State of Sensemaking 2020

2020

A Snapshot of the Sensemaking and

Culture-making Ecosystem

Sep 2020

Life
Itself

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This report is the first output from our ongoing efforts to map the ecosystem in which we exist. The ecosystem is still emerging and ill-defined. Reflecting this there is no clear name for it and we have settled, not entirely happily on the "state of sensemaking".

We emphasize our research here is clearly highly preliminary and was limited by both resources and our own knowledge. But we have to start somewhere and we wanted to publish our work so far in the hope it will both be of value to others and aid in the ongoing discovery process.

The ecosystem as we have mapped it is quite broad – even disparate. However there are commonalities. Emerging organisations and individuals are opting towards 'teal' style collaboration and community building in order to maximise resources as a generalist, lateral way of operating comes into view as a more effective way of tackling systemic problems.

There is a focus on systems, emergence, coherence, sovereignty, sensemaking as buzzwords, along with activism, governance, and regenerative culture. This is characterised by a strong lean towards spirituality (mindfulness) and the relationship between inner and outer life. At a higher level, we have identified three core thematic areas which tie together the varied groups in the space: *collectivism, (w)holism and counterculturalism and culture-making.* We will expand on these below.

Beyond this thematic overlap we have identified four major areas of activity: *physical spaces, research, media/publishing and events*. Nonetheless, it has been notable that

many organisations have shifted to multi-channel working across a number of these (e.g. producing media content as well as running retreats and events).

Collectivism

One major shared premise accepted by many organisations we encountered was their commitment to collectivism. This takes two forms. First is the focus on groups, rather than just individuals, as a primary unit of analysis. It is this focus which ties together intentional communities like Findhorn, spiritual organisations such as the Plum Village monastery, and groups working in collective intelligence and decentralised governance such as Enspiral. In each case, a focus is on collective ways of being and these are presented as preferable to individualism.

Second, and relatedly, there is a broad commitment across the ecosystem to operating in networked and communal ways. A number of the organisations listed are themselves (often fairly decentralised) networks, from the aforementioned Enspiral and Extinction Rebellion to the Transition Network and the Dharma Action Network. Movements such as GameB privilege non-rivalrous operation, and the intentional communities listed focus on operating communally rather than individually.

This collectivism is not a catch-all, with the libertarian sensibilities of outlets such as the Joe Rorgan podcast arguably falling outside of its scope, but it nonetheless remains a major explanatory variable when we are analysing ecosystem membership.

(W)Holism

Closely related to collectivist sensibilities, what we have termed here (w)holism[1] relates to the views taken of social phenomena, social change and simply the world at large. There is a widely shared understanding of the world as a gestalt object, be this under the banner of interbeing used by Buddhist and more spiritual actors, the complex systems terminology used by groups such as the International Bateson Institute or the 'integral' label taken up by the disciples of Ken Wilber.

One implication of this is that a significant proportion of the actors in the ecosystem work beyond, or indeed above, the silos of older generation social change organisations. Perspectiva, for example, talks about the meta-crisis, Rebel Wisdom targets the crisis of sensemaking, and the GameB and Metamodern organisations refer to deficiencies at the level of our social operating system. In each case, there is an attempt to target a deeper whole giving rise to negative social outcomes rather than individual social issues, such as prison reform or food poverty, themselves.

Where specific issues are explicitly targeted, such as climate change by Extinction Rebellion and the Transition Network, or an ineffective political system by The Alternative, a more holistic view is taken compared with other actors working on the same problems. These issues and their solutions are seen as spanning a number of domains and social sectors rather than simply being a matter of, for example, institutional or technological advancement alone.

This brings us to the final notable result of this view, namely the identified overlap between the inner world of consciousness and phenomena in the 'outer' world.

---

[1] We use the (w) to signify consideration of wholes, as well as operating holistically.

