

# Bioregional Weaving Lab

## Waterford, Ireland



COMMONLAND  
4 Returns for Healthy Landscapes



PREENCING  
INSTITUTE



# Waterford Landscape Context

## County Waterford and surroundings, Ireland

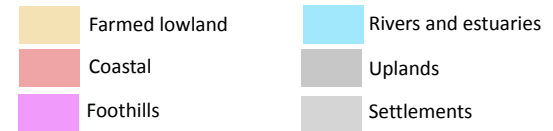
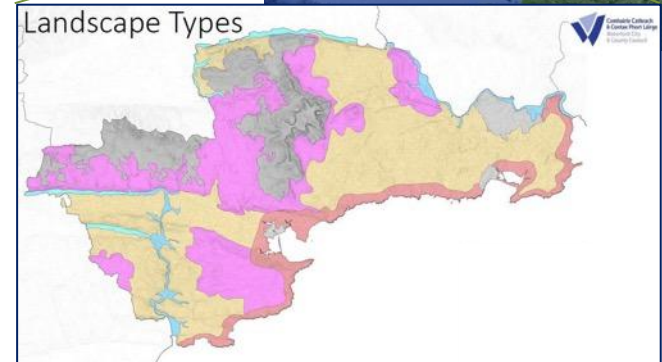
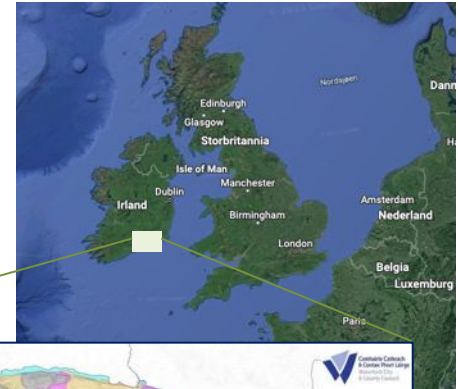
Dominated by **most productive land in Ireland for dairy and meat**. Focus on export and intensive farming. Also: Waterford City, rural villages, uplands, wetlands, and marine ecosystems.

Population expected to grow by 60% by 2040, with 83,000 new jobs.

Area: 185,700+ hectares

Socio-ecological challenges:

- **Soil** depletion, **biodiversity** loss, nutrient run-off and decreasing **water quality**
- Increasing pressure for economic **growth** and job creation, **housing** and **land prices**.
- One of worst in Europe for: **mental health** in farming communities, **obesity** and **cancer**



# Stakeholders and Timeline

## Key partner

**GIY** (Grow It Yourself) - a social enterprise that delivers climate and environmental impact through the **food empathy** that comes from growing some of your own food. Programmes for **schools, businesses, growing groups** and **TV** - reaching millions on global basis.

## Stakeholders in the BWL, examples:

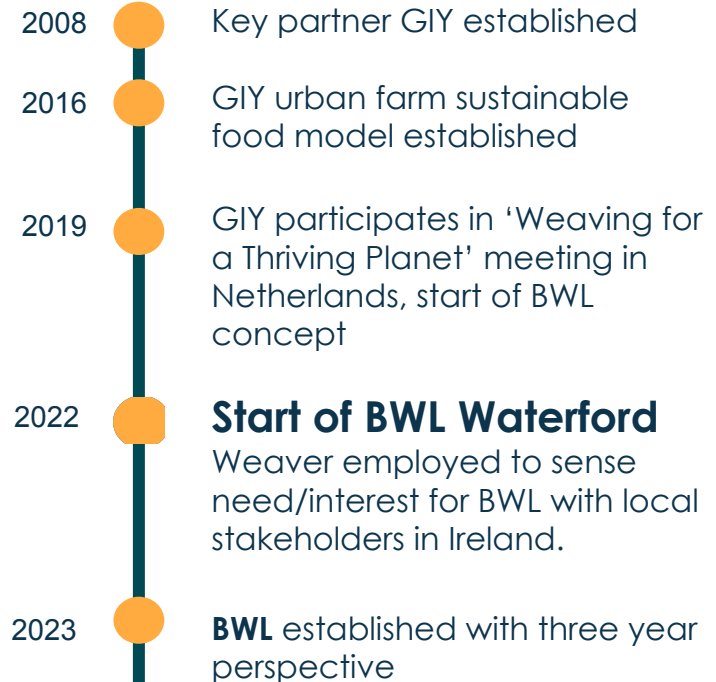
- SETU (university)
- Farming with Nature
- Dunhill Multi-Educational Centre
- Comeragh UplandCcommunity

