SECOND SPIRAL — APPLIED INQUIRIES

Green Paper 23

A Decent Economy Under the Jurisdiction of Life

Money, stewardship, and responsible passage through living fields

STATUS
Green Paper · candidate v0.2.1 · September 2026

PUBLISHER
Spiralweb Papers

ACCOUNTABLE KNOWLEDGE STEWARD
Lars A. Engberg

LANGUAGE
English working translation

Language: Danish original · English working translation

Developed through human-led research, dialogue, editorial revision, and AI-assisted articulation. Final selection, judgement, public release, and responsibility remain with the named human steward. See Methods / Editorial Practice and Sophia Lumen.

Document function: economic grammar, thematic diagnosis, and open practice inquiry

This paper does not in itself activate a field, funding relationship, stewardship agreement, or financial product. Publication is not validation.

Abstract

This paper explores how ordinary money might finance human, cultural, and ecological stewardship capacity without turning life into a commodity or payment into its equivalent. It begins in a lived experience of indecency: people, places, and living systems carry time, risk, maintenance, and creative power, while income, ownership, and decision-making authority often accumulate elsewhere. Through Penguin Economics, Elir, Elia, PG Ledger, and Flow Desk, the paper develops an economic grammar that keeps payment for products, payment for work, collective resource allocation, and support without the purchase of performance distinct. Its central turn is that externalities should not be addressed only by internalising nature's value in a price. The decisive shift is not from no price to the right price, but from externalised consequence to internalised responsibility. The paper proposes neither a new currency nor a universal economic model, but a correctable flow architecture in which money can protect life-sustaining capacity while authority, provenance, rights to halt, and consequences for living systems remain visible.

> **Status**
> This paper formulates a working hypothesis, not a completed economic theory, a new currency, a financial product, or a promise of demonstrated impact. It investigates how ordinary money, work, knowledge, and institutional capacity might move more responsibly in relation to people, places, and living systems.

---

1. When the Figure Becomes Legible

An economy can use money without allowing money to determine what has value. It can pay for products, work, and shared capacity without claiming that the payment is equivalent to the person, place, or living system the work serves.

Spiralweb's economic grammar gathers a set of distinctions around this possibility. Moral Biology asks what people, relationships, and institutions can actually carry. Penguin Economics describes rotation towards the exposed edge. Elir and Elia protect place-bound care and human dignity, respectively, from capture. PG Ledger, Penguin Dashboard, Regenerative Reciprocity, Correction Loop, and Flow Desk connect observation, support, decision, responsibility, and learning.

Together they make a generic figure visible:

> **Spiralweb investigates how ordinary money can move through a different ethical, relational, and institutional grammar, so that it protects life-sustaining capacity without turning life into a commodity, a financial equivalent, or an asset.**

This inquiry carries the ethical stance of Green Paper 20, Planetary Guardianship: Holding the Line, into the economy. Guardianship protects without laying claim to what is protected. GP23 therefore asks what limits must apply when support, contracts, and finance enter the relationship:

> **Money can support what it is not entitled to own.**

This is at once an economic grammar, a flow architecture, and a learning architecture.

It is a **grammar** because it restores distinctions between relationships and forms of value that economic systems often collapse.

It is a **flow architecture** because it asks how money, work, knowledge, attention, decision-making power, and responsibility move—from where, through what conditions, to whom, and with what consequences.

It is a **learning architecture** because no generic model can decide in advance what a living place needs. Every application must be open to correction, limitation, suspension, and change through experience and local judgement.

And it is a **membrane** because it must connect different economic and institutional worlds without dissolving their differences. A membrane permits passage, but not unrestricted flow. It sorts, protects, translates, and makes conditions visible.

The paper's decisive movement is therefore not a search for the perfect price. It is a movement from externalised consequence to internalised responsibility: from the attempt to make all of life's value economically exchangeable to the more concrete task of locating responsibility, payment, and the possibility of correction within the institutions and relationships that receive value or produce consequences.

---

2. The Lived Indecency

This architecture arises not only from a theoretical interest in alternative economies. It also arises from the experience that something in the existing distribution has become indecent.

The indecency does not necessarily appear as a single deception or a single malicious actor. It appears as a recurring pattern: people, places, and living systems carry the time, attention, risk, and reproductive capacity that make a valuable practice possible, while a disproportionate share of income, ownership, and decision-making power accumulates elsewhere.

The artistic economy is a clear example. Music may be heard millions of times, become part of people's identities, accompany grief, love, work, and community, and still leave many performing artists without an income capable of sustaining an ordinary life. Streaming has made access to music nearly limitless for the listener. But access and remuneration have not grown in proportion. The European Parliament has noted that a majority of authors and performers receive very low payments from streaming, while the UK Competition and Markets Authority has shown an extreme concentration of plays among a small group of top artists.[1]

The issue is not only whether a particular streaming service pays too little per play. It is the deeper displacement: a cultural way of life is treated as though it were merely the delivery of files to a distribution platform. The years of practice, artistic risk, failed works, local scenes, teaching, inspiration, periods without income, and the human capacity to create at all disappear from the transaction's field of vision. Passion becomes a free factor of production. Freedom is financed through debt, casual work, unemployment insurance, partners' income, family networks, or burnout. When a few artists receive a grant or lasting public recognition, it appears as an exception, even though culture as a whole is a shared condition of life.

Similar patterns exist in care, education, local associational work, small-scale farming, open source, journalism, nature management, and relational labour. Systems receive the product or effect but often assume that someone elsewhere will pay for the capacity that keeps the practice alive.

At the same time, the economy can reward activities extremely highly when they are close to ownership, financial leverage, intellectual property, data, platforms, or speculative scale. This does not mean that everyone working in finance, technology, or gaming is doing something wrong, or that complex work should not be paid. The question is structural: why is the right to capture value so strong around scalable assets, while the work of sustaining people, culture, and nature is so often treated as a cost, a vocation, or a private passion?

