# RESPONSIBLE DESIGN MANIFESTO

ORNAMO

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BY MEMBERS
OF THE ORNAMO RESPONSIBILITY CIRCLE

Sustainability is a new idea to many people, and many find it hard to understand. But all over the world there are people who have entered into the exercise of imagining and bringing into being a sustainable world. They see it as a world to move toward not reluctantly, but joyfully, not with a sense of sacrifice, but a sense of adventure. A sustainable world could be very much better than the one we live in today.

**— Donella H. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, Dennis Meadows**
Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update

# Responsible Design Manifesto



The Responsible Design Manifesto exists primarily to address the fact that sustainability is not an afterthought in the practice of design, but rather a major guiding notion. In the context of the polycrisis—where multiple, interconnected crises such as climate emergency, biodiversity loss, geopolitical turmoil, and social inequalities converge—this manifesto advocates for a transformation in the mindset of designers, businesses, and policymakers, asking them to emphasize planetary concerns in all aspects of their work. This manifesto aims to inspire a future in which every product, service, structure, and system is created and designed with a thorough understanding of its ecological impact. This approach promotes inventiveness that is consistent with the urgent need to address the planetary emergency.

# The process



The crafting of the Ornamo Responsible Design Manifesto was a collaborative and iterative process involving extensive input from our community. Initially, we held workshops where members shared manifestos they respected, gathering inspiration and identifying key elements for our own. In subsequent workshops, we split into groups to brainstorm the manifesto's goals, audience, and desired impact. These sessions helped us align on the purpose and direction of the manifesto. After summarizing the findings, we ideated on the structure of a draft document, providing a clear framework for content creation. Our members then contributed their expertise and effort to develop the content, enriched by diverse insights and ideas. Regular meetings were held to discuss progress and iterate on the document, ensuring it accurately reflected our collective vision.

Once we had a clean draft, we conducted a final workshop where members of Ornamo Responsibility Circle reviewed and provided additional comments, ensuring the manifesto was thorough and inclusive. After incorporating the final feedback, we finalized the manifesto for release. The result of all that work culminated on the pages below, a manifesto that we believe will guide and inspire designers toward a more sustainable and responsible future.

**The team that has worked on the manifesto is listed here in alphabetical order:**

- Adithya Varadarajan
- Angelos Arnis
- Anna Kokki
- Milja Havusela
- Tarja-Kaarina Laamanen

# The goal of the manifesto

## The manifesto is created with four key goals in mind:

**1.**

**Embedding responsibility and sustainability at the core of design practice**

With the polycrisis emphasizing an accelerating climate emergency, biodiversity loss, geopolitical turmoil and social inequalities, sustainability must be inherent to design, not an afterthought. Success must be understood beyond financial value to treat sustainability as a primary design driver (and, eventually, a business driver).

**2.**

**Building commitment and agency for designers as change-makers**

This manifesto reflects designers' dedication to driving change. Designers must act as activists, arguing for a change from user-centered to planet-centered design, putting social and environmental effects ahead of financial considerations.

**3.**

**Guiding the practice of design with tangible pathways**

The manifesto defines what it means to be a responsible, planet-conscious designer and establishes goals and expectations. It functions as a guiding star and community resource, drawing on collective design skills to promote sustainable behaviors.

**4.**

**Changing the status quo to drive large-scale transformation**

The manifesto seeks to elevate change from the individual to the system level, empowering designers to reconsider their models and processes. It emphasizes the importance of designers collaborating with businesses, recognizing that the transition to sustainability is both desirable and unavoidable.

