INTRODUCTION


Stockholm
Gdańsk
Euregio
Meuse - Rhine
Vienna
Evia

Introduction

Imagine how we confront the defining challenge of our time: climate change. Funded by the European Union, Creative Europe, Turning the Tide emerges from a simple yet radical premise: that art, culture, and creative practice hold essential power to address the interconnected crises we face. Across six European locations (Gdańsk/Poland, Vienna/Austria, Evia/Greece, Stockholm/Sweden, and satellites Glasgow/Scotland and the Euregion Meuse-Rhine), the project brings together diverse organisations and experts united by a shared commitment to inspiring meaningful, lasting change through innovative artistic interventions. These locations, each situated along waterfronts, embody the intersection of urban life and ecological vulnerability. Their coastal and riverside zones serve not only as spaces of economic and social activity but also as frontline territories where the impacts of climate change manifest most visibly. From rising sea levels to flooding risks, from pollution to biodiversity loss, these waterfront communities face unique environmental pressures. Yet they also offer fertile ground for creative solutions: spaces where the tension between development and sustainability becomes visible, negotiable, and ultimately transformable.

At its core, Turning the Tide asks a question that precedes technical solutions: What kind of world do we want to live in? Rather than treating sustainability, carbon reduction, or just transition as isolated policy targets, the project begins with this foundational inquiry about values, vision, and collective desire. From this starting point, practical answers emerge organically; not as imposed mandates but as choices rooted in shared aspiration. Climate justice and climate conflict are framed not as separate concerns but as interwoven "wicked problems" requiring holistic, culturally grounded responses.

Socially engaged practice serves as Turning the Tide's methodology; a process that values collaboration over top-down control, and dialogue over commands. Artists hold a central place within this approach. Their ability to express complexity, move people emotionally, and offer fresh viewpoints makes them essential in helping communities at all levels understand intricate environmental and social issues.

Partnership and Practice

Turning the Tide is built upon the strengths of five distinct partner organisations, each bringing deep expertise and local presence:

Intercult, based in Stockholm, operates as an independent cultural production and resource centre. As a hub for local, regional, and international cultural exchange, Intercult initiates and leads collaborative projects, networks, and competence-sharing across borders. Their experience in managing cross-cultural initiatives provides crucial infrastructure for Turning the Tide's transnational scope.

Instytut Kultury Miejskiej (Urban Culture Institute) in Gdańsk is a municipal institution dedicated to strengthening culture's role in city life and encouraging resident participation. Working through both their cultural observatory and direct community engagement, they connect cultural networks with everyday life, ensuring Turning the Tide's interventions remain rooted in local realities.

ARTIT, based in Athens, represents a pioneering digital platform connecting, supporting, and rewarding visual artists through monthly publishing opportunities and themed virtual exhibitions. Operating on the principle that art can trigger positive change, ARTIT amplifies voices striving toward better futures and ensures broader visibility for Turning the Tide's outcomes beyond physical locations.

Wiener Bildungsakademie in Vienna is a social democratic educational institution committed to freedom, equality, justice, and solidarity. Through extensive educational programming, they work to strengthen democratic structures and support individuals seeking to develop their city and political systems, aligning closely with Turning the Tide's vision of participatory transformation.

Dear Hunter, an artistic research practice specialising in mapping and atlas-making based in Vaals/The Netherlands, contributes cartopological methodologies grounded in ethnographic fieldwork. Founded by Remy Kroese and Marlies Vermeulen, Dear Hunter has worked with European governments since 2014 to map public spaces and deepen understanding of urban environments.

Programme architecture

Turning the Tide unfolds through four interconnected programme strands designed to facilitate local immersion, international exchange, and collaborative learning:

Cartopological Mapping precedes the artists' residencies and functions as a knowledge base and critical input for artists and other stakeholders throughout the project. Over a period of six weeks per location, Dear Hunter immerses themselves in the local context, translating their findings into a hand-drawn map that merges local knowledge, global issues, and the ways in which residents confront and navigate the effects of climate change. These maps do not merely document place; they assemble the entangled agencies of water, infrastructure, governance, and everyday life into a visual artefact that informs and provokes the work that follows.

The International Artists' Residencies build upon these cartopological foundations. Socially engaged artists from the partnering countries are invited to immerse themselves in local contexts across partner cities, drawing on the maps and insights generated beforehand. These month-long programmes structure research and production phases, enabling artists to engage deeply with communities and understand environmental challenges firsthand. The resulting artworks speak simultaneously to local audiences and contribute to global conversations on sustainability and climate resilience.

The Local Urban Labs function as hybrid art residencies operating across Austria, Poland, Sweden, and Greece. These programmes invite artists from each country to explore the climate crisis through workshops, creative collaboration, and site-specific production. Though grounded in local realities, Local Urban Labs form part of a transnational framework fostering dialogue, experimentation, and collective reflection across borders.

The International Urban Labs create EU-wide platforms for dialogue. Bringing together project partners, experts, artists, and local communities, these labs facilitate the exchange of experiences and approaches to climate challenges. Results from the cartopological mapping, the local labs and the international residencies are showcased and debated here, showing and questioning how art can play a vital role in environmental action.

Vision Forward

Ultimately, Turning the Tide envisions a world where cultural and creative practices become central to climate action. By empowering artists to produce works reflecting community perspectives on environmental concerns, the project generates not just aesthetic outputs but pathways toward meaningful transformation. The cartopological work embedded throughout, from mapping exercises to atlas-making, documents these journeys visually, creating layered records of place, perception, and possibility.

The Turning the Tide Atlas

This atlas stands as one such record: an artistic document capturing the textures, tensions, and hopes emerging from Turning the Tide's collaborative process. It offers readers not merely information but an invitation: to look differently, to question assumptions, and to imagine together what might become possible when art and ecology meet in the spirit of shared future-making.

Rather than providing a conventional project overview, the atlas enables deep engagement with its findings. Readers are invited to puzzle through the material, compare perspectives, and move between roles—as researcher, urban planner, social worker, policy maker and artist. Through this process, one learns how local climate effects are perceived, how (for example) urgencies vary dramatically across communities, and how trust in government and technology ranges widely—from 'they'll solve it for us' to 'we're on our own, and the system works against us.'

Four overarching themes have emerged throughout the fieldwork and recur across all locations. These themes surfaced organically during our research and were identified retrospectively as anchors for grouping and comparison. Together, they frame the diverse conversations, anecdotes, and insights gathered across the project locations.

How the insights are generated

The knowledge contained in the atlas derives from intensive periods of cartopological research, a methodology that fuses cartography with anthropology. This captures the essence of the approach: mapping not just physical space, but the lived experiences, cultural meanings, and social relations that shape how communities understand their environment.

During immersive stays across the project's locations (Gdańsk, Vienna, Evia, and Stockholm as primary sites, with the Euregion Meuse-Rhine as satellite context), not only Marlies and Remy from Dear Hunter but also local and international artists spent weeks embedded in the urban and natural landscapes. What is mapped is not a final or complete picture, but rather what is heard, seen, and experienced about water and climate in these places. The cartopological method prioritises ethnographic fieldwork: listening to residents, observing daily practices, documenting local narratives, and recording the subtle ways climate change manifests in different waterfront territories.

Each map functions as a collage: fragments gathered along the way, layers of time and space placed side by side. Precisely in its incompleteness and carefully selected fragments, the map opens space for unexpected connections, where unusual stories meet and new narratives for the future can take shape. The approach deliberately avoids imposing a single truth or pointing fingers at what is right or wrong. Instead, it invites reflection, wondering, and closer listening to the landscape.

The methodology layers scale and time, bringing together snowy summits and local waters, ancient myths and contemporary urban activities, historical ice sheets and present-day post-glacial rebound. Indigenous and artistic references extend into the city's current realities, suggesting relationships between people, land, and futures not yet visible. The cartopological lens treats maps not as authoritative documents, but as generative provocations that invite dialogue rather than deliver conclusions.

The atlas contains five cartopological maps: one for each primary location (Gdańsk, Vienna, Evia, and Stockholm) and one containing additional research from the Euregion Meuse-Rhine. Additionally, there is the ‘cross-section map’ functioning as a comparative reflection. How are the challenges similar on the five locations, and where do they differ? How are climate and water challenges dealt with in different places? What concerns residents, and what does not? Together, the maps and the reflection constitute the Turning the Tide Atlas: a guide for acquaintance and inspiration for the five locations and other waterfront communities seeking deeper insight into the relationship between urban life, water, climate, and the role of citizens in transformation processes.

Aims

Turning the Tide's aims extend beyond the artistic activity delivered during the project's lifetime. The project set out to demonstrate that cultural and artistic practice can make a substantive contribution to climate action, on equal footing with scientific, technological and policy approaches, and that this contribution can be sustained beyond the period of EU funding. This Turning the Tide Atlas is one of the means by which that aim is pursued.

