



# “I want to show you something about the saltmarsh”: exploring intangible values for wellbeing as part of the CoastWEB project

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A scenic landscape at sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm orange and yellow glow that reflects on the water. The sky transitions from a pale blue to a soft orange. In the foreground, there are green, leafy plants and grasses. A white circular graphic with a thin black border is positioned on the right side of the image, containing the word "Methods" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

# Methods

# Where and who?

- N=26
- Purposive & snowball sampling

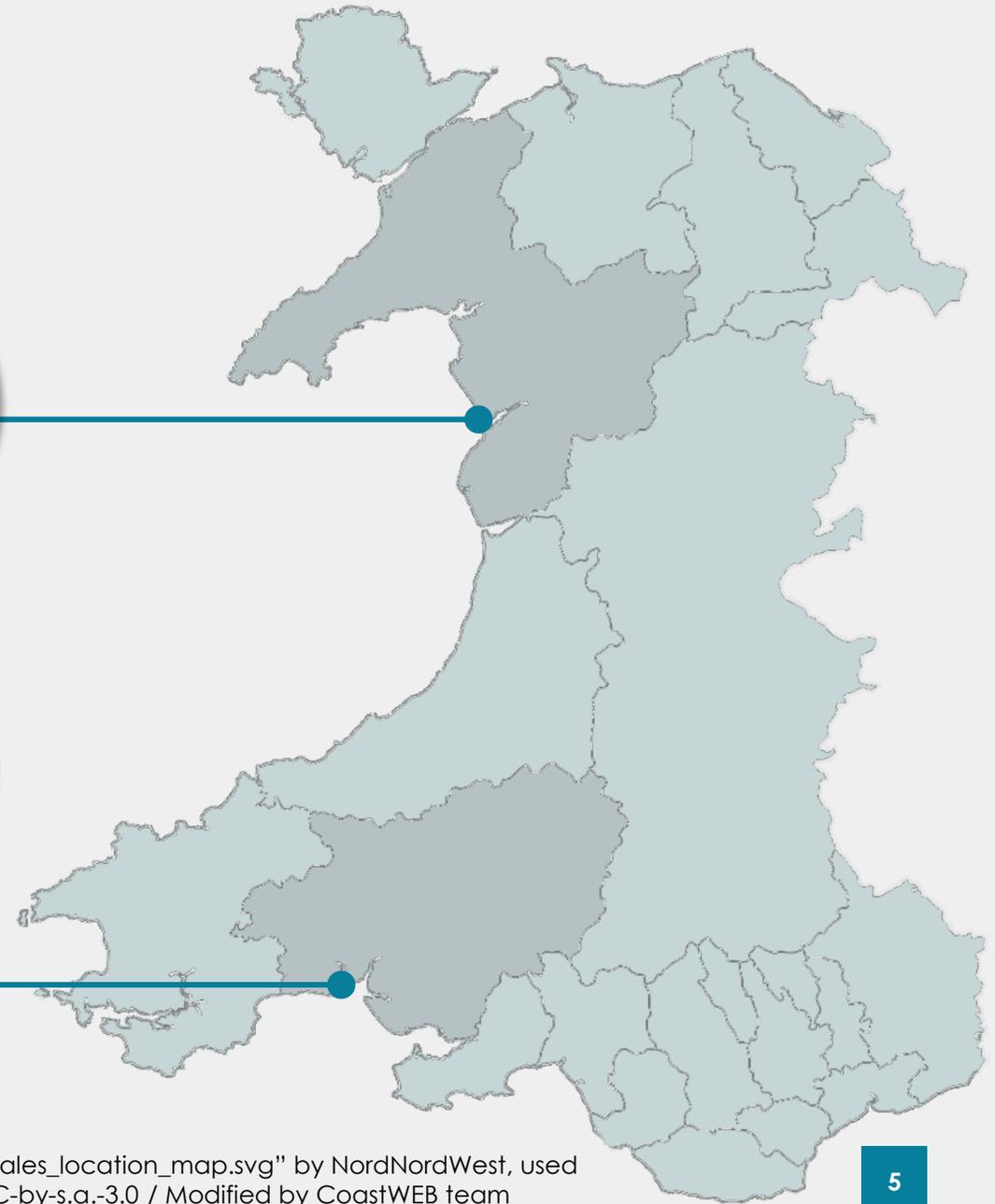


**Mawddach**  
(Gwynedd)

- Residents, visitors, users, non-users
- Broad range: age, gender, occupation, etc.



