education and skills, and a fair transition towards climate neutrality. Key research gaps under the latter include conceptualizing fairness, understanding attitudes and lifestyles, building trust and legitimacy, evaluating climate policy instruments, systemic design approaches, democratization of the green transition, and the green-digital nexus.

Alexandre Caussé (JPI Cultural Heritage / ARCHE) introduced the emerging European Partnership Resilient Cultural Heritage and highlighted the role of cultural heritage both as a sector highly vulnerable to climate impacts and as a powerful entry point for public

engagement. Cultural heritage makes climate impacts visible and tangible for citizens, while also mobilizing traditional and local knowledge that can support resilience and adaptation. A more proactive approach to protecting cultural heritage was presented as both socially meaningful and economically efficient.

SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION: RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS



Roundtable discussion with Andrea Catellani (Université catholique de Louvain) Roberto San José (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid), Siret Talve (Board Member EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, Tallinn University), Anne Maria Eikeset (Norges Bank Investment Management) and moderated by Gregor Laumann (German Aerospace Center, DLR)

The first roundtable discussion examined the current state of knowledge on societal transformation and knowledge gaps. Participants stressed that although climate knowledge has expanded, gaps remain in enabling societal transformation in practice. The context for climate action has changed rapidly in recent years, with increased polarization, fragmented media landscapes, misinformation and competing societal crises.

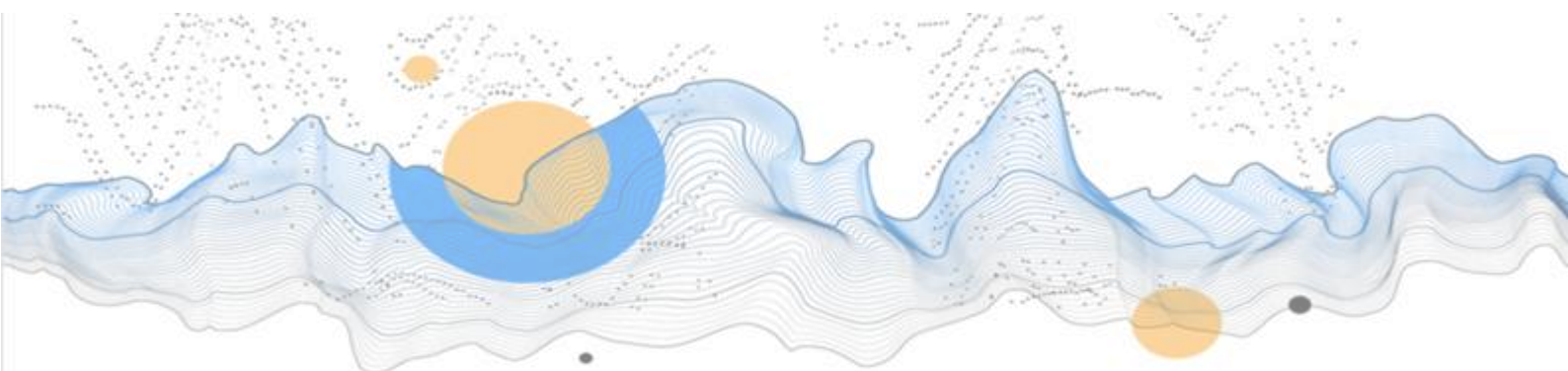
Participants highlighted a limited understanding of how people make sense of climate change in their everyday lives, and why concern often does not translate into action. More knowledge is needed on efficient communication approaches and how identities, social norms, polarization and pluralistic ignorance influence engagement.

One gap concerns communication and how to provide decision-relevant, relatable and trustworthy information that resonates with different audiences. Participants emphasized that current engagement approaches are too generic. Knowledge gaps persist in developing targeted and inclusive strategies, avoiding overwhelming narratives, empowering citizens, and reaching diverse groups. There was a suggestion to establish an observatory on e.g. evolution of climate transition attitudes to gain better knowledge of how communication can be targeted to different contexts.

