

Impact template (REF3a)

Institution: University of Glasgow
Unit of Assessment: 17 – Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology: Geography
a. Context

The Human Geography Research Group (HGRG) at the University of Glasgow (GU) is committed to impactful engagement with a diversity of constituencies beyond the academy, addressing a variety of user groups from politicians/policy-makers through to professionals, practitioners, activists and local communities. Impacts have included influencing dimensions of public policy, providing training resources, improving ‘qualities of life’, encouraging ground-level participation, shaping terms of public debate, and enhancing experimental forms of cultural experience.

We profile two particular case studies (**CS1** and **CS2**) in REF3b, set within a matrix of impactful activity arising from all of our research themes: we say more about these two case studies in **d.** below. Researchers named in **bold** are the 13 Category A staff returned in REF1; those in *italics* are individuals who left HGRG during the REF assessment period; and those in plain are non-submitted GU staff (RAs).

b. Approach to impact

Impact is central to our research ethos. It was already present in our RAE2008 submission, where we spoke of “moving readily from the conceptual to the substantive to the engaged,” adding that “HGRG is committed to engaging with end-user communities, broadly conceived.” This ethos has been continued and formalised during the assessment period, and in our REF5 template we explain how our work is constantly “translating from the abstract topologies of theory into the social topographies of everyday environments, landscapes and settlements.” We also claim “a sense of responding critically and participatively in the face of multiple injustices and silences.”

Our approach, refined across two research assessment periods, embraces a distinctive splicing together of *collaboration*, *participation* and the creation of *impact*. For us, impact is not something separate from core research, but rather we endeavour, from the outset of all field-based research, to undertake studies of relevance and importance *to* the communities with and on whose behalf we work. We devise research so that collaborative partners and participating subjects – those with whom we conceive research questions/methods *and* then explicitly participate in our inquiries – are *also* configured as non-academic beneficiaries (the users) of our completed inquiries. There is a crucial circle here that we always seek to close. We regard research partners/subjects as ‘experts’ in their own situations, and we respect and, where possible, enhance *their* capacity to use *our* research creatively, critically, tactically and in terms of their own self-understandings and self-representations. Our experience is that a genuinely engaged research process, entailing dialogue throughout between academics and potential users, is most likely to produce impacts reaching deeply into the situations involved and achieving significant changes of attitude and conduct.

We consistently seek to foster enduring relationships with key partners/subjects/users, usually through becoming deeply immersed within the situations under study, striving to build trust with the diversity of actors involved. We exemplify this approach in **d.** below with reference to **CS1** and **CS2**, which deliberately build trusting relationships simultaneously with *both* policy, professional and practitioner communities *and* ground-level peoples, places and lived worlds. Our approach is also illustrated in the following (contrasting) examples of our participative impact work:

- Reflecting long experience of addressing his landscape research to wider audiences – including public exhibitions and writing/presenting 8 individual/different BBC Radio programmes – **Lorimer** (as PI, with **Gallagher** as Co-I) has secured AHRC grants (2012-2014) to set up an experimental site of environmental memory and learning (the ‘Invisible College’) at the ruins of St. Peter’s Seminary, Cardross. This project learns with local communities through participative arts workshops, creating accessible archival/electronic resources (such as an ‘audio-drift’ for visitors and a ‘digital guided walk’ [linked to the RGS Discovering Britain initiative]) which can also involve local opinion on future plans for the site’s reinvention.
- Emerging from past work on/with mental health communities, especially with **Parr** in the Scottish Highlands, **Philo** (co-I, with colleagues from Dundee) has secured an ESRC Seminar Series grant for events on ‘Rethinking Learning Disability’ (LD), one involving people with LD

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and their supporters (creating theatrical sketches and using wall-chart/table-cloth practical activities) and another featuring prominent policy-makers/professionals in the Scottish LD field. Materials from all three events have been processed and posted, mainly by **Philo**, on a publicly-accessible Word Press site for use by a variety of actors in LD policy and practice.

- Working closely with nature enthusiasts, activists and scholars, **Naylor's** (Co-I) AHRC grant (2010-2011) nurtured a creative anthology of modern nature-writing, *Anticipatory History*, informing how National Trust property staff convey ideas about landscape and wildlife management, while his (Co-I) AHRC Follow-on project (2012-2013) on popular climate histories/futures is producing an on-line 'weather memory bank' and a 'phone app' for walkers.
- Informed by years of participative work with dispossessed peoples and places across the globe, but specifically in South Asia, *Routledge* has pioneered scholar-activist engagement. Notable during the assessment period was his involvement in the Bangladesh Climate Caravan of 2010, which mobilised and informed thousands of landless people, impacting too upon Bangladeshi climate change and land reform policy.

c. Strategy and plans

Our approach to impact has developed through the collective experiences of HGRG members and is now formalised in an impact strategy, drafted in Summer 2013 and extended not just to 'core' staff but to PG students as well, with the following components:

