

Making the best of unanticipated impacts: boundary work, statistical entrepreneurship, and ‘opening up’ indicators

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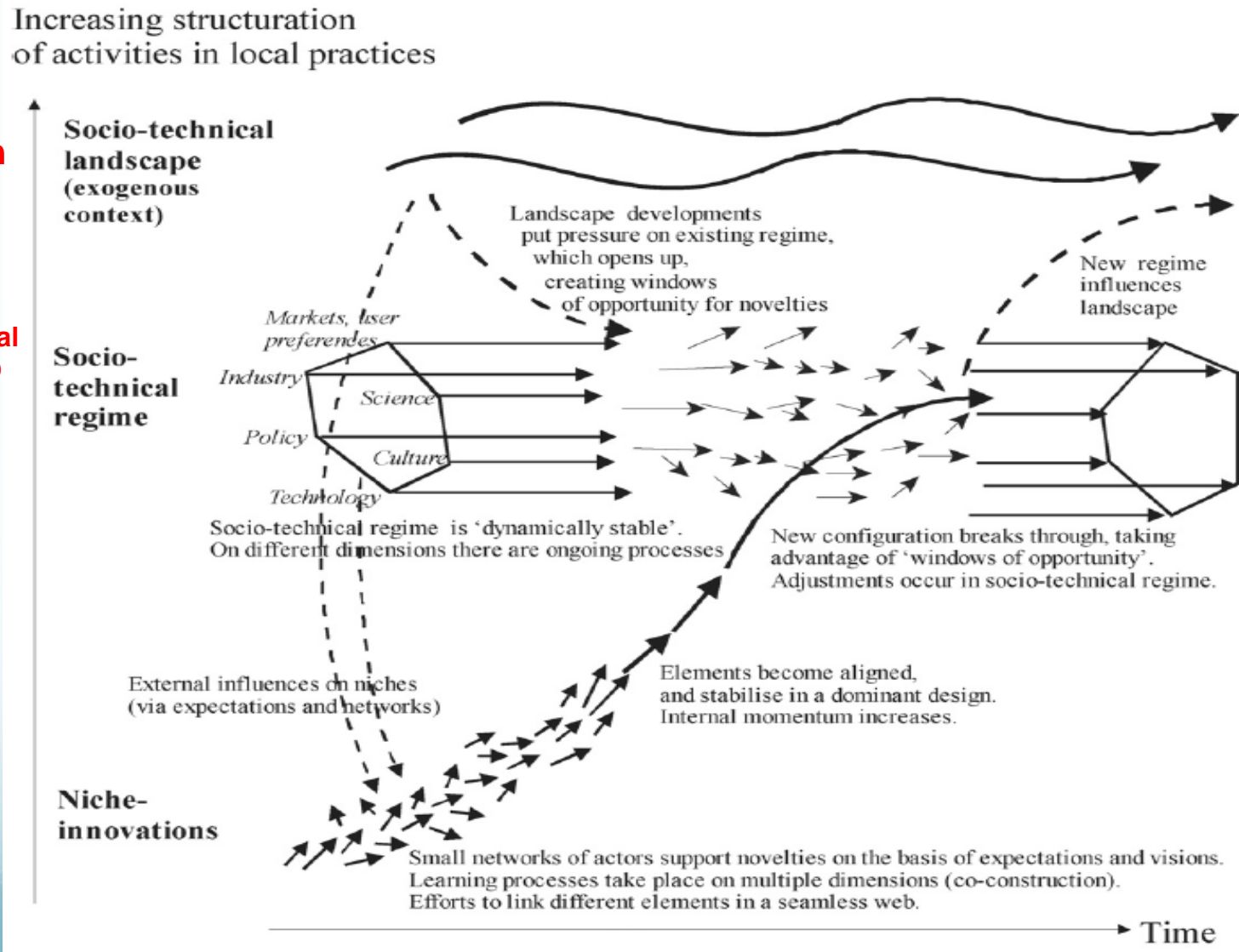
Need for disruption – and stability

- Direct, intended use or indirect, unanticipated influence of indicators?
- Need for SDIs to move beyond BAU: disruptive indicators?
- But how to disrupt while maintaining/strengthening trust in official statistics and indicators?
- Post-truth, Big Data revolution
- “Opening up” and statistical entrepreneurship – to combine stability and flexibility?