Spiralweb does not begin with a claim of moral purity. We are ordinary consumers ourselves. We use platforms, buy cheaply, seek convenience, and participate in the systems we criticise. The point is precisely that the problem cannot be reduced to the virtue of individual consumers. When practical infrastructure makes the cheap, fast, and extractive movement the easiest one, personal conscience is an insufficient corrective.

A decent economy therefore requires more than good intentions. It requires institutional priorities and weightings that make it possible to pay for the work and capacity on which society actually depends.

---

3. The Polycrisis Is Not a Backdrop

This crisis of distribution is not unfolding within a stable society in need of minor adjustment. It is unfolding within a polycrisis: climate change, biodiversity loss, pressure on land and water, war and displacement, growing inequality, debt, fragile supply chains, mental distress, demographic shifts, and a technological transformation of work.

The word polycrisis must not become a dramatic catch-all that makes everything appear hopeless. Its precise meaning is that the crises interact. Drought becomes food insecurity; food insecurity becomes debt and migration; insecure work intensifies psychological strain; psychological strain reduces participatory capacity; political distrust makes long-term climate and nature decisions more difficult. A solution in one register may shift the cost into another.

Denmark illustrates the tension. The country has high material security, strong public institutions, and a strong green self-image. Yet Denmark’s Country Overshoot Day in 2026 fell on 20 March: if everyone lived with the resource demand associated with the average pattern of consumption in Denmark, the year’s regenerative budget would be exhausted in less than three months.[2] The overshoot measure is a model with methodological limitations, not a judgement on any individual person. But the signal is difficult to dismiss. A way of life may feel normal while requiring more planetary regenerative capacity than exists.

All warning lights are flashing while the institutional rules of the game continue to reward throughput, short-term output, and individualised adaptation. Institutions remain largely calibrated to a world in which the natural foundations of life could be treated as background, fossil surplus as an engine, and human restorative capacity as a private matter.

That calibration is obsolete.

The task is not merely to make people consume more correctly. It is to recalibrate the institutional weight given to practices that need wages, time, education, legal form, security, and social recognition. If society needs more soil building, water care, biodiversity work, local food security, climate adaptation, care, conflict capacity, and cultural cohesion, these needs must be able to become decent working lives—not only campaigns, volunteerism, or temporary projects.

---

4. A Labour Market Unravelling and Taking Shape

Global labour-market turbulence makes the question urgent. The World Bank describes a coming employment challenge in which about 1.2 billion young people are expected to reach working age in developing economies over the next decade, while current projections indicate that only about 420 million jobs will be created.[3] These are global projections, not destiny. But the gap points to a social contract already under pressure.

In India, high growth may coexist with extensive youth unemployment and underemployment. In China and elsewhere, livestream selling, platform work, and permanent digital self-presentation have become paths to income for young people who struggle to find stable positions. A person stands in a small illuminated street studio and sells directly into an algorithmic market. This may be inventive, entrepreneurial, and genuinely income-generating. But it may also be a working life in which the body, face, personality, and continuous availability become the means of production itself.

The decisive question is not whether such a life looks strange from the outside. It is who carries the risk. The platform can change its algorithm. The audience can disappear. The working day can spread across the entire day. No employer necessarily has to pay for illness, education, breaks, equipment, or old age. The young person appears self-employed but may in practice be deeply dependent on an infrastructure over which they have no influence.

Generative AI intensifies this movement. The ILO estimates that roughly one in four jobs worldwide has some exposure to generative AI and that transformation of tasks is more likely than the complete replacement of all jobs.[4] This is an important qualification. AI is not a single wave that mechanically removes work. It changes the division of labour, pace, access to skills, and bargaining power. It can accomplish in a week something that previously required the prolonged coordination of many people. This does not make the result equivalent, nor does it remove the need for human oversight.

The productivity gain is real. But its social meaning depends on ownership and distribution. If AI-freed time primarily becomes higher returns, fewer employees, and more intensive monitoring of those who remain, the technology reinforces the cold edge. If part of the gain is instead converted into shorter working hours, learning, care, art, ecological restoration, and local capacity, it may become part of a different transition.

AI also has a concealed human and ecological underside: data work, moderation, labelling, traumatic content, mining, energy, water, infrastructure, and people who correct the systems' errors. The smooth digital surface must not lead us to repeat the old confusion and assume that frictionless delivery means frictionless production.

The flow architecture therefore asks not only: which jobs disappear? It asks: which human capacities are released, who gains the right to them, and what work do the planet and society actually need?

---

5. The Body Is Not a Private Error Message

Alongside economic and ecological turbulence, broad attention is growing around the nervous system, the body, regulation, sleep, movement, food, contact with nature, trauma, and boundaries. It appears as yoga, mindfulness, somatic practices, therapy, communities, slower ways of living, self-building, ecological cultivation, outdoor life, and a desire to live with a smaller material footprint.

Some of this can become a lifestyle industry, identity consumption, and yet another demand for individual optimisation. A person may end up feeling inadequate because they are not also meditating correctly, eating cleanly, exercising, sleeping eight hours, building their own house, and regulating their nervous system, while the structures producing the pressure remain untouched.

But beneath the surface of the wellness market lies a generic truth: human capacity is embodied. A nervous system cannot be treated as an infinite resource. WHO emphasises that decent work can protect mental health, while excessive workloads, low control, and job insecurity are risks; it also estimates that depression and anxiety cost around 12 billion working days globally each year.[5]

To be “in green” cannot mean permanent calm, positivity, or the absence of conflict in this paper. Life requires mobilisation. People must be able to enter a state of alarm, act, set boundaries, and meet danger. What matters is whether they can return; whether exposure rotates; whether relationships and institutions exist that help the body move out of a permanently red state.

If people systematically break down under a form of work, the body is not merely a private error message. It is a field indicator.

Here private does not mean hidden, but individualised. When stress, exhaustion, or breakdown recur among people living under similar conditions, the body’s response cannot be understood solely as a fault in the individual. It must also be investigated as feedback from the form of work, institution, or economy in which the body is embedded. The body does not in itself provide an unambiguous diagnosis, but it does call for inquiry.

