Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Queen's University Belfast
Unit of Assessment: 28 - Modern Languages
Title of case study: Shared Spaces and Names of Places: The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project (NIPNP)

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project was designed to have a range of public impacts since its inception and this case study focuses especially on the following three overlapping impacts: 1) It has enriched cultural life by recording, preserving and publishing free online the corpus of local place-names, and 2) has enhanced public understanding of aspects of language and history as preserved in these names. In particular, 3) it has impacted on civil society by creating space in which linguistic and cultural diversity can be encountered in an inclusive manner, and by illuminating the depth of connection between place and people across the range of historically diverse ethnic groups.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project was initially established with funding obtained from the Department of the Environment (and, subsequently, the Central Community Relations Unit) to research the origins and meanings of over 30,000 names of settlements and physical features. The majority of names are of Irish origin but the corpus also includes names which were coined by English, Scots and other settlers over many centuries.

The work of NIPNP represents the first systematic attempt to document and analyse the place-names of Northern Ireland according to modern scientific principles. The methodology developed by the Project has been at the forefront of developments in the UK and Ireland and was applauded by Professor W.F.H. Nicolaisen (in an independent report for the funding body) for having 'acquired a research unit which is truly unique and to which others will look with admiration and envy… not least because of the methodological principles adopted from the very beginning.' In order to establish the original form and meaning of each name, over 130,000 historical citations (with accompanying source references and other contextual information) were gathered from sources ranging from the 6th century down to the Ordnance Survey records of the 19th century. The resulting historical profile of each name was analysed in the light of the local pronunciation which was transcribed phonetically from recordings in the field. The pronunciations form a unique component of the Project's archive and are crucial in the process of elucidation of names coined in Irish as they preserve the original stress pattern. The analysis was further informed by evidence drawn from archaeology, history, topography and folk tradition.

In its ten published volumes (eight during the census period), NIPNP has produced detailed original analyses of approximately 4,000 place-names. The whole database of historical evidence has been published on the web and a further 500 names have been analysed for the first time there. In addition, seminal articles pertaining not only to onomastics, but to historical geography and linguistics, have been published by members of the research team: Toner on settlement terms, Muhr and Ó Mainnín on names in the early literature, and McKay on Scots influence on the toponymy of Ulster.

NIPNP was originally comprised of a team of five research fellows under the direction of Professor Gerard Stockman (1987-96); with the completion of the capture of geographical data and preliminary trawl of historical sources, this was reduced to two research fellows from 1999. Professor Stockman was succeeded as director by Nollaig Ó Muraíle (1996-2003), Professor Dónall Ó Baoill (2003-09) and Professor Mícheál Ó Mainnín (a member of the Project's original research team from 1987 to 1996). Kay Muhr was, from the outset, the senior research fellow on the Project (1987-2010); other research fellows within the census period were Hannan (1987-95),

Mac Gabhann (1994-97), McKay (1994-2010), Ó Coinn (1993-94), Tempan (2012-13, part-time), and Toner (1991-97), now chair of Irish & Celtic Studies at Queen's.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

(i) key research grants:

Date	Funding Body	Amount
2009-2010; 2012-13	All-Ireland Language Body, Foras na Gaeilge	£40K
2005-2006	Foras na Gaeilge/Ultach Trust: *Street & Road Names*	£72K
2004-2009	Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland/Land & Property Services (Department of Finance and Personnel)	£500K
1999-2004	Arts and Humanities Research Board	£524K
1993-1997	Department of the Environment (N.Ireland)/Central Community Relations Unit (from 1990)	£430K

(ii) key research outputs:

- www.placenamesni.org (The Northern Ireland Place-name Project's database, hosted by Land & Property Services, Department of Finance and Personnel)
- Ó Mainnín, McKay, Toner, Muhr, Mac Gabhann, *Place-Names of Northern Ireland* series, vols 3-8 (Belfast: 1993; 1995; 1996 (x2); 1997; 2004)
- McKay, *Dictionary of Ulster Place-Names* (Belfast: 1999, 2007)
- McKay & Muhr, *Lough Neagh Places* (Belfast: 2007)

(iii) evidence of quality:

The following is a representative sample of reviews of print publications:

- W.F.H. Nicolaisen, *Names* 41 (1993), 198-9.
- I.A. Fraser; S. Taylor, *Nomina* 17 (1994), 142-6.
- S. Ó Cearnaigh, *Irish Historical Studies* 30.117 (1996), 125-6.
- B. Ó Curnáin, *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies* 32 (2000), 166-9.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project was established with funding from local government as a centre of research expertise which, from its inception, would supply and disseminate information on the linguistic origin, meaning and history of local places to government departments, community groups and the broader public. Its remit, therefore, was to bring tangible linguistic and cultural benefits to the local community (in particular, the enrichment of cultural life, the enhancement of public understanding, and the promotion of cultural diversity) and to contribute to a sense of connected communities and shared space. Throughout the course of its existence it has provided an extensive outreach programme of lectures and seminars (over 50 in the census period), all of which draws on its underpinning research, and has contributed significantly to cultural enrichment in Northern Ireland (and to the creative industries) through participation in TV and radio documentaries and interviews. It also provides a consultancy service to government agencies, individual members of the public and local community groups. It has collaborated closely with Land and Property Services to integrate cultural and geographical data, and has used its research expertise to inform the work of public bodies such as the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency, particularly in identifying sites of potential archaeological significance and providing further contextual information on those sites (cf. http://apps.ehsni.gov.uk/ambit/). Members of the team provide research support and advice for other statutory bodies and Ó Mainnín currently serves on

the Irish Place-names Commission (which reports to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and advises on authoritative Irish forms of place-names for official and public use in the Republic of Ireland).

NIPNP has engaged in **three major collaborations** in the census period which have had substantial impact beyond academia. The most significant of these, the collaboration with **Land and Property Services**, was initiated in 2004. NIPNP's research database of historical evidence and place-name analysis has been enhanced by the provision of detailed and technologically-advanced mapping by LPS in our collaborative online website (www.placenamesni.org). This has also enriched and added a cultural dimension (for the first time) to the work of LPS with the result that the general public can now easily access (on a single site) geographical, historical, linguistic and cultural information on the places where they live or visit. The link between onomastic research and mapping providers is unique, and could be followed as a model elsewhere, in the United Kingdom. The research continues and a new version of the website (including new data) was officially launched by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at the Northern Ireland Assembly in January 2013. The event provoked considerable media interest and the website has had a total of 172,696 interactive page views in the six months since the launch (as of the end of July 2013).

The second major collaboration is in the realm of street names and this has contributed to the embedding of cultural diversity in civil society (through increased visibility for minority indigenous languages) and the enrichment of cultural life. Our **street-names project** was commissioned by the all-Ireland statutory language body, Foras na Gaeilge, in 2005-06 and the origins of over 6,000 street-names in selected urban districts (in 12 local council areas) were published online (www.ulsterplacenames.org) in the course of 2008. As a result of the project's scholarly research, the Irish versions of names which appear on public signage can be accepted as authoritative and definitive. Work on street names is ongoing. NIPNP is consulted on a regular basis by local councils in response to requests from the community for bilingual signage; subsequently, the names provided are included in urban maps. The most recent edition of the Belfast Street Map (2010) includes 82 Irish-language versions of names provided by NIPNP which appear in street signage and a further 30 names have been provided to Belfast City Council over the past year which will appear in future editions of the street map and on signage. Moreover, in 2011, a cross-community project (funded by Belfast City Council's Good Relations Unit) on Belfast street and district-names invited members of the community to explore their local place-names and respond with further information gleaned from oral and other sources. The engagement between Ó Mainnín and the local community was recorded and broadcast on local radio, Radio Fáilte, and resulted in the production of a CD for dissemination to community groups across the city.

The most significant of the many collaborations with community-based groups in the census period is that which involved the **Lough Neagh Partnership** (www.loughneaghheritage.com) — comprised of stakeholders with an interest in the largest freshwater lake in Britain and Ireland (and drawing representation from local authorities, and statutory and community organisations). It commissioned NIPNP to research place-names which would be encountered by cyclists on the Sustrans Cycle Trail around the lake in order to develop the site for cultural, educational and tourism purposes. By including names of diverse linguistic origin (Irish, English and Scots), this collaboration created space for the engagement of civil society with cultural diversity in the Lough Neagh region, increased public understanding of local history and heritage, and enriched cultural life. The research, published in *Lough Neagh Places* (2007), enabled the Partnership to pursue further research within the census period in the form of a local history and archaeology project (of eighteen months duration) in 2009-10 and so further develop the amenity (http://tinyurl.com/owmx6nt). The place-names work also drew public attention to the area. Muhr was interviewed on BBC radio as part of a special programme on Lough Neagh

which was broadcast across the UK (23/01/09), and staff delivered a programme of lectures at local venues, including Lisburn Historical Society (04/02/09), Craigavon Museum (07/03/09) and Bangor Family History Society (21/01/10), all of which engaged with aspects of the research conducted on the Lough Neagh region. Place-names research also fed into the wider cultural environment through participation in BBCNI's acclaimed six-part series *Sruthanna* (2012), to which both Toner and Ó Mainnín contributed.

Other forms of engagement which have increased public understanding and enriched cultural life have continued during this period. The Regeneration of South Armagh community group used NIPNP's research in the booklet on local townland names (2008) with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Lottery had also provided the original funding (£9,000) for the place-name exhibition, *Celebrating Ulster's Townlands*, and an accompanying booklet produced by Muhr. The exhibition has been shown at a variety of venues in Ireland and Scotland over the years, most recently (i) at an exhibition (and accompanying talk by Tempan) in Belfast City Hall (16-18 March 2013) to celebrate St Patrick's weekend in the city, and (ii) in the Northern Ireland Assembly (17/06/09) at an event hosted by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure to promote and raise awareness of local place-names. Muhr represented NIPNP at the seminar involving legislators and other stakeholders which formed the core of this event, thereby contributing to public discourse on the importance of intangible heritage.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)
NIPNP resources in the public domain:
- www.placenamesni.org (NIPNP's electronic database)
- www.ulsterplacenames.org (website of the Ulster Place-Name Society)

Published list of activities at www.placenamesni.org
- list of public lectures/talks/seminars
- media events and some sample media clippings
- consultancy and contact with public
- publications: list of academic and popular articles arising from the Project's research

Organisations for consultation: (see corroborating contacts)
1. Land & Property Services (Head of ICT). The nature of our website and the role of Land and Property Services in its design and maintenance. Also, the importance of the website in terms of LPS's IT and outreach agenda and more detail on the impact of the website (i.e. hits and interactive page views).
2. Belfast City Council (Business Co-ordinator). The provision of Irish forms of place-names to Belfast City Council and the importance of this in terms of the Council's promotion of cultural diversity and good relations.
3. Lough Neagh Partnership (Marketing Officer). The role of the work of NIPNP in contributing to the agenda of the Lough Neagh Partnership in terms of developing the amenity and enriching the cultural life of the region, and exploring its history, heritage and cultural diversity.
4. Historic Monuments Council (Chair). The identification of sites of potential archaeological significance among the corpus of names in the NIPNP database through interpretation and analysis of their initial elements. The database facilitates searching for archaeological elements in the placenames and provides further contextual information on the names in question.
5. Northern Ireland Assembly (Chair, Finance and Personnel Committee). The importance of the work of NIPNP to the government agenda of a shared future and shared space. More detail on the impact of the launch of the latest version of the website in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the support of the Committee of Finance and Personnel.