

## **Sensemaking the Transformations Community's Future**

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### **Abstract**

The Transformations Community (TC) is a dynamic collective of sustainability action researchers and systems change practitioners dedicated to fostering equitable, sustainable, and regenerative futures. Since 2013, the TC has organized biennial conferences, with the most recent being a July 2023 five-day hybrid event in Sydney, Australia; Prague, Czechia; Portland, Maine; and online, with over 400 speakers and 700 attendees from over forty countries. This article delves into the insights and recommendations of a curated group, termed "sensemakers," who convened in Prague after the biennial conference in 2023. Their role was to engage in a deep reflective process, synthesizing their experience at the conference and charting ideas for desired future trajectories of the community. They identified core guiding principles labeled the "four Ts": Temperance, Transdisciplinarity, Translocalism, and Transformative Learning. These principles capture the TC's ethos, emphasizing the blend of academic rigor with real-world applicability and the interplay between individual agency, collaborative action, reflexivity, and alignment across sectors and places. Sensemaker discussions spotlighted four core areas of potential engagement for the community: decentralized and networked conferences, dynamic digital platforms for resource sharing and community building, collaborative workspaces for extended projects, and strategic partnerships with related transformation-oriented initiatives. Furthermore, the sensemakers acknowledged the need to pursue immediate actions such as organizing future conferences and developing long-term governance strategies that nurture the

community's growth in alignment with the four Ts. By identifying where the TC stands and possible paths forward, sensemakers initiated a broader process of reflection and wayfinding that will continue within the TC over the next year.

## **Introduction**

The Transformations Community (TC) finds itself at a crossroads of immense potential and challenge. An eclectic group of forward-thinking sustainability researchers and systems change practitioners, the TC's unique strength lies in its commitment to transdisciplinary theories and practices that cross the traditional boundaries of discipline, profession, and context. Over twelve years, the TC has navigated the varied terrains of global conferences from Norway to Chile and the ever-evolving digital landscape. These formal and informal gatherings have focused not only on understanding complex social-ecological crises but also on how to catalyze transformative change, redress historical injustices, and engage in introspection and development. Our members are well-versed in the intricacies of participatory investigation, the delicate dance of knowledge co-production, and the mobilization and co-creation required for effective collective alignment and action. Like any evolving community, the TC faces hurdles — from systemic rigidity that resists transformative change to institutional barriers that can stymie collaboration across sectors, scales, and places.

This analysis weaves together the insights shared at a day-long retreat held by “sensemakers,” a small group of dedicated community members, immediately after we convened in Prague at our biennial conference in July 2023. This analysis offers a synthesis of that day's rich dialogue, extracting core themes and recommendations that emerged as they considered the TC's future. We extract the core themes, insights, and recommendations that emerged from the sensemaker meeting and reflect on their relation to what we perceive as crucial aspects of the community's overall identity, as well as current challenges. These reflections are, by nature, limited in the scope of what can and should be claimed about a collective of diverse individuals. We aim to offer them as a resource to inspire with an invitation to engage in dialogue and sense-making, including critique, disagreement, and recommendations for further development.

## **Beginnings**

### *The Transformations Community and Conference*

The Transformations Community is a global consortium of action researchers and reflective practitioners committed to fostering transformations toward equitable, sustainable, and regenerative futures (<https://www.transformationscommunity.org/>). With members spanning diverse sectors and disciplines—ranging from academic programs and initiatives focused on sustainability to government bodies and non-profit organizations to consulting firms—the global community has been a nexus for transformative thought and action since its inception in 2013. It regularly organizes dialogues and workshops with the objective of translating transformation-oriented ideas and ideals into tangible actions. It has held biennial conferences in various locales, including Norway, Sweden, Scotland, Chile, and a virtual conference in 2021 due to the pandemic. The 2023 conference took place with the main hub in Sydney, Australia, and with

parallel events online and additional hubs in Prague, Czechia, and Portland, Maine (<https://www.transformationscommunity.org/transformations-conference-2023>). Working collaboratively to embody the theme of "Partnerships for a better future," this conference featured over 250 sessions, engaged 700 attendees from more than 40 countries, and highlighted insights from 400 distinguished organizers and presenters.

### *Sensemakers*

At the Prague conference, a group of individuals were invited by the Transformations Community leadership to serve as "sensemakers" through the duration of the conference, based on their experience with the Community and a desire to have a variety of research and practitioner perspectives and experiences represented. These individuals were not passive attendees; they were asked to embody the principles of deep listening, observation, and sensing. This sensemaking is at the core of "Theory U," developed by 2023 Transformations Conference global keynote speaker Otto Scharmer. The sensemakers' mission was to tap into the emerging future potential of the community and discern patterns, feelings, insights, and opportunities in the in-between that might otherwise remain unspoken or overlooked. They actively engaged in sessions, initiated and guided thematic conversations through in-person and virtual dialogues using the conference online platform, and documented their perspectives and realizations throughout the event's duration.

One tangible manifestation of this sensemaking was the production of video reflections, offering a visual and auditory tapestry of the conference's heartbeat. These were shared across various platforms such as Whova, YouTube, and the [Transformations Community's website](#), providing windows into the conference's unfolding. Their insights acted as spotlights, shining light on crucial conference themes and dynamics, bridging gaps in understanding, and intensifying reflection and comprehension amongst participants.

