ZEURTUNG CITY THRISSUR



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## Introduction

#### Shaping the future begins with reimagining the present.

#### Our collective stand for Thrissur's future

The world is experiencing a convergence of multiple, interconnected crises. A metacrisis\* whose effects resonate from the global to the local is also touching our very lives here in Thrissur. Across the planet, we witness ecological emergencies like biodiversity loss and climate catastrophes; socio-economic fractures of rising inequality and deprivation; political shifts toward authoritarianism that threaten pluralism; cultural homogenisation that erodes diversity; and a widespread personal experience of alienation and meaninglessness. These are not distant issues. We feel their compound effects in our city of Thrissur as well. This complex web of crises creates recurring instability, demanding a response that is both urgent and deeply systemic.

In this pivotal moment, a response is needed from every corner of society. While the challenges are global, the solutions need to be local. It is at the local level in our cities and communities that we can most effectively rebuild systems rooted in justice, sustainability, and wellbeing. The Thrissur Municipal Corporation, being the tier of governance closest to the people, holds a unique power and responsibility to lead this transformation by listening to and acting on local voices.

#### Rooting our response in community

Learning City Thrissur emerged in 2020 from the shared struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic, founded on the belief that a resilient future begins with a connected, civically conscious community. Through public gatherings and learning programmes, we have worked to reimagine our city by facilitating deeper connections, helping the people of Thrissur

(re)connect with themselves, with each other, and with the rest of nature. We propose localisation as a vital strategy to build long-term resilience against crises that are deepened by short-term thinking.

#### A manifesto co-created by the youth of Thrissur

This Youth Manifesto is the direct outcome of that commitment. It is a collective voice of the youth of Thrissur, articulating the actions we demand from our local government. To build this vision, we engaged in a meticulous process of public consultation using the Alternatives Transformation framework developed through the Vikalp Sangam\*\* process. This approach, built on over a decade of work across India, envisions transformation through the core pillars of: 1) Social Wellbeing & Justice, 2) Economic Democracy, 3) Ecological Integrity & Resilience, 4) Direct and Delegated Democracy and 5) Cultural Diversity & Knowledge Democracy.

Guided by this framework, we asked how values like solidarity, dignity, interconnectedness, diversity, autonomy, joy, and respect for all life can be woven into the fabric of Thrissur in different aspects of life. The result is a thorough, hopeful, and practical vision for a city that commits to the wellbeing of its people and its environment.

This document is more than a list of demands; it is a roadmap for a thriving, resilient, and joyful Thrissur. We offer it as a vital contribution to all political parties, public institutions, and fellow citizens committed to building a city where every young person can envision a future full of hope, purpose, and possibility.

- Team Learning City Thrissur

<sup>\*</sup> Metacrisis is the overarching, systemic crisis of our civilisation's underlying operating system, encompassing our failing institutions, outmoded economic models, and limiting worldviews, that generates and interconnects the many acute global crises we face, from ecological collapse and technological disruption to geopolitical instability and social fragmentation.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Vikalp Sangam, which translates to Alternatives Confluence, is a platform to bring together movements, groups and individuals working on just, equitable and sustainable pathways to human and ecological wellbeing. It rejects the current model of development and the structures of inequality and injustice underlying it, and searches for alternatives in practice and vision.

## Sector-wise actions we seek

This section translates our collective vision into solid actions. We have laid out specific demands at both policy and programmatic levels across different sectors which are essential aspects of life in our city.

As a people's collective, we at Learning City Thrissur commit to actively working towards these goals, holding ourselves to the same standards of accountability and transparency that we demand. We commit to partner, advocate, and build. In return, we expect the Thrissur Municipal Corporation, government institutions, and our elected representatives to meet these demands with the urgency, commitment, and integrity they deserve.

This is our shared roadmap. Let us walk it together.

#### 01. Society, Culture & Peace

Thrissur's legacy as the cultural capital of Kerala, evident in its lively literary, musical, and artistic platforms, its libraries, and its history of peaceful coexistence, now demands a new purpose. As the world grapples with the interconnected crises of climate change, political, religious and cultural polarisation, economic inequality and food insecurity, our city's cultural strengths must be redirected to address these challenges and shape a resilient society.

Young people in cities are often either distracted by hyper-consumerism or overwhelmed by societal pressures, leaving little space to engage meaningfully with these crises. We urge a reimagining of Thrissur that cultivates a true culture of being. This means creating spaces that celebrate our diversity in food, language, and festivals, while also facilitating engagement on critical issues, artistic expression, mental wellbeing, and a shared respect for planetary boundaries\*. We need robust mechanisms to uphold peace and harmony, replacing performative solidarity with genuine action for

the most vulnerable.

True peace and cultural vitality cannot exist without equity. Even decades after independence, marginalised groups, including women, Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi communities, the LGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, children, and senior citizens, still struggle for dignity and safety. We demand intentional affirmative action and concrete steps to ensure their full inclusion and protection in Thrissur.

We envision a cultural revival that amplifies unheard voices and awakens individual and community values centered on safety, peace, and free expression. We strive for a society that is not numbed by crisis, but is resilient and courageous in its peaceful engagement with complex issues, collectively rebuilding an inclusive culture for all.

- Host curated film screenings to build public awareness and nurture collective sensitivity on critical global issues, from climate change to human rights crises.
- Mainstream secular and inclusive values by organising public activities and installations that visibly celebrate and normalise diversity in our shared spaces.
- Ensure the intentional inclusion of immigrant communities in local festivals, creating dedicated platforms for them to share and practice their cultural traditions.
- Weave learning into community life by promoting skill-sharing through local art, handicraft workshops, guided walks, and public gatherings.
- Create dedicated youth spaces for connection and creation by collaborating with artists and facilitators to host regular gatherings for sharing, collaboration, and community building.
- Institute regular open-mic events in public spaces as free, accessible forums for residents to express themselves through music, dance,

<sup>\*</sup> The Planetary Boundaries framework identifies a safe operating space for humanity by quantifying the nine key Earth system processes, like climate change and biosphere integrity, that, if pushed beyond their limits, could lead to irreversible and abrupt environmental change on a global scale.

poetry, and conversation.

- Organise an annual Youth Culture Conference-Festival to engage young people in redefining Thrissur's identity as a cultural capital, exploring what culture means for today's youth and how to shape a more inclusive future, while bridging divides between digital and physical, academic and lived experiences.
- Establish and nurture Fifth Spaces for youth, autonomous and co-governed environments beyond the four traditional spheres of family, friends, education/career and recreation, to facilitate deep self-exploration, support social action experiments, and empower young people to become awakened active citizens and changemakers.

#### 02. Democracy & Governance

Our Constitution is a revolutionary promise, a guarantee of democratic functioning, citizens' rights, and self-governance. While the framework for urban self-governance exists, its implementation needs to be further strengthened.

