Agency and Constraint: the role of individuals in delivering policy coherence

Kirsty Blackstock, Kerry Waylen, Alba Juárez-Bourke & colleagues

Political ecology of professional practice: plurality and possibilities in environmental governance II (P037-S2)

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Emergent ideas

- Amalgamation of data from three projects

- Emerging ideas from inductive analysis

- Systemic approaches to environment constrained by institutional arrangements

  - EU level – CAP as nexus policy

  - Scottish policy coherence of env policy instruments

  - 4 UK catchment partnerships linking water quality, quantity and biodiversity objectives (> public policy)

- Is this line of analysis worth pursuing?

Policy Lens

- Existing single policy design - effective & efficient
  - Silo approach = direct and spill-over impacts; duplication, gaps, emerging problems
  - Incrementalism and inertia, 'sticking points'
- What is 'policy'?
  - **Levels** (Tier 1 and Tier 2, legislation, steering and instruments)
  - **Cycle:** design (objectives, instruments), implement, evaluate & adapt?
  - **Institutions:** involving outcomes, actors, actions, interests and ideas in dynamic system
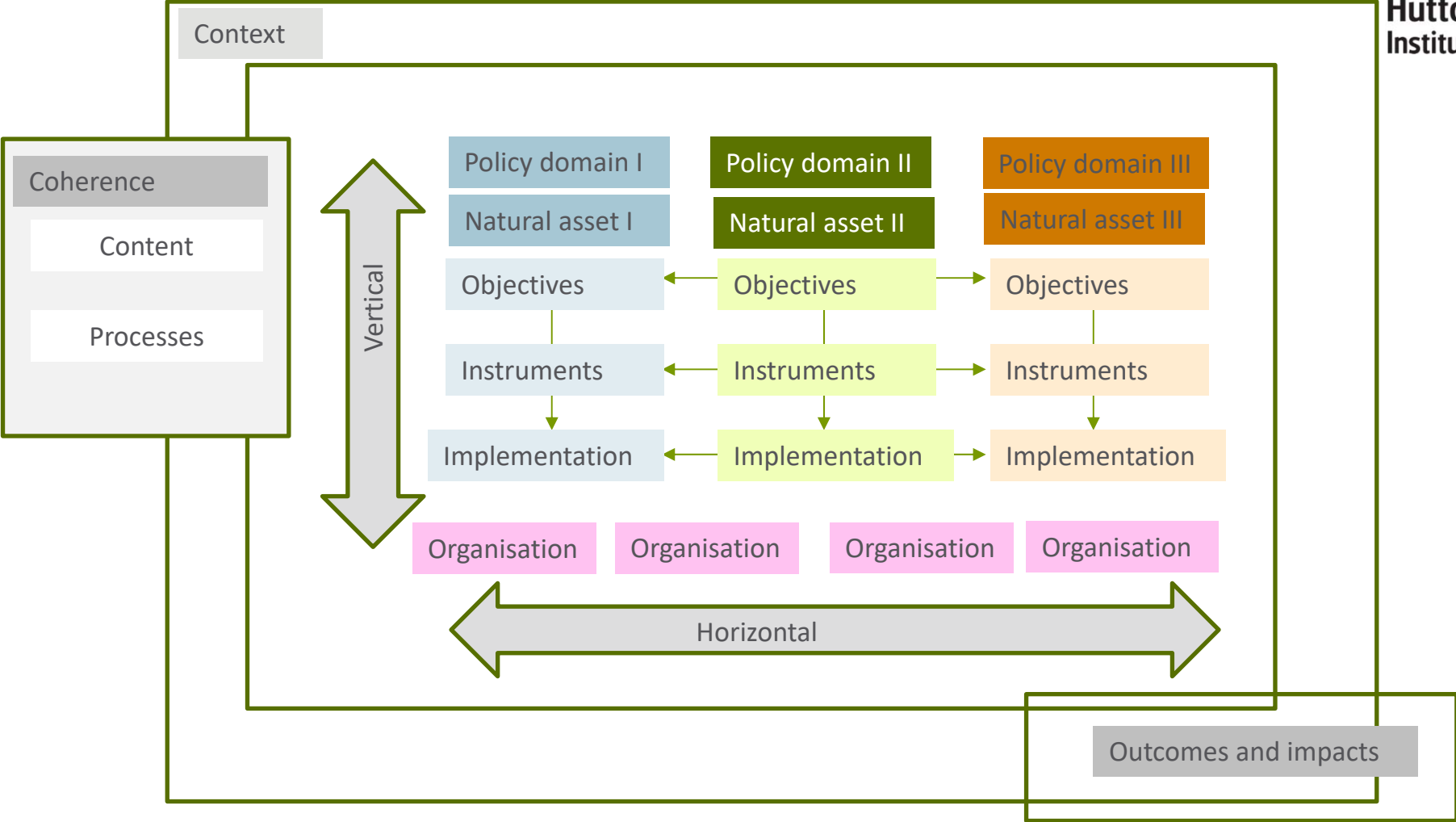- Critique simplistic representations of policy processes

Waylen et al., (2015) Ecology and Society, 20, Article No. 21.
Cairney P & Geyer R (2017) Complexity, Governance and Networks, 3 (2), pp. 1-11.

