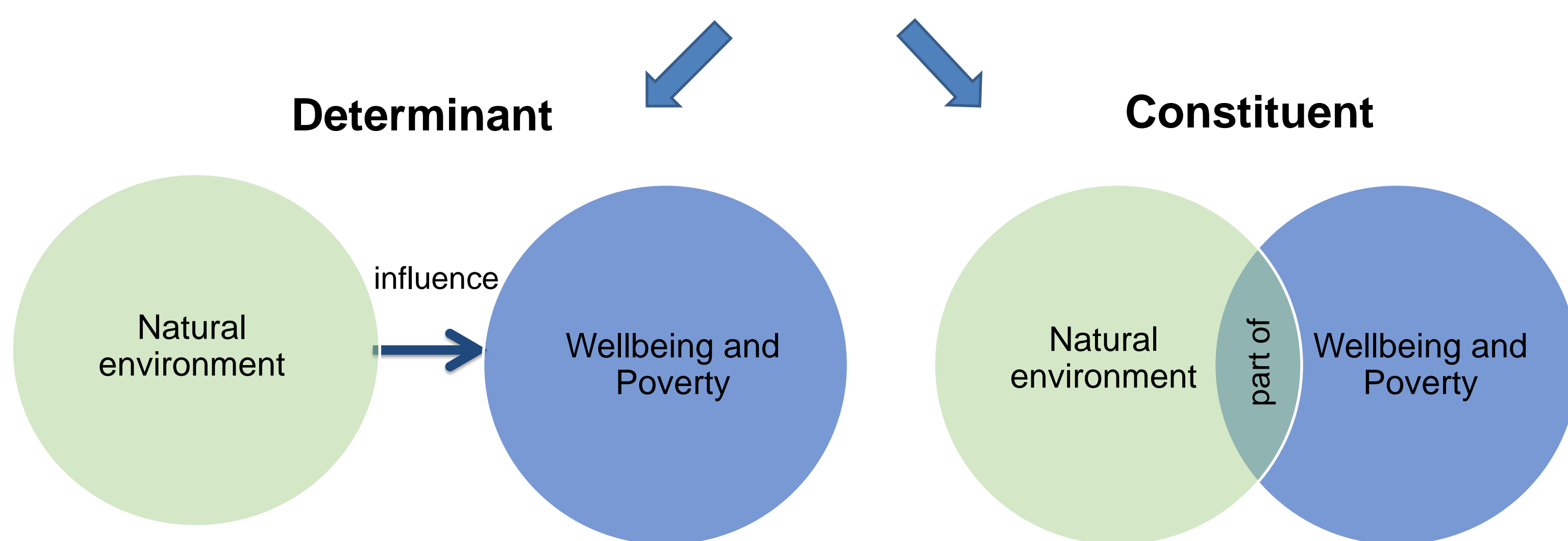


Poorer without It? The Neglected Role of the Natural Environment in Poverty and Wellbeing

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Introduction

- The importance of the natural environment for human wellbeing and poverty is widely recognised in the environmental and development literatures. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are explicit about the pivotal role of the environment for eradicating poverty in all its forms.
- However, the percolation of environmental aspects into international development policy and poverty alleviation strategies has been limited; in part because there is limited understanding of the exact pathways of how the environment interacts with wellbeing and poverty.
- The following distinction has not received much attention in the literature: the role of the environment as a (1) 'determinant' (or external, instrumental) element as opposed to (2) a 'constituent' (or internal factor, part) of poverty and wellbeing. While most of the literature has treated the environment as a determinant factor, it might also have a constituent role.



Objectives

The research project aims to address the following questions:

- Whether there is a philosophical and conceptual basis for treating the natural environment as a 'constituent' of the concepts of wellbeing and poverty, as opposed to a 'determinant' factor?
- What are the practical and political implications of this choice?

Methodology

The project team reviewed:

- The role of the environment in contemporary philosophical accounts of wellbeing;
- Key conceptual frameworks of wellbeing and poverty with regards to the role of the environment, definitions, their purpose and underlying philosophical accounts;
- Political and practical considerations of treating the environment as a determinant and/or constituent element of wellbeing and poverty.