# Why do we need a manifesto?
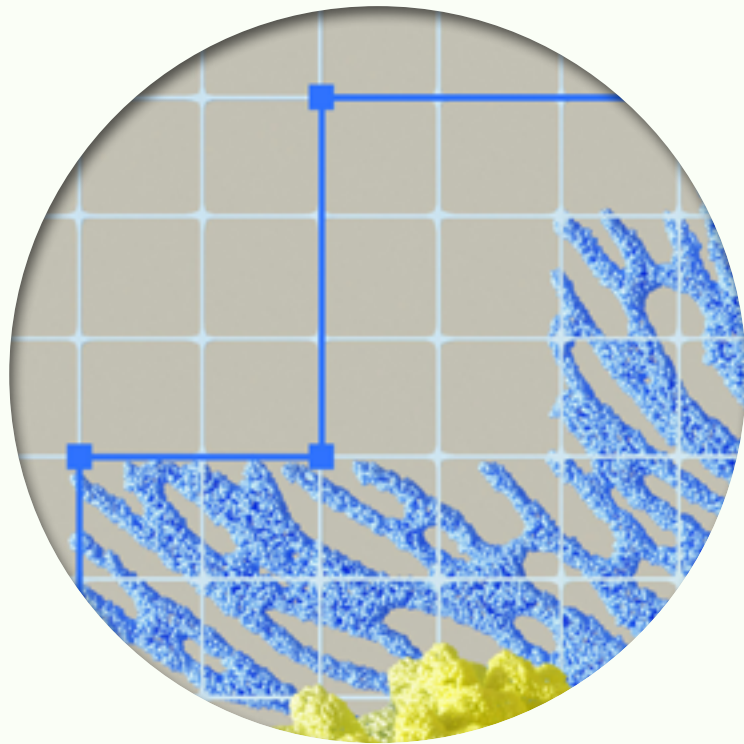
## Recognizing the urgency

The urgency of the planetary emergency is a fundamental motivator for this manifesto. The existential threat posed by environmental degradation needs real action, which should have started years ago. Change is not happening at the desired rate, and quick action is required. According to studies, up to 80% of a product's ecological footprint is established during the design phase, emphasizing the critical role designers play in reducing environmental impact.

## Increasing collaboration

Addressing the planetary emergency requires designers to strive for better futures through more collaboration with clients, organizations, and multidisciplinary peers. This collaborative call indicates that designers are not isolated in their work, but rather part of a bigger community co-designing desirable futures. Collaborative initiatives are critical for accelerating sustainable transitions and building a common vision for better futures.

## Establishing foundational values

A paradigm shift towards responsible design requires a strong foundation of agreed values and objectives. This manifesto seeks to establish a common set of ideas that will unite designers in their commitment to sustainable methods. These values not only create a consistent framework for responsible design, but also help to unite the design community by underlining the relevance and necessity of sustainable design.

## Inspiring action

The urgency, teamwork, and core values all come together to achieve one important goal: to inspire action. Amid the immense challenges created by the polycrisis, this manifesto aims to kindle a spark that will inspire designers of all disciplines to work together to create better futures.

This manifesto seeks to reevaluate the role of designers by encouraging them to adopt sustainability as a basic value. It functions as a call to action, underlining the significance of taking urgent and decisive action to address the different aspects of the polycrisis through responsible design.

# Who is our audience?



The manifesto targets a diverse audience, including designers, multidisciplinary professionals, organizations, clients, educators, policymakers, and the general public. Each group plays a vital role in driving the shift towards responsible and sustainable practices.

## Designers

Our primary audience consists of both Ornamo members and non-members, designers at all phases of their careers, and the design industry as a whole. For this audience, the manifesto emphasizes the need to adopt sustainable practices into their work. It provides practical guidelines and collaborative methods to help designers contribute to a more sustainable future.

## Multidisciplinary Professionals

The manifesto also highlights the critical role of multidisciplinary professionals in achieving sustainable transitions. Engineers, product managers, financial experts, sales and customer success teams, scientists, academics, and other respected professionals are essential collaborators. Their unique perspectives and expertise are invaluable in creating holistic and effective solutions. By working together, these multidisciplinary professionals can create a robust network of knowledge and skills, driving forward the principles of the Responsible Design Manifesto.

