

Institution: Liverpool Hope University
Unit of Assessment: 26 - Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>O'Callaghan's research on Munster rugby has been the subject of frequent discussion outside of academia. It has, therefore, had an impact on public discourse surrounding an institution of popular cultural acclaim in Ireland (the Munster rugby team). This impact has been achieved through press coverage, broadcast media interviews and the research has been a topic for discussion on online forums and blogs. It has influenced the manner in which people perceive an institution of popular acclaim (the Munster rugby team) in Ireland.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research was O'Callaghan's doctoral research on the history of rugby football in Munster which culminated in the publication of a monograph, <i>Rugby in Munster: a social and cultural history</i> (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011). This was completed while at Liverpool Hope. The book was the first substantial piece of academic research on Irish rugby and added to a small yet growing historiography of Irish sports. The research used previously unstudied source material from the archives of regional and national rugby governing bodies. Among the key aspects of the work, and subject to subsequent public debate, was an analysis of the modern Munster rugby team's self-perception. Munster's idealised image as a classless, egalitarian team with humble roots in contradistinction to their 'posh' middle class rivals is an image that was critiqued; O'Callaghan found that it was largely illusory and based on the type of myth-making commonly engaged in by sports teams. He also conducted a detailed analysis of the game's social origins in the province and its subsequent social evolution along the lines of class, politics and culture. This allowed key myths of egalitarianism, provincial unity and anglo-centricity to be challenged. The work also analysed the modern business and marketing model used by contemporary professional sports teams.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History</i> (Cork University Press, 2011) pp 308 ISBN 9781859184806 • 'The red thread of history.' The media, Munster rugby, and the creation of a sporting tradition,' <i>Media History</i>, 17:2 (May 2011) pp.175-184 <p>Professor John A Murphy (Emeritus Professor of Irish History, University College Cork) described the book as 'a remarkable contribution to the serious historiography of Irish sports' and went on to assert that 'all in all it establishes a standard in this particular genre that will be difficult to equal.' Murphy subsequently used the book as a key source base for his popular history of sports in Cork (<i>Where Finbar Played</i>, [Cork, 2011])</p>
<p>4. Details of the impact</p> <p>The research tackled a topic with mass popular appeal and was the subject of press reviews in local and national newspapers. Much of this discussion was centred on the book's focus on revising commonly held myths about rugby in Munster and tangibly influenced public discourse in that regard. The research for the book on Munster Rugby featured heavily on online discussion fora and in email correspondence from fans of the Munster Rugby sports team. There was also a feature length article in the <i>Limerick Leader</i> newspaper when the book was published. The book</p>

revised and challenged many popular assumptions about the history of rugby in Munster, particularly the popularly promoted idea that the game is 'classless' in the province. Indeed, class formed the subject matter of press reviews, particularly one written by the playwright John Breen in the *Irish Examiner*. This was followed by a review in Cork's *Evening Echo* (readership 76,000) in which it was stated that: 'Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History is a compelling read. Its narrative unravels many of the highly complex mysteries of rugby in Munster. It puts into context the opinions, grudges, loyalties and traditions that have evolved since the game was first played here in the 1870s.'

The research also succeeded in reaching people in the Irish peripheries as a 'hard to reach' sub-group. In this case, the book provoked dozens of comments on the popular 'People's Republic of Cork' blog – a very active discussion forum patronised by people living in this county of South West Ireland. Debate about the findings of the book also dominated the Cork-based newspaper *The Irish Examiner's* (circulation 43,000 JNLR figure) internet discussion forum in November 2011. *Rugby in Munster* formed the basis of media interviews on RTE Radio's Sport at Seven, *The Irish Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and Dublin's 98fm. The *WSJ* (circulation 2,118,315, American Audit Bureau of Circulations) featured the research, where it underpinned a discussion on the business and marketing model used by Munster rugby (April 30, 2010). This interview also drew upon O'Callaghan's research into the professional evolution of Munster rugby and the contrived nature of the modern provincial unity enjoyed by the Munster team and fans: 'Nobody foresaw this when rugby union went professional in 1995. Liam O'Callaghan, a historian at Liverpool Hope University whose doctoral thesis examines Munster rugby, said that "they were playing three times a year in the Irish inter-provincial championship, often in front of three-figure crowds, and the occasional match against a touring team. They had been playing since the 1870s, but any identity was pretty dormant—loyalties related to your street, your parish and your club rather than the province." (*WSJ*, 30 April 2010)

The twelve-minute interview on RTE's flagship weekday sports programme was an in-depth conversation on key findings of the book. The interviewer, Greg Allen probed O'Callaghan on three issues: the modern Munster rugby phenomenon and his argument that this is based on an egalitarian myth, the relationship between the team and its home ground, something that he has again attributed to myth and the manner in which the game has historically given rise to parochial identities. These issues were of particular interest to the rugby-following public as, again, they involved the revision of key aspects of the Munster team's historical self-perception.

More pervasive has been the impact of the research in influencing public discourse surrounding an institution of popular cultural acclaim in Ireland (the Munster rugby team) through fan internet forums and message boards. For example one blogger (thetrueball.com) has commented that: 'it has become quite the fashion in Irish rugby circles to champion the cause of the game in Limerick as proof that in Ireland at least, the game is classless, or rather cross-class. For antidote to this prevailing idiot wind ... I implore you to seek out Liam O'Callaghan's recent work *Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History*. Or even his article *The Red Thread of History* which appeared in the learned journal *Media History* last year'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Press/media interviews and reviews

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704302304575214110674378950.html#articleTab>

Impact case study (REF3b)

[s%3Darticle](#)

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/news/definitive-guide-to-rise-of-rugby-in-munster-182525.html>

<http://www.dodonovan.com/?p=352>

Internet forums:

<http://www.peoplesrepublicofcork.com/forums/showthread.php?s=fa10722ec959eec30ea29e407d1648b4&t=96566>

<http://www.munsterfans.com/threads/30767-New-Book-on-Munster-rugby-reviewed-in-Irish-Examiner>