

PARTICIPATION OR “EXPLOITATION”: HOW CAN CONCEPTS OF COMMUNITY AND PRIVATISATION COALESCE AROUND WATER EFFICIENCY APPROACHES?



- Water efficiency is an essential component of Integrated Water Resource Management
- This paper explores the socio-political context in which water efficient approaches are deployed
- It takes a critical look at the context of water efficiency- in order to suggest approaches which may reduce the dissonance between community action and IWRM endeavours.



- Water efficiency as a practice is embedded within the English and Welsh water management regime:
- 1991 Water Industry Act
- 2000 Water Framework Directive
- 2014 Water Act



Yet water efficiency faces a challenge.....

We are encouraged to do more with less water...

Yet using less water has a **negligible** effect on customer water bills...

So why should we use less water?

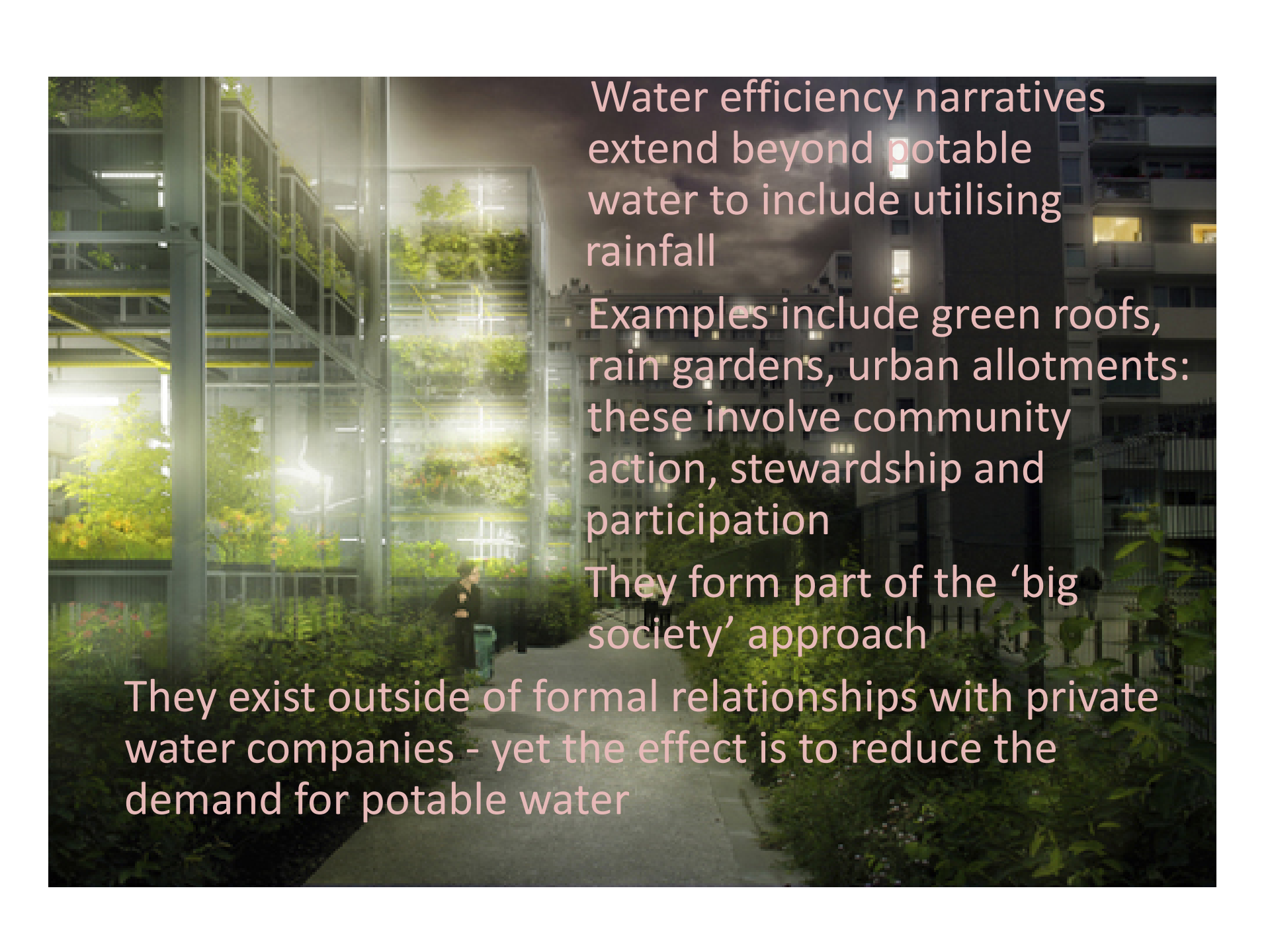
What the average household pays			
	2003-04	2013-14	% increase
Anglian Water	£274	£434	58%
Dwr Cymru Welsh Water	£279	£434	56%
Northumbrian ¹	£207	£339	73%
Severn Trent	£213	£335	57%
South West	£335	£545/£499 ²	64%/49%
Southern	£252	£449	78%
Thames	£203	£354	74%
United Utilities	£242	£406	68%
Wessex	£263	£478	82%
Yorkshire	£211	£368	75%
Average	£276	£388	64%
RPI inflation (2003-12)			36.1%³