This need to deepen democracy is urgent. At the national level, we see an alarming erosion of democratic freedoms in the form of stifling of dissent, the curtailment of speech, and the suppression of peaceful assembly. This makes it all the more critical to strengthen democracy where it is closest to us: in our city.

We demand a radical return to the constitutional vision of true local self-governance. This section outlines the essential measures we demand to move beyond mere consultation towards meaningful power-sharing. We call for a Thrissur where every citizen is an active participant in shaping our collective future, ensuring that our municipal corporation is not just a governing body, but a truly democratic space that protects and empowers all.

- Mandate Triple Bottom Line Budgeting\* for all major projects where budgets are evaluated against parallel metrics of social equity, ecological regeneration, and economic prosperity, moving beyond purely financial accounting.
- Implement Participatory Budgeting\*\* and citizen assemblies to devolve real power and budgetary control to residents for specific city projects, thereby building public trust, generating better solutions, and shaping a more engaged citizenry capable of collective action.
- Institutionalise transparent and informed ward-level governance by facilitating regular ward meetings and establishing robust mechanisms to ensure genuine public participation in decision-making.
- Mandate proactive communication from ward councillors by requiring them to formally inform citizens about all public work activities in their locality, including those involving digging, tree-cutting, service deadlines, or other significant changes.
- Ensure active collaboration between ward councillors and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) to ensure citizens can easily access and benefit from schemes rolled out by the municipal corporation and other government bodies.
- Actively support the formation of RWAs in localities where they do not currently exist, thereby strengthening the community's organisational capacity.
- Launch public awareness campaigns to ensure all citizens are informed of their rights and responsibilities, and create clear, accessible avenues for them to take up local civic duties.
- Ensure maximum transparency by publishing regular, easily understandable updates on the municipal corporation's official website regarding all decisions, budget allocations,

<sup>\*</sup> Triple bottom line budgeting refers to a financial planning approach that incorporates three key areas: social, environmental, and economic performance. It is a move from a single bottom line (net profit) to a triple bottom line, ensuring that a project's spending and investments align with its social and environmental goals, not just its economic ones. It recognises that long-term economic prosperity is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of people and the health of the planet.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Participatory Budgeting is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of the city's public budget. It is a form of direct democracy where all citizens, not just elected officials, identify, discuss, and prioritise projects where public money is invested.

- announcements, schemes, and the progress of undertaken projects.
- Leverage technology for enhanced civic engagement by developing gamified experiences and user-friendly applications that simplify processes like registering complaints, tracking their resolution, and participating in public consultations.

#### 03. Environment, Ecology & Climate

Our environment, ecology, and climate are the interconnected living systems that sustain all life. They encompass our natural resources, biodiversity, and the delicate balance between air, water, soil, and species. A healthy environment is not a luxury; it is the foundation of our health, our economic resilience, and our unique cultural identity in Thrissur.

Yet, this foundation is under severe threat. Rapid, unplanned urban expansion is encroaching upon our vital wetlands and paddy fields, while deforestation and climate change disrupt natural drainage, biodiversity, and our local microclimate. The consequences are stark: recurring floods and waterlogging, depleting groundwater, and mounting waste. This crisis is compounded by fragmented climate action and a failure to integrate ecological wisdom into urban planning, putting our city's rich heritage at risk of irreversible erosion.

We envision a different path for Thrissur, one of harmony and not domination. We must treat the environment, ecology, and climate as nonnegotiable stakeholders in every development decision. Our goal is to see human life not as separate from nature, but as an integral part of it. This means shifting from a logic of extraction to one of regeneration, weaving ecological thinking into the very fabric of our daily lives. We call for a city that moves forward by healing its ecosystems, recognising that nature is not a resource to be managed, but the very source of our social, cultural, and collective wellbeing.

In this context, we propose the following actions:

 Launch a decentralised water stewardship programme to conserve ponds, canals, and wetlands by integrating local knowledge with

- modern ecological practices for restoration and management.
- Establish a city-wide circular economy framework based on the principles of refuse, reduce, reuse, and compost, while enforcing extended producer responsibility to achieve zero-waste neighbourhoods.
- Initiate a project to actively restore biodiversity by promoting native trees, pollinator-friendly habitats, traditional crops, food forests and urban gardens that bring food and life closer to communities.
- Develop a community-led master plan to transform the current Thrissur Zoo grounds into a social-cultural hub and urban forest, serving as a vital carbon sink and green commons once the zoo relocates to Puthur Zoological Park.
- Implement nature-based climate adaptation by reviving wetlands, expanding urban tree cover, and mandating flood-resilient and cool-roof design in building codes and street layouts.
- Create and maintain a public, digital tree census to map and monitor the city's canopy, guiding equitable urban planning and ensuring adequate shade for all neighbourhoods.
- Mandate an urban heat island mitigation strategy that uses strategic greening, cool pavements, and water-sensitive urban design to lower temperatures in public spaces.
- Establish a City Climate Action Cell to coordinate with government departments and collaborate with civil society and other climate-actors to facilitate cross-sectoral climate action.
- Integrate ecological literacy and the rights of nature into school curricula and public awareness campaigns, building a lasting civic commitment to protecting our natural heritage for future generations.
- Establish an Eco-Justice Library as a central resource for environmental law, indigenous knowledge, and climate justice, facilitating informed advocacy and intergenerational dialogue.
- Launch a continuous public climate education programme using workshops, storytelling, and accessible science communication to empower citizens of all ages to understand and respond to climate impacts.

- Institutionalise transparent and participatory environmental governance by ensuring data transparency, mandating youth representation, and creating inclusive forums for community decision-making.
- Mobilise climate finance for Thrissur by exploring green bonds, public-private partnerships, and innovative funding streams dedicated to local adaptation, renewable energy, and nature-based solutions.

#### 04. Economy

A stark statistic frames our national reality: the richest 1% of Indians now hold 40% of the nation's wealth. This extreme inequality is fueled by a narrative of development obsessed with consumerism, one that systematically sidelines the most marginalised. As capitalist giants reshape our urban landscape, they turn local culture into a consumer product, replacing the diverse tapestry of local knowledge, food, and crafts with a homogenised, market-driven monoculture.

We demand a radical reorientation of Thrissur's economy. It is imperative that we develop new markers of economic wellness that look beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to measure true prosperity. We must prioritise localisation, an economic trajectory that nurtures the flourishing of Thrissur's own producers, ecosystems, and communities. This requires strong reforms to encourage local production, processing, and consumption.

We must mainstream a culture of conscious consumption, where citizens know what they are buying, how it was made, and at what true cost. We envision a Thrissur where convenience, like 10-minute deliveries, is not fetishised, and where market aisles are not dominated by monopolistic brands.

Our vision is of an economy where development includes everyone. This necessitates concrete steps toward wealth redistribution through effective tax collection and social security like pensions. We must cultivate a civic culture where donating wealth to solve the metacrisis becomes a greater status symbol than accumulating it. Our natural resources and commons must be

managed as collective assets, and the values of our citizens must be realigned towards their protection for generations to come.