**Tâf**  
(Carms)



# How?

Semi-structured interview

Mobile interview

Pre-interview



Sit-down interview

Participant Photo taking / collecting

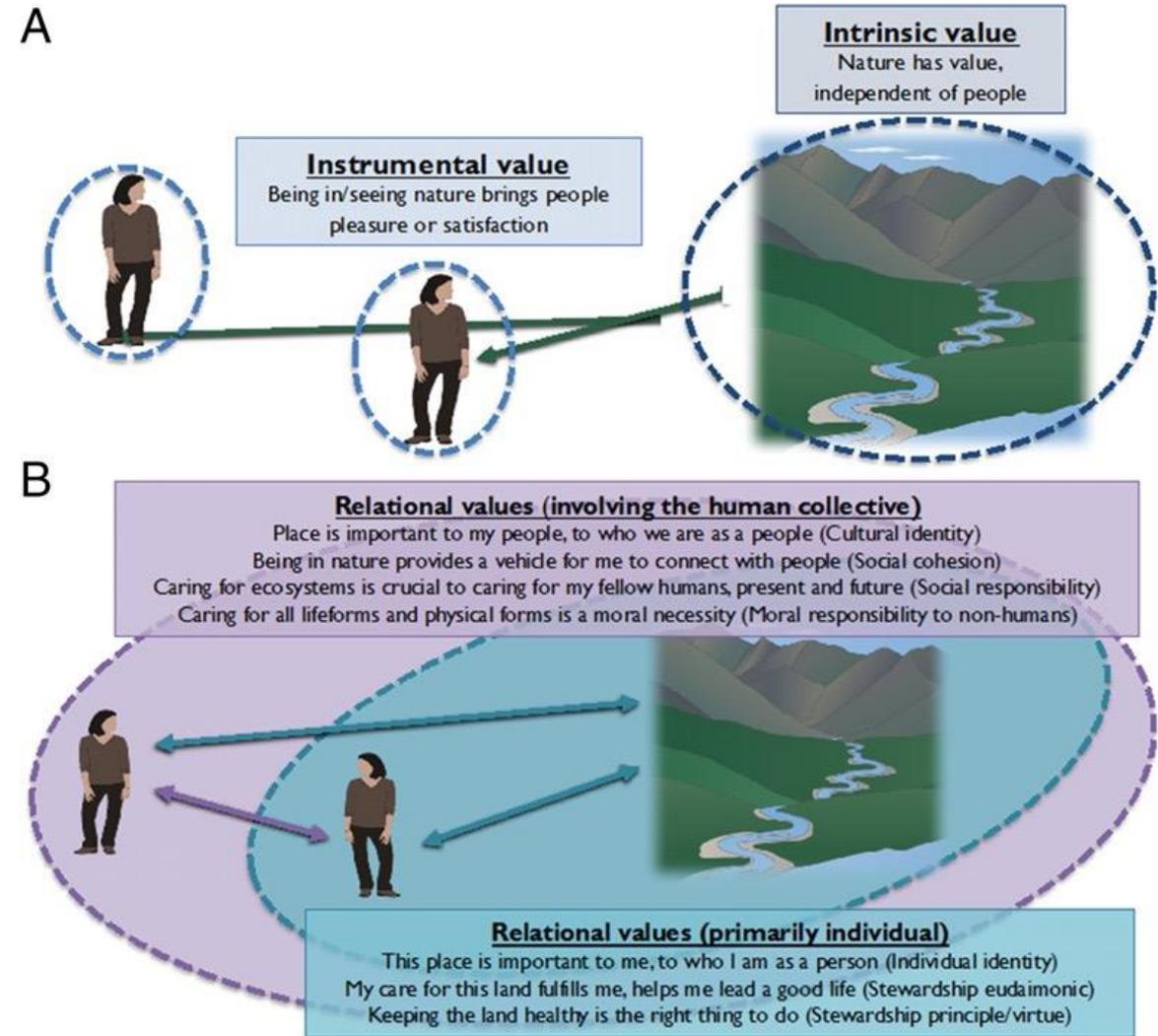
Photo task | Map task | Word task

A scenic view of a sunset over a body of water, with a white circular graphic overlaid on the left side containing the text 'Theoretical Framework'. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The foreground is filled with green, leafy plants and grasses. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

# Theoretical Framework

# Intangible cultural values: a relational approach

- Relational values are...
  - Environmental values that derive from our **relationships** with nature and our responsibilities towards it
  - **Subjective** and held individually and/or collectively in relation to specific environmental features.
  - People's use of **stories** - personal narratives and collective discourses - reveal much about the meaningfulness of particular human-environment relations.
- One way to think about relational values is through the lens of affordances (Gibson, 1979)...