Contemplative and spiritual organisations such as Plum Village place meditative improvement of the inner at the heart of their activities, and while they may use different practices personal development organisations such as Landmark, media organisations with a personal development bent such as Rebel Wisdom, and proponents of psychedelics and other routes to mind altering experiences such as Joe Rogan and the Psychedelic Society all share this focus. Crucially, it is not just that organisations in this ecosystem see such inner development beneficial, but in fact as crucial for shifting broader society. This commitment can be seen everywhere from the Ekskäret Foundation's 'Mindshift' project to the Transition Network's 'Inner Transition' initiative, and the 'waking up' referenced by Wilberian 'Integral' groups and by The Alternative. All of this is not to mention the organisations that make even more explicit ties to this relationship in their purpose, including Life Itself, Alter Ego and intentional communities such as Tamera.

Counterculturalism and culture-making

Counterculturalism for us is a desire to go beyond the dominant norms and narratives. This includes the norms of the progressive movement more broadly – perhaps its most surprising and interesting aspect. We also emphasize the *culture* in counter*culturalism*: for us, it is concerned with shifting the very foundations, worldviews and assumptions of our current order. In this sense it is a form of "culture-making".

The focus of actors in this ecosystem is often on wholesale transformation, including a direct focus on culture and worldviews, rather than iterative improvement or transformation of only certain areas (e.g. economic systems). This

point in particular is strongly related to the holism discussed above; organisations which are attempting to explore what entirely new systems of social organisation would look like, such as GameB and Metamoderna, will almost definitionally be engaged with radically transformative countercultural projects. Similarly, though, intentional communities such as Findhorn and Tamera model ways of living which are incredibly far removed from current norms and ways of life, groups such as Enspiral have put forward new and radical ways of collective organising, and the proposals of groups such as Extinction Rebellion focus on transformative social and cultural change as a root to climate change mitigation, rather than more commonly accepted proposals such as cap and trade schemes. In each case there is interest in a world and in ways of existing that are completely different to our current one at a deep, cultural as well as institutional level. This contrasts to worlds which might be very similar in culture and worldview but improved across some metrics, such as that held up by alternative ecosystems such as the Effective Altruism movement (we would contest, at least in the nearer term), or where dramatic changes in other areas are assumed to improve culture and worldviews in underspecified ways, such as in Communism.

As mentioned, a willingness and desire to transgress social norms is a further feature of this counterculturalism. To use the Wilberian terminology, there is a desire to move beyond the 'green' developmental stage which is currently taken to characterise Western liberal societies, and much of the progressive movement as a whole. This leads actors in the ecosystem to be more open to questioning or dispute social and political positions that may be understood as norms not just in wider society, but also those (for example understandings of inclusivity) within progressive circles themselves. This can be seen particularly in media organisations, for example in the guest choices, discussion topics and opinions expressed the Joe Rogan Podcast and Rebel Wisdom, both of which have constructed brand identities

that centre a degree of controversy. Similarly, however, we might view the presence of organisations such as the Psychedelic Society in the ecosystem as being partially explained (along with the aforementioned focus on the 'inner') by this same normative questioning.

Map

This map outlines the snapshot of our ecosystem captured in late 2020, with organisations grouped based on the coe activities they undertake. To see a full size version see https://lifeitself.us/ecosystem/2020/.

Selected Groups

Overview

- **Emerge** (Media & Events Platform)

- ○ "Emerge is an independent, non-profit media platform aiming to explore the emerging cultural narratives of our time."

- **Perspectiva** (Think Tank & Events Platform)
  - ○ "We research the relationship between complex global challenges and the inner lives of human beings and highlight why this matters in society."

- **Ekskaret** (Learning & Research Platform)
  - ○ "The Ekskäret Foundation aims to facilitate the co-creation of a more conscious and sustainable society where people create more well-being for themselves, each other and the world."

- **Alter Ego** (Media & Events Platform)
  - ○ "Profiling the big ideas that are emerging from the pioneering edge of the political conversation."

- **OnBeing** (Media Platform)
  - ○ "Pursuing deep thinking and moral imagination, social courage and joy, to renew inner life, outer life, and life together."

- **GameB** (Online Subculture)
  - ○ "Play along. That's what we do as systems that fortify society fall apart: financial systems, political systems, public educational systems, healthy food systems, the environment, media and markets. What will crack next?"

