

Galvanising Change via Natural Capital

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This project is led by a team at the James Hutton Institute (www.hutton.ac.uk), also involving significant input from Scotland's Rural College (www.sruc.ac.uk).

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Aim and objectives:

The aim of this project is to produce constructive insights about the most productive venues (territorially and sectorally) and approaches (how and with/for whom) for using natural capital concepts and data to galvanise change for sustainability.

We seek to understand potential uses and influences of Natural Capital concepts and data in (i) national-level policy processes, in regional- and landscape-level planning, and (ii) in the decision-making processes of private actors and investors, including to identify new investment routes or other leverage points to support nature-based solutions and a well-being economy – i.e. an economic system which serves the collective wellbeing of current and future generations within safe ecological limits.

Research approach

The research approach is embedded in the interpretative qualitative sciences, so we can explore how people think about natural capital and make decisions. Academic fields that inform this work include those on knowledge co-production, the policy sciences and organisational studies. We will work with stakeholders to track and follow real-world processes; we will also explore co-constructed hypothetical scenarios to explore the differences that could be made by natural capital. The data we will collect will be predominantly based on a mixture of documentary evidence, interviews and focus group discussions. The research methods and insights will be shared and made accessible in accordance with Open Science, but our datasets will be mostly not be accessible, in order to protect the confidentiality of participants in line with GDPR & ethical guidelines.

Structure of research project and main outputs:

- WP1 (joint SRUC & Hutton): A review of international practices in governing with natural capital, running from month(m)1-m48, with interim insights on international practices e.g. about the prevalence and consequences the Four Capitals approach versus other framings available by m24. Based on systematic mapping/rapid evidence appraisals, supplemented with interviews with professionals, with a final deliverable summarizing international innovative practices relevant to Scotland, due m48.
- WP2 (Hutton): A co-constructed analysis of natural capital in Scottish policy processes. Based on transdisciplinary collaboration with Scottish government policy peers, this research 'walks along' with policy to explore when and how Natural Capital concepts and data might influence planning, delivery and appraisal processes. The target policies will depend on policy stakeholder experiences, preferences, and policy windows. This runs from m6-60, with a final m60 deliverable of co-constructed recommendations for embedding natural capital in Scottish policy.
- WP3 (SRUC): Evaluate opportunities and consequences of markets and blended finance for natural, economic, human and social capital. This will respond to evolving practices and opportunities arising from Scotland's Route Map to £1 billion, and any other initiatives. This WP runs m1-60 and will deliver a review of future private schemes and finance mechanisms and public-private blended finance options in m12, and report on pilots of blended finance for natural capital policy in Scotland, in m60.
- WP4 (Hutton): Understand how natural capital concepts can unlock private sector investment in nature-based solutions (NBS). This WP runs m6-60, with a milestone of understanding private sector motivations and contributions in m36, and a m60 deliverable on requirements for governance approaches to maximise appropriate private sector involvement.
- WP5 (SRUC-Hutton): Sharing and discussing insights on using natural capital to galvanise change. This WP runs m1-60. It provides a backbone of communication and engagement activities, ensuring coordinated and frequent engagement across the WPs and stakeholders. We aim to respond to opportunities to link with and inform new initiatives, as well as proactively initiate dialogue on the uses and influences of Natural Capital.