- Formally adopt and promote localisation as a core principle for Thrissur's development, actively supporting place-based economies that reduce dependence on multinational corporations. This includes championing community gardens, credit cooperatives, alternative learning spaces, and small business alliances that build resilient, interconnected local networks and placebased relationships.
- Contextually adopt Doughnut Economics framework to ensure the city's operations meet the social foundations of all citizens such as housing, equity, health, etc. without overshooting the planetary boundaries.
- Revitalise local markets by transforming them with community-centric models like flea markets and seasonal festivals, creating hubs that support local artisans and encourage a culture of conscious consumption.
- Implement a "Produce Local, Buy Local" policy by actively promoting and creating dedicated platforms for the sale of locally sourced food, handcrafted goods, and textiles, ensuring a resilient and unique local economy.
- Leverage Thrissur's financial heritage by partnering with the city's banks and financial institutions to create a dedicated fund for supporting sustainable projects, green entrepreneurship, and climate-resilient livelihoods.
- Strengthen municipal finances by modernising and streamlining tax collection systems to ensure robust funding for essential public services and infrastructure.
- Promote local entrepreneurship and remote work by establishing accessible, wellequipped co-working spaces across the city.
- Establish a dedicated fund for entrepreneurs from marginalised and underrepresented genders, preceded by a comprehensive study to identify their specific challenges and inform the design of a tailored capacity development programme.

- Leverage international climate and development finance by actively attracting grants and partnerships with global NGOs and funds to power job-creating initiatives focused on urban resilience and climate adaptation.
- Adopt and expand Green and Pink Budgeting practices following the lead of the state of Kerala and other Indian cities and states, by systematically tagging and assessing the municipal budget for its impact on climate sustainability and gender equality, with a commitment to annually increasing these allocations.

#### 05. Livelihoods & Employment

Livelihoods and employment encompass the diverse ways in which people secure their material needs, dignity, and social belonging. This includes not just income, but also working conditions, resource access, creativity, participation, and personal growth.

In Thrissur, as in much of Kerala, our livelihood systems face significant challenges. Youth underemployment is prevalent, and a persistent mismatch exists between the skills taught in our educational institutions and those needed by the economy. The informal and private sectors dominate, often offering little job security or upward mobility. Meanwhile, traditional occupations and artisanal livelihoods struggle to remain viable amid urbanisation, mechanisation, and climate change. A critical lack of structured support for green and regenerative enterprises prevents us from aligning economic wellbeing with ecological restoration.

We believe that livelihoods must sustain and regenerate natural ecosystems, not degrade them. They must ensure dignity and autonomy, giving workers fair value and control over their labour. Equity and justice are non-negotiable, requiring a fair sharing of power, profit, and resources across all social groups. Cultural and indigenous practices must be preserved and given space within our economy. Livelihoods should build resilience, adaptability, and knowledge sovereignty to face ongoing ecological and economic challenges, enabling holistic personal growth.

In today's digital era, communities must have control over digital tools, data, and knowledge systems, using technology for empowerment, not dependency. We envision a Thrissur that transitions from a culture of extraction to one of regeneration, supporting communities with the skills, financial backing, and participatory planning needed to build restorative and fulfilling local economies.

- Recognise and value unpaid care work and community contributions like volunteering and ecosystem restoration as essential, dignified components of our society.
- Extend legal recognition and social protection to informal workers, including street vendors and waste recyclers, ensuring they have access to fair policies, social security, and public infrastructure.
- Establish public livelihood information centres and peer networks to strengthen awareness of workers' rights and diverse local opportunities.
- Reorient education and skilling systems to bridge the gap with livelihoods, aligning curricula with local economic needs and ecological priorities through hands-on apprenticeships and experiential learning.
- Launch a "Thrissur Heritage Livelihoods" initiative to revitalise traditional occupations like weaving, pottery, metal work, organic farming, etc. through guaranteed market access, design innovation, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- Universalise social security measures including healthcare, pensions, and safety nets for all workers to ensure protection from socio-economic and environmental shocks.
- Create a dedicated "Green Skills Fund" to train youth for future-ready sectors like renewable energy, ecological restoration, and circular economy practices.
- Incentivise and promote regenerative livelihoods in sectors that prioritise community and ecological wellbeing, such as agroecology, responsible media, conservation, waste management, alternative education, etc.

#### 06. Health & Wellbeing

True wellbeing is the foundation of a thriving city. Yet, we face a mounting and complex health crisis. The most vulnerable among us suffer from inadequate access to healthcare, worsened by the increasing privatisation of this essential service. This is compounded by poor nutrition, unclean water, exposure to chemical pollutants, and the stresses of conflictual social environments. We witness a rapid decline in the availability of nature's free pharmacies and nutritional resources, while irresponsible promotion of junk food escalates. The result is a dangerous convergence where 'diseases of poverty' persist alongside rising 'diseases of affluence,' all set against an alarming tide of mental health challenges.

Amidst these challenges, hope persists. Inspiring examples led by communities, civil society, and proactive government agencies prove that a different model of public health is possible; one focused on prevention, solidarity, and care.

We demand a radical reimagining of health in Thrissur, grounded in the fundamental truth that our wellbeing is entangled to the health of our land, our water, our flora and fauna, and our entire ecosystem. This section outlines our call for action to build a city that actively cultivates the conditions for all life to flourish, ensuring that the right to health is a lived reality for every resident.

In this context, we propose the following actions:

- Invest in the core social determinants of health by guaranteeing access to nutritional food, clean water, dignified sanitation, and a safe, unpolluted environment for all.
- Launch a city-wide "One Health" public awareness campaign to educate citizens on the inextricable links between human health and the health of our ecosystems.
- Enact and enforce stringent regulations to depollute our air, water, and soil, directly addressing the environmental causes of disease.
- Regulate the advertisement and sale of junk food and sugary drinks, particularly in and around schools and public spaces frequented

by children.

- Integrate mental health services into primary care at all public health centers and create dedicated, accessible, and affordable community mental health clinics.
- Create and maintain public spaces that include shaded walkways, dedicated cycle paths, and outdoor gyms in every ward, actively promoting their use across all age, gender, and class groups.
- Create structured avenues for citizens to connect with self, community, and the rest of nature to build positive mental and emotional health
- Create more nature play zones and learning gardens in schools and public parks to directly counter Nature Deficit Disorder among children and youth which is causing increased stress, anxiety and attention difficulties.
- Facilitate regular community-building activities and support groups in public spaces to reduce social isolation and strengthen mental and emotional resilience.
- Incentivise the creation of urban farms and community gardens in vacant lots to simultaneously provide fresh food, green space, and opportunities for social connection and physical activity.

#### 07. Food

Food is more than mere sustenance; it is our most fundamental connection to the land, our health, and our community. Yet, in our city today, this connection is often observed to be broken. We are faced with the dual crisis of unsafe food and ecologically hazardous production methods, leading to rising health issues and a deep disconnect from the sources of our nourishment. Most of us are passive consumers, unaware of where our food comes from or the true cost of its journey to our plates.