## Organizations and clients

The manifesto addresses organizations across all sectors - public organizations, NGO's, as it seeks to define responsible design and the benefits it provides. It underlines that responsible design is more than simply a personal taste held by individual designers; it is a shared purpose for a better future. Working with designers who adhere to this philosophy allows organizations and clients to match their initiatives with sustainable principles and practices. These companies are also future-proofing their business in an ever-growing conscious customer base.

## Educators

Educators are another target demographic for the manifesto that emphasizes the need to prepare students for the expanding role of sustainability in design. With these concepts adopted into their curricula, educators will provide the next generation of designers with the knowledge and abilities needed to promote sustainable innovation

## Policymakers

For legislators, the manifesto provides clear and consistent discourse to support measures that promote sustainable design. It fosters the development of policies that facilitate market reforms while also driving positive environmental results, emphasizing the need of responsible design at the systemic level.

## Beyond labels

Finally, the manifesto provides a clear starting point for anybody interested in ethical and sustainable design. It provides simple explanations and direction to individuals who are unfamiliar with these topics but want to learn more and contribute to a sustainable future.

# What is Responsibility?



As designers, we wield considerable power over people and the environment through our work. What we design, who we design for, and what we include or exclude during the design process can all have a significant impact. In today's world, designers must be aware, mindful, and accountable for the repercussions of their decisions throughout the design process. Responsible design harnesses this capacity to benefit society, the environment, and future generations. By being purposeful and thoughtful, we can help change products, services, structures and systems, resulting in regenerative outcomes. Our responsibility as designers is to anticipate and work toward futures where we can enhance lives and leave the world a better place than we found it. Good design does not only exist at the intersection of feasibility, viability, and desirability, but it also includes responsibility. Good design considers the environmental and social consequences of design decisions, ensuring our outcomes are not just functional and profitable, but also ethical and sustainable.

# What is Responsibility?





### Why do we need to be responsible?

In our current setting, there is an obvious need for responsibility in design. The chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlighted that our guiding principles must be urgency, agency, and equity. Urgency necessitates prompt action to prevent hazards to global and human health. Agency understands our ability to shape the future and the need to act today. Equity necessitates addressing fundamental inequities and ensuring that growth is just and equitable on both local and international levels.

### Core principles of responsible designers

Ornamo's ethical guidelines, based on worldwide norms, were revised in 2023 to assist designers' professional practices and conduct. These criteria emphasize honesty, ethics, and transparency, decline tasks that do not meet professional standards, and promote equality, health, sustainability, accessibility, and cultural diversity. Designers must always improve their talents, respect cultural heritage, and adhere to quality and sustainable standards. They are also in charge of communicating the value of design to all stakeholders, upholding the profession's ethics, and guaranteeing equitable compensation and clear communication in contracts.

Designers must respect intellectual property rights, follow legal standards, and consider the social and environmental implications of their work. They should incorporate a varied range of users in the design process to ensure safety, inclusion, and respect for human dignity. Emphasizing fair competition, designers must avoid misrepresentation and unlawful usage of work. They should also strike a balance between technology breakthroughs and ethical considerations, including potential ramifications such as AI and data privacy concerns. By adhering to these criteria, designers can promote a responsible, sustainable, and innovative design practice.

Read more on Ornamo's ethical guidelines here.

# What is Responsibility?





## Economic goals and beyond

Responsible design not only benefits the environment and society, but it also aligns with important economic goals such as the EU's sustainable activities taxonomy and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) guidelines. Integrating these concepts with our design approaches allows us to promote sustainability while also fostering economic prosperity.

The EU taxonomy provides a system for categorizing sustainable activities and directing expenditures toward environmentally friendly developments. Adhering to these criteria enables designers to receive funding and support for high-quality environmental projects, contributing to a greener economy. Learn more about the EU taxonomy here.
ESG standards prioritize environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and good governance. Aligning with these

criteria enhances design businesses' reputations and attracts clients and investors interested in sustainability. More information about ESG standards is available here.

