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| <p>Institution: University of the Highlands and Islands</p> |
| <p>Unit of Assessment: 30</p> |
| <p>Title of case study: ‘The Land for the People’: Shaping land reform policy and assisting community buyouts in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland through historical and public policy research</p> |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact Professor James Hunter’s research focuses on the relationship between land and people in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. This research established that land reform could lead to the economic and social regeneration of rural communities and has had considerable impact on public policy debate in Scotland during the REF 2014 period. In particular, Hunter’s recent research into community ownership of land led to his appointment (2012-13) to the Scottish Government’s Land Reform Review Group (LRRG) by Scotland’s First Minister, the Right Hon. Alex Salmond and his activism has led to changes in Scottish Government policy. Moreover, Hunter’s research has informed community buyout schemes, leading to a range of economic, social and environmental impacts.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research Professor Hunter is a historian and land reform campaigner. His extensive research on the Highlands and Islands of Scotland focuses on the history of land reform and the evolution of community land ownership. Hunter became Professor of History at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and Director of the Centre for History (CfH) in January 2005. In August 2010, he became Emeritus Professor of History at UHI, maintaining his involvement in the everyday life of the Centre through PhD supervision and research mentoring. Since 2008, his research has played a pivotal role in public policy debate about land reform and has influenced community buyout schemes across Scotland. Hunter’s research has established that land reform enables communities to take greater ownership and control, leading to significant economic, social and environmental benefits.</p> <p>Professor Hunter has published thirteen books on land reform, the Scottish diaspora and the history of the Highlands and Islands. Hunter’s first book, <i>The Making of the Crofting Community</i> was published in 1976 and has been continually in print for thirty-six years. This book is in its fourth edition and remains the authoritative work on the subject of crofting as a system of land holding which emerged during the mid-nineteenth century in response to the Clearances. Hunter’s examination of the way in which crofters became politically organised and campaigned successfully for land reform underpins his career in public policy and has significantly shaped the nature of public debate in the last thirty years. A new edition in 2000 contains a lengthy preface in which Hunter reflects on the book’s historiographical origins and on the debates it has generated. A long postscript to a further new edition in 2010 (when Hunter was at CfH) (3.1) reflects on linkages between the book and land reforms which have taken place in Scotland during the last thirty years. For example, in his John McEwen Memorial Lecture in 1998, Donald Dewar, then Secretary of State for Scotland and later First Minister in Scotland’s first post-devolution administration, said that Hunter’s book had been among the influences persuading him of the need for the land reform package eventually embodied in the Scottish Parliament’s Land Reform Act of 2003. Hunter’s research on the Clearances and land reform during the nineteenth century has been built upon by staff at the Centre, most specifically in the work of Elizabeth Ritchie (see REF5 and REF3b(2)).</p> <p>Most recently, Hunter has used his own research on the history of land reform to inform his work on community ownership programmes in Scotland, in which he continues to play a key role through his membership of a number of public bodies (see below). From September 2010 to May 2011, Hunter was commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust to research the impact of community ownership of land in Scotland. The resulting book (<i>From the Low Tide of the Sea to the Highest Mountain Tops</i> (2012) records how more than half a million acres of land in Scotland have been taken into community ownership in Scotland over the past twenty years (3.2). It assesses the implications and impact of land reform in Scotland during that period, analysing how the acquisition and development of assets by local communities has become a central public policy issue across the UK. Hunter’s research established the extensive social and economic benefits of community land ownership, to the extent that Highlands and Islands Enterprise could testify to the LRRG in</p> |

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January 2013 that '[t]oday community asset ownership is no longer viewed as an experimental project but as a proven model of rural regeneration' (3.3, p. 15). Many communities are involved in buying land, thereby engaging with the growing political agenda that communities and individuals should take greater responsibility. Hunter's research establishes that community land ownership has led to the development of renewable energy generation, local food production, local service delivery, greater access to digital technology, more sustainable tourism, better housing and improved social cohesion. For example, the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust's buyout of the island in 2002 has led to an increase in population, the refurbishment of housing stock, and the establishment of a successful windfarm which, during the period 2008-13 gave the Trust an annual income of over £100,000 (3.2, pp. 2-10, 129-35).

3. References to the research

Authored books and papers

- 3.1 James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, New edition (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010).
 3.2 James Hunter, *From the Low Tide of the Sea to the Highest Mountain Tops: Community Ownership of Land in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Isle of Lewis: Islands Book Trust, 2012).
 3.3 James Hunter, Peter Peacock, Andy Wightman and Michael Foxley, *432:50 – Towards a comprehensive land reform agenda for Scotland: A briefing paper for the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee* (July 2013)
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/scottish-affairs-committee/news/land-reform-inquiry/>

Evidence of research quality

'One of the most significant Scottish books of its generation', Professor Ewen A. Cameron, University of Edinburgh, in E. A. Cameron, 'Review of *The Making of the Crofting Community*', *Scottish Historical Review*, 72:2 (1996), pp. 262-4.