Three aims in particular have shaped the project's design and, correspondingly, this publication. The first is audience development: extending awareness and engagement on climate issues to groups not typically reached through scientific or policy communication alone, including artists, cultural operators, planners, civil society organisations and residents of waterfront communities. The second is transferability: ensuring that methodologies and findings developed in one local context can be understood, adapted and applied by organisations and practitioners working in other places, including those outside the current partnership. The third is sustainability: securing the continuation of the project's approach and outputs after the project's formal conclusion, in part through the ongoing work of the River//Cities Network.

The Turning the Tide Atlas supports these aims by consolidating the project's methodologies and reflections into a single reference. Where the Local and International Labs, residencies and cartopological mappings generated knowledge through direct engagement in specific places, this publication records that knowledge in a form that can be read, referenced and applied independently of the original activity. It is intended to function as a working resource rather than a closed record: something that cultural planners, artists, researchers and policymakers can draw on when developing their own responses to climate challenges in waterfront and other environmentally affected contexts.

In this respect, the Turning the Tide Atlas's contribution to the project's aims is direct. It extends audience reach by making the project's work available to readers who were not part of the original partnership. It supports transferability by presenting methodology and findings in a form suited to adaptation elsewhere. And it contributes to sustainability by providing a durable reference point that remains available once the project's funded activities have concluded.

Foundations

Environmental crises are never solely environmental. They are also cultural. They shape, and are shaped by, the ways people understand place, value landscapes, remember histories and imagine the future. Turning the Tide emerged from the conviction that responding to climate change therefore requires more than scientific evidence, technological innovation or political agreement. It requires cultural transformation.

From its outset, the partnership recognised artistic practice not simply as a means of communicating environmental issues, but as a distinct form of research and knowledge production. Artists worked alongside communities, scientists, planners, architects and policymakers, creating spaces where different forms of knowledge could meet. Through curiosity, dialogue and creative enquiry, artistic practice revealed hidden relationships, challenged assumptions and opened new ways of understanding the complex social, cultural and ecological systems that shape our environment.

This approach reflects wider European ambitions expressed through the Creative Europe Programme, the European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus, all of which acknowledge that today's environmental challenges cannot be addressed by any single discipline alone. Turning the Tide sought to contribute to these ambitions by developing practical approaches that place culture alongside science, policy and civic participation as an essential component of sustainable transformation.

Central to the project was a commitment to place. Every landscape carries its own ecological systems, histories, memories and identities. Rather than applying predetermined solutions, partners worked with the distinctive character of each location, recognising that resilience grows from careful listening, participation and local knowledge. Through cultural planning, socially engaged artistic practice, Dear Hunter's cartopological mapping methodology, and the Local and International Labs, learning remained rooted in local contexts while being enriched through exchange across Europe.

Equally important was the belief that innovation emerges through collaboration. Bringing together organisations, artists, researchers and communities from different countries and disciplines created opportunities to learn not despite difference, but because of it. Shared methodologies developed gradually through experimentation, reflection and mutual exchange, while respecting the unique character of every place and partnership.

The foundations of Turning the Tide therefore rest on a simple but far-reaching proposition: culture is not an addition to environmental action but one of its essential conditions. By nurturing curiosity, participation and collective imagination, artistic practice helps create the relationships through which more resilient, inclusive and sustainable futures become possible. Rather than offering fixed answers, the project invites others to continue exploring how culture can shape Europe's response to the environmental challenges ahead.

About cartopology

THEORY AND PRACTICE IN TURNING THE TIDE

Cartopology, a neologism merging cartography with anthropology, is the methodological backbone of Dear Hunter's contribution to Turning the Tide. It maps not merely physical space but the lived experiences, cultural meanings, and social relations that shape how communities understand their relationship with water, climate, and place.

Foundations

Jane Jacobs[1] taught us that everyday life and street-level observations reveal what abstract planning misses. Jan Gehl[2] extended this by demonstrating that cities must be understood through human-scale experience: how people walk, linger, and interact with public space. Cartopology inherits this commitment to grounded observation while expanding it further. The "place-work-folks" triad resonates with Turning the Tide's core question: What kind of world do we want to live in?

Tim Ingold's concept of correspondence[3] enriches this lineage. Unlike representation, which positions the observer outside the world to produce static depictions, correspondence describes how knowledge emerges through active, ongoing engagement. We correspond with the world by walking, dwelling, and attending; not to record it from a distance, but to grow alongside it. For cartopology, this means maps are not finished products but traces of a dialogue between maker and landscape, between body and place, between community and water.

Bruno Latour's actor-network theory[4] challenges the modernist separation between nature and culture. In these networks, water, climate systems, infrastructure, technologies, animals, and governance structures are not passive backdrops but active agents shaping and being shaped by human life. For cartopology, this is foundational: the waterfronts of Gdańsk, Stockholm, Evia, and Vienna are not merely settings where stories unfold: they participate in those stories. Rising sea levels act; flood barriers act; reservoirs act; post-glacial rebound acts. Mapping cartopologically means tracing these entangled agencies rather than isolating human experience from its material conditions.

Method

Research unfolded through weeks of immersion across partner cities. During the Gdańsk residency (May–June 2024), fieldwork captured what emerged through sustained presence rather than predefined categories. Similar stays occurred in Vienna, Evia, and Stockholm, with additional research in Glasgow and the Euregion Meuse-Rhine.

Each map functions as a collage: fragments gathered along the way, layers of time and space placed side by side. Precisely in its incompleteness, the map opens space for unexpected connections, where unusual stories meet and new narratives can take shape. The methodology avoids imposing single truths. This echoes Latour's insight that there is no view from nowhere: all representations are partial, situated, and assembled from multiple perspectives.

The approach brings together disparate temporalities and scales: snowy summits alongside local waters, ancient myths alongside contemporary activities, historical ice sheets alongside present-day post-glacial rebound. Indigenous and artistic references (such as Britta Marakatt-Labba's work) extend into current realities, suggesting relationships between people, land, and futures not yet visible.

By producing multiple maps across five locations, cartopology enables systematic comparison. Four overarching themes emerged organically during fieldwork and recur across all locations. A 'cross-section map' then functions as comparative reflection: How are challenges similar across the four primary cities, and where do they differ? What concerns residents, and what does not?

Practice in Turning the Tide

Climate change manifests differently across contexts. Rising sea levels in Gdańsk are not identical to flooding risks in Evia, nor to post-glacial rebound in Stockholm. Cartopology makes these variations visible without collapsing them into generic categories. It reveals how trust in governance, technological optimism versus scepticism, and community agency diverge across locations.

Through ethnographic fieldwork, cartopology amplifies perspectives that might otherwise go unheard. Residents' anxieties, hopes, and everyday practices become central to the documentation. This counters dominant narratives positioning communities as passive recipients of expert solutions. Like Jacobs championing community knowledge against technocratic planning, cartopology centres those who live the consequences of decisions made elsewhere.

By opening space for unexpected connections, we hope to provide narratives for futures not yet visible. Refusing predetermined solutions but allowing practical answers to emerge organically from shared aspiration. These maps aim to become invitations rather than mandates, fostering ownership and agency among those whose lives are being mapped.

Together, the maps and reflections constitute a guide for acquaintance and inspiration for the five locations and other waterfront communities seeking deeper insight into the relationship between urban life, water, climate, and inhabitants' roles in transformation processes. The approach is meant to be transferable beyond Turning the Tide's immediate geography.

Forward

Places matter, stories matter, how we see and represent (map!) matters profoundly for what becomes possible. In the context of climate change, a challenge requiring both technical ingenuity and cultural imagination, map-making in general and cartopology in particular offers a path honouring complexity without surrendering to paralysis.

Donna J. Haraway[5] invites us to 'stay with the trouble' of messy, entangled realities. Latour calls us to 'compose a common world.' Together they anchor cartopology's commitment to careful attention and collective imagination. As the project Turning the Tide comes to an end, the work will continue to evolve. Future iterations may incorporate additional locations, deepen comparative frameworks, or experiment with new forms of representation. What remains constant is the fundamental commitment: to listen closely, to map honestly, and to imagine together what might become possible when art, ecology, and place meet in the spirit of shared future-making.

Notes

1. Jacobs, J. (1961). The death and life of great American cities. Random House.
2. Gehl, J. (2011). Life between buildings: Using public space (J. Albright, Trans.). Island Press. (Original work published 1971)
3. Ingold, T. (2015). The life of lines. Routledge.
4. Latour, B. (1993). We have never been modern (C. Porter, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1991)
5. Haraway, D. J. (2016). Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene. Duke University Press.

