

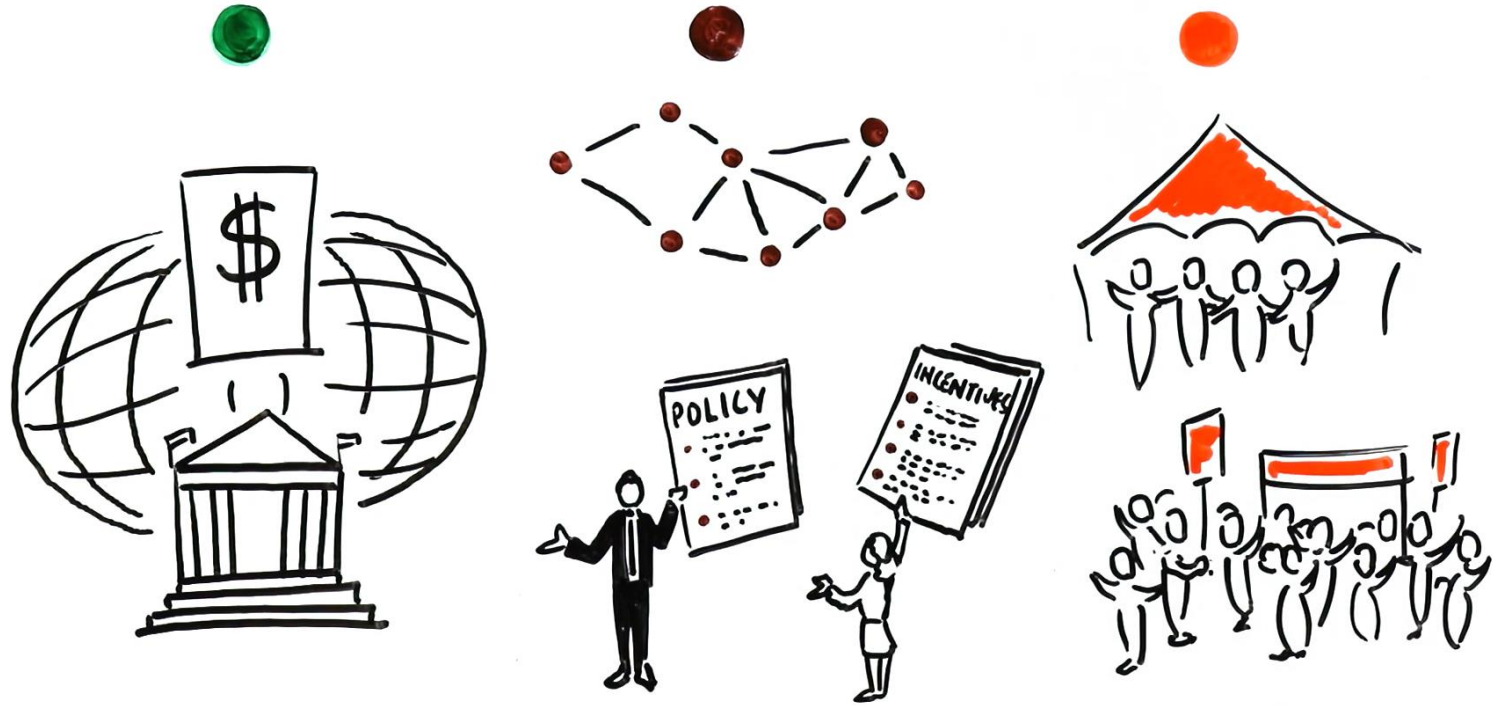
# Politics of Circular Plastics Economy in Europe