Grant award:

James Hunter, 'The Impact of Community Ownership of Land in Scotland', Carnegie UK Trust, Sept 2010-May 2011, £10,000.

<http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/changing-minds/people---place/rural-development>

4. Details of the impact

James Hunter's research has established the economic and social benefits of community ownership in Scotland, underpinned his extensive career in public policy, informed public policy debate on land reform and assisted community buyout schemes. Since 2008, the key impacts of his research have been:

- 1) To put land reform back onto the Scottish Government's agenda to the extent that is now a central plank of current and future legislation;
- 2) To inform and assist community buyout schemes;
- 3) To demonstrate the ongoing economic and social benefits of community buyouts.

Public policy impact

Hunter has had a long and distinguished career in policy-related work which has built on his academic research on crofting and land reform, including periods working as the Director of the Scottish Crofters Union (1985-90) and Chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (1998-2004). As Director of CfH, Hunter continued his high-profile involvement in public and policy-related activities, with a particular focus on the issues of land reform explored in his research. These included:

- Member of the board of Scottish Natural Heritage (2004-10) and Chairman of the SNH's Scientific Advisory Committee (2006-10);
- Chairman of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, the body which owns Eigg on behalf of the islanders (2004-07);
- Member of the board of Highland Birchwoods, a non-profit forestry consortium (2006-10);
- Aigas Community Forest Champion (2010-).

Hunter's expertise in, and continuing contribution to, land reform was underlined in July 2012 when Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, appointed him Vice-Chairman of the Scottish Government's Land Reform Review Group (a role held by Hunter until April 2013) with a brief 'to deliver radical change'. Hunter's research has had considerable impact on government policy, leading to the First Minister's commitment in June 2013 to bring a further 500,000 acres of land into community ownership by 2020 'in the wake of the publication of the interim findings of the

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Scottish Government's Land Reform Review Group' (5.1). Moreover, the work of the LRRG has also underpinned the Scottish Government's commitment to a Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill, which was under consultation between June and September 2012 (5.2) Most recently, in July 2013 Professor Hunter was commissioned by the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee (SAC) to write a briefing paper for their forthcoming inquiry into land reform in Scotland. This report places contemporary public policy debate firmly in a historical context derived directly from Professor Hunter's research for the Carnegie UK Trust in 2010-12. The reach of the SAC paper was demonstrated when the journalist George Monbiot tweeted a link to the paper to his 70,000+ followers on the social networking site (5.3). This briefing paper is now being used by the SAC to inform its inquiry into land reform in Scotland and has led to a call for public submissions of evidence (5.4).

Community buyout activism

Moreover, Professor Hunter's research has had a direct causal link with changes in land ownership in Scotland, which has transformed communities and the lives of the people living in them. The land reform activism inspired by Hunter's research has enabled these communities to be rebuilt from within, functioning as a focal point for the formation of local groups dedicated to changing the nature of land ownership. During his time as Chair of HIE, Hunter was responsible for setting up the Community Land Unit, committed to assisting communities in their desire to purchase land. A number of community groups were set up as a result of Hunter's research and activism, leading to the transfer of the ownership of over 500,000 acres of land to the people living in those communities and to the economic and social impacts outlined below.

In September 2009, Professor Hunter was the keynote speaker at the Community Land Conference in Harris, and from this event emerged Community Land Scotland, a group representing community landowners throughout the country. Moreover, this speech demonstrated Hunter's key role in the campaign for the reintroduction of the Scottish Land Fund by the Scottish Government in 2012, which has made £6 million available to assist community buyouts of land (5.5). David Cameron, the Chair of Community Land Scotland, attested to the impact of Hunter's work, saying that it had 'contributed heavily when [community landownership] policies have and are being advocated...[C]ommunity landownership's remarkable progress in gaining credibility and increasing numerically would have been very difficult without Professor Hunter's work' (5.6). The importance of Hunter's research to community activism was underlined by Peter Peacock, former Leader of Highland Council, former MSP for Highlands and Islands and Scottish Government Minister, and current Policy Director of Community Land Scotland: 'James Hunter's highly respected research and writing has helped give authority to contemporary policy thinking... [His] work cannot be overestimated in its importance in helping shape current day policy of great relevance and importance to the Highlands and Islands'. (5.6)

