Redefining Environmental Planning For Uncertain Times:
Applied Research in Ecosystem Services, Infrastructure & Participatory Place-Making for Scotland as part of Europe

This Aberdeen-based initiative on Placemaking, Planning and Ecosystem Services is an important development that, suggests to me, represents some innovation, some critique, some revisiting, and some risks as related to achieving credibility within the local and international planning profession.

The project is of sufficient importance that I want to make contact as a scholar and practitioner of this field who has worked in a number of countries inside and outside of Europe.

INTRODUCTION
The underlying project in this Hutton initiative "to develop and implement a coherent, transdisciplinary and applied three-year research programme in the domain of Placemaking, Planning and Ecosystem Services" effectively functions to re-inscribe operational metrics and standards for stakeholders, indictors of preference, community participation, natural services, and spatial decision-making frameworks -- all research topics and professional activities which are at the core of the field of environmental planning -- at an interesting point in the history of Scotland, the UK, and Europe.

The proposal and funding of this fellowship amounts to at least the suggestion of a critique of either local planning practices and outcomes and more broadly of the field within Europe.
And central to the successful design and sustained funding of a research programme, over the coming three years, will be the honing, elaborating, and further substantiating concerns over professional planning practices related to natural services, public participation, and place-making.

Environmental planning is a field that emerged after World War II, on the cusp of town planning, broader scales of landscape architecture, and environmental and ecosystem management. Engagement in range of natural and social scientific research is necessary and not such as scholarship but essential to the professional planning activities.

Data is necessary from a range of fields: from ecology to environmental psychology, aesthetics, social theory (especially around stakeholder analysis and sociology), 'governance' (including law, political economy, postcolonial / decolonial, gender, and queer theory often as part of institutional studies), and public policy.

Today, there are well over a hundred postgraduate degree and certificate programmes in environmental planning throughout the world, thousands of professionals with Masters degrees.

There are hundreds of researchers and professionals with doctorates specifically in environmental planning. There are scores of environmental planners engaged in professional work and teaching in Scotland. Virtually all of these professionals and scholars would consider activities around participation, natural services, and place-making central to these planning operations.

The following is an incomplete list of the programmes in planning research and postgraduate educational institutions in Scotland:

* Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh - Urban Strategies and Design MSc;
* Heriot-Watt University - Edinburgh - Urban and Regional Planning MSc - Urban Strategies and Design MSc - Sustainable Urban Management MSc;
* University of Dundee - Spatial Planning with Environmental Assessment MSc;
* University of Strathclyde - Glasgow - Global Sustainable Cities MSc; and
* University of Glasgow - City and Regional Planning MSc - Public and Urban Policy MSc - Public and Urban Policy PGDip.
But few of these programmes focus specifically on environmental planning and "Placemaking, Planning and Ecosystem Services" more specifically. So I see a soft and dynamic niche for a new initiative based at Hutton.

Most of the holders of environmental planning degrees also have professional accreditation directly through town planning institutes (such as The Royal Institute of Town Planning Scotland).

But the relationship between environmental and town planning has been contentious -- particularly around operational practices and standards for use of natural and social science data, stakeholder analysis, community participation, and markers of the extent of vulnerability of natural services and ecological infrastructure (and community preference and satisfaction).

The origins of environmental planning are often attributed to a number of Scots, who worked in Scotland and abroad, and, in part, in responses to the pressures on Scottish communities.

Patrick Geddes (1854–1932)
Born in Ballater, Aberdeenshire, and educated at Perth Academy, the Royal College of Mines in London under Thomas Henry Huxley between 1874 and 1877, and Department of Physiology in University College London (where he met Charles Darwin), Geddes is considered the founder of modern environmental planning and town planning more generally.

Ian McHarg (1920-2001)
A Glasgow native, McHarg studied at Harvard, then taught at the University of Edinburgh, and was the founder University of Pennsylvania Depart of Landscape Architecture which had a strong emphasis on regional and landscape planning. McHarg was the modern founder of, and today is still most paradigmatic figure in, the field of environmental planning. He developed an early concept of environmentalism termed 'ecological determinism'. McHarg was deeply active in questions of protection and restoration of natural services for place-making for community development (especially for the rapidly expanding American suburbs) and was a bridge to contemporary planning and design movements. His laboratory was the first to lay the basis for environmental analysis and GIS in regional decision-making.
Michael Mackie Laurie (1932 - 2002) was born in Dundee. As well as a professor at the University of California Berkeley, was the co-founder of the landscape planning and design programmes at the Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh and its Architecture & Landscape Architecture group extending to today's MSc programme in Urban Strategies and Design.  
http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/architecture-landscape-architecture

Michael Hough (1928-2013) studied at the University of Edinburgh and went on to found two major North American centres for ecological planning in Toronto.  