- **Dark Mountain** (Cultural Platform)
  - ○ "The Dark Mountain Project is a network of writers, artists and thinkers who have stopped believing the stories our civilization tells itself."

- **The Emergence Network** (Research & Cultural Platform)
  - ○ "What if the way we respond to the crisis is part of the crisis? The Emergence Network is a research inquiry into the otherwise."

- **Advaya Initiative** (Events Platform)
  - "Advaya is a systems change platform galvanising a culture shift towards radical regeneration. We explore the connections between ecology, economy, spirituality and mental health change to consider how we can create deep, systemic change for people and planet. Our media platform, campaigns and live events empower and inspire, weaving stories of beautiful transformation, resistance and renewal."

- **Rebel Wisdom** (Media & Events Platform)
  - "Rebel Wisdom is the cutting edge of a new counterculture. A media channel founded by BBC & Channel 4 journalist and filmmaker David Fuller, we uncover the most rebellious ideas in philosophy, human potential and transcendence to find direction through the chaos of the times."

- **Future Thinkers** (Media Platform)
  - "Future Thinkers is a media platform, community, and education portal dedicated to the evolution of society, technology, and consciousness."

- **Plum Village** (Monastic Community)
  - "A global community of mindfulness practice centres offering retreats and teachings on engaged Buddhism and the art of mindful living, founded by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh."

- **Integral Life** (Media Platform)
  - "Integral Life is a member-driven digital media community that supports the growth, education and application of Integral Philosophy and integrative metatheory to complex issues in the 21st century. "

Selected Groups Detail

Emerge

Media & Events Platform

"Emerge is an independent, non-profit media platform aiming to explore the emerging cultural narratives of our time."

People: Tomas Bjokrman (Co-Initiator), Jonathan Rowson (Co-Initiator), Ivo Mensch,

Matthew Green (Editor), Tarn Johns (Co-Editor), Sebastian Baier

Founded: 2018

Locale: Berlin, Sweden, London

Emerge is an independent, non-profit media platform highlighting the initiatives, individuals and ways of thinking that are sowing the seeds of a new civilisation. We are exploring how to act wisely in a world that seems out of control. We aim to explore the emerging cultural narratives of our time by collecting useful content from across the web, profiling change makers and thinkers, publishing thought-provoking commentary and producing original videos and podcasts. We are living in times of profound transition where our ways of working, communicating and governing are quickly transforming. Many of our received wisdoms, habits and perspectives are becoming obsolete. What will emerge in the vacuum created by this disruption is not yet clear, but some critical questions hang in the balance: Will we manage to avert ecological crisis? Will our new technologies enable powerful collaboration, or create intense polarisation? What does it mean to live a meaningful life in relationship with ourselves and others? Nobody knows what the world will look like in 20 years time. At Emerge we believe that we all have a part to play in weaving a new story for

humanity and our planet. In fact, we are already doing it. Emerge is a hub for people and initiatives searching for solutions to pressing global challenges, asking the question: What new patterns of living, working and existing together are currently emerging? We are a network and a movement that celebrates people and projects. Our purpose is constantly emerging and taking shape. We offer an invitation to each of us to discover our role in this new story.

- We hope to sow the seeds for a new civilisation - we are farmers or gardeners.
- We are observing and helping to give birth to a new civilisation - we are midwives.
- We want a more-conscious society - we are alarm clocks or zen teachers.
- We seek to co-create a more conscious society - we are collaborative innovators.
- We are interested in three kinds of transformation; the self, society and emergent systemic properties of these two together - we are alchemists, or societal chefs.
- We recognise that how we perceive and know and represent the world has revolutionary potential - we are artists.
- We seek complex integration of diverse bodies of theory and practice - we are epistemic freedom fighters.
- We want to support innovative forms of spiritual practice and inquiry that better connect us to the challenges of our time - we are conveners and hosts.
- We love powerful and beautiful communication - we are drum rolls and content curators.

