

ENV 501 / GR A3 30

# Material Flow Analysis and resource management

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Fall 2025

# Last week


- Urban Metabolism vs. Urban MFA
- System boundaries of cities
- Accounting approaches
- Where to find data
- Urban metabolism examples
- Circular economy and MFA
- Circular economy policies and insights

# Course outline

8:15 - 9:00 and 9:15 - 10:00

13:15 - 14:00

14:15 - 15:00

| Block I:<br>EW-MFA<br>global /<br>national                  | W1 - Sep 11  | Introduction to the course and general concepts  | All                                | Exercise  | Project |
|---|--------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
|   | W2 - Sep 18  | EW – MFA and EW – MFA in the Swiss context   | External Guest – Florian Kohler    | Exercise  | Project |
|   | W3 – Sep 25  | Examples of EW – MFA. Scaling EW-MFA to Cantons  | FMC                                | Exercise  | Project |
|   | W4 - Oct 02  | Urban Metabolism and Circular Economy  | FMC                                | Exercise  | Project |
| Block II:<br>MFA<br>regional /<br>urban                     | W5 - Oct 09  | MFA method and the Stock-Flows-Service Nexus  | CRB                                | Exercise  | Project |
|   | W6 - Oct 16  | Dynamic MFA  | External Guest – Stefan Pauliuk    | Exercise  | Project |
|   | Oct 23       | Autumn break   |                                    |           |         |
|   | W7 - Oct 30  | Applications of MFA – case study   | External Guest – Guillaume Massard | Exercise  | Project |
|   | W8 - Nov 06  | Input-Output Analysis and Material Flow Cost Accounting  | External Guest – Vincent Moreau    | Exercise  | Project |
|   | W9 - Nov 13  | Spatial MFA  | FMC                                | Exercise  | Project |
|   | W10 - Nov 20 | Combined approaches: MFA + LCA; MFA + sociodemographics.   | AS & FMC                           | Exercise  | Project |
| Block III:<br>Social<br>sciences<br>and<br>public<br>policy | W11 - Nov 27 | Combined approaches: MFA + surveys; Quasi-dynamic MFA  | GF & FMC                           | Exercise  | Project |
|   | W12 - Dec 04 | Social metabolism and dynamic MFA in industrial systems  | CRB – Martyn Wakeman               | Past exam | Project |
|   | W13 - Dec 11 | Agent-based model  | CRB, FMC, MAH, SLC                 | Project   | Project |
|   | W14 - Dec 18 | Group Project Presentation   | All                                | Project   | Project |

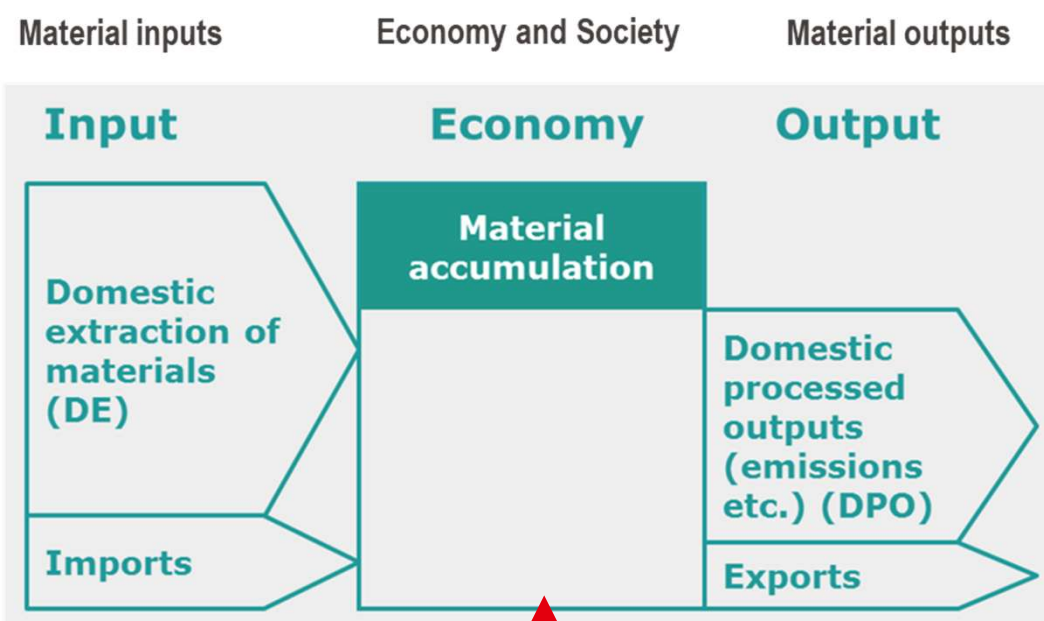
# Content of lecture

- Opening the box: regional MFA
- Main components of MFA systems
- MFA and mathematical system definition
- The Stock-Flow-Service Nexus: Definitions and relevance
- System's linkages in society's metabolism

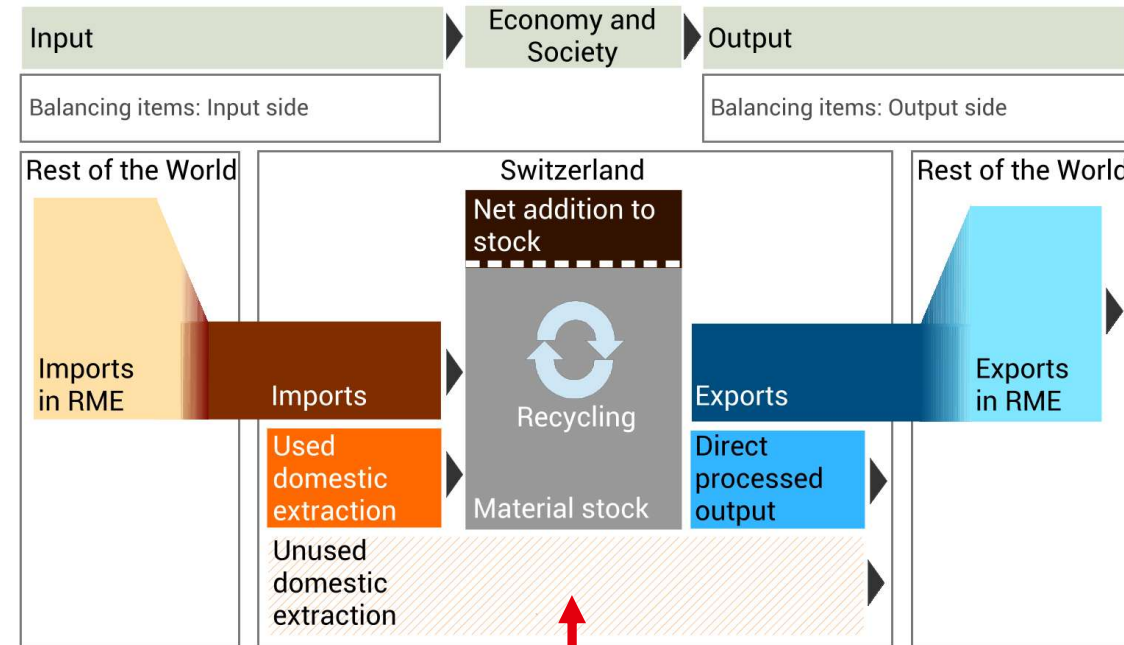


# Opening the box

# Switzerland EW-MFA indicators



What happens inside the box?

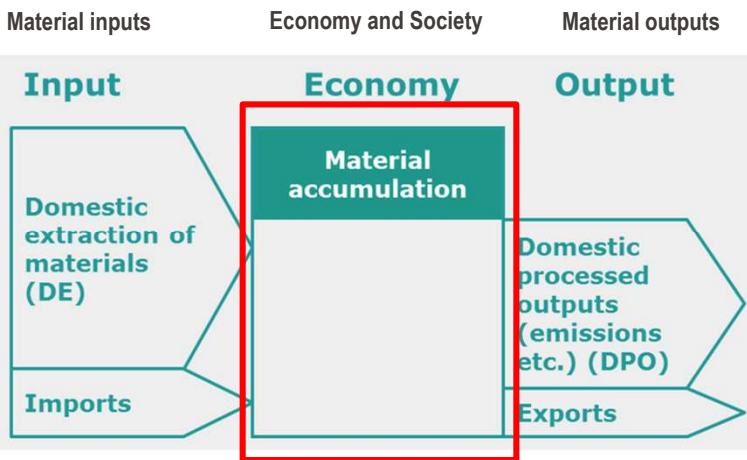


RME: Raw Material Equivalents

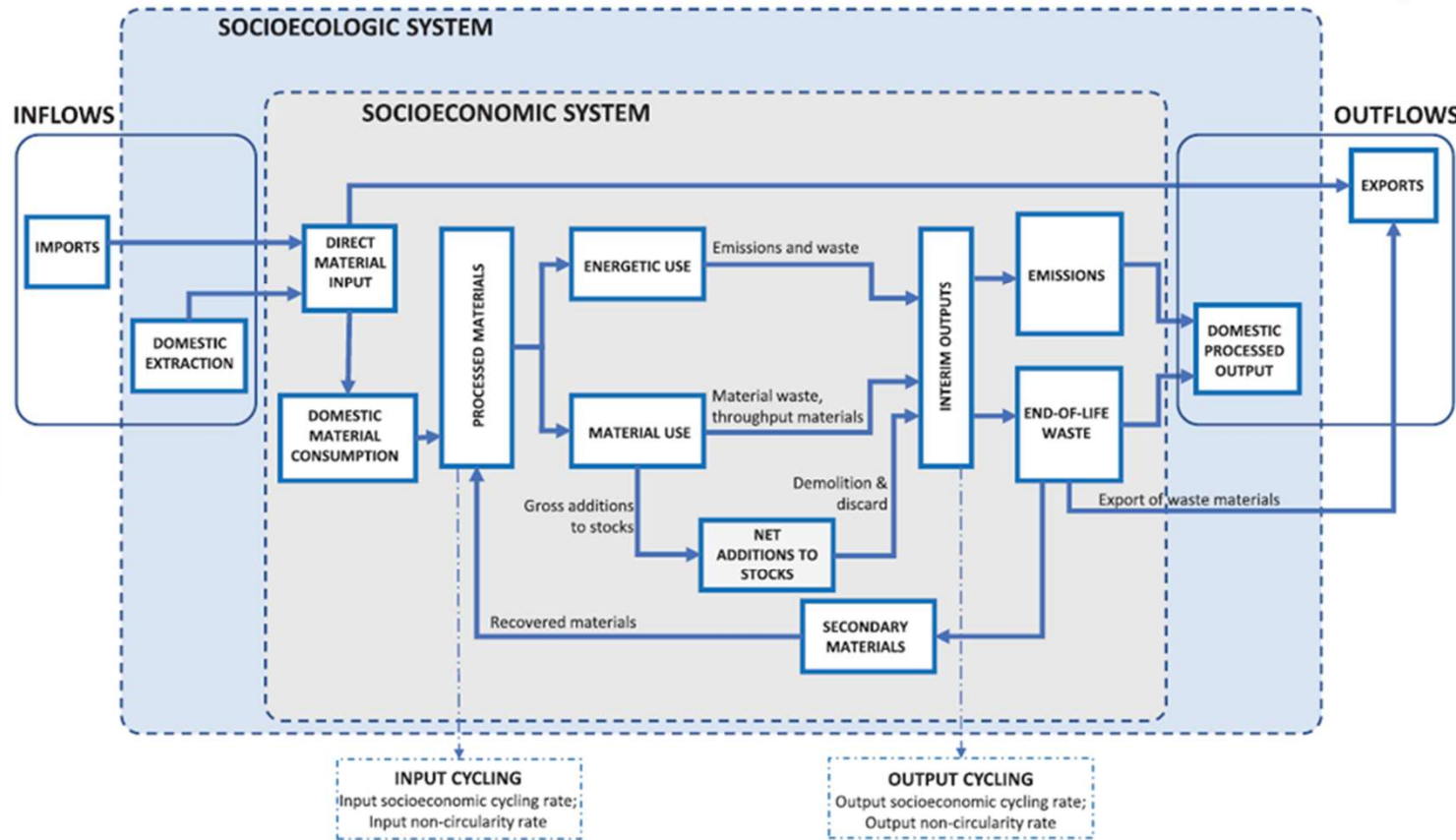
Who consumes what?  
 Who recycles ?  
 What are the recycling processes?

Source: [Swiss Federal Statistical Office](#), 2018; [Eurostat](#), 2018

# Economy-wide MFA (EW-MFA)



Note: Calculations also possible in **Raw Material Equivalents** = domestic extraction of natural material inputs that were necessary to produce the respective traded goods



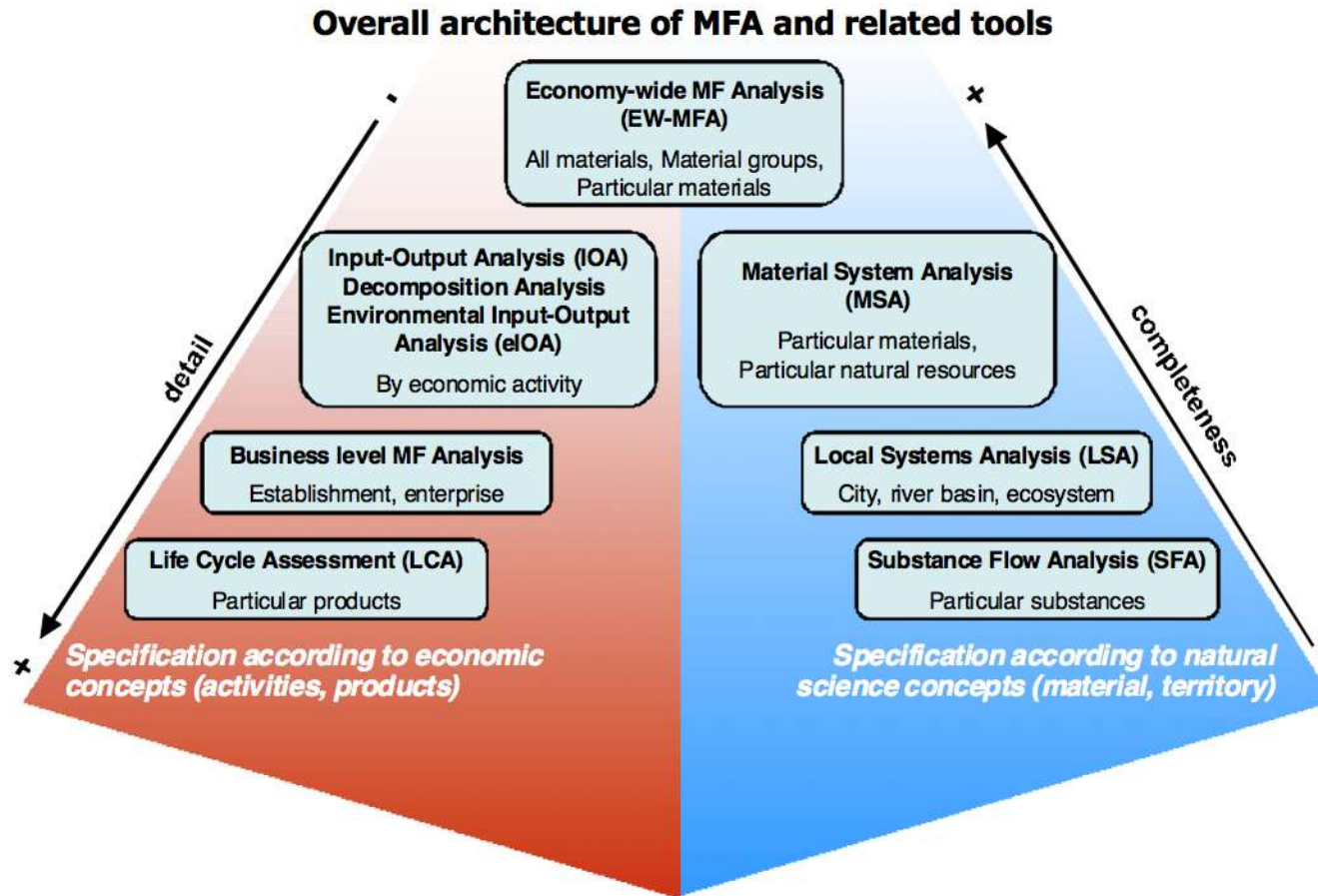
**INPUT CYCLING**  
Input socioeconomic cycling rate;  
Input non-circularity rate

**OUTPUT CYCLING**  
Output socioeconomic cycling rate;  
Output non-circularity rate

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Source: [Martin del Campo et al., 2023](#)