Disruptive indicators?

- Need for sustainability transitions – need for new, transformative SD indicators?
- Disruptive innovation, destabilisation, lock-in & unlocking, co-evolution and cumulative causation...
- Transitions: destabilisation of the dominant socio-technical regime
- Beyond GDP indicators as an attempt to destabilise the prevailing regime

Multi-level perspective of socio-technical transitions

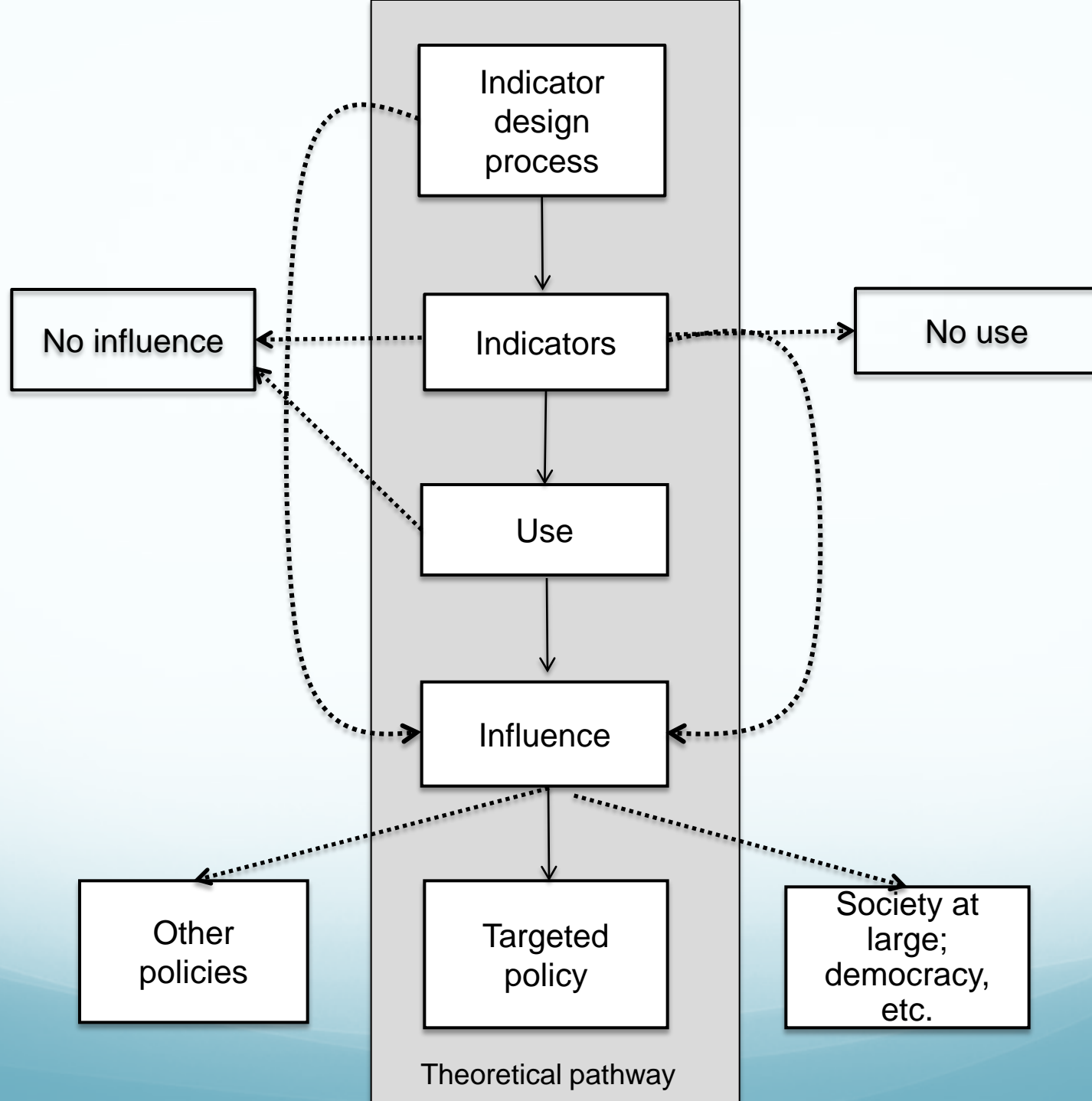


Source: Geels & Schot (2007).