Hunter speaks regularly to community groups, local and national organisations on a variety of developmental and historical themes. For example, in the summer of 2010, at the invitation of the Carnegie UK Trust, he gave a lecture on land reform at the annual Festival of Politics in the Scottish Parliament (5.7). This led to the Carnegie UK Trust commissioning Hunter to write an account of the development and expansion of community ownership in the Highlands and Islands. The resulting book, *From the Low Tide of the Sea to the Highest Mountain Tops* was published in March 2012 by the Lewis-based Islands Book Trust – selected by Hunter because of the Book Trust's links with the area where so much community ownership has occurred. Hunter gave presentations on the book in Inverness, Edinburgh, London and elsewhere, his presentation in the Scottish Parliament, to MSPs, policy makers and others, attracting an 80-strong audience. As David Ross, Highland Correspondent of *The Herald* (Glasgow) wrote, this was '...a provocative work, which has clearly influenced Scottish Government thinking on land reform' (5.6). Hunter's work, then, has had a demonstrable influence on community buyout activism throughout Scotland. As Lorne MacLeod, a key figure in the community buyout movement, has argued, Hunter's research 'has helped the emergence of a greater confidence in, and understanding of, land ownership amongst communities...[it] has been a catalyst which has helped initiate several campaigns for community ownership', including recent buyouts of land by the Isle of Rum Community Trust in February 2009 and April 2010 (5.6).

Economic, social and environmental benefits

The community buyout schemes that Hunter's research has influenced have seen a number of economic, social and environmental benefits during the period 2008 to 2013. The Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust succeeded in bringing the land of the island into community ownership in March 2002, building on both the research and public policy work of James Hunter. This was partly funded by a grant of £500,000 from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, at that time under the Chairmanship of Hunter. The economic impact of this community ownership scheme has continued to be felt during the period of REF 2014. For example, the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust established the UK's first community-owned and grid-connected wind farm, whose three turbines generate two-thirds of the island's annual electricity requirements and, in 2011-12, provided a profit of £109,073 to the island from the Gigha Renewable Energy Limited company (5.8). Moreover, the economic impact of the community buyout has also led to an increase in the population of the island of over 50 per cent (5.9). Similar impacts have been experienced on the Isle of Eigg, where James Hunter was Chair of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust from 2004-07. On Eigg, for example, there have been considerable environmental impacts arising from Hunter's research and activism. Here, Eigg Electric was established in 2008 to provide renewable energy for the island, receiving the Scottish and Southern Energy Innovation and Energy Efficiency award at the Scottish Energy and Environment Conference in 2009 for reducing the island's carbon emissions by 50 per cent (5.10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Speech by Alex Salmond at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on Skye, 6 June 2013

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2013/06/landreform07062013>

5.2 Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/programme-for-government/2013-14/Community-Empowerment-Renewal-Bill>

5.3 Named Political Commentator - Astonishing report on land ownership in Scotland. Some owners getting £12,000 a WEEK in subsidies. [http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/scottish-affairs/432-Land%20Reform%20Paper.pdf ...](http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/scottish-affairs/432-Land%20Reform%20Paper.pdf...)

5.4 Scottish Affairs Committee launches consultation on comprehensive land reform in Scotland, 15 July 2013

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/scottish-affairs-committee/news/land-reform-inquiry/>

5.5 Community Land Conference, Harris, 29 September 2009

<http://www.localpeopleleading.co.uk/policy-talk/policy-articles/720/>

5.6 Testimony from the following figures in policy debate:

- Senior representative, Community Land Scotland, Letter to the Centre for History, 10 May 2013
- Policy Director of Community Land Scotland, Email to the Centre for History, 30 April 2013
- Highland Correspondent of *The Herald* (Glasgow). Email to Centre for History, 3 May 2013
- Board member, board of the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust, director of the board of Sealladh na Beinne Moire, the community landowner of the 93,000 acre estate covering the islands of Eriskay, South Uist and Benbecula. Email to the Centre for History, 7 October 2013

5.7 Festival of Politics in the Scottish Parliament (20 August 2010)

<http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/news---events/archive/2010/festival-of-politics-2010>

5.8 Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust, Group Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2012

http://www.gigha.net/recruit/content/acc_%2031.03.2012.pdf

5.9 'Gigha Islanders to Mark a Decade Since Buyout', *The Herald*, 15 March 2012

<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/gigha-islanders-to-mark-a-decade-since-buyout.17023167>

5.10 Eigg Electric Report on Energy Efficiency: <http://islandsgoinggreen.org/about/eigg-electric/>