Difference between instrumental/intrinsic value framings (A) and relational value framings (B) developed by Chan et al. (2016) [<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1525002113>]

# Saltmarsh 'affordances': a lens for cultural intangibles

*The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or for ill (Gibson, 1979)*

Affordances are...

- **relational, situational** and **dynamical** (Raymond et al., 2018)
- usually 'meaningful, value-rich features of **experience** that in the course of *action and in the context of an individual's history* are often alluring, and sometimes repelling' (Heft, 2010, original emphasis)
- **dependent upon an individual's skills, abilities and knowledge** that are in turn embedded in **sociocultural practices** (Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014)
- both real and perceivable, but not properties of either the environment or person. Instead, **affordances emerge within the relationship between people and their environment** (Lennon, Douglas & Scott, 2017)

# Saltmarsh 'affordances': a lens for cultural intangibles

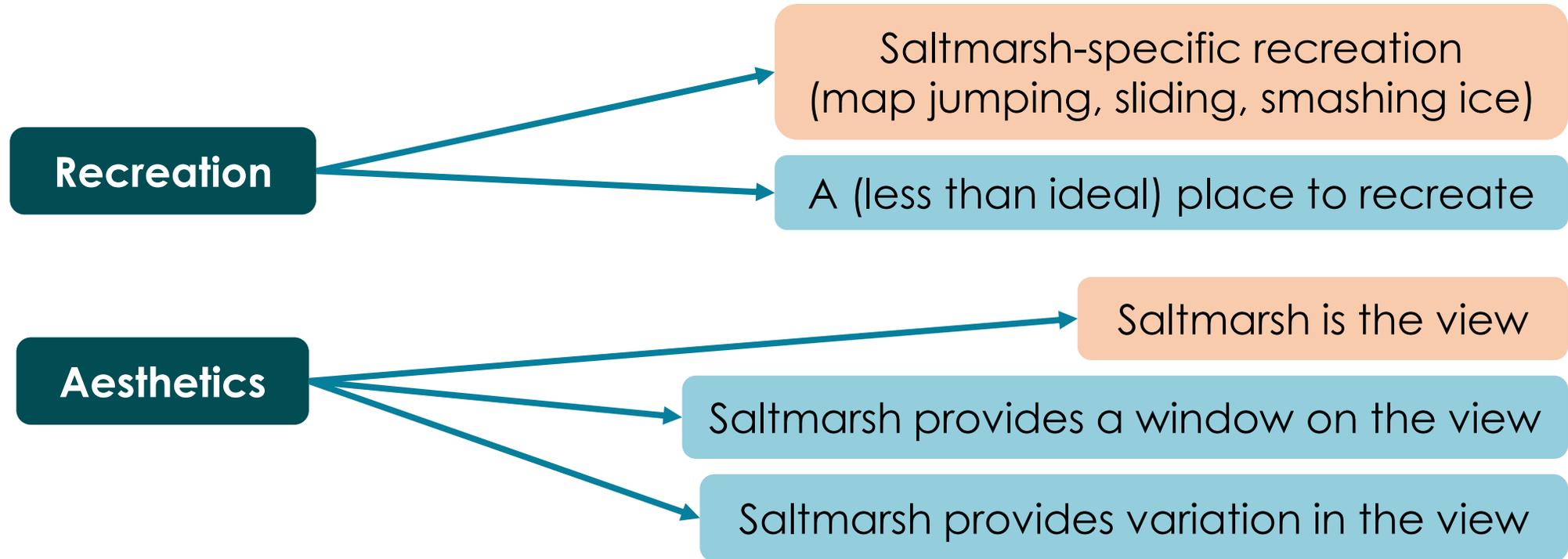
*The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or for ill (Gibson, 1979)*

