

Community engagement

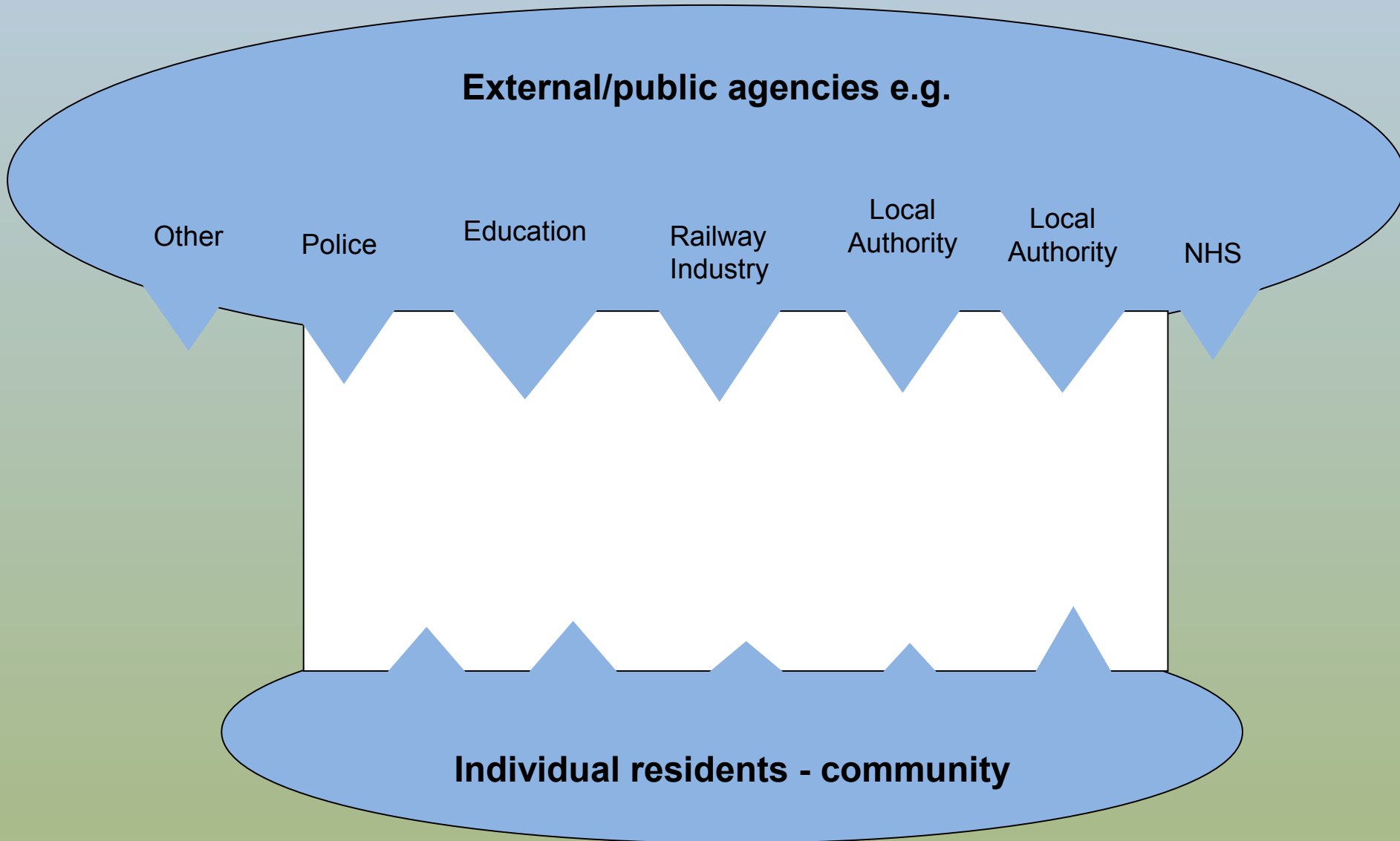
A social eco-system dance

European Conference on Complex Systems 2009
Putting Complexity to Work – Supporting the
Practitioners

Community Engagement

- The nature of community systems
- The two systems lens
- The social eco system dance
 - Some aspects of complex social systems
- Work in progress