We envision a different future for Thrissur, a city where food production is not a distant industry, but a prevalent activity that brings aliveness to our homes, neighbourhoods, and ecosystems. We see a Thrissur where the act of growing food is a common practice, empowering individuals and communities to become resilient and self-sufficient.

This vision calls for a radical shift. We must incentivise and support the growth of vegetables in our homes and educational institutions, and champion the use of our agricultural lands for agroecological food production. By building our collective capacity to grow our own food, we equip ourselves to be more resilient in the face of crises. Addressing this most basic need is the first step toward exploring a truly sustainable and non-extractive economy, one that nourishes both people and the planet.

We seek the commitment for a Thrissur where every bite we take is a source of health, every meal a testament to ecological harmony, and every citizen an empowered participant in our local food system.

In this context, we propose the following actions:

- Support community gardens, rooftop farms, and local food networks to build resilience and reduce the carbon footprint of food.
- Promote hyper-local food production by cultivating a culture of growing vegetables, fruits and millets at household, community, and institutional levels (schools, colleges).
- Develop community-centric food spaces by creating community food gardens, food forests, and partnering with Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) to enable community farming as a tool for connection and aliveness.
- Establish and protect native seed sovereignty through programs to identify, conserve, and distribute native seeds of vegetables and paddy via public seed banks.
- Incentivise a shift to agroecology by promoting and supporting agroecological farming practices across all agricultural lands, with a special focus on protecting and transforming the kole fields.
- Support sustainable small-scale livestock by incentivising and promoting community-based poultry farming and other animal husbandry by Self Help Groups (SHGs).
- Create transparent and direct market linkages that enable the journey of food from producer to consumer through regular farmers' markets and other fair-trade mechanisms.
- Ensure food safety and accessibility by

- enforcing food safety standards in restaurants and facilitating access to reasonably priced organic and healthy foods, including millets, pulses, fruits, and vegetables.
- Launch public awareness campaigns on the value of diverse, nutritious Indian cuisines, promoting 'slow food' and millets over junk food, and actively rejecting casteist food hierarchies and cultural homogenisation.
- Formulate and implement policies that protect the interests and needs of farmers, ensuring their economic viability and wellbeing as the cornerstone of our local food system.

#### 08. Water

Water is the source of life, yet its future in our city is under threat. In a global scenario where both blue water (our rivers, lakes, and groundwater) and green water (the moisture in our soil) are being depleted and polluted, the long-term water security of Thrissur can no longer be taken for granted.

This impending crisis demands immediate and visionary action. We can no longer afford wasteful water use or neglect the ancient wisdom of harvesting every drop. The right to clean, safe water for basic human needs is non-negotiable, and it is the fundamental duty of our local government to ensure it.

This section outlines our collective demand for a water-secure Thrissur. We call for policies and practices that actively discourage waste, aggressively promote harvesting and recharge, and guarantee that this most essential resource is protected, shared equitably, and managed sustainably for all citizens, today and for generations to come.

- Create a public water atlas by comprehensively mapping all ponds, lakes, and wells in Thrissur to ensure their visibility, protection, and advocacy.
- Conserve and regenerate public water bodies by designating ponds and lakes as official water recharge hubs, planting native species

around them to support biodiversity, and undertaking the restoration and de-pollution of the Kole wetlands.

- Ensure equitable and dignified access to all public water bodies, guaranteeing that access is not limited by caste, class, or locality, and protecting the rights of migrant labourers and other vulnerable communities.
- Mandate water self-sufficiency in new developments by basing building permits for new apartments on the local groundwater table and requiring the incorporation of water-saving and groundwater recharging mechanisms.
- Incentivise household-level water stewardship by subsidising and promoting rainwater harvesting systems and the construction of water percolation pits.
- Strengthen enforcement of building and sanitation bye-laws by mandating inspections of liquid waste management systems including septic tanks, soak pits and on-site treatment units to ensure they are scientifically designed, constructed and maintained, preventing pollution of public water bodies.
- Adopt nature-based solutions for water security by implementing measures that enhance both the flow and soil retention of water to mitigate the dual risks of floods and droughts.
- Guarantee safe drinking water through rigorous, regular quality checks of municipal water supplies and the implementation of effective water treatment methods.
- Formalise community-led conservation by creating clear frameworks that enable communities to care for local water bodies while legally safeguarding their traditional access and use rights.
- Ensure functional public infrastructure by committing to the proper operation and maintenance of all water supply and treatment systems.
- Launch comprehensive public awareness programmes in schools, colleges, and communities on water health, contamination, and conservation, empowering every citizen as a water guardian.

#### 09. Learning, Education & Knowledge

True learning is a lifelong journey of discovery, not a race that ends with a degree. It is the essential thread that connects us to our past, equips us for our present, and empowers us to shape our future. Yet, the current system often reduces this journey to the confines of classrooms and a specific age, prioritising the superficial cramming of information to fit us into the dominant economic machine. This approach suppresses local innovation, disrespects the diversity of our communities, and pits us against one another in a culture of individualistic competition. It also systematically erodes the rich tapestry of traditional and local knowledges that have ensured social and ecological harmony for generations in Kerala. Even when progressive policies call for locally relevant and activity-based learning, their spirit is lost in inadequate implementation.

We envision a Thrissur that reclaims learning as a lifelong practice. This means creating avenues for all citizens, regardless of age, to engage with our local history, understand our unique ecology, and build knowledge that facilitates a sustainable and joyful coexistence with our environment.

All around us, initiatives by communities, civil society, and forward-thinking institutions are already demonstrating this path. They prove that learning happens in and through libraries, wetlands, workshops, and public spaces. Let us go beyond critique to champion an education that liberates, connects, and empowers. We call for a system that honours multiple knowledge systems, cultivates cooperation and collaboration over competition, and ensures that every young person can learn, grow, and thrive as a whole human being, deeply rooted in and responsible to our city.

- Integrate holistic wellbeing into the core curriculum, cultivating a deep, continuous sense of interconnectedness with self, community, and the rest of nature.
- Reimagine pedagogical processes to spark curiosity, imagination, and long-term resilience, moving education beyond a narrow

- focus on economic utility.
- Embed ecological and social responsibility in curricula to enable children and youth to think for their locality and promote responsible citizenship.
- Mandate comprehensive life skills education in school curricula, including practical competencies like swimming, growing food, cooking, financial literacy, and driving.
- Strengthen local identity and civic engagement through place-based projects, local history modules, and structured opportunities for civic action.
- Equip every student with disaster management skills, including first-aid training and specific preparedness for local geographical hazards like flooding.
- Embed diverse art forms, play, and theatre across the learning journey as essential tools for connecting with one's self and fellow learners.
- Establish clear guidelines for technology use that balance the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with activities that promote deep cognition, critical thinking, and creativity.
- Champion educational pluralism by supporting a range of alternative learning approaches suitable for diverse cultural, ecological, social, and personal conditions, with a specific focus on inclusive education for children with disabilities.
- Formally recognise and integrate civil society expertise by creating structured partnerships between schools and organisations working on local ecology, ensuring their documented knowledge and on-ground learning spaces become a core part of the educational experience for children.
- Reorient teacher training institutions and professional development to fully align with the above vision and pedagogical shifts.
- Create lifelong learning avenues for adults and the elderly to stay engaged with a dynamic world while maintaining cultural and ecological rootedness.
- Transform public and community libraries into knowledge hubs by facilitating dialogues, workshops, and community-led sessions.
- Establish a Thrissur Learning City Steering Committee comprising academicians, facilitators, and civil society organisations to

lead the ideation, planning, and implementation of the UNESCO Learning City project, ensuring it becomes a people-led programme that establishes Thrissur as a true knowledge hub.

