

COMPOSTING CONFLICT

There's plenty of conflict
in the transition to a
nature-positive society.

Dealing with conflict is
like turning a compost heap:
it generates heat which breaks down
the scraps of injustice to create a
superb substance with which you
can grow something new.

Without heat, nothing transforms
- and the rot leaks out in
more dangerous ways.

 BIONEXT

FOR JUST TRANSITIONS

A zine for you...
if you're involved in fundamental change for nature!

(engaging with) CONTESTATION ≈ DECOMPOSITION

Compost piles begin with smelly, uneven scraps that slowly break down into fertile soil.

Transitions are no different: they start with the injustices already present in a system – the forgotten, the unequal, the exploited – which, if treated right, can be transformed into fertile new ways of doing.

When these scraps meet, they react. Heat builds up and things fall apart. In composting, we call this decomposition.

In transitions, we see something similar. Injustices are the source of contestations. Engaging with these contestations is needed to transform systems. In the BIONEXT project, we have studied such contestations in three European cases.

Curious what each scrap represents? → See the background document for the full cases.



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The Netherlands nature-inclusive agriculture



Policy instruments favour large, capital-rich farms



Agri-industry hinders small farmers from helping others



Energy transition and housing are prioritised due to spatial scarcity



Finland continuous-cover forestry



Historic public promotion of clear-cutting challenges who is responsible



Land ownership is at odds with societal access to nature



Transitioning in peatlands is harder than in sandy regions



Belgium nature-on-prescription



Governance fragmentation results in a separation of nature and health interventions



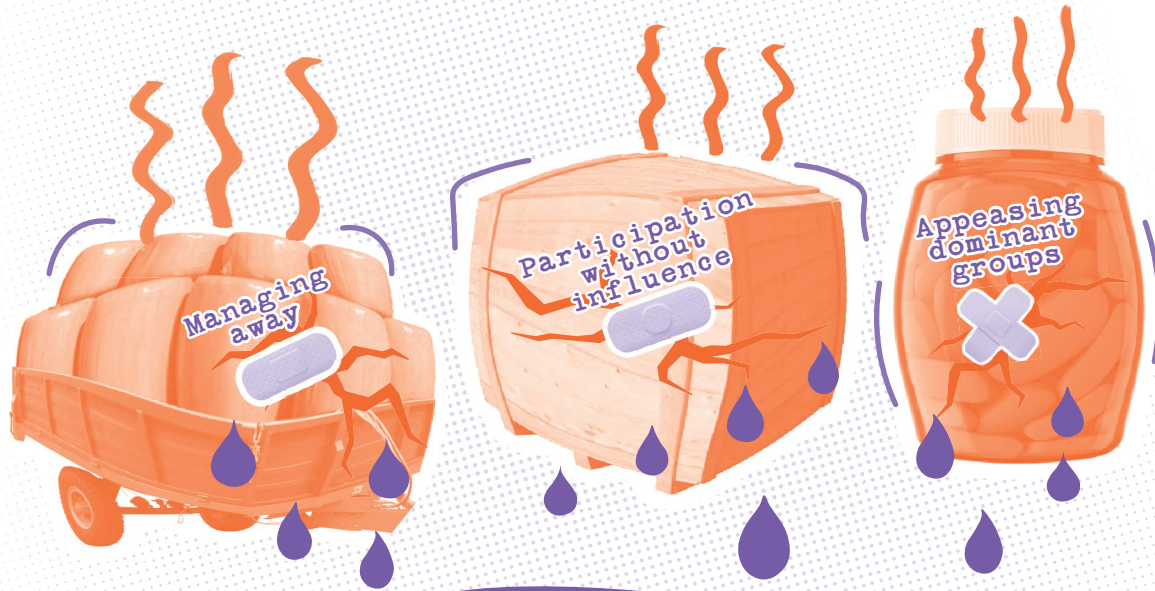
Rich people have way more access to nature than poor people



Healthcare prioritises cure over prevention



REDUCING CONFLICT ≈ CHOKING THE COMPOST



That heat of decomposition (and contestation) can feel alarming – it steams, it smells. But it signals that the old shapes are breaking apart.

There is no transformation of scraps into soil without heat, and no transformation of injustices without conflict.

The heat is the work.

When that compost pile is sealed off, the scraps cannot transform. Instead, (pressure) builds. The scraps stay intact. And the resulting rot forces its way out in toxic, (un)expected ways.

By suppressing heat, you don't prevent conflict – you let it escape elsewhere, except it has now become poisonous.

LET IT BREATHE

(policy can seal the bin – or turn the pile)

Policies can press a lid on the pile, keeping old injustices intact.



“Engagement often feels for show, meaning that stakeholder participation does not really affect the final outcome”
— industry representative



When policymakers cling to old thinking, nothing decomposes.

But when they center justice and engage with conflict, the whole pile breathes.

You don't need to reduce the heat – you can help guide it.



“It's not that you first have a transition and then you become just. You have to become just and then that transition actually comes naturally”
— involved ecologist



Or **policies** can act like a pitchfork: opening space, mixing layers, letting air in so heat can transform scraps into fertile soil.

“Not all green spaces are equal; ecological value must be considered when designing nature-based interventions”
— what this hedgehog might say



Enough compost. Let's call a spade a spade.

Across the cases studied in the BIONEXT project, solving injustice is rarely treated as a key component for accelerating the transition to a nature-positive society. Instead, injustices are often met with pragmatism and low-conflict governance, thus stabilising the status quo. If transitions are to address rather than reproduce injustice, policies need to be designed differently.

That is why we recommend the following:

1

Make justice an explicit transition objective

What is not articulated will never be seen as a necessity

3

Institutionally recognise nature stewardship roles

Roles shape how we think and act

2

Treat participation as a social learning process

Participation without power awareness reinforces the status quo

4

Just transitions are contextual and contested

Design governance for that: conflict is not failure