C-PlaNeT NTE-7

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Nur Gizem Yalçın



C-PlaNeT  
CIRCULAR PLASTICS NETWORK  
FOR TRAINING

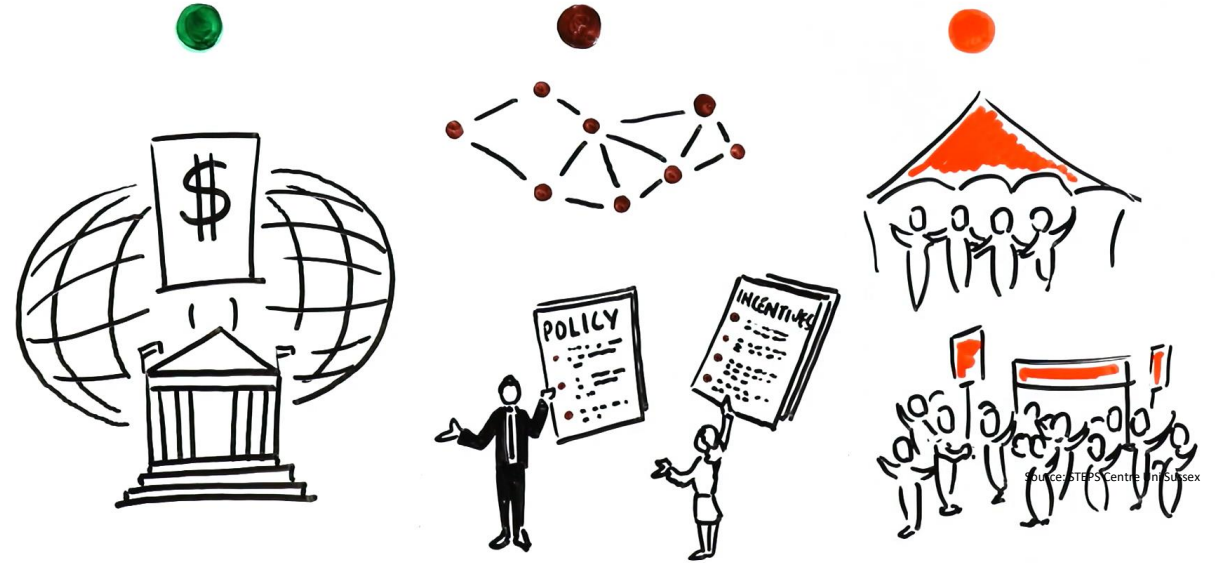


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# Outline

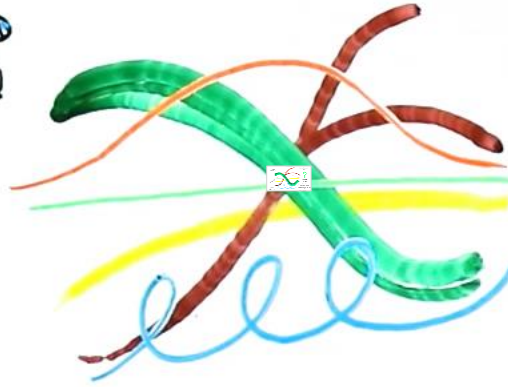


## 1. Politics of circular economy

## 2. Update on PhD research

- Prioritizing material, economy or society? Contested visions of circular plastics economy in Europe
- Quiet capture in noisy politics of plastics?
- Science-art collaboration for circular economy: Case of NaturArchy

What role  
Circular  
Economy  
can play?





Justice  
implications?

Power relations?

What kind of  
change?

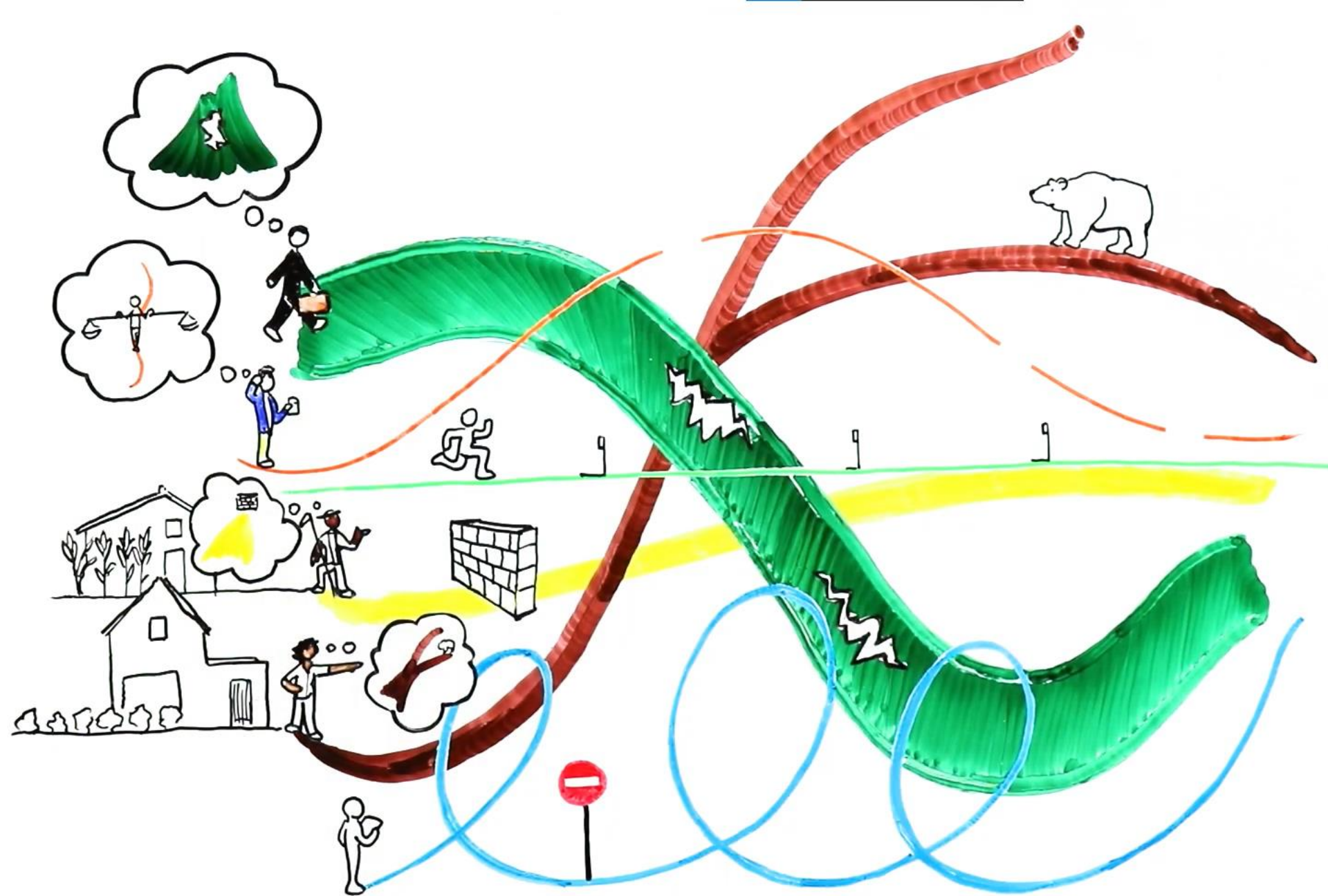
How the future looks  
like?