## Visions:

**BWL collective vision in Europe:** to restore, regenerate and protect 1 million hectares and mobilise 1 million changemakers, using 4 Return framework

**Working vision for exploratory phase in Ireland:** A resilient food system that supports a thriving

## Timeline



# Working for a co-owned vision

To develop a **co-owned** long-term vision and strategy for the landscape, a **Bioregional Food Manifesto** was **co-written**.

This creative writing process focused on what stakeholders **know, believe and want**.

*"A manifesto is **not** a policy document. It is something much more **unruly**.*

*Manifestos are designed to **shake us up**, to get us thinking, to change not just our minds but also our **hearts**.*

*They are not the summation of how far we have come. Instead, they are the **starting points for change**.*

*They wake us from complacency. And they help **usher in futures we can't yet imagine**."*

The manifesto is designed to be **read or played out loud** in local and policy-making fora – it is the voice of the people in this landscape

[Listen to the manifesto here](#)

Manifesto extracts are used as our **compass towards a common vision** at BWL workshops and for strategy development.



## Waterford Bioregion's Food Manifesto (to be read out loud)

Food is not a luxury.  
Food is basic social need by which everyone has a right. It is a right not only to enjoy food,  
but to be able to create it.  
Food is a way of building ideas, connections and communities. Through food we connect  
a sense of ourselves and of each other.

Food is a common good, it is grounded in our common need, and in our common responsibility.  
Food is non-transferable. How we grow food, how we consume it, how we think about it, can lead  
to radical change.

Food is not only about the present: rethinking our relationship with food is a call for a  
different future, a better one.

We, the local producers and consumers of food in the Waterford Bioregion, assert:  
We have the right to challenge. We deserve the status quo.

We have the right to respond, and within we demand:  
Our rights to justice, philosophical, cultural, affective, economic and political. Sometimes  
all at once.

Our dream is about building a better world.

We stand for:  
The breaking-down of barriers between thinkers and doers. We are, all of us, both thinkers  
and doers.

A celebration of the relationships between retailers and producers, because we are the  
ultimate decision makers.  
Food that is sustainable for our health.  
The protection of the land.  
The richness of the soil.  
The flourishing of the imagination.  
New ideas. New stories. New traditions.  
New ways of thinking so the food can grow and eat.

We want future food to come from a place where community is core. Our  
aims are both idealistic and practical. We want to create new habits, and  
new ways of working. We want viable ways of living. We want to protect  
our rivers, restore nature, cherish life. We want a world where  
everything is connected, from rocks to the human heart.

We want our children and grandchildren to know the taste of wild animals  
and the foods those before us enjoyed. We want to be good guardians of  
the soil, and of our traditions. We want to become good consumers.

We want future food to be:  
Grown and eaten with passion, without which we will fail.  
Inspirational.

Easy to get and affordable for all.  
Convenient to sample and commemorate.

Just like:  
Laughing.  
Singing. In a spirit where farmers and consumers share an interest in  
justice.

Who usually:  
Fair.  
Delicious.  
Delicious.  
Delicious.

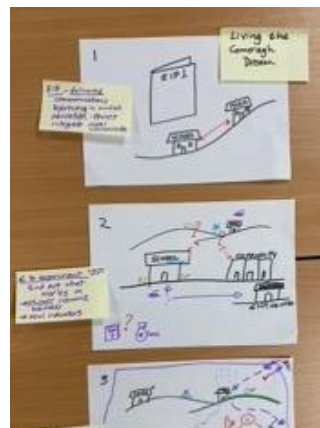
"We want future food to come from a place where community is core. Our aims are both visionary and practical. We want to create new habits, and new ways of working. We want viable ways of living. We want to protect our rivers, restore nature, cherish life. We want a world where everything is connected, from rocks to the human heart"

