

The 'Ecosystem' of Community Action



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Outline of the Session

- **Introductions & scene-setting**
- Present the TESS project
- Discuss the challenges of the work
- Present the collected data
- Play around with the data together
- Exchange ideas about how to make it useful to the permaculture movement
- Conclusion & consolidation

Why are you at this session?
What yields are you hoping for?

How I got here

- Permaculture is the most promising response to the predicaments of the 21st century.
- I studied Sustainable Development at the University of St Andrews.
- During my studies I co-ordinated the Transition: University of St Andrews group for 2 years.
- I graduated and went to do an 8-month permaculture course in Kinsale, Ireland.
- I left 1 month into the course to start my current research assistant position at the James Hutton Institute working on the TESS project.

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The TESS project

“TESS [Towards European Societal Sustainability] is researching the **impacts** of grassroots **community-based initiatives** on **greenhouse gas emissions** reductions as well as their broader **economic, social, political, technological and environmental impacts**.

We are also researching what makes initiatives successful and how they grow to determine how policy could encourage the further development of such activities across the EU.”



- EU-funded project
- 8 partner institutions
- 6 countries
- Diverse motivations



Universitatea
Ștefan cel Mare
Suceava



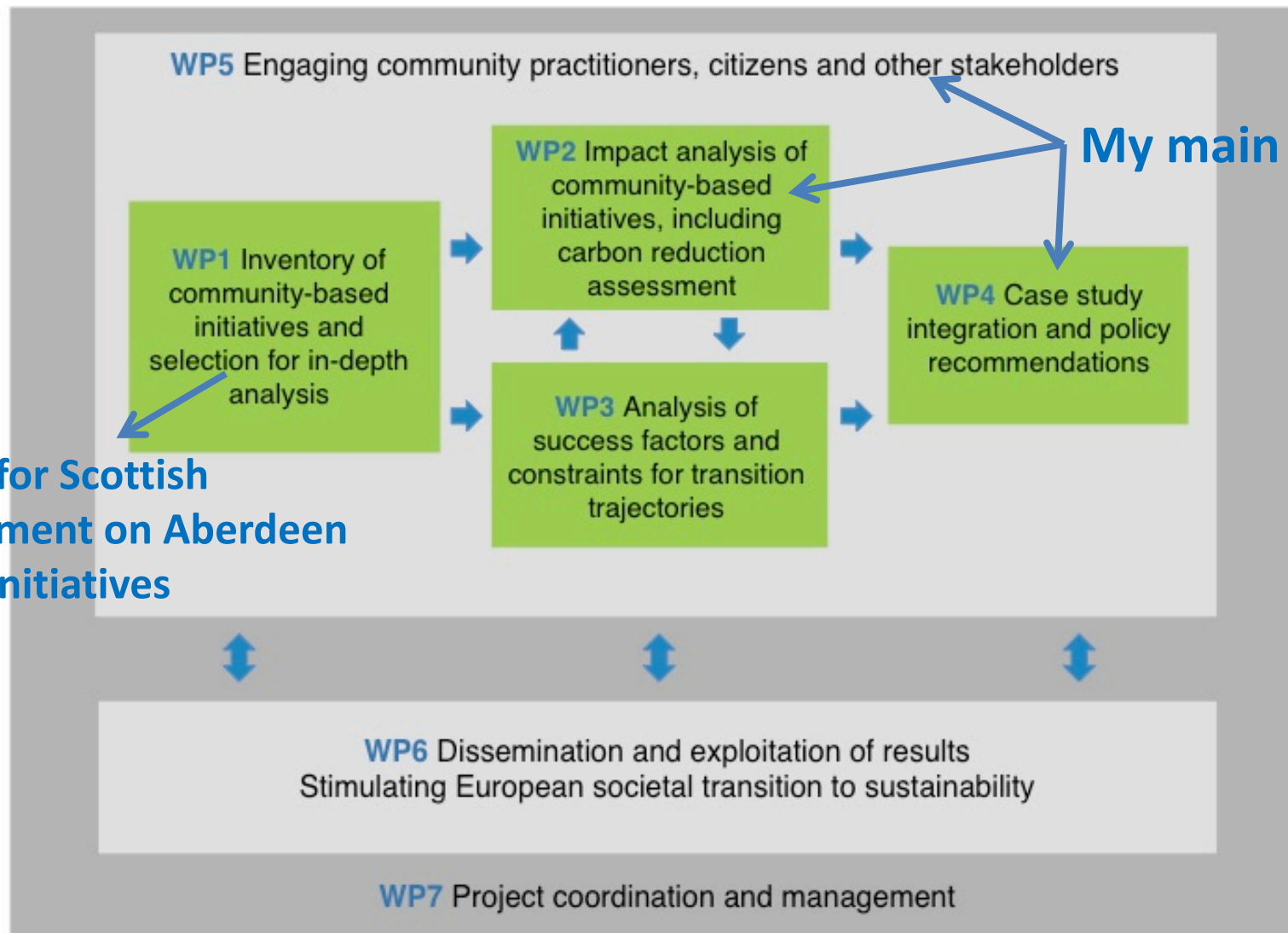
POTSDAM INSTITUTE FOR
CLIMATE IMPACT RESEARCH





Research Approach

**Report for Scottish
Government on Aberdeen
region initiatives**



Research Approach

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Not a monoculture but a diverse ecosystem!



A word cloud of various community-based initiatives and sustainability terms. The words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern, with some larger than others. The colors of the words are primarily green, orange, and red. The terms include: local currencies, freecycle, transition towns, intentional communities, borrowing shop, development trusts, squat, eco-congregations, community-supported agriculture, community buy-outs, social enterprise, community bike workshops, community gardens, community renewable energy, solidary consumption, energy co-operatives, community empowerment, food banks, grassroots development, car-sharing, occupy, consumer co-operatives, food savers, collectives, ecovillages, swapping networks, allotment groups, and skillshares.