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Turning the Tide



[*ATLAS*]

TURNING THE TIDE

INTERCULT

instytut kultury miejskiej

DEAR HUNTER

ARTIT

wba
WIENER BILDUNGSAKADEMIE

FIVE LOCATIONS

Gdańsk

SPRING 2024, THE CITY AND ITS WATERS

Gdańsk is both a river city and a sea city. The Baltic Sea, with its modest tides and absence of significant waves, often seems like a calm pond, far removed from potential danger. But that is only part of the story. The Motława, the Radunia, the Wisła: these waterways and the ingenious locks and dams from the 17th century (partly built by Dutch engineers) form the system through which the city manages its water. The hinterland, reclaimed lands around or even below sea level to the southwest and west of the city, exists solely thanks to this network. Where today recreation and nature develop in historical context, this was once purely defence and gain from the sea.

During our stay, we noticed how self-evident water has become in Gdańsk. Those white beaches, the murmuring rivers, the two still-functioning 17th-century locks. Water has become part of the value and everyday life of the city: countless new buildings turn towards it, while canoeing, kayaking, SUPing, boating, dining – even sleeping on the rivers - have become increasingly commonplace. The daredevils swimming, undaunted by reports of river pollution. And yet: that self-evidence comes at a price. The relationship between city life on one hand and the infrastructure needed to direct water where it must go on the other is rarely made explicit. There seems to be a mental barrier between the city and its hinterland. The water-rich bastions form the boundary between the land that has been withdrawn from the water (where constant effort is required to keep it that way) and the city, where one appears to live with-and-from the water, sometimes even exploiting it.

The effects of climate change are felt here: snow in winter is no longer certain, temperatures become unusually high, dry and wet periods grow more extreme. How far rivers and the Baltic Sea will threaten the city in the future cannot yet be accurately visualised. But one thing is certain: water safety cannot be taken for granted. Water infrastructure and city life will need each other more intensely than ever. Turning the Tide requires first understanding the city's relationship with the water that surrounds and flows through it.

While some stress Gdańsk's identity as a river city, others emphasise that it is principally the sea from which the city derives its character. Formerly a city in its own right, partly hidden from view for residents who didn't go there for work, but the living environment for many. The shipyard is still there, but not on the scale of earlier days. During the communist period, the harbour linked Gdańsk to the West. When Poland was weighed down by scarcity, Gdańsk residents could dress in jeans, as symbols of the West, that arrived by sea, and dream of other times, places, and freedoms. That heritage lives on, in how the city positions itself between Europe and the Baltic zone.

Vienna

AUTUMN 2024, FROM MOUNTAIN TO TAP

For over 150 years, Vienna has performed something of a civic miracle: crystal-clear mountain spring water delivered directly to city taps entirely by gravity, without a single pump. The system was born of crisis: a growing population, recurring disease, and an upcoming World's Fair, woven together by the vision and political acumen of Eduard Suess. Today, this legacy is the pride of nearly all Viennese. And rightly so: around 1,500 public drinking fountains scatter the city, reportedly more than in all of Germany combined. However, beneath the celebrated narrative lies a landscape of ecological dependency, quiet friction, and questions that rarely surface in everyday conversation.

The First Vienna Mountain Spring Pipeline stretches 150 kilometres from the limestone peaks of the Schneeberg and Rax to the city's first reservoir, the Wasserspeicher Rosenhügel. From there, gravity distributes water to around 30 further reservoirs. These are all unique in design, no two alike. A second pipeline, slightly longer at roughly 180 kilometres, exists alongside it, though this map traces only the first.

Rain and snow slowly infiltrate the mountain ground. It can take anywhere from eight hours to thirty years for that water to percolate through rock and soil to reach a spring. From there, another 24 hours to Vienna. The longer it seeps, the better its quality: snow typically yields even finer drinking water than rain. Limestone plays a crucial role in this filtration, and the forest cover above the catchment area is equally vital: cut too many trees, and the entire water supply is at risk. This is why strict controls govern the alpine pastures within the water protection zone. Only a limited number of cows may graze there. Yet an old right persists, allowing cattle to graze when necessary, overriding even the City of Vienna's ownership. Friction, it turns out, is baked into the system at every scale.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Vienna acquired approximately 245 km² of water rights in distant alpine regions. Today, only about 3% of available spring water is actually used, a figure that seems reassuringly low. But the city keeps growing, and that proportion could rise.

There has always been a lingering friction around these water sources. A sentiment, never quite resolved, that Vienna is taking water that belongs elsewhere. The pride in Vienna's drinking water is inseparable from pride in the mountains and landscapes that produce it; natural heritage essential not only to the water but to the identity of many Austrians. Meanwhile, the average Viennese resident now uses 20 litres less water per day than a few decades ago. Yet demand rises regardless, simply because the city expands.

Groundwater currently makes up about 10% of Vienna's drinking water supply. Some people mistakenly believe it is 'worse' than spring water because it sits underground. But the soil filters groundwater on its way to the wells: the main difference is temperature. And here's a paradox worth pausing on: spring water is, ultimately, also groundwater. Both originate from precipitation: rain, snow, hail. Whether it rains over the Schneeberg or over Seestadt, doesn't all rainwater eventually become groundwater, and, in the water cycle, turn back into rain?

Unlike mountain spring water, which flows to Vienna without a single pump and even generates energy through small hydropower plants along the route, groundwater requires energy to pump it up. The system's elegance is also its asymmetry.

Seestadt

At the opposite end of the pipeline's trajectory lies Seestadt, one of the lowest-lying areas of Vienna, far from the mountain springs. And yet, here too, "mountain water" flows from the tap. Seestadt is in every sense a new environment where pioneering is not a luxury but a necessity, much like the construction of the pipelines themselves once was. But Seestadt reveals an interesting contrast. Many fountains overflow, especially when the wind blows. The water Viennese take such pride in flows across asphalt, straight into the sewer. Is that not a waste?

The Asperner See, an artificial lake fed by a hyper-engineered under-street system that separates dirty water into the sewer while allowing clean water to flow into the lake, remains crystal-clear and perfect for swimming. But its clarity depends not only on this engineering. A natural groundwater flow ensures continuous renewal, and at twelve metres deep at its deepest point, the lake stays relatively cool even on the hottest days. Hidden natural currents do what the visible infrastructure cannot.

During long and heavy rainstorms, Seestadt's water system kept functioning: despite high water levels, the sewers managed the rain without overflow. Each new section of the still-unfinished district incorporates lessons from recently completed streets, squares, and buildings. Everything must align; just as in the construction and maintenance of Vienna's water network.

The Donauinsel, initially a byproduct of the construction of the New Danube, was never intended as a recreation area. Yet already during construction, locals carried beach chairs and parasols to its shores. Today, groundwater wells on the island provide water of remarkably consistent quality. The area around the Danube was once marshland, a wide stretch of nature occasionally flooded. When heavy rains fall in the Wienerwald, it can still lead to high water levels in Vienna. The water system is vast and complex, spanning mountains, forests, rivers, reservoirs, and the underground flows beneath a growing city.

The mountain filters the water, yet the journey it takes can never be fully traced. That gives it a magical quality: one that fosters respect and wonder for the mountains. This map tries to hold both: the measurable and the untraceable, the engineered and the natural, the source and its destination. The people responsible for this system work on it every day with enthusiasm, pride, and impressive expertise.

Evia

SPRING 2025, TWO WORLDS IN COLLISION

What people tell us (and especially what they don't say), yet becomes visible in a glance in how the environment is treated. That's what we set out to explore on Evia. We had read about devastating forest fires on a scale we'd never experienced up close. About floods, often consequences of those same fires. We chose our base carefully: centrally located on the island, close to a river: the Lilas. Hoping it would offer insight into how landscape and inhabitants are entangled.

Once we arrived, the river turned out to be almost non-existent. Excavators were widening and deepening the bed, banks being reinforced. But no running water. "Ah, the dry river," we heard. "It only flows for a few days a year. But when it flows, it comes in force." The image of the empty riverbed lingered. A river that is mostly absent, but occasionally devastatingly present. It felt like a metaphor for more.

Our curiosity quickly turned into disbelief about the nearly collective belief that the fires were no accident. That they fit into a broader plan in which local needs were subordinated to economic logic: commodification, development, profit. All in the name of 'progress.' Ironically, in a place where climate change is most tangible, the climate crisis itself was gradually disappearing from view.

We recognised two fundamentally different ways of relating to a place. Not old versus new. Not traditional versus modern. It went deeper than that. We saw what Claude Lévi-Strauss[1] once described: the bricoleur and the engineer. The bricoleur works with what is at hand: materials, tools, knowledge accumulated over generations. Their work is rooted in place, cyclical, relational. The engineer, by contrast, works according to a plan, using abstract concepts. They design systems from a distance, aiming for control, efficiency, and scalability. On Evia, these two concepts emerge, and quickly clash.