# Trust and togetherness - The foundations for change

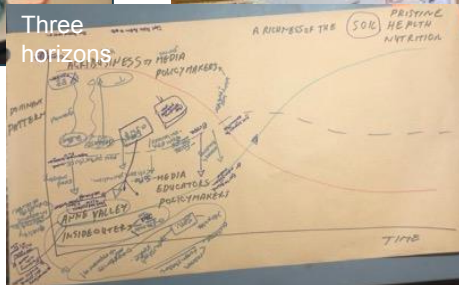
1. **Trust** was built through visits to stakeholders own projects that are the **pockets of the future** we aspire to
2. Well attended multi-stakeholder workshops **together** uncover **holistic** approaches to systemic innovation



System modelling



Three horizons



## Action pathways 1

### Stakeholder projects and participation

From the outputs of the future thinking workshop the following patterns for action could be seen:

1. Reframe producer-consumer relationships – neighbourhoods and townships, work to establish food partnerships and biodistricts
2. Develop strategy to create a new body to promote organic, regenerative and non-chemical farming in Ireland
3. Look for opportunity to partner with, or start new, media channels that communicate quality assured stories about organic/no-chem farming, food, and changemaking for future we aspire to
4. Campaign to stop spreading protected area
5. Building a proper support structure for community participation – e.g. water-related
6. SETU as a beacon of sustainable and regenerative mindsets, research, teaching and practice. Demonstrations of what works for soil, water, food and education.
7. Short and long skills training (NOTS++) for Regen farming, biodiversity and more
8. Farming with Nature – can this grow to be piloted in the bioregion?
9. Community processing hubs and mobile units – what would these look like and how to get them going in the bioregion?
10. The power of procurement and new business forms
11. Schools - schools in community, heritage and place. Schools as places to give children opportunities to experience being changemakers

## Action pathways 2

### BWL support platform and documentation

From the work of the BWL in Waterford and through the wider BWL collective we see potential patterns of action in the following areas:

1. The role of BWL as facilitating collective impact network
  - Communications – connecting, stories, website, learning.
  - Events, workshops, analysis and visits
  - Tools for systems change – identify and design systems change strategies
  - Indicators that mean we are getting there (local 4Rs) – collective impact collation.
  - Governance and decision-making processes – what will they be?
2. Co-ventures within either key org? And inside-outers.
3. Strategic partnership building for long-term collaboration
4. Building an financial ecosystem for transformation by system and landscape change, for both stakeholder projects and actions, and support platform role
5. Landscape Plan – writing and reporting
6. Portfolio of Nature Based Solutions and System Innovations – bioregional, national and international
7. Map-making – for inspiration and clarity
8. Weaving out of the region – upwards to decision-makers, outwards to other BWLs and regions.



Trust and togetherness



Systemic innovation tools



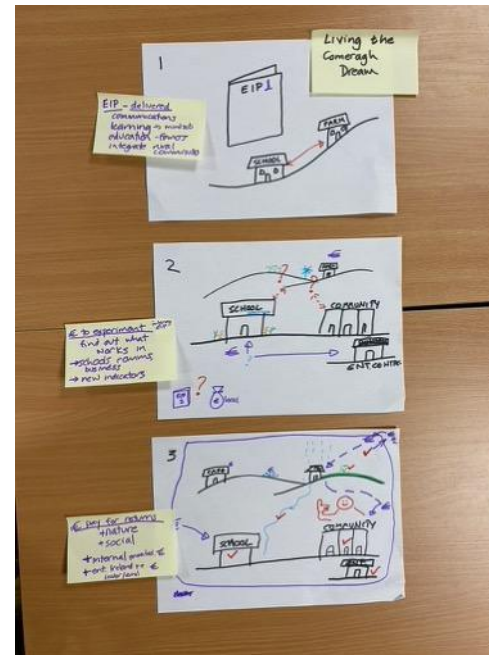
Pathways to change

# Emerging holistic initiatives

These three ideas emerged at a BWL workshop in December 2022 and will be developed in 2023



**Paradise Regained** Investing in whole watersheds. Anne Valley as a case with its integrated wetlands, community land management, education centre, rural enterprise hub.



**Living the Comeragh Dream** New socio-economic model for uplands farmers and rural communities incl. berries, wool, education and local regenerative enterprises.



**Cultivating Community** Community-owned regenerative farms connecting consumers to food, and giving farmers predictable assured salary. inspired by Herenboeren model

# Landscape investment portfolio - tangible



## Established

- **GIY (Grow it Yourself)** – food empathy for widespread change. Looking for investment to deliver on mission.
- **Anne Valley and Dunhill Ecopark** – is a rural community with an enterprise hub and a land-management initiative for water quality (wetlands) and land-management.