Policy Lens

- Existi...

  - S... ...ation,

  ...

- ...

  - **Insti**... ...tcomes, actors, actions, interests a... ...system

- Critique simpl... representations of policy processes

Struggling with multiple overlapping concepts
e.g. Policy making (cohesion, integration, mixes?) + multiple Implementation literatures
+
Regime/Institutions/Bureaucracies
+
Nexus/networked governance

Idea of the Interplay

Context

Coherence

Content

Processes

Vertical

Policy domain I	Policy domain II	Policy domain III
Natural asset I	Natural asset II	Natural asset III
Objectives	Objectives	Objectives
Instruments	Instruments	Instruments
Implementation	Implementation	Implementation

Organisation Organisation Organisation Organisation

Horizontal

Outcomes and impacts

Oberthür, 2009 – Interplay down and upstream, Clement , 2010 – politicised IAD approach

Idea of the Interface

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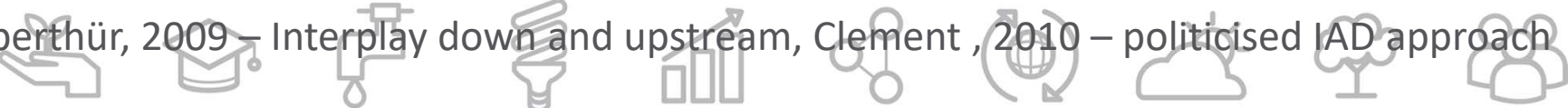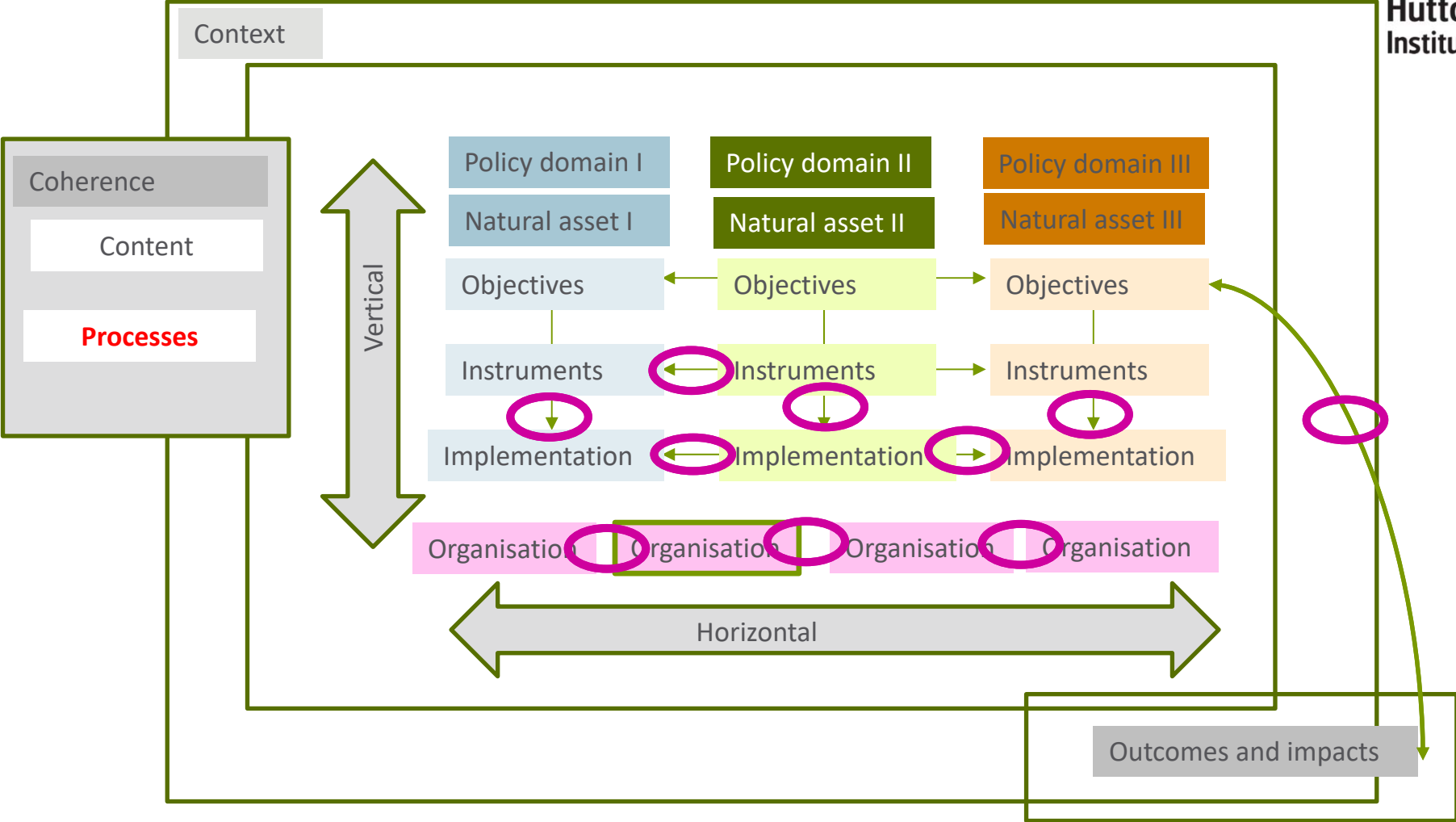
Lipsky, 2010, Street Level Bureaucrats, Funder & Mweemba, 2019, interface bureaucrats
Timmermans et al (2014) Policy Entrepreneurs & transformative change?