#### 10. Energy

Energy powers and sustains every activity in our city, and its constant availability is an undeniable need. However, this demand is largely met through carbon-intensive processes that fuel the global climate crisis. As urban centers become frontline actors in this fight, Thrissur must reimagine its role in achieving the vital goal of restricting global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius, with the energy sector being a critical lever for change.

The urgency is underscored by our state's energy reality. Kerala generates only a third of its electricity, importing the rest from predominantly coal-based sources. This stands in direct opposition to its aims of 100% renewable energy by 2040 and carbon neutrality by 2050. While Kerala possesses a vast solar potential of 12.4 GW, the current installed capacity is just around 2 GW, revealing a critical gap we must bridge.

We demand a decisive shift for Thrissur. This requires aggressively improving the integration of renewables, especially through widespread rooftop solarisation, and implementing demandside management to shift our energy use to match clean supply. We must champion energy savings through innovative measures in buildings and transportation. This transition is not just an environmental imperative but a pathway to energy security, resilience, and a sustainable future for our city.

- Assess the city's renewable energy potential by reviewing current solar deployment and developing a strategic plan to bridge existing gaps.
- Study and adapt successful models of decentralised electricity generation to empower prosumers and enhance local grid resilience.

- Develop and disseminate public communication materials in collaboration with educational institutions to raise awareness about energy efficiency schemes, renewable energy, and demand-shifting.
- Create and implement incentive programs to reward residents for reducing energy consumption during peak demand hours.
- Ensure full compliance with state Energy Conservation and Sustainable Building Codes in all city building by-laws.
- Implement Green Public Procurement policies for all municipal construction projects.
- Pilot a carbon-neutral roadmap for Thrissur by formally studying successful models like the Meenangadi project and other decentralised energy systems to adapt and implement applicable measures.
- Organise workshops and conferences on carbon credit opportunities involving stakeholders from power, transport, agriculture, and forestry sectors.

#### 11. Settlements & Urban Planning

How we plan our city defines how we live. Urban planning and land use dictate how space is organised and shared for housing, livelihoods, ecology, and recreation. This is not merely a technical exercise; it is a direct reflection of our society's deepest values concerning justice, collective rights, and the kind of development we pursue.

Currently, Thrissur's growth has been haphazard and ecologically unsustainable. Rapid, uncontrolled urban expansion has led to the conversion of agricultural land, the reclaiming of water bodies, and vulnerable government lands being lost to encroachment. This model extracts resources from rural areas and dumps urban waste back into them, creating a cycle of degradation.

The social consequences are severe. Soaring land prices have made affordable housing increasingly scarce, forcing economically weaker sections into inadequate living conditions in slums and informal colonies. There is an urgent need to move beyond mere numerical targets and understand the true, affordable housing needs of

our population, especially those below the poverty line. Compounding these issues is a critical lack of coordination between the government departments managing housing, industry, and investment.

As Thrissur evolves, so do our socio-cultural practices, housing needs, and mobility patterns. We envision a city that rejects this fragmented and exclusionary model. We demand a comprehensive, inclusive, and ecologically-regenerative approach to urban development, one that plans for the wellbeing of all citizens and the land we inhabit.

- Design neighbourhoods where homes, workplaces, shops, and leisure are within easy reach, drastically reducing the need for long commutes.
- Prioritise walking and cycling by ensuring all settlements are pedestrian-friendly and cyclist-safe, with dedicated pathways.
- Create unrestricted public spaces for community gathering, ensuring they are petfriendly and accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Ensure universal accessibility by mandating that all public spaces and infrastructure are fully accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Mandate climate-resilient and energyefficient building design that uses local architectural knowledge to reduce environmental impact.
- Incorporate water-sensitive design by preserving space for rainwater seepage to recharge groundwater and maintain soil health.
- Develop integrated waste management infrastructure as a core component of urban planning.
- Address traffic congestion by improving narrow inner roads and junctions, installing adequate traffic signals, and relocating poorly placed bus stops to enhance safety and flow.
- Ensure timely maintenance and repair of all roads to ensure safety and longevity.
- Strengthen regional collaboration between the Thrissur Corporation and neighbouring panchayats to manage urban expansion in a balanced and sustainable way.

 Develop inclusive urban policies that prepare the city to welcome and support immigrants, ensuring their smooth integration into the social and economic fabric of Thrissur.

#### 12. Transportation & Mobility

Transportation is the vital lifeline that connects our citizens to education, livelihoods, and healthcare. As Thrissur grows, so too will the demand for mobility. However, for too long, transport planning has been an afterthought rather than a foundational element of urban design. We must integrate sustainable, transitoriented development into the heart of our city's master plan, creating a system where walking and cycling are safe, convenient, and preferred modes of travel. We demand that the core principles of our transport system be affordability and equity.

The needs of the most marginalised, for reliable last-mile connectivity and access to essential services, must be prioritised alongside major infrastructure projects. Our public transport must serve as a tool for social justice, ensuring that low-income groups, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities can move through the city with dignity and ease.

Our vision is a Thrissur where public transport is the first choice for all, renowned for its comfort, frequency, and safety. Achieving this requires a decisive policy shift: disincentivising private vehicle use through taxation, creating vehiclefree zones, and heavily investing in a bus fleet that specifically meets the needs of school children, senior citizens, and every citizen who deserves a stress-free commute.

In this context, we propose the following actions:

- Transform bus stands into safe, inclusive hubs with ample seating and essential amenities, including charging stations for laptops and mobile phones.
- Ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists by creating dedicated, well-maintained pathways and enforcing traffic laws effectively.
- Assess the demand for e-cycles among key social groups, including students,

- community volunteers and marginalised communities, and propose a targeted procurement scheme based on the findings.
- Accelerate the transition to electric vehicles by investing in necessary infrastructure, such as charging stations.
- Conduct a comprehensive transportation study for Thrissur city to analyse current and future transport demand, identify bottlenecks, and propose integrated solutions, which is inclusive of mobility patterns of women, children, youth, elderly persons, differently-abled persons and the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Implement technology-driven route optimisation for the city's bus services to enhance efficiency and reliability.
- Create permanent and temporary vehicle-free zones in the city to promote walking, cycling, and community-based recreational activities.

