

The projects for this programme were commissioned in late 2002 and started their research by spring 2003. The programme will run until about June 2004 and consists of fifteen projects lasting for about a year. Summary descriptions of each project, researcher profiles and contact details are available on the Programme website (see back page). This newsletter reports on some of the early events and ideas generated by the projects and Programme.

A second and final newsletter will be produced in April 2004 reporting on the main results of the Programme. Research Briefs on some of the main themes and conclusions of the programme will be produced in 2003 and early 2004.

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## WHY A RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN BEHAVIOUR?

It is crucial for the effective development of environmental policy that it is based on a sound understanding of human behaviour towards the environment and how such behaviour might change. Both human behaviour and environmental change are formidably complex areas, and their combination compounds the complexity. Interdisciplinary research from a variety of theoretical perspectives is called for, covering a broad range of environmental issues.

The core objectives of the programme are to seek insights, and avenues for further research, into the following questions:

- **Why do people behave as they do towards the natural environment?**
- **How do or will people seek to adapt their behaviour in response to environmental change, especially rapid environmental change?**
- **What public policy approaches might persuade people to change their behaviour, either to mitigate the extent of negative environmental change, or to adapt to it in ways that do not exacerbate it, and to change their behaviour in ways that are least costly for society as a whole?**


In addition to the substantive outputs from each project, the programme will increase understanding of the area as a whole and produce advice and recommendations to the ESRC on how it should take this research area forward in future.

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# what is the environment?



**The Programme is holding a Research Seminar with the title ‘What is the Environment?’ at PSI on June 23rd, as its contribution to the ESRC’s Social Science Week. Eight Programme researchers will make presentations on the following subjects:**

## **Perceptions from Different Communities**

- **The Environment and the Indian Middle Classes** Emma Mawdesley
- **The Environment and Saharan Peoples** Jeremy Keenan
- **The Environment and UK Low-Income Communities** Jake Elster/Anne Power

## **Perceptions from Different Contexts**

- **The Environment and Small Businesses** Robert Blackburn/Andrea Revell
- **The Environment and the Home** Elizabeth Shove/Heather Chappells

## **Perceptions from Different Applications**

- **What is Environmental Appraisal Appraising?** Tim Rayner
- **The Environment and Genetic Modification** Andy Dobson
- **The Environment and Learning** John Foster/Stephen Gough

Below two of the presenters set out some of their ideas on this theme.



## **Social science research and the ‘environment’ by Jeremy Keenan, University of East Anglia**

Many of the peoples around the world who tend to be referred to as ‘tribal’ or ‘non-western’ are invariably faced with major and often seemingly insoluble problems of resource management and associated social and political conflicts, which are often caused or exacerbated by the intervention of external agencies such as governments, multinationals, NGOs, etc. One reason for this is that external agents often fail to understand the fundamental nature, culture and values of the peoples with whom they are engaging.

Drawing on a wealth of social anthropological experience and data, this project focuses on the Tuareg peoples of the Sahara to illustrate one of the biggest problems being faced today by indigenous and threatened peoples in most of the world’s extreme environments – such as hot deserts, high mountains

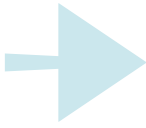
zones, polar regions, tropical rain forests, etc. This problem is that they and their environments are the target destinations of the world’s voracious tourism industry, often on a huge scale. (Travel & Tourism is the world’s largest industry, comprising more than 10% of global GDP). The impact of tourism on these societies and their environments has been complex. While often seen ‘positively’ – especially by governments and associated development agencies (not to mention travel agencies themselves) – as a conduit for economic development, tourism development has nearly always been the subject of conflicting strategies, with its benefits often being outweighed by its many downsides in the form of the creation of new or the exacerbation of existing social and economic cleavages, and with damage to both the physical and cultural environment.

Unlike most external agents, the Tuareg - like all such

people around the world - do not see their environment simply in physical terms, but as a cultural entity that is inextricably linked, often in the most complex ways, with the social order. In their rush to exploit the Sahara’s enormous tourism potential, we show that the combined failure of local governments, international development agencies and tourism companies to understand and share this integral socio-cultural perspective of the environment is likely to lead to what the people of the Sahara themselves are now referring to as an ‘environmental catastrophe’. But, this catastrophe, unless it is averted, will not be simply to the physical environment. Nor will its implications be limited to the economic and political spheres. It will also have devastating and irreversible cultural and social consequences.

