Participatory governance for scaling-up Nature-based Solutions

Social science insights from a fast-paced, interdisciplinary project

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About me

- Background in **Human Geography and Environmental Planning** / Governance (BSc, MSc, MSc from Cardiff University)
- PhD in Environmental Planning from the CCRI (Uni of Gloucestershire) - **engagement in UK environmental decision-making**
- Postdoctoral Researcher at Uni of Oxford - **equity, governance, participatory democracy** in nature recovery & NbS
- Theoretically-informed research with real-world impact - **transdisciplinary, applied**

This webinar aims to...

1 Background to large, interdisciplinary projects **Agile Initiative Sprint 3 'Scaling-up Nature-based Solutions in the UK'** and the **Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery**

2 Key insights from social science research research on the **participatory governance of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and how this shapes multiple, equitable outcomes**

3 Sharing **emerging findings and lessons learned** from contributing social science evidence to a fast-paced, solutions-focused interdisciplinary project at the science-policy interface

...thoughts, reflections, feedback...

Agile Initiative & LCNR

www.agile-initiative.ox.ac.uk

Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery

www.naturerecovery.ox.ac.uk

Scaling up successful and sustainable Nature-based Solutions in the UK

A rapid research project based at the Nature-based Solutions Initiative, University of Oxford

Part of the Agile Initiative which aims to respond to policy questions with fast-paced, solution-focused projects that deliver demand-led new research precisely when it's needed.

www.agile-initiative.ox.ac.uk www.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs
Environment Agency
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NATURAL ENGLAND
rspb giving nature a home
CORE THE GREENHOUSE GAS REMOVAL HUB
UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
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HIGHLANDS REWILDING
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Environmental Change Institute eci1 OXFORD
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- Nature-based Solutions (NbS): **“solutions to societal challenges that involve working with nature”**

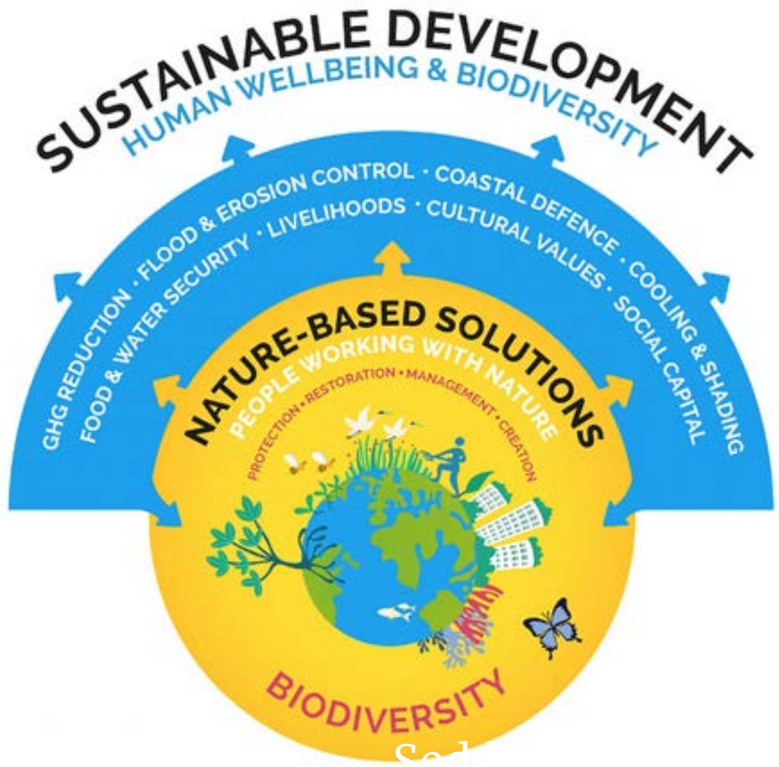
- Popularity as an integrated approach that could address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, while supporting sustainable development goals.

- Protection, restoration or management of natural and semi-natural ecosystems, sustainable land / aquatic system management, or creation of novel ecosystems.

- Growing evidence that **well-delivered NbS can deliver multiple benefits for people and nature,** e.g., through ecosystem services.

?

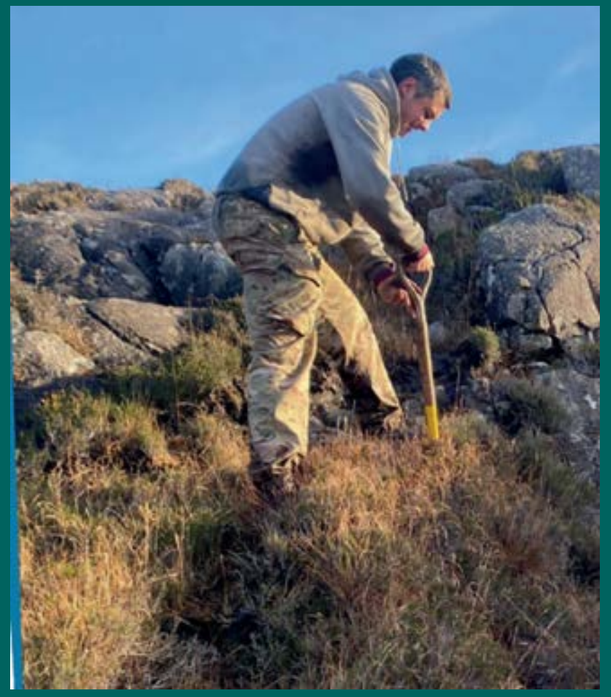
Thoughts on alternative definitions?