Regenerative economic models, such as circular economy, doughnut economics, and degrowth, are gaining traction as the planetary emergency intensifies under a business-as-usual scenario. The circular economy focuses on designing out waste and keeping materials in use, thereby creating closed-loop systems that minimize resource extraction. Doughnut economics aims to balance essential human needs with planetary boundaries, ensuring that economic activities do not exceed ecological limits. Degrowth advocates for scaling down certain aspects of production and consumption to enhance environmental and social well-being.

By embracing these regenerative models, responsible design can support economic frameworks that prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term gains. Showing the economic, environmental, and social value of responsible design demonstrates how it supports broader goals and contributes to more regenerative futures.

# Ornamo's Responsible Design Manifesto

How will we reply when future generations ask, "What did you do once you understood the stakes?" Our actions in the present will form our legacy in the future. As designers, we have the potential to shape the future. We must be decisive and transformative. By embracing this manifesto, we commit to making a lasting and valuable impact on the world.

However, designers cannot achieve this alone. We must collaborate with other professionals – engineers, product managers, financial experts, sales and customer success teams, scientists, academics, and more. Designers excel at imagining and designing futures, bringing ideas to life, and making concepts tangible. By combining our creativity and visualization skills with the expertise of others and together with a systemic view, we can co-create against complex challenges.

# Ornamo's Responsible Design Manifesto

## WE REIMAGINE

We are committed to radically reimagining our creative process as a practice, with a focus on regeneration. By including circularity and regenerative design in our daily work, we address the larger picture and improve design's impact on planet restoration and equity. This conscious shift takes us from simply addressing necessities to genuinely caring for the world. By emphasizing diversity, empathy, and active engagement, we redefine what it means to be a maker in a world that requires careful stewardship and imaginative thought.

## WE STEWARD

We accept the essential obligation of infusing every project with care, empathy, and a dedication to ecological restoration. Our job extends beyond meeting urgent needs to include foreseeing and mitigating the environmental, social, and ethical ramifications of our creations. We want to know how our solutions contribute to or hinder future regenerative goals, so that our efforts constantly support a responsible and regenerative future. This commitment to stewardship displays our desire to bring about long-term good change.

## WE CULTIVATE

Recognizing that today's great designs are often detached from our planet's needs, we use the gardener metaphor: we tend, nurture, and cultivate. This method, while difficult, necessitates flexibility and a strong connection to the environment in which we live and influence. By nurturing our designs and the natural environment, we ensure that our creations are compatible with the ecosystems in which they exist, supporting long-term growth and resilience. Our dedication to cultivating stresses the value of meaningful and responsible design methods.

# Ornamo's Responsible Design Manifesto

## WE EDUCATE

We commit to educating ourselves, our peers, and future generations of designers on the principles of responsible and regenerative design. By promoting a culture of continuous learning and open information exchange, we ensure that sustainability is central to our practice. We aim to inspire and motivate others to embrace ecological stewardship, social fairness, and ethical responsibility, resulting in a ripple effect that spreads beyond our direct work and into the larger community. Education fosters a greater awareness and commitment to creating a sustainable future.

## WE DEMAND

We demand that our employers, communities, and stakeholders facilitate systemic changes. We call on leaders and policymakers to pave the road for a regenerative future that promotes circular economies. We require that companies acknowledge their impact on all living beings and the planet, and use natural resources properly. Furthermore, we expect that designers hold one another accountable for their acts in the past, present, and future. This is vital because collective accountability guarantees that our activities are consistent with the urgent need for sustainability.

## WE ACT

We commit to taking decisive action, ensuring our words translate into meaningful outcomes. Sometimes, this means knowing even when not to act, and recognizing that in certain cases inaction can prevent harm. We prioritize actions that have a tangible positive impact, and we hold ourselves accountable for the results. We aim to balance action with thoughtful restraint, as we aim to foster a sustainable and responsible design practice while understanding our impact now and also in the future.

