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**AHRC Landscape and Environment programme Impact Fellowship
'Narrating Environmental Change' workshop - Report
14th June 2011, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), London**

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this workshop was to bring together the Primary Investigators (and Co-Investigators) from the AHRC Researching Environmental Change (REC) networks, key network members, collaborative external partners (including representatives from The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), National Trust, and LWEC) and other interested parties to discuss network outcomes, share learning experiences and generate ideas for future funding. The public value of the activities undertaken by the REC networks and more generally the importance of arts and humanities perspectives on environmental change, particularly in contributing to the cross-Council Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) programme will be subjects for discussion. Participants will be invited to explore different methods of public engagement and the possibilities offered by different narratives and histories of environmental change (global, scientific, local, cultural, negative, positive, amateur, professional).

Workshop questions

- i) What has been the **public value** of the REC networks? Who has been engaged and through what means?
 - What have been the successes of network partnerships with professional bodies, land and heritage managers and cultural institutions? (What are the implications of environmental change on these partners and their role in public engagement on the issue?)
 - Have histories and representational strategies been able to effectively engage with current and future environmental concerns?
 - What is the status of humanities evidence?
 - Is a changing framing of environmental change apparent?
 - Have performance methods successfully engaged people?

- ii) What is the role for **narrative and stories** in histories and futures of environmental change?
 - How have different perspectives and narratives been employed in the networks? global, local, scientific, cultural, positive, negative, amateur, professional, legal, future etc

iii) What difference does an **arts and humanities perspective** make to researching environmental change? How can the activities of the REC networks be used as a bridge/interface with LWEC (Living with Environmental Change)?

- How do we ensure that human value, authority and responsibility are represented effectively in the environmental sciences and initiatives like the National Ecosystem Assessment? (the idea of ‘cultural ecosystem services’)
- How do the networks connect to the environmental sciences, economics and policy? How have key scientific terms and definitions been used?
- How do we retain and expand our inter-disciplinary connections?
- How do we take the networks forward in the form of teaching, student activity, research, public voices, and publications?
- The use of innovative methodologies (i.e. performance, creative writing)

Participants

- Stephen Daniels (Director of the AHRC Landscape and Environment programme, University of Nottingham)
- Catherine Souch (Head of Research and Higher Education, RGS-IBG)
- Lucy Veale (Research Fellow AHRC Landscape and Environment programme, University of Nottingham)
- Charlotte Lloyd (Project Coordinator AHRC Landscape and Environment programme, University of Nottingham)
- Sheila Anderson (King’s College London)
- Graeme Barker (University of Cambridge)
- Stephen Bottoms (University of Leeds)
- Nick Brooks (Independent researcher and consultant)
- Joanne Clarke (University of East Anglia)
- Ben Cowell (National Trust)
- Peter Coates (University of Bristol)
- Tom Corby (University of Westminster)
- Georgina Endfield (University of Nottingham)
- Greg Garrard (Bath Spa University)
- Axel Goodbody (University of Bath)
- Mike Goodman (King’s College London)
- Gary Grubb (AHRC)
- Mike Hulme (University of East Anglia)
- Gail Lambourne (AHRC)
- Hayden Lorimer (University of Glasgow)
- David Moon (University of Durham)
- Ayesha Mukherjee (University of Exeter)
- Simon Naylor (University of Exeter)
- Dan Osborn (LWEC)
- Neil Ravenscroft (University of Brighton)
- Paul Warde (University of East Anglia)
- Mike Wilson (University College Falmouth)

Schedule

- 9:30am: Arrival, tea and coffee
- 10:00am: Welcome and introductions by Professor Stephen Daniels and Dr Catherine Souch (RGS)
- 10:30am: Researching Environmental Change Case Study presentations
i) 'Local Places, Global Processes' (Professor Peter Coates)
ii) 'Cultural Spaces of Climate' (Dr Georgina Endfield)
- 11:30am: Questions and discussion – what next for the networks? (Future plans, funding opportunities, publications, maintenance of web-based materials, LWEC and the National Ecosystem Assessment, RGS projects etc)
- 12:30pm: Keynote presentation by Professor Graeme Barker - 'The cultured rainforest: long-term human ecological histories in the highlands of Borneo'
- 1:00pm: Lunch
- 2:00pm: Images of Environmental Change – discussion and annotation of images provided by participants in relation to the three main workshop questions (3 groups).
- 3:00pm: Tea and coffee
- 3:15pm: Key words, images and issues: open discussion
- 4:15pm: Response by Professor Mike Hulme
- 5:00pm: Wine reception

