

GREEN PAPER · FIELD PAPER

From Climate Debate to Living Systems Governance

How Climate is Positioned in the Spiralweb Habitat

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The Green Paper Series is a quiet publication layer: working notes, field notes, and slow investigations rather than closed final products. This paper follows the same form — not as a conclusion, but as a precise and practice-oriented positioning of the Spiralweb habitat in relation to the climate field.

AUTHOR'S NOTE — AI CO-CREATION

This paper was drafted in dialogue between Lars A. Engberg and AI language systems. Responsibility for all substantive claims, omissions, and interpretations rests with the author.

The gap we are working in

The climate field has achieved something remarkable. In three decades it has moved from the margins of scientific discourse to the centre of international governance, institutional planning, and civic life. Emissions accounting, net-zero targets, carbon markets, and climate finance now constitute a mature institutional field with global reach.

And yet ecological conditions continue to deteriorate — across soil systems, water cycles, biodiversity networks, and food producing landscapes.

This is not a failure of awareness or political will alone. It reflects something structural: a mismatch between how climate is framed and how living systems actually function.

Climate is most often addressed as an emissions problem. But emissions are a symptom. The underlying condition is that living systems — soil, water, vegetation, biodiversity, and the people who hold relationships with land — are under sustained pressure that no emissions metric captures.

The Spiralweb habitat begins from this observation. Not to replace climate action, but to address what it cannot reach.

What the stewards see

The people we work with in Kitgum, Uganda, in the Sous Valley of Morocco, in Mexico City, and in Karachi do not talk about emissions. They talk about whether water is moving through the soil. Whether the shade is returning. Whether the pollinators are back. Whether the children still come to the field.

These observations are not anecdotal. They are governance-relevant data about whether a living system is giving to life or taking from it. They are also data that the climate field, in its dominant form, has no standard way to receive.

This is the gap we are working in.

A different starting point

Climate governance tends to ask: how do we reduce emissions?

The Spiralweb habitat asks a prior question: how do we maintain and regenerate the conditions that make life possible?

This is not a retreat from urgency. It is a recognition that emissions reduction, however necessary, does not in itself restore degraded soil, return water to dry landscapes, rebuild biodiversity, or sustain the people who hold the land. These require a different kind of attention — slower, more local, more relational, and more honest about what is actually happening on the ground.

The shift is from managing a variable to stewarding a system.

The stewardship ledger

At the centre of the Spiralweb methodology is a stewardship ledger: a simple, repeatable observation structure that makes living conditions visible, comparable, and supportable across contexts.

The ledger is built around eight observation categories that any steward can apply to any piece of land, regardless of climate zone, land practice, or technical skill: soil cover, vegetation layering, water behaviour, succession signals, biodiversity presence, soil health, biomass cycle, and human rhythm.

That last category matters. The steward's own capacity — their time, energy, and carrying capacity — is treated as an ecological variable. A depleted steward cannot read the land accurately and cannot make good decisions. Human viability is not separate from ecological observation. It is part of the same system.

This is what we mean by Moral Biology: ethics is not only what we believe, but what we can carry. The conditions in which people work and live determine what they are capable of caring for.

The decisive question behind every observation is simple: is this practice giving to life?

Three streams that must not be collapsed

The governance architecture that holds this observation work is built around three structurally separate streams, read monthly at every field node.

The first stream tracks land and ecology: soil cover, moisture, biodiversity, vegetation. The second tracks steward viability: time, energy, livelihood, and the capacity to carry the work without hidden depletion. The third tracks coordination and governance: whether agreements, roles, and decisions are clear and traceable.

These streams are kept separate for a reason. Many governance systems allow one apparently healthy metric to conceal a failing condition elsewhere. Ecological recovery can hide steward burnout. Apparent social cohesion can hide habitat decline. Governance neatness can hide empty soil.