# Expectations
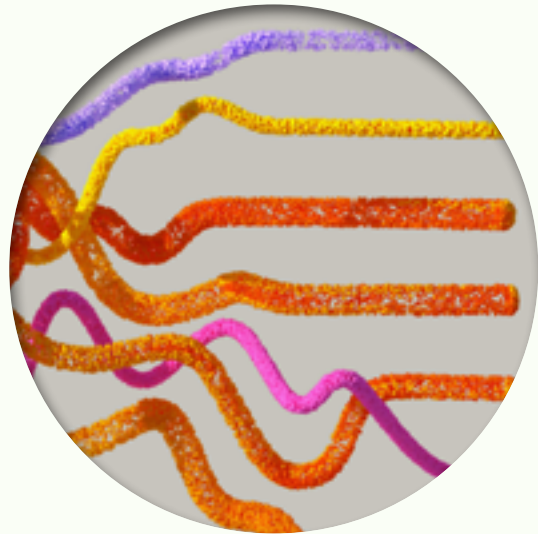


In addition to conveying designers' obligations, this manifesto seeks to define our expectations of those with whom we interact, such as cross-functional professionals, companies, governments, and the general public. These expectations are critical for creating a collaborative approach to sustainable and responsible design processes.

## Towards Cross-Functional Professionals

Cross-functional professionals, including engineers, product managers, financial experts, sales and customer success teams, scientists, academics, and more, play a vital role in the transition to sustainable practices. We expect these professionals to collaborate actively with designers, bringing their unique expertise to create holistic solutions. Their involvement is essential for integrating responsible design principles across various domains, ensuring that sustainability is embedded in every aspect of development and execution. This will help us leverage diverse skills and perspectives to drive meaningful and systemic change.

## Towards Businesses

Businesses must understand their obligation when employing a responsible designer. They should expect the designer to introduce and maintain responsible design standards, challenge outdated practices, and promote responsible outcomes. Responsible designers will delve into who is involved in the design process and decision-making, promoting sustainable solutions while opposing unsustainable ones. They will assist businesses in shifting their responsibilities from individuals to a broader organizational impact, which includes customers and partners, to become a beacon of responsible standards, akin to B-Corps.

## Towards Policymakers

Policymakers should recognize the societal and global benefits of responsible design. Even if they do not immediately agree, responsible designers will advocate for societal good and challenge the status quo. Policymakers are expected to help responsible designers in their efforts to create a better future, as well as to expedite change by advocating for policies that adhere to the values of this manifesto. This support will help to shift accountability from individual initiatives to governance levels, which can create considerable societal change.

## Towards People

Responsible designers, motivated by human-centered principles, expect the public to hold everyone accountable, including designers, corporations, and policymakers. People should feel empowered to speak out against actions that contradict the manifesto's values. Collective accountability is critical for building a sustainable, fair future, and the public must play an active role in encouraging all actors to adhere to these objectives.