Natural Grid & Community Forest, Plymouth

Highlands Rewilding, Scotland

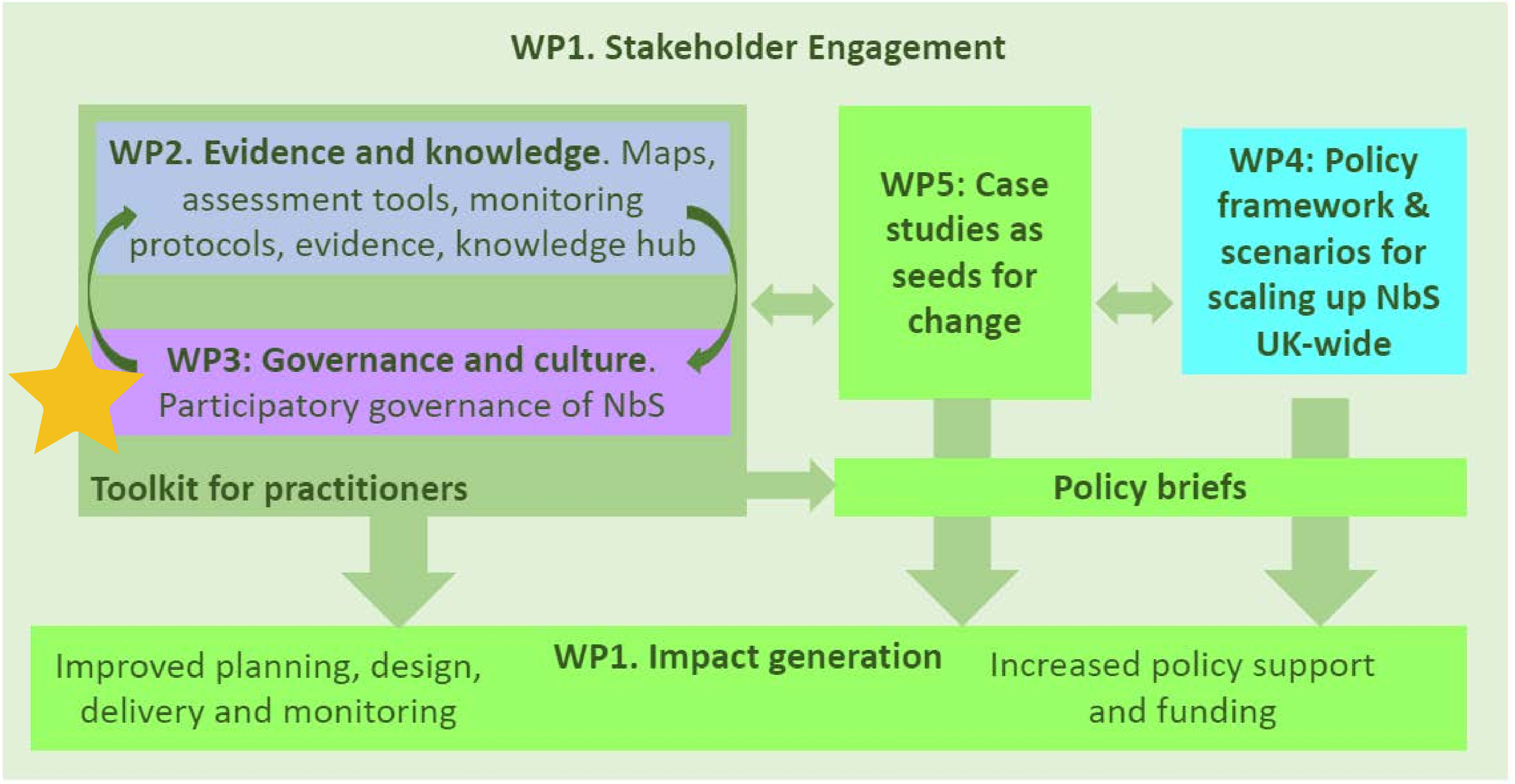
North Harris Trust, Scotland

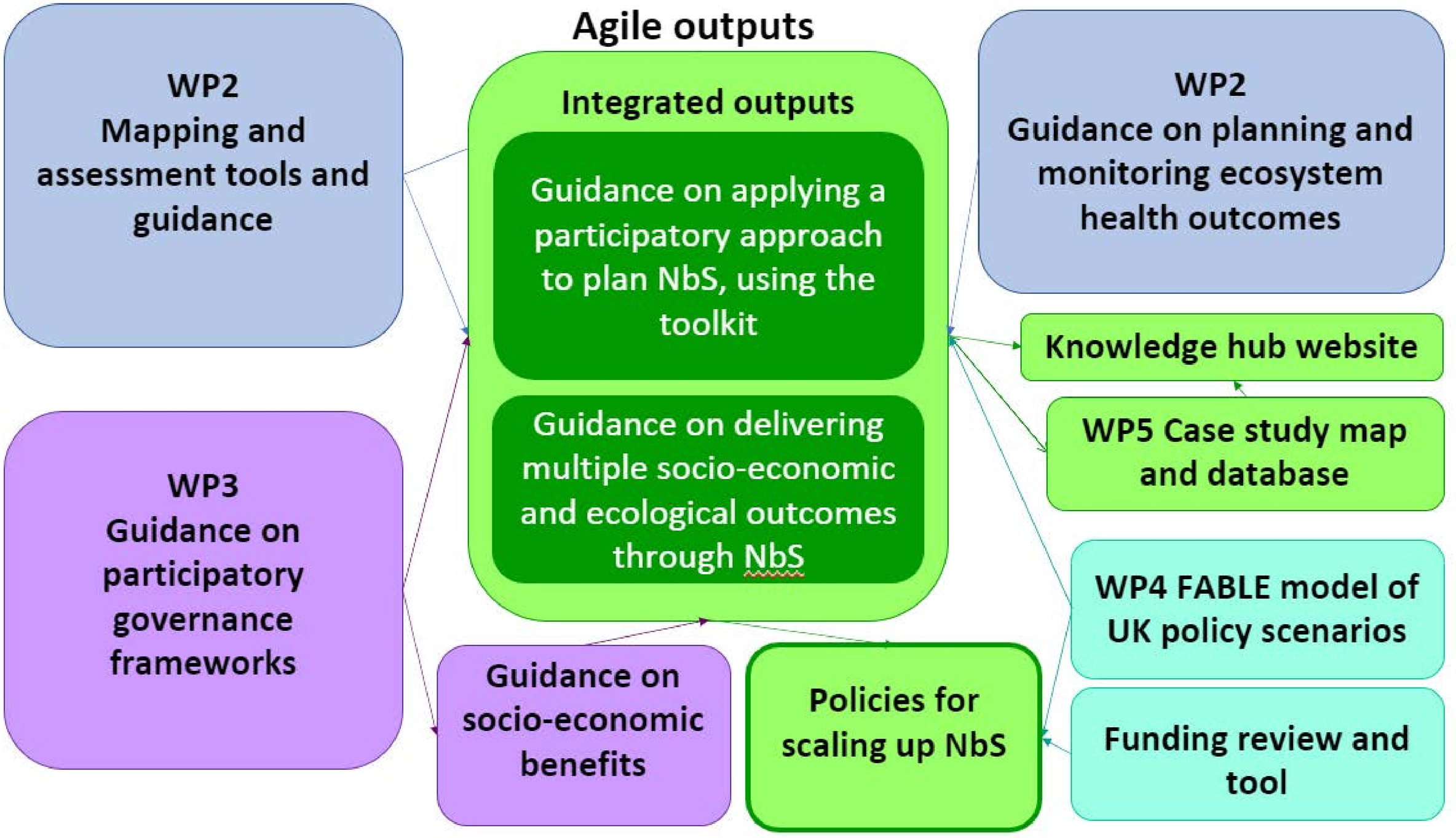


Carbon Community, Wales

Hogacre Common, Oxford

Work plan structure

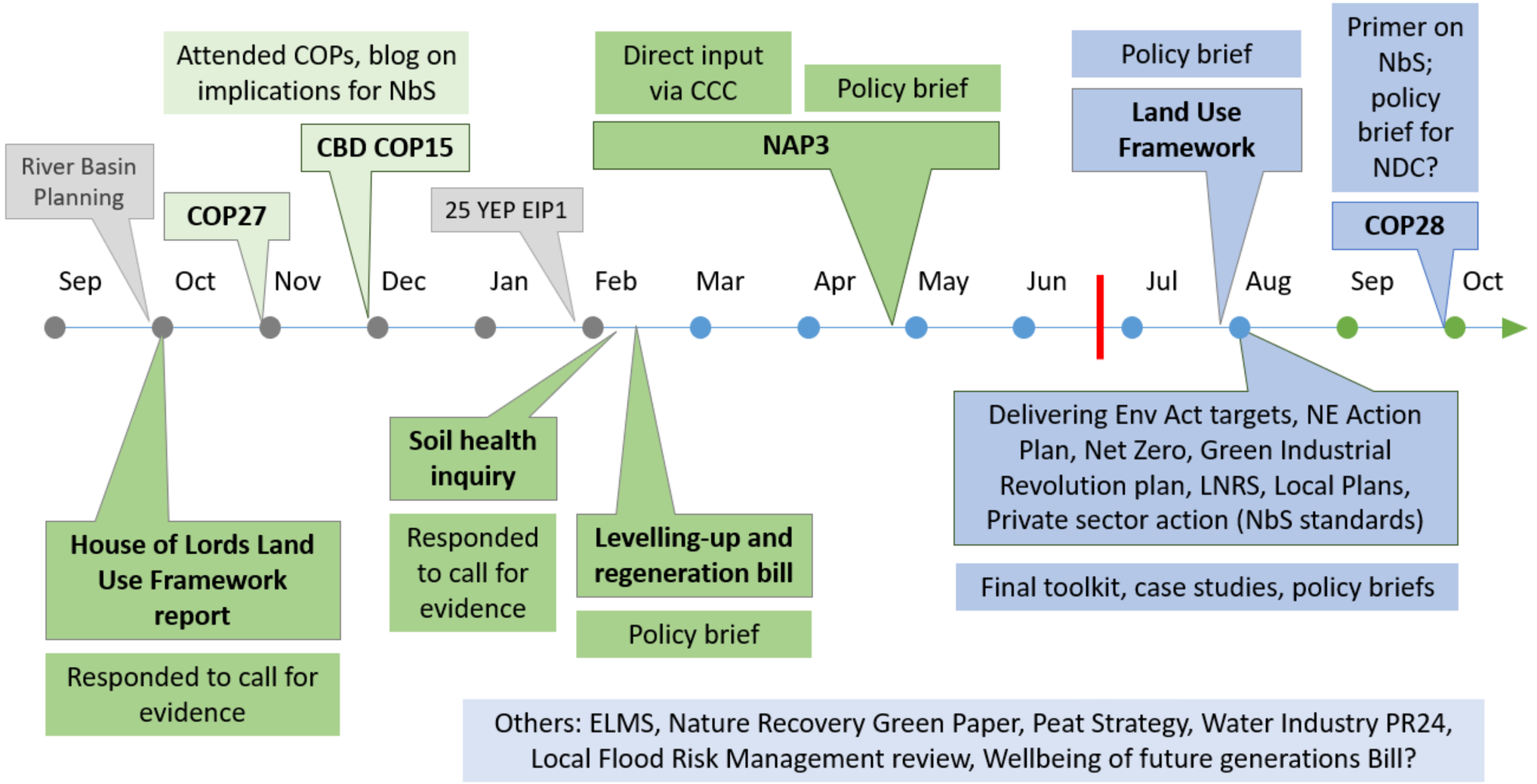



Agile outputs
WP2
Mapping and assessment tools and guidance
WP3
Guidance on participatory governance frameworks
Integrated outputs
Guidance on applying a participatory approach to plan NbS, using the toolkit
Guidance on delivering multiple socio-economic and ecological outcomes through NbS
Guidance on socio-economic benefits
Policies for scaling up NbS
WP2
Guidance on planning and monitoring ecosystem health outcomes
Knowledge hub website
WP5 Case study map and database
WP4 FABLE model of UK policy scenarios