In the concluding synthesis session of the Prague conference, the sensemakers were tasked to crystallize various break-out discussions into essential takeaways. A day-long session directly following the conference was dedicated to collective reflection, weaving together a tapestry of insights and charting the path forward for the community. This rich dialogue was meticulously recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, culminating in a narrative that distilled their sense of the conference's essence. Lastly, this article was created integrating sensemakers insights through iterative and collaborative editing, as well as peer review.

### *Sensemaker Introductions*

Sensemakers began the retreat by introducing themselves. Here's a summary of what they shared:

**Sam Buckton**, a PhD researcher at the University of York, focuses on how evaluation can support systemic transformations and appreciates the personal transformation work he experienced during the conference. <https://www.york.ac.uk/environment/our-staff/sam-buckton/>

**Bruce Evan Goldstein** is Associate Professor in the Program in Environmental Design at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He deeply values the TC and is dedicated to nurturing it. His research and practice focus on supporting transformative networks and communities.

**Vicki Nichols Goldstein** is a lifelong ocean conservationist and community organizer, and Founder and Director of the Inland Ocean Coalition, which is dedicated to organizing ocean conservation work among people who don't live near the coast.

**Julianna Gwyszcz** was born and raised in Pennsylvania, USA, where she now once again resides and serves as the Capacity Building and Engagement Lead for the BRIDGES Sustainability Science Coalition, a UNESCO Management of Social Transformations (MOST) program and its Flagship Hub based at the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona State University. Julianna's work is dedicated to enhancing social and ecological justice, as well as sustainable well-being, to foster a regenerative future for people and the planet.

**Chris Ives** is Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham's School of Geography but grew up in Sydney. With a background in ecology and environmental planning, he leads a master's program in environmental leadership and management and is committed to recognizing and acting on historical moments of opportunity with groups like the TC. His work is focused on the role of values, nature connection, and inner dimensions in enabling sustainability transformations.

**Curtis Ogden**, Senior Associate with the Interaction Institute for Social Change and facilitator of Food Solutions New England, traces his blood roots back to the UK, Germany, and the present-day Czech Republic, and now resides in western Massachusetts in the US on the traditional lands of the Nonatuc people. During the Prague gathering, he introduced an energy systems science and practice workshop he is developing that will enhance interpersonal, intrapersonal, and larger systemic healing.

**Joel Onyango**, born and educated in Kenya, works with the African Center for Technology Studies (ACTS) as lead of the Climate Resilient Economies Programme and ACTS Pathways Academy. His expertise lies in water science, policy research, and community sustainability, and he is dedicated to rethinking conventional approaches in various systems through challenging dominant narratives in research and practice through decoloniality dialogues.

**Carlos Alvarez Pereira**, the Vice President of the Club of Rome and Programme Chair of The Fifth Element, was born in Paris to Spanish parents. He values diverse perspectives and possesses an inquisitive nature, which he described as similar to a six-year-old - full of questions leading to more questions, a reflection of the never-ending cycle of life.

**Luea Ritter**, originally from Switzerland and now based in Greece, is co-founder and creative steward of Collective Transition and co-leads the WorldEthicForum. As a process steward and participatory action researcher, she designs spaces for the interaction and relation between diverse voices, including the subtle wisdom of systems. Fostering coherence in social fields to navigate the complex challenges and potentials of our times is her main inquiry that underlines her diverse involvements.

**Niko Schöpke** is an assistant professor in Environmental Governance at University of Freiburg, Germany, and a senior research associate at the Research Institute For Sustainability (RIFS) in Potsdam, Germany, and specializes in sustainability transitions, transdisciplinary research, and inner transformations. [https://www.envgov.uni-freiburg.de/de/prof-envgov/Team-EnvGov/niko\\_schaepke](https://www.envgov.uni-freiburg.de/de/prof-envgov/Team-EnvGov/niko_schaepke)

**Karen A. Spiller**, a native of Detroit, Michigan, is the Thomas W. Haas Professor of Sustainable Food Systems at University of New Hampshire, Durham. She is both the Coordinator and the Massachusetts Ambassador for Food Solutions New England. Karen emphasizes racial equity in food systems and in all systems and is deeply committed to service, drawing inspiration from her ancestral ethos.

*Beginning the Post-Conference Sensemaker Dialogue*

**Bruce** and **Julianna** co-facilitated the Sensemaker gathering, with the entire sensemaker group co-designing the day's agenda. Before we delved into our planned reflective questions and small group conversations, **Curtis** and **Karen**, drawing on their vast experience co-facilitating dialogues, workshops, and gatherings, led us through a grounding exercise, inviting us to become present to ourselves and each other.

**Bruce** then kicked us off by describing the research to identify the essence and ethos of the TC, published the previous year with his collaborators (Goldstein et al. 2022a; Goldstein et al. 2022b; Balakrishna et al. 2002; Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2022). Drawing on interviews with 60 attendees from prior transformations conferences, they found that TC members are distinctly “transdisciplinary” and even “metadisciplinary,” integrating knowledge from different disciplines and beyond academia to address complex systems challenges and introducing novel techniques and practices that transcend established paradigms. As action researchers and reflective practitioners, TC members aid communities in actualizing system change. One particularly intriguing commonality among community members is that many have encountered significant challenges that have led to questioning conventional roles and institutions and seeking opportunities outside of them. They often experience isolation and frustration, which shape a collective desire to be in a community of like-minded peers.