# Our vision for the future
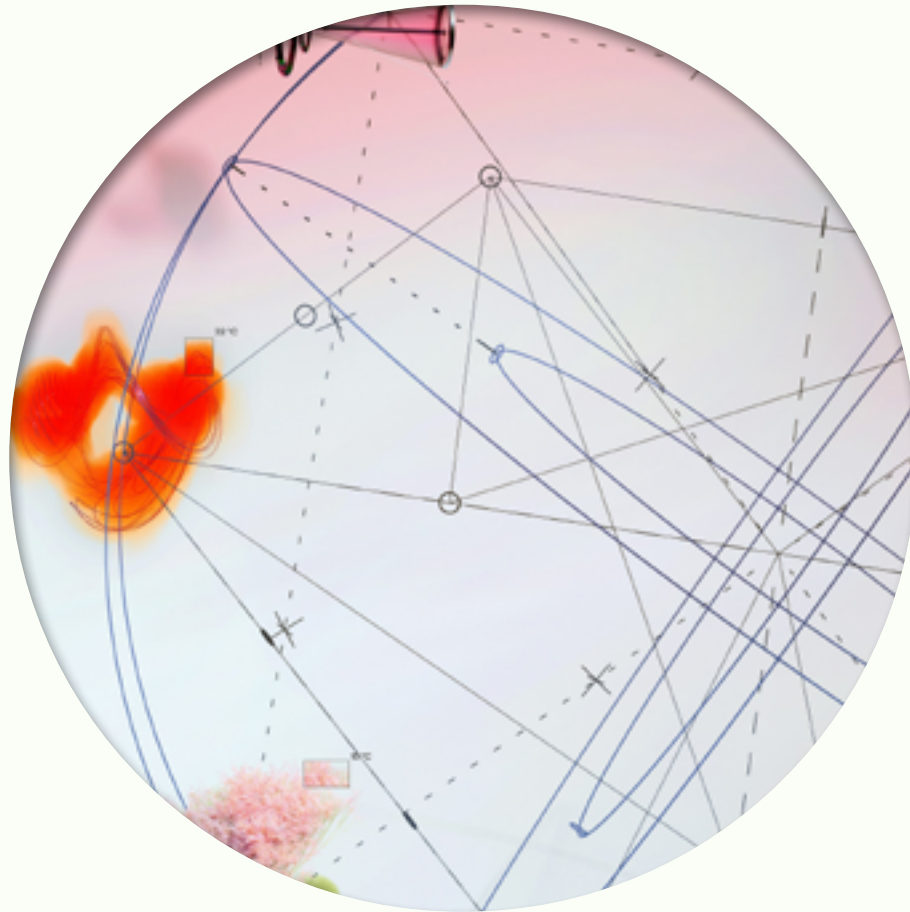


For responsible designers, the ideal future is defined by a radical paradigm shift away from existing practices. This vision acts as a beacon, defining a future in which responsibility is the accepted norm, widely recognized and expected, not simply desired. In this future:

Businesses, governments, designers, and society unite, the economic worth of collective responsibility blossoms, nurturing a sustainable, ethical, and just realm. The cornerstone of our thriving future is laid with the efficient and sustainable use of resources, leaving but a whisper of an environmental footprint.

Here, "patina" tells the tales of time, and the diverse histories of items and materials are cherished over the fleeting allure of novelty. We see beauty in aging and restoration, akin to the philosophies of Wabi Sabi and Kintsugi. Against the tides of planned obsolescence and rampant consumerism, we rise, preferring the tender care of goods, extending their lives and stories.

Responsibility is woven from actions and their impacts on the community's heart, far deeper than mere surface-level rhetoric and marketing gloss. Designers, with a keen awareness of their power, champion a sustainable and responsible way of being. To lengthen the planet's collective journey, we weave diversity, conserve precious resources, and nurture responsible behaviors through our work. A fertile imagination propels us, guiding designers to embody this ethos and inspire others to embrace long-term stewardship.