- What do affordances add to an exploration of wellbeing?
  - Affordances are different from 'services' or 'contributions to people' because affordances prompt us to explore the **relationships between the 'abilities' of people and the features of the environment**
  - **Affordances help us understand the role of places in shaping human wellbeing** in terms of concrete interactions between people and their physical and social environment (Ettema & Smajic, 2015)
  - '...the processes of wellbeing or becoming, whether the enjoying a balance of positive over negative affects, of fulfilling potential and expressing autonomy or of mobilising a range of material, social and psychological resources, are **essentially and necessarily emergent in place**' (Atkinson et al. 2012; 3)
  - Wellbeing is thus **an emergent quality of situated interactions** between personal, social, institutional and biophysical processes (Atkinson, 2013)



# Findings

# A dichotomy: indirect and direct affordances



## Key

Direct affordances (saltmarsh specific)

Indirect affordances (not saltmarsh specific)



# Affordance 1: Recreation

- Recreating with the saltmarsh itself e.g. using it as a slide, jumping between imaginary islands, smashing ice on pools (direct affordances)

*“I believe [young people are] so conditioned to holidays abroad with, you know, beautiful sandy beaches and what have you, they look in disgust at this. **They don’t realise that they can actually use it as it is.** Because my son, right, round the corner there back two summers ago, see the banks there, he was like a fool. He made a mudslide [...] and was sliding down the mud into the water [...] He’s 25 [years old]” (Alan, Laugharne)*

- A place to recreate (e.g. paddling, walking, playing cricket) that just “happens to be a saltmarsh” (indirect affordance)

*“Well I would [go to a saltmarsh by myself] but I wouldn’t be thinking, oh I think I’ll go to a saltmarsh today. [...] You know, I would be thinking, I’ll go to so and so, and **that happens to be a saltmarsh.** So, it might be that I might be paddling, I might be walking, and where I’m going is, yes, it’s a saltmarsh” (David, Mawddach)*



## Affordance 2: Aesthetics

- Saltmarsh is the view (direct affordance)

*“I like to **look at it**” (David, Mawddach)*

*“It’s because of the shapes, intricate shapes of the channels, right, it makes you focus on it.  
So, if it wasn’t there, you’d miss it.” (Alan, Laugharne)*

- Saltmarsh affords a window for the view: it is flat, so I can see the beautiful landscape beyond (indirect)

*“I look beyond the saltmarsh [...] because the vista’s so wide [...] I rarely look at the actual saltmarsh [...] you’re looking at the view beyond aren’t you [...] because it’s **more interesting** to see, isn’t it, what’s beyond it...and I suppose you don’t often see such a wide open space, do you? So, you’re enjoying this **open view which you don’t often get**, do you? [...] And it’s flat, isn’t it?” (Charlotte, Laugharne)*

# Affordances and wellbeing

playing

familiarity: saltmarshes are less widespread than other spaces of recreation, e.g. beaches, forests

boating

changing trends:  
fewer people own boats

history and historical knowledge

foraging

changing needs : no longer necessary to go on the marsh (e.g. for food, trade)