Moral Biology and the principle of **Gold Before Bloom** arise from this. Before a person is expected to flourish, innovate, document impact, develop, scale, or be resilient, they must have sufficient warmth, food, sleep, safety, dignity, and time. Gold is not a luxury. It is the basic human capacity to endure that makes flourishing possible without self-exhaustion.

Some will call this a moral premise. It is. But it is also a biological and institutional reality. A society that underfunds human restoration pays later through illness, absence, conflict, lost knowledge, and relational breakdown. Creating decent conditions of life is therefore not merely kindness. It is the maintenance of shared capacity.

---

6. From Poacher to Conservation Steward

The image of poachers being trained as conservation stewards or rangers is compelling because it gathers several layers of transition into one human movement.

A person who previously lived by hunting an endangered animal may possess exceptional knowledge of landscape, tracks, seasons, behaviour, and local routes. Within a narrow legal and market grammar, the person is only an offender. In a broader reading of the field, they may also be a person whose competence was shaped under conditions of poverty, limited access to lawful income, and an economy in which the animal is worth more dead in an illegal chain than alive to the local community.

Programmes that create genuine livelihoods and retrain former hunters for protection demonstrate a possible redirection: the same place-based attention can move from extraction to stewardship. This is not a romantic purification. There may be violence, local inequality, militarised conservation, dangerous work, and conflicts over rights. A ranger's uniform does not automatically make a system just. But the example makes something important visible: work is not merely an individual attribute. It is shaped by what institutions and flows of money make possible.

The ILO defines green jobs as **decent jobs** that contribute to preserving or restoring the environment. The word decent is decisive.[6] According to the ILO, UNEP, and IUCN, nature-based solutions could create up to 32 million new jobs by 2030 if investment is made in skills, nature-based infrastructure, and decent working conditions.[7] The potential is considerable, but it is not self-executing.

Green employment can otherwise become another cold edge: low pay, insecure project contracts, dangerous tasks, gendered care burdens, unpaid local knowledge, and global branding built on other people's exposure. Stewardship must therefore not become a more attractive word for expecting people to sacrifice themselves for a cause yet again.

The possible emerging field of work is broader than conventional nature management. It can include people who:

- maintain soil, water, forests, coasts, and habitat;
- grow healthy food and preserve seeds, soil knowledge, and local provisioning capacity;
- observe change and connect local experience with research and public authorities;
- support human regulation, rest, movement, and relational capacity;
- work with climate adaptation, self-building, repair, and less resource-intensive housing;
- maintain cultural spaces, music, stories, and practices that make a place humanly inhabitable;
- translate between institutions without taking over local authority;
- hold conflict, succession, learning, and the possibility of correction.

These practices are not all the same, and they should not be pressed into a single profession. The point is that they can all carry functions that the market product alone does not finance. They can become parts of an emerging stewardship field if payment, education, rights, and responsibility are developed with the same seriousness as in other professions.

---

7. Lifting One Another Into Something Better

Penguin Economics begins with a simple image: a colony does not survive by celebrating the strongest at the edge. It survives by organising warmth, exposure, and rotation so that no body is used permanently as a shield for the others.

Applied to the economy, this does not mean everyone must always receive the same, or that differences in experience, responsibility, and effort are irrelevant. It means that basic dignity and welfare should not be treated as a private prize available only after market value has been demonstrated. They are shared conditions of production and life.

We do not lift one another into something better by promising everyone a harmonious life. We do it by creating paid frameworks in which more people can apply their attention, craft, care, local knowledge, and creative power without being economically penalised because their work maintains shared goods rather than scalable assets.

This entails a decisive double movement:

1. We must move resources towards life-sustaining practices.
2. We must protect those practices from absorption by the same extractive logic that made the redirection necessary.

A conservation steward should not have to prove their value by producing ever more measurable units of nature. A yoga teacher or therapist should not turn human vulnerability into an endless customer journey. An artist should not document every encounter with an audience as social impact. A local steward should not be permanently available because the work is called a vocation. An association should not convert every relational moment into a fundraising story.

This is why the membrane is necessary. Money must be able to enter the field, but its claims to ownership, acceleration, visibility, and equivalence must be limited.

Spiralweb's working question can now be formulated as follows:

> **Can some of society's existing money, institutional capacity, and AI-freed time be moved towards decently paid, place-based work that sustains human, cultural, and ecological viability—without turning life itself into a commodity or payment into its equivalent?**

This is not a promise that stewardship can absorb the whole of a future employment gap. Nor is it an idea that everyone should return to the land or live in the same way. It is a direction for institutional learning: which functions have we taken for granted? Who already performs them? What would it cost to make the work viable? Who receives the value or produces the consequence? Which forms of payment can protect capacity without purchasing the field?

---

8. Flow Architecture as Recalibration

In this light, Spiralweb is not primarily a proposal for a new currency. It is an architecture of recalibration.

It seeks to recalibrate the institutional weight given to different forms of work and value:

- from output alone to the capacity that makes output possible;
- from individual adaptation to partially shared responsibility;
- from nature as background to living systems as material jurisdiction;
- from passion as free input to passion carried by decent frameworks;
- from efficiency without provenance to visible movements of gain, risk, and cost;
- from a permanent front line to rotation and restoration;
- from pricing life to financing named stewardship functions;

- from abstract impact to correctable relationships in concrete fields.

Flow architecture asks not only where the money ends up. It follows the whole passage: where did it come from? What conditions did it carry? What did it seek to make possible? Who gained authority? Which work became visible, and which remained hidden? Who could say no? What happened to bodies, relationships, places, and species? Could the movement be corrected?

Here economic grammar, learning architecture, and membrane become one figure.

The economic grammar keeps different relationships distinct. The learning architecture makes the hypotheses correctable. The membrane regulates passage between the different logics of capital, institutions, and living fields. Penguin Economics helps us see the cold edge. Moral Biology and Gold Before Bloom remind us that no abstraction may demand more than living bodies can carry. Elir and Elia protect place-bound commitment and human dignity, respectively, from exchangeability and capture. PG Ledger preserves provenance. Flow Desk helps the next legitimate movement find its form.