# Hierarchy of MFA tools



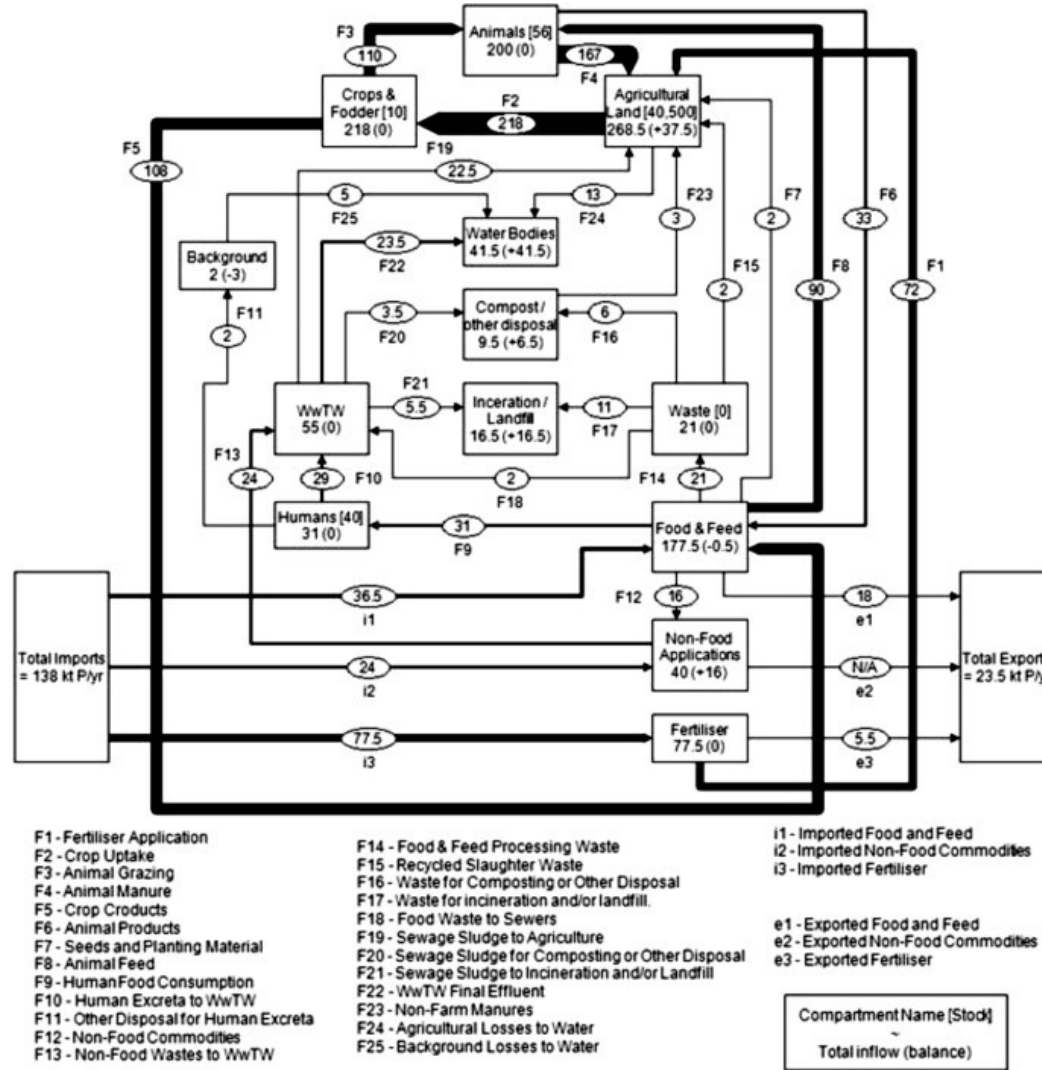
OECD, 2008

# IE approaches in this course

|                          |   |  |   |   |  |  |  |                                     |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Main objective           | Substances  | Materials  | Products, Goods and Services                        | Businesses  | Economic activities  | Countries, Regions   |  |                                     |
|                          | e.g., chemical elements or compounds (Cd, Cl, Pb, Zn, Hg, N, P, C, CO <sub>2</sub> , CFC) | e.g., raw materials and semi-finished goods, energy carriers, metals (ferrous and nonferrous), sand and gravel, timber, plastics | e.g., batteries, transportation, packaging          | e.g., offices, plants, small and medium sized enterprises, multi-national enterprises | e.g., mining, construction, chemical industry, iron and steel industry | e.g., aggregated mass of materials and related mixed or selected materials |  |                                     |
| Type of analysis         | Substance Flow Analysis   | Material Flow Analysis   | Life Cycle Assessment                               | Business level Material Flow Analysis   | Input-Output Analysis  | Economy-wide Material Flow Analysis  |  |                                     |
| Type of analytical tools | Substance Flow Accounts   | Material Flow Accounts, Industrial, Urban or Regional Metabolism   | Life-Cycle Inventory, Impact Assessment (ISO 14040) | Lif-Cycle Costing   | Material Flow Cost Accounting (ISO 14051)                              | Business Material Flow Accounting  | Physical Input-Output Tables, NAMEA approaches | Economy-wide Material Flow Accounts |

Source: Moreau and Massard, 2017

# Phosphorous flows in UK



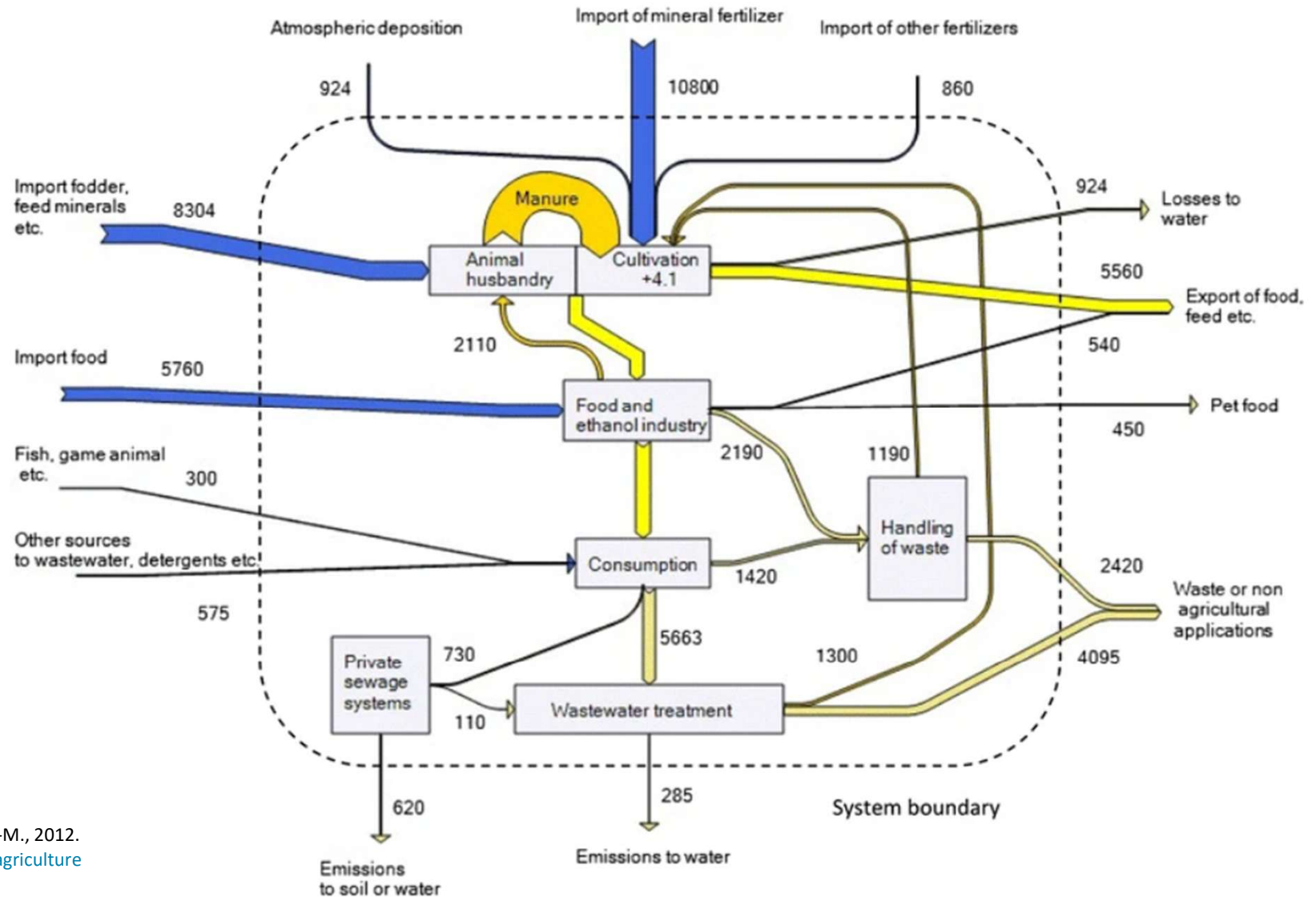
SFA for the UK food production and consumption system. Diagram produced using the STAN program All values are expressed in kt P/yr. The calculations, assumptions and uncertainties for each flow are detailed in Table 1. The existing stock, inputs and accumulations for each process are presented in Table 2. Cooper and Carliell, 2013

# Phosphorous flows in UK

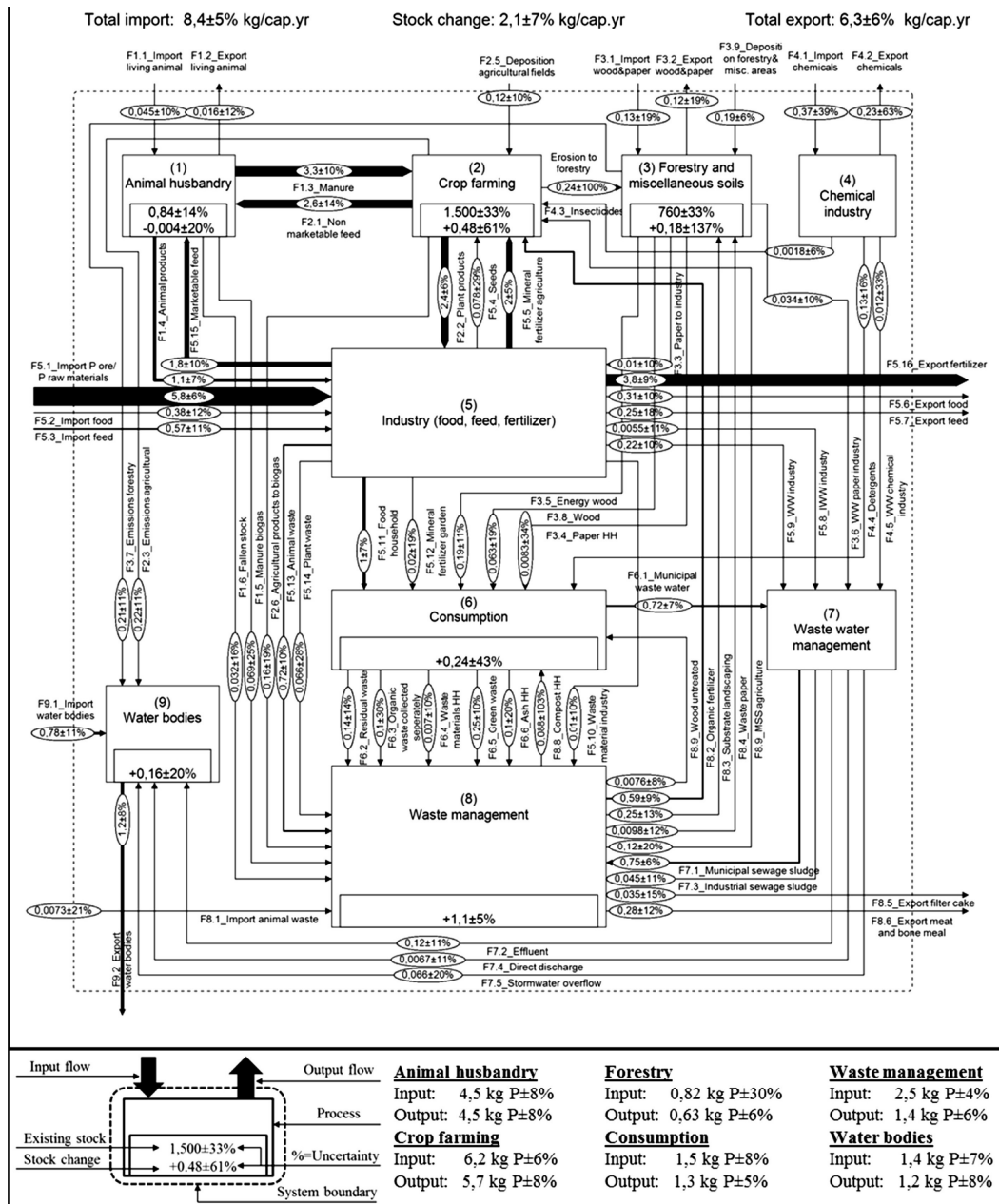
| Flow number and name       | Description  | Calculations, assumptions and references.  | Estimated amount (kt P/yr) | Average amount <sup>a</sup> [±2 s] (kt P/yr) | Average confidence interval <sup>b</sup> [range] (kt P/yr) | Final value <sup>c</sup> [95% confidence limits] (kt P/yr) |
|----------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| F1) Fertiliser application | The quantity of p within fertiliser applied to arable and grassland in the UK. | FAOSTAT (2011) estimate of consumption in 2009.  | 73.8                       | 68.0<br>[±20.0]                              | */1.1<br>[±9.5]  | 72.0<br>[±20.0]  |
|                            |  | FAOSTAT (2012) estimate of consumption in 2009.  | 80.3                       |  |  |  |
|                            |  | British Survey of Fertiliser Practice (BSFP) 2010 land areas and application rates for 2009 (Defra, 2011b). British application = 70.5 kt P/yr (45.7 kt P/yr to arable land (4.55 million hectares (Mha) at 10.0 kg P/ha) and 24.8 kt P/yr to grassland (6.3 Mha at 3.9 kg P/ha)). Northern Ireland total = 2.3 kt P/yr (DARD, 2010b). | 72.8                       |  |  |  |
|                            |  | BSFP total fertiliser nutrient consumption for UK (Defra, 2011b).  | 56.3                       |  |  |  |
|                            |  | Defra's soil nutrient balance for 2009, inorganic fertilisers (Clothier, 2010).  | 56.0                       |  |  |  |
| F2) Crop uptake            | The quantity of P removed from agricultural land in crops and grasses.         | Estimates for UK crop production obtained from Agriculture in the UK 2010 (Defra, 2011a), average nutrient contents taken from the Fertiliser Manual (RB209) (Defra, 2010d), gives UK crop production of 107.3 kt P. Uptake of P from pasture of 110 kt P from Clothier (2010).  | 217.3                      | 217.0<br>[±0.3]                              | */1.2<br>[±48.0]   | 218.0<br>[±48.0]   |
|                            |  | Defra's soil nutrient balance for 2009, total phosphorus outputs, including total harvested crops, forage and crop residues (Clothier, 2010).  | 217.0                      |  |  |  |

Cooper and Carliell, 2013

# From: Phosphorus Flows to and from Swedish Agriculture and Food Chain



Linderholm, K., Mattsson, J., Tillman, A.-M., 2012. Phosphorus flows to and from Swedish agriculture and food chain. *AMBIO* 41, 883–893.



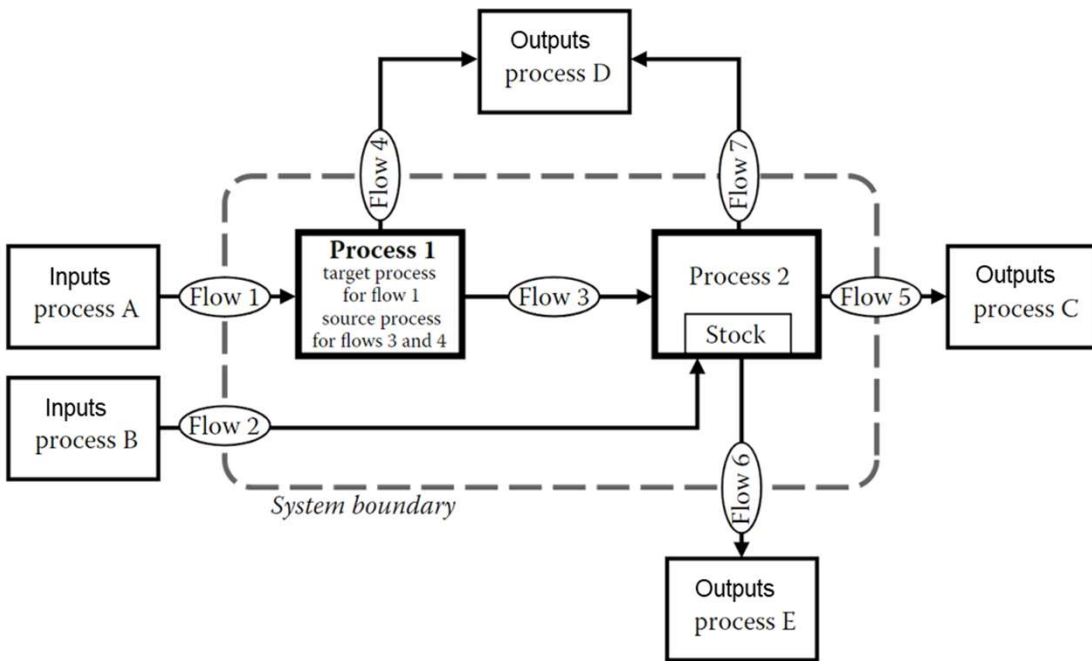
Laboratory on Human-Environment Relations in Urban Systems

Austrian national phosphorus budget with reconciled data in kg P cap<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>. Egle et al., 2014

# Observations

- No clear standardized representations
- Each country uses different set of processes
- Difficult to compare countries
  
- What do they have in common?

# Main components of MFA systems



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# Material Flow Analysis (MFA) – Definition (recap)

- Material Flow Analysis (MFA) is the systematic study of **physical flows of natural resources and materials** into, through and out of a given system (usually the economy).
- It is based on accounts in **physical units**, and uses the **principle of mass balancing** to analyze the **relationships between material flows** (including energy), **human activities** (including economic and trade developments) and **environmental changes**.
- The system is defined in **space** and **time**.
- **Connects** the sources, pathways and sinks of a **material**.

# MFA system

- **MFA system:** comprises a set of material **flows**, **stocks**, and **processes** within a defined **boundary**.
- **System boundary** is defined in space and time.
- **Temporal boundary:** time period over which the material balance is calculated (e.g. 1 hour for waste incineration process, 1000 years for landfills, 1 year for a city).
- **Spatial boundary:** geographical area (e.g. municipality, region, city) or virtual limits (e.g. private households, company).

# MFA system (I)



## What is a **process**?

- A **process** is any **transformation**, **operation**, or **activity** within a system where materials or energy are **converted**, **stored**, or **utilized** to produce **goods**, **services**, or **emissions**.
- Processes interact with flows by receiving inputs, transforming these into products or services, and generating outputs like emissions or waste.
- Analyzing processes is crucial for identifying efficiencies in production systems, and optimizing resource use.

