



Attempting to implement the Ecosystem Approach in the UK: Achieving innovative change or hopelessly constrained?



Kerry Waylen based on work in collaboration with **Kirsty Blackstock**, and with input from others



The James
Hutton
Institute

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SEFARI
LEADING IDEAS
FOR BETTER LIVES



Overview

- EcA versus “Business as Normal”
Our study
- Progress of projects
Approaches to tradeoffs
- Explanations & Implications –
Can we achieve more?

<https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/ecosystem-approach-review>



The Ecosystem Approach (EcA)

- “a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way”

- 12 Malawi Principles
- www.cbd.int/ecosystem

Principle	Description
1	The objectives of management of land, water and living resources are a matter of societal choice
2	Management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level
3	Ecosystem managers should consider the effects (actual or potential) of their activities on adjacent and other ecosystems
4	Recognizing potential gains from management, there is usually a need to understand and manage the ecosystem in an economic context. Any such ecosystem management programme should a) reduce those market distortions that adversely affect biological diversity; b) align incentives to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; c) internalize costs and benefits in the given ecosystem to the extent feasible.
5	Conservation of ecosystem structure and functioning, in order to maintain ecosystem services, should be a priority target of the Ecosystem Approach
6	Ecosystems must be managed within the limits of their functioning
7	The Ecosystem Approach should be undertaken at the appropriate spatial and temporal scales
8	Recognizing the varying temporal scales and lag-effects that characterize ecosystem processes, objectives for ecosystem management should be set for the long term
9	Management must recognize that change is inevitable
10	The Ecosystem Approach should seek the appropriate balance between, and integration of, conservation and use of biological diversity
11	The Ecosystem Approach should consider all forms of relevant information, including scientific and indigenous and local knowledge, innovations and practices
12	The Ecosystem Approach should involve all relevant sectors of society and scientific disciplines



EcA versus ‘business as usual’

- Established approaches in UK
 - Technocratic - expert led
 - Reliance on rules and regulation
 - Single /narrow issues e.g. protect endangered species

- EcA entails “opening up”
 - Stakeholder participation and knowledges
 - Systems perspectives
 - Flexibility in tools, goals



Our study

- EcA in Scotland's Land Use Strategy

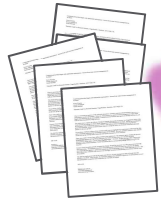


- Government unsure how to support

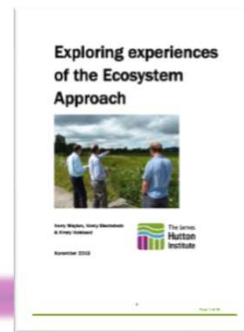
- How can we implement it?
- How can we communicate it?
- How could we evaluate it?



Our study



Empirical studies of Env management
Environmental governance
Institutional analysis

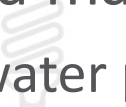
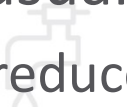


Health warning – data collection in 2013 –
albeit discussions, workshops and related
research since then...



Our study

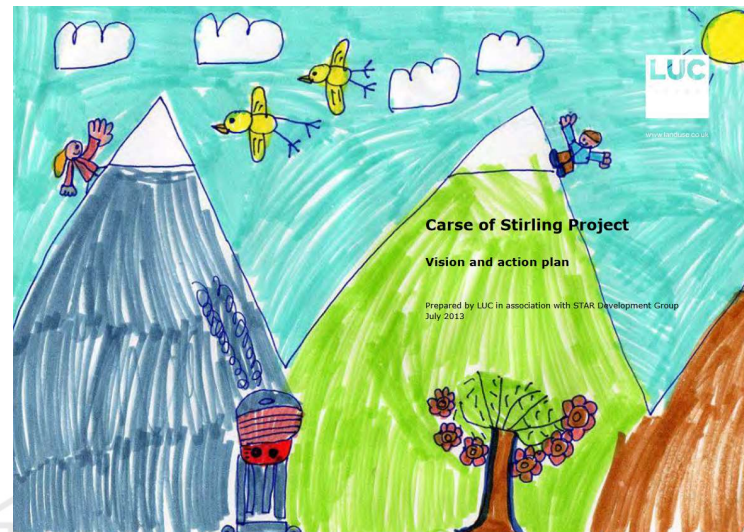
- 24 projects
(often labelled retrospectively)
- Varied set
 - Scale: 21 – 1000s of ha
 - Domain: marine, catchment, terrestrial
 - All multiple objectives...
 - 1+ ecological changes, plus social or economic (but latter not monitored)
 - ... but usually a main focal issue.
 - e.g. reduce water pollution