#### 13. Media

In an age of information, truth has become a contested resource. Across the country, we witness a dangerous convergence: a stranglehold on media by corporate and state powers, the rampant spread of disinformation, the systematic trolling of dissent, and the suffocation of independent journalism. This environment erodes democratic discourse and creates a polarised, misinformed public.

Yet, from this challenging landscape, a new hope emerges. We are inspired by the rise of innovative, democratic media initiatives that prove another way is possible. Learning from them, we must take decisive action at the local level.

We envision a Thrissur that is not a passive consumer of media, but an active, critical creator of it. Our city needs active forums to amplify local issues, platforms to celebrate the good and hopeful work happening in our communities, and digital spaces dedicated to educating about our rich local history and ecology.

We urge for building a media-literate Thrissur, a city conscious of what it consumes and courageous in generating content that is socially just, ecologically aware, and deeply relevant to our lives. This is a call to reclaim our narrative, empower independent voices, and ensure that our public sphere serves the people, not power.

In this context, we propose the following actions:

- Launch public media literacy campaigns in schools, colleges, and libraries to equip citizens with the skills to identify misinformation and critically analyse media sources.
- Establish a public, digital platform for civic engagement that enables citizens to report local issues, propose community-led solutions, and track governmental responses.
- Create and maintain a dynamic "Thrissur Biodiversity Digital Archive" to document the flora and fauna of our public spaces, making ecological knowledge accessible to all.
- Systematically document and disseminate Thrissur's local history by producing and archiving content in diverse, accessible formats for a wide public audience.
- Institute an annual "Thrissur Stories Festival" to showcase and promote local content creation focused on community initiatives, ecological heritage, and positive narratives.

#### 14. Waste Management

Waste management is the mirror of a society's relationship with its environment. It is more than the technical process of collection, segregation, and disposal; it is a direct reflection of our collective ethics of care, responsibility, and our commitment to ecological balance.

While Kerala and Thrissur have made significant strides in this sector, critical gaps remain. Waste collection is not yet universal, illegal dumping on vacant plots persists, and mismanaged waste continues to pollute our soil, water, and air. This reveals a fundamental flaw: we are treating symptoms, not the cause. We must urgently reimagine our relationship with materials and consumption, shifting from a linear "buyconsume-dispose" model to a circular and regenerative system where waste is redesigned as a resource, and every citizen is an empowered participant in this cycle.

We envision a Thrissur where an effective waste

management system is a hallmark of our social consciousness and ecological commitment. This requires a system designed for segregation at source, supported by scientific processing that feeds materials back into the economy. We champion a decentralised approach, built on the empowerment of local workers, transparent data, and robust citizen participation. By investing in behaviour change, education, and smart technology, we can transform waste management from a civic duty into a powerful tool for climate action and urban regeneration.

- Establish "Clean City Trails" as public educational pathways where citizens can observe the full waste cycle, from generation to collection, segregation and disposal, making the consequences of mismanagement and the benefits of circular systems visible and tangible.
- Implement neighbourhood-level circular systems to convert organic waste into compost, directly feeding it back into urban agriculture and terrace gardens to regenerate soil and reduce the use of chemical fertilisers.
- Manage e-waste and battery waste through dedicated collection centres and safe dismantling facilities, enforcing extended producer responsibility to keep toxic materials out of landfills and water bodies.
- Mandate construction and demolition waste to be reused in new projects.
- Protect water sources from contamination through integrated planning that prevents leachate, runoff, and illegal dumping near ponds, canals, wells, and wetlands.
- Launch public education campaigns focused on "Refuse, Reduce, Reuse" to shift behaviour, building a culture where citizens take ownership of what they discard.
- Use the protection of water health as the primary motivator in public campaigns, as polluted water is one of waste management's most visible and consequential failures.
- Prioritise behaviour-centric approaches over purely infrastructure-led solutions, recognising that dustbins and collection systems are enablers, not the complete solution.

#### 15. Commons

The disappearance and mismanagement of common resources including water bodies, wetlands, city parks, and fisheries is a critical global issue. In Thrissur, the Kole wetlands are a prime example of a vital commons, providing a home and livelihood for a rich diversity of human and non-human life. While the Kole paddy fields produce yields above the state average, they also face the challenge of excessive chemical fertiliser and pesticide use, threatening their long-term health.

As urban residents who both depend on and impact these shared resources, we have a responsibility to use them sustainably and ensure they remain accessible to all. We embrace the concept of "Cities as Commons," which views the city with all its physical resources and services as a shared inheritance for all its inhabitants. This includes our rivers, lakes, public spaces like the Thekkinkad Maidanam and Swaraj Round, and also our cultural commons: festivals, food cultures, shared history, and even our collective waste, which should be re-envisioned as a potential resource.

We urge the building of a Thrissur where everyone, especially youth, finds joy and fulfillment in using common spaces, facilitating a culture of responsible and compassionate stewardship for our shared urban heritage.

- Facilitate public responsibility of commons through thoughtful design, consistent maintenance, and the active promotion of cultural programming in these spaces.
- Actively plan, fund, and protect noncommercial public spaces such as libraries, parks and community centers, where diverse citizens can interact and build social capital.
- Transform parks, grounds, and water bodies into lively social hubs by regularly hosting festivals, cultural events, and providing space for local clubs and civil society organisations.
- Activate civic spaces as open-air classrooms to cultivate a shared sense of community ownership and belonging.

- Protect access for marginalised communities by prioritising their needs in all renovation and reconstruction projects for public spaces.
- Safeguard public access by formally opposing the privatisation or restrictive management of commons.
- Develop Vadakke Chira as a community wellness hub, including through the installation of open-air gym facilities.
- Establish Vanchikulam as a living museum to showcase the local history and heritage of Thrissur.
- Reimagine Jawaharlal Nehru Children's Park by integrating urban food gardens where children can learn to grow their own food.
- Conserve the Chembukkavu zoo grounds as a green sanctuary by creating community food gardens, butterfly and dragonfly habitats, and spaces for cultural expression, promoting it as a centre for local biodiversity.
- Celebrate and protect the Kole wetlands as critical biodiversity zones, recognising their vital role as a habitat for huge populations of migratory birds.

## Conclusion

#### We live in the shadow of converging crises, but we stand in the light of converging solutions.

The Youth Manifesto for Thrissur was born from the conviction that a different city is not only possible but is already being seeded in our collective imagination and action.

The interconnected visions we have laid out—for learning that liberates, democracy that empowers, an economy that regenerates, and a culture that connects—are not isolated demands. They are the essential, interlocking pillars of a single, transformative idea: that Thrissur can become a city of holistic health and wellbeing, where the health of every citizen is inseparable from the health of our community and our ecosystems.

