

No One Protects What They Don't Care About: Reconnecting Head, Heart, and Hands for Research That Matters

Dr. Lucia Walsh

National College of Ireland
Research Day

18th June 2026

'What did you do once you knew?'



Me in my happy place where I grew up with people I love (behind the camera)

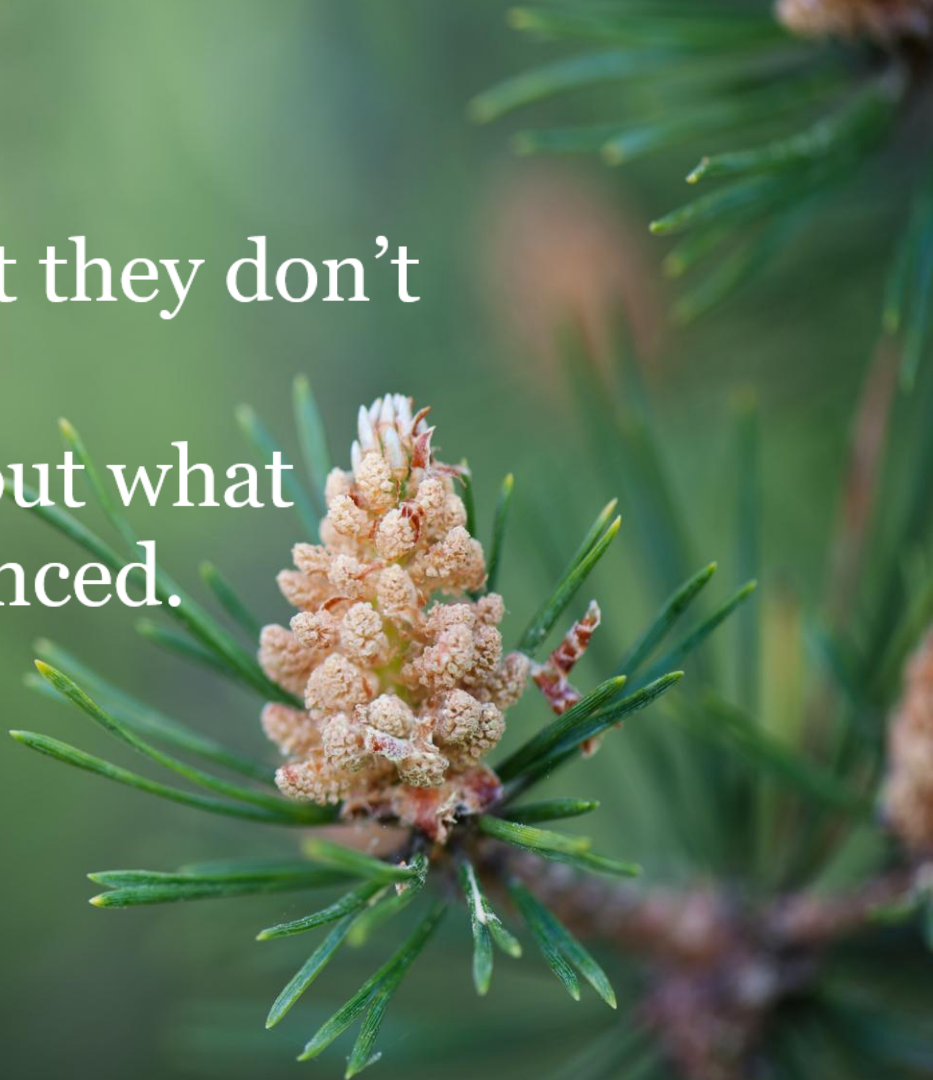


Me in my happy place in work – connecting with people and our place

“

No one will protect what they don't
care about;
and no one will care about what
they have never experienced.