- *Themes and impact:* All of our research themes (as detailed in our REF5 template) can and do generate impact, but it is strategically planned that the exact focus of impact varies across the four themes. Thus, **T1** (*Subaltern globalisations*) speaks most directly to peoples and places marginalised by globalisation 'from above', working closely with activists in producing alternative models of solidarity and justice; **T2** (*Vital geographies*) speaks to policy-makers, professionals and practitioners in diverse fields of social concern, notably pertaining to policing and mental health, but also seeks to engage those peoples struggling to 're-script' their (lost or denied) human potentials; **T3** (*Knowing, creativity and experiment*) explicitly innovates with creative and experimental means of representing, exhibiting and performing our research, and is thereby a platform for efforts at publicly communicating our findings across the other three themes; while **T4** (*Stressed environments and communities*) speaks most directly to policy-makers, professionals and scientists in the fields of environmental, development and health policy, albeit aiming to bring the critical 'voices' of grounded experience into this dialogue.
- *Publics and impact:* As well as working directly with partners/subjects/users, our strategy is also to reach out to wider publics, deploying a range of creative means informed by our development of research theme **T3** (see above). The national broadcasting work of **Lorimer** and the 'story-telling' of **Parr** (see **CS2**) can be highlighted here, but notable too are ideas introduced by recent arrivals to HGRG: **Dixon's** (PI) ongoing NSF-AHRC funded art/science collaborations (with Straughan as RA) are engendering site-specific artistic interventions and other publicly-accessible explorations of the 'post-Science Wars' landscape (with commentaries in *Nature* and *Science*); while **Last** brings experience of experimental installations, filming and performance, as well as 'mentoring', in the public communication of science. Related to his *Solidarity* (2012) book, **Featherstone** has spoken at public events in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Berlin, Lund and New York, demonstrably influencing transnational activist discourse on solidarity (with the book now prominent in on-line discussion by the US-based Raha Iranian Feminist Collective); **Shaw** authors a high-profile blog *understanding empire* (c.21,000 views, September 2012-September 2013), shaping public debate about the geographies of neo-imperialism; while **Karaman** will co-edit the 'Cities' page (launched September 2013) of *Jadaliyya*, an influential e-zine featuring content on the Middle East.
- *Grants and impact:* We have strategically targeted funding opportunities with an explicit impact focus, such as AHRC 'applied arts and humanities' schemes (**Lorimer**: see **b.** above), the Wellcome Trust (**Philo**: a 'scoping grant' to develop a conservation plan for the archive of a remote Scottish Highlands psychiatric hospital) and the Leverhulme artist-in-residence scheme (**Philo**: a grant funding Drew Mulholland to compose and perform his 'musical psycho-geography' pieces). We have also secured ESRC CASE/Scottish Governmental and AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Studentships, where the emphasis is precisely on user interfaces. We have introduced impact dimensions into other funded research, arguably beyond the explicit

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requirements of the funder: here we particularly reference **CS2** and **Philo's** ESRC Seminar Series (see **b.** above).

- *Practices and impact.* When developing a particular research project, HGRG members consult an 'impact checklist' developed iteratively from collective experience (with GU-level guidance): have potential non-academic users been identified, and relationships built with them, from the outset? are methods in the field or elsewhere appropriately formulated (ethically, practically and regarding the value of data to be generated) with reference to the needs of users? is there a dissemination strategy, deploying both physical events and virtual forms of communication? is there a feedback strategy for communicating back to collaborators? are there devices in place for monitoring the impacts arising from the research project? HGRG will hold an annual 'impactful geographies' event for members to share best practice and to refine practices/mechanisms.
- *Mechanisms and impact.* The School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES) Research Committee, on which HGRG is represented, discusses KT/KE and impact plans as a standing item; seed-corn funding is dispersed for initiatives in this domain, while provisions are made for the timing of research leaves associated with sustained periods of fieldwork likely to generate impact (see also below). GU has an 'Impact Enhancement Funding' KT/KE scheme (worth £1M over 3 years), from which we are eligible to seek financial support for impactful initiatives. Impact activity is a formal part of annual staff Performance and Development Reviews, and personal impact plans are set and monitored here in the context of HGRG impact strategy (and also wider GES/GU impact agendas).

d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies, **CS1** and **CS2**, demonstrate the outworking of both the ethos of our approach to impact and the more strategic features described above in **b.** and **c.:**

- Through many years of field-based research in Africa – embedded in particular localities, collaborating with local scholars and also liaising closely with high-ranking politicians and policy-makers – **Briggs** has influenced environmental policy in Sub-Saharan Africa, while also now bringing his research background to bear in an appointed role (from 2010) as Member of the UK's DFID Research Advisory Group. This (partially DFID-funded) research, together with **Sharp**, has created the impact reported in **CS1**, reaching across development policy circles *and* into everyday African communities and environments.
- Working intensively with both NGOs and users of services – and contributing research during the assessment period for the Scottish Recovery Network – **Parr** is also influencing the practices (and potentially policies) of the UK Police and the Missing Persons Charity through current ESRC-funded research (her as PI, Stevenson as RA). Her research has created the impact reported in **CS2**, reaching across policing policy circles *and* into the everyday life-worlds of missing people, their families and the police who search for them. This work has secured a national prize for its outstanding 'applied policing work'.

CS1 sits within the orbit of our research themes **T1** and **T4**, while **CS2** sits within that of themes **T2** and **T3**; and the very rationale of these themes (for 'globalising from below'; for 'augmenting the human'; for 'de-stressing environments') is entirely coincident with outward-looking objectives in the achievement of impact. Both case studies reflect sustained relationship- and trust-building, demanding lengthy periods of engaging with the relevant policy-makers, organisations, peoples and places, in part as enabled by targeted research leave arrangements which have facilitated staff in establishing strongly grounded connections. Both case studies have involved strategically planned dissemination, workshop and training events held with varying combinations of users and publics (in **CS1**, local Bedouin through to national Ministers; in **CS2**, families of missing people through to senior police officers); and these events have themselves been instrumental in leading to tangible impacts, whether a decision to incorporate 'indigenous knowledges' into Egyptian 'protected areas' policy (**CS1**) or a decision to include testimonies from returned 'missing people' as part of UK National Police College training courses (**CS2**). **Parr** has recently secured c.£30k from the above-mentioned GU KT/KE funding scheme to develop/deliver further educational impact legacies with the National Police College, hence creating additional impact activity associated with **CS2** and showing the relevance of strategic GU support for this particular case study.