A persistent challenge lies in effectively bridging research, policy and practice. This includes engagement, translating complex knowledge into actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners and investors and overcoming disciplinary silos. There is, for example, a need to clarify the combined climate and nature risks and translate these insights into integrated and decision-relevant knowledge. SSH expertise is essential for capturing social and ecological context of financial decisions.

The key challenge identified was not a lack of knowledge, but the need to better mobilize, translate and embed existing knowledge in ways that support meaningful societal engagement and action.

THE VALUE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES



Presentations Karina Standal, CICERO and Benjamin Sovacool University of Sussex/Aarhus University/Boston University

Karina Standal (CICERO) framed societal transformation for climate action as a fundamental shift that goes beyond technological solutions or incremental policy change. Drawing on IPCC and SSH scholarship, including from the MAGICA project, she emphasized that transformation requires changes to political, economic and social structures that sustain existing systems, particularly in energy, land use, urban infrastructure and industry.

She highlighted how climate action is increasingly shaped by broader crises, including geopolitical tensions, the nature crisis and declining trust in institutions. She presented knowledge gaps within governance and policy innovation, public perception and climate narrative formation, justice and legitimacy, and the integration of adaptation and mitigation across sectors and governance levels.

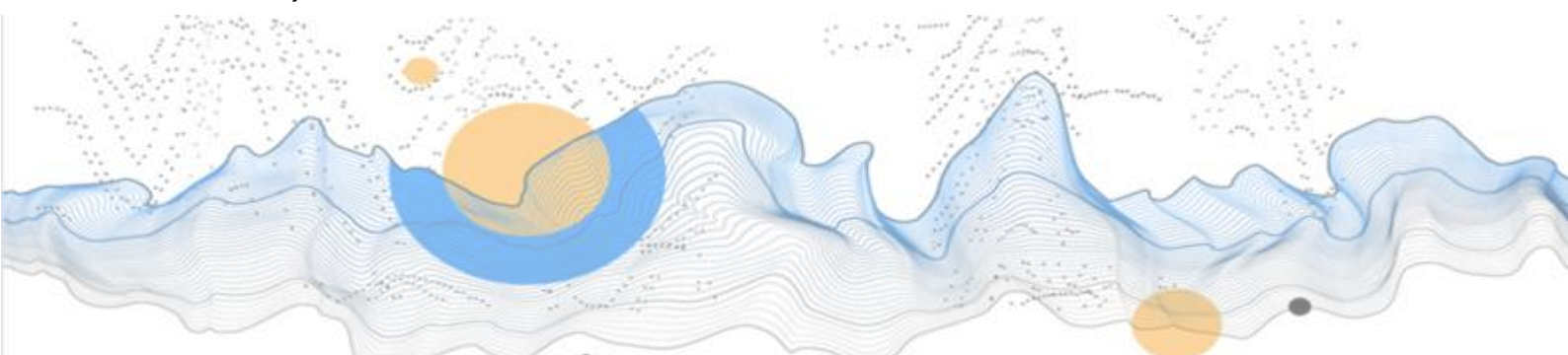
Finally, Standal stressed the importance of SSH, transdisciplinary and participatory approaches to address these gaps. She argued that effective societal transformation depends on inclusive leadership, co-production of knowledge with stakeholders, attention to local contexts, and the integration of diverse forms of knowledge, including grassroots and marginalised perspectives.

In his presentation on the value of social sciences research for energy and climate, Benjamin Sovacool (University of Sussex/Aarhus University/Boston University) emphasised that the arts, humanities and social sciences are essential to effective climate and energy research, as decarbonisation is not only a technical challenge but a deeply social one. SSH are critical for understanding energy behavior, demand and practices, for identifying and communicating climate and energy risks, and for addressing questions of ethics, equity, fairness and social acceptance. SSH help humanize climate debates and shape solutions that are both effective and legitimate.