Source: Ofwat. Bill for water and sewerage. Notes: ¹ excludes Essex & Suffolk Water; ² South West Water customers will benefit from £50 government rebate from April 2013 - without this, average bill would be £545; ³ RPI inflation January 2003-December 2012 (source: ONS)

Moreover, **Allen and Pryke** argue that household water bills, which are regular and often uniform, are used by water companies to **financialise other profit seeking endeavours** – with no profit share returned to the consumer....

- Yet in the very act of water provision water companies and regulators still have to address issues of **leakage, contamination, pollution, faulty infrastructure**
- This makes water efficiency appear as a feel good tokenistic mantra
- This dilutes the importance and relevance of the water efficiency agenda



A photograph of a modern building at night with a large glass facade reflecting city lights and a person walking on a path in the foreground. The building's interior lights are visible through the glass, and the surrounding area is dark with some greenery in the foreground.

Water efficiency narratives extend beyond potable water to include utilising rainfall

Examples include green roofs, rain gardens, urban allotments: these involve community action, stewardship and participation

They form part of the 'big society' approach

They exist outside of formal relationships with private water companies - yet the effect is to reduce the demand for potable water

- Water efficiency as a concept asks water customers to **change behaviours**, use new technologies and alter their relationship with water in their work and home environment
- With **little financial impact on users** the narrative that supports one of water efficiency is that of **stewardship**: that we are all custodians of water environments
- As **Sayfang & Longhurst** argue that **patterns of consumption** behaviour need to be addressed: simply **reduced consumption will not go far enough to protect water resources**



- So from a cynical perspective do these narratives around water efficiency promote participation – or are they exploitative and, in terms of resource protection, ineffective?
- The profit-making element, together with tightly held company data, creates a gap between water user and water supplier. This dissonance can be viewed as a **legitimacy gap**
- Water efficiency narratives need to **close this gap** in order to embed long standing behavioural and perceptual change



Hope is not lost...