Perspectiva

Think Tank, Events

"We research the relationship between complex global challenges and the inner lives of human beings and highlight why this matters in society."
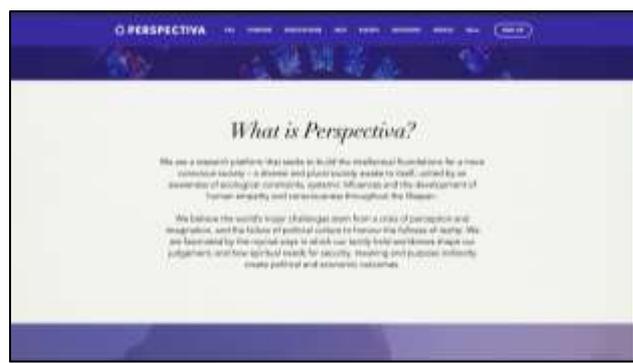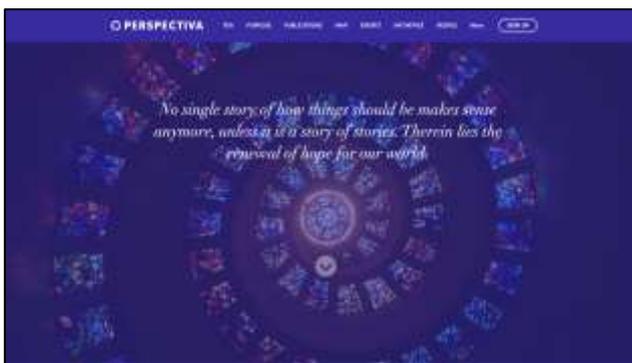
People: Jonathan Rowson (Founder), Tomas Bjorkman (Co-Founder), Ivo Mensch, Mark Vernon, Pippa Evans, Zak Stein, Ronan Harrington

Founded: 2016

Locale: London

Our work is aligned with the mainstream heterodox view that democratic capitalism in its current form is not tenable, and that prevailing populist and puritanical alternatives - the restless clamour for clarity and certainty – is not the way forward. No credible alternatives from within liberal democracy currently seem particularly credible either, and that's partly because the challenges we face are not transactional or technocratic in nature – they are about human nature and purpose as such.

Perspectiva exists because we are convinced that somebody needs to deal head on with 'the crisis of perception', and work on the meta-crisis.

Ekskäret

Learning & Research Platform

"The Ekskäret Foundation aims to facilitate the co-creation of a more conscious and sustainable society where people create more well-being for themselves, each other and the world."
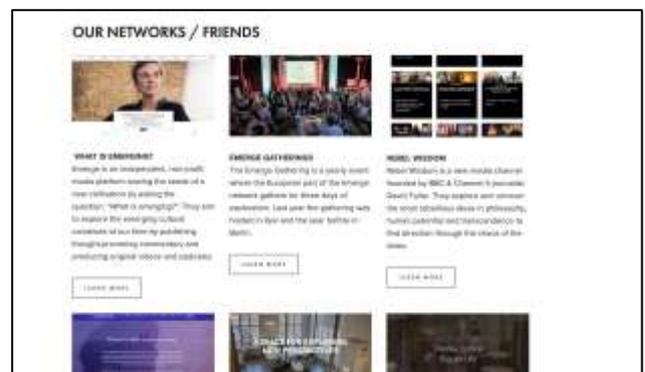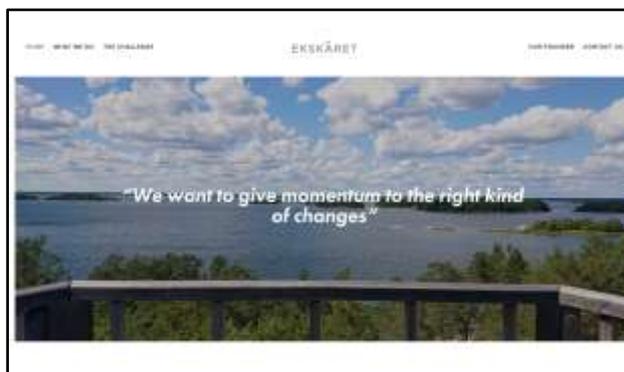
People: Tomas Bjorkman (Founder)

Founded: 2016

Locale: Sweden

With The Aim To Facilitate The Co-creation Of A More Conscious And Sustainable Society

[The Ekskäret Foundation](#) aims to facilitate the co-creation of a more conscious and sustainable society where people create more well-being for themselves, each other and the world. The Foundation was founded in 2009 and has since then developed locations, arenas and contexts for inquisitive exploratory meetings, dialogue and lifelong

transformative learning. Starting with youth camps the Foundation offer workshops, programs, conferences and work labs in personal development and social transformation.