Funding review and tool

Co-design

- Workshops with stakeholders before project inception to co-create research priorities
- Aim for continuous stakeholder engagement throughout project - termly meetings & informal, work package-specific engagement
- Outputs tailored to specific policy hooks co-identified with stakeholders
- Organisational needs, priorities, & capacity considerations
- Focus on integrating social science expertise

Output: Tailored outputs to meet specific policy hooks



Iterative co-design process

Social science contributions

Project legacy

Work package 3: Governance and culture

How can we scale-up Nature-based Solutions to deliver multiple socio-economic and ecological benefits, in a way that is equitable and financially sustainable?

Mark Hirons
Research Fellow

Selasi Emmanuel Tomude
Research Assistant

What are the key challenges for implementing and scaling Nature-based Solutions?

Join at

slido.com

#2558 751

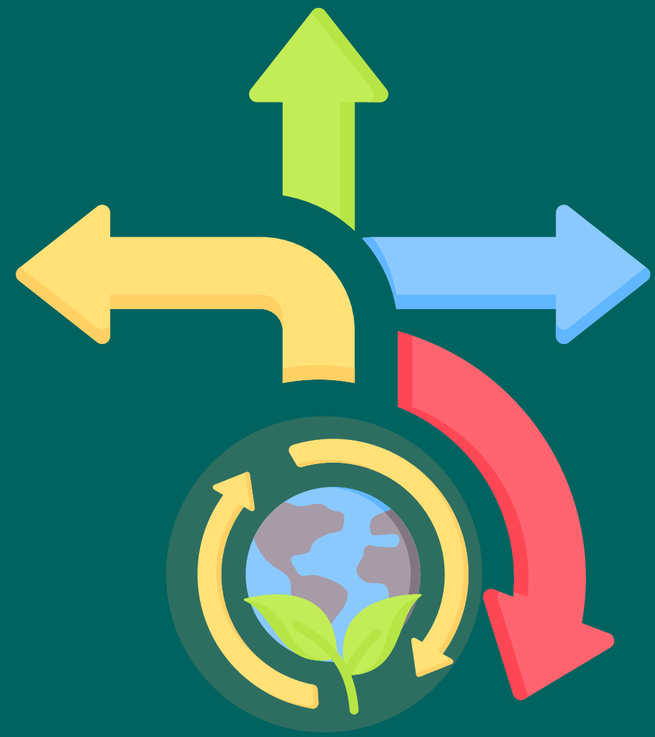
Context and purpose

- NbS promoted for sustainability pathways
  - -Global attention for biodiversity and well-being benefits (e.g., IPCC, CBD)
- Rooted in collaboration "with and for people and nature"
- Antidote to exploitative economies and unsustainable growth
- Combatting harmful misunderstandings and misuses of NbS
  - -Resulting in harm to biodiversity, erosion of trust, and disempowerment
- Success involves:
  - -Engaging local communities
  - -Co-design for optimized, equitable delivery of multiple "co-benefits
  - -Management of potential "undesirable trade-offs"

IPCC (2019); IUCN (2020); Raymond et al. (2017); Raworth (2017), Seddon et al. (2021).