Social scientists, especially social anthropologists, have a key role to play in helping external agents avert such catastrophes.

# what is the environment?



## 'What's Dog Sh\*\* got to do with global warming?' by Jake Elster, London School of Economics

Most people are probably familiar with the idea that the environment is a middle class issue – membership of Greenpeace and buying organic food come with their own stereotypes. However, this idea has been strongly challenged by a growing body of work and practice looking at the links between environmental issues and the experiences of people living in low-income communities in the UK.

People living in the most deprived areas in the UK also often suffer from the worst environments. For example, environmental hazards, such as air pollution and traffic danger, are often worse in more deprived areas. Living environments also tend to be worse, with neglected buildings and open spaces, vandalism, and fly tipping.

Environmental problems such as dog fouling, rubbish, and neglected parks are often high on the agenda for low-income communities, often leading to local action. For example, the Shell Better Britain Campaign has a database of 26,000 local groups that are taking action to address local environmental and social issues, through projects such as estate clean ups, community gardens and campaigning against incinerators.

People may ask how dog fouling, vandalism and traffic danger can be important for sustainable development when compared with the global problems of climate change or loss of biodiversity? A natural focus on local environmental issues, and on action that

addresses local needs, can have relevance for sustainable development in a number of ways. For example, locally relevant issues engage a much wider audience than more abstract issues like global warming, and there is evidence that involvement in local action can lead to wider environmental awareness and behaviour change. Tackling neglect and area decline may have a local focus but it can help prevent area abandonment and demolition that has high environmental and social costs.

Talking to people living in low-income areas reveals a widespread concern and engagement with wider environmental issues, which people are often unable to express practically. For example a community activist living on a low-income estate in Colchester said that she and her friends were concerned about wider environmental problems and did what they could – like buying dolphin friendly tuna. But she couldn't afford organic food and there were no local recycling schemes. This resident was involved in a local community group that provided much needed local services and facilities for people on the estate, including a mother and toddler group and community café. The group also provided fresh fruit and vegetables at cost price from a local pesticide-free farm. The fresh food stall tended to run at a financial loss, but they felt it was important enough to keep subsidising it from the café profits, in an area where it was impossible to buy fresh fruit and vegetables locally at an affordable price.

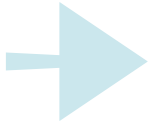
LSE Housing, a research team

at the London School of Economics, will be investigating these and other links between environmental issues and human behaviour in UK low-income communities. We will bring together results from previous research and large-scale surveys, and will carry out new research by talking to people from 10 low-income neighbourhoods around the UK, to try and answer questions such as: what environmental issues and pressures affect peoples' behaviour in low-income communities?

what factors affect how people behave towards the environment in this context? For example, are there any constraints on more environmentally friendly behaviour, such as cost, or access to facilities (like recycling services)? can local action on local environmental and social concerns be relevant to wider sustainable development problems? For example, can involvement in local action lead to wider awareness or behavioural change? Can small local actions make a contribution to national sustainable development goals?

We will highlight any lessons that can be learned by policy makers and practitioners to help increase positive behaviour towards the environment, and help people adapt to environmental problems and change.

For more information about our project please visit the ESRC Environment and Human behaviour web site at: <http://www.psi.org.uk/ehb/projects/power.html> or contact Jake Elster at: [j.elster@lse.ac.uk](mailto:j.elster@lse.ac.uk)



## Natural Capital: Metaphor, Learning and Human Behaviour: Seminar Report

**The Natural Capital project held its first research seminar at Lancaster on 14th / 15th April 2003. Themes for exploration concerned the “natural capital” metaphor – its origins and status within the political economy of sustainable development, its implications for sustainability education and its possible bearings on behaviour change. Participating were academics from disciplines including economics, politics, education, geography, ecology, science studies and philosophy, with the business, policy and local government worlds also represented.**