**Bruce** underscored several other salient attributes of TC’s membership. First, members often engage communities in co-design and participatory diagnosis and knowledge co-production. Secondly, they are committed to social equity and redressing historical injustices. These commitments are intertwined with their desire to support personal change, specifically through transformative learning experiences. Interestingly, many of the members' own transformative journeys were spurred by insights and epiphanies from interactions with non-Western cultures. In addition, their path is not without challenges. They face hurdles on multiple fronts, including systemic rigidity and institutional constraints (Balakrishna et al., 2022). They often address these challenges by designing and facilitating novel organizational arrangements for transformative experimentation.

**Julianna** then introduced a set of framing questions that would shape the day's discussion:

1. *How do we understand and interpret the shared purpose emerging from this Transformations Community?*
2. *What strengths/capacities and needs/gaps are you sensing from this community? How might the TC better leverage those strengths and meet those needs in service of collective action?*
3. *What do you feel called to contribute, or how might you show up in this community moving forward?*
4. *What are some possible next steps?*

**Julianna** then invited the sensemakers to explore what they, individually and as a group as a whole, could aspire to come away with from this gathering. **Bruce** suggested that we might be at a turning point in the community's development, so we shouldn't just "... put the Transformations Community in mothballs for two years until we come up with another conference." **Carlos**, resonating with Bruce's sentiment, sought direction, asking, "What do we envision based on the current capacity?" Central to this initial discussion was a shared focus on strategy, inclusivity, and defining the community's broader purpose. **Joel** underscored this by emphasizing the significance of "decentralization, access, inclusion, and participation." **Luea** suggested that we focus on what is the community's distinctive position, noting that "There are numerous networks out there, so what makes this community unique within the ecosystem of networks?" She emphasized the need to align our agenda with our understanding of the community's role in the broader ecosystem, "Clarity is needed not just in thoughts but in our actions." **Vicki** agreed with Luea's emphasis on seeking clarity and distinctiveness, asking, "How do we become more effective and not just grow for growth's sake?"

Extending this point, **Curtis** stated that, "Purpose drives everything. The ecosystem is constantly evolving, and this community functions as an organism within that ecosystem. How do we contribute, and what do we offer?" **Luea** also posed the critical question, "How do we grow? Do we even need to? And how do we ensure this growth is sustainable?"

Following up on a similar comment by **Joel**, **Julianna** asked, "How do we nurture a diverse community and collaborate effectively?" Her emphasis on establishing a "regenerative community" hinted at the group's aspirations for adaptability, growth, healing, and restoration. **Curtis**, envisioning the transformative potential of the group, proposed, "Our aspiration should not just be about survival or minimal energy expenditure. We should be focusing on how this community can renew the world, foster transformation, and do so innovatively." **Karen** suggested rooting this in nimbleness, noting that the community needed to be "adaptable, especially given how swiftly terrains and contexts might change," a recurrent theme in the discussions that would unfold throughout the retreat.

Overall, there was agreement around the desire for a better understanding of our shared purpose within the TC, addressing questions including, "What are we about?" and "What gaps are we striving to fill?" Moreover, the sensemakers wanted to come away with greater clarity around what it is we offer to one another and those considering joining the TC. In other words, "What is

our invitation,” as **Luea** put it, and what are the expectations that such an invitation holds? Finally, the group felt a strong desire to come away with tangible pathways forward for not only strengthening and sharing our unique capacities in service of our collective purpose within the TC, but also to act as a “compass,” as **Chris** put it, for the evolving field of transformation scholarship and practice. This opening dialogue underscored the sensemaker’s desire for the community to find its unique path and purpose and laid a foundation for deeper discussions and sense-making on how to realize the TC’s intention of supporting transformative change.

## **Exploring Shared Commitments and Purposes**

### *The Four Ts*

A distinct set of core attributes surfaced from the following discussion around a shared TC ethos, which will be referred to as "four Ts": *Temperance, Transdisciplinarity, Translocalism, and Transformative Learning*. These characteristics seem to touch upon many facets of the TC's ethos and aspirations, echoing the themes and nuances that frequently surfaced during the sensemaker discussions. Each "T" illuminates an important part of the TC’s approach to collaboration, knowledge creation, and transformative action. In the following section, we delve deeper into these attributes, shedding light on their significance as drawn directly from the sensemaker conversations.

### *Temperance: Enabling agency and coherence*

Temperance historically relates to moderation or self-restraint, and it's one of the four cardinal virtues in classical philosophy. For the TC, Temperance is about maintaining the tension between individual freedom and group coherence to support shared objectives while mitigating the dominance of any single perspective or individual and fostering an inclusive environment where different viewpoints and experiences are valued and contribute to the community's richness. In alignment with this idea, sensemakers agreed that the TC should operate as an ecosystem that thrives on the synergy between individual agency, collective capacities, and aligned purpose. **Joel** stressed the importance of devising concrete activities to bolster the level of ownership and momentum driven by the community members. He advocated for organizing active programming before the next conference. This could include virtual gatherings that address pressing questions relevant to the community's shared experience. Also, he suggested that "instead of specifying actions in advance, we should invite members to participate actively." **Julianna** also leaned more toward enhancing member agency, noting that "It is about extending the invitation, ensuring everyone feels they can help to shape our community's future." Rather than expanding specific offerings that meet only a subset of particular members’ interests, she suggested that the TC should empower its members to co-create different pathways for engagement grounded in shared purpose. In this way, the TC could leverage the collective strengths, resources, and experiential knowledge of the whole while simultaneously enabling individual members to make their specific contributions.