## Emerging

- **Upland** berries – refusing investment due to lack of new farmers in Ireland – potential to build on European Innovation Programme (EIP) with Comeragh Upland Communities
- **Farming with Nature** – successful EIP pilot on farming for biodiversity, now looking to explore brand and link to consumers across the landscape
- **Weaving** as the missing part to transformation innovation **within** institutions such as municipalities and universities, as well as to **reach out** to communities and stakeholders.

## Future – idea stage from workshops

- **Fibershed** are looking to establish research and evidence base for circular **textile** industry in the region.
- **Community-owned** farms and **biodistricts**

# Landscape investment portfolio - intangible

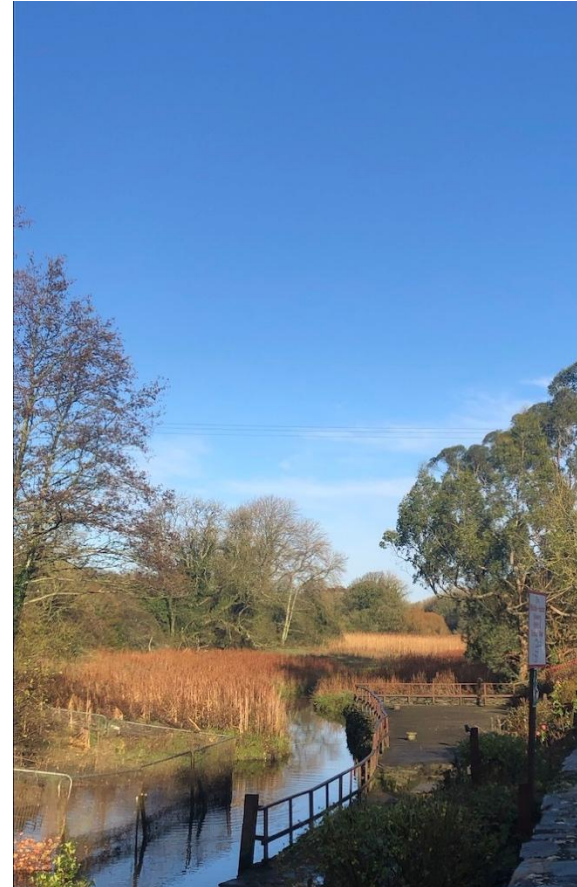


Weaving aims to connect people, projects and place for universal well-being. Any investment portfolio should consider how these are **all entangled** and this need to be reflected in funding.

Landscape finance should include **intangible** projects in their portfolios.

BWL Waterford emerging ideas from workshops for intangible systemic and transformational innovations include:

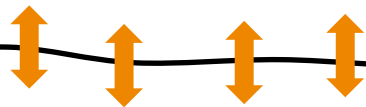
- **Once organic, always organic** – no onward sale to intensive farming.
- Certified organic, but there are non-chemical and regenerative farms not being documented. What **mapping** and **labelling** should reflect where and how nutritious food is produced?
- Organic/regen at the moment is part of national institutions with joint responsibility for intensive and growth driven industry. Need for a **dedicated body**?
- Water quality – no accountability, reinforcement or joined up thinking. Quality decreasing despite investments. **Find the root causes** and lobby for change
- **Planning development procurement** – long-term health of planet and