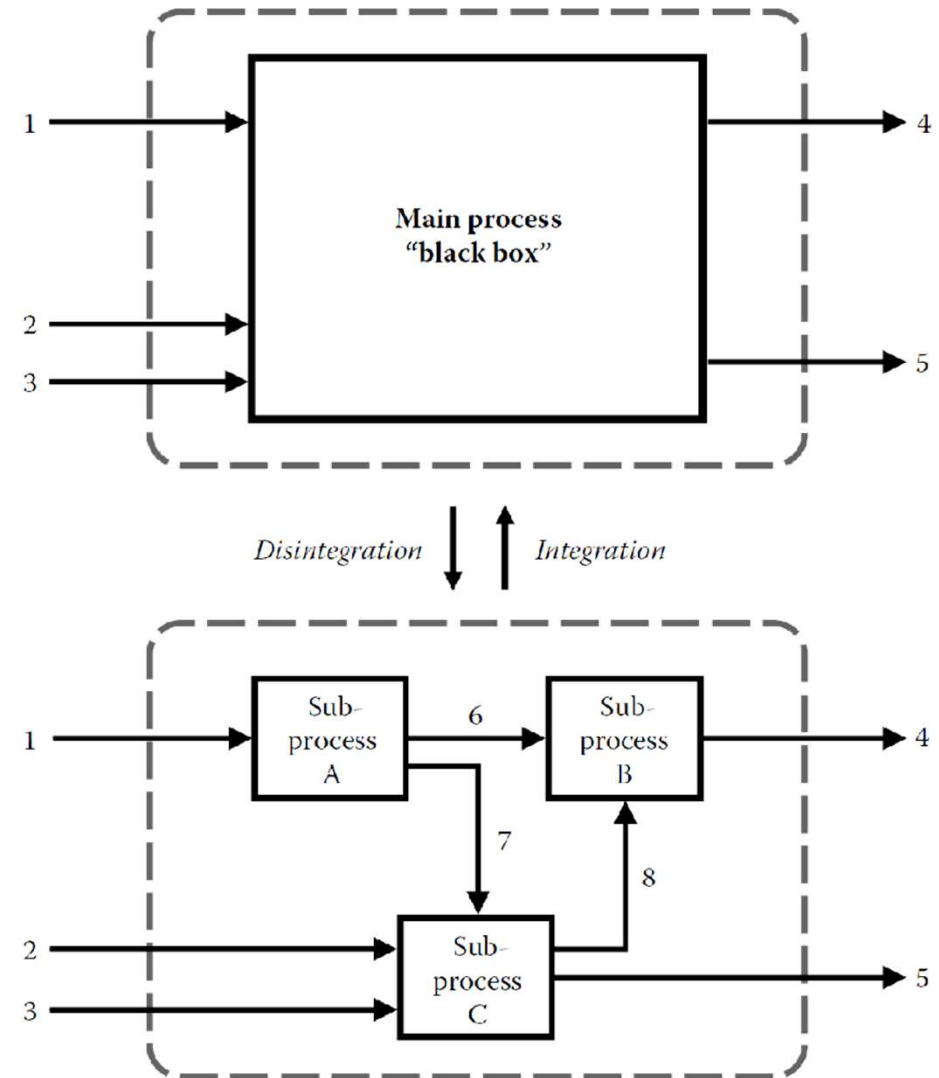
# MFA system

## Process

## System understanding

### Opening the “black box”

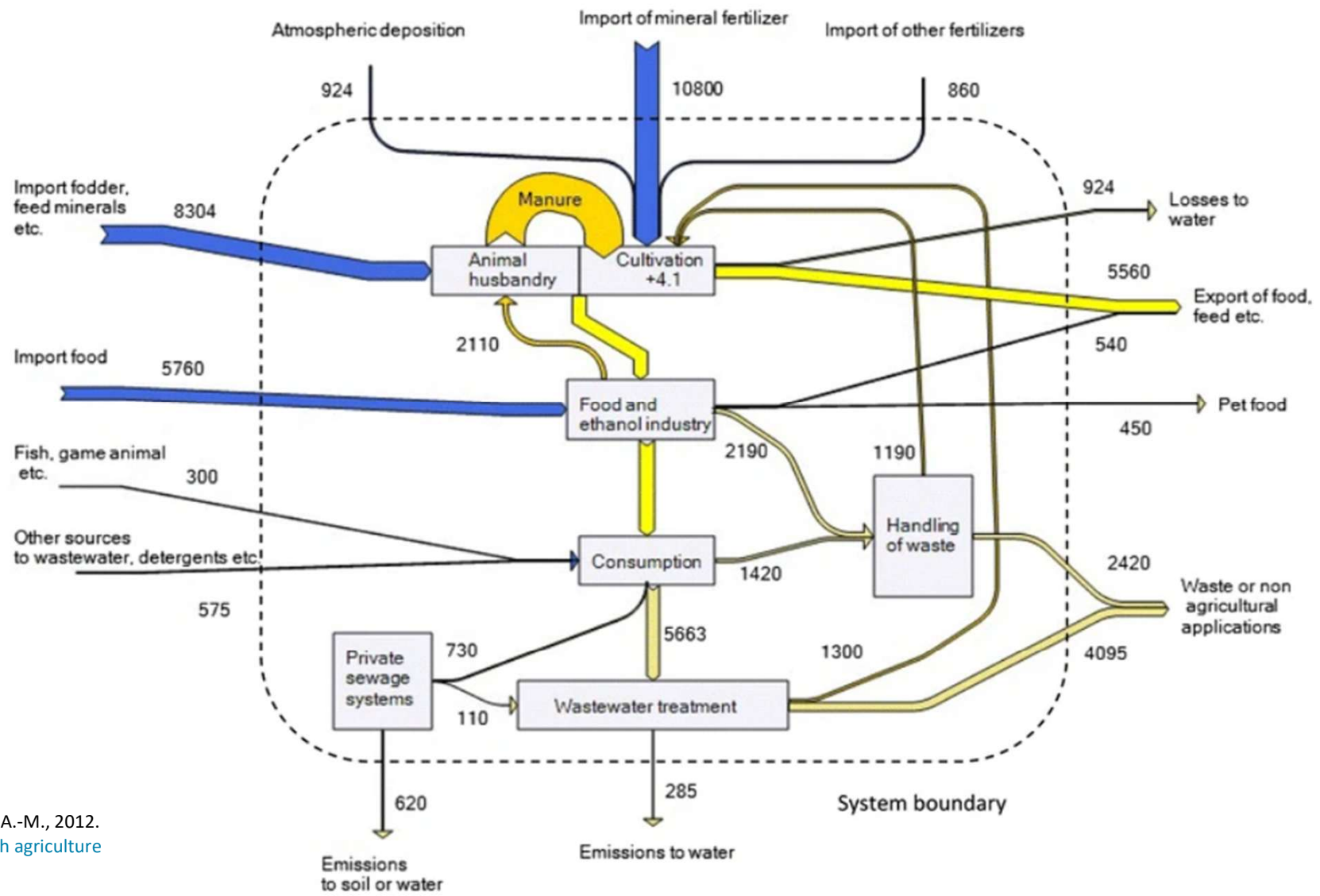
- Waste incineration process
- Wastewater treatment plant
- Energy production
- Recycling
- Landfill



# From: Phosphorus Flows to and from Swedish Agriculture and Food Chain

How are processes labelled?

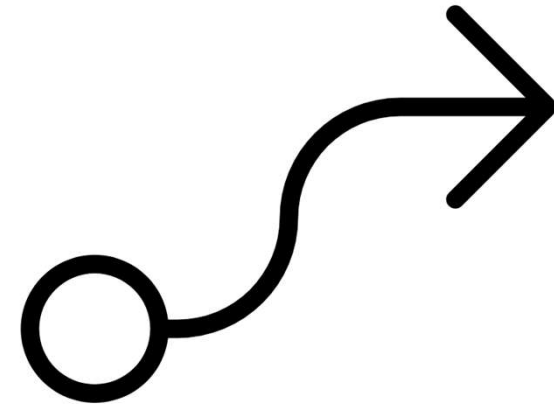
How would you define efficiency indicators?



Linderholm, K., Mattsson, J., Tillman, A.-M., 2012. Phosphorus flows to and from Swedish agriculture and food chain. *AMBIO* 41, 883–893.

# MFA system (II)

What is a **flow**?



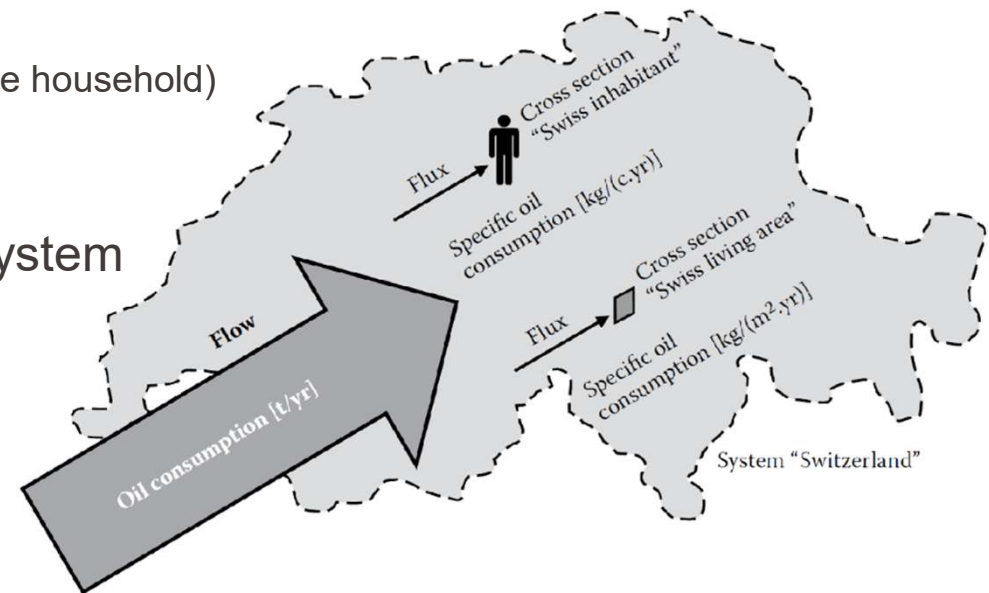
- A **flow** refers to the **movement** or **transfer** of materials, resources, or energy **through a system** over a specific period of **time**.
- **Inflows** (inputs), **throughputs** (flows within the system), and **outflows** (outputs e.g., emissions, waste, or products).
- Tracking flows is essential to monitoring resource efficiency, consumption patterns, and environmental impacts associated with production and use.

# MFA system (III)

## Flows

Materials flowing from one process to another

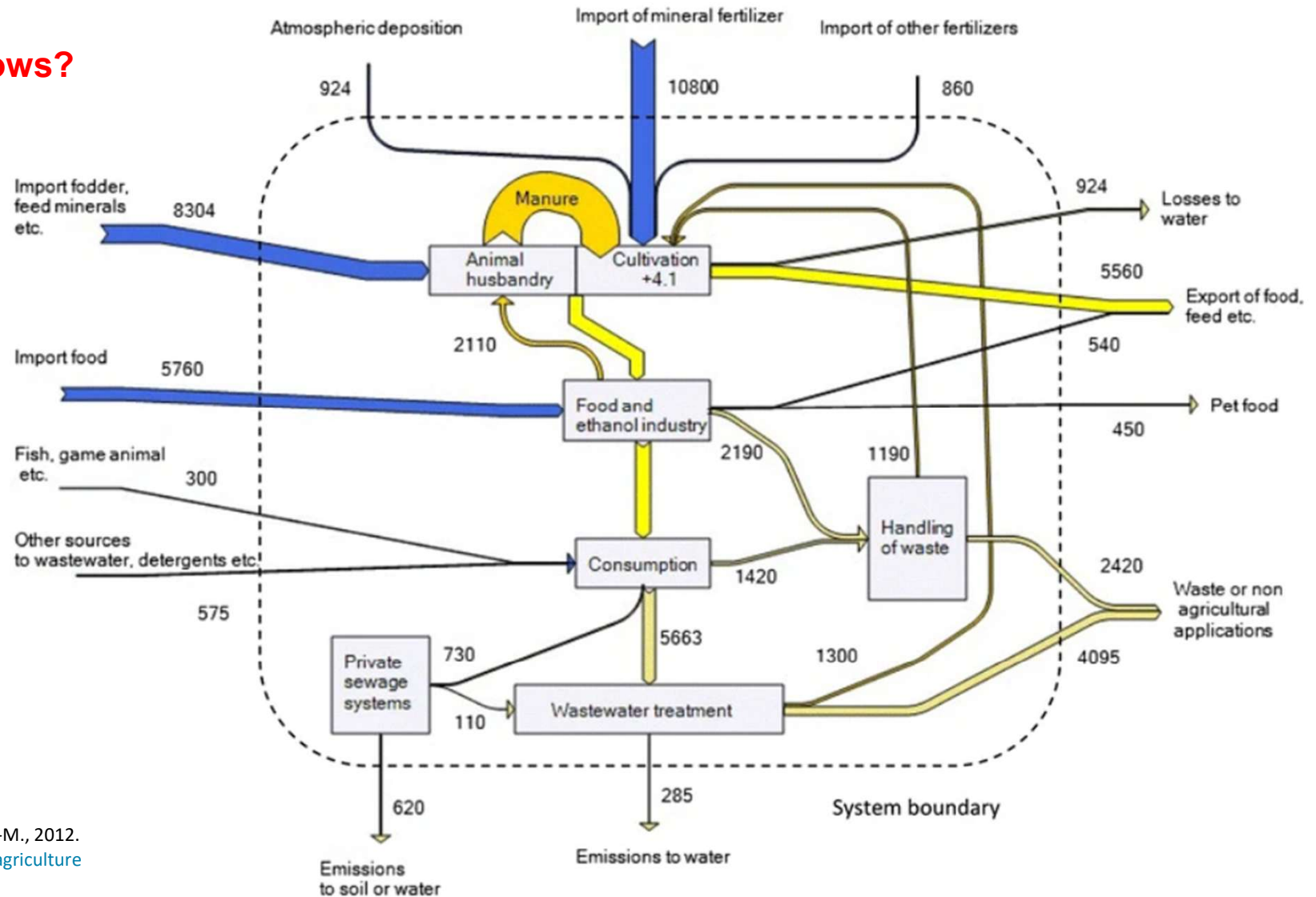
- **Flows:** ratio of mass per time (e.g. t/y)
- **Fluxes:** flow per cross section (e.g. person, private household)
- **Inputs:** Flows/fluxes entering a process
- **Outputs:** Flows/fluxes exiting a process
- **Imports and exports:** Flows/fluxes across system boundaries:



Source: Brunner & Rechberger, 2016

# From: Phosphorus Flows to and from Swedish Agriculture and Food Chain

What are the key flows?



Linderholm, K., Mattsson, J., Tillman, A.-M., 2012. Phosphorus flows to and from Swedish agriculture and food chain. *AMBIO* 41, 883–893.

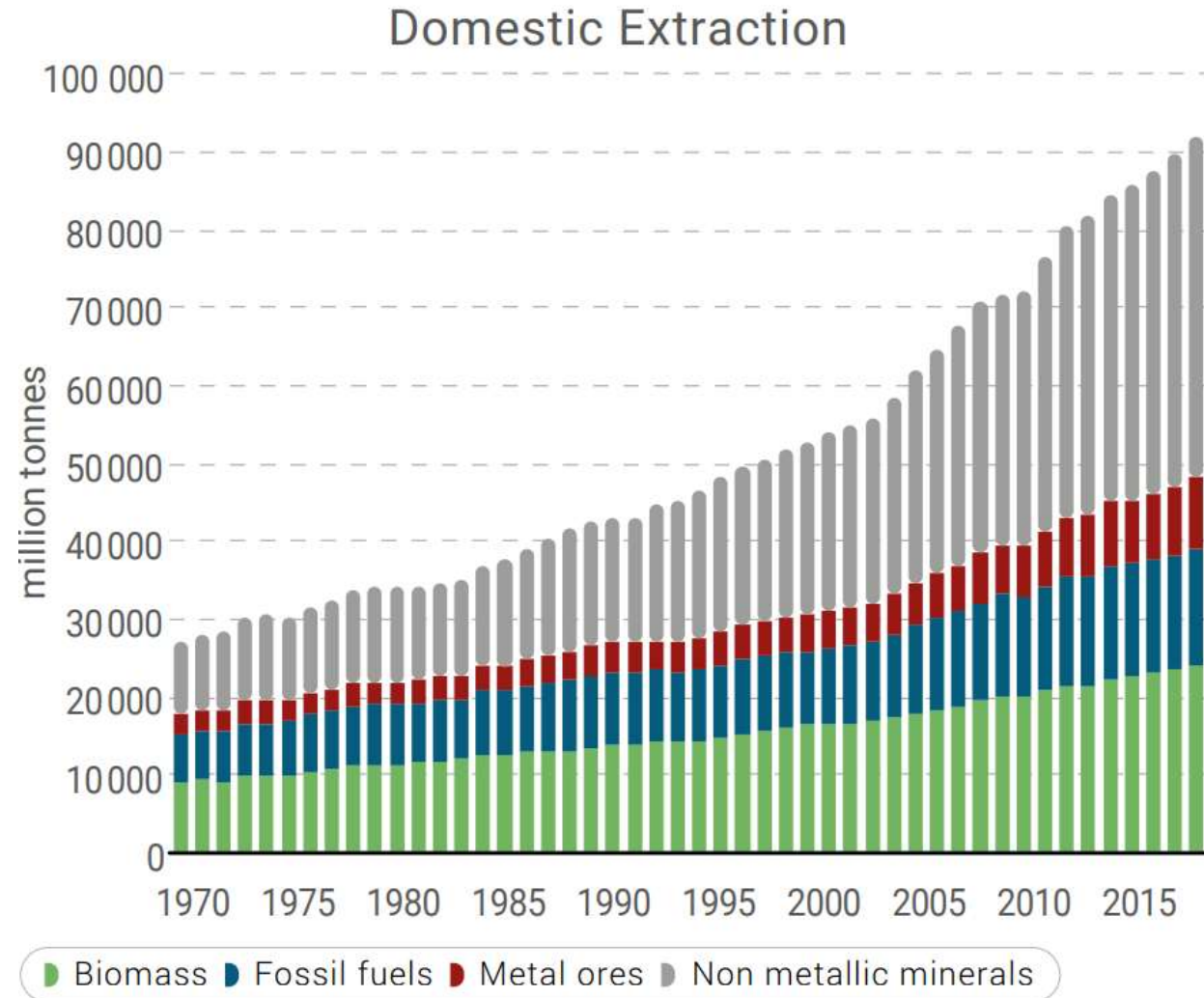
The growth in resource use has caused a sharp increase in global material extraction, particularly of non-renewable materials.