**Chris** suggested that we could encourage individual initiative without losing focus by setting a "general direction or compass bearing for the next few years." Others shared this sentiment that

the TC could have direction without being bound by rigid milestones. **Curtis** promoted the idea of individual initiative and collective coherence as operating within a positive feedback loop, noting the community should function like a "regenerative ecosystem." **Karen** emphasized clarity, remarking that "People need to know what they are investing in, "both understanding their role and having the freedom to step in where drawn and back with a pause when necessary. **Sam** suggested aligning with broader system momentum and a shared vision since "Transformations are often about building on existing momentum or supporting existing initiatives rather than starting anew." In sum, this dialogue suggests the possibility of maintaining the tension between autonomy and coherence, as individual agency is expressed within a coherent shared vision.

Transdisciplinarity: Co-learning across the barriers between disciplines, cultures, paradigms, and knowledge and practice

Transdisciplinarity transcends traditional disciplinary and professional boundaries, integrating and synthesizing diverse perspectives and methods to address complex problems holistically. Sensemakers grappled with the inherent tension between melding academic research and practical knowledge and general theory and from-the-ground experience. While aiming for a harmonious integration of theory and real-world practices, the challenge remains in ensuring that both realms enrich rather than diminish each other. **Curtis** underscored the pressing need to refine and crystallize the meaning of Transdisciplinarity. **Carlos** noted the perceived chasm between academia and practitioners, observing that "So many people perceive us as an academic community... How about interacting with other communities?" **Vicki** suggested that personal relationship-building is essential for both sectors to feel connected and included in the community. **Joel** proposed that the TC supports intermediary spaces while acknowledging the complexity of intertwining academia and practice, especially given the profound influence of businesses on transformation.

The discussions unveiled deeper layers of tension as they explored the intricate dance between individual identities, varying disciplines, cultural specificity, and the broader aspirations of the Transformations Community. **Bruce** emphasized the need to both engage in "expert-level conversations" and foster open dialogues across a myriad of perspectives. **Carlos** challenged the group with the question, "How do we engage with worldviews that are totally different from ours?" He suggested that knowledge exchange was too narrow an objective to build a community around and noted that "The purpose of life and the essence of living beings is to recreate ourselves in the world." Hinting at the existential challenges of belonging and identity within the community, **Carlos** concluded that "This open nature is essential for our community's growth." **Bruce**, echoing these sentiments, reinforced both the importance and the challenges involved in operating across social worlds and ontological boundaries while maintaining a core collective identity. How can we ensure that both academics and practitioners can productively participate on their own terms while contributing to achieving each other's purposes? In the backdrop of these complexities, **Carlos's** analogy that the TC is a "country" that should be clear about who gets a passport and what are the requirements of entry underlines the broader vision of inclusivity and coexistence, emphasizing the pressing need to navigate and reconcile the tensions associated with transdisciplinarity. Sensemakers agreed that the emphasis should be on finding



ways to learn and communicate across epistemological differences, build upon shared experiences, and foster a culture of mutual support and “reciprocity,” as **Julianna** put it.

#### Translocalism: Connectivity and placemaking across geographies and cultures

Translocalism refers to the interconnectedness and flow of ideas, practices, and resources across localities, fostering resilience and adaptive capacity in addressing environmental and societal challenges. Sensemakers grappled with the need to support Translocalism by championing place-based learning and capacity-building while simultaneously fostering meaningful exchanges across diverse sites, contexts, and communities. Central to this tension is the challenge of navigating linguistic and cultural divides. **Carlos** highlighted the potential pitfalls of English language discussions, underscoring the importance of linguistic inclusivity to avoid insights getting “lost in translation.” As **Joel** aptly stated, “Understanding the nuances of Nigeria requires more than just speaking English,” emphasizing that barriers to deeper understanding go beyond simply how we communicate. On a broader scale, **Bruce** drew attention to disparities in access and opportunity to participate in TC activities between Western European participants and those in the Global South. He stressed the necessity of developing a deliberate strategy if the community aspires to operate as a true global organization.

Discussion centered around the potential of decentralized communities of practice that, while geographically distinct, share a unified vision. **Joel** advocated for nurturing these diverse communities with a common purpose. **Julianna** highlighted the importance of enabling better clarity around what distinct roles people play within the TC while taking care not to overburden individuals with too many community responsibilities. Crucial to this is ensuring the self-determination of TC community members while respecting the constraints they may be under. Also important is generating equitable opportunities for engagement across geographical, cultural, disciplinary, generational, and other boundaries and communicating those well to the wider community. **Luea's** reflections on the pace of conference spaces and its activities touched upon the need for deeper relationality and deliberation in navigating interactions between people with diverse needs, perspectives, and discursive repertoires. This concerns both the physical design of space and place, as well as the temporal flow of the program; it should allow for diverse forms of integration, reflection, and regeneration as individuals, small groups, and the whole circle of participants. **Luea** also wondered how the conference could function as a regenerative prototype through inviting diverse languages, including diverse and wider ways of knowing. **Carlos** recounted a dialogue he had with a previous conference organizer that raised pertinent questions about the community's identity. Are we carving out a unique space for transdisciplinary expertise or evolving into a distinct discipline [e.g., transformations science], which might enable us to make a stronger draw on funding resources? These conversations underscore the community's need to harmonize the specificities of localized understandings with the broader mission of bridging divides and fostering global exchange.