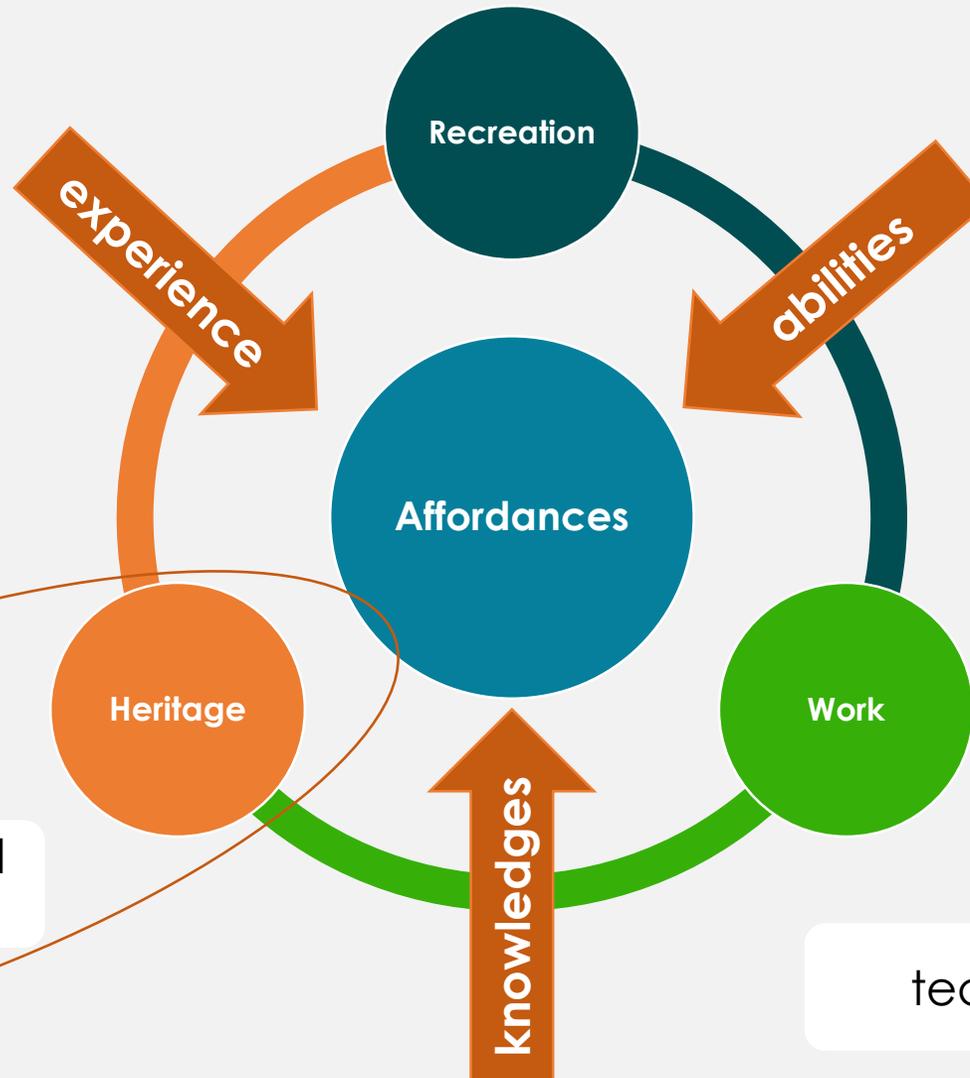
environmental memberships

muddy, dirty, dangerous, inaccessible

studying, sampling

uncertainty re. access rights

teaching



# Conclusions

- Using an affordances lens, we find that saltmarshes offer indirect affordances – those that are not ‘fundamental’ to the saltmarsh but could be sought in other environments
- They also provide direct affordances, for which the saltmarsh itself is fundamental
- This dichotomy can be understood when we consider the relationships between people and their physical, social and cultural environments that are specific to time, place and person
- Wellbeing is an emergent quality within this web of relations – the result of *situated* interactions between personal, social, institutional and biophysical processes (see *also* Atkinson, 2013) - and is thus dynamic and subject to change through time



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