However…

- Growing concerns about NbS reinforcing incumbent power structures, inequalities and social exclusion
- Normative framings driving NbS implementation can reinforce hegemony, human-nature dichotomies, and the neoliberalisation of nature (**favouring of certain interests over others, maintaining authority)**
- Structural, organizational, and policy contexts within NbS implementation entrench **domination, divisions, and binaries**
- Specific framings of NbS dominate, downplaying alternative pathways to sustainability transformation
- Implications for knowledge politics, decision-making, equitable distribution of benefits
- **Need to critically examine & reshape now NbS are conceptualised and implemented to ensure more equitable, sustainable outcomes**

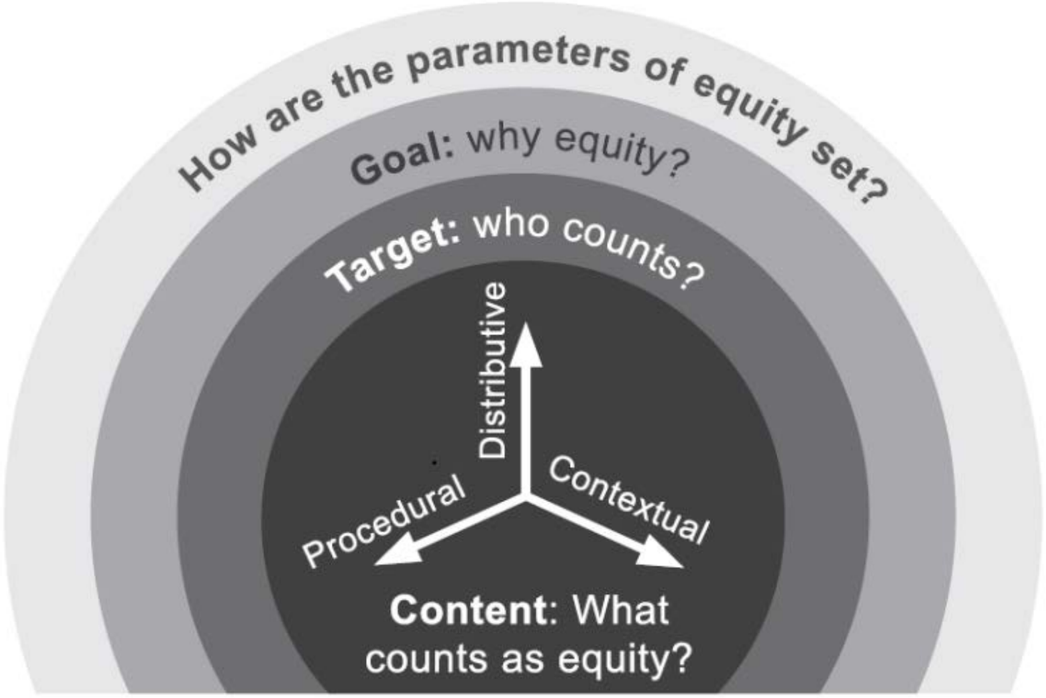


Technocentric? Market-oriented? State-led? Citizen-led? - powerful role of framings, actors, institutions

Whose nature? Who decides? What knowledge is considered legitimate? Who wins and loses?

Cooper et al. (2023); Keech et al. (2023); Tallent & Zambala (2023); Scoones et al., 2015; Stanley (2023); Welden et al. (2020)

Applying an ‘equity framework’ to NbS governance



No universally applicable standard - context-specific parameters can be generated, adopted, and modified for a given intervention (ideally through a participatory process)

McDermott et al. (2012);
McDermott (2013)

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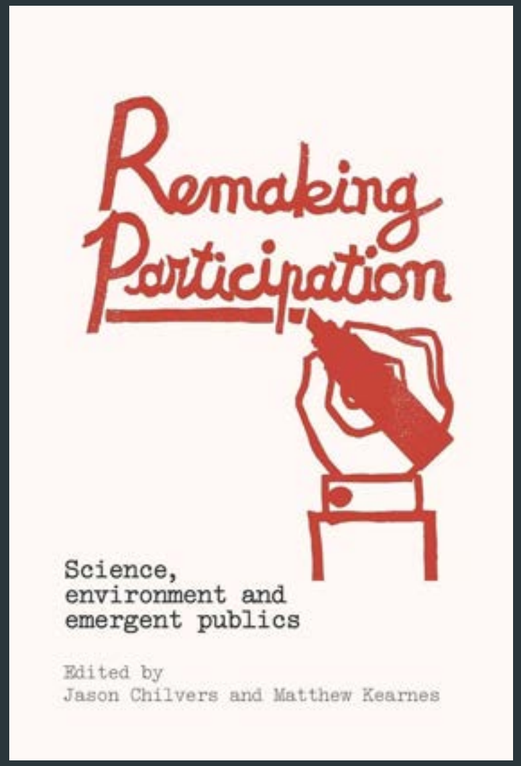
Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery

(Rethinking) participation & democracy in the pursuit of NbS

Involving people in the "processes, structures, spaces and decisions that affect their lives, working with them to achieve equitable and sustainable outcomes on their own terms" (Kindon, 2009 p. 518).

- Work to both open up and close down democratic, equitable and 'just' outcomes
- Tokenism, manipulation, control > collaboration, empowerment, and emancipation
- Range of typologies and frameworks to frame debates (e.g., top-down/bottom-up)
- Interest participatory environmental governance surged in recent years - reimagining democracies, reforming systems, & transformative changes in response to planetary crisis
- Need to rethink participation in more constructivist ways, as "collectives" that are emergent and continuously created: "in the making" rather than "fixed and procedural"
- Pormative assumptions about participation (and NbS) risks reinforcing incumbent power structures (rather than challenge and dismantle them)

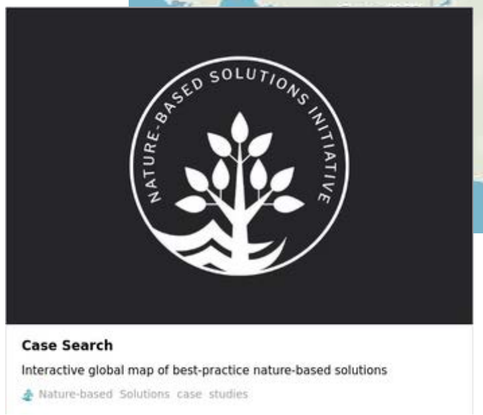


“The planetary crisis is a colonial capitalist product. Decolonising the current system is not about more diversity. It is not about having a seat at the table, but burning the table down and a fundamental reformulation of paradigms and solidarities rooted in justice and meaningful praxis.” (Sultana, 2023 p.6)

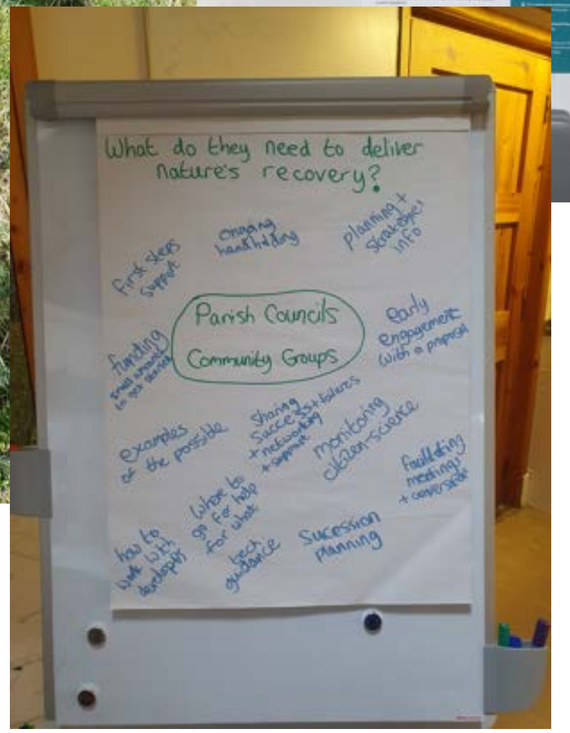
How does the interplay between the politics and governance of NbS, and participatory democratic processes, relate to considerations of equity that are needed for transformative pathways to sustainability and the delivery of co-benefits?

Methodology (work package 3)

- Semi-structured interviews & survey
- Practitioners perspectives on NbS design and implementation and the implications for delivering multiple, equitable outcomes
- Participants selected based on UK NbS case studies identified as part of NbSI case study map database (WP5) following IUCN NbS guidelines
- Mixed sampling method including purposeful sampling of diverse governance approaches



earth trust
NEWS
Wild Oxfordshire
COMMUNITY ECOLOGY


What do they need to deliver Nature's recovery?
Parish Councils
Community Groups
Succession planning

Early reflections

1. What narratives exist that reflect different framings for Nature-based Solutions?
2. How do these framings work to open up and close down the participatory and democratic governance of NbS?
3. What are the implications for the contributions of NbS towards equitable, plural, and 'just' transformative outcomes?