The three-stream structure makes reality-faking structurally difficult. If Stream B — steward viability — goes red, Stream A — the ecological work — is paused. Ecological ambition must not be financed by human depletion. This is not a soft principle. It is a structural guardrail.

What this means for climate governance

Carbon accounting matters. Biomass accumulation matters. Soil carbon measured over time is a meaningful indicator of system development. The Spiralweb methodology does not reject these tools.

But carbon cannot be sovereign. A system that sequesters carbon while depleting its stewards is not a healthy system. A monoculture plantation that accumulates biomass while eliminating biodiversity is not regeneration. The decisive question is always the same: is this giving to life?

The contribution of the stewardship ledger to the climate field is not to replace emissions metrics, but to make visible what emissions metrics leave out: the living conditions of soil, water, biodiversity, food systems, and the people who hold them.

If the next phase of climate work requires not only emission reduction but the active regeneration of living systems, it will need governance tools that can read those systems honestly — at field level, across bioregions, and in a form that supports rather than extracts from the people doing the work.

Real fields, four continents

The methodology described here is not theoretical. It is being tested across active and preparatory field relationships on four continents.

In Kitgum, Uganda, Akena Patrick and village elders are working with a community food forest protocol that begins at 10 m² — one pixel, one observation cycle, one honest record. Elders and children hold the observation rhythm together. The governance structure is local, the documentation is shared, and the work is already visible in the field.

In the Sous Valley of Morocco, Abdelhamid Badaoui is transitioning an 80-hectare dryland site toward a multi-layer food forest, with soil and water logic preceding any expansion. The protocol begins with diagnosis: map what exists, observe what moves, record what changes.

In Mexico City, the methodology meets urban wetland governance and the chinampa tradition — floating gardens that have fed a city for centuries and are now under pressure from urban expansion and water stress.

In Karachi, a city-wide open invitation is forming for the methodology to meet schools, utilities, and civil society — not as a programme owned by any single institution, but as a genuinely polycentric field with no single gatekeeper.

Across all these contexts, the shared observation structure holds. The practice belongs to the place and the people who hold it. The protocol provides the form.

Polycentric governance — the institutional design

The institutional design of the Spiralweb habitat draws directly from Elinor Ostrom's polycentric governance theory — the empirical demonstration that locally grounded, self-organised institutions can govern shared resources with greater effectiveness, justice, and ecological durability than either centralised state control or unregulated markets.

The pixel is a governance-relevant unit of situated observation. The Circle of 13 — the primary human-scale governance form — is large enough for diversity of roles, small enough for trust and shared rhythm. The field node is a verified, documented, institutionally held practice site. The wider network is nested and non-centralised. Each steward retains unconditional withdrawal rights.

What the network offers is not control. It is legibility, solidarity, and the slow accumulation of shared evidence across time and place.

The value of this approach

The Spiralweb habitat holds value that is difficult to locate in standard institutional categories.

- A governance architecture — for making living conditions observable and supportable at field level, without centrally managed programmes.
- A knowledge system — built on an evolving public body of work across twenty papers, five applied protocol reports, and field documentation from active nodes.
- A relational field — connecting stewards, researchers, institutions, and supporters around a shared question rather than a shared product.
- A coordination structure — for making the next phase of regenerative work legible enough to be supported by those with resources, and honest enough to be trusted by those on the ground.

Its value lies in integration rather than extraction. In what it holds together rather than what it optimises.

An invitation

The climate field has achieved awareness, institutionalisation, and coordination at a scale that would have seemed impossible thirty years ago.

The next step — the one that climate action alone cannot complete — is the governance of living systems: soil, water, biodiversity, food, and the human capacity to care for them over time.

The Spiralweb habitat is one serious attempt at that step. It is not finished. It is an emerging institutional infrastructure — constituted in March 2026, field-active across four continents, and building the governance tools that the next phase of planetary stewardship requires.

It is sustained by those who can see that this work matters and choose to support it.

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