Argument so far

- Attention to **implementation** processes for systemic environmental governance

- Not enough attention to actors and processes within sites of integration and (in)coherence
  - Efforts often invisible and under-recognised

- Actors have *inherent motivations* + contextual enablers and constraints – between organisations and within organisations

- To what extent do actions help us understand outcomes and potential or actual transformations?

Main Research Focus

- Objective: to draw attention to the practices involved in making policy coherence work

- Research questions:
  - Who are the actors 'doing' coherence?
  - To what extent do these actors influence the outcomes?

- Focus on environmental policy professionals (employed by State **and beyond**)

Who are the actors? (participants)

- EU CAP nexus – mainly Directorate General staff & agency staff
    - They design and evaluate policy and their instruments
- Scottish Env Pol – Scottish Government and agency staff
    - They design, implement and evaluate policy instruments
- Catchment Partnerships – Agency, **NGO and Private Sector staff**
    - They implement policy (and other) instruments
- Different actors and different contexts but similar themes

What do they do? Why do they do it?

- Some focus on policy efficiency (low integration)
  - Focus on existing processes, doing what can within austerity, risk of not achieving objectives

- Others seeking cross-silo appr (more effective)
  - Seek new evidence*, form internal alliances, advocate for participation, become partners

- Improves ability to do job (instrumental)

- Learning – topic & procedural (substantive)

- Shared concern to improve env (normative)
  - These interact to amplify each other

*E.g. Voelker et al, 2019, Journal of Rural Studies

Constraints

- Institutional approaches
  - E.g. how 'environment' is defined and measured
- Organisational culture
  - Invisible work is unrewarded work
- Austerity
  - Time (and funding) to do the 'extra'
  - Staff turnover (short term contracts or transfers)
- Accountability
  - Diffused and fragmented (see Waylen et al. **P036-F0)**

Attention to agency

- Policy entrepreneur: willingness to invest their resources - time, energy, reputation, knowledge

"certain individuals make their organisational input happen in a certain way but I think that's more the individual than the organisation." (Catchment Partner)

Performing integration

- (post) graduates in environmental science tasked with relationship management

  - Expressive emotional labour (Hochschild 2012)

    "that's a very slow process and there's incredible sensitivities …people not liking each other." (Partner)

  - Personality politics (Florczak et al, 2020)

  "I've never heard him raise his voice or…people…he just produces respect in people" (Coordinator)

  - Additional (emotional) work required to 'interface' within and between organisations

Hochschild A R (2012), The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling
Florczak, C., et al. (2020). Personality and Individual Differences 163, 110065.

What difference do they make?

- Move beyond discourse to action
  - Make and sustain networks for knowledge sharing
  - Share and trade labour, funding, techniques
  - Providing evidence for new approaches (NFM)
  - Advocate for integrated implementation

"this has been a 15 year progress of people who never used to work together. Who were kind of very silo-based. Now people are so used to working in this sort of way that it's become the norm" (coordinator)

- But….
  - Narrow focus, narrow set of actors – group think?
  - Integration rather than transformation?

What does this mean?

- Attention to policy professionals (> street level bureaucrats – across levels, beyond State)

- When and why policy actors work for altruistic outcomes (> policy entrepreneurs)

- About forms of power (power with, power to*)

  - Personal traits (emotional intelligence, contacts, affability)

  - Avoid psychologising – agency within wider institutional arrangements

- More empirical & contextual analyses of agency within constraint required

*VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Allen A, 1999, Haugaard 2012 – Four dimensions of Power

Next Steps

- Is there sufficient insight on agency within constraints to warrant further development to publication?
  - Focus on UK WFD data only – advancing street level bureaucrat & policy entrepreneur approaches
- Or additional data collection required?
  - Questionnaire to get wider coverage of structural criteria of interest re (intersectionality attributes, length of contract, disciplinary background, employer) and use existing instruments to measure sense of autonomy, effect, affect, etc?
  - Role of online and social media to trace biographies and relationships? Social Network Analysis?
  - Versus ethnographic methods as most appropriate way to access these experiences?

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www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/water-integration
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✉ Kirsty.Blackstock@hutton.ac.uk
🐦 @KerryWaylen @MAGIC_NEXUS @SEFARIscot #POLLEN20