Sovacool also highlighted persistent weaknesses in current research systems, including disciplinary bias, limited interdisciplinary incentives, dominance of European and North American perspectives, and an overreliance on single-country case studies. He argued for stronger support for comparative, geographically diverse and mixed-methods research, greater inclusion of Global South perspectives and non-academic knowledge, and funding and institutional incentives that prioritise problem-driven, socially grounded climate and energy research.

FROM RESEARCH GAPS TO ACTION

Roundtable discussion with Tristan Beyens (The Belgian Risk Assessment Center CERAC), Jorn Verbeeck (Board Member EU Mission for Climate-Neutral & Smart Cities), María José Sanz (Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3); Roseline Remans (Gloco-learning), Vilija Balionyte Merle (SINTEF Digital) and moderated by Philippe Tulkens (the European Commission)



Summary report from Equinox Workshop on Societal Transformation in the face of Climate Change

The second roundtable discussion focused on moving from knowledge generation to implementation in the context of growing geopolitical, economic and environmental pressures. Participants noted that, despite a lot of data and research, implementation lags behind ambition, and recent political and societal backlash risks further weakening climate action.

A key message was the need for closer collaboration and co-development between researchers, policymakers, public authorities, practitioners and communities. Connecting research to people's everyday lives through e.g. food systems or health was highlighted as key to strengthening engagement, agency and trust. Systemic transformation was seen to materialize when stakeholders are involved in collaboration and co-development processes from the beginning and continuously through projects and beyond as building trust takes time.

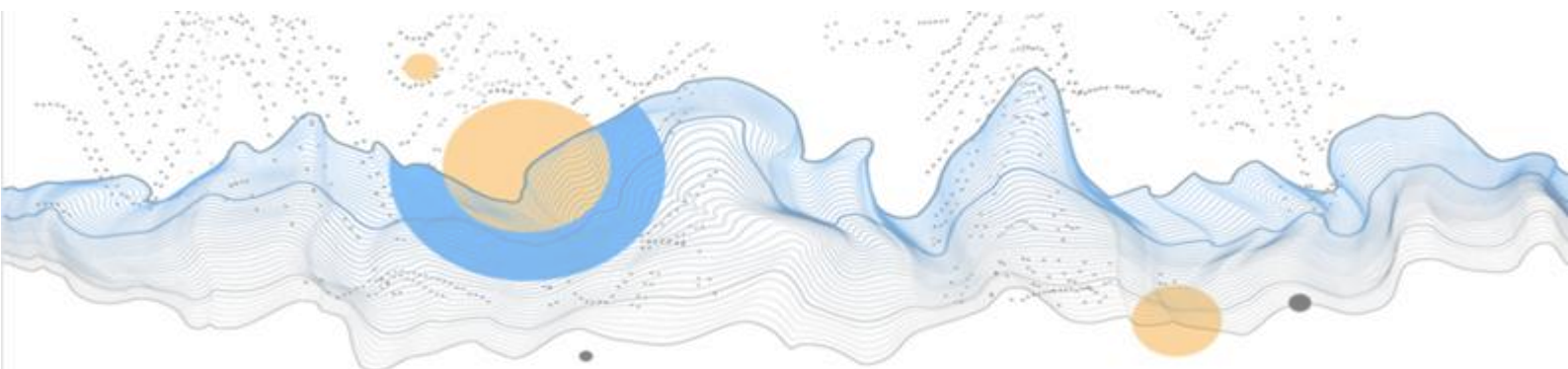
Several speakers emphasized the importance of context-specific approaches. Understanding local socio-ecological systems, history, culture and tradition, and overly standardized solutions were seen to risk undermining effectiveness. This reinforces the need for multidisciplinary research and long-term collaboration with stakeholders that allows trust-building, co-design, learning and knowledge integration over time. Suggestions were made for longer-term projects or to secure long-term collaborations through successive or linked projects.

Examples from EU Mission Adaptation, EU Mission Cities and regional projects illustrated how needs-driven, flexible and ecosystem-wide collaboration can generate concrete results, mobilize additional investment and enable scaling of solutions. Participants also highlighted gaps in documented case studies, particularly on how and why certain approaches work or fail across governance levels.

The discussion underlined the need for research funding programmes to support comparative learning and knowledge integration, multidisciplinary and multistakeholder projects bringing different communities together.

PARTICIPANT INTERACTION

As part of the workshop an interactive Mentimeter poll was conducted among the participants. It showed that participants considered inclusiveness, participation and transparency as key to enabling effective and legitimate societal transformation for climate action. Participants identified lack of political leadership, misinformation or politization of climate issues, cultural norms and habits and lack of trust in institutions as key barriers to broad public engagement. Equity, social justice and human rights, health and wellbeing, energy security and nature protection were highlighted as areas of climate policy co-benefits.

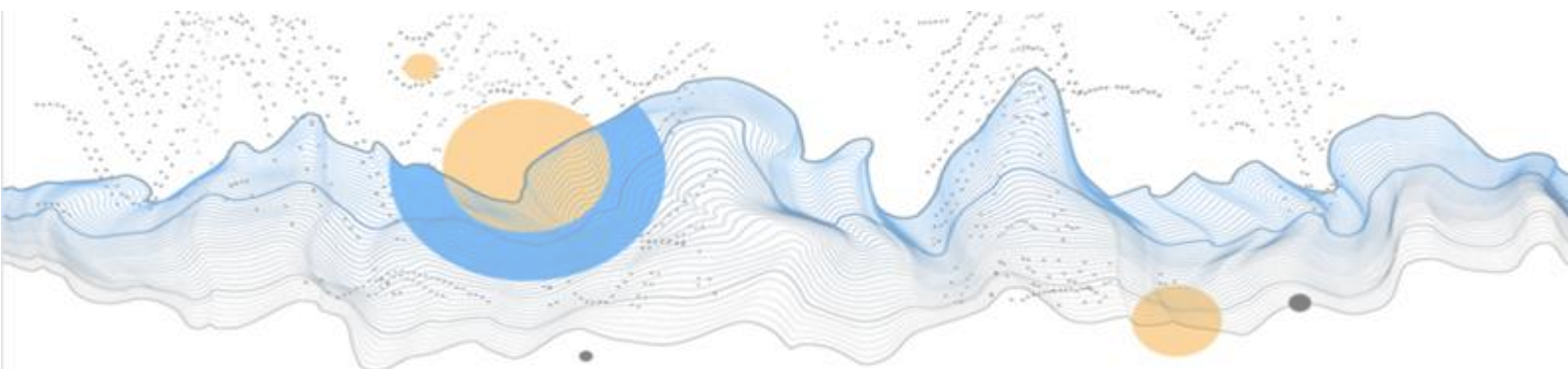


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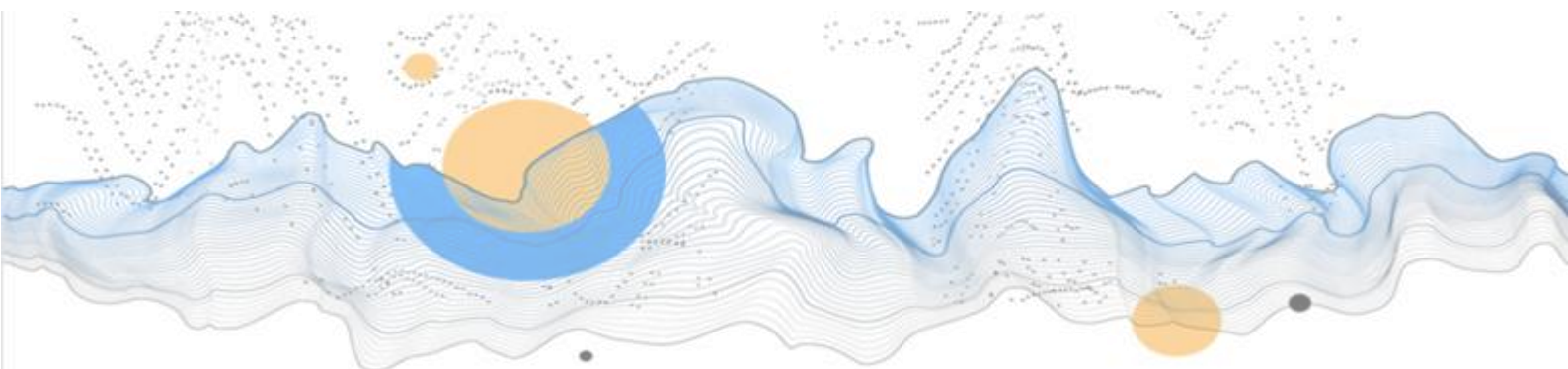
The Equinox workshop on societal transformation was organized in Brussels 11 December back-to-back with the Equinox Dialogue on modelling the economics of climate change.

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CONCLUSIONS

The workshop highlighted that social sciences and humanities play a critical role in building trust, shaping meaningful and dual-purpose narratives, and connecting climate action to people's everyday lives. Moreover, SSH are key for identifying and communicating climate risks, and for addressing questions of ethics, equity, fairness and social acceptance. Transdisciplinary and participatory approaches are critical for addressing knowledge gaps for societal transformation. Progress requires closer collaboration between research, policy and practice, as well as long-term and inclusive collaboration and attention to local contexts. Moreover, funding frameworks should support co-creation, learning, knowledge translation and experimentation. Ultimately, enabling climate action at scale depends on empowering diverse actors to engage with climate challenges in ways that strengthen wellbeing, resilience and shared ownership of the transition.



ANNEXURE: WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

EQUINOX WORKSHOP ON SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

11 December 2025 | 10:30-16:45

BELSP0, WTC III, Boulevard Simon Bolivar 30, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Climate change challenges require knowledge that enables societal transformation towards a low-emission society and climate adaptation. Social Sciences and Humanities thus play a vital role as a basis for knowledge-based policymaking to enable a just and effective transition. This science-to-policy workshop will showcase knowledge gaps and present projects and activities on societal transformation in the face of climate change that are relevant for climate action.

Key questions to be addressed:

- How should governance and policy be designed to drive effective and legitimate societal transformations for climate action?
- How can broader public engagement and change of practices be enabled among citizens, businesses and political institutions to advance climate action?
- What are trade-offs and co-benefits between climate policy and other policies? (environmental, competitiveness, security, agricultural etc.)