#### *Transformative Learning: Deep shifts in understanding through disruptive learning*

Transformative learning refers to a deep, structural shift in thought and perception, enabling individuals and communities to challenge and change their fundamental beliefs and practices

toward sustainable and resilient ecological and social systems. To this end, the TC aims to create an environment that, on one hand, is nurturing, emotionally supportive, and fosters a deep sense of belonging, and, on the other, challenges its members to confront and reassess their core assumptions through reflexive practices. **Chris** articulated the emotional spectrum experienced by attendees, ranging from feelings of despair, fear, and isolation to a deep-seated desire for validation. He emphasized how even the subtlest details, like the arrangement of furniture, can play a pivotal role in shaping these emotional responses. **Julianna**, too, spoke of her vision for the community to become one that offers a "healing space" made possible by cultivating a strong "culture of care." Such a space becomes indispensable, providing members with the emotional and social support they need to foster genuine connections grounded in trust. This can support their ability to nurture positive growth that addresses the intergenerational trauma often found related to issues of sustainability, crisis, and transformation. **Curtis** emphasized the importance of cultivating love in the community, explaining that "The practice of love is so powerful and important – it invites us to expand, not contract, to give, not hunker and hide. It enables us to avoid being pulled down by low energetic vibrations and continue to fracture or lean into higher vibrations that help us to see otherwise "unseen" possibilities that lie in the "in-between" spaces. Paolo Freire wrote about the importance of a pedagogy of the heart, which I take to mean stepping into love-centered courage to counter injustice and fight for freedom."

Parallel to this nurturing ethos, sensemakers discussed ways the TC could support disruptive experiences that could shift worldviews by challenging existing beliefs and prompting critically conscious reflection – the fundamentals of transformative learning. **Niko** and **Sam** agreed on the need to address challenging issues, such as racial injustice, climate anxiety, and grief. **Niko** emphasized that these are skills that members need to deploy in their work in communities and organizations, while "On the flip side, we should also focus on self-care and being a regenerative community that supports each other." **Luea's** insight into transformation as a personal learning experience, often accompanied by discomfort, encapsulates the essence of this balance that is both an inner and an outer journey. She invited the TC to reflect on the practices and capacities at our disposal that can be woven together more explicitly, creating the preconditions for being a living prototype. The community, while ensuring emotional safety, shouldn't shy away from instigating thought-provoking discussions that might unsettle established beliefs. Sensemakers agreed that the TC is both a place for comfort and affirmation and for embracing seemingly intractable challenges, engaging with diverse perspectives, and navigating the intricate dance between familiarity and the unknown.

### **Community Priorities That Reflect Commitments to the Four Ts**

Diving deeper into the TC's potential future trajectory, the sensemakers then sought to identify actionable steps that could align with the community's core ethos commitments and pave the way for innovative responses to emerging challenges and opportunities. The discussions spotlighted four potential areas to engage:

- 1) *Organizing decentralized and networked conferences,*
- 2) *Establishing dynamic digital platforms for curated resource sharing,*

3) *Fostering collaborative workspaces and extended action projects to support meaningful engagement and*

4) *Forging strategic partnerships with other transformation-oriented entities.*

Each of these areas represents a facet of the community's approach, seeking to blend the TC's theoretical foundations with a pragmatic action orientation. **Julianna** inquired: "I would like to know what is stirring up for all of you - How can we better address those needs in the Transformation Community?". This prompted the sensemakers to envisage a roadmap grounded in the TC's traditions and existing capacity.

*Conferences: Decentralized and networked gatherings*

Coming on the heels of completing the sixth of the Transformations Community's biennial conferences, sensemakers noted the importance of maintaining this tradition. **Vicki** advised the TC to develop a stronger rationale for how the conference enabled the community to achieve its goals as well as a firmer financial model. Sensemakers also discussed how future conferences should:

1. Enable emotional support and community building,
2. Focus on place-based, contextual, and radical, problem-centered approaches,
3. Have a well-paced flow that allows for inspirational exchange, creative experiments, and reflective spaces and sense-making, and,
4. Facilitate the blending of academic discourses and practice-based approaches and techniques.

**Niko** stressed the importance of the latter, asserting, "We should not segregate researchers and practitioners into separate sessions but instead build upon each other's knowledge to exemplify how different types of knowledge can coexist and enrich the conversation." **Chris** added to this focus on bridging different knowledge practices by emphasizing that "We should not just expose people to ideas but ensure they understand how to operationalize them in practice." Instead of solely showcasing ready-made solutions, discussions should revolve around complex and unresolved issues and tap into the collective wisdom of attendees on how to begin addressing them. **Vicki** emphasized the need to incorporate a heart-centered approach to engage people in a way that they can both feel and understand the issues. The overarching aim, as **Chris** put it, would be to "articulate the insights we gather, be it through words, art, or other mediums." To support such an effort, **Luea** proposed the idea of prototyping a two-way mentorship model. This would pair scholars with practitioners in between conferences and facilitate their collaboration on future conference sessions and post-conference activities. **Julianna** thought this was a great opportunity to build on the aspirations of a mentorship design that was ideated within the Sensemaker group during this year's conference in Prague.

Reflecting on this year's conference multi-sited offerings in Sydney, Prague, Maine, and online, sensemakers explored the idea of organizing multiple regional gatherings as an alternative to a single global event. While these decentralized gatherings might face logistical challenges, such as synchronizing interaction across regions, the recent proliferation of digital platforms could

help streamline the consolidation of insights. These more intimate gatherings could foster discussions on pressing questions faced by the community while enabling members from diverse regions to amalgamate insights and disseminate feedback. Sensemakers also highlighted the significance of post-event interactions, local hubs, and online sessions in reinforcing a communal sense of belonging. This would support a meaningful integration and weaving of the experiences back into the members' daily work.

