Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research

ISSN: 1351-1610 (Print) 1469-8412 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ciej20

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**To cite this article:** Roger Keller, Hans Keune & Simone Maynard (2018) Where do IPBES delegates in Europe see challenges, needs, gaps and opportunities in policy uptake of "Nature's contributions to people"?, Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research, 31:sup1, S116-S124, DOI: 10.1080/13511610.2017.1361814

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2017.1361814



Published online: 07 Aug 2017.

*Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 2018
Vol. 31, No. S1, S116–S124, https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2017.1361814



# Where do IPBES delegates in Europe see challenges, needs, gaps and opportunities in policy uptake of "Nature's contributions to people"?

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(*Received 15 January 2017; final version received 21 July 2017*)

This research note illustrates how European national delegates to the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) perceive the challenges, needs, gaps and opportunities related to the policy implementation of "Nature's contributions to people (NCP)" in their nation. Until now, only little information has been available on how IPBES delegations perceive national policy-uptake and the implementation of the IPBES core concept of NCP. Based on an online survey with IPBES delegates, we aim to provide a stock-take of how IPBES delegations see NCP currently being incorporated in national government policies in Europe and how these policies are being implemented through programmes. Survey results show IPBES delegates consider a lack of relevant data and methodologies for NCP assessments to be a major obstacle to the uptake and implementation of NCP concepts in Europe. We wonder if availability of data and methodologies are the most prominent challenges to make IPBES a success, and consider the need for policy uptake and implementation to be more prominently addressed within the IPBES process.

**Keywords:** IPBES; nature's contributions to people; national perspective in a global context; policy uptake

## Introduction

This research note aims to illustrate challenges, needs, gaps and opportunities related to European policy implementation of the Nature's contributions to people (NCP) concept (as opposed to policy implementation concepts specifically to conserve nature for its own sake). Pluralistic valuation approaches and techniques to estimate different values attributed to nature by different individuals and groups have been gaining momentum within conservation communities and related intergovernmental institutions (Stenseke 2016). The emergence of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) subsequent to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005) required intense discussions between different stakeholders on a global level, of how the linkages between "nature" and "human well-being" could be

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conceptually captured (Brooks, Lamoreux, and Soberón 2014; Borie and Hulme 2015; Arpin et al. 2016; Vadrot 2014a). The concept of "Ecosystem Services" as an economic concept to convince policy-makers to take action, played a vital role in the creation of IPBES (Norgaard 2010). However, this emphasis on economic values was debated controversially at plenary meetings (Vadrot 2014b; Granjou et al. 2013).

In recognition that different cultures have different conceptualizations of biodiversity and ecosystem services, IPBES developed a Conceptual Framework (CF) to illustrate its understanding of relationships between people and nature (Díaz et al. 2015). The IPBES CF was drafted by a multi-disciplinary expert group and adopted by the IPBES plenary in 2013; it includes different knowledge systems and world views of natural and social systems. While until the end of 2016 IPBES predominantly used the term "Nature's benefits to people" to describe this relationship, the IPBES conceptual framework also encompasses alternative terms like "Ecosystem goods and services" or "Nature's gifts". Now, "Nature's contributions to people" is the main term used within their assessments (IPBES 2017; Pascual et al. 2017).

IPBES aims "to strengthen the science-policy interface" (IPBES 2016a, 2016b) by bringing scientists, indigenous and local knowledge holders, and policy-making communities together. Significant resources (e.g. time, money) go into regional and thematic assessments (IPBES 2016a, 2016b), and preparing and attending IPBES Plenaries. However, a stock-take within the IPBES context of where NCP is currently being incorporated in national government policies, how these policies are being implemented through programmes (e.g. through market based instruments, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans) and what challenges, opportunities needs and gaps there are, has not been conducted.