Community Engagement



Two Systems: Forms & Processes

Public & Voluntary sector agencies

Community Nature

Organisation

Organisations incorporated
Command & control systems

organisations unincorporated
informal systems

Management

Vertical hierarchical relationships
Authority/line management

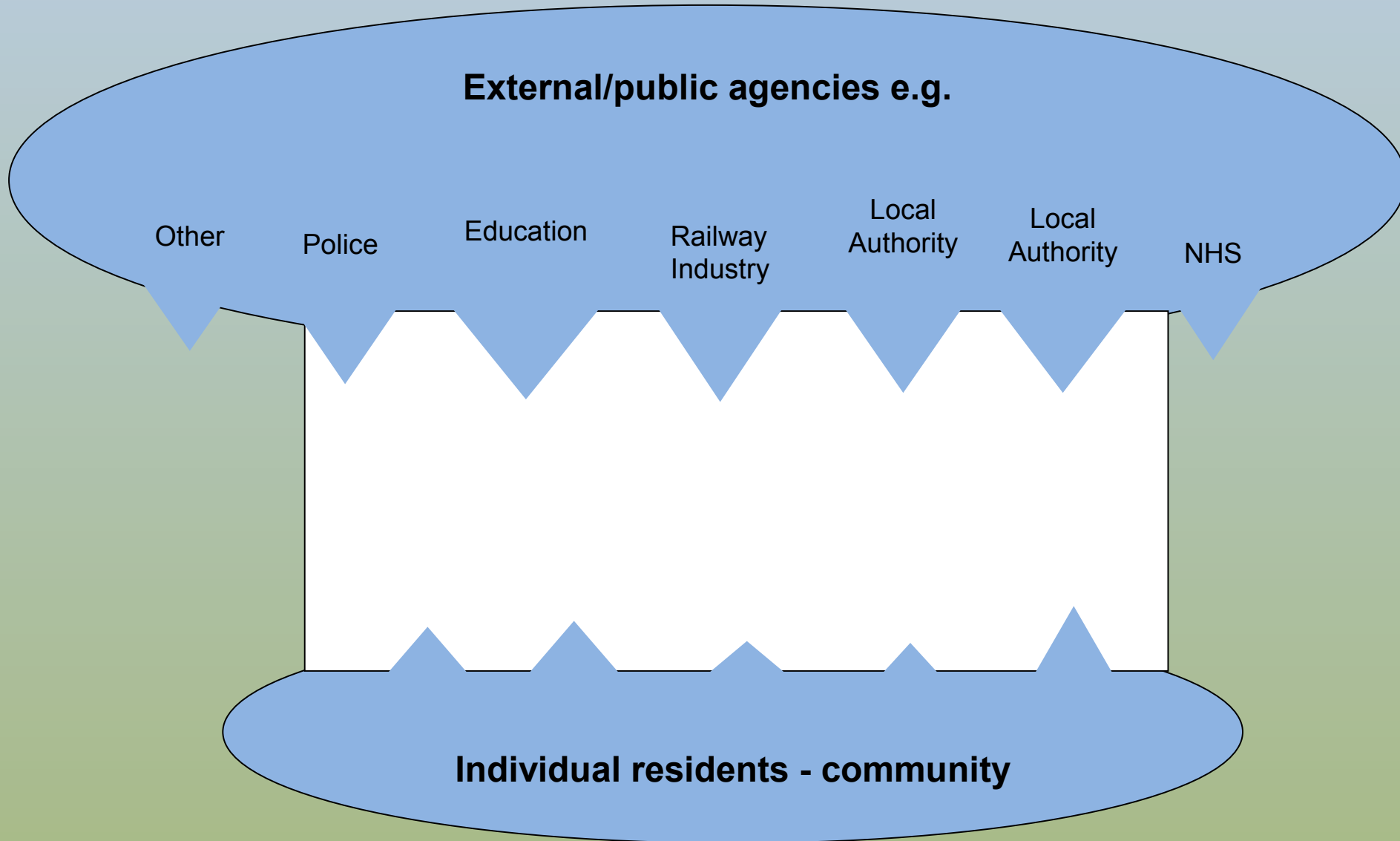
horizontal peer relationships
social equality