Extraction in **1970**:  
+**20** billion tonnes

Extraction in **2020**:  
+**100** billion tonnes

Projections by **2050**:  
+**180** billion tonnes

Recycling rates in **2020**:  
**8.6%**



Source: UNEP & IRP, 2018

# MFA system (IV)

## What is a **stock**?

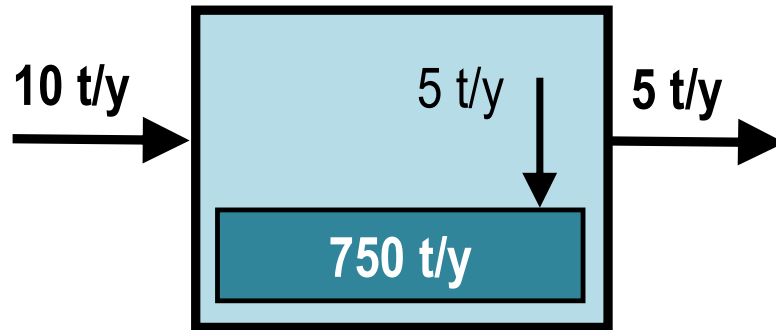


- A **stock** represents the **accumulated quantity** of a material, resource, or product present in a **defined system or boundary** at a given point in **time**.
- Stocks can refer to **physical assets** such as buildings, infrastructure, machinery, or the amount of a resource stored within a particular environment (e.g., metal stock in urban buildings).
- Stocks are crucial because they store materials, need materials for maintenance, and eventually release them back into the environment.

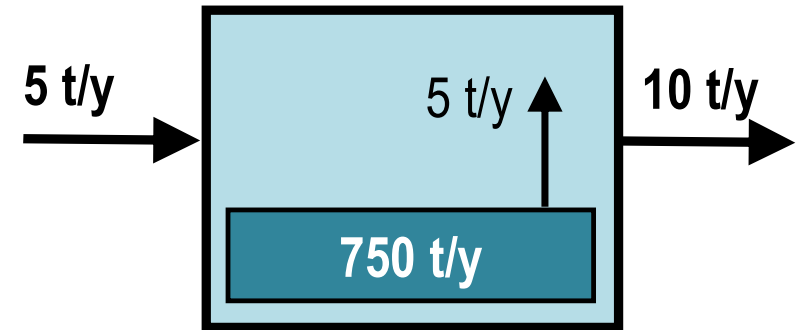
# MFA system: Stocks

- Material reservoirs or material quantity **within a process**
- Stocks can stay constant, increase or decrease in size
- Accumulation/depletion of stock: difference between process inputs and outputs between two time steps

**Accumulation of stock**

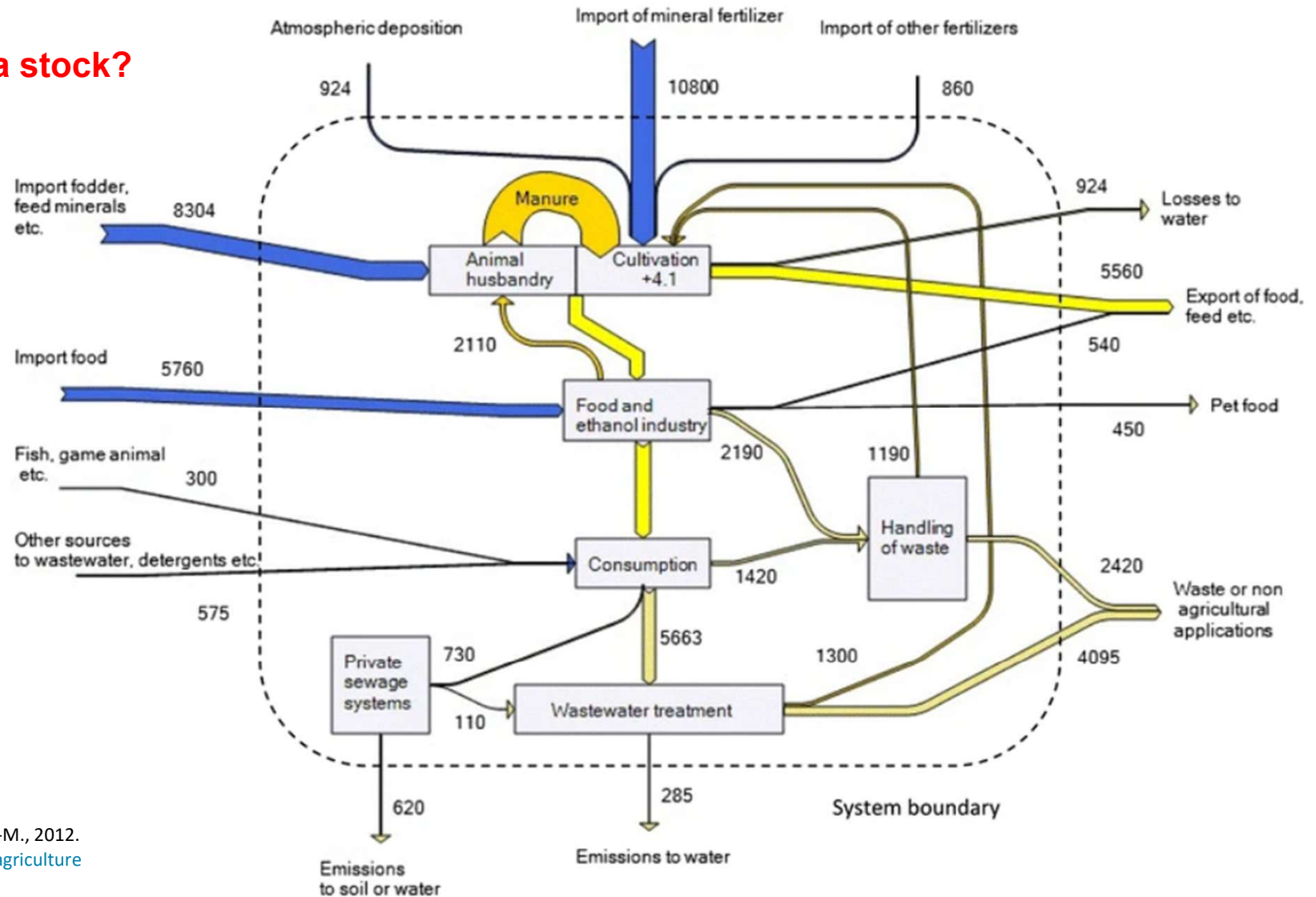


**Depletion of stock**



# From: Phosphorus Flows to and from Swedish Agriculture and Food Chain

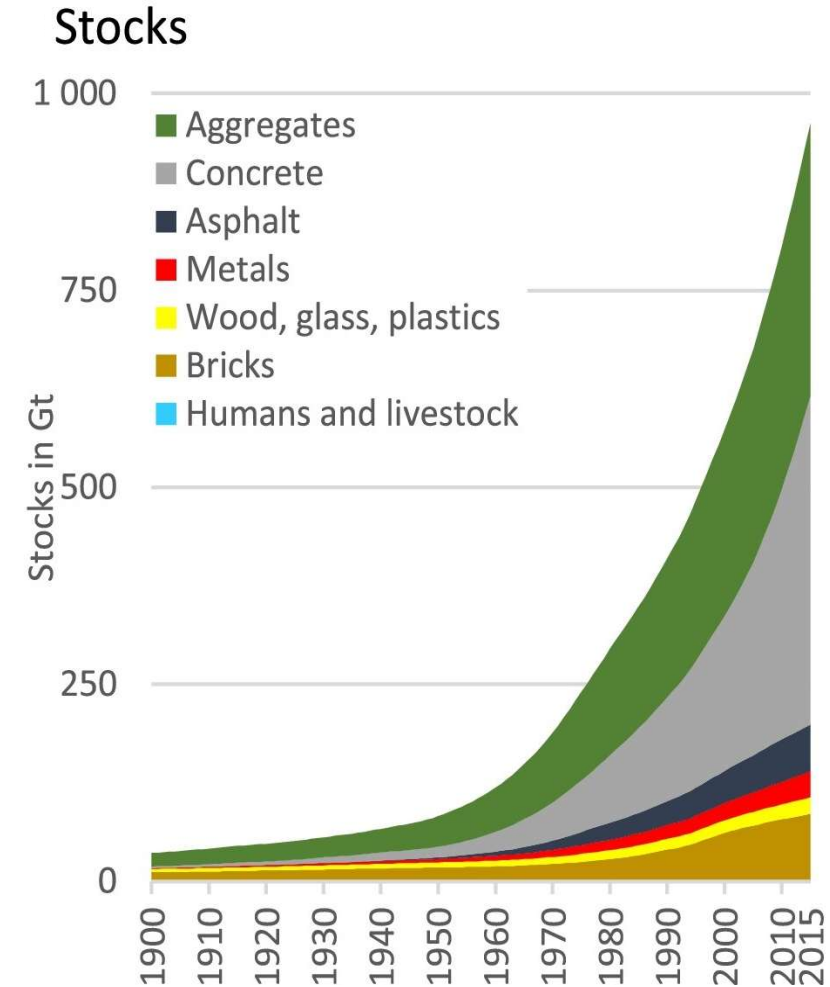
Where do we have a stock?



Linderholm, K., Mattsson, J., Tillman, A.-M., 2012. Phosphorus flows to and from Swedish agriculture and food chain. *AMBIO* 41, 883–893.

# Importance of stocks

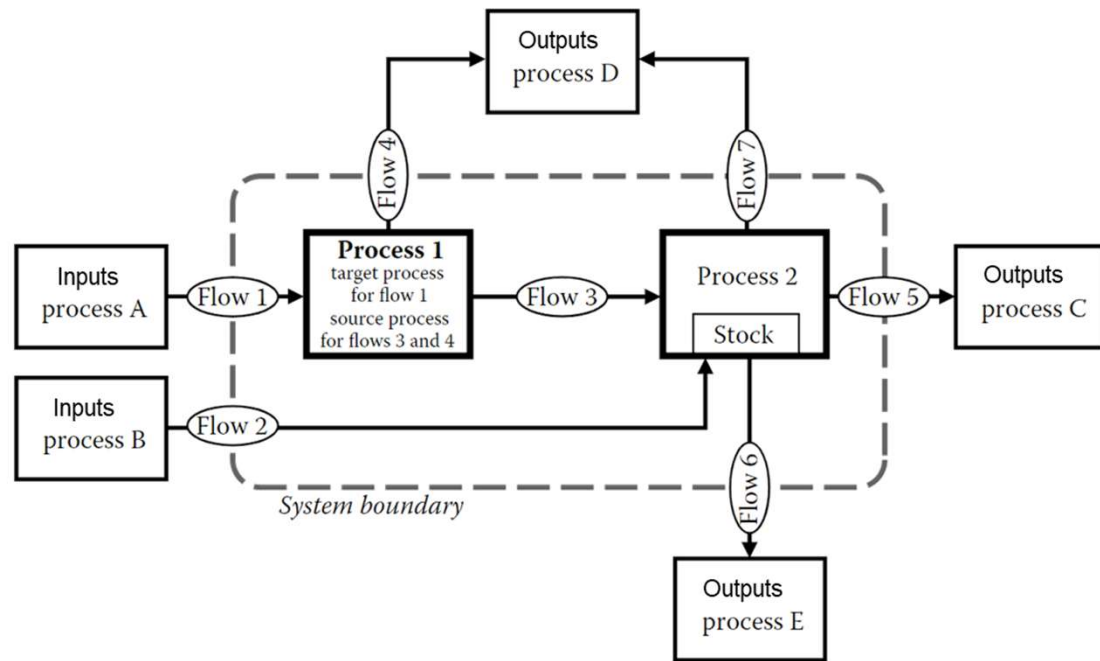
- In 2015, **75%** of all **extracted materials** were linked to increasing or replacing **material stocks**
  - Buildings
  - Infrastructures
  - Machinery, etc.
- Utilized for **building** and **maintaining** these, or for **operating** them and **providing services**
- **When they are obsolete – they become waste**



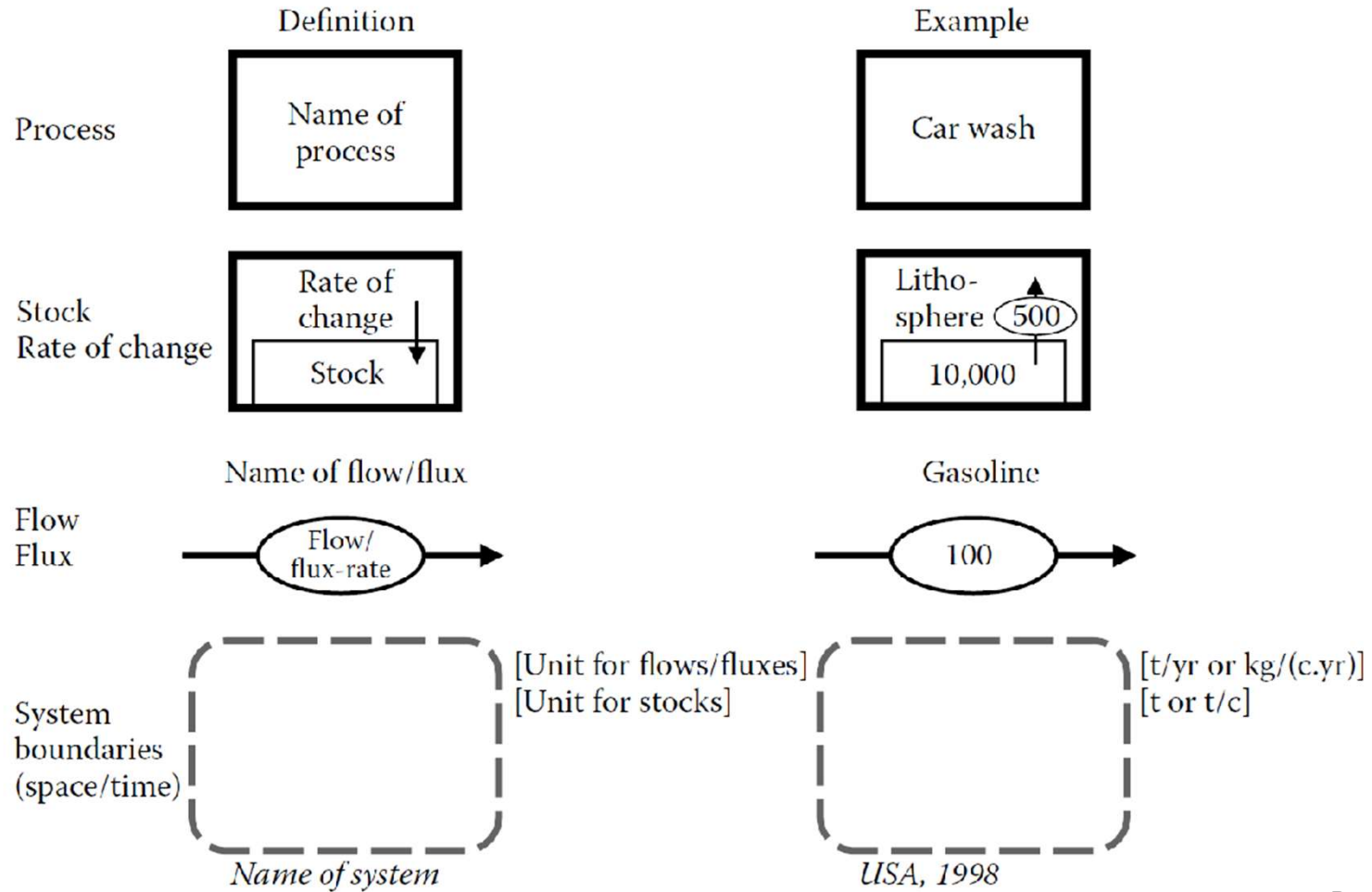
Krausmann et al. 2018

# Material Flow Analysis

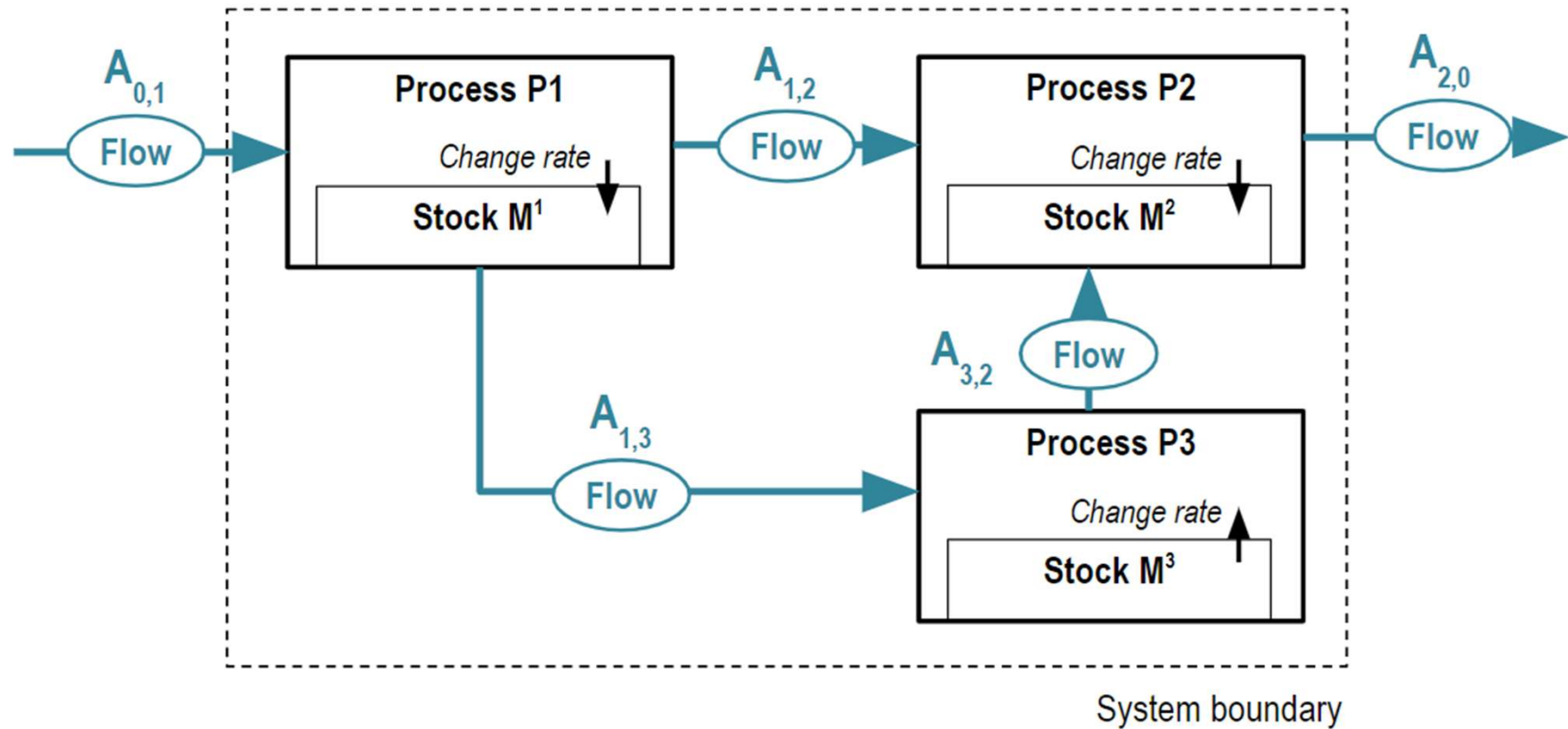
MFA notation, transfer coefficients and the time aspect in MFA