The coherence does not lie in all concepts saying the same thing. It lies in their holding different necessary constraints around the same movement.

From here we can return to the economy's fundamental confusion.

---

9. The Fundamental Economic Confusion

The market economy is particularly strong at one operation: establishing a price in a transaction between a buyer and a seller. This operation is real and practical. It makes products, labour, and services exchangeable and enables people to coordinate across great distances and complex societies.

The problem arises when the transaction is allowed to define where value comes from.

At least five distinct movements are then easily compressed into one:

1. Something creates, carries, or sustains value.
2. Someone senses or recognises the value.
3. The value is described, documented, or measured.
4. A legitimate actor decides to allocate resources.
5. A payment or market transaction takes place.

The fifth movement is often treated as evidence of the first four. If someone is willing to pay, something is said to have economic value. If no one pays, its value appears subjective, external, or economically irrelevant.

But a wetland regulates water before anyone purchases a unit of its function. A person provides care before that care is invoiced. A chinampero maintains soil, canals, knowledge, and living relationships even when the product price covers only the produce. A teacher contributes to a child's education and development without the salary being the monetary equivalent of the child or that development.

Payment does not necessarily create the value. It can protect, recognise, or strengthen the capacity that makes the creation of value possible.

This distinction is the paper's point of departure:

> **Price is not value. Payment is not equivalence. Resource allocation can protect capacity without setting a price on life.**

---

10. Not a Rejection of Markets—A Limit on Their Jurisdiction

Spiralweb need not claim that markets are unreal. Market transactions are real social and institutional events. They affect access, distribution, production, work, security, and power.

But the market is not the whole of reality.

A product may have a market price while the living and social conditions that make it possible remain unpaid. A transaction may be voluntary while historical property relations, a lack of alternatives, or unequal bargaining power shape its terms. An economic result may be positive while water, bodies, relationships, or institutional trust deteriorate.

Spiralweb's possible contribution is therefore not to replace markets with a single new universal economic order. It is to limit the market's claim to be the only legitimate translator of value.

The market can pay for products and specified services. Public institutions, communities, foundations, and other recipients of value can at the same time finance the capacity that sustains shared conditions of life. People can support one another without purchasing performance. And some values can be protected without being made fully measurable or exchangeable.

This is a plural economy: not because everything counts as currency, but because different relationships are not forced into the same form.

---

11. Four Distinct Economic Relationships

A hybrid transition requires clear distinctions above all. At least four economic relationships can coexist within one field.

11.1 THE PRODUCT AND SERVICE TRANSACTION

Here something bounded is exchanged:

- food;
- plants;
- materials;
- transport;
- teaching;
- a guided tour;

- advice;
- a specified service.

There may be a price, contract, delivery, quality requirements, rights, and remedies. The grammar of markets and contracts is relevant.

But payment covers what has actually been agreed. It must not silently be taken to represent the entire living, cultural, and institutional system that made the product possible.

Product payment is not stewardship payment.

11.2 PAYMENT FOR STEWARDSHIP WORK

Here a person or organisation is paid for concrete work, responsibility, or capacity held in readiness:

- maintenance of water, soil, or habitat;
- observation and local preparedness;
- transmission of seeds and knowledge;
- coordination;
- teaching and succession;
- documentation;
- care between project periods;
- institutional translation;
- conflict and relational work.

This is not Elia and should not be romanticised as voluntary care. If agreed work is performed, there must be real wages or contractual payment.

But the payment need not be tied to a tradable unit of nature. One can pay for a stewardship function and the capacity that carries it without claiming that the amount corresponds to nature's total value.

11.3 COLLECTIVE RESOURCE ALLOCATION TO SHARED CONDITIONS OF LIFE

Some payments do not arise as purchases of an individual commodity. They arise as institutional or political decisions to sustain necessary shared capacities.

Funds may come from:

- public budgets and taxation;
- participatory budgeting;
- maintenance and prevention funds;
- foundations and philanthropy;
- membership contributions and voluntary donations;
- universities;
- institutional partnerships;
- tourism- or visitor-related contributions;
- companies with concrete territorial relationships;
- international climate, water, food, biodiversity, or cultural programmes.

A public-school teacher's salary is not the monetary value of a child's education and development. An emergency-preparedness budget is not the true price of safety. Likewise, a public or collective payment for stewardship can be a decision to sustain necessary capacity, not a pricing of life.

11.4 SUPPORT WITHOUT THE PURCHASE OF PERFORMANCE

People may need support that does not purchase work or guarantee output:

- help during illness or crisis;
- the possibility of rest;
- a temporary space of safety;
- support for human dignity and continued presence;
- a gift without demands for branding, exposure, or loyalty.

This is the domain of the Elia relationship. It must remain distinct from wages and contracts. Otherwise an economic system risks turning human love into a substitute for decent payment—or concealing control as generosity.

---

12. Elir and Elia: Not Currencies, but Protective Grammars

The early Green Papers called Elir and Elia currencies. The term carried an important intuition: the economy contains more kinds of flows and obligations than market currency can describe. But the word currency can also mislead. It may invite tokenisation, exchangeability, conversion, accumulation, and speculation.

Within this architecture, Elir and Elia should therefore be understood as **relational grammars**, not as parallel monies.

12.1 ELIR: THE PLACE-BOUND GRAMMAR

Elir describes care that accepts becoming concrete, bounded, and accountable to a place.

Elir:

- is bound to a particular living field;
- connects responsibility with time and consequence;
- creates stewardship, not ownership;
- has ceilings and limits;
- cannot circulate freely;
- cannot accumulate power;
- must not be treated as transferable value;
- rejects speculation and anonymity.

A payment can be **Elir-oriented** if it moves within a place-bound, transparent, and limited stewardship relationship. But the amount is not Elir. Elir is the grammar that determines what the money may do, whom it makes responsible, and how the relationship can be corrected.