Achievements

- Build on pre-existing initiatives, issues and leads
 - Pre-existing focal problem: e.g. water quality
 - Pre-existing boundaries: e.g. protected sites
 - Pre-existing lead agencies: e.g. Environment Agencies

- Only 1 project with ‘fresh start’



Achievements

- Rarely try to implement all 12 ‘Malawi’ principles
- Most challenging:
 - #1 Societal choice of objectives
 - #2 Decentralisation
 - #3 Consider effects on adjacent systems
 - #10 Balance conservation and use



Approaches to tradeoffs

- All projects involve tradeoffs
 - All balance different benefits derived from nature
e.g. *“there’s quite a lot of different issues in there around carbon in soils, about flooding, around woodland expansion, about communities...”* Carse of Stirling
 - Most but not all frame it in terms of ecosystem services: not necessarily financially valued



£ €



Approaches to tradeoffs

- Compensation, winners & losers
 - “Compensation” rarely mentioned

- More positive framings?

- Themes of collaboration and partnership were more common
- Quantification or valuation of ecosystem services – never primary basis for decision-making



Approaches to tradeoffs

- Less positively...
 - Difficult to explicitly discuss power imbalances
 - no challenge to existing rights and interests
 - No mechanisms for compensation
 - only existing subsidies or resources (e.g. via CAP)
 - Some of the empowered (agencies) are at the same time disempowered (limited resources)?



Achievements

- Progress?
 - Lots of plans
 - Steps to involve stakeholder group(s)
 - Efforts to track ecosystem services
 - Monitoring mostly in terms of biological indicators



Achievements

- Innovative change or hopelessly constrained?
- Positive change but piecemeal efforts
- no revolution (yet)



