

The power of 'gardening': Cultivating resilience in policy making

Today's global challenges—ranging from climate disruption and health system stress to energy transformation—are characterised by complexity. In such environments, conventional policy approaches that rely on control, optimisation, and linear causality increasingly reach their limits. This talk proposes a shift from an 'engineering' model of policymaking—aimed at designing fixed, stable systems—to a 'gardening' model that emphasises adaptive capacity, relational interdependence, and long-term system flourishing. Using the metaphor of gardening as a conceptual and practical guide, I argue for a policy paradigm rooted in humility, care, and distributed agency. Rather than resisting complexity, this approach engages with it: enabling systems to self-organise, evolve, and remain resilient in the face of disruption. Drawing on examples from healthcare governance, I will outline how such a model can inform actionable strategies that support inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable decision-making.