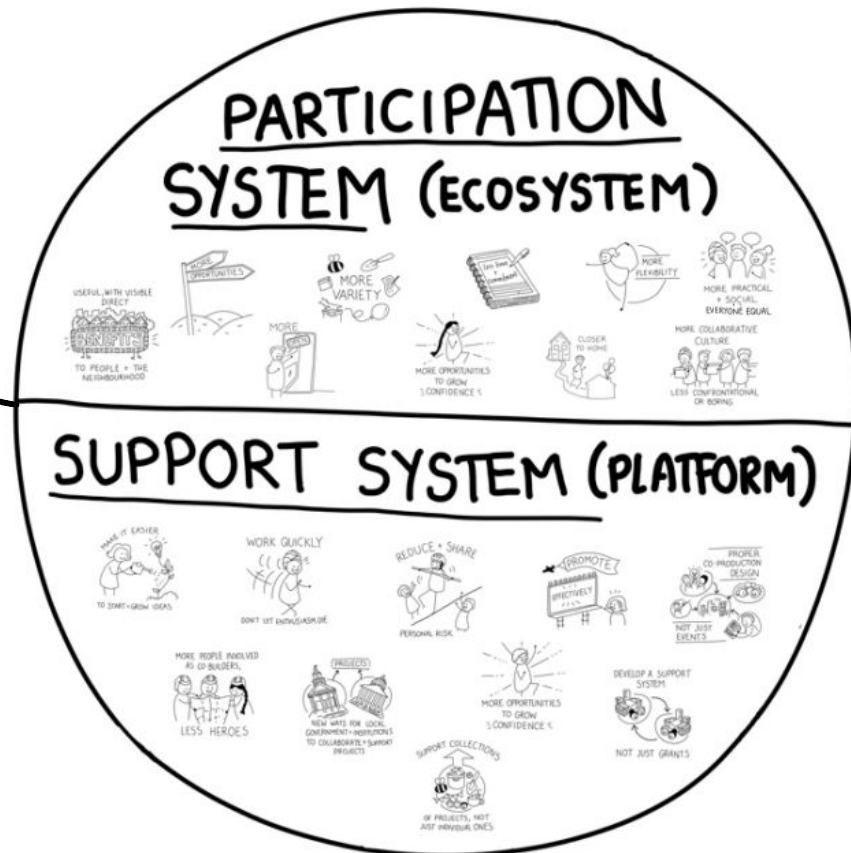


# Financial support is required at two levels:

1 The communities and stakeholders should be well supported in their individual and collective actions and participation to build the futures we collectively aspire to.



2 The BWL support system will aim to support by 'weaving for system change' that delivers our contribution to 1 million hectares and 1 million changemakers, guided by the Bioregional Food Manifesto and within the 4 Returns Framework.



# Funding needs

Two-pronged investment model:

## 1. Projects and programmes

need **grants** as form of start-up capital for regenerative business emergence and early stage growth. **Hybrid** finance models can be developed for medium-longer timescale. Year 1: €7K, Year 2: €150K; Year 3: € 250K; Year 4-10 € 500K

## 2. A support and capacity building programme in the form of a BWL

needs **multi-year grants** both for weaving team, system-change work, and supporting emerging innovations. Year 1: exploration phase: € 150K. Year 2: 3 person core team € 300K. Year 3-10: 5 person core team to include co-weavers and system change competencies: € 500K

### Total core funding:

Once up and running in Year 4, a BWL would need € 1 million a year to support and seed regenerative working practices and emerging innovations.

**Total over 10 years: € 8.4 million.**

### Additional:

To divest, i.e., undertake land purchases and secure regeneration in perpetuity, fund transition payments, as well as support place-based impact investments for future changemaker generations: **€ 50-100 million**



# Lessons learned about funding challenges

There are no innovative financial instruments underway in the Waterford landscape currently. The potential to be a first mover in this field is there to grasp. Some current challenges in securing finance include:

## General challenges

- Major **profit-driven systems dominate**, and extractive and destructive practices are the norm.
- **Mindsets are stuck in the short term**. There is no mitigation for obesity, cancer and mental health, as well as soil health water quality, community, sense of belonging, etc.
- Transactional forms of funding persist. **Funding for collective impact is not available**.
- Access to progressive philanthropists and social finance institutions is hard from this corner of Ireland.
- **Unrestricted core funding for support platform essential (but lacking)** to even start having projects to invest in.
- Little understanding of principles of subsidiarity to get funds out to where they can make a difference