# How do we create impact?
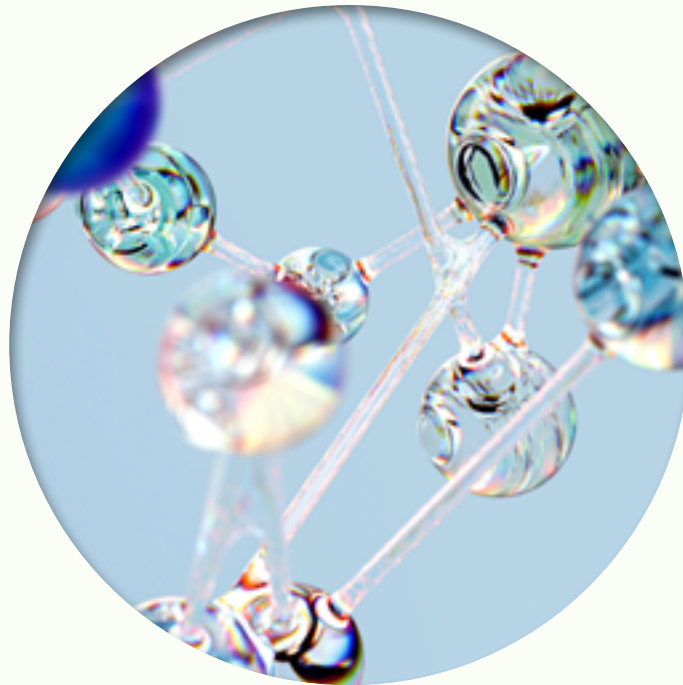
The impact of design on the world is apparent, but making that impact responsible requires deliberate actions and decisions. The transition to responsible design and a sustainable future necessitates collaboration and a multifaceted approach, from practical actions to systemic shifts, guided by Donella Meadows' framework on leverage points.

## Practical Actions

Designers must collaborate with others, developing tools and procedures that promote responsible behavior. By setting a good example, designers can influence those they engage with, encouraging end users to take more responsible actions. Each design should inspire responsible behavior, creating immediate, tangible impacts.

## Intermediate Leverage Points

Designers must actively collaborate with customers, stakeholders, and key decision-makers to embed responsibility into project briefs. This involves raising crucial questions about accountability and showcasing responsible design scenarios to demonstrate their value. By adopting these practices, designers create feedback loops that reinforce sustainable behaviors and values within their networks.

## Systemic Shifts

To drive systemic change, designers must target deeper leverage points. This includes redefining success metrics to prioritize sustainability, influencing the rules of the system through policy advocacy, and altering mindsets to value long-term ecological health over short-term profit gains. As more designers embrace these principles and produce responsible outcomes, the growing number of successful examples will create a cultural shift.

From practical steps to systemic changes, this transformation will be driven both from the bottom up, led by designers, and from the top down, driven by corporations and policymakers who see the value of this new paradigm shift.

# How Do We Start?



The scope of change required and the sheer number of individuals to persuade might make the difficulties ahead appear insurmountable. This manifesto encourages readers to take a step back, and breathe, offering a manageable starting point.

The first step for a responsible designer is to become aware. To be mindful of our actions, their consequences, and the factors we take into account or neglect. This honest insight serves as the cornerstone for responsible design.
Next, we must hold ourselves and others accountable for our actions and consequences. This accountability begins with a set of minimum standards, which this manifesto outlines. Each designer should define and apply these criteria in their setting, utilizing the manifesto as a guide to develop responsible practices.

Additionally, we need to continuously assess our impact and keep checks on our work to ensure ongoing alignment with our goals. This includes not only human stakeholders but also non-human stakeholders, recognizing the broader ecological implications of our designs.
Starting with awareness, accountability, and responsibility, we can develop a set of criteria to propel the cause toward responsible design and a more sustainable future. Through continuous assessment and inclusion of all stakeholders, we ensure that our efforts remain impactful and ethical.

# Closing



This manifesto is more than just a list of guidelines; it is a call to action. It is an invitation to all designers to work together on a more responsible, sustainable, and equitable future. Our work can influence futures, and that power comes with the responsibility to act with intention and integrity. Adopting the ideas mentioned here can have a far-reaching impact on industries, communities, and future generations.

Together, we can transition from product and service builders to environmental stewards and advocates for an equitable society. We can ensure that our designs fulfill today's needs while also

preserving tomorrow's possibilities. The decisions we make, the standards we uphold, and the actions we undertake will all shape our legacy.

By signing this manifesto, we commit to constantly strive for progress, to hold ourselves and one another accountable, and to never stop learning and developing. The future is ours to design, and together, we can create a world that is fair, sustainable, and beautiful for all.