12.2 ELIA: THE HUMAN GRAMMAR

Elia describes support for a person without converting the support into debt, ownership, delivery, loyalty, or visibility.

Elia:

- does not purchase work;
- does not guarantee output;
- does not demand gratitude;
- protects the right to say no, change direction, rest, or leave the relationship;
- must not be used as branding;
- should reduce pressure rather than increase it.

A flow of money can be **Elia-oriented**, but the amount is not Elia either. Elia describes the quality of the relationship and its prohibitions against capture.

12.3 WHY THE DISTINCTION MUST BE PRESERVED

If Elia is treated as Elir, the person becomes a territory over which the giver believes they have a claim. If Elir is treated as Elia, the land becomes a feeling without concrete obligations.

And if either is treated as a tradable token, its centre of gravity shifts from relationship and responsibility to circulation and accumulation.

The architecture should therefore not issue a digital Elir or Elia currency. Its task is more modest and more demanding: to allow ordinary money to move through the protective relationships named by Elir and Elia.

---

13. Penguin Economics: Where Should Capacity Move?

Elir and Elia help delimit relationships. Penguin Economics offers a distributive logic.

In the circle of emperor penguins, no one remains permanently at the cold edge. Small movements bring the most exposed towards the warmth and move those who have recovered towards the edge. Rotation is not charity. It is a condition for the whole to remain viable.

Translated into human and institutional systems, Penguin Economics asks:

- Where is the cold edge?
- Who or what carries disproportionate risk, load, or maintenance?
- What capacity is missing if exposure is to remain temporary and repairable?
- Has the same person, family, or function become the permanent front line?
- Can responsibility, visibility, and risk rotate?
- Should further expansion stop until existing capacity debt has been repaired?

Penguin Economics is not yet a macroeconomic model. It is a discipline of budgeting and distribution:

> **Support seeks the cold edge without turning exposure into an identity or permanent client status.**

The cold edge may be an older steward without a successor, a young person without stable income, a woman carrying both market and care work without corresponding authority, a necessary habitat function without a saleable product, or an association carrying coordination and responsibility through unpaid labour.

Rotation also requires ceilings. Unlimited support for one actor can create new centralisation. Capacity must move far enough to restore viability, but not in a way that makes the recipient the owner of the whole.

---

14. Non-Compensation: No Common Currency for Everything Living

One of the most decisive consequences follows: not all values should be converted into the same unit.

Spiralweb keeps at least three readings separately visible:

1. **Land / Life** — what is happening to soil, water, habitat, species, food, and other local conditions of life?
2. **Steward Viability** — can the people carrying the work live, rest, learn, participate, and continue?
3. **Governance / Commons** — how are authority, responsibility, consent, knowledge, money, and the possibility of correction distributed?

These readings must not be averaged into a single green score.

An ecological outcome cannot compensate for exhausted people. An income gain cannot compensate for the loss of local authority. A democratic process cannot make polluted water acceptable. A strong habitat cannot legitimise hidden or dangerous work.

This is not a prohibition on measurement, prioritisation, or political choice. Societies sometimes have to make difficult trade-offs. But the trade-off must appear as a named human and political decision—not be hidden inside a technical composite score.

The non-compensatory rule thereby protects the architecture from becoming another natural-capital, impact, or ESG system in which heterogeneous forms of life and harm can be offset through a unified account.

---

15. From Internalising Value to Internalising Responsibility

> **The paper’s central turn**
> The decisive shift is not from no price to the right price, but from externalised consequence to internalised responsibility.

Standard economic responses to externalities often seek to internalise them through:

- taxes and charges;
- subsidies;
- regulation;
- property rights;
- trading systems;
- payment for ecosystem services;
- carbon or biodiversity credits.

Some of these instruments can be useful. A pollution charge can change behaviour. A public subsidy can make necessary maintenance possible. A contract can place a responsibility that would otherwise remain invisible.

But internalisation can have a stronger meaning than pricing alone:

> **It is not necessary to internalise nature’s full value in a price. It may be both possible and necessary to internalise more responsibility within the institution, budget, and relationship that receives value or produces consequences.**

This means:

- making dependency visible;
- identifying who carries the work and risk;
- recording who receives the gains;
- locating decision-making responsibility;
- financing necessary stewardship functions;
- protecting rights and local boundaries;
- preserving the possibility of correction;
- avoiding the claim of full economic equivalence.

This movement is more modest than the promise of setting nature’s true price. But it may be more institutionally transformative because it changes who must see, decide, pay, and remain responsible.

16. PG Ledger: An Accountability Ledger, Not a Natural-Capital Account

If the architecture is neither to issue new currencies nor reduce life to a common unit, what is the function of a ledger?

PG Ledger should not record:

- the total monetary value of a field;
- tradable units of nature;
- universal stewardship credits;
- a certified sustainability score;
- an asset that can be owned or resold.

Instead, the ledger should preserve relationship and provenance:

- Where did the money come from?
- What conditions did it carry?
- Who had the mandate to decide?
- Which function or capacity was to be supported?
- Who performed the work?
- What was observed before, during, and after?
- What was interpretation, and what was direct observation?
- What uncertainty or disagreement existed?
- What unintended consequences arose?
- Who could correct or halt the movement?
- What happened to human, living, and institutional capacity?

The ledger’s trust statement is modest:

> Sufficient local authority, transparency, documentation, and capacity for correction can make the next movement of resources reasonable to support.

This is not proof of universal value. It is an accountable connection between money, work, decision, and consequence.

---

17. Flow Desk: The Practical Function of the Membrane

A ledger can remember. A dashboard can help people read. Neither decides what may legitimately happen now.

Flow Desk names the human and institutional function that helps a possible movement find its appropriate form:

- Is there a real and present need?
- Is there a legitimate local holder?

- Has the relationship been verified?
- Can the field receive support without becoming overloaded?
- Are the purpose and conditions of the money clear?
- What kind of flow is this: product payment, payment for work, stewardship allocation, Elia-like support, emergency assistance, or something else?
- Who can decide?
- What must remain private?
- What is the smallest responsible movement?
- What should cause it to pause or stop?

