

How to improve policy and decision making for nature by mainstreaming  
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*: "... people say that I should study to become a climate scientist so that I can 'solve the climate crisis'. But the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change."*

Greta Thunberg (2018) at the Extinction Rebellion Rally, London, October 31, 2018

As the epigraph shows, climate change activist Greta Thunberg has made a call asking us to "wake up and change." This paper improves our understanding of both how to wake up, and why we have been asleep for too long through environmental mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is a process that embeds an 'environmental' concern like climate change into the everyday priorities, plans, decisions and behaviours of people/agencies outside the environmental sector. Currently, many problems are identified, treated and managed in separate silos, resulting in conflict and stalemate. However, if 'silos' can be broken down through more collaborative approaches that involve academics, policy and practice communities working together on problems from the outset, we can 'wake up' and better realise opportunities. However, such work is not a magic bullet. Often such approaches can lead to compromises that dilute environmental priorities which then have little overall impact. So, this paper answers four critical questions: 1) What is the added-value that mainstreaming provides for environmental policy and practice?; 2) What insights emerge from mainstreaming and related literatures?; 3) How can we advance our understanding of mainstreaming processes?; 4) How can we improve future environmental mainstreaming interventions?

Our literature review reveals a research and policy gap on the way mainstreaming processes evolve and change over time. So we build a framework that adapts ideas from collaboration, sustainability and diffusion of innovation theories to model mainstreaming pathways resembling a

game of snakes of ladders; where progress is made through distinctive phases of innovation, persuasion and adoption, depending on encounters with hooks (ladders) and barriers (snakes) and desired behaviour change. Our framework helps us understand environmental mainstreaming as a series of multiple pathways reflecting the interplay of many concepts that are now used to capture nature's benefits. Using the example of natural capital, we demonstrated that, whilst some progress has been made through to adoption, this is weak and still too focussed on persuading people to mainstream through more evidence rather than making sure we are working across disciplines and professions with the right partners from the outset to achieve the desired impact.

We conclude that more attention needs to be focussed here with more positive communication of key environmental messages. We argue that our focus on lifecycles and pathways helps us understand why we have been asleep and provides a starting point to help identify key hooks to wakes us up.



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