National institutions provide a pivoting point between international initiatives and local implementation, to sustainably manage the provision of NCP (Maynard 2016). It is therefore imperative to identify and address the needs, gaps, challenges and opportunities nations face regarding NCP policy implementation. As IPBES national delegates (i.e. members of national delegations to IPBES Plenaries or National Focal Points – see section "methods") are the authorised representatives to international discussions on NCP assessments, our research has focused on identifying IPBES delegates' views. It is important to note, that delegates of IPBES member states are not a homogenous group: some work as thematic experts in national ministries/agencies or for national platforms, others have coordinating expertise and work as national focal points for different multinational platforms.

This research note presents the most prominent challenges, needs, gaps and opportunities related to national NCP policy development and its implementation in Europe, as identified by IPBES national delegates in European nations. By focussing on the perception of IPBES delegates, it is an example of social science research results and tries to contribute towards a more transdisciplinary research process.

## Methods: who and what?

An online survey was developed with 22 questions, grouped into 5 question blocks, using SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). The questions related to the incorporation of NCP in national policies and its implementation through programmes. For a detailed description of the methodology and an overview of the results from a global perspective we refer to Keller et al. (under development). Responses by European delegates to questions relating to the challenges, needs, gaps and opportunities of national policy uptake and implementation of NCP is the primary focus of this research note (see section "results").

An invitation to participate in the survey was sent September 2015 to all IPBES heads of national delegations ($n = 141$) as listed on the IPBES-3 Plenary participant list, and the list of IPBES National Focal Points on the IPBES website (IPBES 2016c). Recognising not all delegates are experts in all policy areas in which NCP could be included, delegates were encouraged to forward the survey to others working in policy areas different to themselves. At the IPBES-4 Plenary delegates were randomly approached in person during tea breaks. All potential respondents received an e-mail with a link to the online survey which also included the aims of the research project and the authors biographies and institutional affiliations.

Table 1 shows the IPBES boundary for the European and Central Asia regional assessment (Column 1) and sub-regions (Central and Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia). Column 2 shows the nations within these boundaries, and Column 3 shows the nations that survey responses were received from. Nineteen of the 35 IPBES member states in the European and Central Asia region responded to the survey between September 2015 and July 2016 providing a 54% response rate. However, not all respondents responded to all questions of the survey. The only sub-region that did not respond was Central Asia, hence the results presented in this research note are European specific.

## Results

To establish the role of respondents in the IPBES process we asked **what is your affiliation to IPBES**? Participants were provided 3 choices (multiple answers were possible as often people perform multiple roles). The majority of respondents ($n = 10$) ticked National Focal

Table 1. The European distribution of survey respondents (as of 25.07.2016).

| IPBES (SUB)REGION | IPBES SIGNATORY NATIONS | SURVEY RESPONDENTS |
|---|---|---|
| Europe & Central Asia | $n = 35$ | $n = 19$ |
| Central and Western Europe | Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Slovakia, Turkey (Group of Central European countries) | Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovakia, Turkey |
| | Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Group of Western European countries) | Austria, Belgium (Federal and Flemish level), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland |
| Eastern Europe | Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation | Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine |
| Central Asia | Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan | – |

***Member status as of 22. December 2015,*** **Source:** http://ipbes.net/index.php/about-ipbes/members-of-the-platform

Points (NFPs), followed by Members of the national delegation ($n = 7$). Six respondents ticked "Other" which included observers, members of national IPBES committees, members of IPBES expert groups or government officials (see Figure 1).

Respondents were provided a pre-defined list of national policy areas and **asked in which of these areas they work**. Twenty-four responses (i.e. from national delegates and those they forwarded the survey to) were received across the 19 European nations listed in Column 3, Table 1. Twenty-two respondents were working in nature/biodiversity conversation, 8 in protected area management and 7 in forestry, followed by other policy areas (multiple answers possible).

In the next question (again multiple answers were possible), respondents were provided the same list of policy areas and asked i**n your country, which of these policy area(s) has NCP been explicitly included at the national level?** Figure 2 shows the policy areas where NCP has been included on a national level in Europe as identified by IPBES national delegates. It is clear from Figure 2 that on a national level NCP is most often included in nature/biodiversity conservation policies, followed by forestry, protected area management, agriculture, wetlands, land-use planning and climate change.