Flow Desk is not an automated marketplace, matching algorithm, or central grant-making authority. It is a lightweight, humanly accountable membrane function.

Its core proposition is:

> **The field lives. The Ledger remembers. The Dashboard helps people read. Flow Desk helps the next legitimate movement happen. Named humans decide.**

---

18. Correction Loop: The Economy Must Be Able to Learn

A new economic grammar becomes dangerous if its own concepts cannot be corrected.

A payment may begin with a good purpose and create dependency. Documentation may begin as transparency and become a disproportionate administrative burden. A nature indicator may improve attention and later become a target that practice is artificially optimised against. A foundation may support local capacity while also shifting the agenda. A stewardship agreement may create security for one person and exclude others.

Every concrete application must therefore preserve:

- the right to correct without penalty;
- the right to contest interpretation;
- the right to limit documentation;
- the right to pause;
- the right to leave a voluntary relationship;
- named responsibility for decisions;
- traceability between a decision and its later consequences;
- the possibility of concluding that the tool or hypothesis does not hold.

AI can support research, synthesis, translation, scenarios, documentation, and structural memory. AI cannot determine local truth, mandate, or legitimate equivalence. The final consequential movement—The Last Impulse—belongs to a named person or legitimate body with real access, time, competence, and authority to change the decision.

---

19. The Association as the First Economic Test

Spiralweb Stewardship Association is not merely a legal container for funds intended for others. The Association is itself the first place where the grammar must withstand reality.

This means the Association must be able to show:

- what is paid work;
- what is voluntary stewardship;
- where volunteer effort is becoming concealed capacity debt;
- which funds go to local activities and materials;
- which funds go to steward livelihood and local capacity;
- which funds finance analysis, fundraising, coordination, administration, safeguarding, and learning;
- what conditions a donor, foundation, or institution imposes;
- who decides;
- where conflicts of interest exist;
- what turns yellow or red;
- when new ambitions must wait.

The Association's work is not an irrelevant "cut" taken from local flows. Project development, fundraising, research, agreements, administration, auditing, learning, and accountability are real work with real costs.

But these costs must not be hidden inside the field's needs either. They must stand as a distinct and legitimate capacity stream.

The same rule applies to all participating institutions. A university, local organisation, steward, and Spiralweb must each be able to show what work and responsibility they carry and how these are financed.

---

20. Three Visible Money Streams

A first practical budgeting discipline is to keep at least three flows of money distinct:

STREAM A — LAND, WATER, AND LIVING SYSTEMS

May include:

- materials;
- soil and water work;
- plants and habitat;
- tools;
- repair;
- direct ecological activities;
- safety and necessary infrastructure.

STREAM B — STEWARD VIABILITY AND LOCAL CAPACITY

May include:

- paid working time;
- income stability;
- transport;
- education and training;
- occupational safety;
- rest and restoration;
- succession;
- local organisational capacity;
- care burdens that would otherwise make the work impossible.

STREAM C — GOVERNANCE, COORDINATION, AND LEARNING MEMBRANE

May include:

- local meetings;
- project development and fundraising;
- contracts and administration;
- research;
- translation;
- documentation;
- PG Ledger and learning work;
- institutional coordination;
- safeguarding;
- financial accountability;
- conflict and correction processes.

The streams may be connected within one project, but they must not conceal or compensate for one another. A project is not healthy merely because materials are funded if people and coordination are expected to be carried for free. Nor can high administrative costs be legitimised by abstract reference to an ecological purpose.

---

21. A Possible First Seed: Stewardship Compact

The architecture need not begin with a new national law, a new currency, or a complete alternative economy. It can begin with a small, correctable agreement in a real field.

A preliminary **Stewardship Compact** could include:

1. A concrete place or stewardship function.
2. A legitimate person, group, or institutional relationship that actually carries the work.
3. A local formulation of what is necessary and worth sustaining.
4. A description of what market payment for products already covers.

5. A mapping of existing public, philanthropic, and institutional payments.
6. An identified stewardship function or capacity that remains underfunded.
7. A realistic budget in ordinary currency.
8. Three distinct budget streams and readings.
9. No claim that the payment corresponds to nature's total value.
10. No automatic payment per biodiversity, carbon, or impact unit.
11. Clear decision rights, consent, and boundaries.
12. Light observation of what the support made possible and what burdens it created.
13. The right to correction, pause, and closure.
14. A Return to the people and place that carried the inquiry.

Payment could consist of:

- a stable base payment for stewardship capacity;
- payment for concrete, agreed functions;
- materials and direct costs;
- a reserve for repair and the unpredictability inherent in living systems;
- separate financing for coordination, documentation, and learning.

Such an experiment would not prove a new economy. It could show whether ordinary money can move through a different relational and institutional grammar, and whether doing so improves viability, accountability, and consequences for living systems without creating new capture.

---

22. Where Does the Money Come From?

No grammar abolishes this question. Money has to come from somewhere.

But the question can be asked more precisely:

- Who already receives products or services?
- Who receives wider public, institutional, cultural, or ecological value?
- Who avoids costs or harm?
- Who has a legal responsibility?
- Who has budgetary authority?
- Who voluntarily wishes to support?
- Who has gained research, visibility, reputation, or learning?
- Who currently carries the cost without corresponding capacity?

Possible funding sources include market income, public budgets, participatory budgeting, foundations, universities, tourism, institutional partnerships, public procurement, membership contributions, voluntary donations, and international programmes.

The sources are not morally equivalent. Each carries different conditions, power relations, and responsibilities. The membrane must therefore do more than move the money. It must make its character visible.

A philanthropic contribution does not automatically become non-philanthropic because it is called stewardship. A public payment does not automatically become democratic because it comes from a budget. A market payment is not necessarily fair because it is voluntary. What matters is which rights, obligations, decisions, and consequences travel with the flow.

---

23. Gain Without False Economic Equivalence

An institution will reasonably ask what it receives from its payment. That question need not be answered through a single monetary return on investment.