Over the last half century, the canons of the profession of environmental planning (and research), have been centred on the following:  
A. protection and restoration of ecosystem services often involving environmental and ecological assessment;  
B. spatial planning and the use of a range of permitting and legal interventions; and  
C. (community) place-making, liveability, and sustainability.

There are some important benefits to revisiting this work in this 2016-19 fellowship at the James Hutton Institute. Environmental planning continues to be often marginalised within broader town planning frameworks largely focused on economic development, housing, and legal compliance. Planning exercises are largely driven by legislation interpreted by politicians and the administrators who work for them.

With several established centres in planning teaching and research in Scotland, why is the James Hutton Institute's initiative in Placemaking, Planning and Ecosystem Services, so important to the country, to Europe, and to the entire field of environmental planning?

SOME HISTORICAL REASONS FOR REVISITING NATURAL SERVICES, STAKEHOLDERS, PARTICIPATION & SPATIAL PLANNING IN SCOTLAND  
A. There are a few decades of new research on natural services, ecological infrastructure, landscape amenities, stakeholders, participation, and spatial planning that have not always been well-integrated into environmental and town
planning practices around the world. Certainly some updated text books and manuals would have a receptive audience.

B. Environmental planning continues to be undermined by neoliberal and austerity policies, with ongoing critiques on state intervention from the right, and broader concerns about the state-constrained nature of 'participation' in planning from the left. So debate and redefinition of the roles of and relationships between studies on natural services, community participation in decision-making, and spatial planning would be timely.

C. Today, some of the late 20th Century community participation frameworks are being re-examined critically, especially in relationship to gender, race, and decolonial studies, as not being sufficiently inclusive. The standards of 'participation' are generally on the rise. So Hutton could create a leadership role for itself within Scotland, the UK, and Europe.

D. For Scotland, specifically, there is pull between greater transnational integration into Europe through the frameworks regulated in Brussels, on one hand, and a return to a focus on a federal system controlled through Westminster, on the other hand. The tensions between these two processes could have huge implications for town and environmental planning in the country, and in deed more general goals for community development, over the next decade. Further devolution could influence planning practices in Scotland -- and again Hutton could take the lead in interpreting these developments for planning professionals.

SOME OBSTACLES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
In considering how to develop a research programme for the James Hutton Institute, that is relevant to both Scotland and to the European Union, strategies are necessary to overcome a number of problems and obstacles.

1. Town planning in Scotland currently involves hundreds of professionals and researchers already heavily engaged in place-making, collaborative planning, participatory approaches, and protection and of restoration of natural services as part of community development. This professional (and often politicized) work is largely carried out within the parameters of legal frameworks defined in Holyrood, Westminster and Brussels. A research group, not tied to producing planning professionals, would have a distinct role in the region.

   solution 1
   So to create a sustained institutional involvement around "Placemaking, Planning and Ecosystem Services," a distinct set of research engagements and services can be defined. The first task of this project could well be to define a distinct set of goals
and associated benefits (and effective services) obviously different from the academic programmes in Scotland and the work of The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland.

2. Much of planning scholarship is less centred on short, peer-reviewed articles based on empirical research and often involve longer studies (often presented as professional papers and policy briefs) focused on a smaller number of case studies of unique combinations of sites and landscapes, human populations and stakeholders, institutions, and legal frameworks.

solution 2
So to illustrate some new ways of thinking about environmental planning, a small number of case studies, typically involving discrete ecological, cultural, and administrative units, are prudent.

3. Scotland, including planning institutions, frameworks, and practices, is at the beginning of a period of historic uncertainty related to a shifting array of legislative and procedural relationships to Westminster and Brussels.

solution 3
The research design, for the coming years, could best embody re-examination and diversification of practices of place-making, planning, and ecosystem services on three levels:
a. the context for environment planning in Scotland as relationships within the UK frameworks were renegotiated;
b. the context for environmental planning in Scotland within the European Union; and
c. generic environmental planning involving place-making, planning, and ecosystem services (reflecting a range of contexts).

