

Ecosystem Approach – Taking Stock

Background

The first Sibthorp Seminar in 1996 made a significant contribution to ecosystem management, breaking away from conventional thinking, and identified principles of ecosystem management that subsequently proved strongly influential in guiding the definition of the Ecosystem Approach under the CBD and the articulation of the rationale underpinning its application (Maltby E, Holgate M, Acreman M & Weir A, 1999. Ecosystem Management: Questions for Science and Society). Some 15 years on, there is now widespread acceptance of the need for integrated and holistic approaches to the management of natural resources, such as the ecosystem approach.

Governments, including the UK, are attempting to mainstream the ecosystem approach. There is considerable momentum in its application at a national, EU and international level through it being embedded in Defra policy and in the Convention on Biological Diversity. The thinking behind the ecosystem approach is also represented but is not always explicitly mentioned in many policies at a national and EU level (e.g. Water Framework Directive). For these reasons, those charged with delivering policy are committed to the application of the ecosystem approach and any evaluation of integrated and holistic solutions to ecosystem management must consider it as an important strand in the debate. Yet there are still major challenges in translating the conceptual framework into practical policy implementation.

We believe that the effectiveness of such initiatives will be limited unless they are extended to include social cultural and economic considerations. But do such fully integrated models or approaches actually exist in practice? There may be significant experiences from different sectors and from around the world from which lessons can be drawn but in the UK there is sometimes a notable lack of openness to learning from examples implemented outside specific sectoral areas or elsewhere in the world. Both in the UK and worldwide, across academia and the public and private sectors, many initiatives using a variety of tools and approaches have been undertaken or are underway that attempt to deliver integrated and holistic solutions. Although not always using the term 'ecosystem approach', in practice the approaches being implemented are often compatible with the framework it sets out.

Many of the tools and approaches being applied are complementary, but there is often a poor understanding of how they relate to each other and there are important lessons to be learned from a critical evaluation of the range of approaches. There are clear overlaps between some tools and methodologies. For example, Initiatives such as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) are consistent with an ecosystems approach but based around economic costs. The ecosystem approach is also closely aligned with the approach of Integrated Landuse Planning but practitioners using either of these approaches are often not aware of the similarities. Frequently, the complementarity between some approaches and tools are not recognised because of differences in terminology. This can often lead to a resistance to applying certain approaches and tools. In other cases the use of seemingly complicated or specialist terminology presents a key obstacle for practitioners, as the fundamental ideas are obscured and difficult to grasp. Presenting the fundamental ideas more clearly would improve the understanding and the uptake of the methodologies.

There is increasing recognition and widespread acceptance of the need for holistic and integrated thinking in ecosystem management, as evidenced by the range of recent projects and programmes that have been initiated, notably the National Ecosystem Assessment, Natural England's Ecosystem Services pilots and TEEB, and the embedding of the ecosystem approach in national policy (e.g. Defra's Natural Value Programme and action plan for embedding an ecosystems approach). Despite this, there are still barriers to its acceptance amongst some practitioners and barriers to embedding new approaches in practical situations. While in some cases it has been found to be a useful approach, in other cases there is no clear need perceived for such approaches. The generality, the high level definition and the lack of definition of different scales of operation of the Ecosystem Approach are often regarded as key problems and resulted in many considering that it has no validity or is too superficial or is difficult to implement. There is a need to examine what the barriers are and what action needs to be taken to overcome them and allow implementation of integrated approaches.

Objective

To advance the arguments for integrated and holistic solutions to ecosystem management in order to change existing mindsets and to identify changes needed in policy and practice to enable their implementation in practical situations.

Workshop issues

This workshop will focus on the range of approaches, frameworks and tools that are available to deliver integrated and holistic solutions for ecosystem management problems. It will encompass both UK and worldwide examples and involve both 'high level thinkers' as well as practitioners.

The objectives of the workshop will be to:

- Argue the case for integrated and holistic approaches to the management of ecosystems at different scales. Also, where are these approaches NOT appropriate? For example what is the case for species protection where we still don't know their role in ecosystem functioning and the delivery of services for human well-being? Can we distinguish the amount of care we devote to a species rich coral reef and a species poor coral reef if they are both economically and socially providing very similar services?
- Identify general barriers to the delivery of integrated and holistic approaches to ecosystem management (e.g. sectorally based policies); we need to be clear about but avoid going over old ground (such as lack of evidence, difficulty with language, lack of political/business clout). We could explore e.g., how we can get people to work together better as they need to in new ways and organisations to fulfil this approach – what stops them or what can we do to enable / encourage them?
- Provide clarity for policy makers and practitioners on the relationship between various approaches and frameworks, and the tools used to deliver them; Cut through differences in terminology to identify the overlap and complementarity between the commonly used approaches, frameworks and tools; - Different approaches will be set out for everyone to be on the same "page" at the beginning of the session. Are differences in approach actually

a problem for delivery? We all talk different languages and have different “takes” on problems – is this an issue here? Might a diversity of approaches be a good thing? What can we do to help various methods to become more mutually reinforcing whilst retaining the individuality of them where this is important to different stakeholder groups (recognising that “invented here” can increase buy-in significantly).