The weak transformative capacity of Beyond GDP indicators (Malay, forthcoming)

- Many/most Beyond GDP indicators reproduce the same picture and country rankings as GDP – and hence reinforce the status quo
- Possible explanations
 - data quality requirements – MRV value (measurable, reportable and verifiable)
 - Institutional inertia and political interests
 - Epistemic communities: shared common values, beliefs, frameworks of thought, policy endeavour, criteria for what is a good indicator, professional identities – **beliefs concerning the role of indicators in policy**
 - The “law” of inherent conservatism in official statistics (van Tuinen 2009)

Role of indicators in
policy:
intendend use vs.
unanticipated influence



But this is a simplification,
because it does not take into
account co-evolution between
policy, indicators, technologies,
cultures...

Therefore...

Indicators as boundary objects

Boundary objects

Mediate between different categories of policy actors, or “social worlds”

Facilitate dialogue, learning and **consensus-building** across policy boundaries:

- experts and non-experts
- state and non-state actors
- various governance levels
- “science”, “policy”, and “society”
- indicator expert communities



Boundary

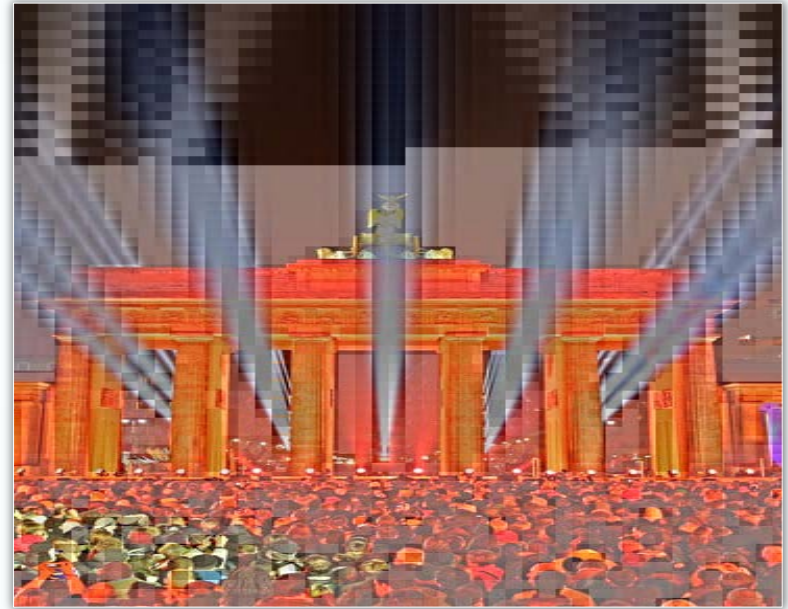
- Boundary = a shared space, where the meanings of 'here' and 'there' are confounded



Boundary objects

Flexible, vague and **ambiguous** enough to cater to different worldviews, perspectives, cognitive assumptions and frameworks, while retaining sufficient stability to...

...allow groups to work together **without consensus**, in a process of tacking back and forth between the vague and the more tailor-made forms of the object



From boundary objects to boundary infrastructure

Regimes and networks of boundary objects

National and international statistical institutions seek to:

- control the tacking back-and-forth
- standardise and make equivalent the ill-structured and well-structured aspects of indicators
- appropriate both the calculus and publication of the indicators

These processes are essential for **trust** in statistics, indicators and statistics authorities

But they also generate inertia that prevents innovation and disruption

How to combine stability and
disruption, consensus and
controversy?

Opening up and statistical
entrepreneurship to the
rescue?