### *Platforms and resource curatorship*

Sensemakers expressed a desire to have ongoing access to a dynamic platform for community engagement. As **Julianna** noted, "Conferences are just one part of our community experience." To bridge the intervals between conferences, the TC could support ongoing activities and resource-sharing, which **Julianna** envisioned through the creation of a "resource guide or access point," a repository where members could share insights, readings, and experiences, thus deepening their transformative journeys. The group briefly discussed platform designs, such as a web-based digital library, a wiki-style collaborative space accessible via mobile app, or an interactive dashboard or mind map. Sensemakers suggested that the platform not merely be a passive repository but an active space, AI curated to ensure relevance and accessibility. Sensemakers addressed the question of whether to actively collate and organize information. They agreed that the abundance of existing information sources, coupled with the easy accessibility of vast databases, makes the need to construct new and unproven repositories from the ground up less compelling. Leveraging advanced search engines and AI tools to curate, organize, and customize existing resources offered by other transformations initiatives may offer a more efficient and pragmatic approach to resource curation.

Other sensemakers suggested different approaches to enable members to engage and support each other between workshops and conferences. **Joel** and **Carlos** suggested that the TC could support documenting specific community events and projects in diverse formats like white papers, syntheses, or case studies. **Joel** noted that his organization was initiating a blog series focused on challenging narratives, which is an example of something the TC could assist with gaining a wider audience. **Carlos** saw potential in turning provocative conference questions into future discussion topics supported by an online platform. However, he also voiced hesitation, stressing that while attempts are often made to engage people in online communication networks, it has proven difficult to sustain genuine, meaningful engagement. He highlighted the importance of multilingual documentation for inclusivity and, with Joel, underscored the significance of conversations in one's native language. Recently developed real-time translation tools could allow members to instantly translate content or even engage in live conversations with members speaking other languages.

In summary, while the sensemakers thought that a centralized platform was promising, they also acknowledged the challenges like keeping it relevant and updated and ensuring global inclusivity through translation and culturally-appropriate offerings. **Julianna** advised a more strategic approach to leveraging existing capacities and resources, adding, "How can we better utilize the tools and resources we already have, such as the website and the conference infrastructure?" The idea here is to consider what untapped potential exists within these tools and resources—and the

people who manage them. It is better to know what has or has not worked already before shifting to something entirely new. Julianna's point also raises the importance of remembering that these mechanisms for engagement and community building require a great deal of time, attention, and careful facilitation. This includes dedicated personnel and/or voluntary members of the TC who are enthusiastic about and able to commit their energy toward this cause. Being cognizant of that demand and respectful of the restorative needs of those who take on these responsibilities is essential to whatever mechanisms are utilized. Despite the potential challenges, the overarching sentiment was clear: the Transformations Community should not only be about periodic conferences but should also offer a continuous space for engagement, learning, and growth. A digital platform, alive with member contributions and discussions, could be the heart of this vision, enabling members to develop a true sense of community over time.

### *Collaborative workspaces and deep dives*

Sensemakers emphasized creating opportunities for collaborative learning and the creation and pooling of shared insights. **Karen** suggested that the TC support ongoing small and decentralized global gatherings, saying, "We are all addressing similar questions; the learnings and offerings from these gatherings could be consolidated and shared." Echoing this sentiment, **Julianna** referenced an initiative she engaged in that implemented "leadership triads" for monthly check-ins. This underscores the utility of consistent touchpoints for members to address challenges, seek constructive feedback, and continue to strengthen a sense of belonging. **Luea's** proposal to deploy "academics and practitioners for some sort of test run over the next months or even years" could further amplify the community's commitment to experimenting with bridging the theoretical-practical divide. Yet, it would also necessitate substantial commitment and resources.

### *Collaborating and supporting other communities*

Sensemakers urged the TC to interact and collaborate with other global communities of transformations researchers and practitioners. Key to these discussions was the notion of fostering meaningful engagements over merely expanding affiliations or federations. **Carlos**, drawing from his experiences with initiatives like The Jena Declaration and the BRIDGES Coalition and his association with the International Bateson Institute, highlighted the inherent challenges in aligning different initiatives to achieve larger shared goals, noting, "It is challenging to move the inertia of our current system." Both **Carlos** and **Julianna** stressed the need for a careful and intentional approach to organizational partnerships. While pooling resources and embarking on joint projects are evident benefits, the essence lies in ensuring these alliances don't overshadow the community's unique identity. **Julianna**, emphasizing the intersections between communities, posited that synergies arise when entities with congruent objectives unite. Here, **Curtis** mooted the idea of liaising with higher education institutions in order to change them, remarking, "We should touch base with institutions of higher education to spread our findings and infiltrate the system."

Extending beyond partnerships, **Bruce** suggested that the Transformations Community could serve as a "meta-community" whose purpose is to support other transformations organizations. On a similar note, **Carlos** delineated the difference between merely forming federations for

extended communication and genuinely resonating with other communities. He noted, “The aim should not be to create something unique but to meaningfully engage with other communities. The objective is not to form a federation, but rather to resonate across different communities, and harness collective knowledge and action.” This captures the sensemakers' sentiment to cultivate collaborations without diluting the TC’s essence.