Presentations from different perspectives framed the seminar. Tom Burke of Rio Tinto plc and Robin Grove-White of Lancaster University, both former campaigners now in senior advisory and academic roles, reviewed the history and prospects of the environmental agenda, suggesting that what both saw as its currently stalled momentum required (among other things) a richer understanding of the place of economic metrics in policy-making. Maria Åkerman, of the University of Tampere (Finland), traced the development of the natural capital idea, with its multiple semantic possibilities, as a contested concept within environmental economics and the wider social discourse of sustainability. John Foster (Lancaster) argued from the nature of metaphor as a rhetorical form that adequate recognition of its epistemic force presupposed a “learning society” characterised by creative, open-ended exploration of emergent meanings at all levels; except in such a society, the “capital” metaphor would tend to impoverish our understanding of those human-natural relations which it sought to capture. By contrast, Paul Ekins of the Policy Studies Institute outlined recent research on critical natural capital (Ekins et al. 2003) which illustrated how treating natural resources as literally a capital stock might provide an operational grasp on the requirements for making development environmentally sustainable.

One achievement was simply to generate and maintain a real dialogue on these issues among people from such a variety of intellectual and practical backgrounds. By the end, brains were hurting, but there was clear gain from the pain, in the emergence of two strong connected lines for further enquiry.

The first of these asks: what formal and informal learning dispositions can we make, as

a society, to ensure that economic models like natural capital serve effective policy-making without diminishing the central human realities they address?

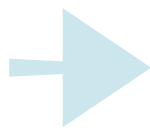
The second concerns the relation between learning itself and behaviour. If learning is just altering the information set on the basis of which we evaluate possible futures, longer-term environmental benefits will always tend to be discounted against the immediate costs of significant behaviour change, whatever economic framework we use. But learning which is inherently about creating, keeping open and re-valuing learners’ future options has readiness for such change already built into it. How might we configure such learning institutionally around core environmental models and metaphors?

Answers to both questions will be pursued in increasing detail through the next three seminars.

### REFERENCE

Ekins, P., Simon, S., Deutsch, L., Folke, C. & De Groot, R. 2003 ‘A Framework for the Practical Application of the Concepts of Critical Natural Capital and Strong Sustainability’ in Special Section of Ecological Economics, edited by Paul Ekins, Carl Folke & Rudolf de Groot, Vol.44 No.2/3, pp.165-185





## Rapid Climate Change: A Sociological Perspective

**Four projects in the Programme are focusing on different aspects of rapid climate change.**

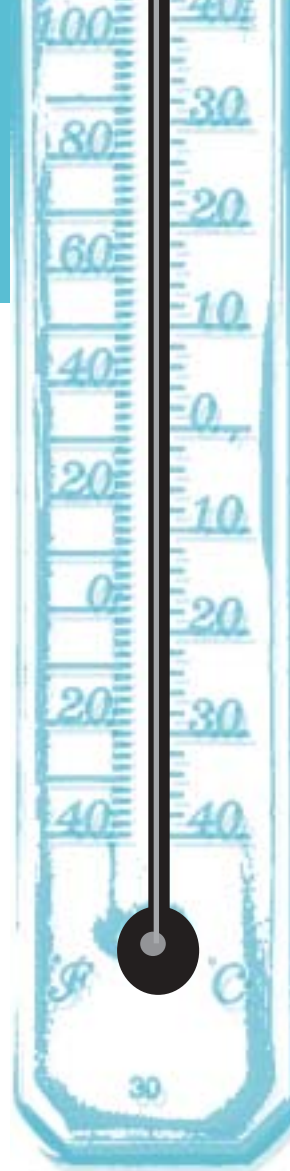
**This view is from Simon Niemeyer, University of Birmingham**

Climate is pervasive in daily life. It impacts the way we behave: what we wear, where we prefer to live and holiday. And also our livelihoods, as part of a wider impact on economic systems, including its effect on agriculture and global trade. Indeed, it shapes the conditions within which whole state systems operate, so much that one political philosopher (Montesquieu) labelled it the 'first among empires'. If climate alters dramatically it confounds assumptions governing social systems — impacting our communities, economies and affairs of state. Empires may not fall, but disruption will follow. At which point does this disruption occur? We have evidence suggesting it does; and useful frameworks conceptualising shifts between adaptive and maladaptive responses. There is, however, little knowledge about how much or what has to change before social systems cross these behavioural thresholds or what will occur. Remedying this shortfall will be difficult. Conceptualising rapid climate change within the natural sciences is complicated enough, and adding human behaviour even more so, for a number of reasons. First, humans are active agents within larger environmental systems. They act 'reflexively' rather than passively in response to environmental stimuli; or, to put it another way, facts do not