- Challenge traditional thinking and sectoral divisions to develop practical guidance on implementing integrated and holistic principles and practices across sectoral boundaries;

Detailed issues likely to emerge may include:

Making non-monetary values count in decisions. Where does “innate” value play in? How can we ensure decisions are made on the whole story whilst the evidence is incomplete or comes in different forms?

Payments – What’s the state of the art view on who pays/gets paid, how mechanisms can work with the minimum of governance, and how to avoid further market distortions in their implementation (just setting up “new” subsidies). Are payments for ecosystem services a viable option?

Who are people in this field talking to? Are climate change people talking to biodiversity people or water people? How do communications channels push this into research, government, etc. What is working and how do we strengthen the most effective channels?

Can we make timescales and approaches work? How does this careful, considered thinking work in an often very fast moving, politically driven decision making environment? Is it possible to make decision makers “stop and think”? What has been the impact of efforts to date such as Sibthorp, IUCN, CBD, Defra and TEEB?

To deliver these objectives in a practical way they can be framed around particular problems of current relevance by identifying evidence gaps and opportunities for application, for example, catchment management (with special reference to water quality, supply and flood risk), biodiversity loss, climate change, human well-being, aid for environment, distribution of costs and benefits from ecosystem services.

Format

Invited delegates will give presentations based on prepared summary draft texts, which will form the basis of discussion in break-out groups.

The workshop will be a two-day meeting with c40 delegates involving some high profile experts and stakeholders / practitioners / end-user beneficiaries. Delegates will arrive for morning coffee on the first day, with a seminar dinner on the evening of the first day and depart after afternoon tea on the second day. The venue will be The Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester.

Draft structure for the seminar:

Day 1:

Registration over coffee

Welcome by Professor Chris Gaskell

Opening by Roger Crofts, Chair Sibthorp Trust

Introduction – The conceptual framework and examples of global experience

11:00 Overview – evolutionary steps and challenges in new thinking, why the EA is important, track record and examples from around the world. Maltby(Sibthorp) / Hamerlynck(IUCN)

Session 1 - The constraining environment

11:30 Barriers to delivery (using concrete practical examples): covering aspects of government organisation, limitations of knowledge/evidence and challenges of social acceptance.

Working with governments/institutions- Mulongoy (CBD)/ Davidson(Ramsar)

Limitations of knowledge / Science evidence - Meire

(Antwerp)/Stewardson(Melbourne)

Socio-economic limitations – Morris(Cranfield)/ Church(Brighton)

12:30 Plenary discussion led by ‘practitioners’, setting out issues for breakout groups

Logan(EA)-Freshwaters

Austen(Plymouth/MMO)-Marine

Clark(NE)-Terrestrial

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:30 Breakout Groups to brainstorm issues

15:30 – 1600 Tea

16:00 – 17:30 Reporting back and wrap-up of Day 1

18:45 Reception

19:30 Dinner with Speaker

Day 2:

Session 2 - Innovations to support implementation

09:00 Tools to support integrated and holistic approaches to cover practical/operational economic, social and scientific tools.

Global scale – Pavan Sukhdev TEEB(TBC)

National scale – Steve Albon NEA

10:00 Six X 5 minute soap boxes from ‘grass roots’ practitioners focussing on lessons learnt

Natasha Barker
Paul Nolan
National Trust
Tom Nisbet
Martin Ross
Peak District

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee

11:00 Towards solutions: Payment for ecosystem services . Laurence Couldrick

11:15 Comments from practitioners e.g. Langholm project, SCAMP

11:30 Comment from policy-makers(DEFRA/DFID) followed by Plenary discussion

12:30 – 1:30 Lunch

Session 3

1:30 – 3:30 Break-out groups to brainstorm key outputs such as: Guidelines for policy makers, Notes for institutions including Treasury and Research Councils, Glossary of terms, Compendium of Tools or others.

3:30 Plenary – reporting back over tea, final discussions (4pm finish)

Potential outputs

- Guidance notes on practical implementation of ecosystem approaches in a range of situations
- Synthesis book based on written contributions from presenters and summaries of discussion groups.
- Guidelines for policy makers
- Notes for institutions including Treasury and Research Councils
- Glossary of terms