4. The lessons for 'modernizing' environmental planning will not be simple and case studies often prove to be complex and dense. So a range of dissemination venues, directly useful to planning professionals, are necessary for the research to have an impact.

solution 4
Given the well-developed nature of the planning profession in Scotland and the relatively large number of academic units for the country’s small population, there are pressures for research outcomes from Hutton that are transmitted through a wider range of accessible and credible intellectual products including the following:
a. a small number of higher impact articles in peer-reviewed journals;
b. at least one book in the first three years that lays out these new renewed place-making, planning and ecosystem services approaches in ways that are accessible to local professionals and other decision-makers in ways that are paradigmatic;

c. web-based articles and digital tools / 'apps' in cooperation with planning and environmental agencies along with professional groups; and

d. workshops and courses for capacity-building to transmit the lessons of the Hutton research in cooperation with The Royal Institute of Town Planning Scotland (which is typically what research institutes do when working in cooperation with groups of planning professionals).

SOME CREDENTIALS AND EXPERTISE RECOMMENDED FOR PLANNING RESEARCH BASED AT HUTTON

With so many other research groups focused on town planning in such as small country, establishment of a group at Hutton with credibility with local professionals, there are some obstacles to overcome. Hutton would have a niche if it was focused on environmental planning and social and environmental sciences (which seems to be a bit thin in some of those academic groups). For long-term success, in terms of funding, productivity, and influence, such a group at Hutton would be compelled to be strong in all three of the following areas:

i. critical social theory with a focus on stakeholder analysis and a broader theoretical engagement in historically marginalised social groups within local and transnational, political economies;

ii. landscapes, natural resources, ecosystems, highly spatialised land use decision-making extending to GIS (extending well beyond Hutton's focus on crops and water to extend to biodiversity, habitat, and aesthetics); and

iii. governance, law, and organizational analysis and development in Europe and beyond.

The achievements of the lead researcher in this group could best be sufficiently deep to involve the following:

a. a rigorous programme of postgraduate studies in all of the fields listed above;
b. a credential and professional practice in planning that would allow them to engage directly, as part of their work at Hutton, as a member of the profession, The Royal Institute of Town Planners Scotland; and

c. leadership skills and intellectual authority to bring together all of the stakeholders as part of forging fundamental changes in town and environmental planning in Scotland (a group of individuals and organizations largely based between Dundee and Glasgow).

CONCLUSIONS & SOME QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

In sharing my own perspectives, honed in North America, continental Europe, and Asia, I leave Hutton with some questions that might well guide the selection and acceptance process for the candidate for the Fellowship.

1. How extensive is Hutton’s current engagement, as focused on applied empirical research, in planning, a murky field that engages in law, political economy, and administrative studies far more than the natural and social sciences?

2. What would be the desired level of formality be in the relationship between the incoming Hutton Fellow and The Royal Institute of Town Planning Scotland?

3. What would be the desired level of formality of a relationship between the Fellow and one or more of the accredited university planning programmes in Scotland?

4. What would be the desired level of engagement be in the current town planning and related community development frameworks and environmental law especially in Scotland?

5. Given that most of the professional planning and university programme offices are in Edinburgh and Glasgow, how much of a budget would be available for travel within Scotland and Europe?

6. What would be the core budget for this initiative and what would be the minimum fund-raising requirements?

7. Given the requirements for fund-raising and engagement with The Royal Institute of Town Planning Scotland, what are realistic expectations for research products during the initial, three-year development phase?
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2016 August 26 Presentation & discussion
The James Hutton Institute
Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences Group, Aberdeen
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[13]
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SOME OBSTACLES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

1. There are already quite a number of institutional actors in Town planning in Scotland.

solution 1
Create a distinct niche in this field and profession in Scotland with a direct relationship to The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland.
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2. Much of planning scholarship is focused on a smaller number of case studies of unique combinations of sites and landscapes, human populations and stakeholders, institutions, and legal frameworks.

solution 2
To illustrate some new ways of thinking about environmental planning, a small number of case studies, typically involving discrete ecological, cultural, and administrative units, are prudent. [18]
3. Scotland, including planning institutions, frameworks, and practices, is at the beginning of a period of historic uncertainty related to a shifting array of legislative and procedural relationships to Westminster and Brussels.

solution 3
Design the research programme to be relevant to Scotland, the UK, and the EU.
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