determine behaviour so much as perceptions about those facts. Second, these perceptions are mediated by a whole range of factors, such as public understanding of science and institutional settings (role of the media, provision of social security and defensive measures etc.). Finally, the relationship between perception and behaviour is itself complex. Understanding how individuals might perceive climate change might be a necessary condition for understanding behavioural thresholds, but it is not sufficient.

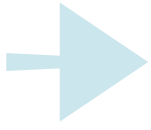
Consider the historical case of Switzerland's 'year without a summer' in 1816 when endless rain was blamed on the installation of lightning conductors, with widespread public demand leading to their removal. Clearly the perceptions did not match the facts, nor would a climate scientist consider the event as indicative of a change in climate regime. Yet the implications were real, the response being arguably maladaptive. The case of decadal drought in the Sahel region of Africa is also illustrative, where communities have adapted to rapidly changing climatic conditions. It is unclear that similar adaptation would occur in the UK, not least because its institutional arrangements are more complex. One reason for adaptation in the Sahel may be a lack of choice but to adapt. Experiencing comparable changes in UK could easily lead to maladaptation if public expectations place demands on public institutions that are unprepared and unable to cope.

Thus, a social science perspective of rapid climate change will involve more than different temporal scales to



those based on natural science. There is, however, scope for common ground. Where climate scientists differentiate between climate events and climate change, the same can apply to sociological conceptions. The 'year without a summer' might thus be seen as a sociological 'event' rather than a longstanding change induced by a rapid shift in climate regime. Analogies might also be explored between human-induced versus natural climate variability, and socially-mediated human responses (based on perception) versus those primarily attributable to actual shifts in climate regime.

Pinning down thresholds, and the nature of social responses to climate change will be challenging, but certainly important: far easier to be prepared if forewarned. It is this illumination that drives the research into the social impacts of rapid climate change.



## Environmental Social Science and the 'Battle of the Sahara'

by **Jeremy Keenan,**  
University of East Anglia

One of the aims of this project is to demonstrate, with specific reference to the Tuareg of the Sahara – the notorious 'blue-veiled warlords of the Sahara' – that environmental social science research can make a major contribution to the future sustainable development of their 'homelands'.

For many years external development 'experts' have tended to see the Tuareg's major resources in terms of their physical environment, notably water and pastoral resources. Many of them are now viewing the Central Sahara as a potential major global tourism destination. The Tuareg themselves tend to see their natural resources and their environment a little differently. While the management of water and pastoral resources is important to them, many of them are beginning to see their cultural heritage, especially the region's prehistoric rock art and associated archaeological remains, as their most valuable natural resource and asset.

After several years of closure because of security and 'political instability', tourism in the Sahara is returning with a vengeance. While Tuareg want small-scale, environmentally sustainable tourism, it has taken no more than a couple of years for them to see how current tourism development strategies, largely in the hands of 'external' governments and agencies, is leading to what they perceive as an environmental catastrophe. Apart from the



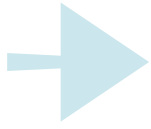
degradation of the fragile physical environment, the development of mass tourism and unregulated 'tourisme sauvage' is causing immense damage to their cultural heritage. They are watching their future being destroyed before their eyes as the floodgates to mass, predominantly European tourism, are being prised open by vested commercial interests. Their struggle to convince their governments to develop sustainable development strategies, in which priority is given to the conservation of their environmental and cultural heritage, has been described as 'the last great battle of the Sahara'. Their battle is not only with government agencies but several European travel agencies who encourage their clients to loot the Sahara's 'valuable' prehistoric paintings and artefacts.