Circular  
Economy

Not only a  
technological question

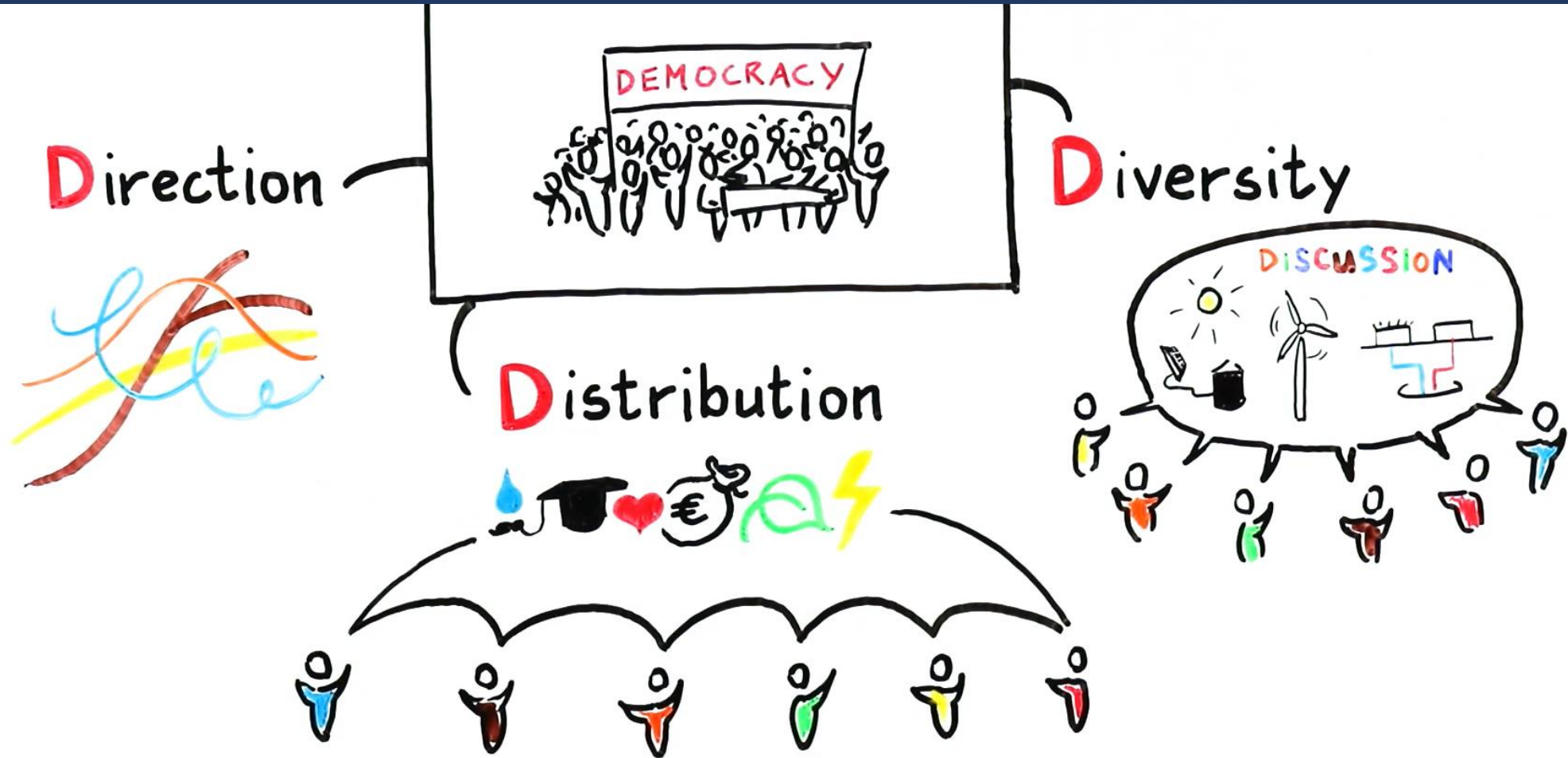
Critical social, political and ethical  
questions