Spiralweb provisionally distinguishes three forms of gain:

- **G1 — released or protected capacity:** less rework, better handovers, more coherent time, fewer hidden compensations.
- **G2 — avoided cost or harm:** fewer errors, breakdowns, complaints, emergency interventions, or irreversible losses.
- **G3 — strategic room to act and resilience:** a genuine opportunity to invest differently in maintenance, prevention, relational continuity, or ecological capacity.

Released time is not automatically a liquid saving. A probable avoided harm is not a realised amount. Strategic room to act exists only when a legitimate decision-maker can actually reprioritise.

The rule is therefore:

> **No budget gain before field gain.**

First, existing capacity debt is repaired. Next, the newly restored capacity is protected. Only then can an actual gain be shared through a visible and legitimate decision.

---

24. What the Architecture Is Not

It is not:

- a new digital currency;
- an Elir or Elia token;
- a market for universal stewardship credits;
- a carbon or biodiversity product;
- a system that sets nature’s true price;
- a claim that markets are unreal or always harmful;
- a replacement for wages, contracts, public budgets, or legislation;

- a method for making all care measurable;
- a composite impact score;
- philanthropy disguised as a market economy;
- a moral right to dispose of other people's land, knowledge, or work;
- a universal model that can be installed in every field.

Nor is it finished.

It is a working and correctable hypothesis that ordinary money can move through better distinctions, clearer responsibility, and greater sensitivity to living consequences.

25. What the Architecture Seeks to Make Possible

It seeks to make the following possible:

- price without a claim to total value;
- payment without ownership;
- wages without romanticising them as love;
- support without capture;
- measurement without a composite score;
- local authority without isolation;
- public finance without necessarily centralising interpretation;
- institutional coordination without making the institution sovereign;
- documentation without turning people into data providers;
- learning without a demand for replication;
- economic support for life without making life the economy's equivalent.

This is not a small ambition. But its first actions can be small.

26. The Combined Architecture

Layer	Function in the economic grammar
Moral Biology	Life, body, and capacity come before abstraction and demand
Meatball Before Symbol	No economic story may demand what bodies and habitat cannot carry
Elir	Keeps stewardship place-bound, limited, and non-speculative
Elia	Protects human support from performance demands, debt, and capture
Penguin Economics	Directs capacity towards the exposed edge and requires rotation

Layer	Function in the economic grammar
Commons as Habitat	Treats shared conditions of life as lived relationships, not merely resources
Three non-compensatory streams	Keep Land/Life, Steward Viability, and Governance/Commons separately visible
PG Ledger	Preserves the provenance of money, decisions, work, and consequences
Penguin Dashboard	Helps people read without a composite value score
Correction Loop	Secures the right to correct, the right to stop, and named responsibility
Flow Desk	Helps the next legitimate movement of resources find its form
The Association	The legal and economic membrane that must first test the grammar on itself
AnchorPoints	Hold relational and place-based continuity
Fields	Make actual phase, evidence, action, and consequence visible
Green Papers	Hold the public, versioned, and correctable learning architecture

No single component is the architecture. It arises in the connections and in the discipline surrounding what must not be collapsed.

---

27. Relationship to Spiralweb’s Working Hypotheses

This paper stands on its own, but it is also a movement within The Spiral of Hypotheses: Spiralweb’s open register of correctable working hypotheses. The paper does not validate the register and does not automatically add a new hypothesis. It especially develops and corrects two existing connections.

H0-c proposes a stewardship economy in which the living field is a primary unit of attention and consequence, and in which decently paid work, shared infrastructure, and local authority can endure without support buying control. This paper gives the meta-hypothesis its first combined economic grammar: product payment, payment for work, collective allocation to shared conditions of life, and support without the purchase of performance must be able to coexist without being conflated.

H56 says that living value must become consequential without price becoming its sovereign form. The paper develops one possible passage through this dilemma: it is not necessary to internalise the whole value of life in a price; it may be possible and necessary to internalise more responsibility within the institution, budget, and relationship that receives value or produces consequences. This is a working hypothesis, not a demonstrated alternative economic system.

At the same time, the paper corrects **H30**. Elir and Elia should no longer be described as currencies or units of measurement for place-bound and human value, respectively. Here they are understood as protective relational grammars that limit what ordinary money and support may do. The amount is neither Elir nor Elia.

Other supporting connections include:

- **H8** — steward viability can limit ecological and institutional expansion;
- **H16–H17** — Land/Life, Steward Viability, and Governance/Commons remain distinct and non-compensatory readings;
- **H25** — rotation must prevent the same people and functions from becoming the permanent cold edge;
- **H27** — guardianship is not ownership; a person who protects, or finances protection, does not thereby acquire what is protected;
- **H29** — support must not purchase substantive local control;
- **H49** — money is bound capacity, and displaced work is not released work;
- **H55** — protective friction can be a legitimate membrane function;
- **H59** — a community is not homogeneous, and stewardship language may conceal internal power and unpaid work.

These connections do not make the hypotheses true. They make the paper's dependencies, correction points, and possible contribution to the further spiral more visible. The macroeconomic architecture remains open: the paper offers an initial economic grammar, not a completed model for taxation, money creation, ownership, labour markets, public budgets, or large-scale distribution.

---

28. A Research and Practice Agenda

If this framing is to develop from a coherent idea into credible practice, it must be examined critically.

Some central questions are:

1. Which concrete stewardship functions are already being performed but remain inadequately financed?
2. How do local actors themselves distinguish between product work, stewardship, governance, and care?
3. When is a stewardship payment a legitimate payment for work or capacity, and when does it become concealed control?
4. Can public and philanthropic finance carry multi-year maintenance without demanding excessive documentation?
5. How can a reasonable amount be determined without claiming full equivalence of value?
6. Who has the mandate to define the function and assess whether it is being carried out?
7. Can three-stream budgeting improve the actual distribution of resources?
8. Can a shadow ledger reduce friction and reveal hidden work without creating further recording burdens?
9. When should market, public, philanthropic, and reciprocal flows be combined, and when should they remain entirely separate?