Respondents were then asked to **choose up to two of these policy areas they were most familiar with** and write these in comment boxes (not more than two responses per respondents were possible). Twenty respondents chose biodiversity / nature conservation or protected areas. The other 15 responses were distributed across 10 different policy areas of which 4 respondents chose forestry.

Respondents were asked **how and to what extent the concept of NCP has been included in these policy areas?** According to responses, NCP or similar terms like "Ecosystem Services" or "Nature's Gifts" have not been directly included in policy. However, many respondents mentioned that the concept of NCP as linking the natural environment with human well-being is specifically included in biodiversity/nature conservation strategies or action plans (e.g. National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans – NBSAPs) were it is translated into measurable targets and metrics. Some respondents noted that the concept of NCP often relates to economic decision-making (i.e. economic value identification or economic assessments).

When asked **how these policies are being implemented in practice (**i.e. what programmes have been developed to support these policies and how they are being applied), respondents again referred to the NBSAPs (or respective action plans of different policy areas). But almost no information was provided on how NBSAPs are actually being implemented in practice or how this translates to on-ground management and improving NCP.

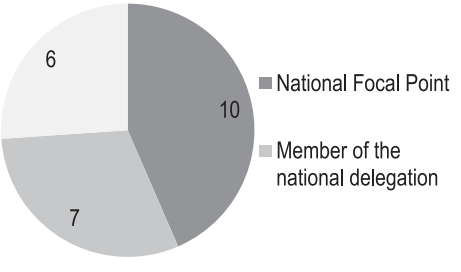


Figure 1. Affiliation to IPBES.

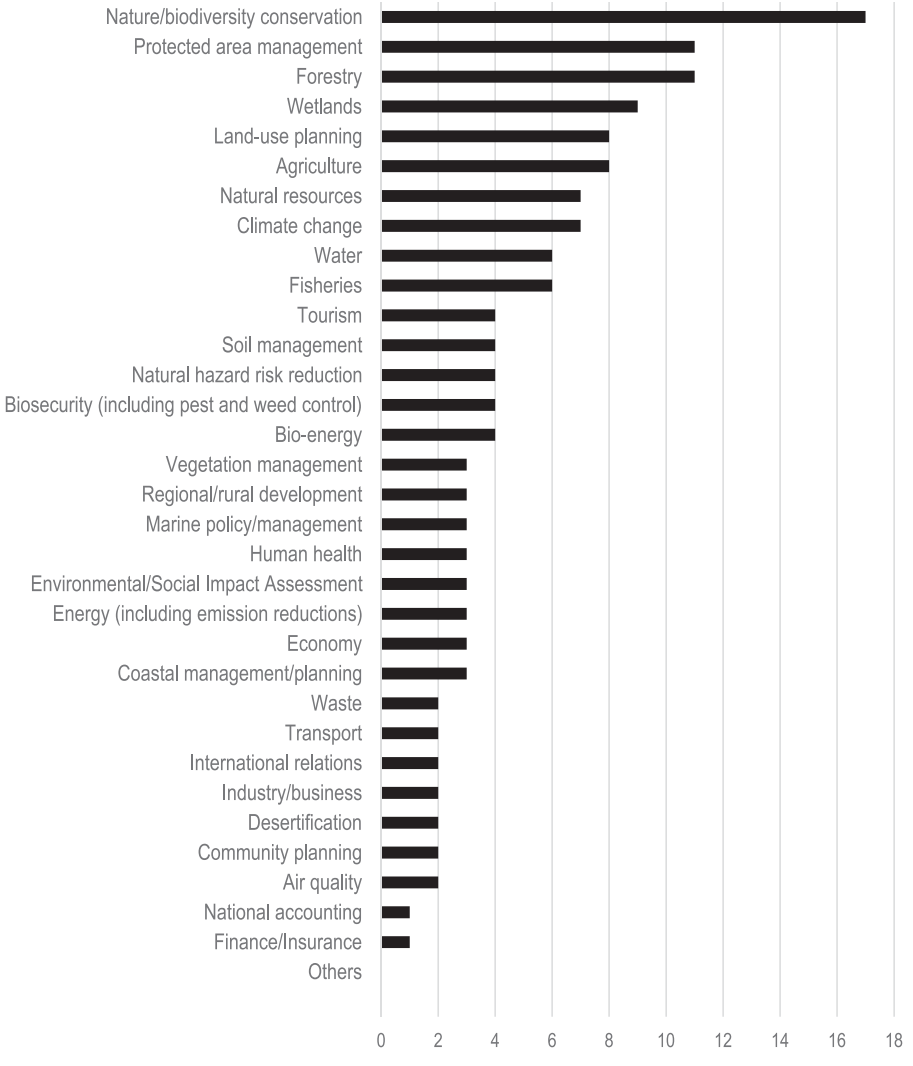


Figure 2. Policy areas where NCP has been included on a national level in Europe.

In the final part of the survey respondents were asked about **challenges, needs, gaps and opportunities** related to national policy uptake of NCP concepts and its implementation in practice. *Challenges* are mostly related to (lack of) data and information, but also understanding and implementing outcomes of valuations. Some respondents mention the challenges related to the assumed need for quantification of data. *Needs* identified by respondents were more closely related to capacity building (e.g. education, awareness raising, start-up projects, revised laws) in areas where knowledge is missing or willingness to uptake NCP is low. Another need was identified as missing assessment tools (e.g. mapping, modelling, spatial planning, TEEB studies) and that intrinsic values of NCP should not be neglected. *Gaps* identified by the respondents again included the lack of data (including modelling/mapping), but also insufficient information exchange/awareness and the slow process of adopting strategies. Commonly recognised *opportunities* for NCP uptake and implementation were identified as international discussions

about NCP (such as IPBES, MAES) which can create an impulse at national level and influence decision-makers opinions; as well, NCP is easily understood and communicated; there were a large number of specialists in Europe working on NCP; the creation of payment for ecosystem services schemes; and adopting indicators at the government level.

## Discussion

Beyond general references to NBSAPs respondents from European countries did not provide examples of the specific uptake of NCP, such as in concrete targets, policy measures or planning processes. One reason could be respondents are not aware of the practice implementations because their positions and/or affiliated institutions are just not responsible for this. Another possible reason is that specific practice uptake has not evolved yet in these countries. Based on our own experience as NCP researchers and practitioners, IPBES Observers, members of national delegations, and members of expert groups, we claim that for the majority of the responding countries, the latter appears highly reasonable.

Currently within the European Union, a lot of efforts are linked to Action 5 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy (European Union 2011) in which member states are mandated to map and assess the state of NCP in their national territories. Several reports have been published to provide guidance for mapping and assessments of NCP (e.g. European Commission 2013, 2014). Mapping and assessing information about NCP can be an important step for awareness raising. However, as shown by this research the uptake of NCP in policies and practice is still a challenge for many European IPBES member states. Lack of relevant data and methodologies was said to be an obstacle for NCP implementation. Some respondents explicitly highlight the challenges related to the assumed need for quantification of data and that intrinsic values of NCP should not be neglected.

IPBES is currently in the process of performing regional assessments on biodiversity and NCP – including the region "Europe and Central Asia". We hope the contributing authors to the regional assessments can gather enough relevant information to provide IPBES member states with necessary advice for NCP policy implementation. Further responses to this survey indicate the respondents are sceptical of this. If right, the question is how to further develop concepts like NCP and policy processes in order to be useful for practical implementation?

Our method has several limitations and strengths. The global scope of the survey and limited resources meant the survey could not be translated into different languages beyond English (only the introduction page of the survey was in the 6 official UN languages). Although receiving 54% of possible responses from European and Central Asia countries is a good result, English is less commonly used in Eastern Europe and Central Asian countries and this may have influenced the lower response rate in these sub-regions (see Table 1).

Working with an online survey had the advantage of being easily accessible by all respondents. Working as independent researchers also increased the independence of the research as it was not limited to a specific set of thematic issues. Directing the survey to national delegates of IPBES member states or NFPs increased the reliability of responses. We argue that the IPBES science-policy-interface process could substantially benefit from insights about NCP policy uptake and application in the IPBES members states, of which national delegates and NFPs are the spokesperson in the IPBES process.

## Conclusion

We support the current initiatives to strengthen the inclusion of social sciences and humanities in the IPBES process as advocated by Vadrot, Jetzkowitz, and Stringer (2016) and Larigauderie, Stenseke, and Watson (2016). An interdisciplinary process that includes social scientists' knowledge helps to provide answers of how to obtain and integrate intrinsic values or manage qualitative data (see Vadrot et al. in this special issue).

This research note is an example of social scientific research as it focuses on the perception of IPBES delegates and on IPBES process issues. We argue that the key asset of IPBES is not interdisciplinary, but transdisciplinarity in the sense that governments collaborate with scientists, NGO's and other stakeholders to develop policy-relevant knowledge. We agree that scientific and cultural knowledge on the status and trends of NCP is required to identify the most urgent needs for action. But there is already a lot of data available (e.g. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment) while we notice only little attention on policy uptake of such information in IPBES. Both prominent terms included in the description of IPBES – "Biodiversity" and "Ecosystem Services" – are used on a global level to awake politicians and the lay public (Takacs 1996; Gómez-Baggethun et al. 2010). But so far, the knowledge on biodiversity loss and its impact on humanity has not lead to significant changes in policies (Cardinale et al. 2012). The conceptual framework of IPBES acknowledges the need to address power struggles and to include political, economic and social dimensions in biodiversity conservation. It also acknowledges the role of institutions and governance. However, these concepts need to be formulated in a way that national governments and local actors can implement them. We therefore argue, that there is a gap on policy uptake which needs to be addressed – and can be supported by social sciences. IPBES could benefit from discussion about the NCP uptake by member states and could thereby strengthen its role as science-policy interface. This is our understanding of the transdisciplinary approach needed within IPBES (and other multi-lateral conventions) in order to produce policy-relevant information.

Based on the survey results we were encouraged by the editors of this special issue to provide recommendations in the direction of our conclusion. We propose the following recommendations:

- Instead of generating more "knowledge" (mostly perceived as data) we need more process towards policy uptake: Policy uptake has not (yet) been the focus of IPBES. We argue that a weak focus on policy uptake involves the risk of political insignificance. We therefore recommend strengthening IPBES' work about policy uptake.
- There is a need for investment in capacity and will to strengthen the focus on policy uptake: IPBES should provide the platform to discuss the issues disclosed by IPBES delegates and include both policy makers and scientists to handle them.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the valuable feedbacks on the survey received from IPBES MEP Members and the Secretariat, and from other science-policy experts. Further we thank the associate Editor of this Journal and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback to this research note. Thank you to our colleagues Gisèle Carnegie, Anis Guelmami, Pamela Melissa Keller, Stanislav Ksenofontov and Ling Wang who translated the survey introduction page into the six official UN languages. Finally, we would like to thank all respondents who contributed their information and provided an excellent data basis for this research.

## Notes on contributors

***Roger Keller*** has worked several years as a Scientific Officer for the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) in the Landscape and Biodiversity Division where he started to engage with the NCP concept. He is an IPBES Observer as a representative of the University of Zurich. Roger completed his PhD in Human Geography about the implementation of the NCP concept into policy and practice in Switzerland.

***Hans Keune*** is a member of the Belgian delegation to IPBES, member of the Expert Group on the 'diverse conceptualizations of values of biodiversity and nature's benefits to people including ecosystem services' and a Lead Author on the IPBES Regional Assessment Europe – Central Asia. He is a Political Scientist (PhD in environmental science) working at the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO) and the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences – University of Antwerp in Belgium.

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