# ?

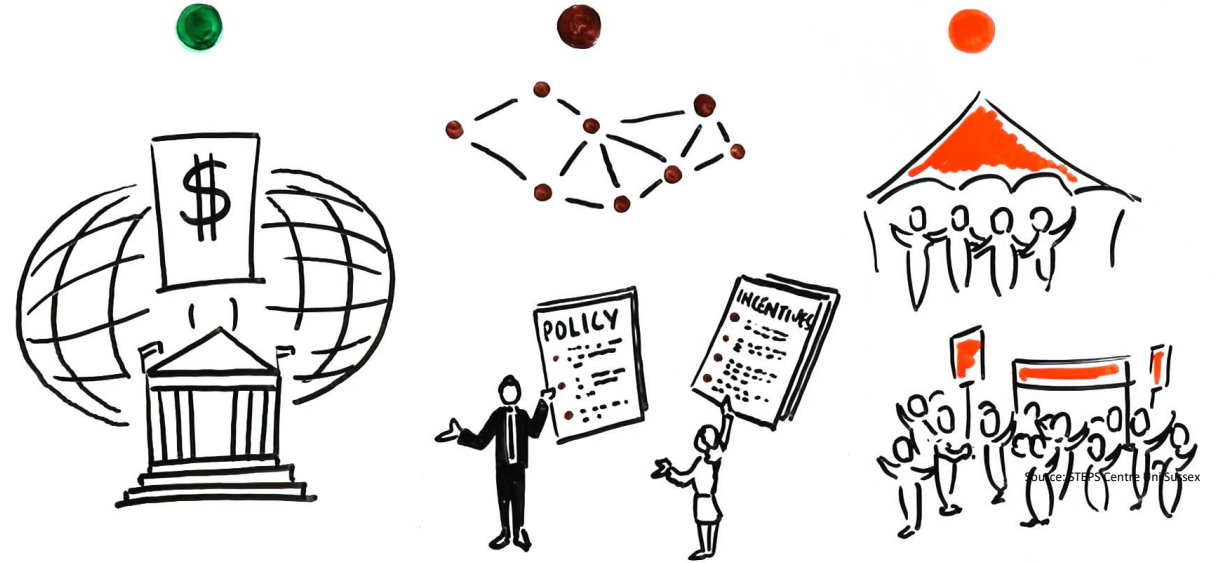
## Circular Economy

# Relevance





# Outline



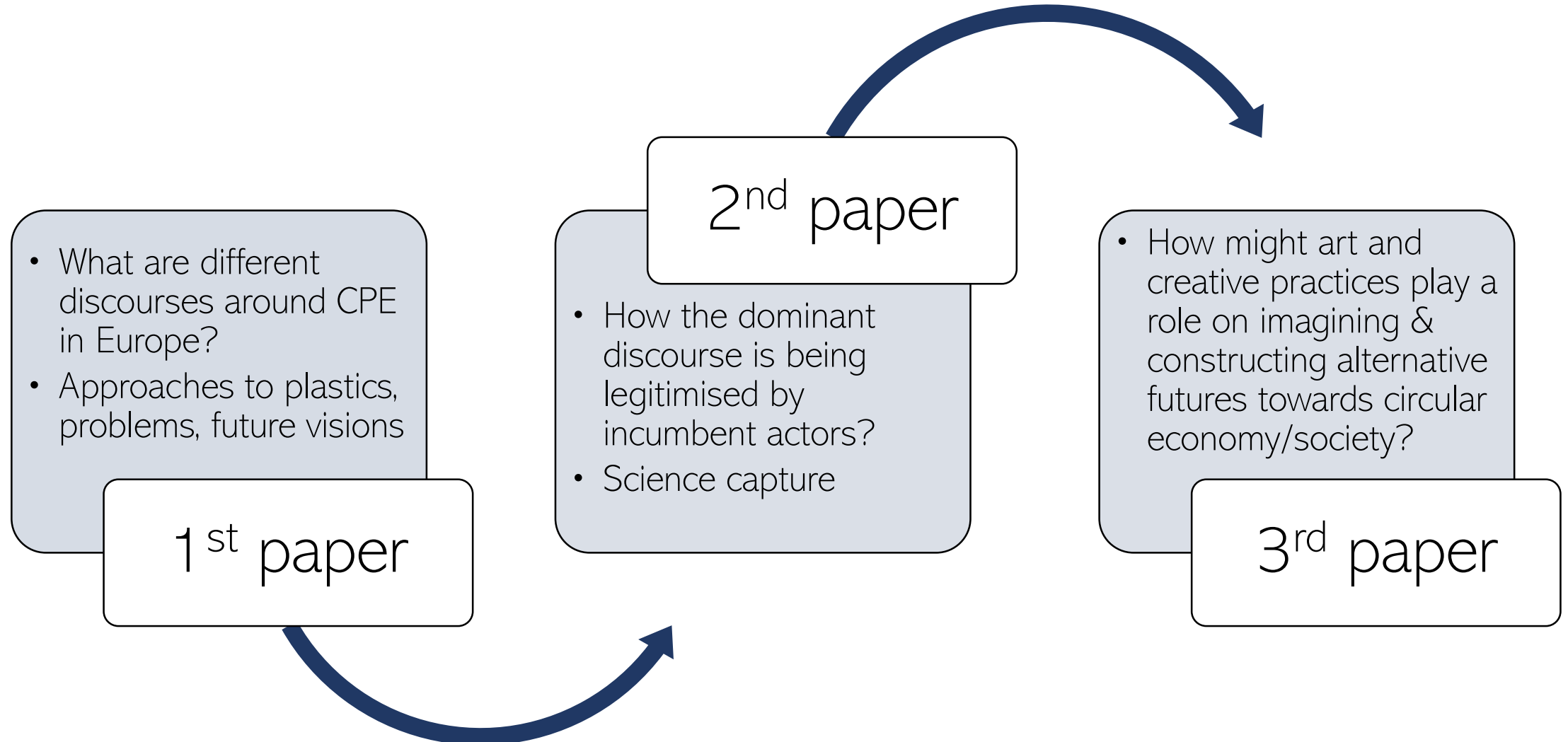
## 1. Politics of circular economy

## ➤ 2. Update on PhD research

- Prioritizing material, economy or society? Contested visions of circular plastics economy in Europe
- Quiet capture in noisy politics of plastics?
- The role of art and creative practices in circular economy/society

# PhD research overview

Lock-in into reductionist quantification, lack of imaginaries for alternative futures



Dominant discourse: eco-modernist views



# Methodology & data collection

- Qualitative research methods, interpretivist tradition
- Media analysis: EurActiv, conference recordings, panel discussions
- Document analysis: EU communications and directives, organisational reports, position papers
- Interviews: Industry, NGOs, scientific institutions, European Parliament and Commission
- Workshops: Interactive, experimentation with creative practices



# 1<sup>st</sup> paper: Contested discourses of a circular plastics economy in Europe

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2023.2192145>



OPEN ACCESS

## Contested discourses of a circular plastics economy in Europe: prioritizing material, economy, or society?

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### ABSTRACT

The European Union has made the development of a circular economy one of the central ambitions of its Green Deal, in which plastics are a defined priority. Current policies, however, have drawn criticism that the narrow focus on techno-innovation opportunities and economic growth falls short of addressing multifaceted socio-ecological challenges, overlooks trade-offs between proposed solutions, and conceals conflicts of interest among different actors. This paper contributes to opening-up the critical political debate on the circular plastics economy using discourse analysis. Looking at how arguments are framed, which priorities are defined, and how actors take positions, we identify three circular plastics economy discourses in Europe: 'Plastic fantastic' (material-focused), 'Circular economy will fly us to the moon' (plastics economy-focused), and 'Even plastic flowers are dead in this system' (socio-ecological systems-focused). Our paper demonstrates that the circular plastics economy is inherently political and is actively imagined, built, and created through discursive mechanisms.