This tension can also be understood through Greek philosophical concepts: Katό Kósmos (the Lower World) and Áno Kósmos (the Upper World). Katό Kósmos, like the bricoleur, is grounded in the local, the immediate, and the relational. Cycles and rhythms that shape life on the island. The interconnectedness of all things: soil, seasons, community. Áno Kósmos, akin to the engineer's approach, represents the upper realm of abstraction, structure, and design. Systems, control and order, often imposed from above, disconnected from the organic nature of the place. Both are equal, yet fundamentally different in their approach and way of seeing.

Plans for Northern Evia's reconstruction were already being presented while the trees were still smouldering. Some say they were ready even before the full scale of the disaster became clear. Chaos was answered with rigid order. A masterplan proposed reconfiguration: tourism here, co-working hubs there, industry elsewhere. Where the landscape was once understood as an integrated whole, it was now divided into functions and sectors. Wind turbines arrived. Large, white, efficient. Built by companies from Germany or Denmark, without meaningful local involvement. The electricity produced wasn't for Evia, but for the national grid. Evia as the battery of Greece, as one resident put it. For the islanders: loss of agency over their own environment. Land overtaken by infrastructure serving distant interests.

During a conversation about fences separating houses from public space, someone said: "The Greek is naturally a little mistrustful." Then added: "But maybe there's a reason for that." History was invoked: world wars, civil war, dictatorship until 1974. Families split, neighbours turned against each other, survival meant retreating behind thick walls. Now there's mistrust in a government that failed to extinguish the fires in time—or rather, suspicion that they were deliberately allowed to spread, to "make space" for development. Early rebuilding efforts (large-scale energy projects run by private companies) made it clear: this isn't about sustainability as a goal, but about sustainability as a business model.

Evia is not defined by despair. What struck us most was the remarkable resilience of the people. In villages where pine forests vanished, we didn't see victimhood, but resistance. Communities organised. Local committees, court objections, maps, letters, networks. Interestingly, they partly used the same tools as the engineer: planning, documentation, legal structures. But their strength lay in combining those tools with deeply rooted bricoleurship: care for place, improvisation, relational knowledge. They defended not just land, trees, or view, but a different logic altogether. Care, time, connection and reciprocity taking the lead. Production aimed at use, not profit. Work tied to seasons, family, the rhythm of the island.

On an island with modest energy needs, forests are cleared to make room for wind turbines generating power for elsewhere, often for places with the highest rates of overconsumption. Those same forests once absorbed CO^2, provided shelter, biodiversity, and security. Rebuilding through the eyes of the bricoleur? What if progress, sustainability, and development only gain meaning when rooted in the place they are meant for?

Perhaps it starts with the forest: not fixed recovery plans imposed from above, but choices made locally. Replanting native species in small plots maintained cooperatively. Or natural regeneration: letting the forest return on its own, with close observation and protection where needed. Energy from solar panels on roofs, not wind turbines on mountain ridges. Agriculture primarily for local use: resin and honey, olives and figs growing as they always have. Footpaths restored—not as an "experience," but as connections between villages, people, generations. Tourism can never be the foundation for sustainable rebuilding. Tourism is a consequence of quality, not the starting point.

What's missing in the plans for Evia is not ambition, but connection: to the land, to its people, to their knowledge, their rhythms. What's missing is an engineer who works alongside the bricoleur. Evia needs not more blueprints, but the rebuilding of trust: trust that those shaping the future are willing to listen, to learn, and to act in dialogue. The question isn't whether the island will be rebuilt, but how, and with whom.

Stockholm

AUTUMN 2025, TIME MADE TANGIBLE

Mid-September in Stockholm, we headed around Lake Mälaren. Early Saturday, near Enköping, we passed the Bronze Age carvings of Hemsta. A fellow visitor told us about Ingwaz: a hero who journeyed beyond the known world in search of wisdom, returning to share it with his people. His path, carved into stone around 1400 BCE, resonates with sagas that tie human destiny to cosmic balance. Those ancient stories ask: where do we find wisdom, and how do we return with it to our people?

Sweden's landscape functions as a slow archive of deep ecological time. The bedrock of the Baltic Shield is ancient and still shifting. When ice sheets melted some 10,000 years ago, the land began to lift. Even today, Stockholm rises by about 5–6 millimetres each year. Erratic boulders lie scattered across the landscape, carried by glaciers from distant mountains. At first we saw Sweden's landscape as scenery. But as we travelled, it became something else: time made tangible. Scratches on granite outcrops turned out to be marks of glaciers moving with patient force across the land thousands of years ago. Landscapes are not fixed, but alive and always in motion.

Lake Mälaren is Sweden's third-largest lake. Surface area: 1,140 km. Maximum depth: 64 metres. Water rests there for 10–15 years before reaching the tap. Historically, Mälaren connected directly to the Baltic; over time, post-glacial rebound lifted the land and turned it into a lake. Today, Mälaren sits about 70 centimetres higher than the Baltic. Regulating that difference secures drinking water for more than two million people. Slussen, the central transport hub, has been undergoing major redevelopment since 2016 to modernise this water regulation. As Stockholm grows and sea levels rise, plans to fortify Mälaren with higher locks are being executed now. The question is not whether walls are high enough but whether building higher walls is the right answer at all.

At the Nordiska Museet, Johan Turi's depictions[2] stood out: clean, simple, beautiful visual testaments of Sámi life and knowledge of the landscape. At the Moderna Museet, Britta Marakatt-Labba's embroideries[3] left a lasting impression. Delicate yet strong. In them, mountains and reindeer stride alongside the Áhkut, the foremothers who watch from the beginning toward futures still unfolding. Humans, animals, ancestors, unborn generations, all woven into the same fabric. The UN has made clear that Indigenous knowledge is essential for designing adaptation strategies. Indigenous communities manage territories containing nearly 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity. Their long-term care for land safeguards resilience in ways 'modern' governance often overlooks.

Far to the north lies Kiruna, home to the world's largest underground iron ore mine. Its ore body extends over four kilometres long, reaching depths of more than two kilometres. The mine produces around 26 million tonnes of iron ore annually. Operations have caused ground subsidence forcing much of Kiruna town to relocate. Kiruna Church, one of Sweden's largest wooden buildings, is being moved 5 kilometres to make way for the expanding mine. With rising demand for rare earth elements and 'green' metals, new mining projects are being explored: lithium, neodymium, dysprosium—materials for magnets, batteries, electronics, and weapon systems. Markbygden Wind Park, one of Europe's largest wind farms, reaches 178-metre turbines and is majority-owned by China General Nuclear Power Group. These operations may protect a Western consumer lifestyle temporarily. But they split Sámi reindeer migration routes and force relocation of cultural landmarks. They do not ask: How do we live? What do we value?

Once, stories enabled coordinated action on a massive scale. As Yuval Noah Harari argues[4], our ability to create shared myths allows humans to cooperate in large numbers. Today, the challenge may be to develop new stories (or rediscover older ones) that weave us back into relationship with land, waters, and future generations.

At a photography exhibition, crowds studied Lars Tunbjörk's images of shopping malls and amusement parks[5]; spaces where 1990s Sweden was remade into a consumer society. The logic of consumption Tunbjörk exposed remains unchanged. The rare earths mined today sustain the same habits pictured thirty years ago.

The crisis we face cannot be solved by technical measures alone. Pouring concrete into higher dams or mining ever more 'green' metals may protect our lifestyle temporarily, but they do not address the relationships that sustain us. Perhaps the deeper challenge is not engineering, but wonder and imagination. What if stories are not just tales of the past, but maps that help us navigate the future? What if our maps helped us trace pathways toward ways of living that honour the past, care for the present, and leave space for futures beyond our own lives? To look at Sweden's landforms with this gaze is to recognise not only what has been, but also what might still be possible.

Euregio Meuse-Rhine

TROUBLED WATERS, A CROSS-BORDER COMMONS

In July 2021, the Euregio Meuse-Rhine was severely hit by extreme rainfall. Rivers like the Ahr, Vesdre, Geul and Gulp burst their banks. The Ahr Valley was especially devastated, with over 130 fatalities. In Belgium, dozens died and thousands of homes were damaged. In Dutch Limburg, major damage occurred without direct fatalities. Across the region, more than 220 people lost their lives. Over 50,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed. Total damage was estimated at over 40 billion euros. Recovery is uneven. In Germany and Belgium, some residents still haven't returned home. In the Netherlands, physical recovery was quicker, but many still struggle with financial and psychological aftermath. Both experts and residents agree: an event like this will happen again.

Responses reveal a culture where acceptance and denial coexist. People choose familiar places, even with recurring risk, over structural change. Insurance policies incentivise rebuilding 'as it was'. Developers sell 'climate-resilient' homes that replicate conventional practices, now sprinkled with promises of green surroundings. 'If I had to choose between being forced out of my home for three months every 15–20 years because of flooding, but in return receiving a completely new interior, or moving elsewhere to live on higher ground, I would still choose the first option.'