David Attenborough



A world dangerously out of balance

UN climate report: It's 'now or never' to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees

NASA: HOLE IN EARTH'S OZONE LAYER FINALLY CLOSING UP BECAUSE HUMANS DID SOMETHING ABOUT IT

Ocean acidification to hit levels not seen in 14 million years

90% of world's children are breathing toxic air, WHO study finds

Water And Energy Shortages Are Fueling A Global Food Crisis

Research finds humans across the globe have microplastics in their stool

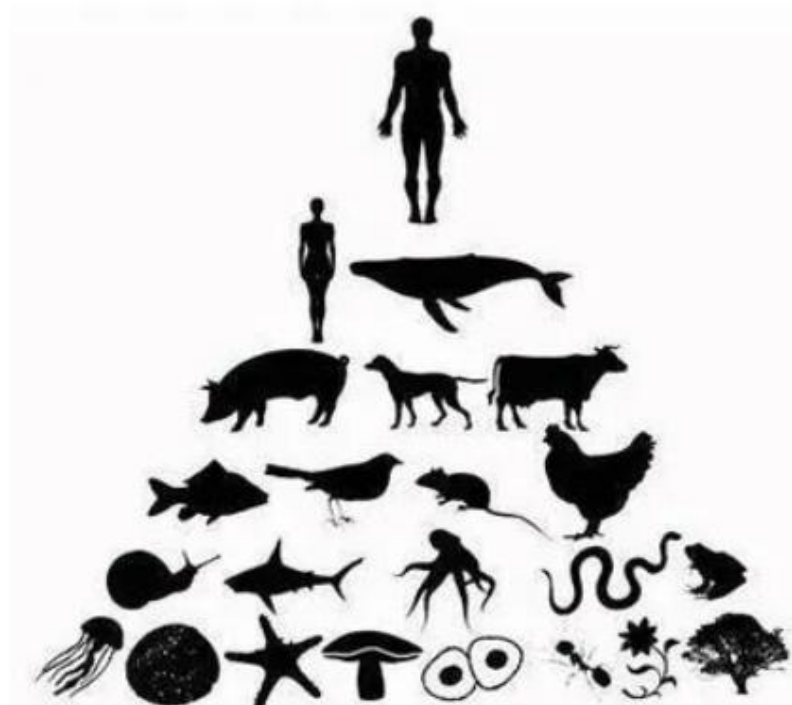
Richest 1% own half the world's wealth

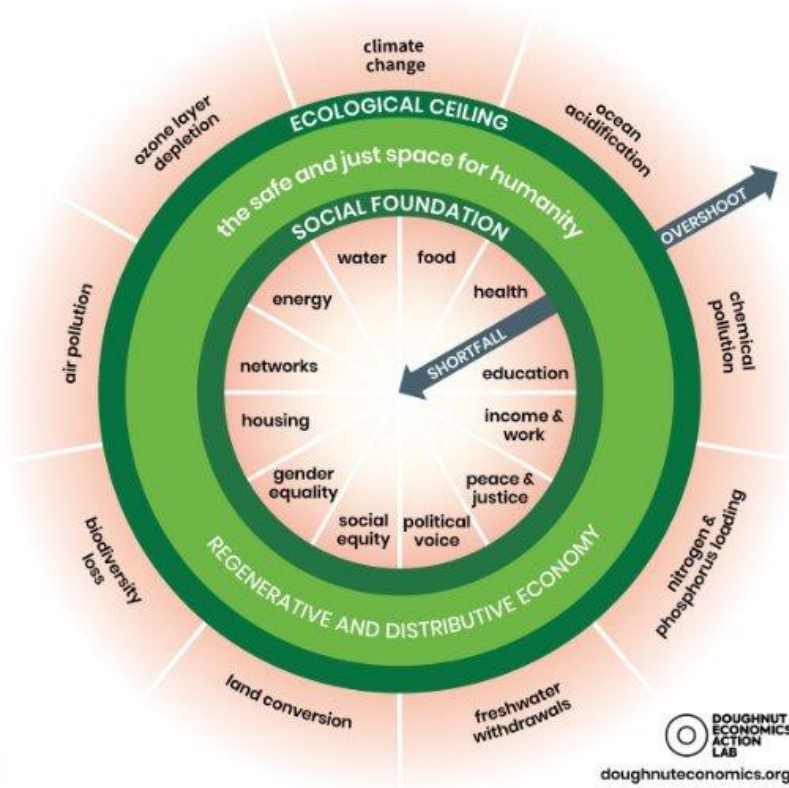
Humans have wiped out 69% of animals since 1970, says WWF

Phosphorus pollution reaching dangerous levels worldwide

Land degradation threatens human wellbeing, major report warns

Water shortages could affect 5bn people by 2050, UN report warns

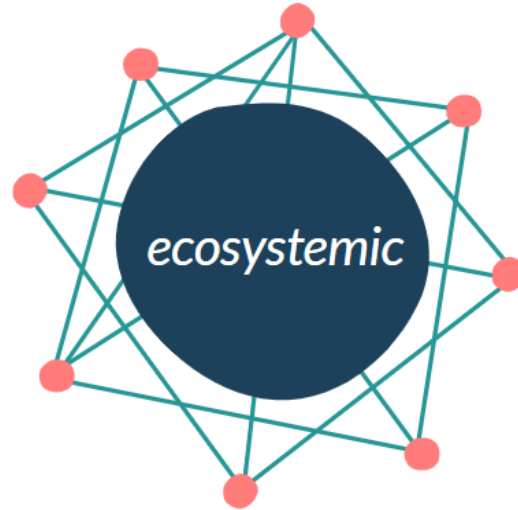
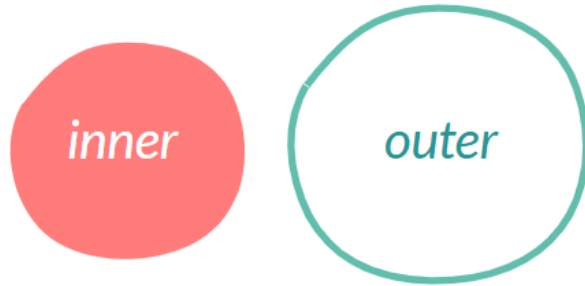




consumerism
anthropocentrism
climate injustice
ecological destruction
business-as-usual
separation
extractivism
neoliberalism

social justice
part of nature
thriving for all
regenerative
connection
love
care
equity
relationships





Hutchins, G. & Storm, L., 2019

'Doing things better' -> 'Doing better things' -> 'Seeing things differently'

(Sterling, 2010)

*Research that matters
does not stop at
knowing.*

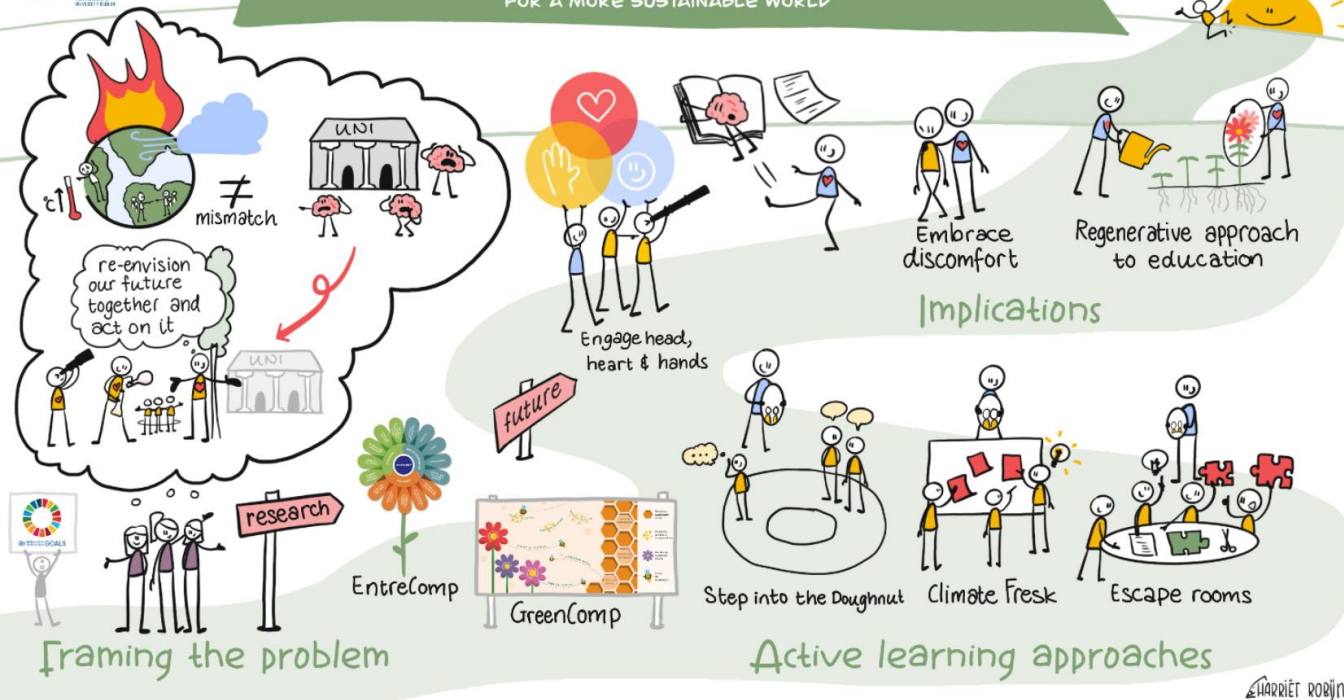
*It leads us from
understanding
towards caring
and acting.*