Reference

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Ecosystem Services as a Missing Dimension of Poverty project: www.espa.ac.uk/projects/ne-m00760x-1

Partners



Results

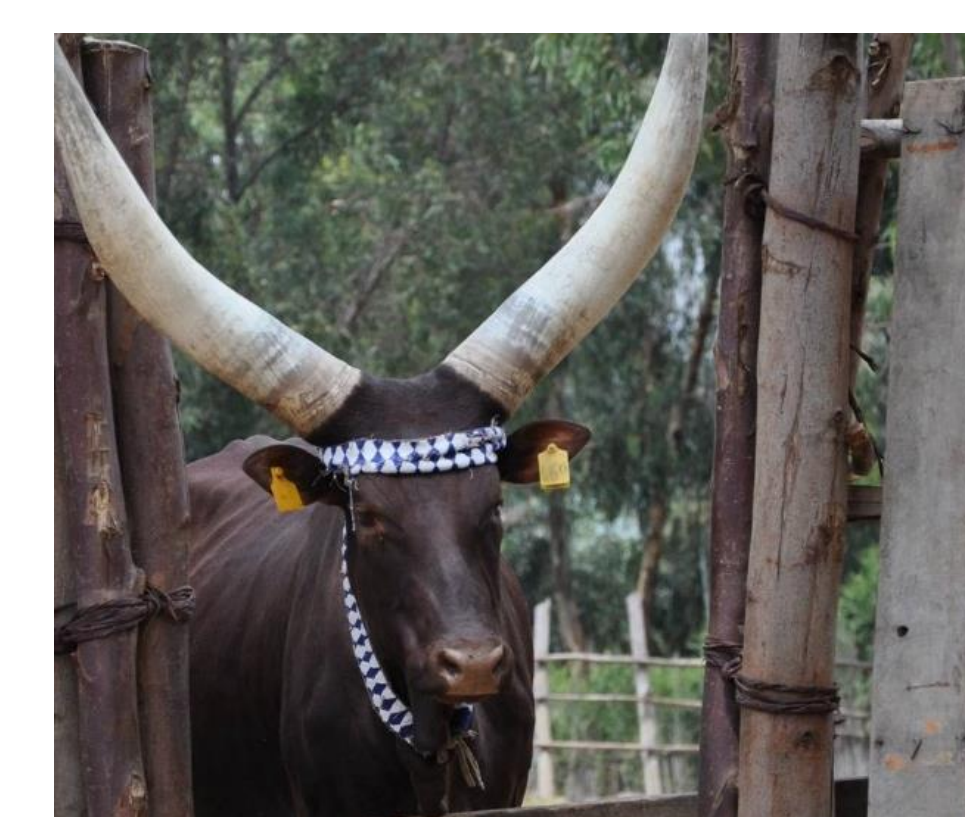
- **Philosophical accounts:** The most prominent theory of wellbeing in contemporary analytical philosophy (called objective list theory) allows for a determinant and a constituent role of the environment. Alternative philosophical accounts also allow for a constituent role.
- **Most key conceptual frameworks** treat the environment as a determinant, while some can also attribute it a constituent role. A number of frameworks are not explicit of their definitions of key concepts or their underlying philosophical accounts
- Treating the environment as a determinant and/or constituent has both **political and practical implications.**

Discussion & Implications

- Treating the environment as a constituent element is philosophically sound and conceptually robust.
- By recognising missing environmental aspects, interventions in environmental management could contribute to poverty eradication objectives; and interventions for poverty alleviation could contribute to environmental goals.
- We therefore argue for developing an expanded account of wellbeing and poverty that allows for including these environmental aspects, while being cognisant of the political and distributional implications.
- The determinant role of the environment is sometimes included in current accounts or measures, but should be more widely acknowledged.

Implications for policy and research - we suggest to:

- Determine whether and what specific aspects of the environment are constitutive of wellbeing and poverty in different contexts, such as cultural aspects, access to natural spaces, and vulnerability to natural hazards;
- Develop qualitative and quantitative indicators that capture these environmental aspects;
- Develop methods for integrating environmental data with other datasets into multidimensional indices of poverty and wellbeing, and identify what relevant environmental data already exist, to help decision-makers and ease reporting for the SDGs.



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