All with the purpose to increase our capacity to create the new story of a more sustainable and conscious society. The Ekskäret Foundation works together with selected partners from business, non-profit, and academic sectors. The Foundation operates without profit interests and is a religiously and ideologically independent organization.

Rebel Wisdom

Media & Events Platform

"Rebel Wisdom is the cutting edge of a new counterculture. A media channel founded by BBC & Channel 4 journalist and filmmaker David Fuller, we uncover the most rebellious ideas in philosophy, human potential and transcendence to find direction through the chaos of the times."

People: David Fuller (Founder), Alexander Beiner (Co-Founder), Ivo Mensch, Kristin Bjorkman
Founded: 2018
Locale: London
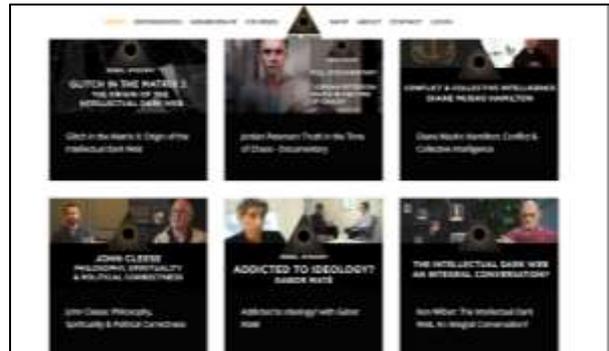
[When our](#) existing assumptions and ways of thinking break down, it's the rebels and the renegades, those who dare to think differently, who are needed to reboot the system. In these times of change, we can no longer trust the traditional media to make sense of the world. The old gatekeepers are losing their power. A new counter culture is filling the void, driven by a great intellectual awakening. Facilitated by new technology, it's made a new kind of conversation possible; more in-depth, more open and more democratic. Rebel Wisdom is a media platform founded by BBC & Channel 4 filmmaker David Fuller, on the conviction that we are seeing a civilisational-level crisis of ideas, as the old operating system breaks down. The new is struggling to emerge - and the most transformative ideas always show up first as rebellious. Rebel Wisdom looks to move beyond ideology.

Future Thinkers

Media Platform

"Future Thinkers is a media platform, community, and education portal dedicated to the evolution of society, technology, and consciousness."

People: Euvie Ivanova (Founder), Mike Gilliand (Founder)

Founded: 2013

Locale: Bulgaria
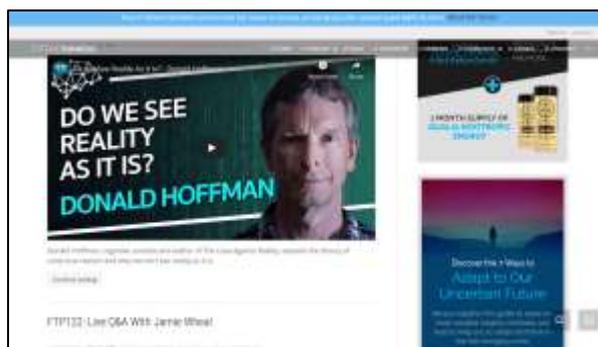
[Future Thinkers](#) is a series of podcasts and videos about evolving technology, society, and consciousness to create a more sustainable future for all of humanity. The podcast explores questions such as "what does the future of humanity hold, and how can we help create it?","how can we create societies where all human beings thrive?", "what is the nature of reality and consciousness?" in the form of a discussion between the co-hosts and guests. Some of the topics discussed include emerging technologies like blockchain, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality, transhumanism, future societies, consciousness, meditation, psychedelics, and the philosophies that connect all these things. Future Thinkers has been featured as one of the best podcasts in Forbes and BBC, and in the iTunes Top 40 in the tech category.