Employment

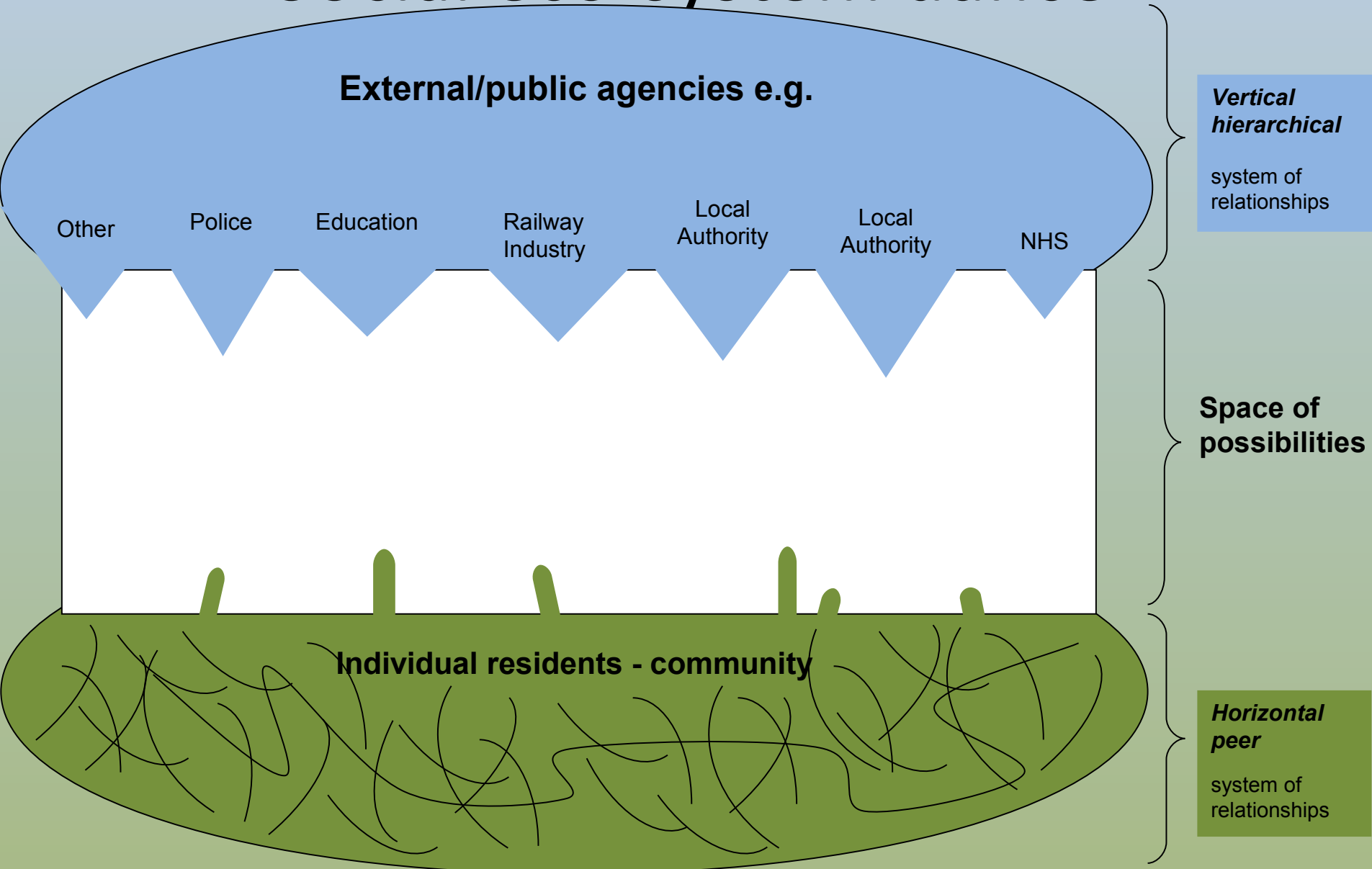
Contractual
Paid staff, & managed volunteers
Employment law context