Interplay between politics & governance of NbS, participatory democracy, and equitable outcomes

Early reflections

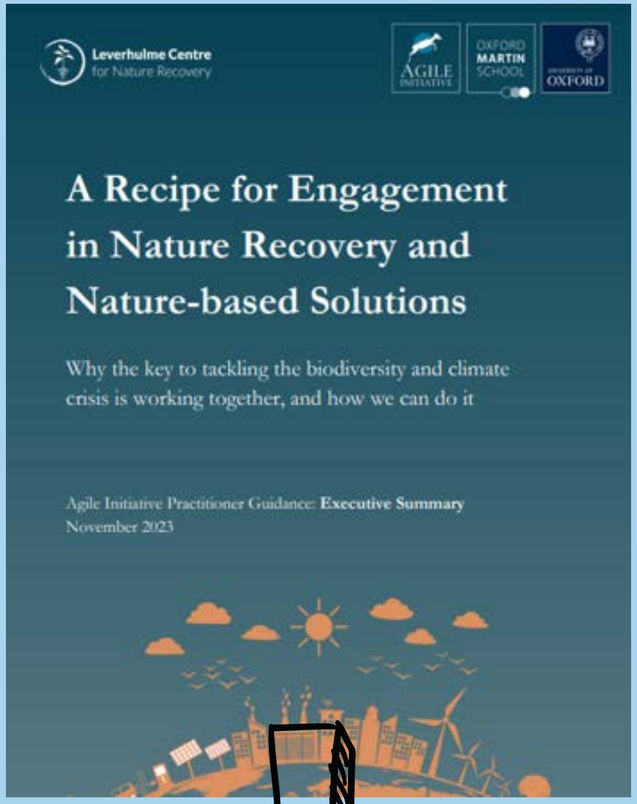
- Despite well-intentioned efforts for more holistic, integrated and diverse messages surrounding NbS, important issues remain...
- Certain perspectives, particularly those favoring technocentric, market-focused, top-down, and control-oriented interventions, may impede transformative outcomes by reinforcing power structures and diverting attention from crucial discussions on democracy, equity, and justice.
- Vital to examine how this influences the ‘opening up’ and ‘closing down’ of discussions on alternative perspectives and pathways for transformative outcomes through NbS - risk of further entrenching political polarisation, impacting participatory and democratic debate.

Outputs, outcomes, impact…

- Critical social science perspectives on NbS implementation
- Theoretically-informed outputs with real-world implications
- Focused on realistic solutions - ***how can we produce practical, relevant, and useful outputs for impact, while maintaining a commitment to longer term, more radical shifts, and to ensuring that decisions now do not constrain the possibility of such longer term changes?***

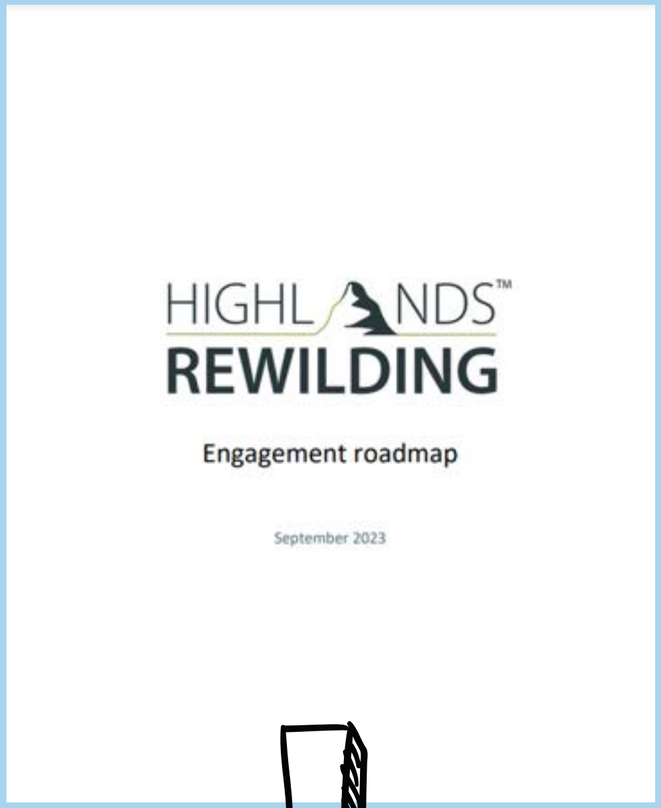
- ‘Traditional’ academic outputs
- Practitioner guidance
- Policy briefs

Scoones et al. (2015)



Hafferty et al. (2023);

- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Natural England engagement
- Highlands Rewilding



Highlands Rewilding (2023)

- Engagement and community benefits strategy
- FIRNS bid - new standards for community engagement & benefits from natural capital
- Organisational learning, culture & capacity

; Davis et al. (2023)

- ‘Stakeholder Engagement Plan for Landscape Recovery’
- Knowledge sharing with Landscape Recovery schemes

Unlocking the power of engagement for nature recovery and nature-based solutions: Join our webinar!

Event details

Speaker(s)
Various

When
Tuesday 20 Feb 2024 - 10:00am-11:00am

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"This webinar is relevant for anyone working in the on-the-ground delivery, design and/or strategy of a broad range of nature recovery and nature-based solutions projects which aim to benefit both people and nature."