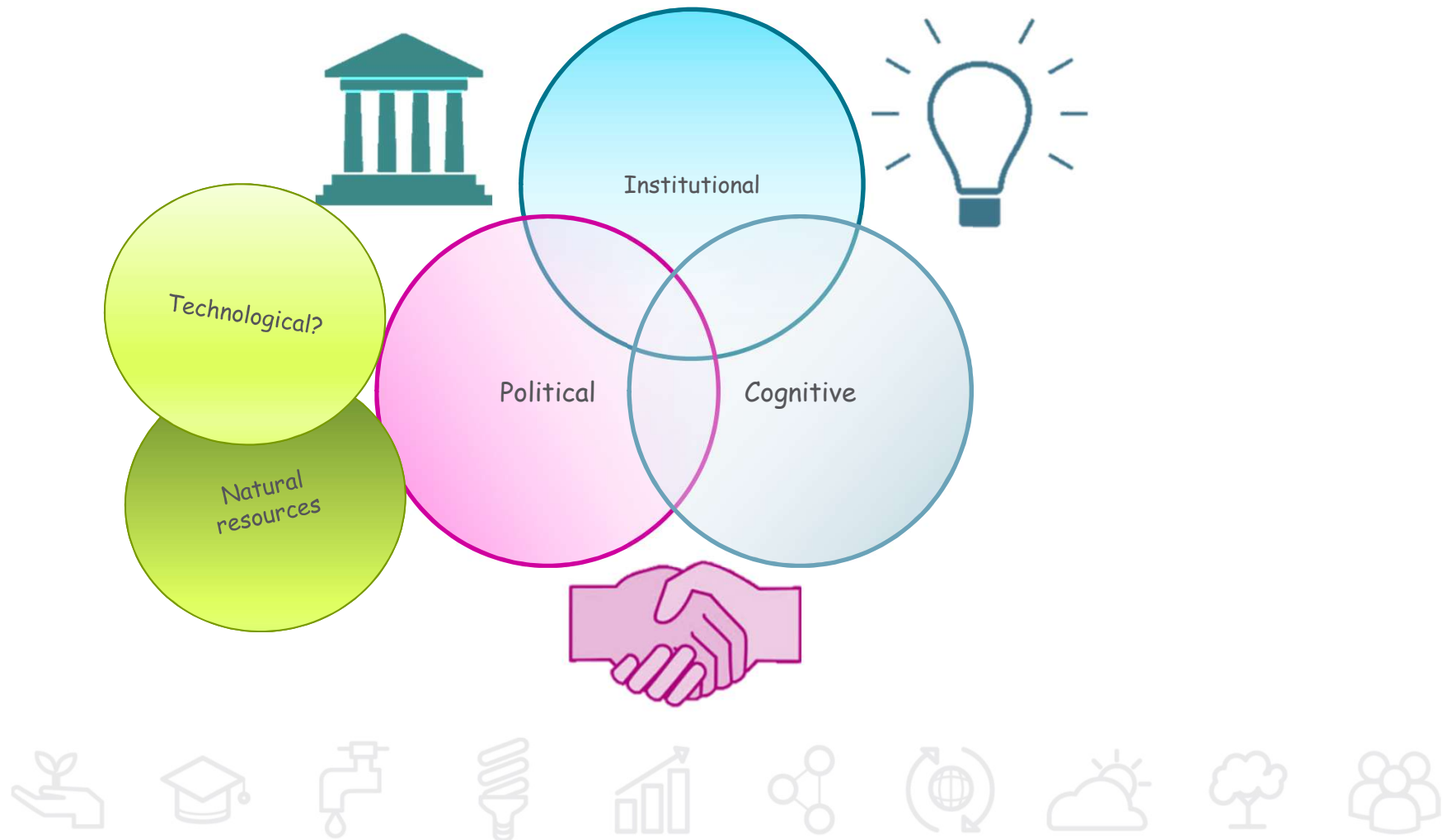
Explanations & Implications

- Positive - ethos of holistic thinking and collaboration
- Existing initiatives not enough to completely overcome legacy of 'Business as Usual'
 - Relatively little time, most <5 years
 - Focus on “the project”
 - Limited scope of change
 - Temptation to retrofit labels



Explanations & Implications

“Sticking points” from legacy effects



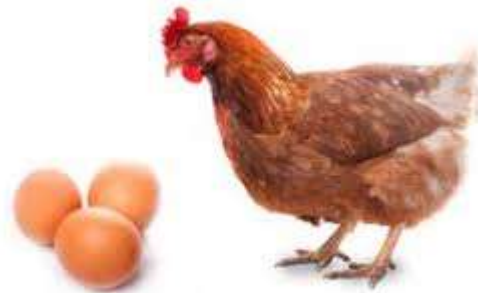
Explanations & Implications

- Not enough just to rely on project managers
- Higher-level institutions and processes critical
 - Evaluation criteria
 - Budget allocation processes, etc.
 - Organizational structures
 - Mandates for knowledge collection



Implications (& Ponderings)

- Need systemic change in order to achieve systemic change
- Where to start?



Implications (& Ponderings)

- Leverage points?

- Donella Meadows:

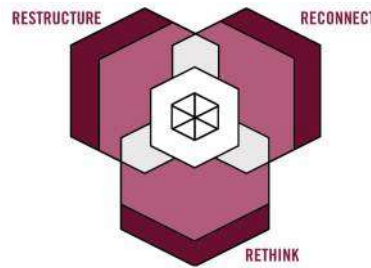
“Tendency to focus on highly tangible, but essentially weak leverage points (i.e., interventions that are easy to make, but have limited potential for transformative change)”

<http://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/>



Implications (& Ponderings)

- Leverage points for sustainability
 - To find the best ways to focus efforts:



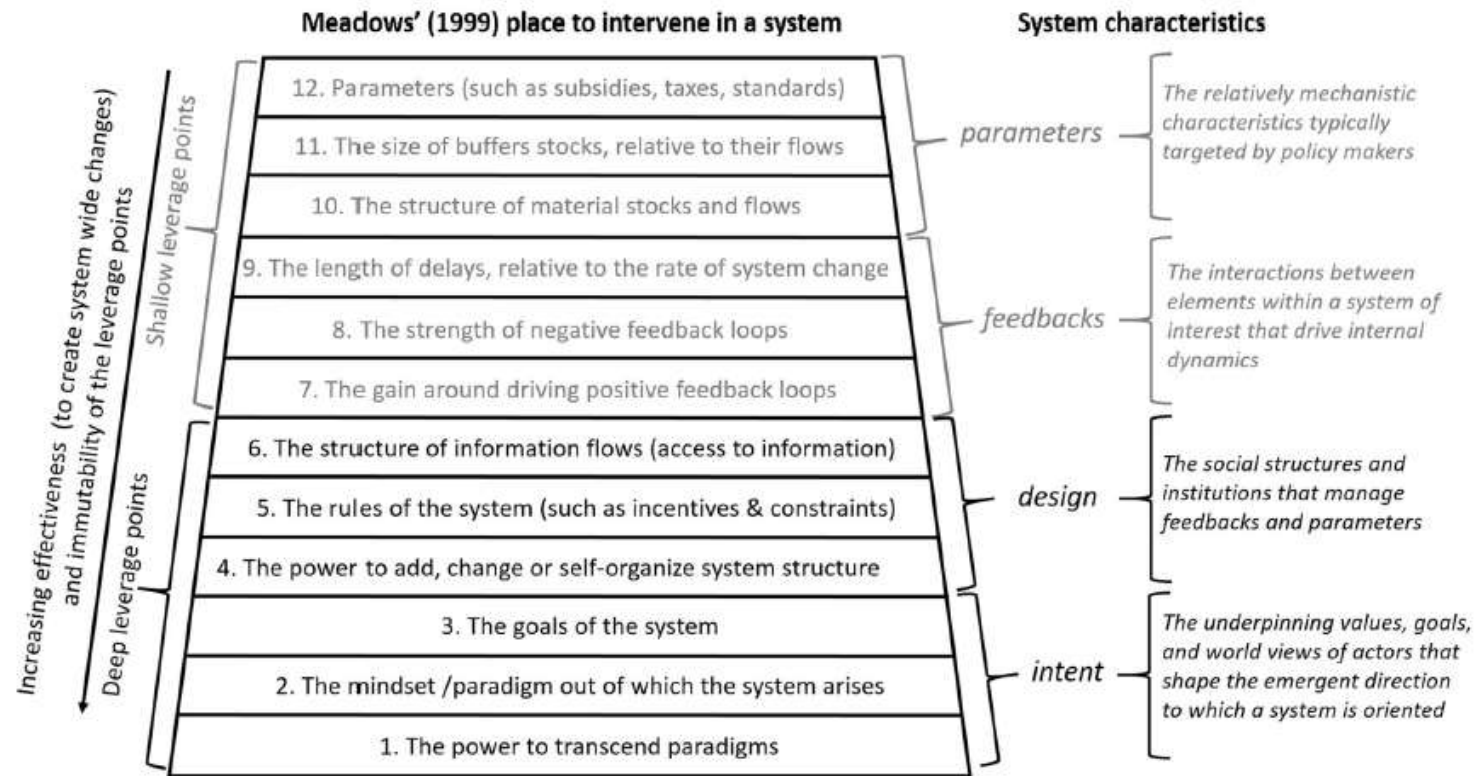
<https://leveragepoints.org>

- Can this uncover new ideas about how to enable EcA and related approaches?



