Solutions for Environment, Economy & Democracy

The problem. Fundamental needs of growing numbers of people on the planet are threatened by a set of systemic problems: overconsumption and related waste, dependence on fossil fuels, economic policies that produce unsustainable growth and inequality, and diminished democratic control over the economy and environment. The thousands of groups tackling different parts of these problems are fragmented due to lack of broadly shared ideas, solutions, and political strategies. Resulting citizen activism seldom meets the nature or scale of the challenges. Many good answers to the crises in human systems already exist, but networks engaged with specific issues and localized projects often struggle to incorporate broader narratives in their work.

The model. SEED is a distributed alternative to the global think tank network that spread neoliberalism so effectively around the world in the last half century. Our goal is to develop strategic partnerships with organizations interested in sharing our vision of economies that work better for more people, within environmental limits, and democracies that better represent present and future inhabitants of our planet. SEED workshops and online discussions help partner organizations incorporate ideas about environmental, economic and political system change into their more specific missions. Events, online forums, and case studies will spread core ideas, memes, and strategies for political change.

The process. With 14 members on the steering committee, and over 50 affiliates representing dozens of organizations working for change, the SEED team is uniquely positioned to create diverse organizational partnerships and facilitate a distributed thought/action network. The SEED network grows through workshops and online forums for sharing common narratives and memes among organizations currently isolated by issues, geography, or other conditions. Case studies of these activities show how network partners engage with issues such as: inequality, positive roles for business in society, automation and the future of work, resource overconsumption, pollution, democratic disruption, and better measures of prosperity than GDP. This evolving User's Manual for System Change provides models for fair and sustainable economies and democracies that work.

Impact. In this time when anti-democratic forces are on the rise, and neoliberal systems remain in power despite being unpopular, developing more widely shared ideas and political strategies helps everyone working for positive change. SEED workshops, webinars, online platforms, network partners, and resource archives translate systems thinking into personal and organizational narratives that inspire more coordinated and effective action. SEED case studies offer a learning process and resource base to help evaluate the effectiveness of these ideas and actions in diverse settings.

Founders. The Center for Communication & Civic Engagement, University of Washington, Seattle USA; the School of Media and Information, University of Siegen, Germany; the International Institute for Socio-Informatics, Bonn, Germany. New partner networks will be announced soon.

Find us. The SEED project website (seed.uw.edu) includes the SEED manifesto, a resource center, links to partner organizations, a list of steering committee members, descriptions of recent workshops, and an invitation to join the seed-discussion email list. Meet us online, or email us directly at seedproj@uw.edu.