



Agency and Constraint: the role of individuals in policy coherence for joined-up water governance

Kerry Waylen, Kirsty Blackstock,
Alba Juárez-Bourke & Keith Marshall

ICPP5, 2021



Starting point

- Systemic, holistic, adaptive governance
a common goal but commonly not achieved*
- Focus here on integration of multiple policy &
other stakeholder goals
 - Where does integration happen?
 - Who is 'doing' integration, and how?
 - Which concepts help us understand or inform
integration?

* Chaffin, B.C., et al. 2014. Ecology & Society 19 (3).



Empirical basis

- 3 venues/ levels
 - EU level – CAP links to water and other nexus issues
 - Coherence of Scottish env. policy instruments
 - 4 UK catchment partnerships linking water quality, quantity and biodiversity objectives (> public policy)
- All espouse desire of coherence or integration
 - Focusing on single-issues seems relatively effective & efficient; identifying and achieving systemic approaches is more difficult
- Emerging ideas from inductive analysis
 - Welcome comments on connection with and contribution to water policy & governance literatures



Conceptual basis

What is 'policy'?

- *Levels:* (Tier 1 & 2, legislation, steering and instruments)
- *Cycle:* design, implement, evaluate & adapt?
- *Institutions:* involving outcomes, actors, actions, interests & ideas in dynamic system

Multiple, overlapping literatures

- Policy making (cohesion, integration, mixes)
- multiple Implementation literatures
- Regime/Institutions/Bureaucracies
- Nexus/networked governance



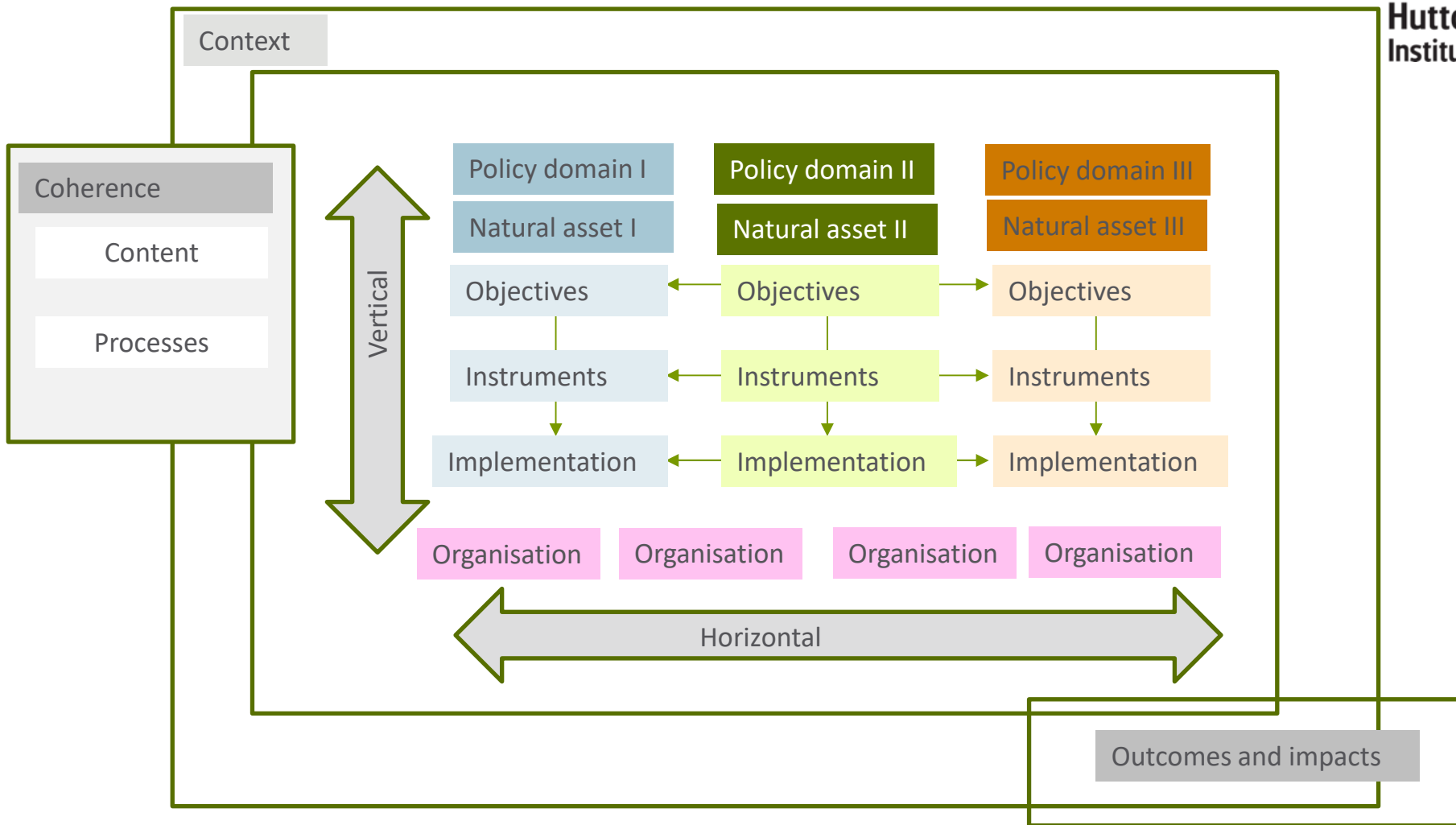
e.g. Newig, J.;Koontz, T.M. 2013. *Journal of European Public Policy* 21 (2):1-20,
Pahl-Wostl, C., et al. 2010. *Environmental Science & Policy* 13 (7):571-581,
Benson, D., et al. 2015. Water Governance in a Comparative Perspective: From IWRM to a
'Nexus' Approach? *Water Alternatives* 8 (1):756-773.

Question #1

- **(How) does the structure of policy and policy instruments affect how policy coherence is achieved?**
- Analyse interplay of Scottish policy instruments & their consequences for policy coherence
 - Detailed search and analysis of content
 - Interviews with those charged with implementation



#1 Idea of the Interplay



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

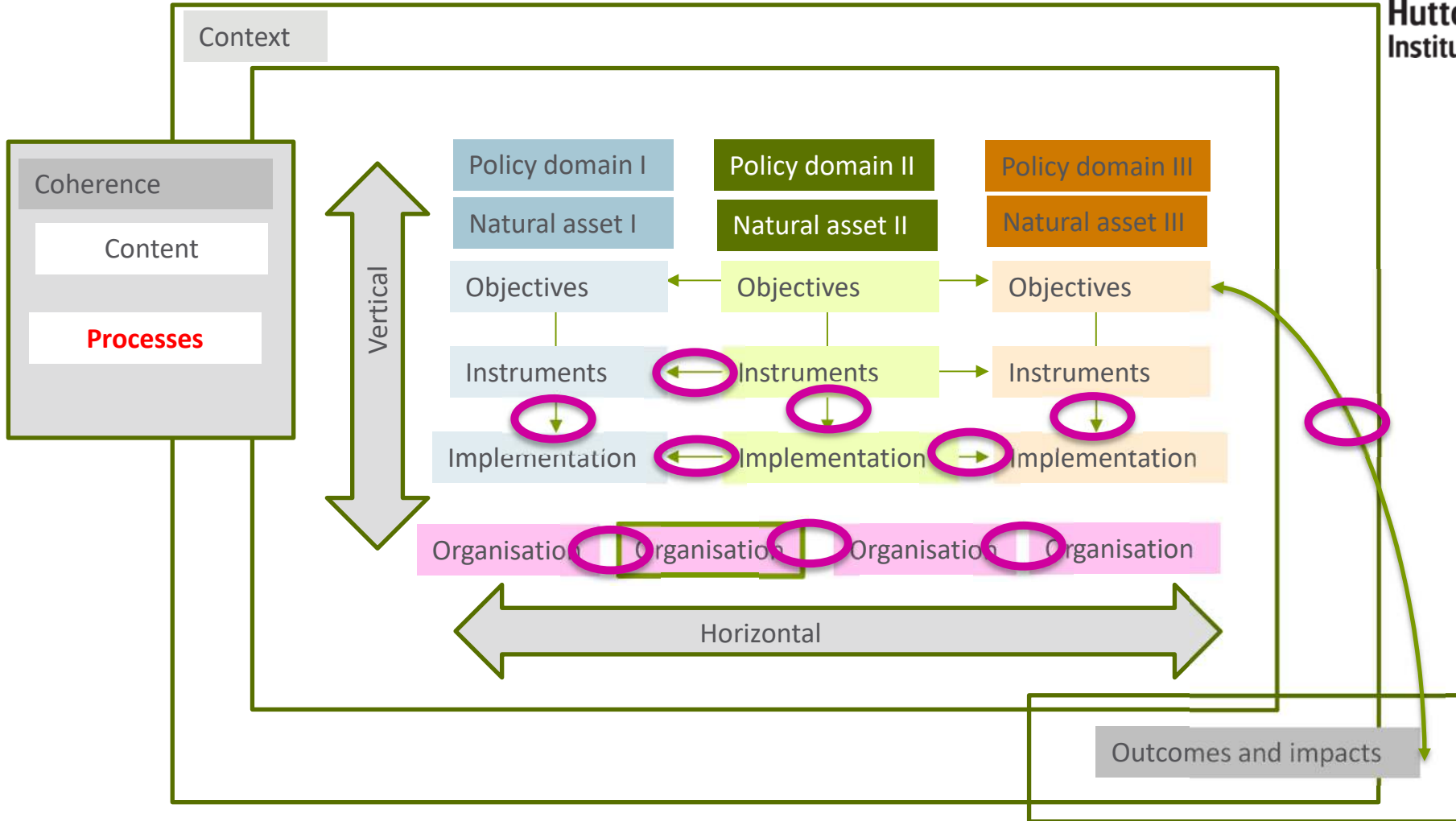
Slide 6

KM7

I get the central rectangle (interactions between siloes from policy down to implementing org - the arrows are important as the next slide explains). Is the context the "boundary object" or space that links the policies? And the outcomes are the collective results of the implementations in this space? Is the coherence box just there to flag that both content and process are elements of this?

