

<b>Institution: University of Brighton</b>	
<b>Unit of Assessment: B7 Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences</b>	
<b>Title of case study: Making inland water more accessible to the public</b>	<b>ICS [2]</b>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>	

Limitations in public access to water environments for recreation are a longstanding source of stakeholder conflict in which previous policy initiatives have been ineffective. Our research has demonstrated how recreational access to inland waters can be increased through stakeholder capacity building and partnership working. In England and Wales the research led to changes in policy decisions for access to water, revised planning policy guidance, improved recreational access, the creation of 102 new jobs, and the modification of management practices by private and public bodies. In Europe the research has shaped new approaches for the management of small waterways in 11 countries.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b>
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**Origins:** Over the last 15 years, the University of Brighton (UoB) has developed a research programme designed to integrate academic, policy and community based research on recreational access to water environments. This programme has enabled research on property rights that have restricted public access to the countryside [reference 3.2], to be combined with work that has shown that countryside recreation is increasingly understood through the medium of lifestyle sports [3.3]. Participatory research methods, used in partnership with non-academic organisations, demonstrated the significant restrictions that exist on recreational access to inland water in England and Wales and the failings of previous policy to improve access [3.1, 3.4, 3.5]. It revealed that the legislative solutions to improve recreational access to land and water were unlikely to improve the situation. The research created new knowledge about people-environment relationships, specifically the dominance of certain interest groups in determining access to inland water [3.1, 3.5, 3.6].

**Translation and initial interventions 1998–2007:** In keeping with the approaches to impact described in REF3a, the academic research was closely integrated with policy related research commissioned by a range of government organisations and also involved working closely with third-sector users. Prior to the enactment of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the researchers were funded by the Countryside Agency to examine the case for recreational access to a number of natural environments, including inland waters. Using a deliberative approach, the researchers showed that access to water was a legitimate area of policy.

The researchers were then funded by government bodies to undertake a series of three projects into public access to water environments. The first project was commissioned by Defra (£112k) to undertake an audit of current access and problems that included an analysis of the potential environmental effects of current access. This work identified how only 4% of the English and Welsh river network was available for navigation and the potential role of voluntary agreements in extending public access to inland water.

The UoB was then funded by the Countryside Agency (£91k) to assess the feasibility of a new policy approach based on voluntary access. The researchers were subsequently commissioned by the Environment Agency (£50k) to pilot local implementation of voluntary agreements by working with national governing bodies for water-based sports and local communities to develop multiple-use water-recreation routes on four rivers.

The research from these projects developed a new set of methods for establishing voluntary agreements to improve access whilst addressing issues of environmental management. These methods involved recreational users, landowners and other stakeholders using collaborative environmental mapping, online posters and a range of public consultation and deliberation activities to move beyond conflict resolution and towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of the co-use of natural resources. Based on phenomenological principles, the methods were designed to engage academic researchers and policymakers with the lifeworlds of those affected by public policy [3.4].

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**Impact expansion 2007–2013:** Having demonstrated in the funded projects the potential of the new voluntaristic approaches, the researchers developed a new strategic framework for the approach. This led to the UoB being commissioned (£306k) over three years to work in partnership with Defra, the Environment Agency, sports organisations and community groups to co-produce regional strategic plans for water recreation in six regions. In response to this research the South Downs Joint Committee commissioned (£5k) for UoB researchers to produce a strategy for the area now covered by the new National Park Authority.

The European significance of the UoB work has resulted in our researchers being commissioned (£25k) in 2010 to support the development of a European Development-funded project on the management of small waterways and, in 2013, to research the ways in which the emergent forms of social ownership in northern Europe can be harnessed to support the environmental management and recreational development of small waterways.

The research generated by the funded projects from 1998 to 2013 was integrated with the academic research to create new knowledge and understandings of property rights and public access issues [3.1, 3.5] and the potential effects of the EU Water Framework Directive on the recreational use of inland water [3.6].

### Key researchers:

- Andrew Church: Professor of Human Geography (Aug 1999–to date). Director of Research & Development (Social Sciences) (Apr 2013–to date)
- Paul Gilchrist: Research Fellow (Jan 2003–Feb 2012), Senior Research Fellow (Mar 2012–to date).
- Paul Hanna: Lecturer (Oct 2010–Jan 2011, Sept 2011–to date), Research Fellow (Feb 2012–Mar 2012, Sept 2012–Aug 2013).
- Neil Ravenscroft: Principal Research Fellow (Sept 2001–June 2005), Professor of Land Economy (July 2005–to date). Director of Postgraduate Studies (Sept 2011–to date).
- Belinda Wheaton: Senior Research Fellow (Feb 2002–Aug 2011), Principal Research Fellow (Sept 2011–to date).

### 3. References to the research

The three outputs marked with a # best indicate the quality of the underpinning research.

- [3.1] # RAVENSCROFT, N., CHURCH, A., GILCHRIST, P. and HEYS, B. (2013) Property ownership, resource use and the 'gift of nature'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31, pp.451–466. [Quality validation: output in leading peer-reviewed journal.]
- [3.2] PARKER, G. and RAVENSCROFT, N. (2001) Land, rights and the gift: the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the negotiation of citizenship. *Sociologia Ruralis* 41(4), pp.381–398. [Quality validation: output in leading peer-reviewed journal.]
- [3.3] TOMLINSON, A., RAVENSCROFT, N., WHEATON, B. and GILCHRIST, P. (2005) *Lifestyle sports and national sport policy: an agenda for research*. London: Report to Sport England. (Available at [http://www.sportengland.org/research/tracking\\_trends.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/tracking_trends.aspx)) [accessed: 8 November 2013]. [Quality validation: output the result of external grant funding that has been peer reviewed.]
- [3.4] # CHURCH, A. and RAVENSCROFT, N. (2011) Politics, research and the natural environment: the lifeworlds of water-based sport and recreation in Wales. *Leisure Studies* 30(4), pp.387–405. [Quality validation: output in leading peer-reviewed journal.]
- [3.5] # CHURCH, A., GILCHRIST, P. and RAVENSCROFT, N. (2007) Negotiating recreational access under asymmetrical power relations: the case of inland waterways in England. *Society and Natural Resources* 20(3), pp.213–227. [Quality validation: output in leading peer-reviewed journal.]
- [3.6] RAVENSCROFT, N. and CHURCH, A. (2011) The attitudes of recreational user representatives to pollution reduction and the implementation of the European Water Framework Directive. *Land Use Policy* 28, pp.167–174. [Quality validation: output in leading peer-reviewed journal.]

## Impact case study (REF3b)

### Key research grants:

CHURCH, Regional strategic planning for water related sport and recreation, Environment Agency, 2007-2010; total funding: £306,000.

CHURCH and RAVENSCROFT, 'Water framework directive: Use and Access of Water Bodies In England And Wales', Defra, 2007-8; total funding: £39,000.

CHURCH and RAVENSCROFT, 'Access for canoeing to inland water', Environment Agency, 2005-7; total funding: £111,000.

CHURCH and RAVENSCROFT, £92,000 from Countryside Agency 'Improving access for canoeing on inland waterways' 2003-4; total funding: £92,000.

CHURCH, 'Water-based sport and recreation', Defra, 2001-2002; total funding: £112,550

## 4. Details of the impact

The underpinning research was designed from the outset to have impact; it was commissioned by government departments and agencies as a means of generating a co-designed and co-owned evidence base from which to make policy decisions. As a result, the evidence has stimulated changes in policy priorities and a range of government initiatives in an area where past policy has been largely ineffective. These policy measures have, in turn, resulted in improved recreational access to inland water, which has generated economic and social benefits for local communities as well as improved health and wellbeing for those who have been able to take advantage of the new access (source 5.1).

**Changing government policy and expenditure in the UK:** A range of government bodies have acted on recommendations and knowledge produced by the UoB research leading to policy innovations and changes to expenditure to support new initiatives. The Welsh Government has worked with partners to implement the regional water recreation strategy for Wales devised by UoB which has subsequently influenced policy expenditure, guidance and legislation. Delivery of the strategy was a priority for relevant Welsh Government-sponsored bodies (5.2). In 2008, in response to the 12 priorities set out in the regional strategy, the Welsh Government established the 'Splash' Water Recreation Challenge Fund. This fund spent £2m in 2008 to 2013, supporting over 130 projects to improve water recreation opportunities, which generated a further £1.8m of match funding in the projects (5.3, 5.4). In 2009, new planning guidance in the Technical Advice Note on Planning for Sport and Recreation (TAN16) required Welsh local authorities to address the UoB strategy in relevant policies, and notes that the strategy is: '*designed to develop awareness of, and facilities for water based sport and recreation in an environmentally sensitive way*' (5.5). The strategy also identified the difficulties encountered by some users in accessing inland water and, partly in response, the National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee (2010) held an inquiry into access to inland waters in Wales (5.6). The opening oral and written evidence was requested from UoB researchers and was presented at the first public committee meeting. A key outcome of the inquiry was that the Welsh Government decided not to introduce legislation on access to inland water and to follow UoB's negotiated voluntary approach, an approach supported by various consultees, including the National Trust, the Country Land and Business Association, the Countryside Alliance and the Angling Trust (5.5). The research has also been used as contributing evidence in the 2013 Welsh Government review of legislation on access and outdoor recreation, which includes access to inland water (5.2).

