

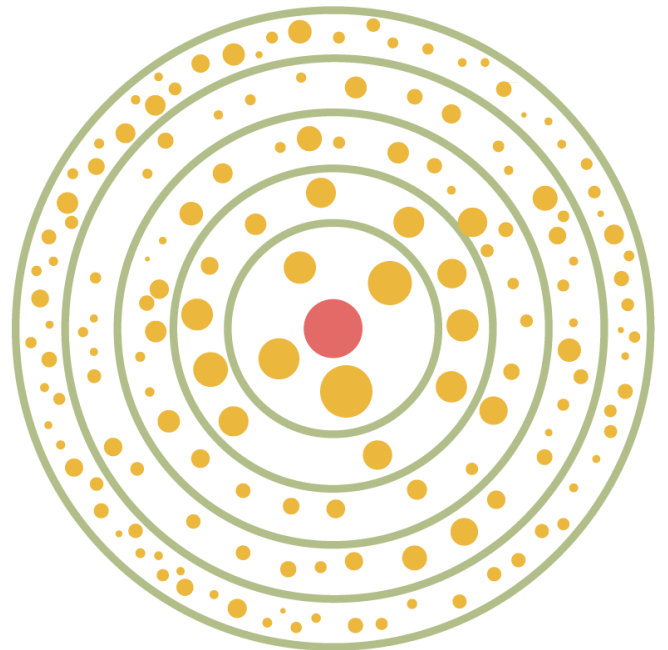
ZONES IN SOCIAL PERMACULTURE

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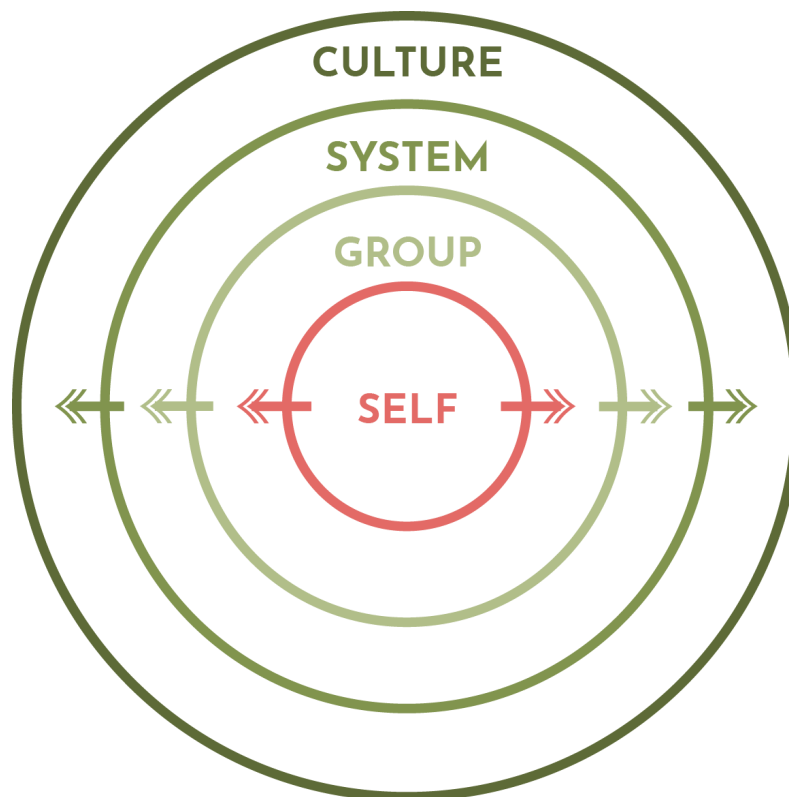
Zone analysis is a design tool with a simple premise: relationships that require more work and deliver a bigger yield should be placed closer to us, while ones that don't need as much of our involvement should be farther away. While it might sound obvious in theory, our lived experiences are full of counterexamples to this common-sense advice—a home at the other end of town from our workplace, or compost bins pushed to the far corner of our yards.

With zone analysis, the designer can address these issues at the beginning of the creative process, prioritizing each element on a scale from 1 to 5, based on how frequently the user interacts with it. In a garden design, for example, we might assign the leafy greens that we harvest daily to zone 1, the tool shed that we access weekly to zone 2, and a patch of brambles to zone 4. Through zone analysis, the designer maximizes efficiency for the user by intelligently placing elements with an attention to maintenance and yield.

Zone analysis can be employed in several ways as a useful tool in social landscapes, as well. Recognizing that our brains and calendars can only handle a finite amount of social interaction, we can use zone analysis to assess our network of relationships, placing each relationship in one of a series of zones from confidante to acquaintance. From there, we may discern useful patterns about which connections we're investing too much time in, and which ones are worth spending more time nurturing.



We can also use the zone framework to understand the gradient of agency and influence we have at various scales of social design. Each of us as **individuals** represent a complex system, with a multitude of values, opinions, needs and competing aims. In turn, each of us are members of various **groups**, from book clubs to corporations, which themselves are their own complex systems. A collection or coalition of groups can cohere into another level of system with its own properties, called a **community** or a **field of practice**. Finally, a **culture** is a super-system comprised of a collection of communities and fields.



As social designers, we have the most ability to influence our own actions and those of small groups, but skillful design interventions have the potential to re-align entire communities or the culture at large, as well.