1. Plastic fantastic!



2. CE will fly us to the moon



3. Even plastic flowers are dead in this system

## Discourses on Circular Plastics Economy in Europe





1. Plastic fantastic!



2. CE will fly us to the moon



3. Even plastic flowers are dead in this system

# Discourses on Circular Plastics Economy in Europe

# 2<sup>nd</sup> paper: Quiet capture in noisy politics of plastics? (in progress)

- Dominant discourse 2 -CE will fly us to the moon

**Strategies** of incumbent actors to maintain their legitimacy in circular economy?

- More and more **regulatory** and **commercial** battles are fought in **scientific** or **technical** areas  
(Laurens, 2018)

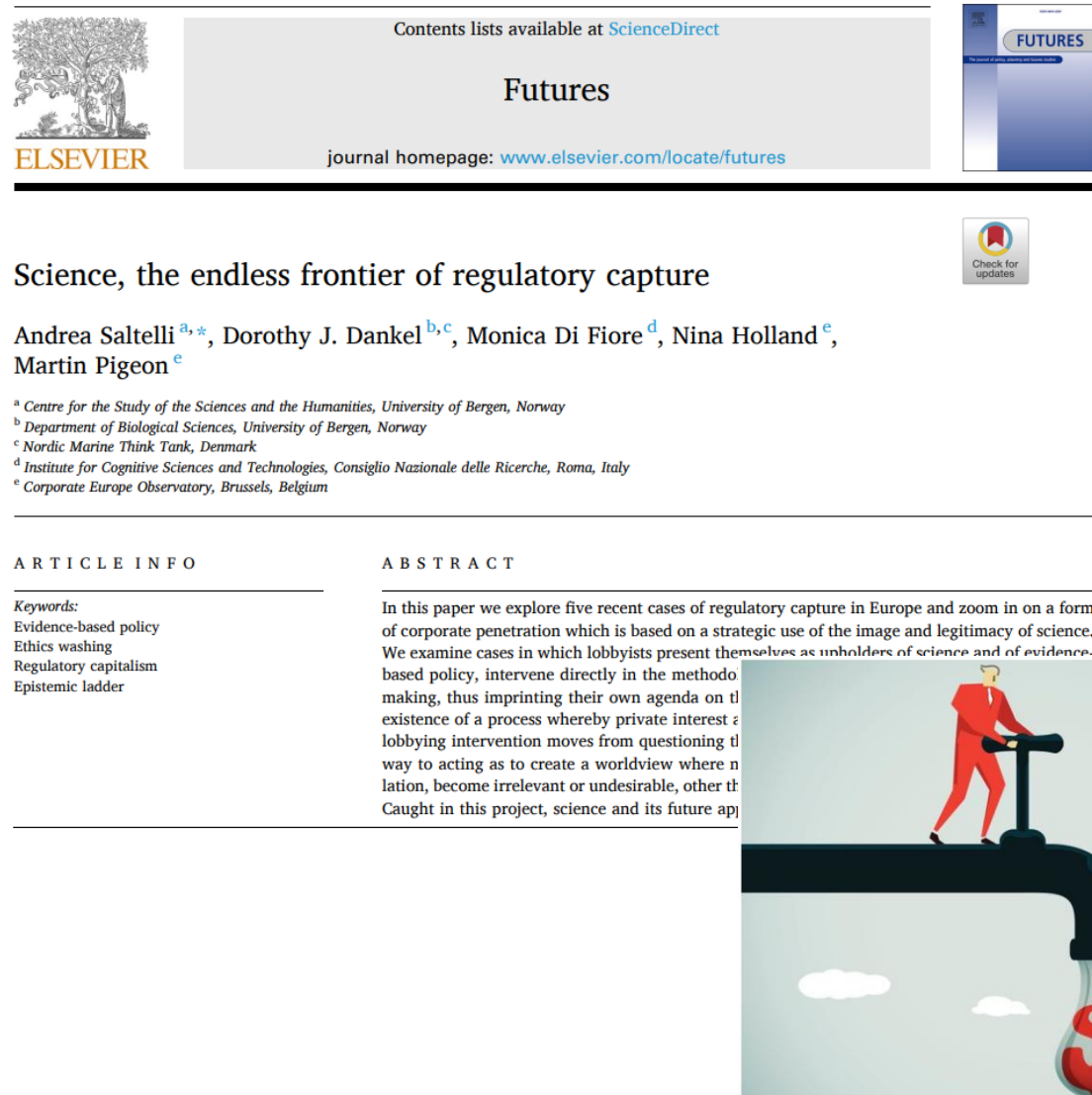




# 2<sup>nd</sup> paper: Quiet capture in noisy politics of plastics? (in progress)

## Regulatory capture by science?

- Regulatory capture is the process which interest groups affect state intervention in any of its forms
- “Quiet politics” as a result of power imbalances (e.g. financial and knowledge)
- Case study: Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (ongoing revision process)



# 2<sup>nd</sup> paper: Quiet capture in noisy politics of plastics? (in progress)

Strategies	Target
<b>Epistemic.</b> Invalidating the inference or influencing the methods whereby the evidence is produced	Science quality criteria and epistemology
<b>Institutional.</b> Delegitimizing the institutional settings which produces the evidence	Science governance
<b>Political.</b> Changing the framework in the context of which the evidence or regulation are relevant or desirable	Relation between science and society