### *Connecting to the 4 Ts*

Considered together, the sensemakers' proposed initiatives present a coherent strategy that intertwines with the four Ts framework: Temperance, Transdisciplinarity, Translocalism, and Transformative Learning:

- Decentralized conferences can enable Translocalism by supporting place-based and cross-boundary learning among academics and practitioners. Transformative learning is made possible by both challenging and supporting members, combining self and collective care with embracing vulnerability and discomfort. They can support Transdisciplinarity through novel formats that blend theoretical, situated, and practical knowledge.
- Digital platforms and resource curatorship embody the spirit of Temperance, emphasizing both individual agency and collective coherence in sharing and accessing knowledge and maintaining continuous community interaction between special events. The emphasis on inclusivity and multilingual resources can enable Translocalism by ensuring that the community's initiatives apply to diverse local contexts and identities while relating to a shared community purpose and Transdisciplinarity by fostering learning and action across disciplines and professions.
- Collaborative workspaces and deep dive projects between academics and practitioners emphasize collaborative learning and knowledge pooling, reflecting the essence of Transdisciplinarity and the possibility of Transformative Learning. A focus on hosting geographically dispersed and networked smaller gatherings exemplifies Translocalism, enabling the TC to remain rooted in local realities while engaging in cross-regional exchange, and also mirrors Temperance through a commitment to fostering both individual agency and collective coherence.
- Strategic partnerships with other transformative communities reflect the productive tension of “Temperance” by maintaining the community's unique identity while amplifying its collective direction and impact. It also aligns with Transdisciplinarity by engaging other professional and academic communities and cultures.

The sensemakers' roadmap, as anchored in these initiatives, offers a robust and integrated blueprint for the TC to amplify its impact by embedding the essence of the four Ts. This is a holistic approach that engages diverse perspectives and ways of knowing, promotes co-learning and community building, and seeks to effect change across multiple scales and contexts.

## **Foundational Meta-priorities**

The sensemakers recognized the distinction between immediate community objectives and the foundational strategies required to support them effectively. In addition to identifying action priorities, they highlighted the need for meta-priorities: overarching frameworks and infrastructures that set the stage for the community's operational priorities. These meta-priorities, as suggested by the sensemakers, are about establishing the right environment, mechanisms, and structural groundwork. This would ensure that as the community pursues specific tasks or objectives, it does so with efficiency and effectiveness and in accord with the four Ts - Temperance, Trans-disciplinarity, Translocalism, and Transformative Learning. Their insights emphasized that before diving into direct action, it's crucial to create shared alignment across perceived boundaries and have the right systems and strategies in place to support and guide those actions.

*Discussions fell into two types of meta-priorities:*

- The first was *immediate action planning*, with a focus on Temperance, so that the immediate steps taken resonate with enhancing the agency of individual members while leveraging that in complementary ways towards collective action. Moreover, these steps should take care to maintain and/or build on the momentum of the community from its successful summer conference series in a way that is coherent with the emerging community's vision.
- Second, sensemakers considered *community governance and growth*. Sensemakers sought ways to engage the epistemologically and culturally diverse and dispersed membership while building a shared sense of the community's core principles and aims. They considered shared governance arrangements and whether to focus on expanding the membership or supporting core and committed members.

### *Immediate Action Planning*

The sensemakers highlighted actions that the TC should consider taking immediately to capitalize on the goodwill and energy generated at the 2023 conferences. As **Joel** put it, “It is crucial to come up with concrete things to do between now and the next conference, focusing on the level of ownership driven by the conference.” To start, the group considered whether the TC should host a digital platform that could not only aggregate shared insights and resources from TC members but also could integrate knowledge from other transformational organizations and initiatives. These resources might encompass research papers, participatory methodologies, case studies, and other materials that resonate with the community's ethos. Sensemakers addressed the intricacies of cultural and linguistic nuances within the community. This speaks to the principles of equity and inclusion, vital for a global community like TC. It also echoes the transformative journeys many members have undergone through their interactions between Western and non-Western cultures. As the TC began planning the next biennial conference in 2025, **Joel** emphasized the need for actionable steps in the interim. This should take a dual focus: consolidating and extending lessons learned from previous conferences and establishing a stronger nexus between the academic and professional sectors of the community. Moreover,

**Chris** emphasized the need for relational and emotional scaffolds, asserting, "Creating a genuine sense of community and ensuring emotional safety is vital for our continued collaboration and growth." **Vicki** agreed, stressing the importance of maintaining an inclusive space for both practitioners and academics.

Pivoting to a more localized approach, the sensemakers envisioned the establishment of regional hubs. These would serve as focal points in various locales, offering members a more intimate space to collaborate, share, and address challenges unique to their regions. These hubs could operate efficiently, leveraging member-offered spaces or echoing the virtual platforms employed during the TC's global 2023 conferences. By engaging in collaborative projects and initiatives, the TC is poised to tap into a broader expanse of collective knowledge and explore how it could be effectively curated. Endorsing these intentions, **Karen** urged, "We have momentum, and we should maintain it."

### *Governance and Growth*

Sensemakers also shared ideas about how the TC can more deeply involve current and potential members in reflection, sensemaking, strategic planning, and implementation. Central to their recommendations was the concept of active engagement and ownership, ensuring that members not only contribute but also feel a genuine connection to the community's direction and purpose. **Carlos** raised pertinent questions about the community's decision-making boundaries and processes, asking, "What kind of process do we have to address questions and make decisions for the community?" This led to a broader discussion on the balance between flexibility and structure in guiding the community's actions. **Bruce** described the lack of a formal governance structure currently. Here, **Carlos** noted the need to build momentum before adding a structural layer through what he termed an "open invitation" to involve the entire community in making strategic decisions. Asking the group, "What would be a healthy way of interacting?" **he** emphasized the need to preserve overall coherence and a strategic vision while cautioning against relying on one individual to shoulder all decision-making responsibilities.

