

## RIFS-Blogpost

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# Reflections from ChangeNOW: Hope, Greenwashing(?) and Unseen Wounds]



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ChangeNOW 2025: the "world expo of solutions for the planet" took place in Paris.

**Attending the ChangeNOW conference in Paris this past April was both energizing and thought-provoking. With a buzz of changemakers in the air, it truly felt like the beating heart of the**

**! Zum Aktualisieren der Textelemente, Zitation markieren und dann F9 drücken !**

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**sustainability movement had gathered in Grand Palais. The conference delivered on its promise to spotlight bold ideas and connect mission-driven entrepreneurs, researchers, policymakers, and activists across sectors, but also raised additional points of reflection that I will address in this blogpost.**

#### 1.1 What worked

**Energy, Encounters, and Innovations:** The atmosphere was unmistakably alive. Being surrounded by people who care deeply about the planet created a rare sense of unity and urgency. I was particularly inspired by the range of grassroots projects and high-impact startups tackling challenges like regenerative agriculture, ocean protection, and circular design. These were not just ideas – they were prototypes, products, and policies ready to scale. The conference offered space for valuable networking, and I left with new connections that I believe will turn into long-term collaborations.

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#### 1.2 What didn't really work

**The Missing Depth in Corporate Panels:** While much of the conference pulsed with authenticity, not everything felt fully aligned with the values it preached. One of the recurring frustrations voiced – usually during informal chats – was the lack of depth in corporate panels. Sessions featuring large corporations often fell back on vague statements like “we’re on a journey” or “sustainability is at our core,” with little substance to back them up.

The risk here goes beyond a few uninspiring panels. There is a broader concern about **greenwashing** taken to a new level. ChangeNOW's majority stake is now owned by a media group linked to French billionaire Bernard Arnault – someone associated



with far-right narratives and climate denialism. Some of the event's key partners, like BNP Paribas and Vinci, have questionable environmental track records. This puts many of us in an ethical dilemma: how do we distinguish between genuine corporate efforts and PR campaigns designed to polish a tarnished image?

It's a complicated question with no easy answers. I trust that many sustainability professionals were there in good faith, genuinely working toward change. But how do we avoid the risk that these spaces become co-opted by the very systems they seek to transform?



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### 1.3 Talking about trauma – but not all of it

Some conversations during the conference focused on the trauma caused by climate change: displacement, eco-anxiety, loss of biodiversity, and collapsing communities. But I have yet to meet someone asking: **what about the trauma that caused climate change in the first place?**

Gabor Maté, a physician and trauma expert, argues that many of today's political and business leaders are themselves deeply traumatized individuals. In *The Myth of Normal*, he writes about how unhealed emotional wounds can manifest as the drive for dominance, endless growth, and disconnection. When leaders are disconnected from their own emotions, it's not surprising that their decisions disconnect humans from nature too.

Addressing climate change thus requires more than clean energy and recycling, it calls for **deeper cultural healing**. If we want to foster regenerative leadership, we must understand the pain behind the patterns. This is not about justifying harmful behavior or slipping into paternalism. Rather, it's about cultivating compassion so that we can design systems that support healthier leadership.

This idea is something I will explore further in my upcoming book as part of my RIFS fellowship, *Beyond Profit: Redefining Business for a Regenerative Future*. We cannot transform outer systems without also addressing the inner landscapes that shape them. Would you agree?

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### 1.4 And then, there was serendipity

Of course, this blogpost wouldn't be complete without a little twist of serendipity. Imagine my surprise when, after returning from Paris, I found out that one of my new housemates in Potsdam, **Adenike**



**Oladosu (another RIFS Fellow) was one of the speakers at ChangeNOW!** We were both there, navigating the same corridors in Grand Palais, soaking in the same energy, and we only discovered this shared experience after she came at the RIFS. Sustainability might be a global movement, but sometimes, it really is a small world.