Table 1. The epistemic ladder of capture (Saltelli, 2022, p.3)

# 2<sup>nd</sup> paper: Quiet capture in noisy politics of plastics? (in progress)



## Epistemic strategies

- Battles on whose truth counts

Brussels set to propose watered down EU packaging law after industry outcry



**Packaging is a vital part of delivering food and drink to Europeans in a safe, quick, and convenient way.**



## Institutional strategies

- Populate committees to influence science governance
- Asymmetry of resources

**World's top polluters holding pen on new EU standards for recycled plastics?**



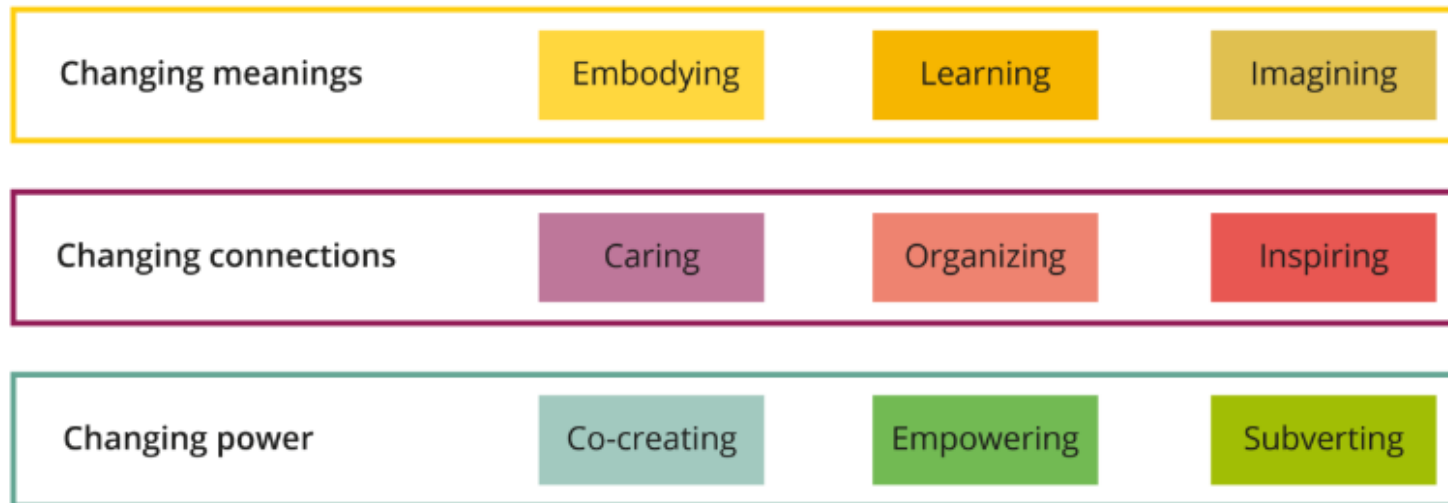