## Challenges in establishing the weaving support platform:

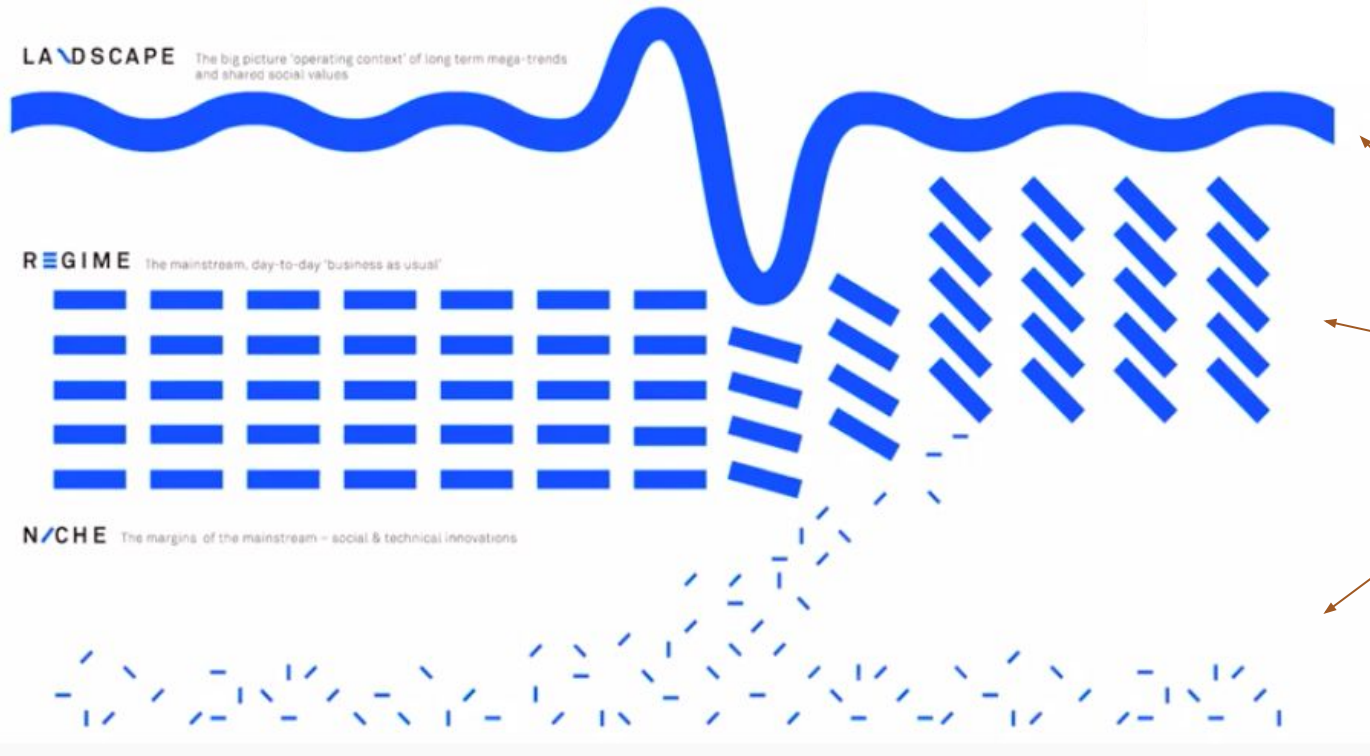
- Trust and togetherness, with a common vision, takes time to build and maintain – who funds that?
- Where to turn for funding relationships and joining dots?
- Where to turn for funding intangible systemic changes?
- And funding for 4 returns (including inspiration) rather than one, two or three (social, financial, natural)?

## Challenges to fund good projects and places such that they become the norm:

- Funding tends to lie in government and bigger organisations that also work for extractive commercialization and export. They can't give our thriving future priority.
- Business models are often extractive themselves.
- Impact investing in whole places is rare/non-existent

# Lessons learned from the process

Change happens at different scales and altitudes all at once.  
Financial instruments and portfolios should reflect this.



Source: Anna Birney, School of Systems Change, [Video](#)

# Key Learnings for Landscape Funders



Invest in portfolios that:

- Generate inspiration from the bottom to the top, and all at once
- Build stable platforms supporting for change processes and weaving
- Include time to co-develop co-owned visions and goals
- Reflect and understand that all impact is entangled in ecosystems
- Include projects for working with intangible change at systems and transformation levels
- Are truly authentic community-rooted processes- that 'listen to the people'
- Believe in emergence
- Incorporate lived experience, equity, diversity, and long-term infrastructures for community empowerment as core investment principles

You as funders really do have the power to trust in listening to the experiences and insights of local people, give them a return of **inspiration** and bring about positive change to whole **place-based communities** and the **landscapes** they live in.

# For more information

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- visit our website:

<https://giy.ie/bioregional-weaving-lab/>