Introduction

Stephen Daniels welcomed everyone to the workshop and highlighted the wide range of arts and humanities contributions to the issue of environmental change made through the REC networks, noting that there had previously been little 'environment' in the programme. The networks have covered three main themes issued in the original call:

- Histories and the ways they are told
- Representations of environmental change
- Knowledge and value

The purpose of the day was to bring these themes together and begin to pull out the public value of the research completed, whilst continuing the discussions with social and physical science. This is a fast moving story with a continually changing language. Stephen discussed the previous day's newspaper headline on climate change being dropped from the school curriculum, also noting its disappearance in recent politics. The Landscape and Environment programme's Impact Fellowship partners include the Royal Geographical Society (with the

Institute of British Geographers), our hosts for the workshop. Catherine Souch explained that the Society would be interested in maintaining connections to the networks after the workshop, helping to connect the networks to school activities, interdisciplinary journals, and a number of the Society's current projects.

Greg Garrard (**Cultural framing of environmental discourse**) noted how he had been struck by both the diversity and common purpose among those working within the 'environmental humanities' during his involvement in three REC networks. However, Greg noted that it remained the case that environmental issues are still understood by policy and the public in largely scientific terms. To counter this Greg emphasised the need for a unified presentation of the public value of arts and humanities research in the field, perhaps through the production of a concise document to tell the scientific community the value of what we do. Everyone agreed that it is important that we don't just talk to ourselves.

Peter Coates – 'Local places, global processes'

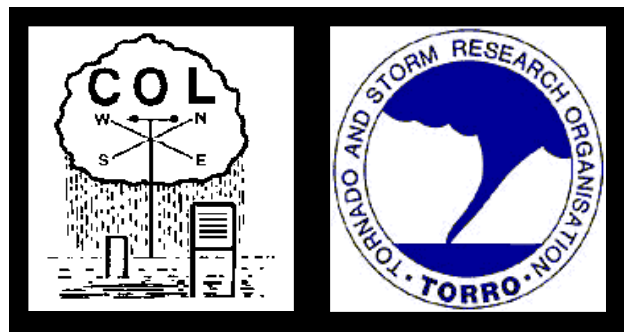


'Spraying at Welney' by Carry Akroyd

Peter Coates, David Moon and Paul Warde explained how the **Local spaces, global processes** network took the form of three site-specific/site-sensitive workshops, each working in association with an external partner. The sites: Wicken Fen, the Quantocks and Kielder Water had been chosen for being the 'first' National Nature Reserve (NNR) in the UK, the 'first' Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and northern Europe's 'largest' artificial lake and Europe's largest planted forest. The workshops brought together environmental historians (from all career stages) from different disciplines who lack a specific group association in the UK. The network meetings illustrated the importance of being onsite (in order to explore the landscape), and the rewards and challenges of working with external partners in learning about land management and its changing history. Partnerships allowed Peter and his team to gain privileged access to sites and personal oral histories of the sites studied. The aesthetics of these sites had been a key concern with an artist present at each workshop – Carry Akroyd's work on Wicken (pictured) was discussed by network members as depicting something of the quality, power and attractions of

engineering projects at Wicken, whereas sculpture at Kielder encouraged participants to look from different perspectives. Public taste and expectations of landscape were interrelated to the management teams of all three sites through what crops were sprayed and which were encouraged. Time was another consideration regarding the appreciation of the historic character of landscape and its hidden labour. What is the function of the environmental in the stories people tell of their lives? The network also traced the development of the term ‘environment’, from being something that was primarily seen as acting on people (before the 1960s) to something that is seen as being shaped by us, whilst also being something you can (and perhaps must) be an expert in. ‘Environment’ has been a concept with international reach, often chosen for its neutrality and apparent absence of valuation. The size and scale of the different workshop sites was also considered, from the big Kielder Water to the smaller quintessential English landscape of the Quantock Hills. The group had speculated about the future of small conservation units in a time of climate change. The team concluded by speculating over possible locations for future events; a nuclear power station, post-industrial city, a coastal rural-industrial location...