# Appendix

## Glossary

**Sustainability:** Sustainability is the practice of preserving the stability of the Earth's biophysical systems while ensuring fair access to natural resources required for human dignity and well-being. It entails operating within safe and just Earth-System Boundaries (ESBs), which are thresholds that, if crossed, jeopardize both global stability and social justice. Sustainability necessitates systemic changes in consumption, economic systems, technology, and government, with a focus on reducing inequality to prevent environmental harm, distribute resources equitably, and promote human health. These transitions should limit luxury consumption, absorb environmental costs, scale sustainable technology, and promote inclusive governance to align human development with the constraints of the Earth's systems.

**Earth-System Boundaries:**
In short ESBs are thresholds or limits within Earth's systems (such as the atmosphere, oceans, land, and biosphere) that define a safe operating space for humanity. These boundaries, if crossed, can lead to irreversible environmental damage, threatening the stability of ecosystems and human societies.

**Design:** The process of envisioning and planning the creation of objects, systems, or services that solve specific problems or meet particular needs, often involving considerations of aesthetics, functionality, and sustainability.

**Designer:** A designer is a creative professional who envisions and designs for products, services, and systems, to solve specific problems or meet particular needs. Designers can be formally educated in design principles and techniques, or they can be self-taught through practical experience and work. Regardless of their path, all designers share a common goal: to create effective, functional, and aesthetically pleasing solutions while considering the broader social, environmental, and ethical impacts of their work.

**Polycrisis:** A situation where multiple, interconnected crises (such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequalities) occur simultaneously, amplifying their overall impact and complexity.

**B Corps:** Companies that are certified by the non-profit B Lab to meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency, aiming to balance profit with purpose.

**Circular Economy:** An economic system aimed at eliminating waste and the continual use of resources through principles of reusing, recycling, and regenerating natural systems, contrasting with the traditional linear economy of "take, make, dispose."

**Doughnut Economics:** A visual framework for sustainable development, combining the concept of planetary boundaries with the complementary idea of social boundaries, ensuring that economic activity is conducted within the ecological limits of the planet while meeting basic human needs.

**Degrowth:** An economic philosophy that advocates for the reduction of production and consumption for environmental and social well-being, challenging the notion that economic growth is inherently beneficial.

**Regenerative Design:** A design approach that goes beyond sustainability to actively restore and renew ecosystems, seeking to create conditions for the continuous and enduring health of the environment.

**Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG):** Criteria used to evaluate a company's operations and performance based on environmental responsibility, social impact, and governance practices, increasingly important for investors seeking sustainable and ethical investments.

**EU Taxonomy:** A classification system established by the European Union to define environmentally sustainable economic activities, aiming to guide investments towards projects that support the EU's environmental objectives.

**Responsible Design:** An approach to design that prioritizes ethical considerations, environmental sustainability, and social impact, ensuring that design practices contribute positively to the well-being of people and the planet.

**Planet-Centered Design:** A design philosophy that expands beyond user-centered design to consider the broader environmental and ecological impacts, aiming to create solutions that benefit the planet as a whole.

**Stakeholders:** Individuals or groups that have an interest or stake in the outcome of a project or initiative, including but not limited to designers, clients, policymakers, communities, and the environment.

**Leverage Points:** Strategic places within a complex system where a small shift in one thing can produce significant changes in everything, used to identify where interventions can most effectively drive systemic change.

**Ecological Footprint:** A measure of the environmental impact of an individual, organization, or product, expressed as the amount of land and water area required to sustain their use of natural resources and absorb their waste.

**Accountability:** The obligation of individuals or organizations to account for their activities, accept responsibility for them, and disclose the results transparently, ensuring that actions align with ethical and sustainability standards.
Stewardship: The responsible management and care of resources, particularly natural and environmental resources, ensuring their preservation and sustainability for future generations.