# Symbols used in MFA diagrams



# MFA notation



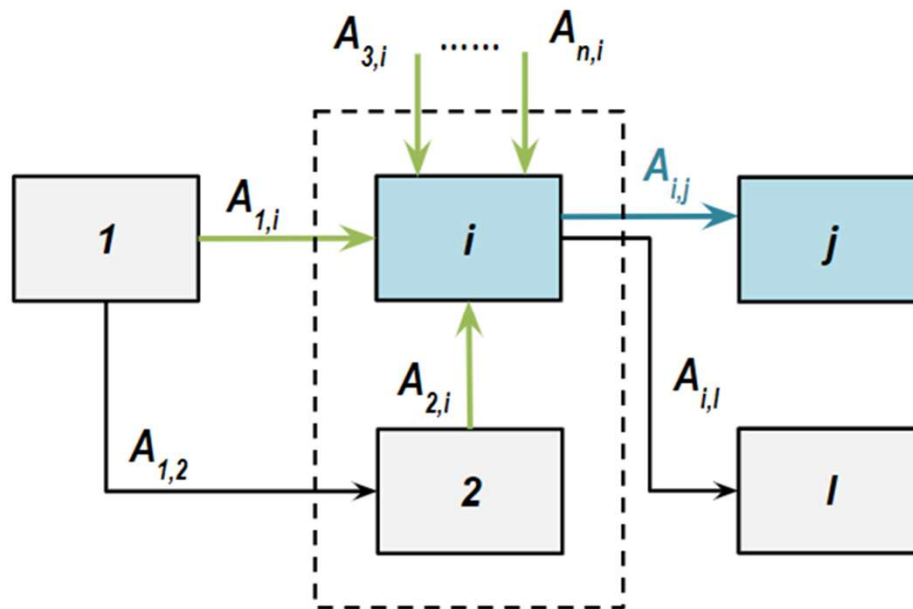
# MFA notation

- **Mass** [t]  $M_{\text{salt, stock}}$
- **Material flow** [t/yr]  $A_{\text{salt, flow}}$
- **Substance flow** [kg/yr]  $A_{\text{Cl, salt, flow}}$
- **Substance concentration** [kg/t]  $C_{\text{Cl, salt}}$

# Transfer coefficients (I)

Transfer coefficients describe the **division** of a **material/substance leaving a process** (output) for a single input or the sum of all inputs.

Transfer coefficient ( $k_{i,j}$ ) indicates the relative proportion of the total input to **process  $i$**  that flows into **process  $j$** .



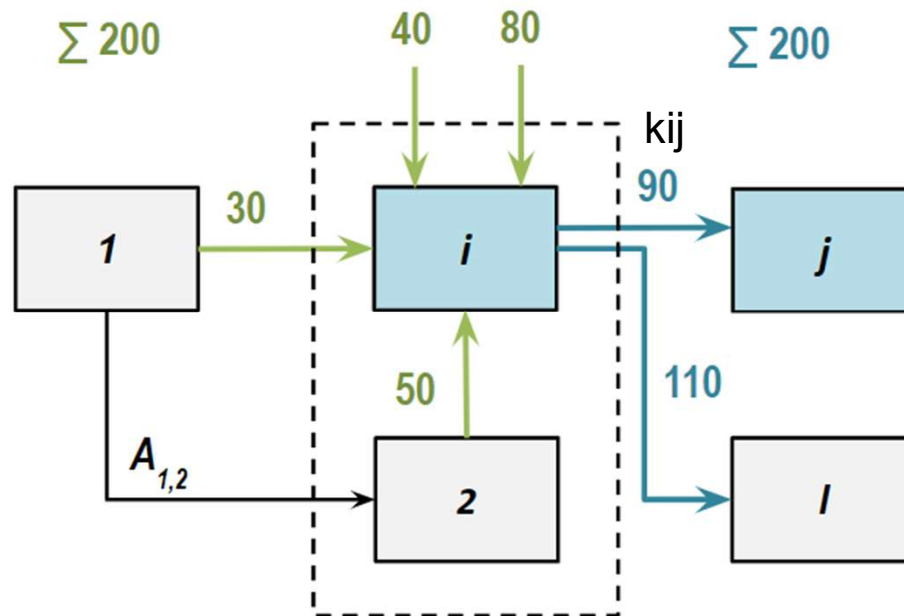
$$k_{i,j} = \frac{A_{i,j}}{\sum_n A_{n,i}}$$

$$k_{i,j} + k_{i,l} = 1$$

# Transfer coefficients (II)

Transfer coefficients describe the **division** of a **material/substance leaving a process** (output) for a single input or the sum of all inputs.

Transfer coefficient ( $k_{i,j}$ ) indicates the relative proportion of the total input to **process  $i$**  that flows into **process  $j$** .



$$k_{i,j} = 90 / (50+30+40+80) = 0.45$$

$$k_{i,l} = 110 / (50+30+40+80) = 0.55$$

$$k_{i,j} + k_{i,l} = 0.45 + 0.55 = 1$$

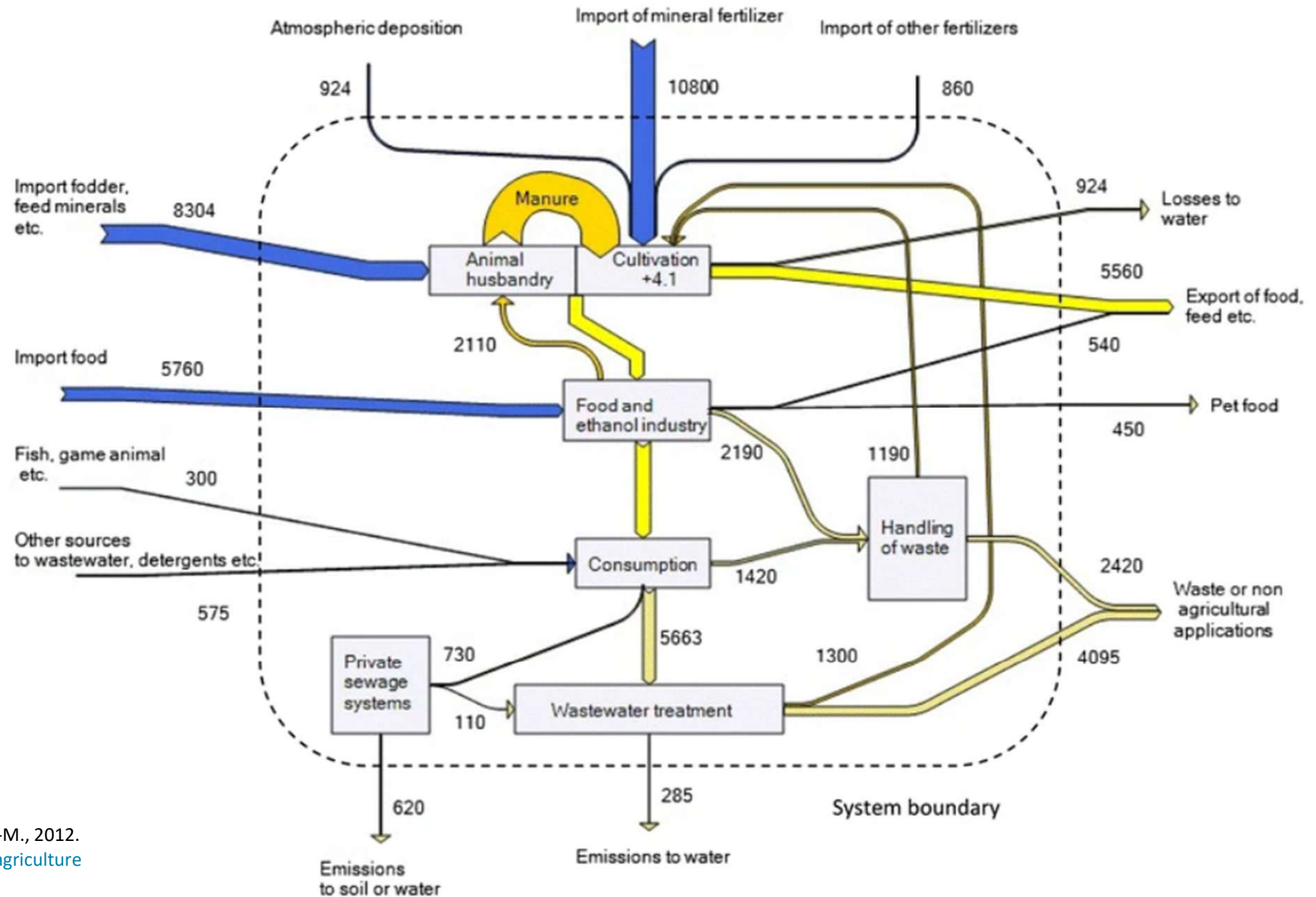
# Transfer coefficients (III)

## Benefits

- Quantifying resource allocation and efficiency
- Supporting system optimization
- Enabling modeling and predictive analysis

# From: Phosphorus Flows to and from Swedish Agriculture and Food Chain

Which transfer coefficients could be optimized?



Linderholm, K., Mattsson, J., Tillman, A.-M., 2012. Phosphorus flows to and from Swedish agriculture and food chain. *AMBIO* 41, 883–893.

# The time aspect in MFA

- **Steady state:** constant flows and stocks
- **Quasi-stationary:** constant flows and linear (de)growth of stocks
- **Dynamic:** system state at “ $t$ ” is a function of the state a “ $t-1$ ”
- **Time dependent:** parameters external to the model are function of time (e.g. extraction or disposal costs)

# Steady state

- Material and energy are conserved for each individual process and for the overall system.
- Steady state of a process  $i$ :**

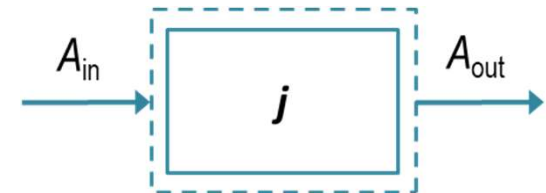
$$\frac{\partial A}{\partial t} = 0$$

$$\frac{\partial M^i}{\partial t} = A_{1,i} + A_{2,i} + \dots + A_{n,i} - (A_{i,1} + A_{i,2} + \dots + A_{i,l}) = \sum_n A_{n,i} - \sum_l A_{i,l} = 0$$



- Steady state of the overall system  $j$ :**

$$\frac{\partial M^{tot}}{\partial t} = A_{in} - A_{out} = 0$$



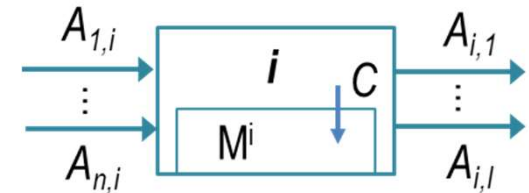
# Quasi-stationary

- Quasi-stationary case of a process  $i$ :

$$\frac{\partial A}{\partial t} = 0$$

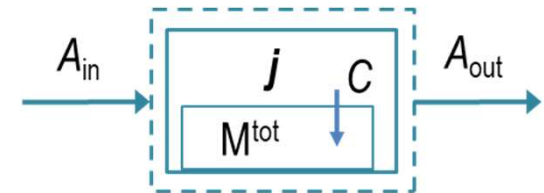
$$\frac{\partial M^i}{\partial t} = A_{1,i} + A_{2,i} + \dots + A_{n,i} - (A_{i,1} + A_{i,2} + \dots + A_{i,l}) = \sum_n A_{n,i} - \sum_l A_{i,l} = C$$

$$\frac{\partial C}{\partial t} = 0$$



- Quasi-stationary case of the overall system  $j$ :

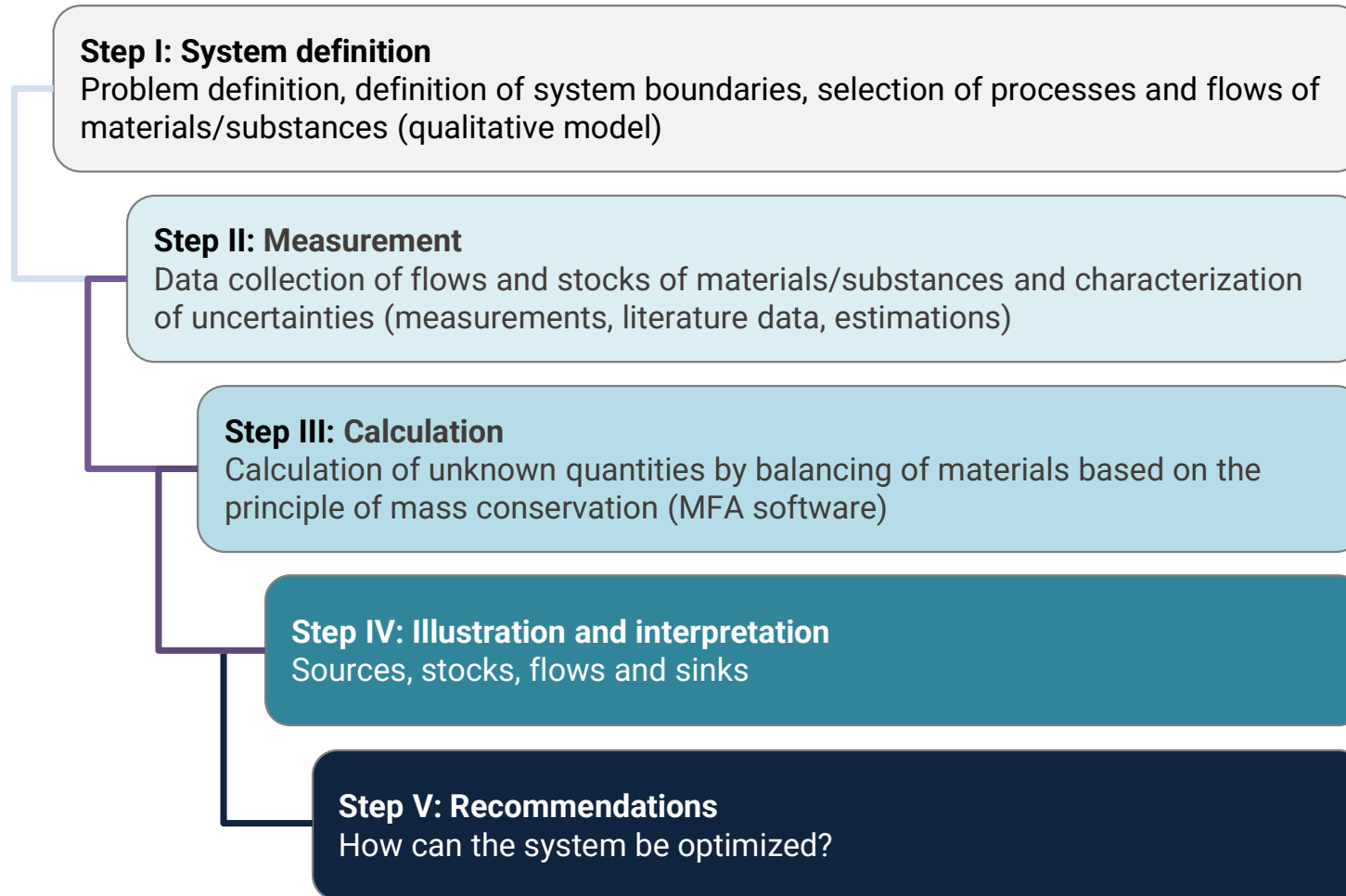
$$\frac{\partial M^{tot}}{\partial t} = A_{in} - A_{out} = C$$