This vision is built on the foundation of food and water sovereignty, powered by accountable energy usage, and sustained through responsible waste management. It is shaped by urban planning that prioritises people and planet, and a transportation system that ensures equitable mobility for all. It is a city where the media serves the public, the commons are cherished, and our environment and ecology are recognised as the

living, breathing foundation of our collective existence.

We have moved beyond critique to present a proactive, practical, and hopeful roadmap. The path forward requires a fundamental shift: from a culture of extraction and consumption to conservation and regeneration; from profit for a few to prosperity for all; and from self-care to community care...

This is our shared work. We, the youth of Thrissur, commit to being partners in this great undertaking to advocate, to build, and to hold ourselves accountable. In return, we demand that our elected representatives and governing institutions meet this moment with the courage, integrity, and urgency it demands.

Let this manifesto be the compass that guides us. Together, let us build a Thrissur that is not merely resilient, but truly alive. A city of joy, justice, and harmony for generations to come. The future is not a destination we arrive at, but a city we cocreate, starting today.

### Annexure

Here, we would like to offer more details on some of the frameworks mentioned in the document.

#### 01. Alternatives Transformation Framework

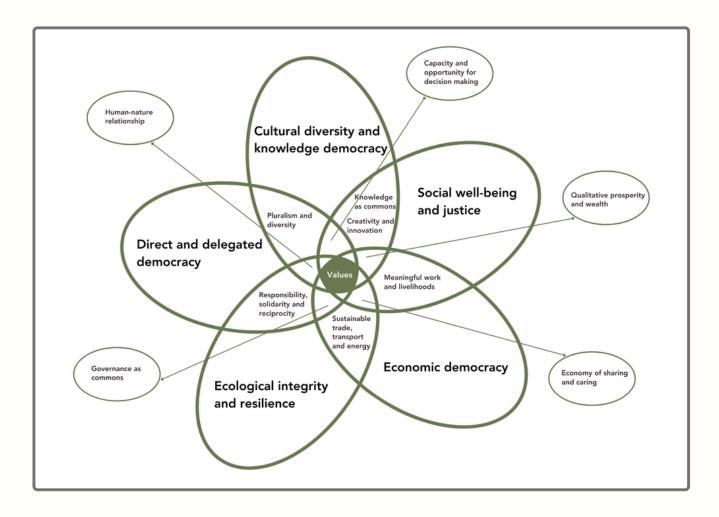


Diagram: Flower of Transformation - Spheres of Radical Alternatives

The Alternatives Transformation Framework visualises radical alternatives as interconnected spheres essential for systemic change. The five spheres are 'Social Wellbeing & Justice', 'Economic Democracy', 'Ecological Integrity & Resilience', 'Direct and Delegated Democracy' and 'Cultural Diversity & Knowledge Democracy'. Alternatives are practical activities, policies, processes, technologies, and concepts that provide a direct contrast to the dominant and exploitative systems. The framework emphasises that initiatives should integrate at least two of these spheres without contradicting the others to be considered genuine alternatives. It serves as a tool for self-assessment and dialogue, helping initiatives align with holistic principles of equity, sustainability, and justice.

For more information, visit: <a href="https://vikalpsangam.org/about-us/">https://vikalpsangam.org/about-us/</a>

#### 02. Doughnut Economics

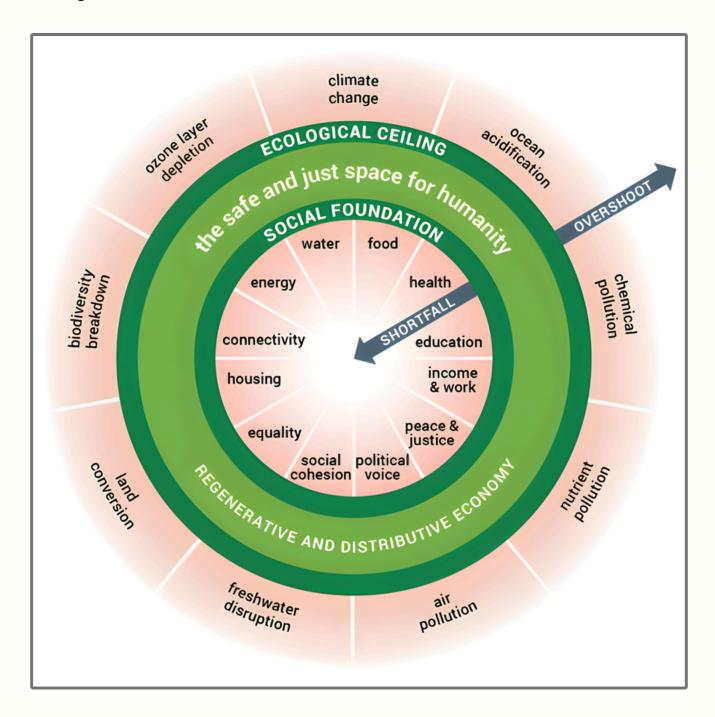


Diagram: Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries.

Doughnut Economics is a visual framework for sustainable development, shaped like a doughnut. The inner ring represents the social foundation, the minimum standard of life essentials no one should fall short of. This includes 'Education', 'Income & Work', Peace & Justice', 'Political voice', 'Social cohesion', 'Equality, 'Housing', 'Connectivity', 'Energy', 'Water', 'Food', and 'Health'. The outer ring represents the ecological ceiling, the planetary boundaries we must not overshoot to avoid critical environmental degradation. The goal is for humanity to thrive in the safe and just space between these two rings.

For more information, visit: <a href="https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics">https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics</a>