Implications (& Ponderings)

Abson et al 2016, Ambio

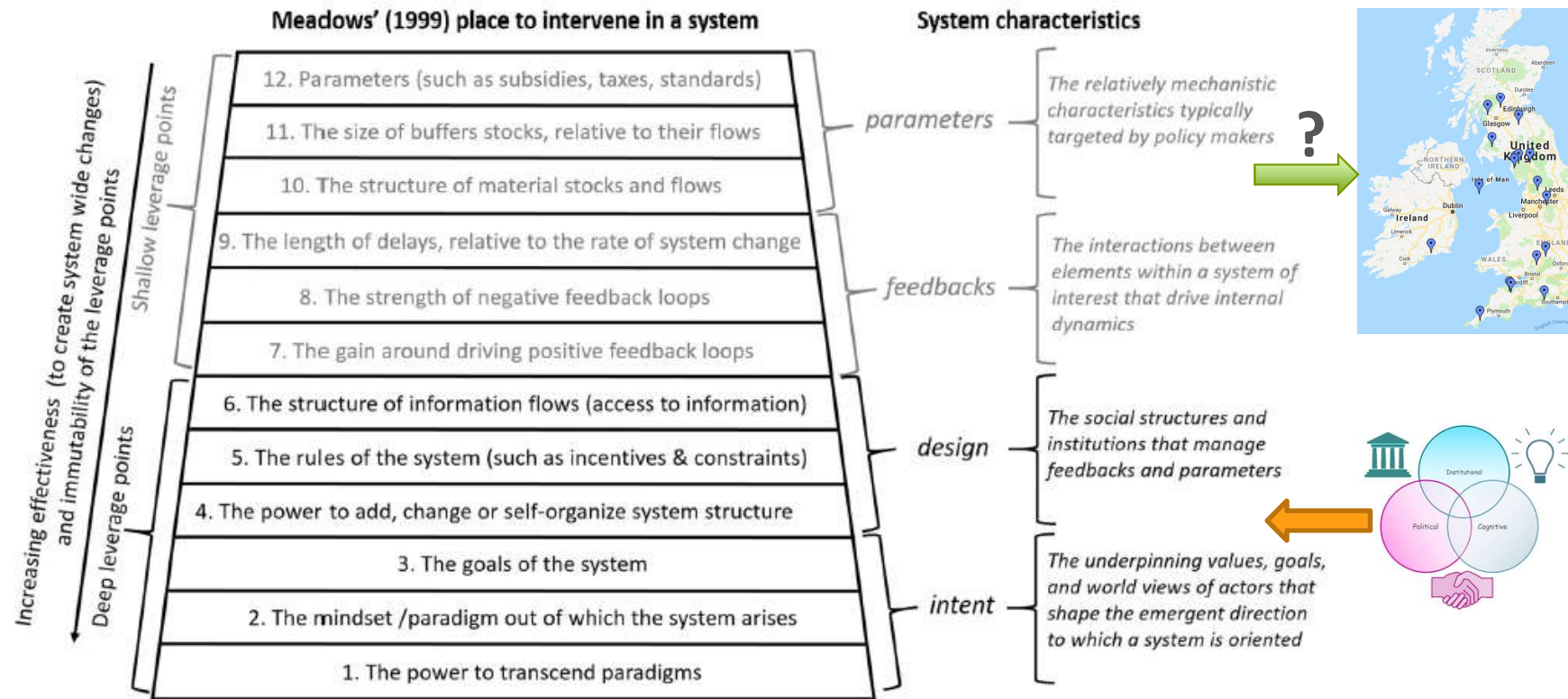


The four system characteristics represent a nested hierarchy of, tightly interacting, realms of leverage within which interventions in a given system of interest may be made. Deeper system characteristics constrain the types of interventions possible at shallower realms of leverage

(Another 12 principles!)



Implications (& Ponderings)



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Conclusion

- Ecosystem Approach is a 'big idea'
...however, implementation not matching the ideal
- Different initiatives offer promise & learning...
...however we may need to think 'big' and step outside our comfort zones to find ways of studying and enabling this.



Postscript



- Administrative restructuring
- Interest in integration
- Initiatives for decentralization
- Focus on use of Natural Capital and ESS by private sector actors



Slow systemic change... or capture?



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<http://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/ecosystem-approach-review>



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot