

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<b>Institution:</b> <b>University of Glasgow</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> <b>Unit of Assessment: D29 – English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> <b>Engaging the public with Scots language research through social media</b>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

The Scots Words and Place-names Project (SWAP) engaged the public through an embedded use of the internet and social media, a strategy designed both to collect data on the Scots language and to raise the profile of Scots in the wider community. In order to make the project accessible to younger generations, a successful schools competition was run using Glow, the Scottish schools intranet operated by Education Scotland. SWAP also involved two partner organisations from the cultural sector, Scottish Language Dictionaries and the Scottish Place-Name Society, in order to provide a bridge between academic and cultural bodies and the general public.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b>
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The Scots Words and Place-names Project (SWAP) was designed to explore the innovative potential of integrated online community engagement methods in the study of language. It sought to engage the public using the internet and social media to investigate Scots language use. The experiment extended across several online platforms and was based in the School of Critical Studies, College of Arts, at the University of Glasgow and delivered in partnership with the National e-Science Centre. The project was run in collaboration with Scottish Language Dictionaries and the Scottish Place-Name Society. Throughout the duration of the project (March-November 2011), the Principal Investigator was Carole Hough (Professor of Onomastics 2009-; Reader 2004-9), with Jean Anderson (Honorary Research Fellow 2012-; Resource Development Officer, College of Arts 1987-2011), Dr John Watt (Acting Technical Director, National e-Science Centre, Edinburgh) and Dr Christine Robinson (Director, Scottish Language Dictionaries, Edinburgh) as Co-Investigators.

Community engagement is central to research into language use. Members of the community are the language users who provide the data for academic research. Particularly for a vernacular such as Scots, which is primarily a spoken rather than written language, and has a wide range of regional varieties, close engagement with a range of local communities is essential for both the collection and interpretation of the data. Similarly with place-name research, while academic expertise is required to assemble and analyse the historical spellings that are fundamental in tracing the derivations of individual place-names, local knowledge is often crucial to interpretation. Moreover, some place-names are known only to local residents, being used within the community without being documented on maps or in other printed material. Traditional methods of data collection by lexicographers and place-name scholars include interviews, written questionnaires and fieldwork. These are useful, but reach only a tiny proportion of potential data providers.

Social networking sites have the potential to transform this field of research. Through social media, SWAP was able to reach a much greater proportion of the community than traditional research methods have done. However, this technique achieved far more than simply transferring the existing methodologies to a more efficient and inclusive medium. Data collection through interviews and questionnaires is essentially a one-way process, whereby material is provided by the community to the academy, which uses it for research. SWAP set up a two-way process, by providing an interactive forum through which the community could not simply provide data but have direct access to existing research so as to engage with it and contribute directly to the ongoing project.

### 3. References to the research

#### Articles and book chapters:

- Ellen Bramwell and Dorian Grieve, 'The Scots Words and Place-names project (SWAP)', *Scottish Language Dictionaries Newsletter* (Autumn/Winter, 2011), pp. 5-6. [[PDF link](#)]
- Carole Hough, 'Facebook and Falkirk, Twitter and Twynholm: investigating Scottish place-names with social media', *Scottish Place-Name News* 32 (2012), pp. 10-11. [available from HEI]
- Ellen Bramwell and Carole Hough 'Scots in the community: place-names and social networking', *Names in Daily Life: Proceedings of the 24th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences*, ed. Joan Tort (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, in press) – paper presented at the international conference 5-9 September 2011, Barcelona. [available from HEI]
- Carole Hough and Wendy Anderson, 'Maximising impact with Scottish resources online', for *Creating and Digitizing Language Corpora. Volume 3: Databases for Public Engagement*, eds. Karen Corrigan and Adam Mearns (Basingstoke: Palgrave, forthcoming, date to be confirmed) [available from HEI]

#### Research grants:

- From JISC for project [Enriching and Developing Community Content](#), awarded through the Digitisation and Content, e-Content programme. Total award £100,699 for 6-month project March-September 2011 (later extended to November 2011). Principal Investigator: Hough; Co-Investigators: Anderson, Robinson, Watt.

### 4. Details of the impact

This project achieved a range of impacts by collaborating with the public, with schools and with a range of other research partners:

- **engaging the public by raising the profile of the Scots language** – The SWAP project had community engagement at its heart, using social media to encourage the public to interact with academic researchers and thereby raising the profile of the Scots language. Input forms on the SWAP website allowed members of the public to submit either Scots words or place-names containing Scots elements. This fed into a wider public discussion forum on the website, to which anyone with an interest in Scots could contribute, as well as reading and commenting on the contributions of others. SWAP's Facebook and Twitter platforms provided an additional forum for discussions and maintained the momentum of the interaction between the SWAP team and their informants, helping to generate sustained greater public interest in the development of the Scots language. The public contributions generated by the SWAP project were used to populate a Glossary of Scots Place-name Elements, created for the project and available at [swap.nesc.gla.ac.uk](http://swap.nesc.gla.ac.uk). The first comprehensive glossary of its kind, it was compiled by Alison Grant of Scottish Language Dictionaries and the Scottish Place-Name Society, using place-name citations from the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* supplemented by the public contributions gathered through social media. The results of the SWAP project have also contributed to the Word Collections of Scottish Language Dictionaries, helping to form new dictionaries of the Scots language. By engaging the public in the project, the SWAP team promoted a sense of ownership, and encouraged the use of the resource after the project had finished.
- **engaging schools by encouraging participation in university research and education** – There is a perceived gulf between schools and universities in Scotland; a gulf which is particularly acute among schools in less affluent areas. While this is being tackled at an institutional level by the University through a range of widening participation activities, a central aim of the SWAP project was to link directly with these schools. This was achieved through the creation of a competition and supporting academic material. Scotland's new national curriculum, the Curriculum for Excellence, gives teachers greater freedom in designing lessons and selecting teaching materials, and informal feedback from teachers indicates that they found the SWAP material useful, incorporating it into class activities prior to engaging with the competition