Building on this key challenge, **Joel** highlighted the importance of ensuring that community activities resonate with the broader membership. He suggested focusing on "concrete things to do... focusing on the level of ownership driven by the Transformations Community." His sentiments were echoed by **Julianna**, who remarked, "If you are a part of this community, there is an expectation to contribute your unique skills and capacities." Mapping the wide range of capacities represented across the TC membership could be an important step in identifying where gaps exist and how those capacities can best be utilized in generative ways. **Karen** emphasized that regional gatherings could address questions about TC's purpose and approach, which would foster a sense of agency and shared purpose. Recalling a well-received paper co-written after the previous TC conference with **Niko**, **Carlos** reiterated the importance of revisiting past community contributions, noting that "we should highlight that the community wrote this paper a few years ago because it is still very relevant." (see *Fazey et al. 2020* for details). **Chris**, reflecting on the dynamics of the community, pondered the balance between embracing diverse viewpoints and maintaining a shared purpose. He mused, "One aspect I wanted to touch upon is the growth of our community... Central to this is how we deal with differing opinions. Do we



embrace diverse viewpoints for constructive conflict, or do we prefer maintaining a degree of similarity in our thinking to keep our purpose pure?" **Niko** noted that the community's scope is in part driven by the ability to obtain organizational support, a challenge that the entire field grapples with.

### *Section Summary*

Sensemakers underscored the importance of meta-priorities, initial decisions, and governance frameworks that set the foundational stage for the community's operational priorities. These meta-priorities establish vital infrastructures that can enable the TC to take actions that are both effective and resonate with the four Ts principles. By emphasizing communal ownership and active member participation, the sensemakers aim to foster a dynamic environment that promotes individuals contributing their unique strengths toward a collective purpose and cultivates alignment in how we do what we do. Simultaneously, there's a clear recognition of the need for a coherent structure that allows swift strategic decisions, mirroring the "Temperance: Agency and Coherence" principle. This interplay between individual agency and collective direction, as encapsulated in the four Ts, is pivotal in ensuring the Transformation Community's growth is both inclusive and purpose-driven.

### **Conclusion**

The sensemaker gathering provided an opportunity for participants to reflect deeply on their roles within the Transformations Community and their aspirations for future involvement. **Julianna** articulated her intent to foster "connections and synergies" that "bridge gaps and cultivate healing spaces" for transformation. She echoed her commitment to developing nurturing environments and furthering a "culture of care" as a way to "serve" the community where she is needed most. **Chris** voiced his aspiration to delve deeper into the community, with a particular interest in supporting UK-based activities. **Karen** expressed a genuine desire to be present, humbly serve as a connector, and contribute to the weaving of the community. **Curtis** saw himself playing a role in connecting colleagues with the community. **Luea** emphasized practical and context-relevant transformation applications, and **Joel** identified areas of facilitation, education, and participation. **Vicki** looked forward to integrating transformative concepts into her ocean initiatives, while **Niko**, **Carlos**, and **Bruce** proposed various strategic involvements and collaborations. All their reflections indicate that the sensemaking process enriched their perspective, subtly enhancing their dedication to the TC's mission and their envisioned roles within it.

The TC stands at a pivotal juncture, buoyed by the momentum of its recent conferences and the exploding interest in the field of sustainability transformations. Through the diverse terrains it has traversed over six conferences over the past twelve years—from Norway to Scotland, Sweden, Chile, Australia, Czechia, the US, and the digital realms—the TC has consistently displayed its adaptive prowess. At its heart lie the core productive tensions associated with the four Ts—Temperance, Transdisciplinarity, Translocalism, and Transformative Learning – which enable the community to combine thoughtful reflection and impactful action.

The sensemaker gathering in Prague crystallized a series of community priorities that both embody the four Ts and chart a clear path forward, combining immediate steps, longer-term projects, capacity-building, and governance principles. The discussions spotlighted four areas of potential engagement: organizing decentralized and networked conferences, establishing dynamic digital platforms for curated resource sharing, fostering collaborative workspaces and extended projects, and forging strategic partnerships with other transformation-oriented entities. These initiatives, deeply rooted in the four Ts, signal a future where the TC continues to operate at the nexus of academic inquiry and ground-level change-making.

Sensemakers also suggested that the TC take some immediate steps to build on the energy from the summer conferences, including supporting regional hubs and interest groups and forming alliances with other communities in the transformations ecosystem. Finally, they recommended that the TC develop an inclusive self-governance approach that would engage members in ongoing sensemaking, strategic planning, and implementation. In addition to improving governance, this will increase members' sense of ownership by enabling them to have a voice in setting the community's direction and purpose.

As the TC prepares to share these insights with its wider membership, which includes “Theme Catalysts” who convened in Sydney, “Synthesizers” who supported the online conference proceedings, and the “Departments of Magic” who laid the groundwork for this summer’s conferences, a window of opportunity opens to co-create a coherent, actionable, and adaptive plan for the coming years. A participatory planning process can highlight the TC's dedication to its mission of reflective practice and action research in a way that invites other transformation-oriented individuals and entities to contribute to, learn from, and be a part of this vibrant collective. This process aims to underscore the community's inclusive, holistic, and adaptive approach to transformative action. For those who have already taken part in our events and potential newcomers alike, the TC is positioning itself in the broader ecosystem of transformation initiatives as a space of thoughtful dialogue, intentional action, and collaborative impact for a more sustainable, equitable, and regenerative future.

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