Georgina Endfield – ‘Cultural spaces of climate’



COL and TORRO logos

The **Cultural Spaces of Climate** network emerged from sessions at the RGS conference in 2009. Formalised through the funding call and the formation of partnerships with the RGS and RMetSoc, the main aim of the network had been to redress the increasing tendency for narratives of climate and environmental change to be global metanarratives rather than cultural and locally significant ones that focus on values, culture and belief and what climate means to people. The network made connections with enthusiast and amateur interest groups such as the Climatological Observers Link (COL) and the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation (TORRO), as well as professional climate scientists, many of whom had been open to engaging with arts and humanities perspectives. The themes for the workshops were *reculturing climate* – that considered how to incorporate arts and humanities research on climate into contemporary climate research, *historicising climate* – considering how history can help us understand present change and the social dimension of historic climate knowledge, and *popularising climate* – focusing on the role of the amateur and including a plenary from the founder of the Cloud Appreciation Society Gavin Pretor-Pinney.

Future plans include conference sessions, an early career research network, and work with the charity ‘Tipping Point’ who produce work focusing on creative responses to climate change.

The future of the networks – open discussion



Discussion in the Lowther Room, RGS-IBG, London

Steve Bottoms commented on the variety of landscapes and environments covered by network activity. His network **Reflecting on environmental change through site-based performance** had provided the opportunity to reconnect with the environment through live performance. Future plans included connecting up with the **‘Living flood histories’** network and the Environment Agency through performance involving communities at risk of flood.

Sheila Anderson spoke about her network’s (**e-Research Approaches to Historic Weather Data**) partnerships with the British Library and the ACRE (Atmospheric Circulation Reconstructions over the Earth) group at the Met Office and their success in bringing historic sources together. Wider discussion highlighted the dangers of stripping instrumental weather data from historic documents without providing context for the data (the nature of the evidence, level of trust, provenance of records). Sheila also highlighted the possibility of bringing the approach together with **Cultural spaces of climate**, bringing in citizen science and creating personal narratives. Simon Naylor spoke about his current work on scientific institutions and instruments on ships, and his dialogue with archivists and librarians – highlighting the partiality of records.

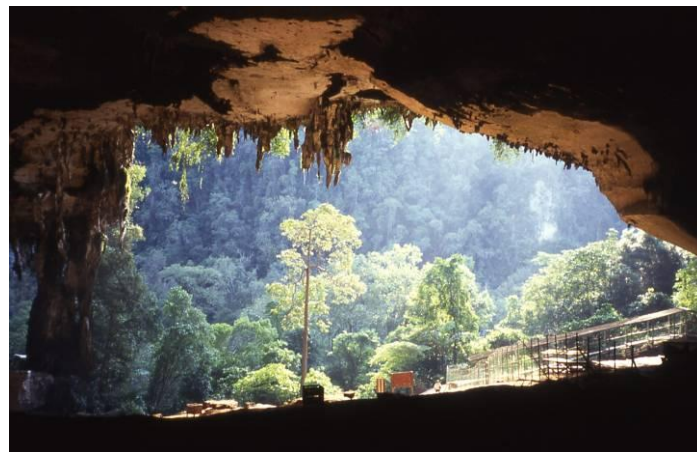
Tom Corby demonstrated the success of the **Data landscapes** network in working with artists and climate scientists in encouraging scientists to think about their own practices and the notion of ‘proxy data’ (the historical response not seeing it as a stand in for something else). Jo Clarke’s **Environmental change in prehistory** similarly brought archaeologists and environmental scientists together to look at a specific period in pre-history, discussing linkages between radio-carbon evidence and lake, sea and ice core evidence. Conversations had necessitated overcoming disciplinary differences in language and specificity versus ‘fluffiness’. This had resonance with other networks and what is happening today. Many agreed that in recent narratives there had been a failure of the imagination resulting in a lack of action and increases in CO₂ emissions. Just what does ‘living with’ mean? LWEC aims to

explore the reality of environmental change and how people receive technical messages. There is a need to know about the past and for people to have their experiences expanded.

The recently published UK National Ecosystems Assessment (NEA) outlines the importance of managing things locally. The assessment of 'Cultural Services' involved a broad range of people from different disciplines with a focus on 'value'. Neil Ravenscroft explained that we can't just value what we can count and that we need to acknowledge the whole set of attributes of ecosystems. However, the group thought that there is always an element of value that cannot be encompassed in economic terms. Value is what the arts and humanities do. Ben Cowell explained the centrality of value to the managing of National Trust sites, through the protection of the reason why places are valued. English Heritage produces a list of why every listed building is valued. In a sense it is remarkable that the 'Cultural Services' chapter has remained in the NEA as it is the only one to use a developmental frame. This offers an opportunity for the arts and humanities to collaborate on future work.

Gail Lambourne talked about future funding opportunities for the networks through the AHRC 'Care for the future' theme, and urged people to apply through 'highlight notices'. She also noted a future call for environmental history consortia grants coming in the autumn.

Graeme Barker – 'The cultured rainforest'

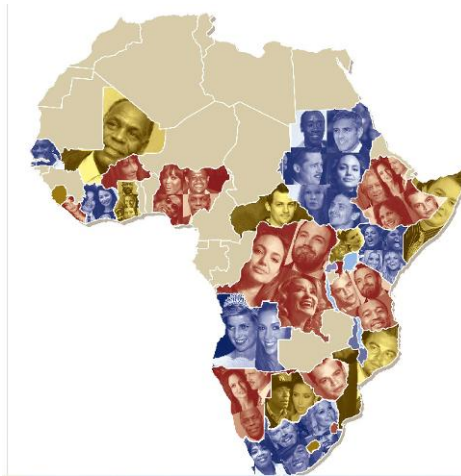


Borneo Highlands

Graeme held one of the large Landscape and Environment projects that looked at how the Borneo rainforest has shaped and been shaped by human interactions with it. The research investigated strategies for living in the rainforest, considering rainforest as a cultural artefact. Present day uses of the forest were also highlighted, cultural heritage and the demonstration of antiquity being the only way to fight logging for Kelabit farmers and Penan foragers. An archaeology of farming has been easier to locate than an archaeology of foraging - the Penan for example pride themselves in just 'making footprints' in the landscape. The research team has helped to create a past for these people through the production of an integrated monograph. Graeme highlighted the tensions involved in storytelling even between the two indigenous groups in the area and the importance of stories that people are reluctant to tell.

Images of environmental change

The aim of the afternoon session was to address the large framing questions of the workshop using images selected by participants as prompts for discussion.



Celebrity map of Africa

Simon Naylor (**Anticipatory histories**) summarised how his group had identified three key themes from their image selection; framing, voice and stories and site specificity. Mike Goodman's image from the **Spectacular Environmentalisms** network showing a map of Africa and celebrities dominated discussions about the role of expertise, voice and credibility. What are our expectations of these visual tools? Axel Goodbody's **Cultural framing of environmental discourse** network had looked at the foregrounding and back-grounding of issues and the use of narratives to frame issues. Peter's image of a tunnel from **Local Spaces, global processes** showed a built, manufactured environment and a monument to a lost river.



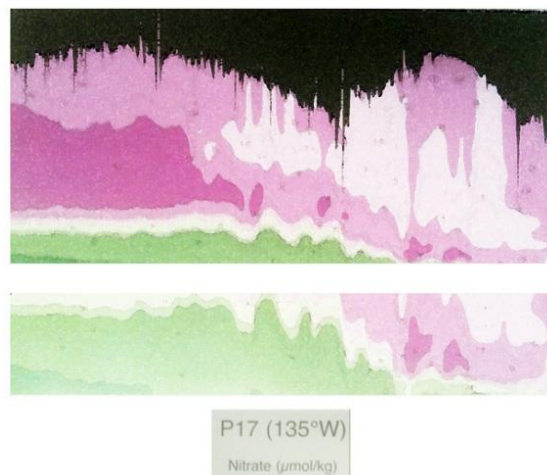
'Being, not being a tree' and group discussion

Ben Cowell explained how the National Trust has to tell stories of environmental change, picking stuff up before it enters the public consciousness, and the group discussed the role of 'change' in the visitor experience. Steve Bottom's images from **Reflecting on environmental change through site-based performance** included a photo of a performance 'Being, not being a tree' at Fountain's Abbey. This was a moment of controversy in the group over the value of this type of engagement with the environment. The photograph becomes a record, and way of seeing change. Hayden's **Values of environmental writing** network

meetings had discussed the various forms and uses of literacy (in the form of creative environmental writing from campaigning to the new nature writing) and their techniques of communicating environmental change through urgency or poetics rather than image. Hayden also noted the rise of the manifesto format, suiting an environmental predicament focused on targets. The use of theatre and documentary forms to communicate climate change issues was also discussed. David Moon's image of the Quantock Hills was also taken from a network meeting, discussions of the AONB invaded by the presence of Hinckley Point nuclear power station, issues of pollution and contamination, raising questions about the aesthetics of various technologies. David also highlighted the success of bringing in artists to the workshops, the Quantocks associated with the Romantic poets.