social informal
unpaid volunteers, not managed
general civil law

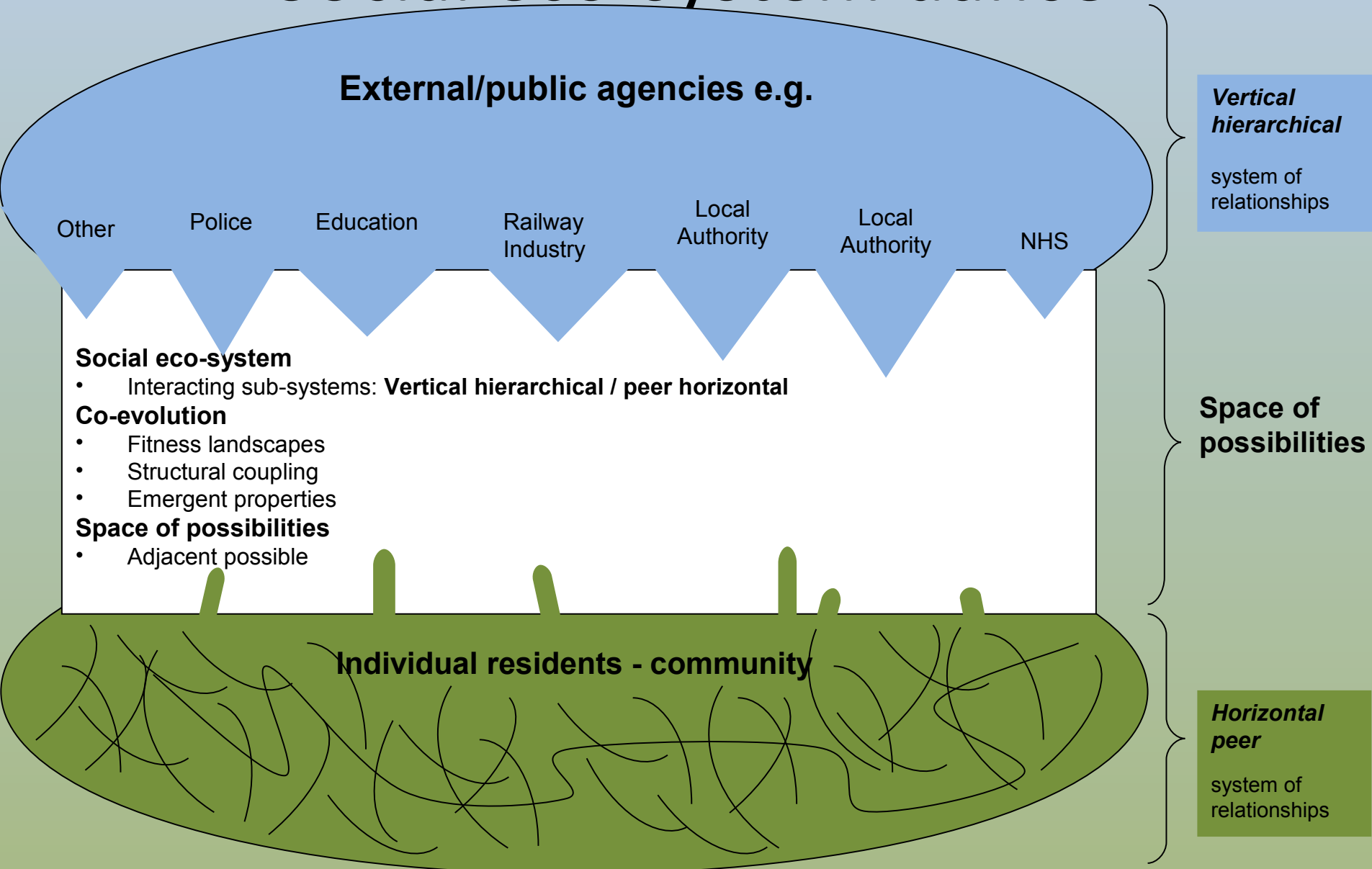
Community Engagement



Social eco-system dance



Social eco-system dance



Community nurturing social gardening

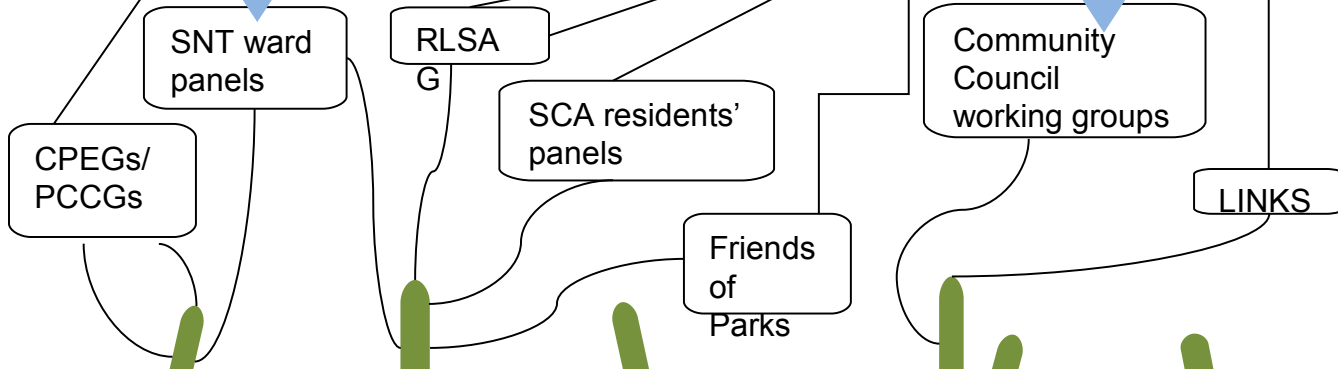
working with the nature of complex systems

- ***Collective efficacy***: loose potential connections
 - Enabling loose connections
 - Nurturing relationships
- **Facilitating the process**
 - Nurturing informal fluid processes