We started Future Thinkers Podcast to explore and bring light to big ideas, to open up to alternative modes of living, and think about how all of us can build a more sustainable future for all of humanity. We want to create an futurist community of thinkers, doers, creators, and organizers who are actively involved in building this future. We have planted the seeds for this community online, and have done several in-person meetups around the idea.

Alter Ego

Media & Events Platform

"Profiling the big ideas that are emerging from
the pioneering edge of the political
conversation."

People: Ronan Harrington (Founder)

Founded: 2016

Locale: London
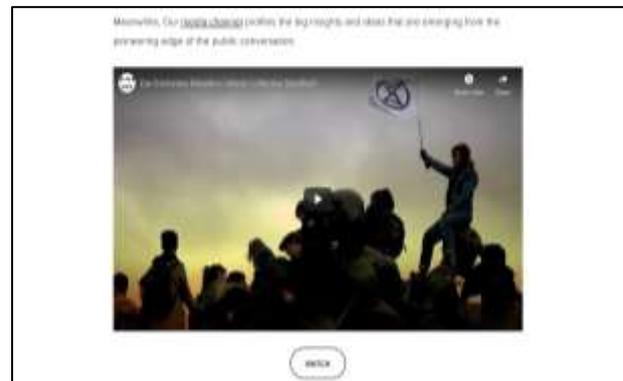
We're living at a moment where the planet is melting, elections shock the world and people don't agree on core values. But we believe we can respond with wisdom to these crises—not just react. For the past two years Alter Ego has been gathering cultural and political leaders to find our way out of this crisis moment in history. This series profiles the big insights and ideas that are emerging from the leading edge of the public conversation. Our series is based on the premise that at the moment we are unprepared and underdeveloped--emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically --for our current crises. We need to grow to meet the challenges of our time. Progress at a mass scale therefore begins, perhaps surprisingly, with personal development. We all need to do inner work to develop beyond our existing beliefs and assume more complex, unifying perspectives. Rather than

remaining insistent and righteous, we can recognise our views as partial understandings of a more complex whole, and work to integrate different and seemingly opposing views. Our polarised culture—on right and left—doesn't reward this. Yet. But we can change that. In this series, we'll be using a developmental lens--focusing on the potential of humans to grow--as we explore the defining political issues of our age, so we can upgrade our thinking and rise to the occasion.

GameB

Online Subculture

"Play along. That's what we do as systems that fortify society fall apart: financial systems, political systems, public educational systems, healthy food systems, the environment, media and markets. What will crack next?"

People: Jim Rutt, Jordan Hall, Daniel Schmatenberger, Jamie Wheal, Jonell Homer, Germane Marvel

Founded: 2014

Locale: Global

[Too](#) impatient to wait for the answer, a team of scientists, artists, entrepreneurs, and investors has joined together to stop playing along and start creating the conditions for a new game to emerge. Committing to work in honesty and good faith, we are applying our knowledge, creativity, and connectivity to steward an epic historical turn.

Our goal is a society of wellbeing we are proud to call home. Experimental, pluralistic, and systemic, our approach draws from many sources including complexity and cognitive sciences; advances in economics; and the willingness of social and business entrepreneurs to create new wells of human and financial value. We expect to be humbled. We anticipate surprise. We hope you will consider joining us.

The Dark Mountain Project
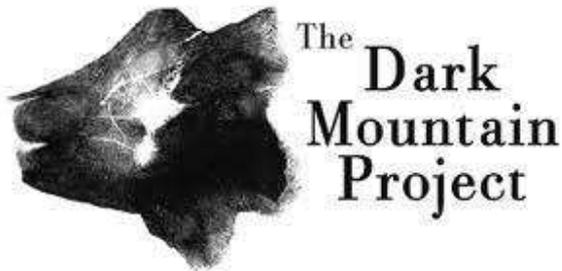
Cultural Platform

"The Dark Mountain Project is still hard to define. It is both a cultural response to a collapsing world, and a network of people who gather to makes sense of that collapse. At its core is a shared recognition that the stories we have inherited are are no longer making sense of our lives, and a new narrative for the times we are living in needs to be forged."