Reflections

- ☑ Confidence and skills contributing theoretically-informed social science expertise in a fast-paced, impact-focused and policy-oriented interdisciplinary environment
- ☑ Expanding contacts in policy and practice arenas relevant to scaling-up NbS and nature recovery, understanding science-policy interface
- ☑ Part of community of enthusiastic ECRs interested in co-designed and ethically-sensitive research impact agenda

- ? Time constraints impacting trusting relationships & rapport essential for interdisciplinary & co-design
- ? Framing of the problem & solutions (e.g., policy) risks narrow 'tunnel vision' and downplaying alternative perspectives
- ? Integrating social sciences (not 'end-of-pipe'), misunderstandings, undervalued, limited capacity & use in addressing environmental issues

Focus on 'non-traditional' outputs, balancing mental health & wellbeing

Central to all of this…

Inter- and transdisciplinary leadership and collaboration skills

Open-mindedness, shared learning, degrees of comfort and discomfort, adaptation…

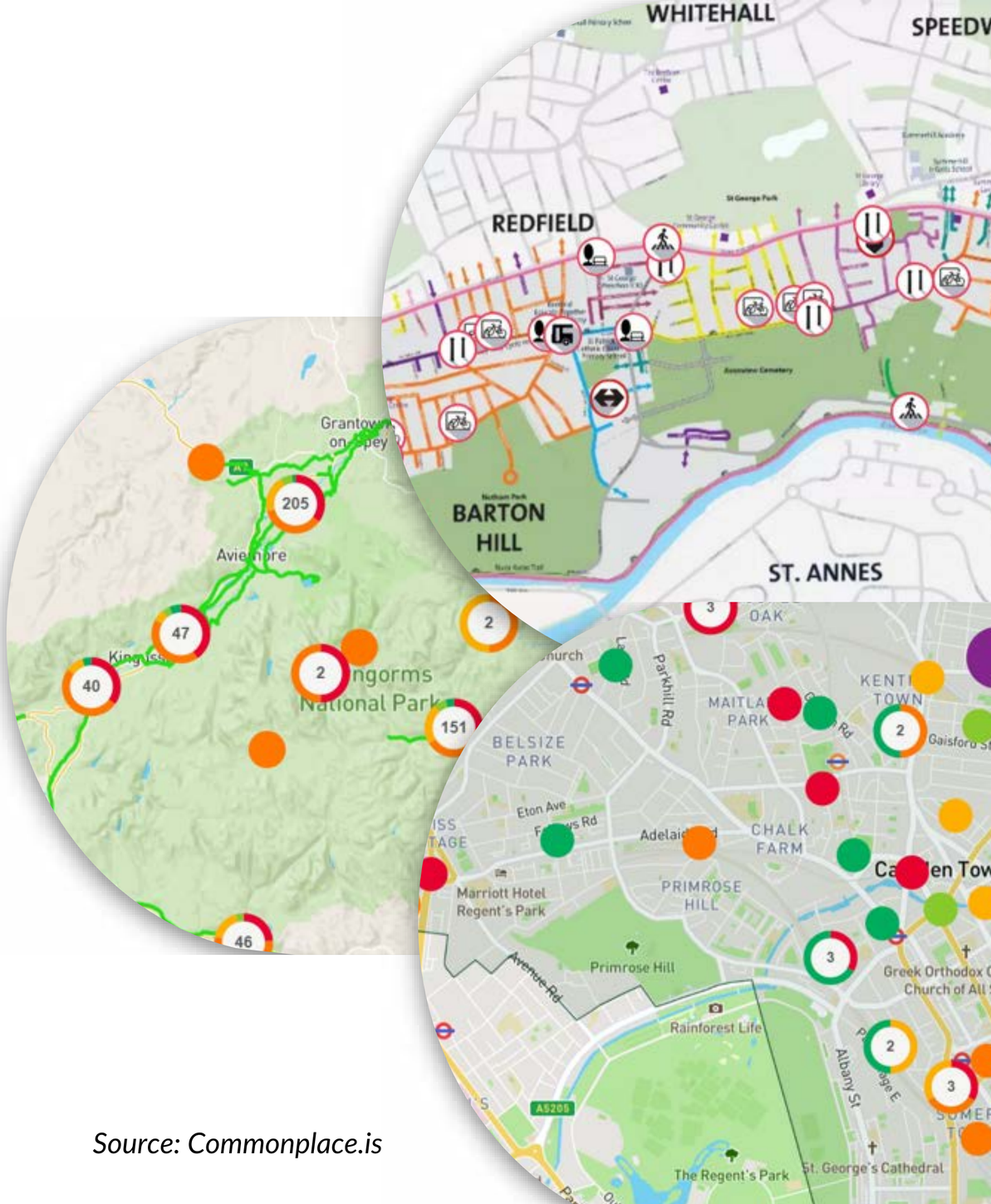
Framing of policy issues, resource allocation, bottom-up action…

…What else?

e.g., Freeth and Caniglia (2019)

What’s next?

- Agile Initiative legacy
- Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery
- Collaboration & partnerships
- Participatory and democratic governance of UK nature recovery & NbS
- Scotland and Oxfordshire ‘living labs’ before scaling out



Source: Commonplace.is

Thank You!

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