Opening up

Opening up of appraisal and indicators

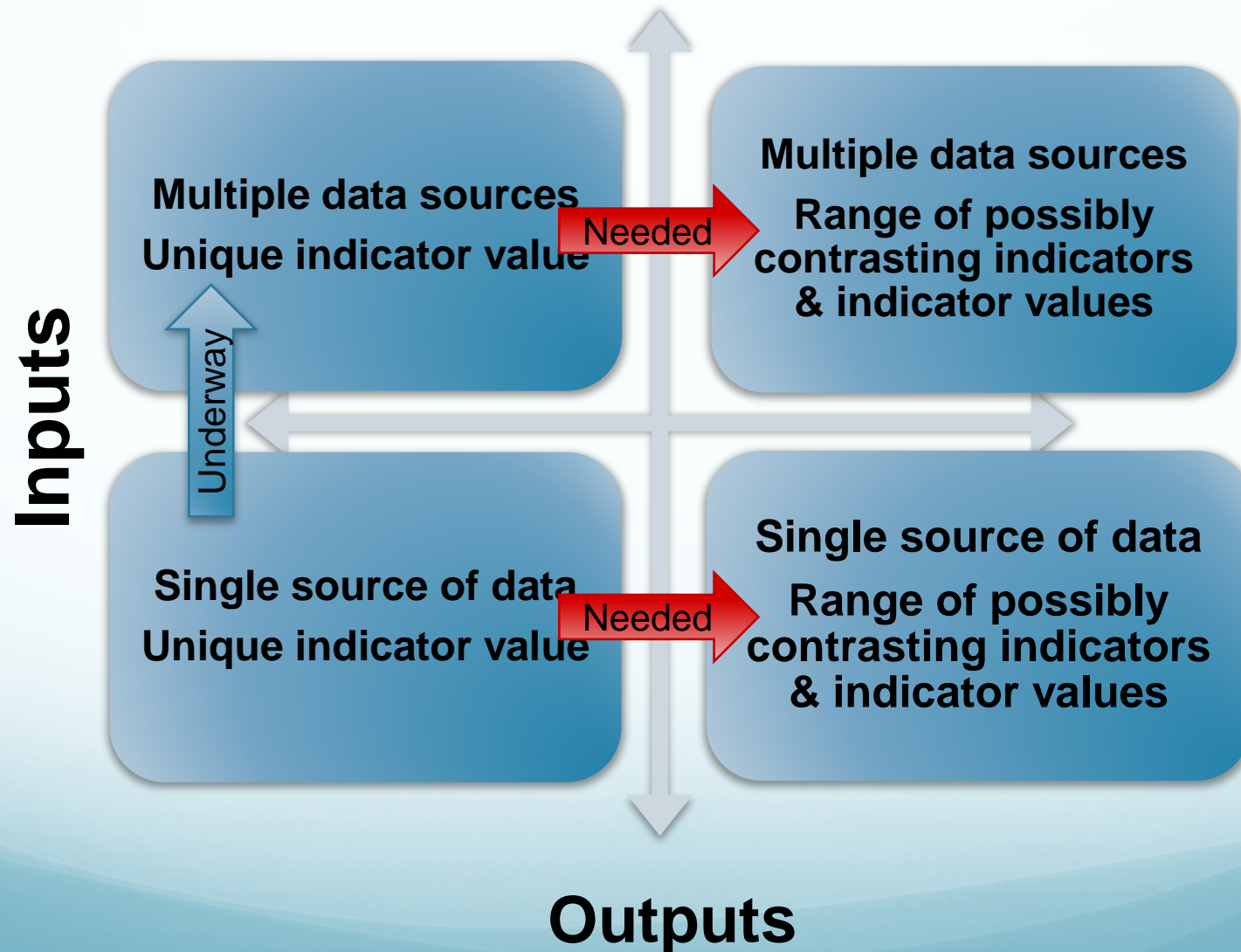
Breadth of inputs

- Disciplines
- Perspectives
- Stakeholders
- Expert groups

Openness of outputs

- Alternative indicators indicating the range of possible outcomes
- Enable rigorous debate on contrasting policy options

Indicators as boundary objects; “opening up”



“Statistical entrepreneurship” (van Tuinen 2009)

Towards a double identity of statistical offices:

1. Provider of authoritative and incontestable facts
2. Innovative and respected research organisation: indicators that highlight complexities and **uncertainties** behind statistics, and explore their practical significance

Change of culture within statistical offices:

- *“put in contact the citizens with official statistics, to make data accessible, to expand the understanding of their analysis, to support individuals, business and institutions in the decision-making process”* (Baldacci & Pelagalli 2017)

Post-truth, Big Data, opening up and statistical entrepreneurship

- Multiplicity of data sources: competition!
- Big Data and the threat of private-sector data oligopolies
- The traditional model of authority is no longer operational: need to innovate, engage with data users and the data communication technologies
- Foundations of trust in statistics/indicators: are they the same in all countries? Virtues of mistrust?
 - Liberal democracy founded on mistrust
 - Nordic democracies built on high trust in state institutions