# Example of MFA and mathematical system definition

# Steps of MFA

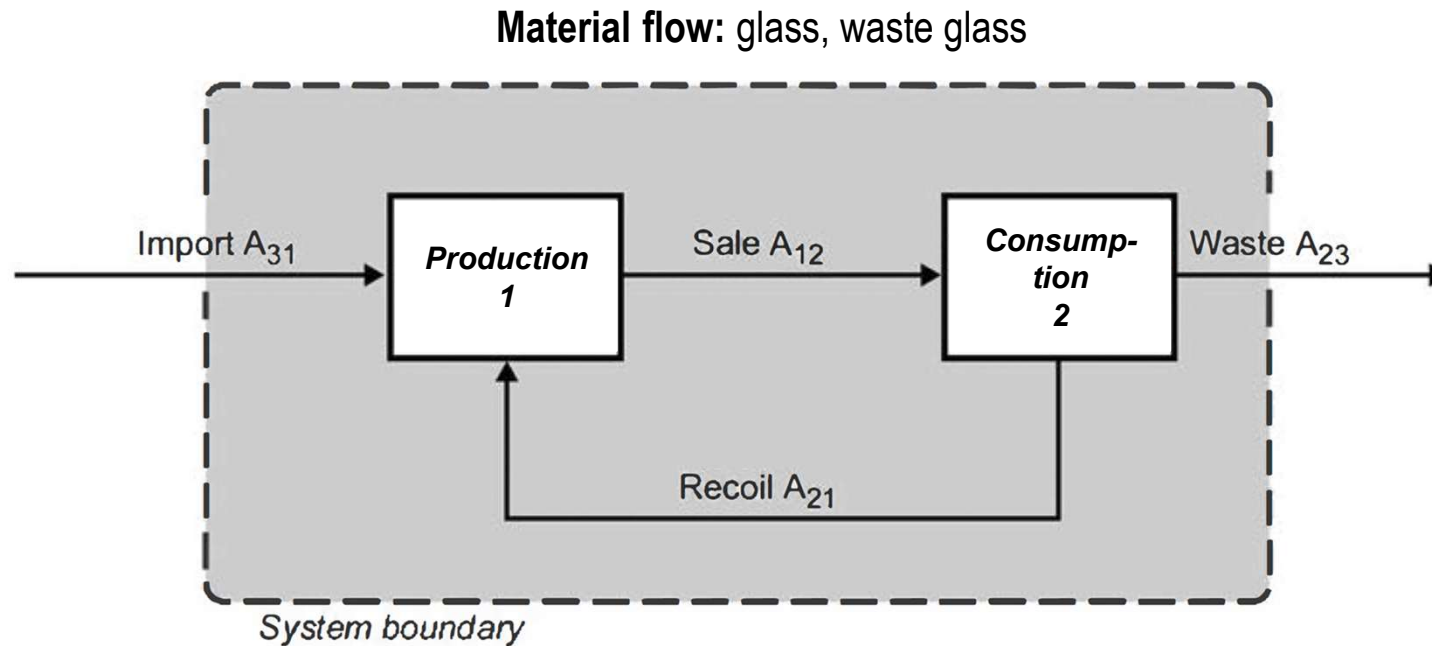


# System definition

- **Research question for glass bottle management in CH:**
  - How does glass recycling change the system?
  - a. How much glass needs to be imported?
  - b. How much energy can be saved?
- **System boundary:** Switzerland, 1 year
- **Unit for flows:** kg/cap\*yr
- **Unit for stocks:** kg/cap
- **Processes:** glass production, glass consumption
- **Material flows:** glass, waste glass
- **Indicators:** glass import rate, energy use

# System definition

## Simplified material system for glass bottle management in Switzerland



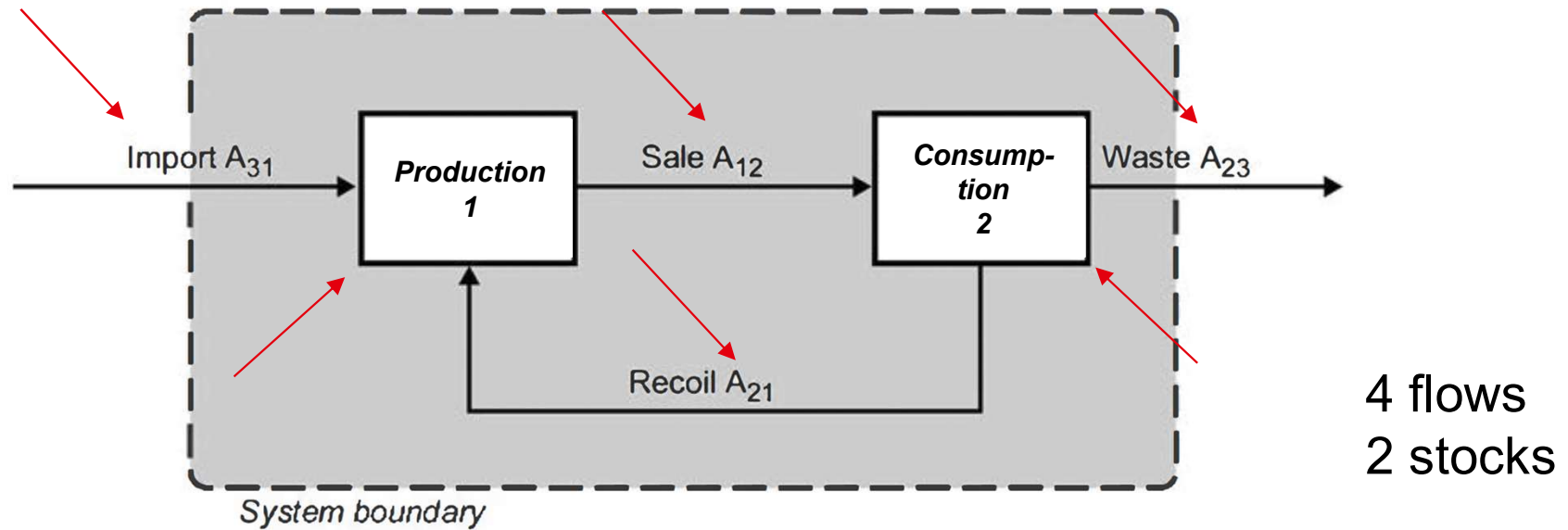
# System definition

## Procedure for mathematical system definition:

- Define the system unknowns
- Setup the system of equations
- Complete the system of equations with specific relationships
- Solve the system of equations
- Analyze the results and check for errors

# System unknowns (steady state)

What are the system unknowns?

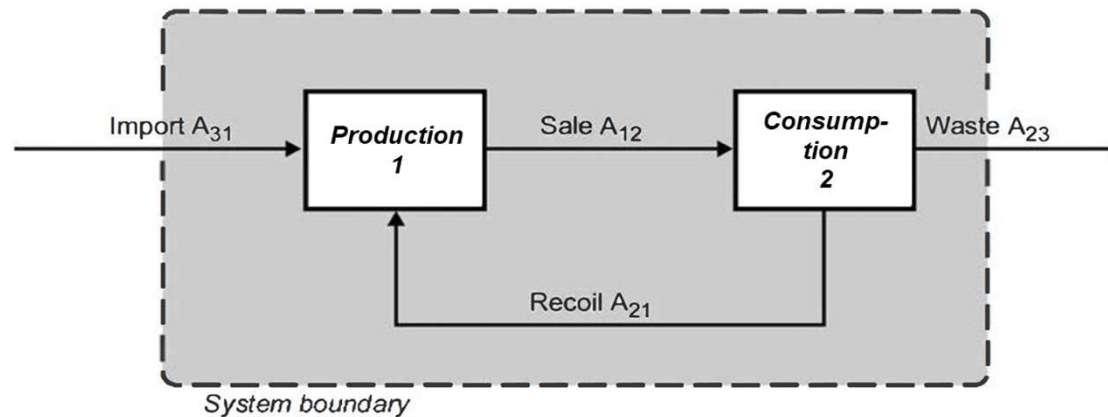


4 flows  
2 stocks

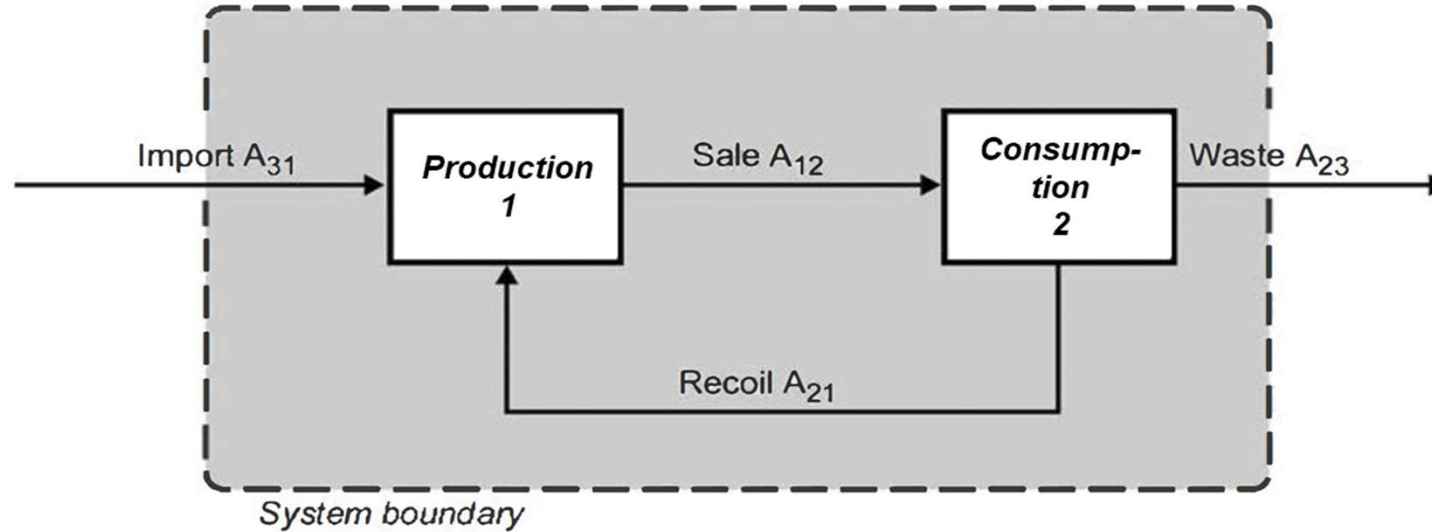
# System unknowns

Steady state: 6 system unknowns (stocks, flows)

Quasi-stationary state: 8 system unknowns (stocks, **stock changes**, flows)



# 2 balance equations (steady state)



$$M^{(1)} =$$

$$M^{(2)} =$$

$$A_{31} =$$

$$A_{12} =$$

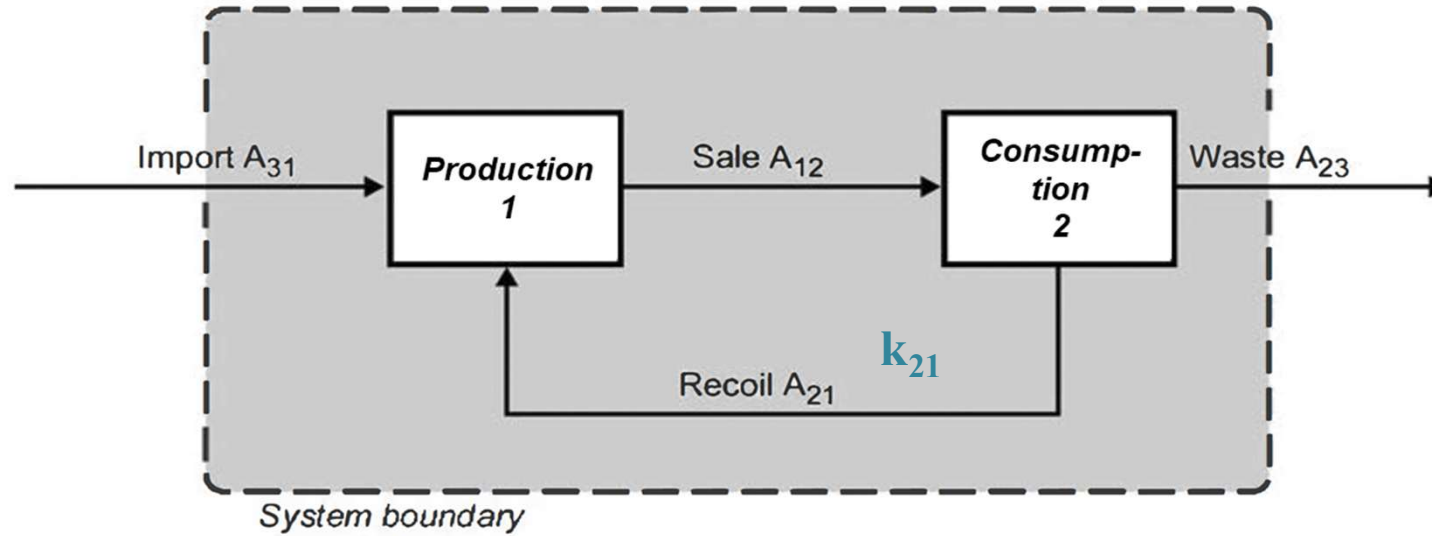
$$A_{21} =$$

$$A_{23} =$$

$$\frac{dM^{(1)}}{dt} = 0$$

$$\frac{dM^{(2)}}{dt} = 0$$

# 6 parameter equations (steady state)



**Assumptions /  
available data**

$$M^{(1)} = 0$$

$$M^{(2)} = 0$$

$$A_{31} = \text{given input}$$

$$A_{12} =$$

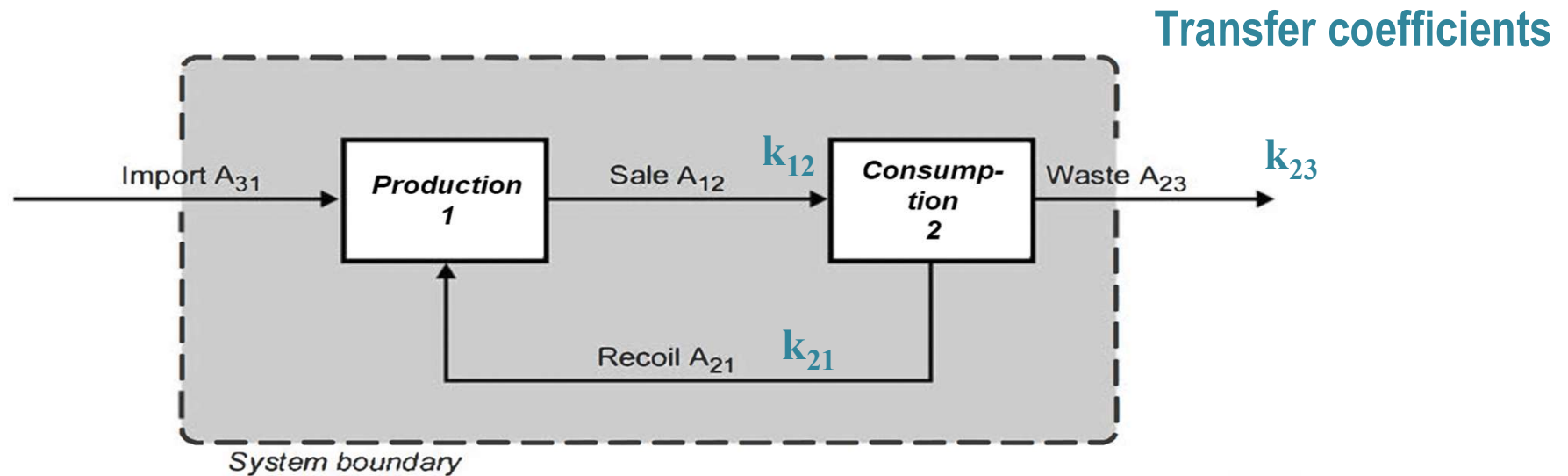
$$A_{21} =$$

$$A_{23} =$$

$$A_{31} = \text{given input}$$

$$k_{21} = \text{given input}$$

# 6 parameter equations



$$M^{(1)} = 0$$

$$M^{(2)} = 0$$

$$A_{31} = \text{given input}$$

$$A_{12} = k_{12} (A_{21} + A_{31})$$

$$A_{21} = \underline{k_{21}} A_{12}$$

$$A_{23} = k_{23} A_{12}$$

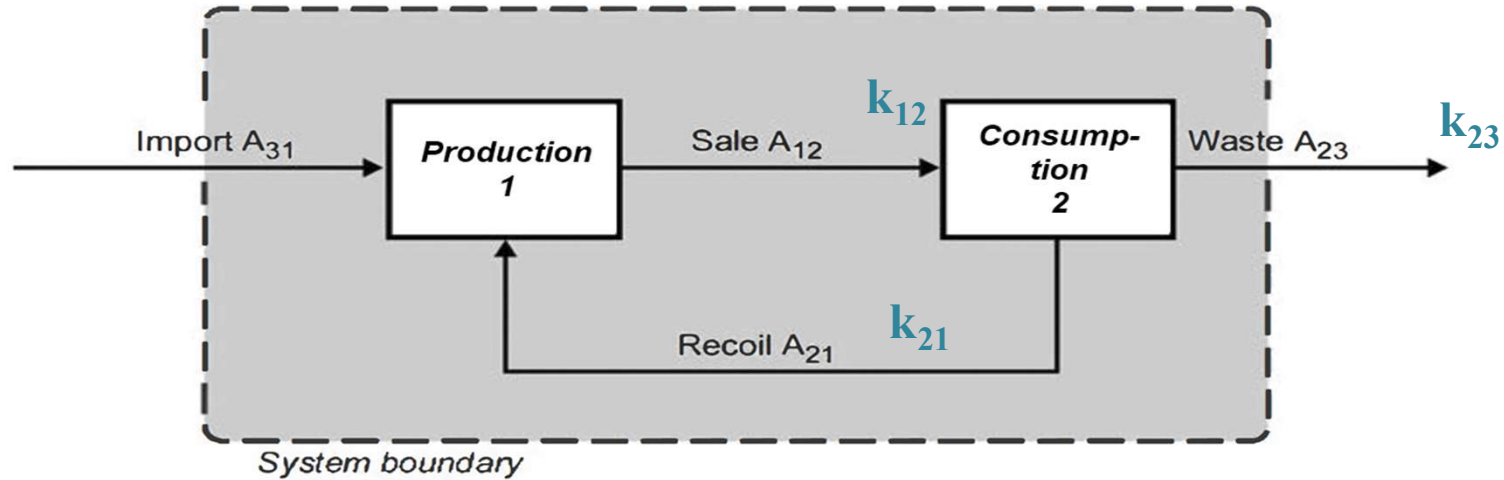
Solving for each Flow A

$$k_{i,j} = \frac{A_{i,j}}{\sum_n A_{n,i}}$$

$$k_{i,j} + k_{i,i} = 1$$

$$k_{i,j} = \frac{A_{i,j}}{\sum_n A_{n,i}}$$

# 6 parameter equations



$$M^{(1)} = 0$$

$$M^{(2)} = 0$$

$$A_{31} = \text{given input}$$

$$k_{21} = \text{given input}$$

$$A_{12} = \frac{A_{31}}{1 - k_{21}}$$

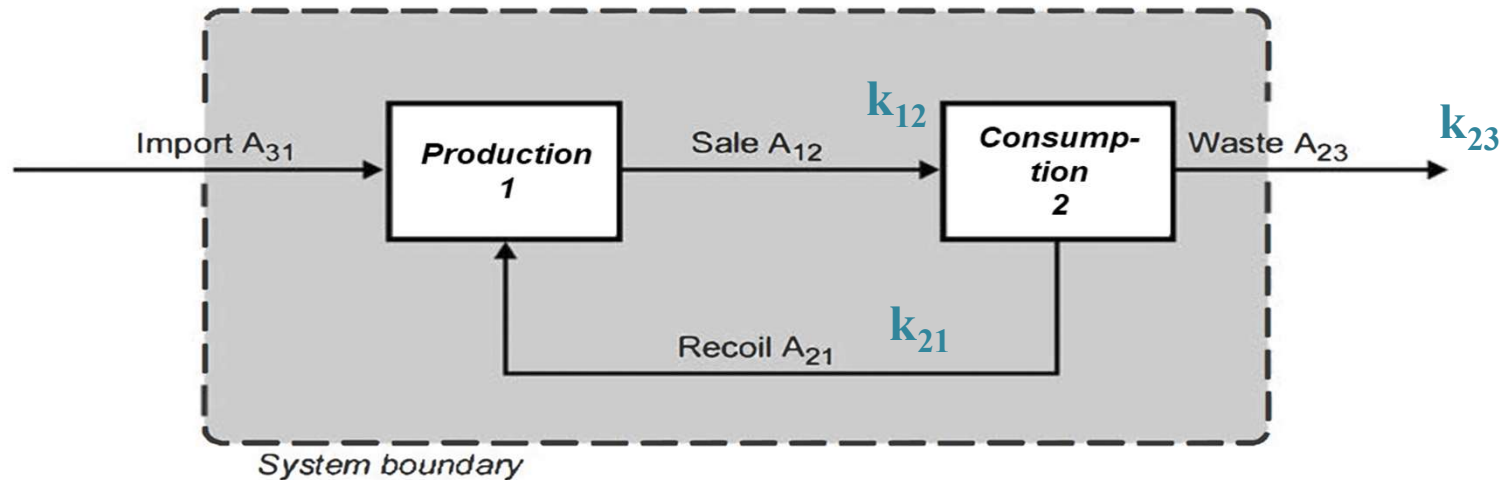
$$A_{21} = \frac{k_{21} A_{31}}{1 - k_{21}}$$