People: Dougald Hine, Paul Kingsnorth, Charlotte Du Cann, Dougie Strange, Vinay Gupta, Martin Shaw
**Founded: 2009**

Locale: UK

[Together](#), we are walking away from the stories that our societies like to tell themselves, the stories that prevent us seeing clearly the extent of the ecological, social and cultural unravelling that is now underway.

We are making art that doesn't take the centrality of humans for granted. We are tracing the deep cultural roots of the mess the world is in. And we are looking for other stories, ones that can help us make sense of a time of disruption and uncertainty.

The Emergence Network
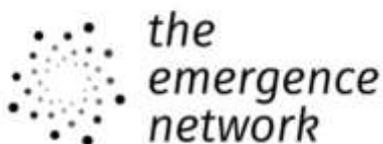
Research & Cultural Platform

"The Emergence Network is a research inquiry into the otherwise."

People: Bayo Akomolafe

Founded: 2019

Locale: India/Global
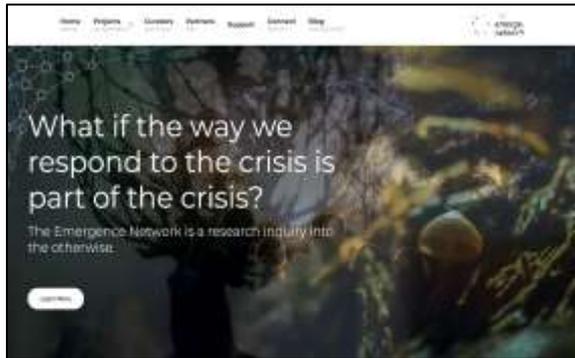
[We are](#) a constellation of humans and nonhumans working together trans-locally to curate projects, rituals, conversations and events that nurture senses of the otherwise via practices that trouble the traditional boundaries of agency and possibility. We seek to shock outmoded modes of perception and action. We want to show how human bodies are changing, how whales and discarded pieces of gum are also 'activists', how remembering ancestry has political consequences, how thought is not a human feature, how bodies secrete time, and how slowing down in times of urgency makes sense in specific circumstances – especially now.

The Emergence Network surfaces at a time when there seems to be a felt need for 'alternative' modes of engaging with our more troubling realities. What we offer are ways of diving into the cracks in our skins, processes that allow us notice that there are other items on the menu. That there are other places of power. Our work is to make more room available for movement – to emancipate action and responsiveness from its narrow humanist confines. Our approach takes for granted the fact that humans can no longer be centralized in our conceptions of change – and that, instead, we must begin to take into consideration the eco-cultural environments that are the conditions for our acting. Our work is to facilitate conversations, curate assemblies, foster trans-disciplinary and trans-professional interactions, convene events that mobilize people into exploring the occluded and the invisible, and nurture regenerative practices that allow for other compelling questions and values to be articulated in the face of crisis.

26

Advaya

Events Platform

"Advaya is a systems change platform building a community of change-makers around the principles of radical regeneration and joyful revolution."

People: Ruby & Cristabel Reed

Founded: 2015

Locale: London

Our world is in crisis: a crisis of mental health, the environment, and the economy. At the root of these crises is a system that has pushed both people and planet to their tipping point. Advaya explores the connections between ecology, spirituality, and mental health, advocating regenerative narratives and economies, collective responsibility, public awakening and mobilisation. By embedding ecological awareness into our lives, we can move from narratives of growth to an economy that values social, individual and environmental wellbeing. Our live events, media platform and campaigns shift narratives, empower and inspire, weaving stories of beautiful transformation, resistance and renewal. We believe positive change will occur when enough people are empowered and united. We therefore cultivate informed communities, link networks, and advocate alternatives,

practices and knowledge in the areas of Food, Economy, Consciousness, Activism, Health, Lifestyle & Story-Telling.

OnBeing

Media Platform

"Pursuing deep thinking and moral imagination, social courage and joy, to renew inner life, outer life, and life together."