Programme

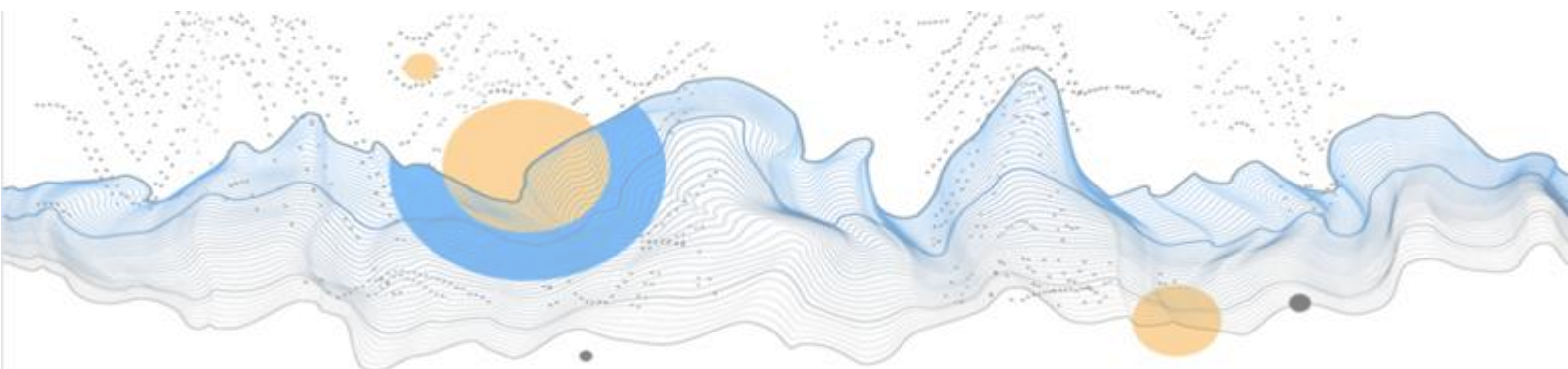
10:00 - 10:30 Coffee – Reception

10:30 - 10:50 Drawing the Bigger Picture on EQUINOX:

Joint opening of the two parallel EQUINOX workshops Societal transformation in the face of climate change and Modelling the Economics of Climate Change

JPI Climate Vice Chair **Frank McGovern** and Executive Director **Petra Manderscheid**

10:50 - 11:30 EQUINOX networking moment



11:30 - 12:30 Opening and Introduction to the Workshop

CICERO Deputy Director **Frode Longva**

Research Council Norway and JPI Climate ExCom Member **Ingunn Borlaug Lid**

JPI Climate Executive Director **Petra Manderscheid**

Setting the Scene

Elina Bardram, Director for Adaptation & Resilience, DG Climate Action, European Commission and Mission Manager for the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change

12:20 - 13:00 Current research focus topics

SOLSTICE – Enabling Societal Transformation in the Face of Climate Change by **Petra Manderscheid**, JPI Climate on outcomes of the joint transnational call

Fair transition towards climate neutrality by **Malwina Gebalska**, National Science Centre in Poland with insights to the European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience (STR)

Adaptation and cultural heritage with insights on the emerging European Partnership Resilient Cultural Heritage (RCH) by **Alexandre Caussé**, Executive Director of JPI Cultural Heritage and coordinator of ARCHE

13:00 - 14:00 Joint EQUINOX lunch

14:00 - 15:00 Roundtable discussion 1:

Research outcomes for societal transformation - status today and knowledge gaps

Andrea Catellani, Université catholique de Louvain (202cm SOLSTICE– Overcoming Obstacles and Disincentives to Climate Change Mitigation: A cross-cutting approach by human and social sciences)

Roberto San José, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (DISTENDER HEU: Developing STRatEgies by integrating mitigaTION, aDaptation and participation to climate changE Risks)

Siret Talve, Board Member EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, Tallinn University

Anne Maria Eikeset, Lead Researcher at Norges Bank Investment Management

*Moderated by: **Gregor Laumann**, German Aerospace Center, DLR*



15:00 - 15:30 The way forward

Societal underpinnings of enabling societal transformation for climate action by **Karina Standal**, CICERO

The value of social sciences work for energy and climate, **Benjamin Sovacool**, University of Sussex/Aarhus University/Boston University

15:30 - 16:30 Roundtable discussion 2:

Societal transformation going forward – from research gaps to action

Tristan Beyens, The Belgian Risk Assessment Center CERAC

Jorn Verbeek, Board Member EU Mission for Climate-Neutral & Smart Cities

María José Sanz, Director of the Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3)

Roseline Remans, Director of Gloco-learning and honorary research fellow of the Alliance of Biodiversity and CIAT and Lead Author of IPBES Transformative Change Assessment

Vilija Balionyte Merle, Senior Business Developer, SINTEF Digital, RESIST project coordinator

*Moderated by: **Philippe Tulkens**, European Commission, DG RTD*

16:30 - 16:45 Conclusion, wrap-up and close by Giulia Galluccio, CMCC

16:45 End of the meeting

17:00 Joint EQUINOX Reception

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