$$A_{23} = A_{31}$$

$$k_{i,j} = \frac{A_{i,j}}{\sum_n A_{n,i}}$$

$$k_{i,j} + k_{i,i} = 1$$

# 6 parameter equations



$$M^{(1)} = 0$$

$$M^{(2)} = 0$$

$$A_{31} = \text{given input}$$

$$k_{21} = \text{given input}$$

$$A_{12} = \frac{A_{31}}{1 - k_{21}}$$

$$A_{21} = \frac{k_{21} A_{31}}{1 - k_{21}}$$

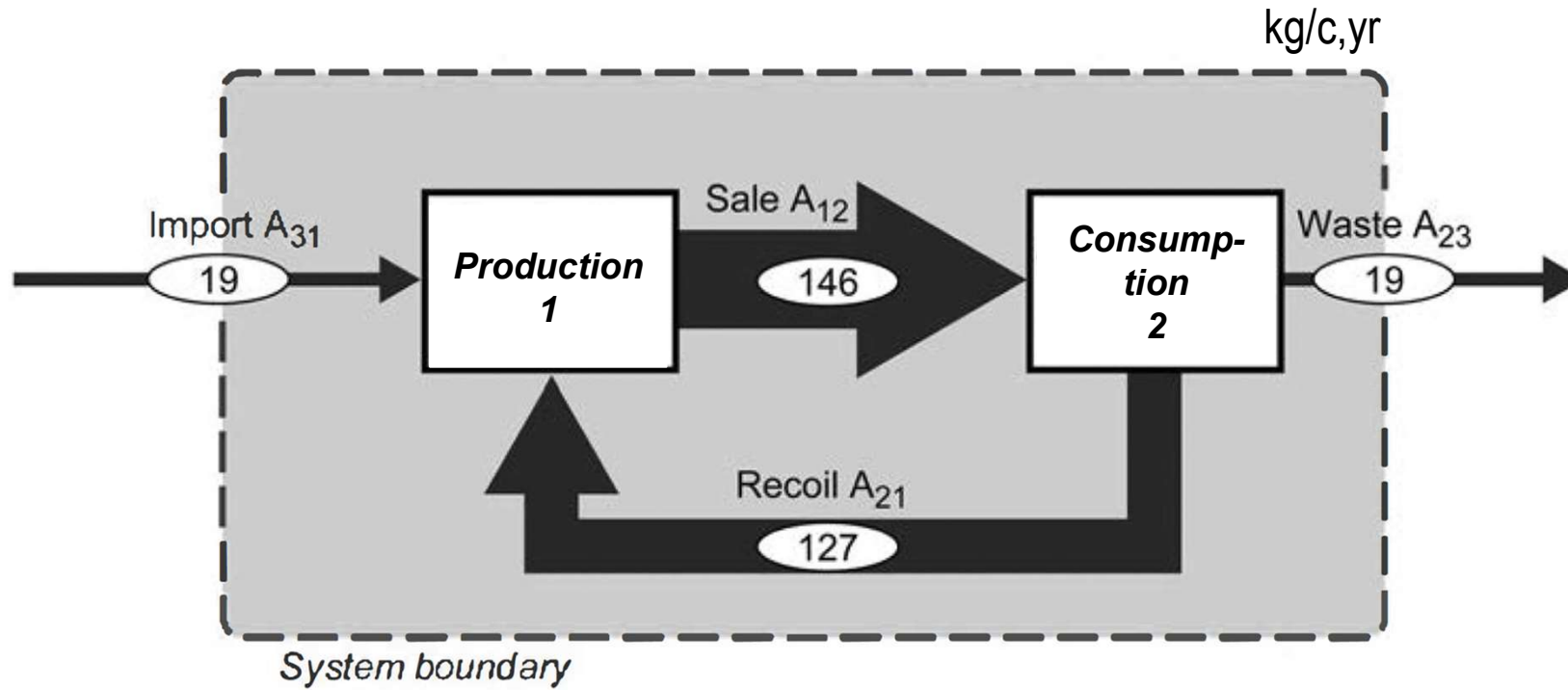
$$A_{23} = A_{31}$$

**Import**

$$A_{31} = 19 \text{ kg}$$

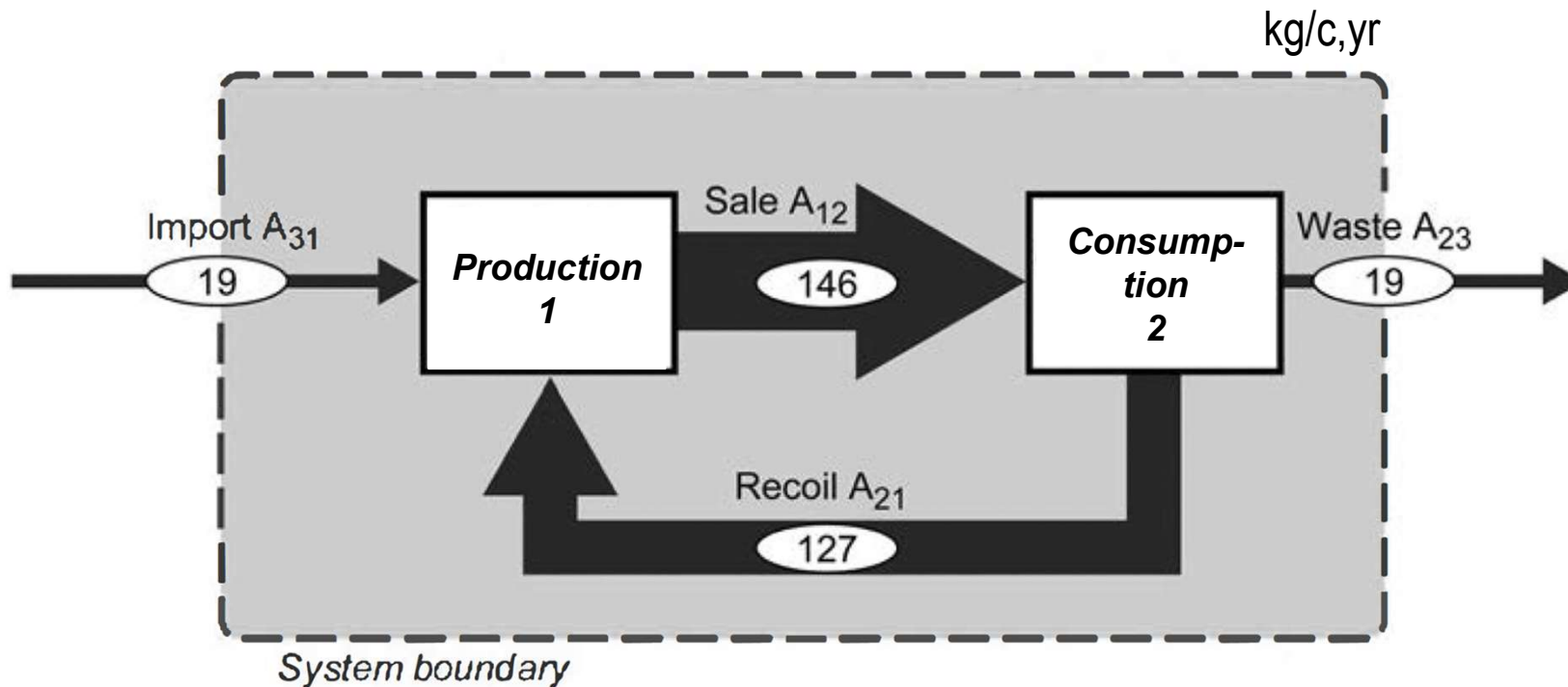
**Recycling rate**

$$k_{21} = 0.87$$



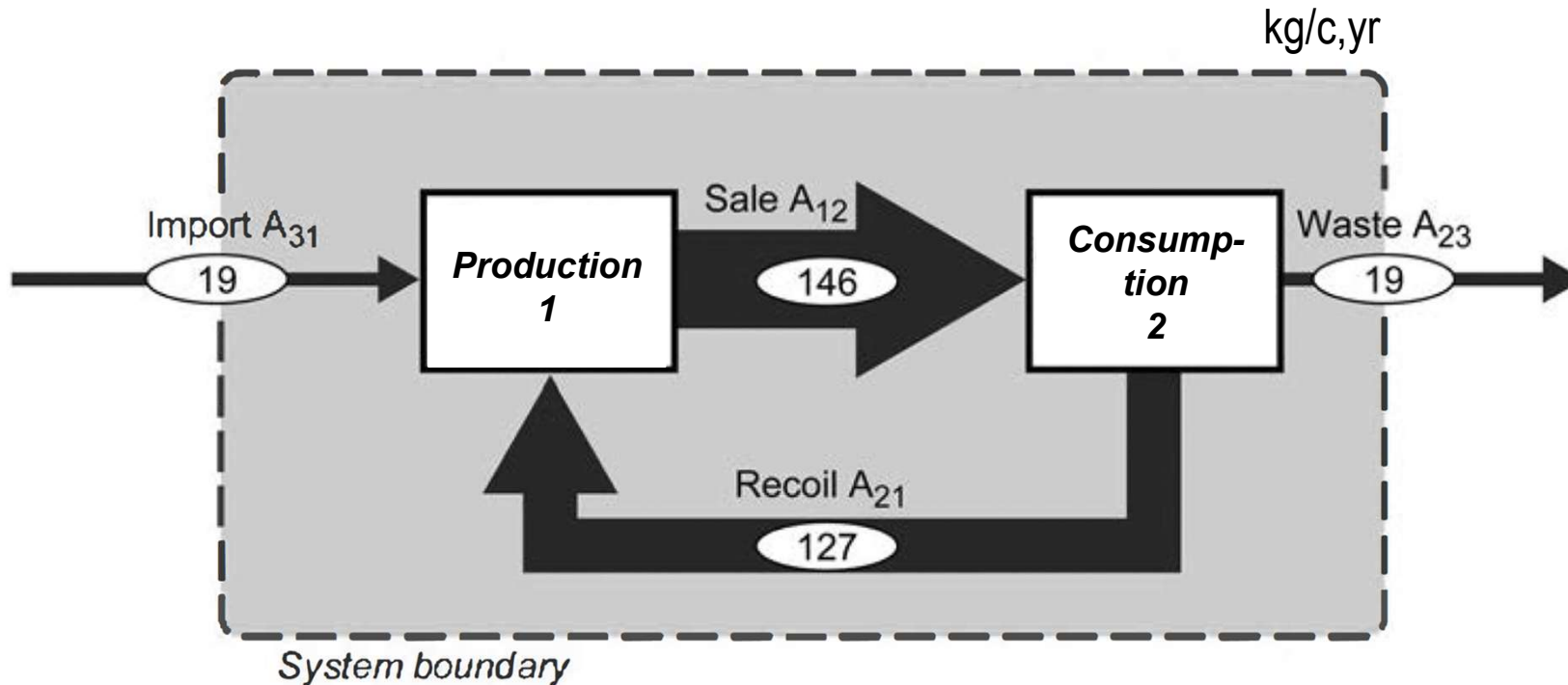
# Results

What if recycling rate increases by 10%  
assuming that glass imports and exports stay constant?



# Results

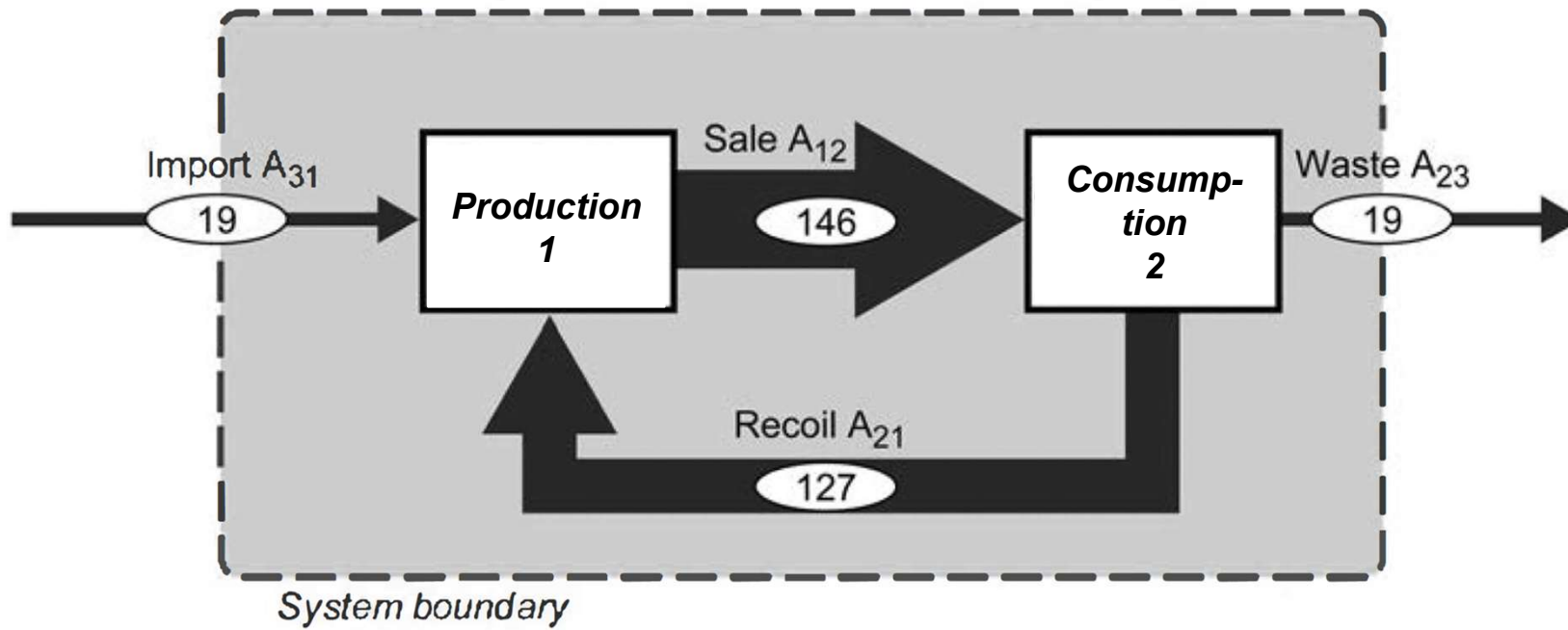
What if recycling rate increases by 10%  
assuming that glass bottle sales stay constant?