We heard variations of this repeatedly. Where insurance covers damage, there is an impulse to restore everything exactly as it was. Where it does not, anger and a sense of abandonment. Both point to the same condition: deep dependence on existing ways of living, coupled with resistance to fundamental change. The trauma is profound. Faced with loss, people reach for what is familiar.

Rolling hills, meandering paths, panoramic views. The Euregio Meuse-Rhine presents itself as one vast romantic landscape. It's the backdrop for tourism campaigns. An idyllic picture. But have we come to believe in that idyll ourselves? As if the landscape were no longer a dynamic system but merely a picturesque scene? Maybe we don't see it anymore because these hills are not mountains. Mountains evoke awe. They come with infrastructure you only understand when torrents rage through them. And maybe that is the danger: we find the sculpted valleys beautiful but no longer grasp the power that formed them. When that power appears, increasingly intensified by our own actions, we find ourselves unprepared.

The floods sparked debate on climate adaptation and warning systems. There's now an app for alerts, real-time water levels, rebuilt bridges, retention basins. Nature-based solutions are explored: restoring earthen banks, ploughing along contour lines. These work with the landscape rather than against it. Still, people describe these actions as unsatisfying. Most measures address effects rather than causes. They aim to hold water back or warn people without fundamentally changing how we build or inhabit flood-prone landscapes. Even when calls for 'real' nature-based solutions are loud, the goal often remains to preserve what was. As if the river must adapt to us. Little room remains for decisions that hurt but actually resolve something. What remains is cautious optimisation: technical fixes and patchwork solutions. Mostly band-aids, shifting the problem upstream or onto the next layer of government.

The floods made visible the limits of how we collectively imagine living with the landscape. What remains untouched is the underlying culture: how risk is distributed, how responsibility is shared across borders and generations. River valleys cannot be governed as a collection of separate plots. Water ignores borders. So does erosion, sediment, runoff. Flooding exposes the landscape as a shared system, and therefore as a commons: shaped by many, affecting all, owned by none in isolation. A culture of commons begins with recognising that individual choices accumulate into collective consequences. That technical fixes cannot substitute for shared responsibility. That resilience is not only infrastructure, but relationships: between upstream and downstream, urban and rural, human and non-human. The challenge is not merely to recover what was lost, but to renegotiate how we inhabit this region. Moving beyond restoration 'as it was' towards decisions that acknowledge limits. Space given back to water, certainty exchanged for adaptability, individual rights balanced against collective safety. Here, the landscape is not a backdrop to policy, but its foundation. Not an object to be managed, but a participant in shaping futures.

Notes

1. *Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966). The savage mind (J. Weightman & D. Weightman, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1962)*
2. *Turi, J. (ca. 1908–1910). Drawings in Nordiska Museet. Nordic Life (Permanent exhibition). Stockholm, Sweden. https://www.nordiskamuseet.se/en/exhibitions/nordic-life*
3. *Moderna Museet. (2025). Where each stitch breathes / Juohke sákkaldat vuoigŋá (Temporary exhibition). Stockholm, Sweden. June 14 – November 30, 2025. https://www.modernamuseet.se/en/stockholm/exhibitions/britta-marakatt-labba*
4. *Harari, Y. N. (2014). Sapiens: A brief history of humankind. Harvill Secker.*
5. *Kulturhuset Stadsteatern. (2025). Lars Tunbjörk: Landet utom sig (Temporary exhibition). Stockholm, Sweden. September 18, 2025 – January 18, 2026. https://www.kulturhusetstadsteatern.se/utstallningar/lars-tunbjork*

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Turning the Tide



[*ATLAS*]

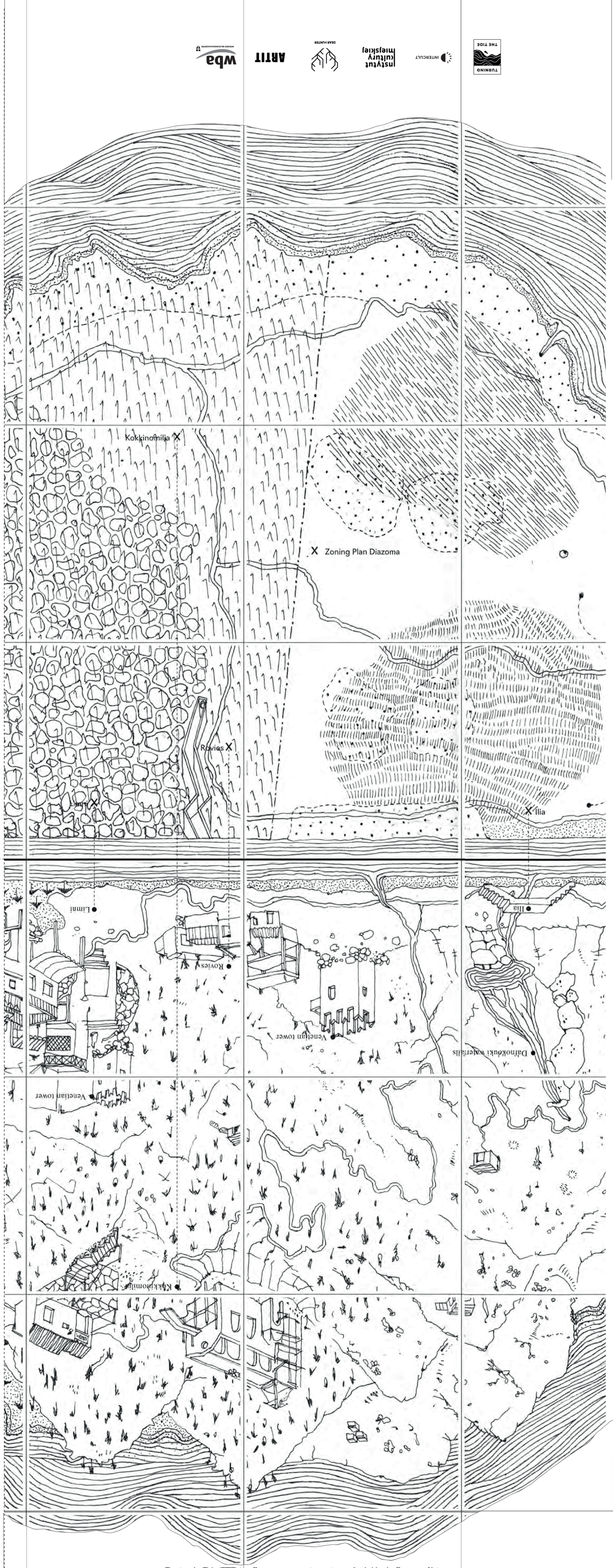
FOUR THEMES

Introduction

Four overarching themes emerged throughout the fieldwork across five locations. They were not imposed from above as pre-determined categories, but surfaced retrospectively from conversations, anecdotes, and insights gathered in Gdańsk, Vienna, Evia, Stockholm, and additionally in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. This emergent quality is itself significant: it reflects the project's commitment to letting places speak on their own terms.

These themes now serve as anchors for grouping and comparison. They frame the diverse findings that would otherwise remain scattered across separate maps and narratives. By naming these recurring patterns, the possibility is created of dialogue between contexts that initially seemed unrelated. A river valley in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine speaks to a burnt island in Greece; a gravity-fed water system in Vienna resonates with post-glacial rebound in Stockholm. The themes make these connections legible.

Each theme addresses a different dimension of how communities relate to water, climate, and place. Together, they map the terrain between what is inherited and what must still be learned to live with.



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Hidden Dependencies

By hiding our dependencies behind distant, efficient systems, we lose the sense of ownership until the inevitable moment those systems fail

Many of today's water and energy infrastructures operate at a distance from everyday experience. They are vast, efficient, and largely invisible, until something breaks. Electricity generated on Evia powers distant cities. The environmental costs of iron ore and rare earth mining in Stockholm are borne far from the capital. Flood protection structures in Gdańsk separate urban life from the hinterland that makes it possible.

This disconnection produces a peculiar sense of safety. Daily life appears stable while its underlying dependencies fade from awareness. Infrastructure becomes something that happens elsewhere, managed by others, for purposes not immediately felt. When crises occur (fires, floods, shortages) the shock is not only physical but cultural. There is a sudden confrontation with systems that no longer feel like one's own, yet even this confrontation is softened by the machinery of compensation. In the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, insurers simply issue a payment through which an interior destroyed by water and mud is entirely renewed. For those affected, the sentiment is one of entitlement: this is what insurance is for. In purely personal terms, it is a relief. In material terms, it is quietly devastating. The furniture, the floors, the plasterwork – replaced without question, drawing anew on timber, minerals, energy and landfill space. The payout dissolves the urgency that a crisis might otherwise provoke, while the deeper question of how, and from what, one rebuilds remains unasked. Carelessness is not corrected; it is reimbursed.