The group noted that we were discussing a global scale issue yet none of the pictures chosen were trying to engage with the global. Instead we have situated local accounts which are all occurring against a scientific narrative/backdrop which is global – because the global doesn't engage people? However people have their own accounts at the local level making it harder to bring in the connected science, yet behavioural change needs to come from the lived experience. A helpful concept may be that of 'eco-cosmopolitanism' giving a sense of place and a sense of planet (Ursula Heisse).

Audience is key and there needs to be awareness that there are many publics, how do we turn the aware into the active? The group also briefly discussed values and their articulation. Do photographs help us deal with change or comparative moments?



Cold War watercolours by Tom Corby

The final group explained how Tom Corby's images from **Data landscapes** suggested both a data intimacy and expressions of scientific knowledge. Mike Wilson presented visuals from the **Living flood histories** network showing creative expressions of flood and flood aftermath, and an imaginary map predicting coastal change. The varied involvement of scientists within the networks was discussed alongside the process by which authority is conferred to scientists who often don't want it – they have the authority to present the data but not what we should do about it. The role of narrative, stories and experiences in the network activities was discussed. The difference the environment makes to the arts and humanities became a conversation about changes to academic disciplines.

Response – Mike Hulme

Mike Hulme was a member of the commissioning panel for the REC networks and an active member of four of those funded by the call. His response began by asking ‘What knowledges count?’ in terms of the political, policy and cultural processes shaping our world. A wide variety of disciplines have been represented through the networks but Mike questioned whether the ‘environmental humanities’ present could (or indeed should) speak with a single voice or even a consensus? Consensus can be dangerous. The IPCC has achieved a hegemonic status but many disciplines are excluded from that account of climate change. Mike then highlighted the number of academic journals from a wide array of arts and humanities disciplines producing special issues on climate change; anthropology, communications, ethics, historical geography, history of science, museum studies etc.

The importance of scale and place was emphasised. At what scales do different knowledges claim jurisdiction? What data count? There needs to be recognition that different disciplines have very different conceptions of data. Likewise which performances of data count? Models, stories, visuals, enchantments? And how are these validated? What is the relationship with different experts and expertise; personal, cultural, professional, disciplined, amateur and professional? → Science as cultural practice is not unified.

Many of the networks have set out to challenge the assumptions that pervade certain types of policy making (among them scientism, presentism, apocalypse, environmental determinism, celebrity). They have embraced cultural complexity, recognising different frames that are often in conflict and the importance of the immersive qualities of personal lived experiences. The value of the programme, of public values themselves and their relationship to the concept of ‘shared social values’ used by the NEA needs to be considered. Mike pointed out that the values by which each generation operates by may change more quickly than the environment itself. Values have a huge impact on the visions we want to create and scenario thinking/planning often hasn’t recognised the diversity of these values. We need to open up rather than close down visions of the future and arts and humanities research should play a leading role here.

Investigating how knowledges are made can help to overcome the great divide between the arts and sciences, and provided the opportunity to argue for similarities too. There is great potential for serious cross-disciplinary work as we move away from the idea that not all environmental problems are scientific problems.

Key words from the workshop

- Environmental humanities
- Public value
- Site sensitive
- Site sensitivity
- Beauty
- Pleasingness
- Time/Timeless
- Scale
- Conservation
- Walk and talk
- Climate
- Culture
- Communication/Community
- History
- Knowledge
- Amateur/professional
- Environment
- Aesthetics
- Human-made
- Site-based/site-sensitivity/specificity
- Evidence/data
- Climate pulses
- Imagination
- Local
- Spatial humanities

- Shared language
 - Value(s)/shared social values
 - Permanent preservation
 - Framing
- Voice
 - Data intimacy
 - Stories
 - Scales and size