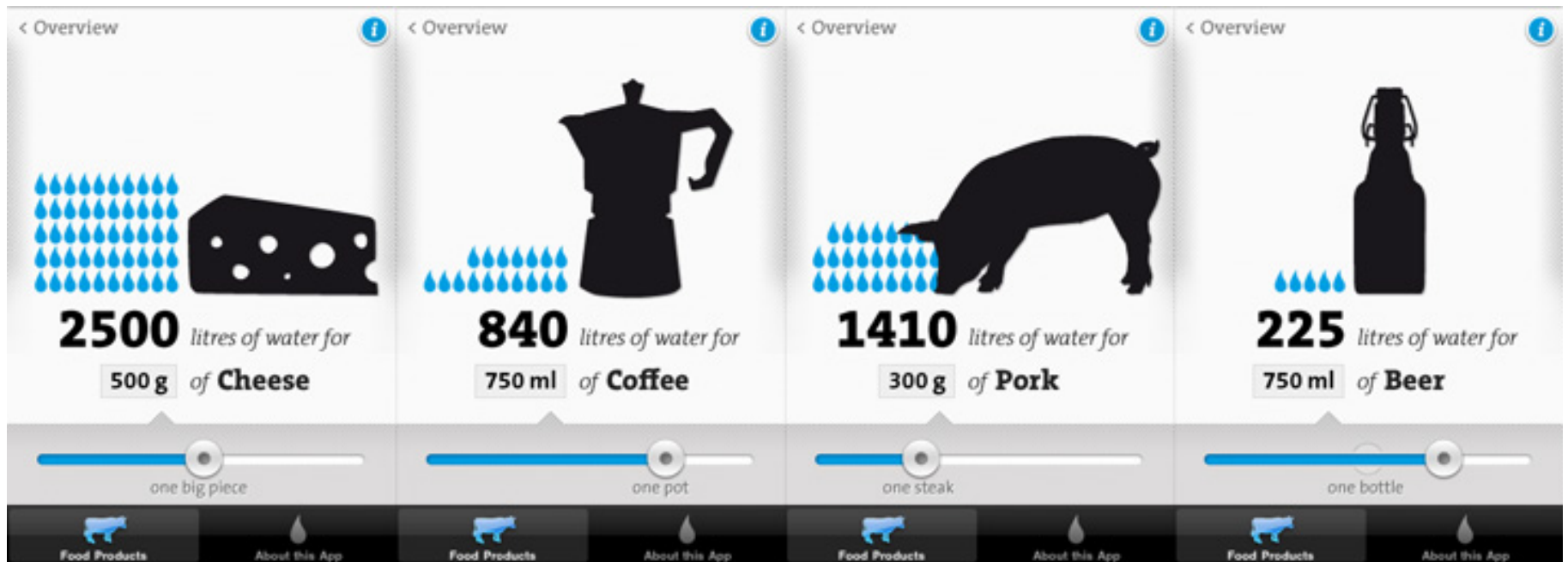
Water efficiency narratives offer the option to actualise the aims of the Water Framework Directive by including all **citizens** in water governance through the personal act of changing water use at home and the political by changing its use at a community level.



- **Radical geographers** such as **David Harvey** and **Noel Castree** go further. If water efficiency makes the personal political, then that extends beyond consuming less water to **consuming less generally**, thought in terms of the virtual water concept, encapsulated in the work of **Tony Allen**
- **Virtual water** is a way of visualising how much water it takes to produce a unit of something: Be it grain, beef, orange juice – or even non comestibles such as clothing or building materials
- By consuming less of everything, we use less water –ergo become more water efficient



- Examples of virtual water



- So we consume less ‘stuff’, we use water more carefully, using less water reduces our energy use, we engage with community projects which enhance our environment. Are we participating or still being exploited? **Is there still a legitimacy gap?**
- The post-privatisation context means that **a form of profit sharing is a viable way to begin to close the legitimacy gap**— relying on ethics/green stewardship perpetuates risks negating the urgency of the water efficiency agenda
- If someone is making a profit from a natural resource then logically we should all share from approaches which seek to protect the resource
- **What forms might these profit sharing options take?**

- One example is by looking at the **Transition Town** movement and its approaches....



Build relationships of trust and transparency

- The Transition Town movement has been described as part of a **Human Economy** approach
- The market is pivotal but not left to regulate itself; instead the state seeks to embed the market within **new forms of social co-operation**



- In water efficiency terms **this re-sites the utility in its locality and reduces the dislocation that international capital markets bring**

- This Human Economy approach rejects reliance on a moral or ethical code of conduct and works on the principle of **mutual self benefit** – which is more likely to have longevity and be complementary with water's existing monetised environment

- In essence – there's no going back, only forward



- A fully realised water efficiency model moves from the personal, to the community to the political

This paper does not aim to provide a water tight model nor deride the role of capital markets

Instead it's aim is to re-engage water efficiency discussions within their **socio-political** context

Re-siting profit into its community context provides a way forward which secures the resource, closes the legitimacy gap and helps moves the water efficiency narrative away from exploitation and **towards full participation**

Save Water



SHOWER WITH
A FRIEND

And use your profit
share rebate to
support local
sustainable
businesses