In Vienna, the mountain spring water system relies on water rights acquired over a century ago in distant alpine regions. Only 3% of available spring water is currently used, a figure that seems reassuringly low. But the city keeps growing. There has always been a lingering friction around these sources. A sentiment, never quite resolved, that Vienna is taking water that belongs elsewhere. Pride in drinking water is inseparable from pride in the mountains, yet the daily tap remains disconnected from the source.

Dislocated infrastructures weaken responsibility. When production and risk are spatially separated from use and benefit, accountability dissolves. What remains is a landscape crisscrossed by systems that sustain everyday life, yet no longer belong to it. Yet Europe offers other precedents. In Gdańsk, centuries-old locks and waterworks sit at the literal and symbolic heart of the city. These infrastructures worked not because they were distant, but because they were rooted. If today's systems no longer require such embeddedness, what does that say about the willingness to take responsibility for them? Are systems still capable of being built that must be lived with, understood, and cared for locally, or has dislocation become the condition that is no longer known how to undo?

Motivations and Urgencies

When urgency is felt directly by some but only observed from afar by others, our collective response fractures along these lines of unequal impact.

Urgency is not evenly distributed. On Evia, climate change is not an abstraction but a lived condition. Forests burned, rivers dry, land reprogrammed for external interests. Motivations to act are rooted in immediate loss, mistrust, and the defence of ways of living that are under threat. Climate here is personal, political, and embodied.

In Stockholm, the signals are quieter. Rising waters are managed through locks and engineering works. Landscapes speak in slow geological movements rather than sudden catastrophe. The consequences of overconsumption (mining, deforestation, displacement) largely occur elsewhere. Urgency exists, but it is mediated through reports, exhibitions, and stories rather than direct experience.

In the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, the trauma of 2021 remains profound. Yet recovery often stalls at symptom relief. Policy responses create a paradox where risk awareness does not translate into radically different choices. People choose familiar places, even with recurring risk, over structural change. Insurance policies incentivise rebuilding as it was. The shock was acute, but the learning curve flattened quickly once safety was restored.

This uneven geography of impact creates a moral and political asymmetry. Those who feel the consequences most acutely often have the least power to shape systemic responses. Meanwhile, those best positioned to act experience the crisis at a distance. Bridging this gap requires more than technical solutions. It demands new narratives that reconnect cause and effect, place and responsibility, here and elsewhere. So who gets to decide when a crisis becomes urgent enough to act? And if urgency is always felt elsewhere, what kind of responsibility remains here?



Static Romanticism

We frame landscapes as static décor, forgetting they are dynamic systems that will reshape themselves regardless of our nostalgia.

In every location, landscapes were found to be framed as static décor. River valleys, forests, coastlines, and hills are approached as scenic backdrops for living, leisure, and identity: romanticised as stable, picturesque, and given. This aesthetic lens obscures the forces that shaped them and continue to act upon them: water that floods, glaciers that lift land, fires that reset entire ecologies.

On Evia, the dry riverbed of the Lilas becomes almost invisible, until it suddenly returns with destructive force. 'Ah, the dry river' was heard. 'It only flows for a few days a year. But when it flows, it comes in force.' The image of the empty riverbed lingered, a metaphor for more. In the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, the river is treated as a threat to be controlled, not as a dynamic ecosystem. Rolling hills and meandering paths present themselves as one vast romantic landscape: the backdrop for tourism campaigns and regional markets. Yet when torrential rains returned in 2021, the power that formed those valleys revealed itself, unprepared for by those who believed in the idyll. In Sweden, glacial traces and post-glacial rebound tell stories of time and movement far beyond human scales. Scratches upon granite outcrops, easily overlooked, bear witness to glaciers that pushed across the land with slow, steady force millennia ago. Yet in everyday planning, these forces rarely register.

This attachment to the romantic landscape is closely tied to ideas of Heimat: a sense of belonging rooted in familiarity, continuity, and the feeling of being at home in a place that seems stable and knowable. Landscapes become emotional anchors, imagined as enduring homes rather than evolving systems. Care, in this framing, often means preservation (holding on to an image) rather than learning to live with change. But this position is no longer tenable. If landscapes will continue to flood, burn, shift, and reconfigure themselves regardless of attachment to them, what does Heimat still mean? What kind of belonging insists on stability where none exists, and why is it kept defended? If the romantic image can no longer hold, what other identities, practices, and ways of inhabiting land must be invented in its place?

The Abstract and the Lived

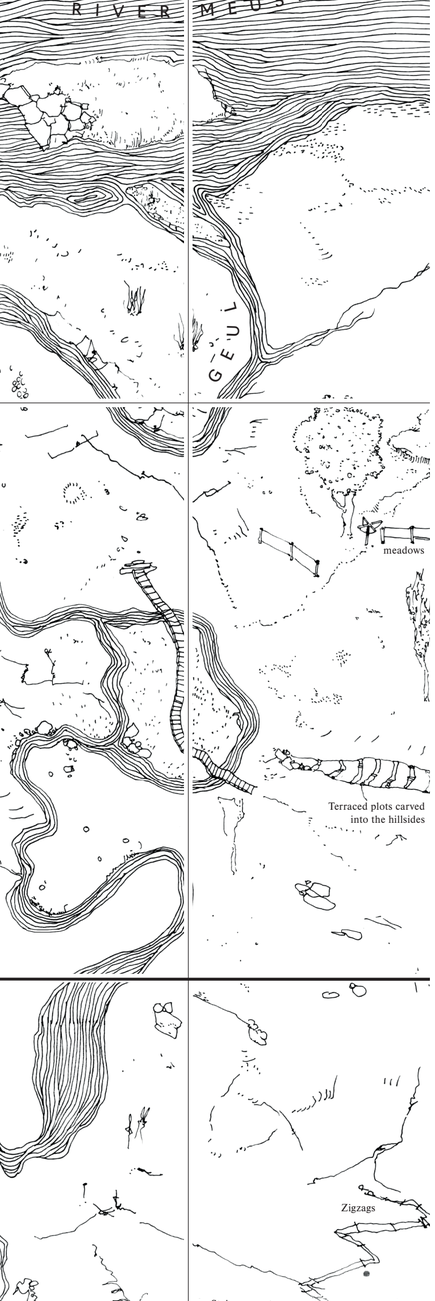
While abstract masterplans descend from above, true resilience is built by those who know the land through lived experience and memory.

Again and again, a tension was encountered between two ways of relating to land and crisis. On one hand, there is the engineer, distant and abstract, operating through masterplans, models, and scalable solutions. On the other, the bricoleur, working with what is at hand, shaped by experience, memory, and long-term attachment to place. This is not a simple opposition between old and new, nor a rejection of technology as such. It is a question of where authority is located: in lived relationships with land, or in abstract systems imposed from above.

On Evia, this contrast became explicit. Large-scale reconstruction plans, energy infrastructures, and zoning schemes arrived from elsewhere, often justified in the name of speed, efficiency, or sustainability. Yet they sidelined local knowledge and reduced inhabitants to spectators of decisions made about their own land. Plans were presented while trees were still smouldering. Chaos was answered with rigid order. Wind turbines arrived, built by companies from Germany or Denmark, without meaningful local involvement. The electricity produced was not for Evia, but for the national grid. As one resident put it, Evia becomes the battery of Greece.

In flood-affected river valleys, technical fixes dominated while deeper questions about how to inhabit certain places remained largely untouched. Residents described actions as unsatisfying because they addressed effects rather than causes. They aimed to hold water back without fundamentally changing how communities build or relate to flood-prone landscapes.

Across Europe, communities with very different histories (reindeer herders in the north, islanders in the south, river dwellers in lowlands) found themselves positioned in remarkably similar ways. They were consulted late, overruled easily, and expected to adapt to decisions made elsewhere. When ways of living with land are repeatedly treated as obstacles rather than as knowledge, what kind of Europe is being produced? Why do groups with little in common culturally find themselves sharing the same marginal position in relation to power? And if those who live most closely with land are systematically excluded from shaping its future, how sustainable or legitimate can these futures really be?



Introduction

The cross-section map is the atlas's heart. It brings together the five individual cartopological maps as a comparative instrument. It invites you to hold multiple places in view simultaneously, and so to see patterns that remain hidden when each location is examined in isolation. Like a geological cross-section revealing strata that would otherwise remain unseen, this composition exposes the sedimented relationships between place, communities and their daily lives. The four themes introduced in another part of this atlas provide the framework; the map itself arranges them across the locations at once. What emerges from this map is a constellation of positions in relation to water. Each legible and offering something to the others.

The cross-section map asks for the labour of close reading. Follow its streams and you will find questions that open new ways forward alongside insights into how deeply entrenched the obstacles are. Hope and disillusionment flow together here, in the same current. Read it as an invitation to wonder at both the similarities that bind us across Europe and the differences that demand recognition. The question is not whether we Europeans depend on one another, but how we choose to acknowledge that dependence, and what futures become possible when we do.