TESS calls them “community-based initiatives (for sustainability)” or “CBIs”.

Discussion: How do you study such a large and diverse set?

- Do you think there is a recognisable “community action for sustainability” movement?
- If so, are there more accurate names for it?
- Can it be defined? If not, why not?
- What’s in? What’s out?
- What’s typical? What’s the archetype? What’s the stereotype?

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Basic Definition

“They are initiated and managed by communities

They may have received public money.

They may be for non-profit as well as for profit; but their overall objectives should serve the community.

They have been up and running for at least one year.

They can be located in a city or in the countryside; the focus is on the initiatives and not their spatial/geographical location.

They operate within at least one of the following 4 domains: Food, Transport, Energy, Waste.” (p. 7 of TESS Deliverable 1.1)

→ 618 initiatives approached

Exclusion criteria: Refusal to participate, no response, too far from the study region, too recently started.

→ Basic inventory & questionnaire (269 out of 618)

Sampling for impact analysis

- Disproportionate stratified random sampling(!)
 - Wanted the sample to equally represent the 6 countries and the 4 domains of activity: food, energy, transport and waste.
 - There should be representative variation in size, duration and organisational structure.
- ➔ Detailed questionnaire (~52 out of 269)

Sampling for detailed interviews

- Partner institutions voted on 26 possible criteria to be used in selecting key case studies.
 - In the end, 9 criteria were adopted:
 - Firstly, we assessed initiatives' **willingness to participate** and **data availability**.
 - Then, their **community base**, **value base**, **environmental impact**, **carbon reduction** and **networking** were taken into account.
 - Finally, the key case studies were checked for representative distribution of initiative **size** and **duration**.
- ➔ Detailed interviews (14 of ~52)

Data Summary

- 618 initiatives approached
 - Basic inventory (269)
 - Detailed questionnaire (~52 out of 269)
 - Detailed interviews (14 of ~52)

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Find TESS, find me:

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- www.sustainable-communities.eu
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