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itself. Digital media once again played a major role in the project, with the competition engaging with all Scottish schools through the new Glow intranet, which provided an online space for entries, resources and peer-voting. The competition ran from May to August 2011 and was available to every school pupil in Scotland. Entries could relate to any aspect of the Scots language or Scottish place-names, and included essays, stories, poems and songs. The competition received over 200 entries from schools across Scotland, from Oban on the west coast to Edinburgh in the east, Shetland in the north and the Scottish Borders in the south. The judging panel included the novelists Amal Chatterjee and Louise Welsh, whose participation helped to raise the public profile of the competition. Three finalists from each of the five age groups were selected by the judges, and the winners were then decided by peer vote on Glow. The University held a prize-giving ceremony in September 2011, attended by finalists, teachers and families and hosted by the University Rector, Charles Kennedy. The 20 children (including two group entries) and their guests were taken on a tour of the University, followed by a specially-curated exhibition which charted the progress of Scots in print from the 16th century to the present day. This material has been made available to the public as a [web exhibition](#) (From 'makaris' to Makars: Scots literature in Special Collections) via the Glasgow University Library website. Informal feedback on the day suggested that these children now saw university as somewhere more accessible to them, and it is hoped that they have taken this attitude back to their schools. The competition was covered in media outlets local to some of the prize-winning schools, such as the *Eskdale and Liddesdale Advertiser*, *Hawick News*, *New Shetlander* and *The Shetland Times*.

- **Engaging partners by forging sustainable links between academic and cultural bodies –**  
The SWAP project shared expertise and collaborated closely with educational and cultural organisations, thereby forging and consolidating links between the University of Glasgow and other bodies which have an impact on public life. The educational body Learning and Teaching Scotland, which has now been incorporated into a larger Scottish Government body, Education Scotland, has been crucial to the University's current and future plans for engaging effectively with schools in Scotland, and the links created by the SWAP project are benefitting subsequent school engagement work. University researchers are now working with Education Scotland to develop a place-name resource within the [Studying Scotland](#) website, which has been piloted by participating primary and secondary schools from March 2013 and is going live later this year. The SWAP project has also built upon links between the University and its project partners, Scottish Language Dictionaries and the Scottish Place-Name Society. For example, editors at Scottish Language Dictionaries are utilising material developed as part of the SWAP project in their revision of the *Concise Scots Dictionary*, which is currently in progress, particularly using data from the Glossary of Scots Place-name Elements for the purpose of ante-dating. These relationships are crucial in constructing a broad research culture which incorporates external expertise, enriching Scottish cultural life through the exchange of information between academics and professional lexicographers. In addition, the University of Glasgow researchers have actively promoted the SWAP project at a number of conferences and public engagement events. A paper by Ellen Bramwell and Carole Hough at the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, held in Barcelona from 5-9 September 2011, led to discussion of the potential for similar projects in other parts of the world, including Australia and Scandinavia. Other conference presentations include a paper by Carole Hough at the autumn day conference of the Scottish Place-Name Society in Dingwall on 5 November 2011, a poster by Ellen Bramwell, Dorian Grieve and Carole Hough on 'Vernacular varieties: social media sources for Scots lexis and toponymy' at the Language in Glasgow workshop on 9 March 2012, and a paper by Alison Grant on 'The impact of the SWAP project on the revision of the *Concise Scots Dictionary*' at the Annual Conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, held in Glasgow from 5–8 April 2013. The team also ran a programme of public engagement events, including a partnership activity on place-names for the BBC's [The Great British Story: A People's History road show](#), held at the Riverside Museum in Glasgow on 9 June 2012, and a workshop on SWAP at YouthLink Scotland's *Digitally Agile Community Learning and Development Key Stakeholders Event* [[video link](#)], held at Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh on 24 January 2013 [[link to event report](#); see pg 7].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**Engaging the public:**

- ‘Is crowd-sourcing dumbing down research?’ [\[link\]](#), *Guardian* online 29 July 2011
- Item on BBC Radio Scotland *Culture Café* 21 June 2011 – presenter Clare English discussed SWAP with project advisor Bruce Durie [\[link\]](#): note SWAP links on page]
- SWAP Twitter feed – [www.twitter.com/scotswap](http://www.twitter.com/scotswap)
- SWAP Facebook page – [www.facebook.com/scotswap](http://www.facebook.com/scotswap)

**Engaging schools:**

- The SWAP Schools Competition webpage, including finalists’ entries [\[link\]](#)
- The SWAP Glow competition page was only accessible to those with a school log-in and has now been deleted. However, publicity for the SWAP competition can be found on Scottish Language Dictionaries’ *Scuilwab* website at [\[link\]](#) and on the Creativity Portal [\[link\]](#)
- *From ‘makaris’ to Makars: Scots literature in Special Collections* an online exhibition curated by Robert MacLean [\[link\]](#)

**Engaging partners:**

- Scots Words and Place-names (SWAP): [Final Project Report for JISC](#) (2011)
- Video summary of the BBC’s *The Great British Story: A People’s History* event in Glasgow, noting the number of visitors (4,000) and the place-names’ contribution [\[link\]](#)
- ‘Digitally Agile Community Learning and Development 2013’, event programme (Edinburgh: Youthlink, 2013) [\[link\]](#), see pg.7] and YouTube video [\[link\]](#)