Reconnecting head, heart and hands Action-based research



'LEARNING ON YOUR FEET' - MOVING TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING
FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE WORLD



Climate Fresk



Step into the Doughnut

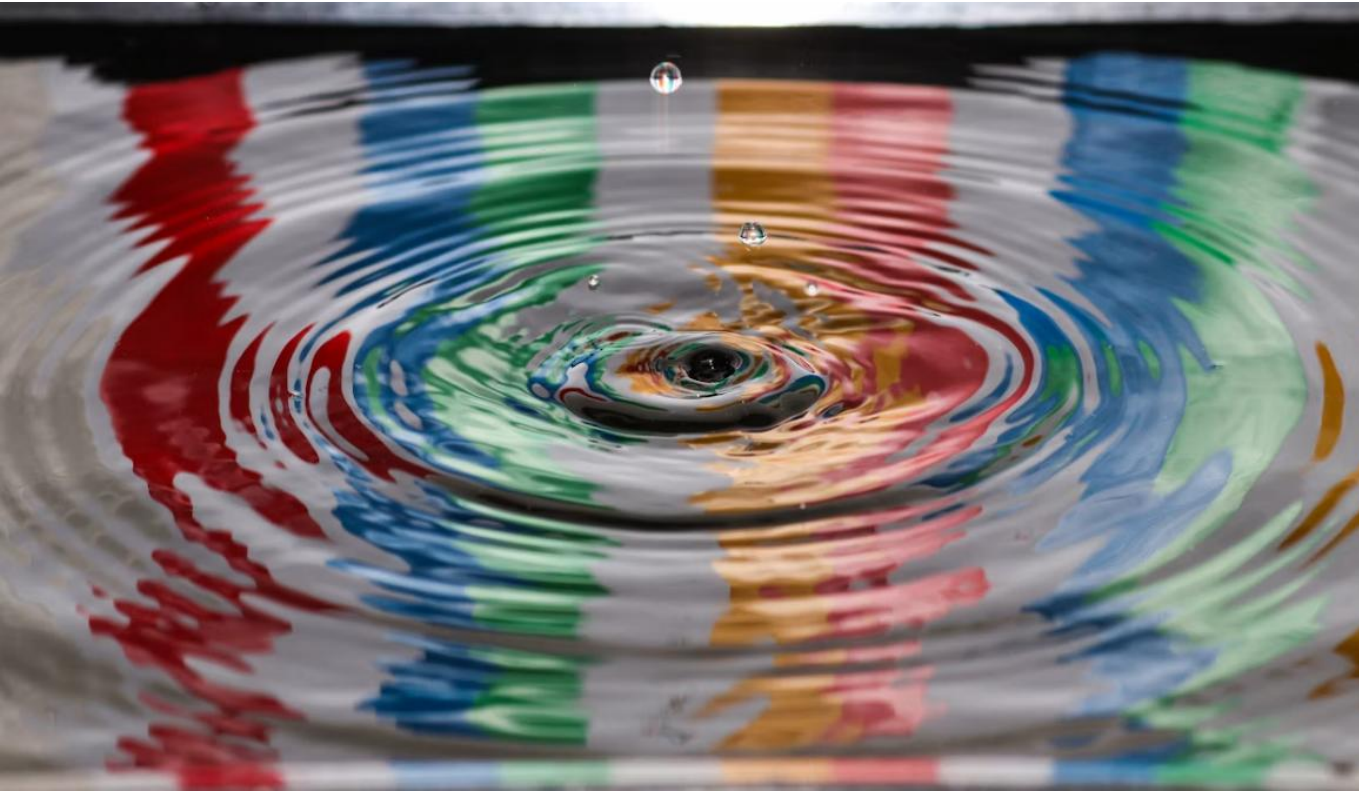


Climate change escape rooms

HARRIET ROBIN

Reconnecting head, heart and hands

Social innovation, impact & scaling

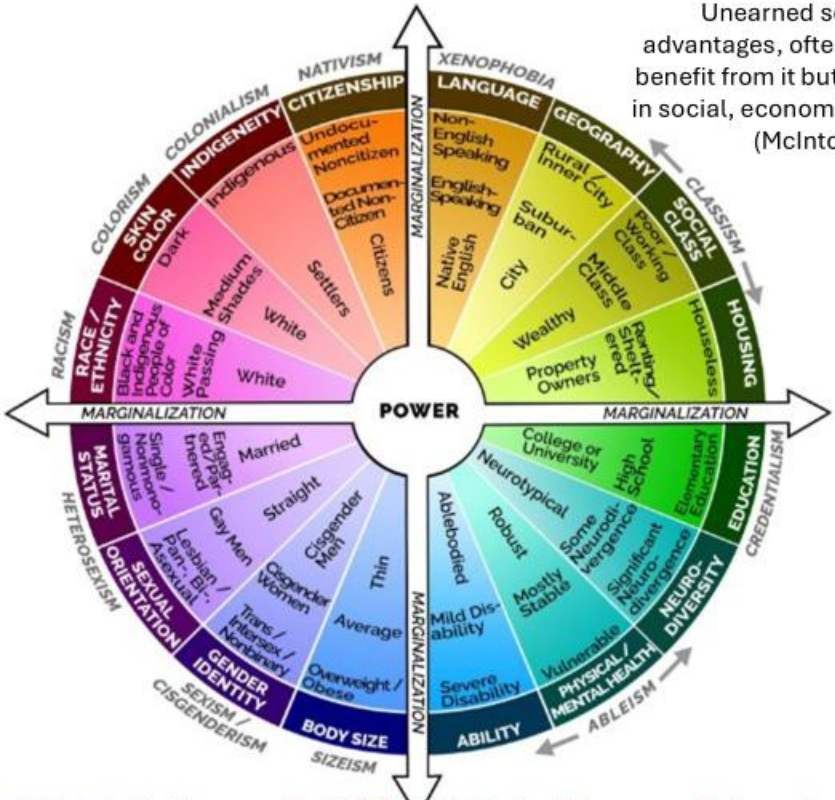


O'Reilly, C., Walsh, L. & Mottiar (2023), O'Reilly, C., Mottiar, Z. & Walsh (in press), Walsh, L. & Hynes, B. (2025)
+ upcoming publications

Reconnecting head, heart and hands

Power, privilege and looking inwards

Academic Privilege
 Unearned set of [intersectional] advantages, often unnoticed by those who benefit from it but giving them an advantage in social, economic & institutional contexts. (McIntosh, 1988; 2009)



Whose voices are most represented in your curriculum?	Where do you use your academic privilege to challenge unjust systems?	How do the planetary boundaries/social foundations feature in your EE practice?
A mix, but mostly Global North/mainstream figures Diverse, Global South & indigenous voices are centered	Primarily Western, well-known entrepreneurs I haven't consciously considered this Research agenda and funding priorities I'm still exploring how to use this privilege	Actively engaged with both (the doughnut!) Primary focus on economic viability TiTs toward social issues, less planetary/ecological Still considering/unsure

Reconnecting head, heart and hands

Action-based research





*Impact,
connections
& work that
matters*

I do get to meet people whose work has shaped me that is not my why: Mary Robinson, Kate Raworth and Katriona O'Sullivan



Curiosity

Courage

Compassion



Inspired by work of Hutchins, G. & Storm, L (2019), Kimmerer, R.W. (2013,2024), Machado de Oliveira, V. (2023, 2025), Macy, J. & Raworth, K. (2017)