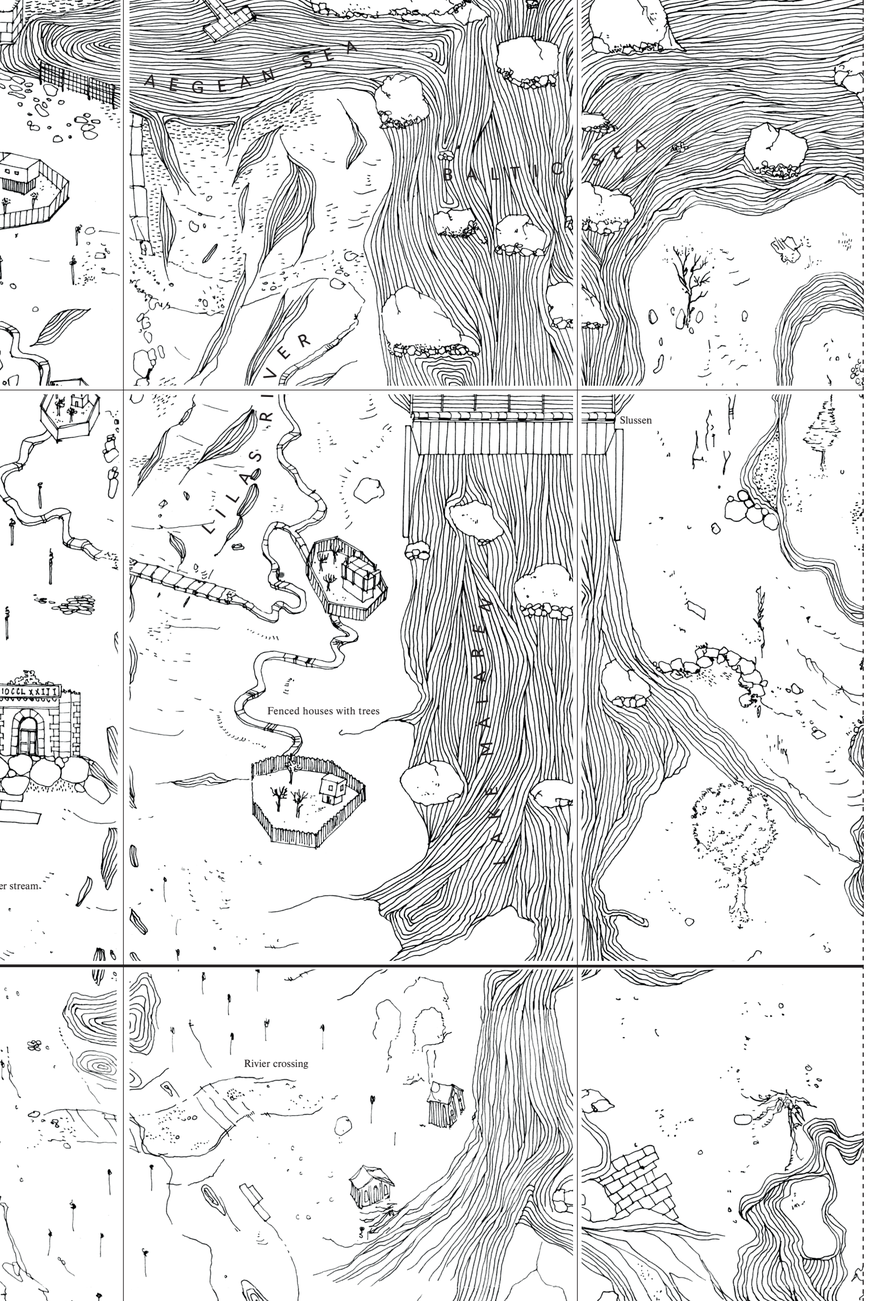
Turning the Tide

[*ATLAS*]

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The organisation of the map

Vertically, the map orders the researched locations from left to right: Gdańsk, Vienna, Evia, Stockholm and the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. Horizontally, it unfolds in bands corresponding to the four themes: Static Romanticism, The Abstract and the Lived, Hidden Dependencies, and Motivations and Urgencies. Between them run rivers. Their width indicates how strongly a given theme is present at a given location. Where a stream forks and an island forms, the theme manifests in its extreme: a tension or contradiction brought to its sharpest expression rather than distributed across a broader, ambivalent field. At the top of the map lies water. From there, the first horizontal band reads as context: the coastal or estuarine threshold of each location before the thematic currents begin. Below the first band, the four themes take over.

Along its currents

Water enters this map from the top. In Gdańsk, the Vistula reaches the coast through multiple historical mouths, each a different relationship between river and city. In Stockholm, there's Slussen, the lock between Lake Mälaren and the Baltic. These are locations whose identity is bound to the meeting of fresh and salt water, to harbours, locks, and estuaries. Both cities face the sea and have shaped their relationship to it through engineering.

Move inland, and the water behaves differently. Vienna's drinking water stream does not reach the sea. It disappears into the reservoirs in the city, and reappears in the Hochstrahlbrunnen fountain, as crystal clear as the groundwater of Aspern Lake. On Evia, the Lilas river is frequently dry, a riverbed that carries water only seasonally. Crossings appear where cars can pass when the bed is empty. At the far right of the map, the river Geul begins near Lichtenbusch, a modest stream that finds its way through gentle ripples, seductive and sometimes misleading. This cross-section map thus moves from abundance to scarcity, from the open sea to a trickle in the hills, and poses the question: what does each location do with the water it has?

Some locations place their infrastructure at the heart of civic life, others hide it far away. Gdańsk's bastions and fortification works sit at the literal and symbolic centre of the city. The polder works of Dutch engineers, 17th- and 18th-century land reclamation, reshaped the relationship between water and ground within sight of the old town. An old lock sits beside a bastion; a new, modern sluice complex rises kilometres away from it. Here, past infrastructure is something the city lives with, understands, and maintains, and new additions are distant and anonymous.

In Vienna, the drinking water infrastructure was also laid down long ago, and the residents remain fiercely proud of it. The Favoriten water tower, the Rosenhügel water reservoir, and the pipeline along the hillsides of the Wiener Wald are all visible traces of the two Mountain Spring Pipelines: a system whose sources lie over a hundred kilometres away, in the alpine springs of the Schneeberg. The system is praised for its elegance. But the further upstream one travels, the more the stream reveals the frictions that accompany them. As scarcity tightens, does Vienna retain the right to draw on water that belongs elsewhere?

Stockholm pushes the logic furthest. The cost of urban comfort is here most visibly extracted from elsewhere. Further upstream on the map, along Lake Mälaren, the stream widens into the industrial extractive landscape of Kiruna's iron ore mining. The typical timber houses mark a settlement pattern that seems in tune with nature. The appearance of harmony is sustained by what happens in the far north, where rigorous and destructive mining makes comfortable urban life possible. In Stockholm, as in Gdańsk, the historic lock at the centre remains a visible landmark, yet the pressures that drive the city's water systems are felt far away. What is visible at the heart of the city draws the eye from what has been pushed to its margins.

Where a theme is not merely present but strained, the stream forks and an island forms. On Evia, The Abstract and the Lived is strongly present and splits into two extremes. A windmill marks one end, a mechanism of engineering and adaptation; at the other stand the islanders, whose way of living and relating to their surroundings runs counter to the path advocated by government and industry. Houses repeat along the riverbed: fenced plots with olive trees inside. Windmills multiply along the upper reaches. Mount Dirfys, the island's own summit, presides over the inland terrain.

Gdańsk carries its own island, though it comes at the end of the stream rather than in its middle. Beyond the windmills, the stream is closed off. There's Russia, one of the major reasons an energy transition is underway here, driven not by fear of water but by the threat from the east.

Against these islands of tension, the Euregio Meuse-Rhine offers a contrast. Its stream is widest in the band of Static Romanticism: terraced plots carved into the hillsides to make the slopes arable, wooden boardwalks tracing small valleys and staircases cut into slopes in deliberate zigzags. Romanticism here is not a residue but a condition, so pervasive that it barely registers as a choice. The Abstract and the Lived, by contrast, runs thin. The valley has long been treated as scenery, not as a working system, and the flood of 2021 demonstrated what that convention costs. A parcel pattern appears further downstream, followed by a waterfront development with sight-lines to the water. Where disaster strikes, insurance payouts quietly restore the picture: interiors renewed without question, urgency dissolved, the romantic convention reaffirmed rather than revised.

The current at Chalkis, the main town on Evia on the top part of the map, moves in two directions at once. A rare hydrological phenomenon, as if the landscape itself cannot decide which way to run. This image recurs, in different forms, across the map. Vienna's water flows toward the city but its origins pull upstream, toward the unresolved question of who the water belongs to. Gdańsk's energy transition is driven not by the river that shaped the city but by a geopolitical current. Evia's islanders live against the direction recommended for them by their government.