# Results

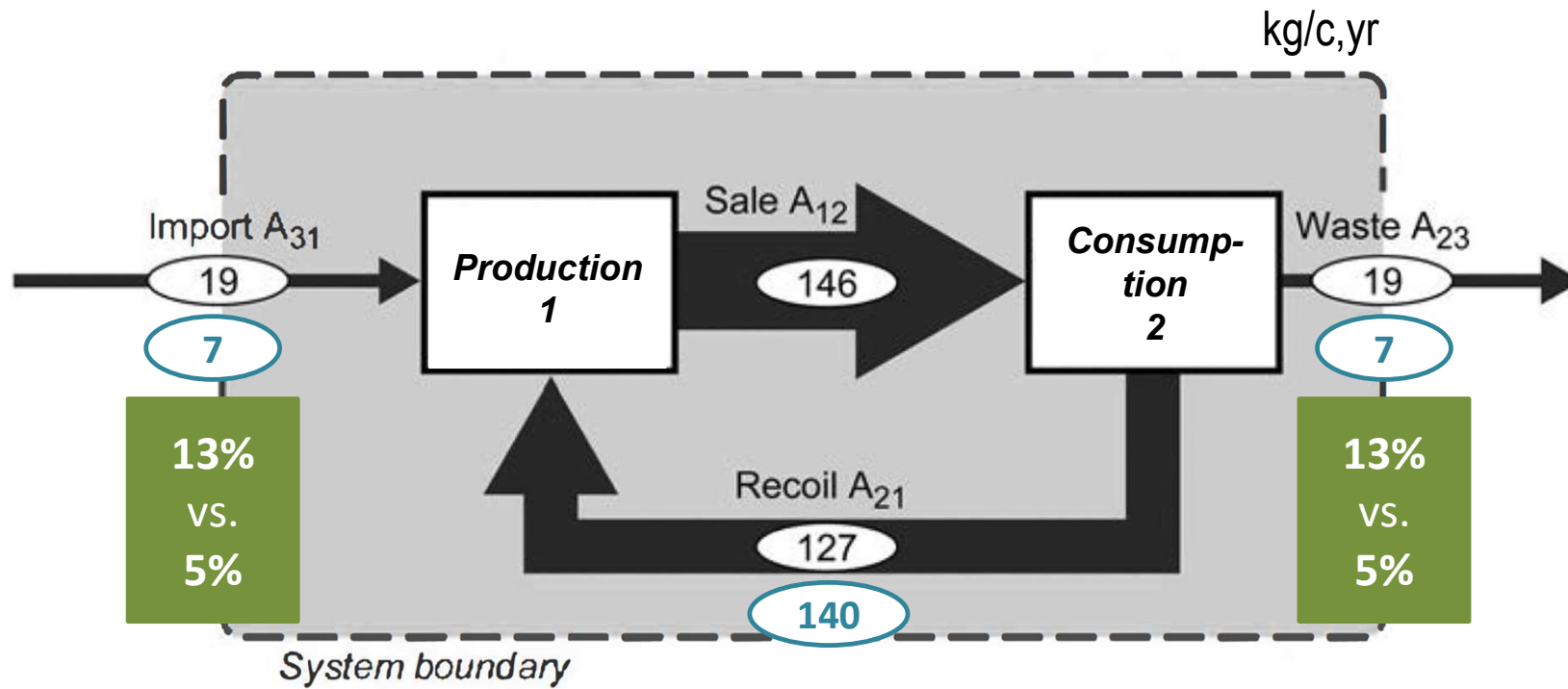
How to check the results?

kg/c,yr



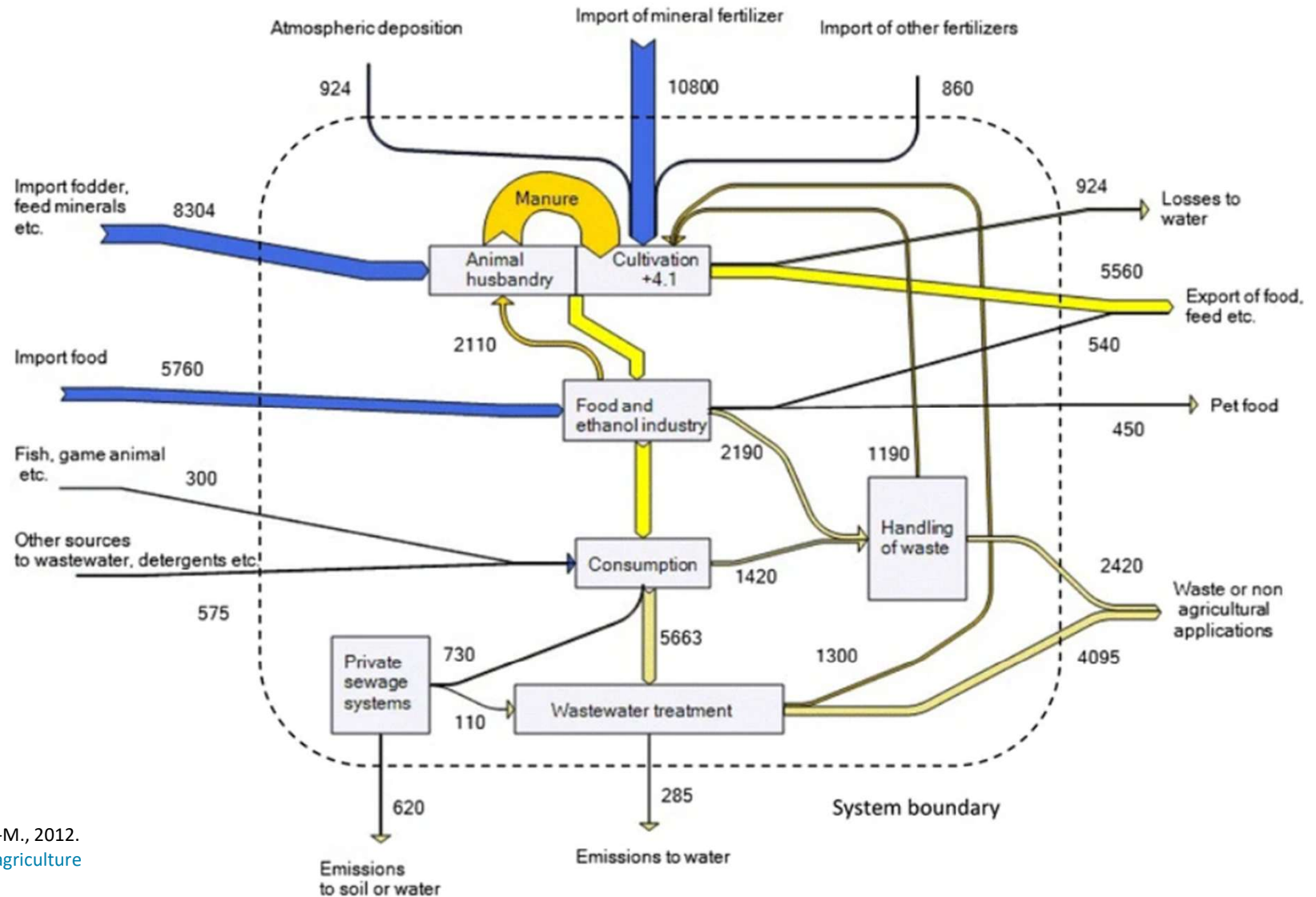
# Indicators

How would you define indicators?



a. Import rate (sale/import)

# From: Phosphorus Flows to and from Swedish Agriculture and Food Chain



Linderholm, K., Mattsson, J., Tillman, A.-M., 2012. Phosphorus flows to and from Swedish agriculture and food chain. *AMBIO* 41, 883–893.



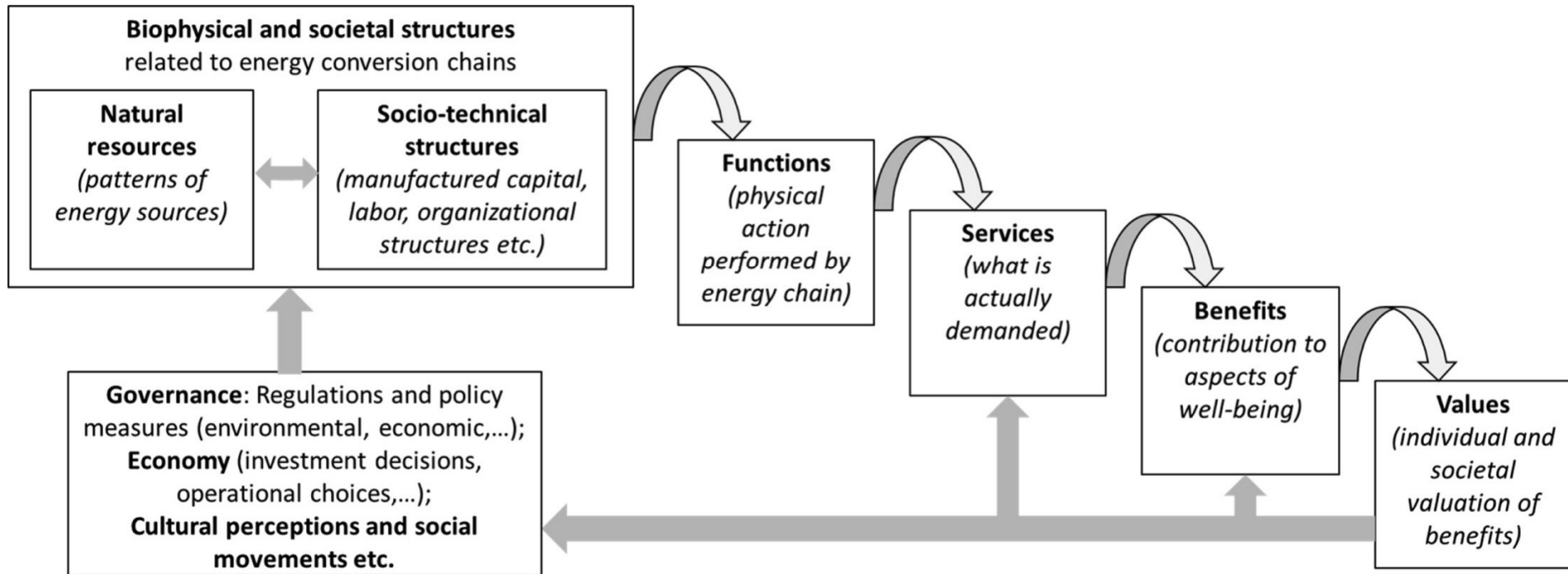
# MFA and services

Using services instead of stocks to fulfill the needs

Definitions and relevance

# The Energy Service Cascade

## The Energy Service Cascade



Source: [Kalt et al. 2019](#)

# The “cascade” approach

A “cascade” approach: used to understand the **multi-step process** through which **benefits** and finally their **values** are **derived** from **biophysical structures and processes**, which in turn **influences** the **functioning** of (eco)systems and their **services**

# Some definitions

## Structure:

- Infrastructure (stock) for providing a service (mobility, heating, etc.)

## Function:

- Capacities that human find useful (accelerating vehicle, food kept cool in a fridge) – but independent from human beneficiary

## Service:

- What humans actually demand – a “service” is only a “service” if a human beneficiary can be identified

## Benefits:

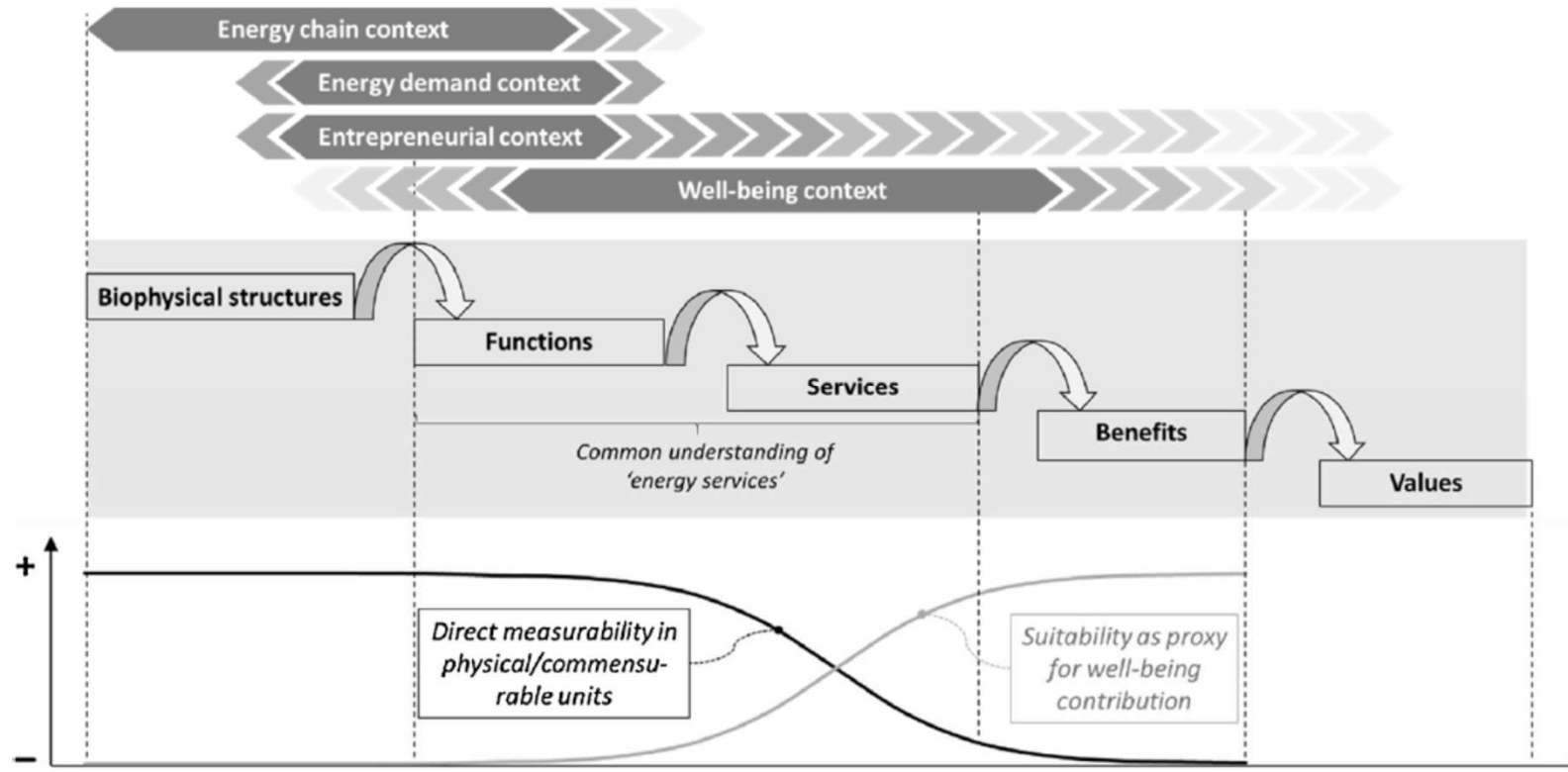
- Contribution to human wellbeing – benefits are outcomes of services

# Examples

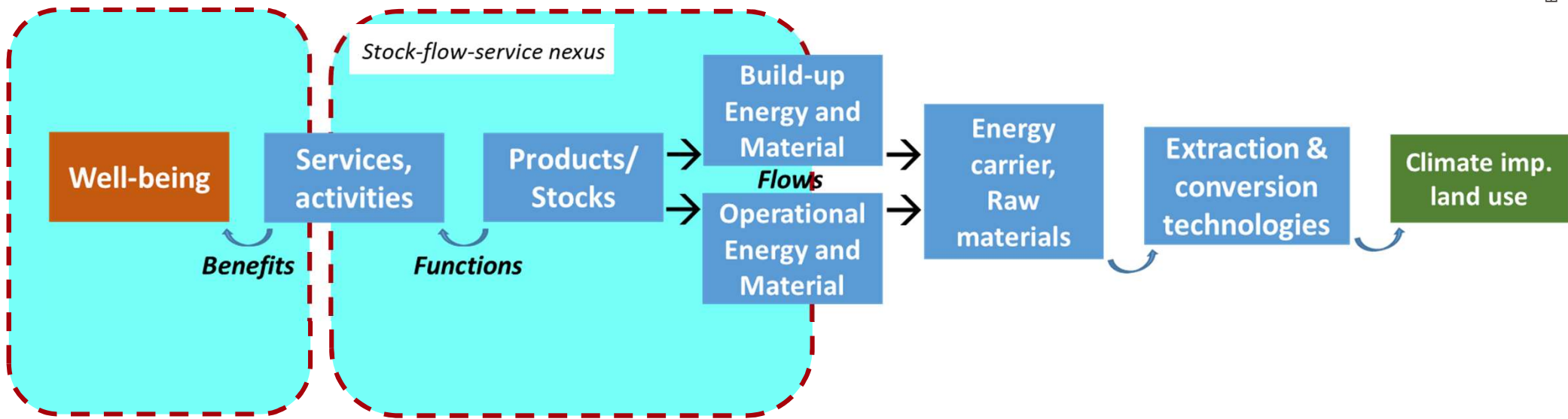
*Electricity system* (infrastructure) allows a space to be *illuminated* (service) which in turn enables the inhabitants to be to *enjoy forms of entertainment, or participate in social life* (benefits)

How much “service” I need to perceive “well-being” (how much benefit do I need?) is individually determined.

# Ex: the energy – service cascade



# Energy & material service cascade - urban scale



# The Stock-Flows-Service Nexus: The challenge

- **Reducing** resource **use** by determining **alternative** options for **service** provisioning
  - Clarity about services
  - Identify and measure the links between flows and stocks
  
- Questions:
  - **How** to determine alternatives?
  - What possible **alternatives** exist?
  - What could be **potential obstacles** for **implementing** these alternatives?

# Question related to your project

How can we provide the same well-being while reducing resource use?

→ **Rethinking our way of how we use and provide services**

Ex.

- I need a car
- I need to get from A to B

→ **I need mobility but I do not need a good**

- I need to work (home office)



**Thank you for your  
attention!**

# Guest lecturer: Dynamic MFA

## Prof. Stefan Pauliuk



- **Position and Role:**
  - Professor of Sustainable Energy and Material Flow Management at the University of Freiburg, Germany, heading the Industrial Ecology Freiburg research group since 2021.
- **Research Focus:**
  - Specializes in **industrial ecology** and **socio-metabolic research**, including global supply chains, sustainable material cycles, environmental footprints, and circular economy strategies.
- **Methodological Expertise:**
  - Advanced methods such as **Material Flow Analysis (MFA)**, **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)**, and **Multiregional Input-Output Analysis (MRIO)**.
- **Professional Contributions:**
  - Led projects on resource efficiency and circular economy, contributed to policy development, and authored influential studies on sustainable material management.
- **Teaching and Community Engagement:**
  - Teaches various MSc-level courses, offers an online course in Industrial Ecology, and actively engages in scientific committees and international collaborations.

# Course evaluation

## Indicative Student Feedback on Teaching

- This feedback system asks students to respond to a single question about the course (*“The running of the course enables my learning and an appropriate class climate”*)
- Opportunity for students to provide comments
- **Go to ISA and respond the Indicative Feedback**
- **Feedback is anonymous**

# Final remarks

- MFA (flows and stocks) are beneficial to **understand** past **trajectories** and current and future **patterns** of society-nature **interactions**
- **Need** to distinguish flows and stocks **services!**
- Future research on this will likely be able to underpin strategies for:
  - **Decoupling** between societal well-being and resource demand
  - **Contingencies and lock-ins** resulting from past build-up of material stocks,
  - Possible **leverage points** to foster sustainability transformations