People: Krista Tippett

Founded: 2012

Locale: US/Global
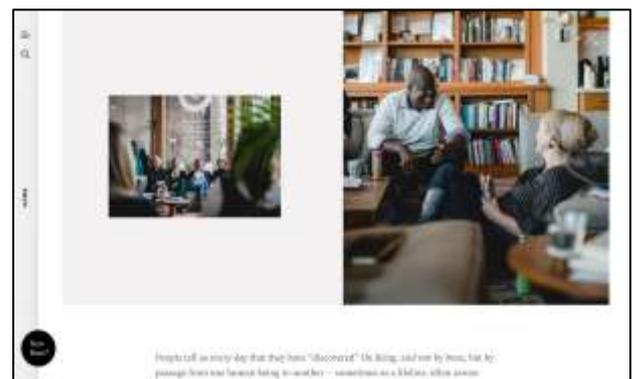
The On Being show and podcast was created by Krista Tippett inside a legacy media organization (American Public Media) in 2003. It began with a controversial idea for a public radio conversation, Speaking of Faith, that would treat the religious and spiritual aspects of life as seriously as we treat politics and economics.

On Being, as it has evolved, takes up the great questions of meaning in 21st-century lives and at the intersection of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, and the arts. What does it mean to be human, how do we want to live, and who will we be to each other?

Plum Village

Monastic Community

"A global community of mindfulness practice centres offering retreats and teachings on engaged Buddhism and the art of mindful living, founded by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh."

People: Thich Nhat Hanh, Phap Linh, Pham Hanh

Founded: 1982

Locale: France

Plum Village, near Bordeaux in southwest France, is the largest international practice center in the Plum Village tradition, and the first monastic community founded by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) in the West.

Plum Village is where Thay has realised his dream of building a Beloved Community: creating a healthy, nourishing environment where people can learn the art of living in harmony with one another and with the Earth.

Plum Village began in 1982 as a small, rustic farmstead, and has today grown into Europe's largest Buddhist monastery, with over 200 resident monks and nuns, living and practising in four different hamlets spread out across the French countryside.

Integral Life

Media Platform

"Integral Life is a member-driven digital media community that supports the growth, education and application of Integral Philosophy and integrative metatheory to complex issues in the 21st century. "

People: Ken Wilber

Founded: 2006

Locale: Global
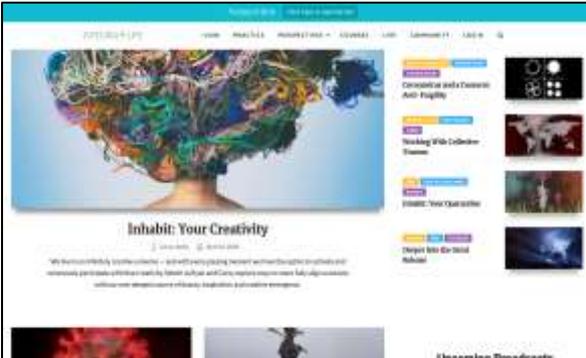
[Integral Life](#) is a member-driven digital media community that supports the growth, education and application of Integral Philosophy and integrative metatheory to complex issues in the 21st century.

Integral Life offers perspectives, practices, analysis and community to help people grow into the full capacities of integral consciousness in order to thrive in a rapidly-evolving world.

Trends

- Sensemaking

- Meta-Thinking - Systems Thinking

- Collaboration - Co-creation

- Metamodernism

- Teal - Integral (& post-Integral)

- Decentralisation

- Ancient Wisdom & Mindfulness

- Visioning Narratives & Storytelling

- Embodiment

- Community

- Activism

- Regenerative Culture

Glossary

- Metamodernism

- Metacrisis

- Meta

- Sensemaking

- Sovereignty

- Emergence

- Coherence

- Systems

- Integral

- Teal

- Lateral

- Decentralised

- Governance

- Wisdom

- Community

- Wellbeing

- Activism

- [Social Change](#)

- [Co-Create](#)

- [Regenerative](#)

- [Collective Intelligence](#)

- [Collective Wisdom](#)

- [Narrative](#)

- [Paradigm](#)