## Political strategies

- Innovation principle
- Better regulation

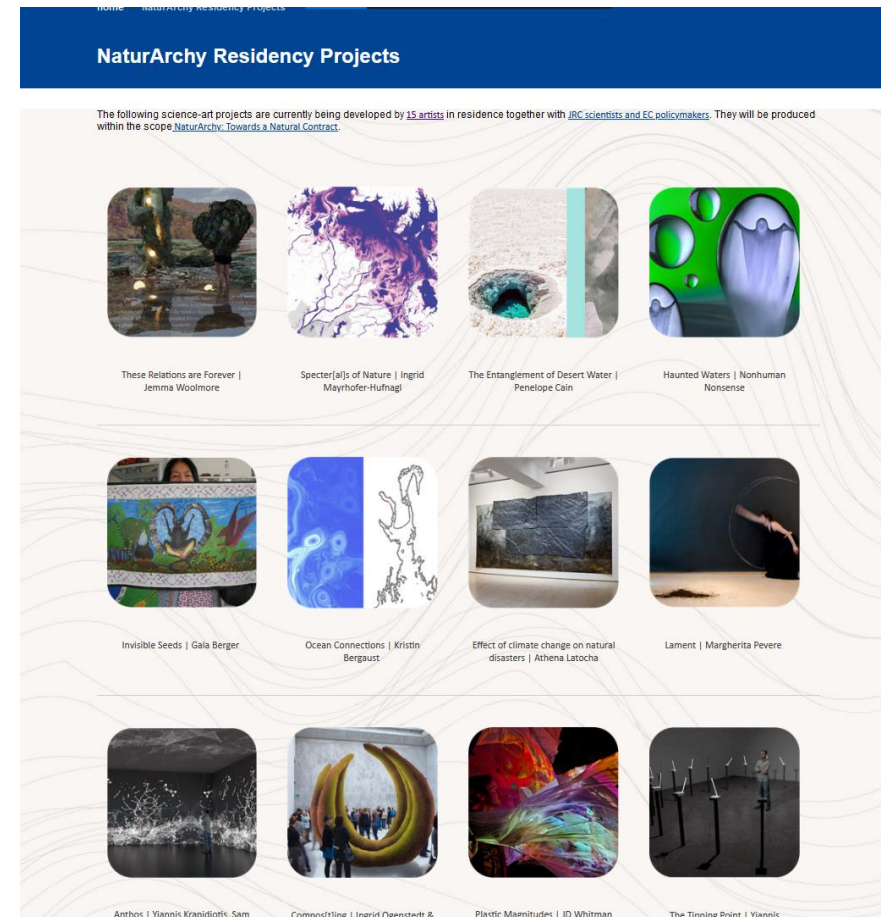


# 3<sup>rd</sup> paper: Science-art collaboration for circular economy: Case of NaturArchy (in progress)

- RQ: How might art and creative practices play a role on alternative futures towards circular society?
- Co-organising a workshop in Circular Society Forum (Berlin) in September.



CreaTures, 2022, p.2





# Conclusions

## Diversity



## Direction

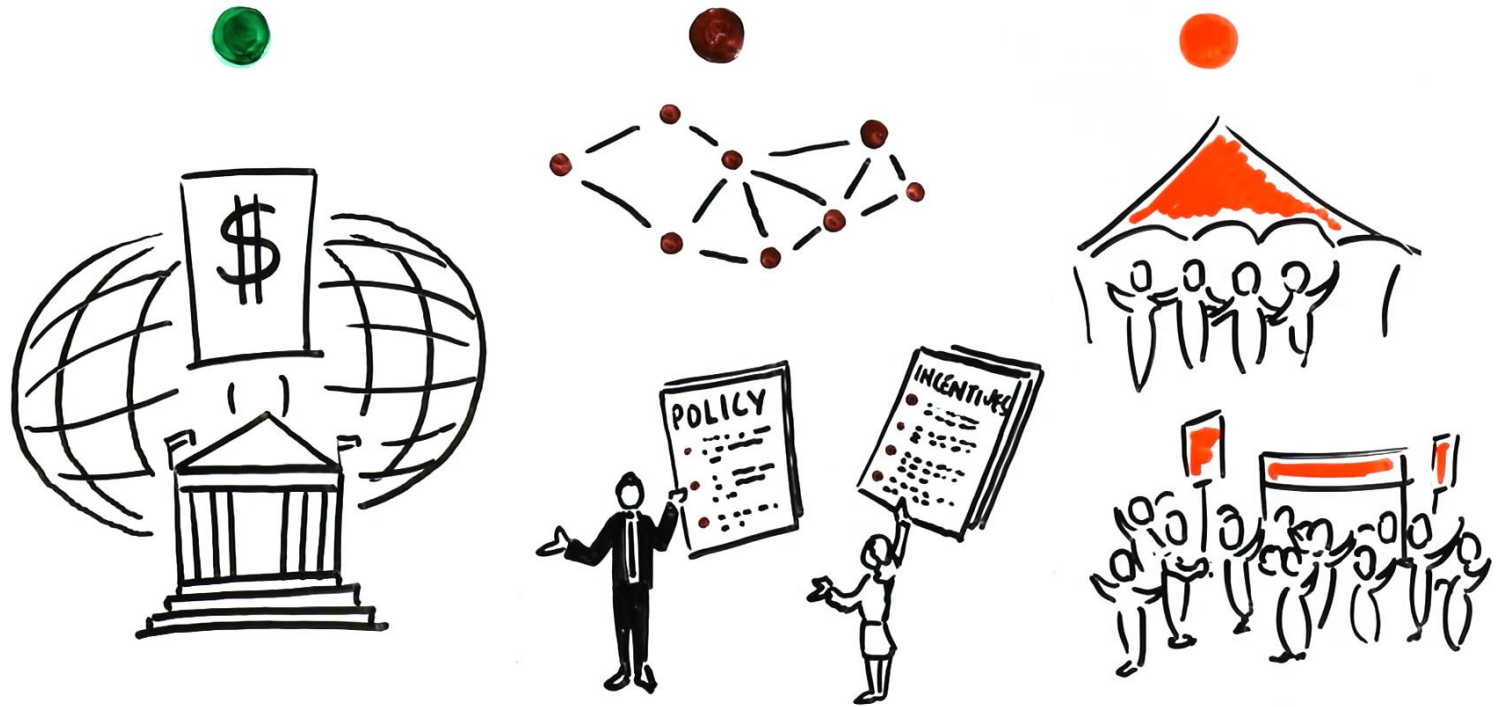


## Distribution



# Thank you!

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