10. How can stewardship payment avoid locking people into a particular identity or practice?
11. Can financing continue if a particular project, charismatic species, or popular story loses attention?
12. Which parts of the grammar prove useless or wrong in real fields?

These questions must not be answered academically alone. They must encounter concrete budgets, people, places, and decisions.

---

29. A Small Transition May Be Enough

A transition need not begin with the entire market economy accepting a new theory of value.

It can begin when one association, public institution, foundation, or local partnership makes a more precise decision:

- a product is paid for as a product;
- work is paid for as work;
- stewardship capacity is financed as necessary shared capacity;
- human support is given without concealed demands;
- nature is not made the monetary equivalent of the payment;
- the conditions and consequences of money remain visible;
- people and places can correct the relationship.

If this improves the capacity to hold a living field without creating further capture, something real has happened.

It is not yet another new economy. It is a seed.

The seed may die. It may prove administratively heavy, politically naive, or economically insufficient. It may be captured by branding, metrics, or institutional interests. It must therefore develop slowly, with open conditions for correction.

But it may also show that the economy already contains more room for action than its dominant story allows. Ordinary money may be able to finance a different form of relationship if people and institutions relinquish the idea that payment creates ownership of value.

---

30. Conclusion: The Economy as Responsible Passage

Spiralweb does not propose that money should disappear. It proposes that money should lose its status as life’s supreme measure.

Money is a powerful social technology. It can coordinate, concentrate, release, protect, accelerate, exhaust, or enable action. It is not neutral, but neither does it have a fixed moral character. Its effects depend on the rights, institutions, relationships, stories, and responsibilities through which it moves.

The combined working hypothesis is therefore:

> **Spiralweb investigates how money, knowledge, and institutional capacity can move towards people and places that sustain shared conditions of life, without life being reduced to a commodity or financial equivalent.**
>
> **Markets can pay for products and agreed services. But product prices do not necessarily carry the long-term stewardship that keeps soil, water, biodiversity, people, and commons alive. Spiralweb therefore investigates hybrid forms through which ordinary money can also finance place-based stewardship capacity and human viability.**
>
> **Elir and Elia are not new currencies. They are protective grammars for place-bound care and human support, respectively. Penguin Economics directs capacity towards the exposed edge. PG Ledger makes the origins, conditions, decisions, and consequences of money visible. Living, human, and institutional outcomes remain distinct and cannot compensate for one another.**
>
> **The aim is not to set the true price of life. It is to make the economy more accountable to the life on which it already depends.**

Another sentence must now be added:

> **It is not enough to move warmth towards the cold edge after people have burned out, species have disappeared, soils have been depleted, or culture has fallen silent. A decent economy must organise work, ownership, and capacity so that the same people, places, and forms of life are not repeatedly made into the permanent edge.**

This is what makes flow architecture more than a distributive mechanism. It must not only alleviate harm after the event. It must help change the passages that produce the harm and open paid, dignified paths into the work that a viable future already calls for.

A membrane is neither a market nor a wall. It makes responsible passage possible.

This may be Spiralweb's economic task.

Editorial Practice and Suggested Citation

Editorial practice: AI-assisted and human-responsible. Method and responsibility.

Suggested citation: Engberg, L. A. (2026). A Decent Economy Under the Jurisdiction of Life: Money, Stewardship, and Responsible Passage Through Living Fields. Green Paper 23, Second Spiral — Applied Inquiries, candidate v0.2.1, English working translation of the Danish original. Spiralweb Papers.

Notes and External Background Material

The external material is used as background and a reality check. It does not in itself constitute evidence for Spiralweb's economic grammar, which remains a working and correctable hypothesis.

Working Source Connections in the Spiralweb Architecture

- Moral Biology and the first constitutional series
- Penguin Economics: Rotation as Care
- Meatball Before Symbol: The First Constitution
- Elir: When Love Touches Soil
- Elia: Love Without Capture
- Commons as Habitat
- The Spiral of Hypotheses / The Founding Field
- The Correction Loop
- Penguin Dashboard: Legibility as Governance
- Knowing From the Ground
- Regenerative Reciprocity
- Capacity, Contact, and the Emerging Stewardship Economy
- Support, Funding, and Patron Pathways
- The Protocol Habitat
- the PG Ledger and Flow Desk architecture

Further development must connect this grammar with concrete fields, budgets, payments, institutions, and local rights of correction. Xochimilco may become one possible application. The Association itself is the first.

---

1. European Parliament, "Music streaming sector: EU must ensure just pay for artists and fair algorithms", 17 January 2024; UK Competition and Markets Authority, "Music streaming report published", 29 November 2022. UNESCO also describes the growing dominance of streaming within the recorded-music economy in Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity. The sources demonstrate concentration and problems of remuneration in the sector, but do not by themselves determine how a fair economy for artists should be organised.↩
2. Global Footprint Network, "Country Overshoot Days 2026". Country Overshoot Day is a model-based illustration of a country's consumption pressure, not a precise account of every person's life or every dimension of ecological burden.↩
3. World Bank, "A Coming Jobs Challenge in Emerging Markets". The figures cover developing economies as a whole and should not, as sometimes happens in public debate, be repeated as figures for India alone.↩

4. International Labour Organization, “One in four jobs at risk of being transformed by GenAI”, 20 May 2025. The ILO emphasises transformation rather than straightforward technological replacement as the most likely overall effect.↩
5. World Health Organization, “Mental health at work”, 2 September 2024.↩
6. International Labour Organization, “What is a green job?”. The definition connects environmental contribution with the requirements of decent work.↩
7. International Labour Organization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, and United Nations Environment Programme, Decent Work in Nature-Based Solutions 2024, 2024. The job potential is a scenario linked to investment and skills development, not an automatic projection.↩

Green Paper 23 — A Decent Economy Under the Jurisdiction of Life

Second Spiral — Applied Inquiries · candidate v0.2.1 · September 2026 · English working translation of the Danish original

Publisher: Spiralweb Papers ·