Keith Marshall, 20/05/2021

#1 Idea of the Interface



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

Slide 7

KM8

Does the lack of arrows between the top boxes imply no 'interface' between policy domains? ;)

Keith Marshall, 20/05/2021

Insight #1

- Regardless of the structure and rhetoric of high-level policies, it is **processes** of policy implementation that matter to outcomes
- Highlights the importance of **agency**:
Need to attend to actors and processes within sites of integration and (in)coherence



Question #2

- **How are actors 'doing' coherence?**
- Identify and interview environmental policy professionals, employed by the state & beyond (e.g. eNGOs)
 - EU CAP nexus – mainly Directorate General staff & agency staff
 - Design and evaluate policy and their instruments
 - Scottish Policy – Scottish Government and agency staff
 - Design, implement and evaluate policy instruments
 - Catchment Partnerships – Agency, NGO & Private Sector staff
 - Implement and respond to policy (and other) instruments



#2 How are actors 'doing' coherence?

- Some focus on efficiency (low integration)
Focus on existing processes, doing what can within austerity, avoid risk of not achieving core objectives
- Others seek cross-silo working (more ambitious)
Seek new evidence*, form internal alliances, advocate for participation, become partners
- Interacting motivations
 - Improve ability to do job (instrumental)
 - Learning – topic & procedural (substantive)
 - Shared concern to improve env (normative)
- Efforts often invisible & under-recognised



#2 What limits these activities?

1. Institutional standards and formal rules
 - E.g. how 'environment' is defined and measured
2. Organisational culture
 - Invisible work is unrewarded work
3. Austerity
 - Time (and funding) to do the 'extra'
 - Staff turnover (short term contracts or transfers)
4. Accountability
 - Diffused and fragmented



Insight #2

- Coherence depends on the actors: as much or more than policy structure & statements
- ..but institutional constraints shape and limit their agency.

Agency and constraint



Question #3

- **What helps us understand how agency & constraint are negotiated, and the consequences for coherence or integration?**
- Useful concepts during our work



#3 Useful concepts & focus?

- Policy entrepreneur: willingness to invest their resources - time, energy, reputation, knowledge
- Street-Level Bureaucrats & Interface Bureaucrats

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

e.g. Lipsky, M. 2010. *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public service*: Russell Sage Foundation; Holstead, K., et al. 2021. *Earth System Governance* 9:100108. Timmermans et al (2014) *Policy Entrepreneurs & transformative change?*

#3 Useful concepts & focus?

- Key issues and experiences of graduates in environmental science when tasked with relationship management: additional (emotional) work required to ‘interface’ within and between organisations
 - Expressive emotional labour*

“that’s a very slow process and there’s incredible sensitivities... people not liking each other.” (Description of collaboration within partnership)
 - Personality politics**

“I’ve never heard him raise his voice or...people...he just produces respect in people” (Partnership coordinator referring to Chair)

*Hochschild A R (2012), The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling

**Florczak, C., et al. (2020). Personality and Individual Differences 163, 110065.



#3 Useful concepts & focus?

- Moving beyond discourse to action
 - Make and sustain networks for knowledge sharing
 - Share and trade labour, funding, techniques
 - Providing evidence on new approaches e.g. Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)
 - Advocates for integrated implementation
- But....
 - Incremental or transformative change? Could we - or should we - expect more, to achieve systemic adaptive governance?

Insight #3

- Some existing policy theories and concepts do draw attention to and help focus on agency & constraint
- This is needed to improve understandings of governance
- Unclear if they could be more consolidated and coherent (should we be able to integrate concepts for integration?!)



Summary and Reflections

- Agency and constraint matter
- To understand (non)coherence, attend to detailed work practices and emotional labour of individual actors – need more empirical work



Summary and Reflections

More empirical & contextual analyses:

- Individuals across levels & ‘interface bureaucrats’*
- Attend to motivations, personal traits, forms of power**
- Use but extend and supplement concepts from policy literature e.g. policy entrepreneurs, beyond the state



*Holstead, K., et al. 2021. Earth System Governance 9:100108.

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

Next Steps

- Developing insights on how agency within constraints plays out in paper for publication
 - Relating catchment partnerships to street level bureaucrat & policy entrepreneur literature

In our future work

- More focus on individuals
 - e.g. pros & cons of cross-team working, role of trust across networks of actors
- Asking what is the ‘right’ extent of coherence & integration, for systemic adaptive governance
 - e.g. link to incremental vs transformative change debates



Thanks to participants in policy departments, statutory agencies and partnerships who have kindly shared their time, ideas, experiences and materials.

This research is funded by the Scottish Government Strategic Research Programme 2016-2021, RD 1.2.4 & 1.4.2 and the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No. 689669.

www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/water-integration

<https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/balancing-multiple-goals-natural-resource-management>

<http://magic-nexus.eu/>

 Kerry.Waylen@hutton.ac.uk

 @KerryWaylen @SEFARIs Scot



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot