Designing water efficiency interventions that engage with the collective context of water use.

Claire Hoolohan

@ClaireHoolohan

Claire.hoolohan@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
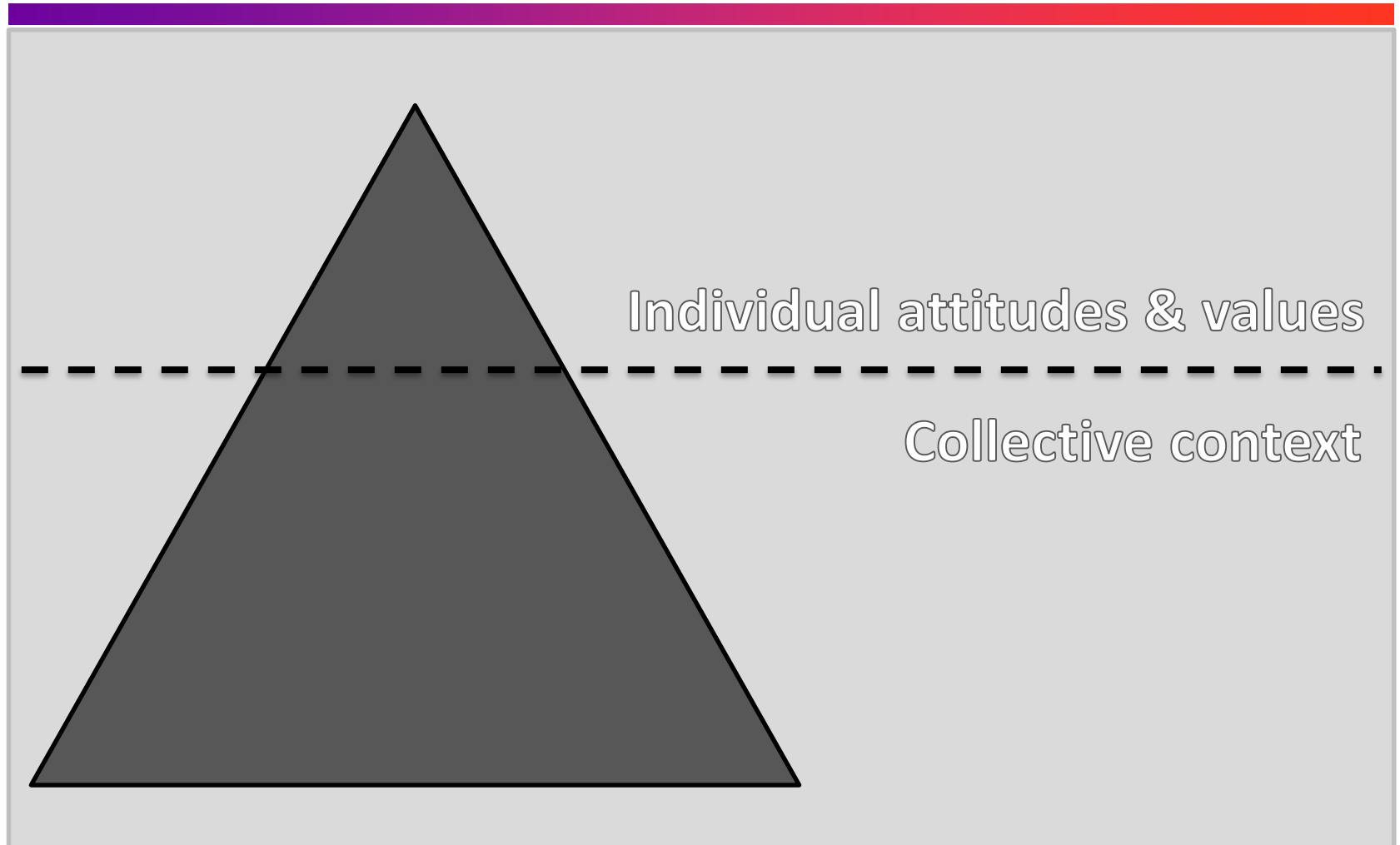
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Collective social, cultural and material elements

Individual attitudes & values

Collective context

Expectations

- **Everybody is different:** and people understand that is both normal and OK, and expect that water will be provided for as they chose to use it.

- **Its not a waste, its just how it is:** people are often aware they use more than they "need" but don't expect to be told what to do, however well justified it might be, or how attractive its made to look.

- **Not here not now:** Water scarcity is seen to be a global issue, not something "our rainy nation" suffers from and not something people will experience personally within their lifetime.

- **Our water, their problem:** People understand that they pay for water so that someone else takes care of managing it, which includes demand management.

- **Safe and sound:** Water is understood to circulate between pipes, treatment plants and homes; disconnected from natural variability.

Experiences

- **People learn from each other:** and water use is guided through interaction and exchange. For example:
    - » Children learn from parents,
    - » People talk and learn (<u>but</u> this isn't common as water use is private)

- **People observe and experience:** a much more natural way of understanding how water is used. For example:
    - » People gain an impression of normal use by observing others
    - » 'Normal' use is also implied in the design of technologies and homes

- Things (like dress codes, building standards, design conventions) **convey a sense of normal** that is not always conducive to less water intensive behaviour.

Material 'lock-in'

- **Design matters:** Material design of objects and homes shape how water is used. Examples include:
  - » garden watering is shaped by the types of plants in the garden and how outdoor space is used;
  - » clothing "needs washing" due to a mismatch between fabrics and functions (e.g. white overalls) and "needs wearing" as a result of dress-codes and uniforms;
  - » small basins and large taps designed for hand-washing and tooth-brushing rather than washing bodies reinforces showering;
  - » a lack of space in the home for "not dirty but not clean" clothes encourages high frequency washing.

- Domestic water use is itself a relatively recent phenomena, but there are few alternatives.

Collective elements are constantly changing

The question is:

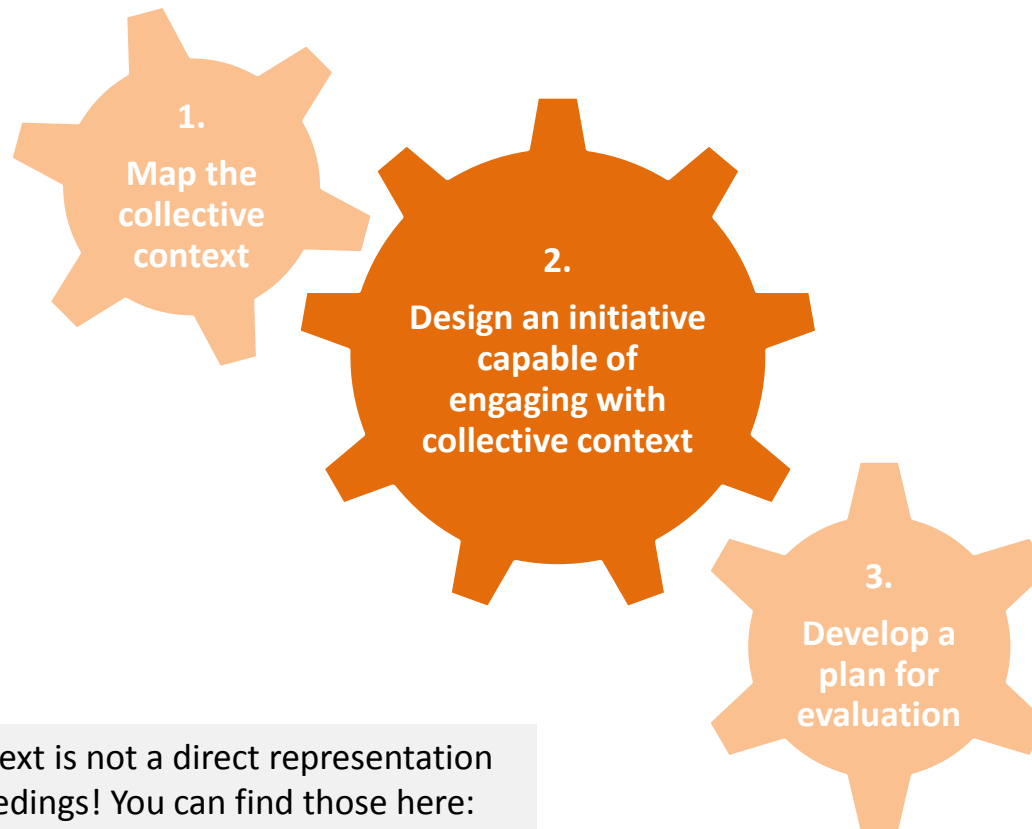How might policy and management strategically alter the direction of change so as to reduce domestic demand?

Reimagining water efficiency

2 workshops, 25 participants, 3 tasks:

1.

Map the collective context

2.

Design an initiative capable of engaging with collective context

3.

Develop a plan for evaluation

Caution: what comes next is not a direct representation of the workshop proceedings! You can find those here:
http://bit.ly/1dhnNqC

Redesign

The identification of problematic aspects of existing water use – e.g. appliances, homes, hairstyles, garden designs & dress codes – and their replacement with alternative less water-intensive alternatives

Existing and possible activities:

- Working with landscapers, garden centres, and the media to popularise alternative garden designs (e.g. incorporating less water-intensive ground covers and drought tolerant plants).

- Working with the health and beauty industry to design products and styles that enable less frequent hair washing (e.g. dry shampoos & up-do's)

Design happens all the time and - intentionally or not - has implications for how water is used. Redesigning is simply about understanding how design processes might proactively encourage less intensive patterns of water use.

Reattune

Enhancing social and cultural connections between water in the home and water in the river, and developing material systems that accentuate these.

Existing and possible activities:

- Facilitating interactions between rivers and communities (e.g. through alternative forms of entertainment or participatory conservation projects).

- Hands-on learning programmes to aid the renegotiation of expectations and develop new understandings and skills (e.g. open-home retrofitting / guided installation of decentralised supply systems).

The disconnection between water and society has a historical legacy, but it is preserved in modern systems of water supply, and current patterns of living in urban areas. There are technologies that might reduce this disconnection – particularly decentralised systems – but also important social aspects involved in establishing the sensitivities that allow this connection to effect water use.

Relocate

Challenge the 'domestic' in domestic water use by reconfiguring water services so as to unlock routines and maximise potential for large-scale water efficiency measures.

Existing and possible activities

- Commercial car-washes
- Workplace with employers to popularise workplace laundry services (e.g. Berendsen currently service uniformed industries throughout the UK)
- Re popularise communal gardens

- The service sector is changing rapidly, with existing businesses stepping into new arenas and new entrants shaking things up (e.g. Uber, AirBnB). The question is how might changes to water services benefit demand management?

Conclusion

- **Aim to make new versions of normality** by reconfiguring the social, cultural and material context of water use.

- **No guarantees** but following these lines of intervention it at least seems less likely that current patterns of water use will continue.

- **Deeply collaborative** poly-centric governance structures that push agency and responsibility beyond water companies and their consumers to consider how a wide web of professions are involved – intentionally or not – in shaping water use.

- The workshops **create a space for creative discussion** that encourages invention and open-ended discussion regarding what future intervention might look like and how they might be achieved.

Thanks for listening

Claire Hoolohan
Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research

@ClaireHoolohan

Claire.hoolohan@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

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