 - Growing from the roots
- ***Much adjacent possible***
 - Moving beyond habitual routines
 - Resisting fixed design in advance
 - Enabling new structures to emerge

Social eco-system dance

External/public agencies e.g.

Other Police Education Railway Industry Local Authority Local Authority NHS



Individual residents - community

Vertical hierarchical
system of relationships

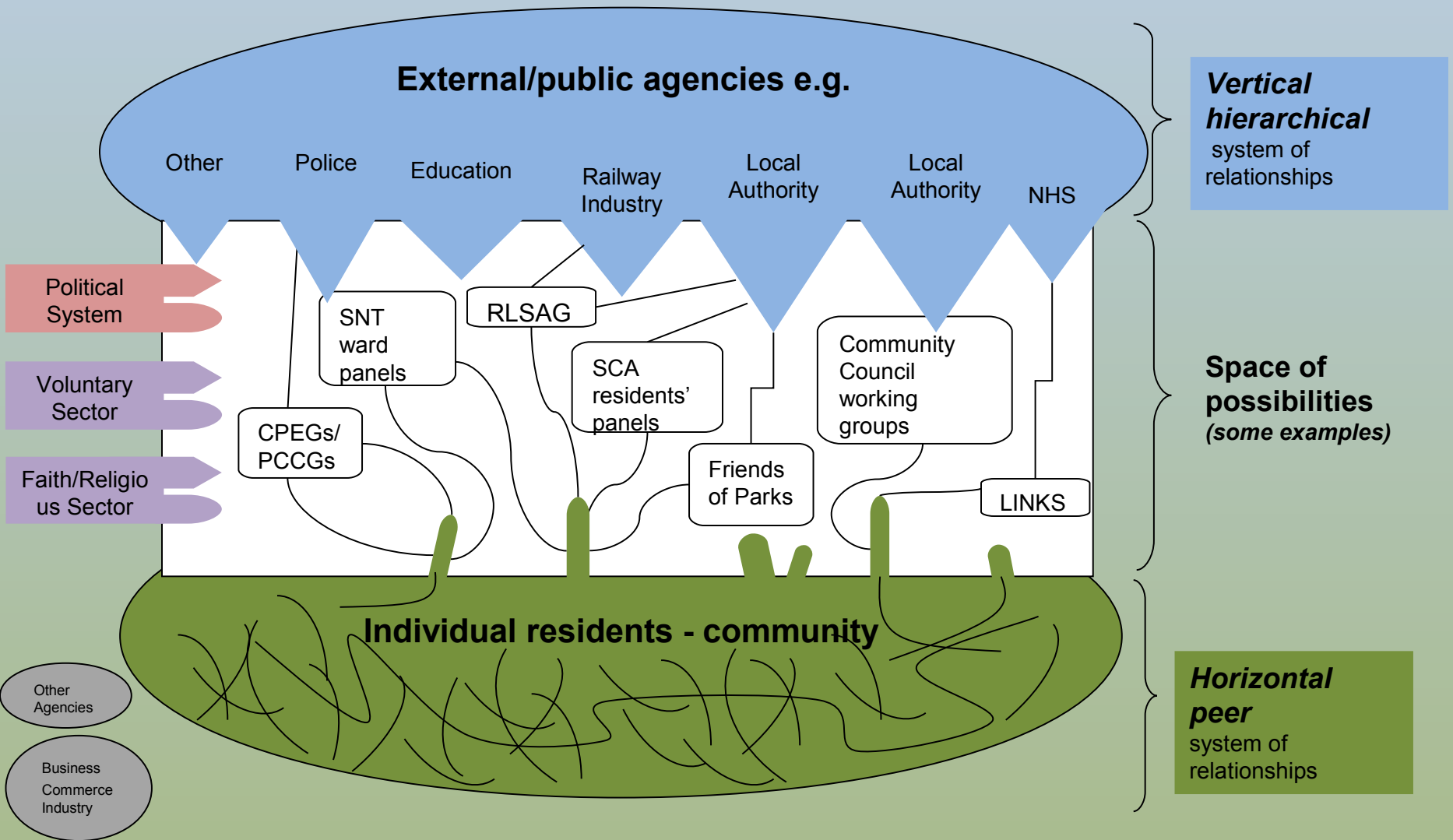
Space of possibilities
(some examples)