Reading the map's rivers together reveals that none of these locations faces its challenges in isolation. The windmills multiplying along Evia's streams echo the extraction underway in Sweden's far north, imposed against the ways of living of the indigenous communities. The polder engineers who reshaped Gdańsk's coastline practiced a logic of control that is slowly being punctured in Vienna and the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, where habits must change because control, it turns out, was always an illusion.

This map leaves us not with answers but with neighbours, five ways of living with water from which to learn, before nature decides for us.

Longitudinal impact

Impact is often understood as something that can be measured when a project concludes: numbers of participants, exhibitions presented, partnerships established or publications produced. While these achievements matter, Turning the Tide adopted a broader understanding of impact. Cultural and environmental transformation rarely occurs within the lifespan of a funded programme. Its effects emerge gradually through changing relationships, evolving practice and new ways of understanding the connections between people, place and environment. From the outset, Turning the Tide sought not simply to deliver activities but to create conditions in which learning could occur. Artists, communities, researchers, planners, architects and policymakers came together through a shared curiosity about how culture might contribute to climate action. As the project unfolded, it became clear that the most significant changes were not always the most visible. They lay in the conversations that continued beyond workshops, the partnerships that developed into new collaborations, the confidence of artists working across disciplines, and the growing recognition that artistic practice can make a distinctive contribution to environmental thinking. Each location generated its own forms of impact because each place presented different environmental, social and cultural realities.

In Seestadt, artistic interventions became part of an emerging urban community, strengthening public participation and shared ownership of place. In Gdańsk, creative practice reconnected ecological concerns with industrial heritage and collective memory, opening new conversations about regeneration and environmental responsibility. In Evia, artistic enquiry supported communities responding to the long-term consequences of wildfire, creating spaces for reflection, resilience and shared recovery. In Stockholm, artists explored the relationship between water, infrastructure and urban transformation, encouraging dialogue between citizens, planners and environmental specialists.

The impact within the partner organisations was equally profound. Each organisation entered the partnership with its own methodologies, professional cultures and ways of working. Rather than replacing these approaches, Turning the Tide created opportunities for them to encounter one another through practice. Ideas were exchanged, assumptions challenged and methods adapted. Over time, partners found themselves working differently – not because they had adopted someone else's methodology, but because each had been transformed through collaboration. Looking back across the three years, this may

represent the project's most significant longitudinal impact. What emerged was not simply a collection of successful artistic interventions or examples of good practice, but the gradual evolution of a 'methodological synthesis'. Across Scotland, the project strengthened the role of cultural planning and socially engaged artistic practice in responding to climate challenges while connecting local initiatives to wider European learning.

Cultural planning, socially engaged artistic practice, cartopological mapping, artistic research, interdisciplinary collaboration and place-based

learning became increasingly interconnected. Through repeated cycles of experimentation, reflection and exchange, these approaches evolved into an integrated framework that no single partner could have developed independently.

This evolution also reflects the project's wider European significance. Turning the Tide demonstrated that international collaboration is not simply a mechanism for sharing existing knowledge but a process through which new knowledge can be created collectively. The Local and International Labs became living laboratories where methodologies themselves could evolvethrough encounter, dialogue and critical reflection. In doing so, the project contributed practical evidence that artistic practice is not merely a means of communicating climate science but anessen tial partner in generating new understanding of complex environmental challenges.

The true impact of Turning the Tide therefore extends beyond the lifetime of the project itself. Its influence can already be seen in continuing partnerships, new European initiatives, academic research, evolving artistic practice and the confidence of organisations to work across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

More fundamentally, it has demonstrated that lasting impact is not measured only by what a project produces, but by what it enables others to become. The methodologies developed through Turning the Tide will continue to evolve wherever artists, communities and organisations choose to build upon this shared foundation of curiosity, collaboration and place-based learning.

Turning the Tide



[*ATLAS*]

LEGACY

Projects are often remembered through their tangible outputs: exhibitions, publications, websites or reports. While these provide important records of what was achieved, the enduring legacy of Turning the Tide lies elsewhere—in the relationships it created, the ways of working it developed and the questions it has encouraged others to continue exploring.

Perhaps the project's most significant legacy is methodological. Turning the Tide did not begin with a single prescribed approach. Each partner entered the collaboration with established practices shaped by different disciplines, cultures and professional traditions. Cultural planning, socially engaged artistic practice, cartopological mapping, artistic research, interdisciplinary collaboration and place-based learning all formed part of the partnership from the outset. Over the three years of the funded programme, these approaches were not simply combined; they were tested, challenged and refined through practice.Gradually, something new began to emerge.

Rather than producing a fixed methodology, the project developed what might best be understood as a methodological synthesis: an evolving framework in which different ways of knowing could work together without losing their individual strengths. Scientific knowledge, artistic enquiry, local experience, professional expertise and cultural memory became complementary rather than competing forms of understanding. The Local and International Labs acted as living laboratories where this synthesis could be explored, questioned and continually refined.

This methodological synthesis remains intentionally open. It is not a toolkit to be applied mechanically, nor a formula to be replicated. Instead, it offers a set of principles through which future collaborations can develop their own responses to the distinctive cultural and environmental realities of place. In this sense, the legacy of Turning the Tide is less about prescribing practice than enabling future practice.

The partnership itself forms an equally important legacy. Relationships established between organisations in Sweden, Greece, Austria, Poland, the Netherlands and Scotland continue through new artistic collaborations, research initiatives and European partnerships. The trust developed through shared experimentation provides a foundation for future projects that extend well beyond the lifetime of Turning the Tide itself.

The Turning the Tide Atlas also contributes to this continuing legacy. More than just documenting a project, it also captures an evolving body of knowledge that remains open to reinterpretation. It acknowledges uncertainty, values experimentation and invites others to adapt, question and extend the approaches presented here.

Ten years from now, individual artworks will be remembered by those who experienced them directly. The ideas developed through Turning the Tide have already begun to travel. They are influencing new projects, informing academic research, shaping cultural planning practice and contributing to wider conversations about the role of culture in climate action across Europe.

If Turning the Tide is remembered in the future, it will not simply be because it produced compelling artistic interventions or successful international collaborations. It will be remembered because it demonstrated that the most enduring innovation often emerges not through inventing entirely new methods, but through creating the conditions in which different methodologies can learn from one another. Its legacy is therefore not a finished model but a living framework: one that others can continue to adapt as they respond to the environmental, cultural and social challenges still to come.

Turning the Tide



[*ATLAS*]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Turning the Tide *has shown that responding to climate change requires more than technical solutions alone. It calls for new ways of working that bring together culture, science, planning and civic participation. The following recommendations emerge not as prescriptive conclusions, but as principles to inform future practice across Europe.*

For policymakers, recognise culture as a strategic partner in climate action rather than an accompanying communication tool. Artists and cultural organisations should be involved from the earliest stages of environmental policy, regeneration and place-making, where they can contribute to research, public dialogue and the co-creation of sustainable futures. Long-term investment in interdisciplinary, place-based partnerships will generate greater social resilience than short-term project funding alone.

For artists and cultural practitioners, continue to embrace artistic practice as a form of enquiry as well as creative expression. The strength of ***Turning the Tide*** lay not in illustrating environmental issues but in creating spaces where curiosity, participation and multiple perspectives have been produced. Artists should be recognised as collaborators in knowledge production, bringing distinctive ways of seeing and understanding the complex relationships between people, place and environment.

For researchers and higher education institutions, strengthen collaborations that value artistic, scientific and community knowledge equally. Some of the most significant learning within ***Turning the Tide*** emerged not within individual disciplines but through dialogue between them. Future research should continue to develop methodologies that integrate creative practice with environmental science, social research and local knowledge.

For planners, architects and urban practitioners, place culture at the heart of environmental transformation. Sustainable places are shaped not only by physical infrastructure but by identity, memory, participation and belonging. Creative engagement enables communities to contribute meaningfully to the future of the places they inhabit, strengthening both democratic participation and long-term environmental stewardship.

For European partnerships and cultural funders, recognise that meaningful innovation requires time. Trust, experimentation and shared learning cannot be compressed into short funding cycles. Future programmes should continue to support international exchange while allowing methodologies

to evolve through practice rather than expecting fully formed solutions from the outset.

Perhaps the most important recommendation is simply this: remain curious.

Turning the Tide demonstrated that lasting innovation rarely emerges from certainty. It grows through openness to different perspectives, the willingness to question established assumptions and the courage to work across disciplinary boundaries. If Europe is to respond creatively and collectively to the environmental challenges ahead, it will require not only new technologies and policies, but new relationships, new conversations and new ways of imagining the future together.

Turning the Tide



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