**Shaping waterway management in Europe:** British Waterways (now the Canal and Rivers Trust) was a leading stakeholder in the development of the UoB's regional strategy for water recreation in the Midlands region. Its officers worked with the UoB researchers to develop a conceptual framework for harnessing the local social economy to underpin the recreational development of waterways (5.7). This concept has since been developed further by the UoB researchers, as part of the Green and Blue Futures project run by the Canal and Rivers Trust, and is now being used by 17 local authorities in 11 EU countries to stimulate policy debate over the role of social forms of ownership for enhancing the management of smaller waterways (5.7).

**Improving access to inland water spaces for recreation:** Research commissioned by the Environment Agency that piloted the implementation of voluntary agreements resulted in policy actions that led to the establishment of new voluntary access agreements and improved access to 70 miles of multiple-use recreational routes on four rivers in England (5.1). An independent

## Impact case study (REF3b)

evaluation undertaken by Ipsos Mori of the four routes found they were viewed positively by sporting, land owning and other stakeholders (5.1). The research also influenced the decisions of 300 landowners or tenants, who, in response to the participatory methods, gave their written support for the new voluntary agreements and improvements in access to water. In Wales, public and private-sector organisations have also improved access to water in response to the 'Splash' fund and the regional water recreation strategy devised by the UoB. Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water has delivered new access and improved water-sports facilities on four of their largest reservoirs (5.3). Similarly, the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia National Park authorities, in response to the regional strategy, now have a greater engagement with water-recreation issues and are investing in improvements to visitor centre sites (5.3).

**Stimulating social and economic benefits:** The economic benefits of the 'Splash' fund set up in Wales directly in response to the UoB research have been evaluated independently (5.8). This evaluation indicates that the fund has stimulated economic activity and increased tourism, which, during 2008 to 2013, resulted in the addition to the Welsh economy of 102 FTE jobs and £1.83m of Welsh gross value-added (GVA) (5.8). Of the 130 Splash-funded projects, 40% are in or within 5kms of the most deprived *Communities First* areas of Wales and the projects have produced health and well-being benefits to the users of water-recreation sites (5.4). One of the four new voluntary access agreements resulting from the UoB research covers a 29km stretch of the River Mersey, which passes through a number of deprived communities. This agreement is viewed as an important recreational resource by local recreational stakeholders and is seen as a considerable achievement that could not have happened without the UoB research (5.9). A private-sector outdoor activities business, opened up as a result of the new agreement, estimates that the number of customers the business has introduced to canoeing has increased four times between 2010 and 2013, to about 1,700 people per year, most of whom are novice water recreationalists (5.9). The agreement has also facilitated the hosting, since 2010, of the River Mersey 'memory paddle', the first annual open water canoe event for the Alzheimer's Society.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial available from the Environment and Business Manager, Environment Agency England, confirming the economic and social benefits as a result of improved access to water and that the new agreements were viewed positively by landowners.
- 5.2 Testimonial available from the Head of Outdoor Recreational policy, Welsh Government, confirming the implementation of strategy based on UoB research, and the contribution to the 2011 response to the National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee Inquiry on Access to Inland and the 2013 Welsh Government review of legislation.
- 5.3 Testimonial from Water Recreation Advisor, Natural Resources Wales, confirming the impact of the Splash fund as a result of Brighton research including jobs created, funding and new initiatives.
- 5.4 Environment Agency Wales (2013) Splash–Water Recreation Challenge Fund for Wales Review 2008–2013 (Bristol: Environment Agency). Available on Request.
- 5.5 Welsh Government's Technical Advice Note on Planning for Sport and Recreation (TAN16) (Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government). Available at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/tans/tan16e/?lang=en> [Accessed: 16 November 2013]. The recommendation for local authorities to address UoB research is at para. 3.31, page 21.
- 5.6 National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee (2010) Inquiry into access to inland waters in Wales. Available at [http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-committees/bus-committees-scrutiny-committees/bus-committees-third-sc-home/inquiries\\_sd/sc3\\_inq\\_inlandwater\\_main.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-committees/bus-committees-scrutiny-committees/bus-committees-third-sc-home/inquiries_sd/sc3_inq_inlandwater_main.htm). [Accessed: 16 November 2013]. The research is highlighted on page 11 of the report.
- 5.7 Testimonial available from the Economic Development Officer, Canal and River Trust, confirming how the UoB research helped to develop a framework to underpin the recreational development of smaller waterways and its further use in 11 EU countries.
- 5.8 Testimonial available from the Regional Access Officer, British Canoe Union, confirming the impact of research on access to and use of the River Mersey.
- 5.9 Welsh Economy Research Unit, Cardiff Business School (2012) Evaluation of EAW Projects (UPDATE) Splash 2008–09/2012–13 12 November 2012. Available on request.