Horizontal peer
system of relationships

Examples in the space of possibilities

- **CPEG** Community Police Engagement Groups
- **PCCG** Police & Community Consultative Groups
(an example of CPEG)
- **SNT ward panels** Safer Neighbourhood Team ward panels.
- **SCA residents panels** Sustainable Communities Act
residents' panels.
- **LINKS** NHS Local Involvement Networks
- **Friends of Parks** liaison with Council departments
- **Community Council working groups:** councillors, officers &
residents working together

Social eco-system dance



Two Systems in relationship

Michael Dove, Yale University, anthropologist and forester, quoted in *Carbon Trading: A Critical Conversation on Climate Change, Privatisation and Power* by Larry Lohmann (2006).

“... I suggest ... that the global system and these indigenous communities are structurally dissimilar members of a more loosely articulated system....”

... Inattention to this distinction is a function of a paradoxical tendency among scholars and planners to insist that systems are either all-embracing... or unconnected (e.g. indigenous communities).

*... The concept of a **differentiated system, with relations obtaining among dissimilar members**, is relatively undeveloped in the international science and development community”*

So what?

Has illuminated:

- gaps in voluntary sector support for the community *horizontal peer* system
- new ways of relating the starship to the earth
 - in structures & processes

Work in progress

Horizontal Peer support examples

Individual support systems

- action based advice & information for active residents
- action learning sets for activists
- peer support systems for activists
- management & organisation training for informal unincorporated groups

New structures

- new access for residents to neighbourhood physical resources
- support & nurturing of local residents' networks
- activists reference panels for feedback to public agencies
- linking community engagement to interacting residents' networks

Some conclusions (1)

- inadequate community engagement will achieve the opposite effect.
- community empowerment must be an end in itself before it can support effective community engagement.
- communities, & the social eco-system they inhabit, are complex living systems which need to be nurtured.

Some conclusions (2)

- systemic differences between the ***vertical hierarchical system*** and ***horizontal peer system***
- community sector, a *horizontal peer* system, largely invisible
- *community development* needed for the *horizontal peer* system, but not from within the *vertical hierarchal* system.
- voluntary sector needs new approaches to community sector infrastructure

Some conclusions (3)

- the social sub-systems are part of same social eco-system dance
- Their intrinsic natures are different
 - *vertical hierarchical*
 - *horizontal peer*
- Complex systems thinking:
 - illuminates the resulting dynamics
 - helps develop new management & organisation tools & skills

Two sub-systems

Engineered structures

Designed, constructed, quantified



Living tangled grass roots, dense growth

Sown, planted, nurtured,



Community engagement social eco-system dance

The End