

<b>Institution: University of Exeter</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 17a (Geography &amp; Environmental Studies)</b>
<b>Title of case study: ‘Follow The Things’: developing critical pedagogies to promote geographically-informed and ethically-aware consumption in school geography curriculum.</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dr Ian Cook (Geography, Exeter) has, over the last 20 years, developed a ‘Follow The Things’ approach to appreciating the social relations and ethics of international trade. This research involves tracing the geographies of everyday things, discovering who made them, where and under what conditions, and then feeding this knowledge into public forums. Its principal aim has been to encourage and inform - in critical, positive ways – academic and public discussions of the ethics, (in)justices, and possible futures of international trade. In this census period this work has had impact by <b>reshaping the teaching and learning of international trade</b> in UK schools through the new Geography National Curriculum, by driving forward <b>innovation in school geography teaching</b>, and by <b>making public a database on trade justice activism</b>.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>‘Follow The Things’ (FTT) is a relatively new approach to the study of Geography. The paradigm shift it represents has evolved in stages over the course of Dr Cook’s academic career. Initial research focused on understanding and conceptualising the social relations underpinning international trade and using this insight to affect public debate around trade ethics. Drawing on David Harvey’s arguments about the need to de-fetishise commodities (Cook and Crang, 1996), and funded by two ESRC awards, multi-site ethnographic research was undertaken into the commodity geographies of tropical fruit and other food products available in UK supermarkets (see for example Cook et al., 2004). This research helped to transform geographies of food research and, beyond this, has shaped the questions that are now being asked by researchers (academic and non-academic) investigating commodity geographies more generally.</p> <p>These empirical and conceptual research foundations provided Cook with the basis to develop new ways of examining, explaining, and critiquing international trade. In this respect, the underlying aim has been to promote geographically-informed and ethically-aware consumption by both engaging in, and informing, public debate around trade ethics and by contributing towards the development of critical geography pedagogies in schools. Building on agenda-setting and influential research published in previous Research Assessment Exercises (e.g. Cook &amp; Crang 1996, republished 2012; Cook et al., 2004), Cook has, since moving to Exeter in 2007, consolidated, developed, and expanded the Follow the Things genre. For example, he researched the scavenging and salvaging of goods from containers washed up from a shipwreck on the UK’s South West Coast in 2007 to critique the genre’s narrow choice of things followed, its concentration on goods produced in the Global South for consumption in the Global North, its lack of nuanced theoretical understanding of materiality, and the ways in which artists worked with salvaged things to engage publics in the wreck’s complex trade geographies in meaningful and moving ways (Cook &amp; Tolia Kelly 2010). This led to an agenda-setting paper arguing that, for commodity geographers to engage wider publics in debates about trade ethics, their work had to move away from a ‘traditional Marxist’ approach involving shame, blame, and guilt, and towards the use of artists’, filmmakers’, and cultural activists’ tactics of creativity, collaboration, social media, playfulness, bitter-sweetness, and appreciation (Cook &amp; Woodyer 2012).</p> <p>In 2011, and drawing both on these ideas and on emerging literatures on Web2.0 scholar-activism, Cook (with others) brought together the FTT approach to geography in a single ‘spoof shopping’ web-site (<a href="http://followthethings.com">http://followthethings.com</a>) designed to engage the public in research-informed debates around trade ethics (Cook et al., 2011-present, and REF2014 research output #1). The purpose of this site was to act as a repository for FTT research within and beyond the academy, to raise the global profile of the FTT approach, and conceptually to move forward Harvey’s arguments about de-fetishising commodities that were first engaged with by Cook in the 1990s. This has led to the development of international networks to ‘crowd-research’ its contents, establishing a format for</p>

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researching and presenting each example's techniques, dissemination, and impacts, designing the site to resemble and be navigated like an internationally-recognisable online store, and using social media to promote a 'one stop shop' for anyone interested in trade justice research and teaching.

Collectively, this body of research has had impact on the teaching of geography in UK schools, and has developed open access resources to engage the public and media in trade justice activism.

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

Evidence of the quality of the research that underpins this case study is provided through the following peer-reviewed publications.

1. Ian Cook & Philip Crang (1996) 'The world on a plate': culinary culture, displacement and geographical knowledges. *Journal of Material Culture* 1(2), 131-153 (doi:10.1177/135918359600100201)
2. Ian Cook et al. (2004) Follow the thing: papaya. *Antipode* 36(4), 642-664 (doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2004.00441.x)
3. Harriet Hawkins, Ian Cook, Shelley Sacks, Eleanor Rawling, Helen Griffiths, Diane Swift, James Evans, Gail Rothnie, Jacky Wilson, Alice Williams et al (2011) Organic public geographies: 'making the connection'. *Antipode*, 43(3), 909-926 (doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00909.x)
4. Ian Cook & Divya Tolia-Kelly (2010) Material geographies. in Dan Hicks & Mary Beaudry (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 99-122.
5. Ian Cook & Tara Woodyer (2012) Lives of things. in Eric Sheppard, Trevor Barnes & Jamie Peck (eds.) *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Economic Geography*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 226-241
6. Ian Cook *et al* (2011-date) *followthethings.com*

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

The government funded Action Plan for Geography resulted from a successful funding bid by the Geographical Association and The Royal Geographical Society (Institute of British Geographers). This bid was underpinned by national concerns about: (i) declining enrolments in school Geography classes, (ii) the knock-on effects on recruitment to UK University Geography departments, and (iii) the persistent difficulty in widening participation in Geography as a subject. The aim of the Action Plan for Geography was therefore to update, and to make more relevant to students, the Geography that they were learning at school. In Action Plan for Geography programmes such as the 'Pilot GCSE' and the 'Young People's Geographies' project, academic and school geographers were encouraged to work together, share ideas, and co-create resources.

Ian Cook's Follow The Things research - which involved detailed multi-site, FTT ethnographies, as well as research into collaborative, affective, co-creative pedagogies - had already been drawn upon haphazardly by Geography teachers for some time. However, it entered the mainstream of UK school Geography education through his participation in a number of Action Plan for Geography projects, presentations and workshops at Geographical Association conferences, publications in teacher-facing Geography journals, and public engagement activities with school geography students. This involvement, over the course of this REF period, has led to Cook's FTT approach: (1) fundamentally **reshaping the teaching and learning of international trade in UK schools**, by influencing the drafting of the new Geography National Curriculum (as acknowledged by the CEO of The Geographical Association 2012: see evidence **item #1a**); (2) driving forward **innovation in school geography teaching**; and (3) by **making public a database on trade justice activism**.

#### 1) Reshaping the learning and teaching of international trade in UK schools

Since 2008, Cook's input to the shaping of school geography has been significant. For example, he was asked by the Geographical Association (the professional association of Geography teachers in the UK) to contribute to the Action Plan for Geography funded 'Young People's Geographies' project. He was adviser to, and fed into, the project through publications, talks and workshops. This

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led to the Follow the Things approach being adopted in Primary (**Item #2**), GCSE (**Items #1b, 3 & 4**), and A-level Geography teaching (**Item #1a**). In 2012, the importance of Follow the Things in school geography was further recognised by both the Royal Geographical Society and Geographical Association who produced Follow the Things teaching resources drawing upon Cook's work (**Items #5**); and it was acknowledged as an inspiration for the popular 'Guerrilla Geography' books and website missions of Mission:Explore (see evidence **items #1c & #6**). It has also inspired teachers to produce and freely share their own Follow the Things resources via, for example, the Times Educational Supplement's UK and Australian websites (see evidence **items #7 & 8**). Both the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (evidence **item #1c**) and Geography Curriculum Developers (e.g., see evidence **item #1b**) have written of the direct impact that Follow the Things has had on Geography school curriculum development and on the student experience, writing that it "is accessible, enjoyable and, given the grounding in a university geography department, sufficiently rigorous to underpin [the] GCSE" (**Item #1c**), and that they have been "amazed" at how its approach could encourage Year 10 students to feel "connected with such places, and that they themselves were 'geographers'" (**Item #1b**). Teachers have also argued that Follow the Things' personal approach to learning made even those students who were normally work-shy respond positively to their studies. This on-going process of collaboration led to the Follow the Things approach to trade geographies becoming part of the Geographical Association's submission to the National Curriculum for Geography consultation process in 2012. It was adopted (**Item #1a**) and retained in the final version published in 2013.

### 2) *Driving forward innovation in school geography teaching*

After being recognised as "an important resource for geography teachers at all levels" (**Item #1c**), Cook worked in 2012-13 with a group of PGCE Geography students at the University of Nottingham, who presented examples of their 'Teaching with followthethings.com' at a workshop at the 2013 GA Annual Conference. Seven teachers have since begun blogging and sharing 'tried and tested' Follow the Things classroom resources as part of a new #followtheteachers project (**Item #9 Cook & Whipp**), and new Follow the Things classroom resources have been written and published on a dedicated 'classroom' webpage. These include a user guide to Follow the Things in the new National Curriculum and a Follow the Things Ethical Trade Trump card game (**Item #9 Cook et al**).

### 3) *Making public a database of trade justice activism*

followthethings.com (Cook, REF2014 research output #1) is intended to be a resource for anyone researching and/or teaching trade justice, including filmmakers, artists, and many other publics. As can be seen on the website's 'peer review' page (**Item #10**), a wide variety of makers of non-academic Follow the Things work value highly the site's research on, and archiving of, their work. The producer of the BBC TV series 'Blood, Sweat and Takeaways', for example, wrote that the site's page on it was a "wonderful resource" that showed, in a fascinating way, "how much of an impact the shows made". To date followthethings.com has generated an international, interdisciplinary community of interest involving 32,000 unique visitors from 154 countries making 127,000 page views. Google Analytics data shows that each visitor visited an average of 3 pages, stayed on-site for an average of two and a half minutes, and that 31% of visitors have returned to view the site multiple times. Over the same period, 7,000 tweets have been sent from @followthethings, which has gained 930 followers, including activist organisations, NGOs, journalists, artists and filmmakers.

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

**#1.** Letters confirming FTT use across education levels: a. Letter from CEO of The Geographical Association (2012); b. Letter from the Secondary Curriculum Development Leader for The Geographical Association (2012b); c. Letter from the Principal Subject Officer for Geography at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2012).

**#2.** Barlow, A. (2012) Tools of the trade. *Primary Geography* 79 (Autumn), 22-3.

**#3.** Firth, R. & Biddulph, M. (2009) Whose life is it anyway? Young People's Geographies. In Mitchell, D. (ed) *Living Geography: exciting futures for teachers and students*. Cambridge: Chris

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Kington Publishing, 13-27.

**#4.** Parkinson, A (2012) How has technology impacted on the teaching of geography and geography teachers? in D. Lambert & M. Jones (eds) *Debates in Geography Education*. London: Routledge.

**#5.** RGS (2012) Research articles: follow the thing, papaya. *Geography in the News* 4 October 2012 (<http://www.geographyinthenews.rgs.org/research/> subscription only, last accessed 17 January 2013)

**#6.** Askins, K. & Raven-Ellison, D. (2012) *Spotlight on Mission: Explore Food*. *Geography*, 97(3), 163-6.

**#7.** Lovell, T. (2009) Teaching ideas: me and my mobile. *Geography Teaching Today* (<http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/curriculum-making/teaching-ideas/me-and-my-mobile/> last accessed 10 July 2009)

**#8.** krystina2 (2013a) Follow The Things Research: pupil worksheet. *Times Educational Supplement* 4 January (<http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Follow-The-Things-research-6312483/> free access, last accessed 17 January 2013); krystina2 (2013b) Follow The Things Research (adapted). *TES Australia* 4 July (<http://www.tesaustralia.com/teaching-resource/Follow-The-Things-research-6312483/>, last accessed 1 August 2013)

**#9.** Cook, I & Whipp, O. (2013) Our #followtheteachers blogging begins. *iwanttodiscussthat blog* 19 July (<http://iwanttodiscussthat.wordpress.com/2013/07/19/followtheteachersoprah/> last accessed 2 August 2013); Cook et al, I. (2013) New classroom resources. *iwanttodiscussthat blog* 26 July (<http://iwanttodiscussthat.wordpress.com/new-classroom-resources/> last accessed 2 August 2013)

**#10.** Many authors (2013-date) Peer Review. *followthethings.com* (<http://www.followthethings.com/peerreview.shtml> last accessed 1 August 2013)