#### 03. Planetary Boundaries

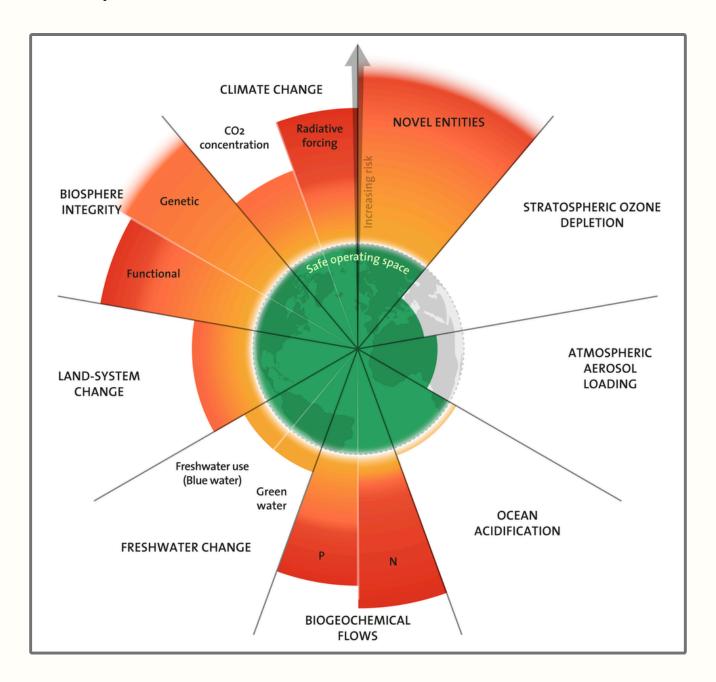
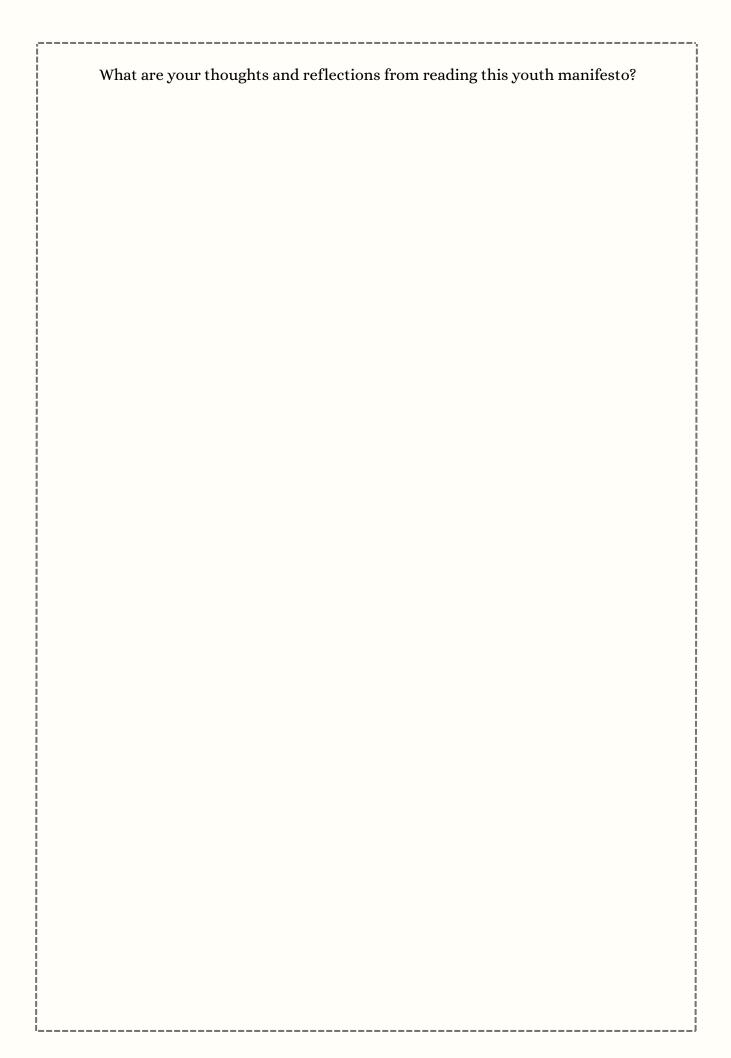


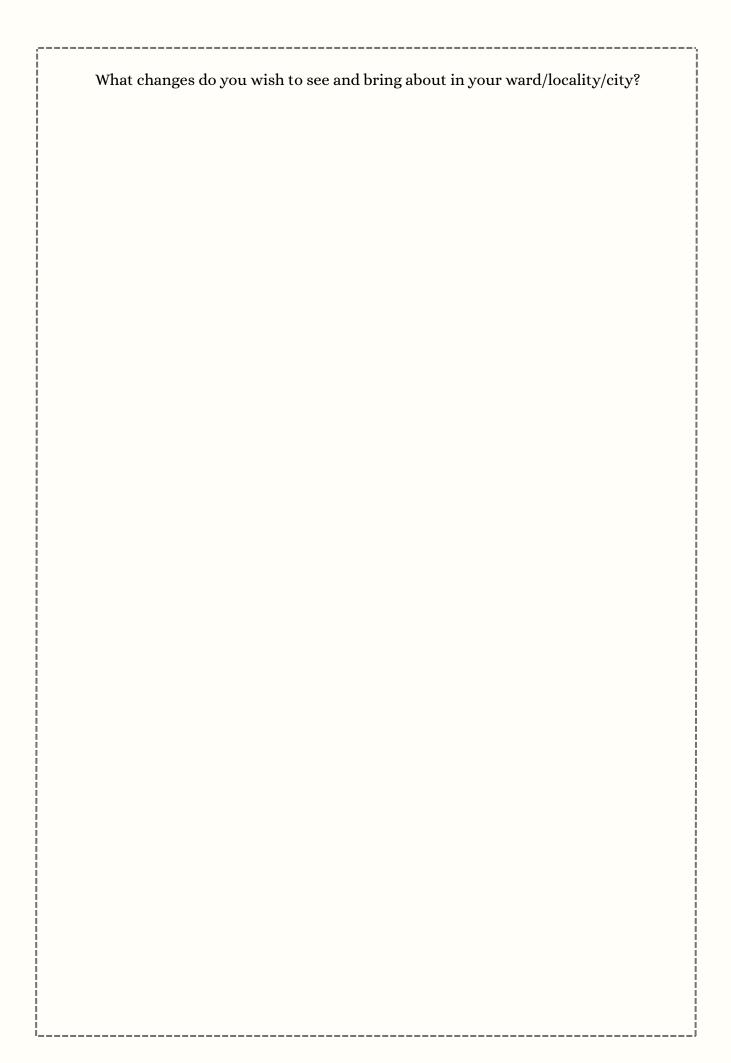
Diagram: The 2025 update to the Planetary boundaries

The Planetary Boundaries framework defines a safe operating space for humanity by identifying nine critical Earth system processes that are essential for maintaining the Earth's stability and resilience. For each process, it establishes a quantitative planetary boundary that, if crossed, dramatically increases the risk of triggering large-scale, abrupt, and irreversible environmental changes. The nine planetary boundaries are: 'Climate Change', 'Biosphere Integrity', 'Land-System Change', 'Freshwater Change', 'Biogeochemical Flows', 'Ocean Acidification', 'Atmospheric Aerosol Loading', 'Stratospheric Ozone Depletion', and 'Novel Entities'. Currently, human activities have already pushed six of these nine boundaries beyond their safe limits, including climate change and biosphere integrity. This concept serves as a science-based guide to show that we are exceeding the planet's environmental thresholds and must reduce our pressure on these vital systems to ensure a sustainable future.

For more information, visit: <a href="https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html">https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html</a>

What does your city mean to you? How do you connect with your city and its people?		





## **About Learning City Thrissur**

Learning City Thrissur is a citizen-led initiative founded in 2020 that sees the city as an ecosystem of opportunities. We believe Thrissur is filled with vast resources and potential for every individual to learn, develop, and meet their needs and ambitions.

We provide a platform to activate this potential, enabling people to participate fully not just in their own lives, but in the civic and cultural life of the city they call home.

Through awareness-building, collaborative learning, and direct action on issues from sustainability and local history to waste management and traditional knowledge, we facilitate a movement for localisation and active citizenry. Our goal is to co-create a Thrissur that is resilient, rooted, and shaped by the people who live in it.

www.learningcitythrissur.org

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