In 2002 a number of Tuareg began to use the Internet to track down European looters. A year later they presented their

government with a detailed dossier containing details of German agencies at the centre of this looting and demanded their arrest. At more or less the same time, 31 European tourists (all apparently German-speaking) in 7 separate groups disappeared without trace in the Algerian Sahara. At the time of writing this article, most media speculation is that they have been kidnapped by supposed Al-Qaeda terrorists. Although there is no evidence at this stage to link these tourists with the current looting of antiquities, local tourism agencies struggling to put an end to this 'tourisme sauvage' and pillaging have been quick to publicise that all of them were travelling 'illegally' and without guides. The 'Battle for the Sahara' is now truly engaged: it is about 'terrorism', tourism, the environment and the conservation of cultural heritage.

# project information

*This section of the Newsletter contains more detailed information about some of the projects.*



**Susan Owens/Tim Rayner/Olivia Bina**  
**University of Cambridge**  
Appraisal, institutional learning and sustainability: defining a new agenda

Can new forms of appraisal of policies, projects and programmes contribute to the formation of consensus behind more sustainable government policies? What can existing literatures on policy science, planning theory and the sociology of knowledge tell us about what might be expected of new approaches, such as strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal? How might insights from such sources be combined with the experience of practitioners to inform an agenda for research into relationships between practices of appraisal, institutional learning and sustainable development? These are the key questions being addressed by this project, which is developing the award holders' previous work on transport policy, strategic environmental assessment and concepts of environmental capacity. Emergent themes include how legitimacy for the results of appraisal exercises can be secured if the pretence of 'objectivity' is abandoned, how those conducting appraisal might become better at identifying and handling the conflicting frames of the protagonists in particular policy controversies, and the manner in which different instruments mobilise particular conceptions of sustainability.

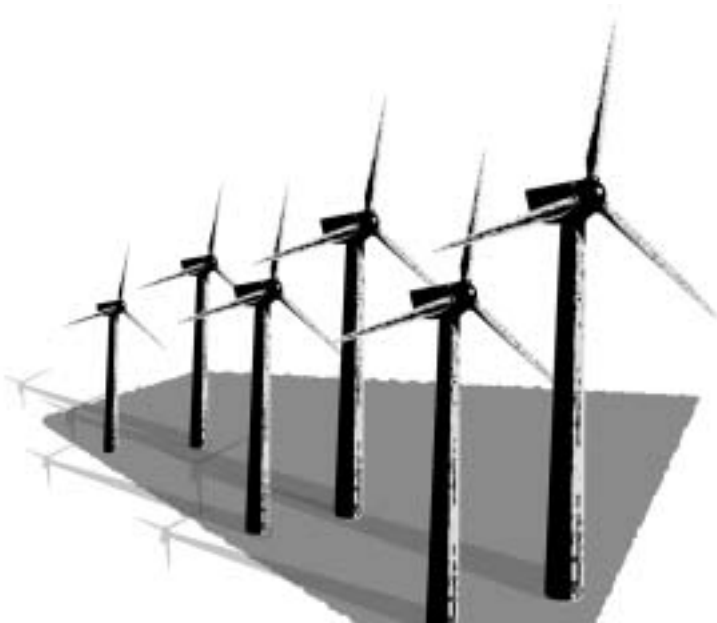
**John Benson/Claire Haggett**  
**University of Newcastle**  
Tilting at Windmills? The Attitude Behaviour Gap in Renewable Energy Conflicts

The contemporary importance of this project, which is examining the apparent gap between high public support for renewable energy (including wind power) and high public opposition to individual windfarm developments (leading to low success in permitting decisions), has been reinforced by the Government White Paper on energy. The commitment to 10% of our electricity being generated from renewable sources by 2010 is restated and the aspiration for 20% by 2020 is underlined. Given that the current contribution from renewables is hardly 2% (excluding major hydro), the so-called "barriers" to realising Government targets are of considerable interest. The White Paper declaration that "It is clear that achieving the 10% target over the next seven years will be very challenging" can be seen as a considerable understatement, despite a recent increase in permissions for windfarms, mostly in Scotland.

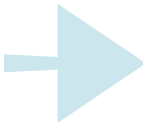
The project is multi-disciplinary and involves twelve academic partners in the region. A number of key themes are already emerging from across the divergent disciplines involved. These include the need to examine and understand the planning processes by which renewables projects are permitted and the connections between public participation and outcomes. This includes issues of control over the processes, power, the imposition of a project on local communities or landscapes and perceptions of its impact and risk. Closely related are issues of trust in experts and science and differences in lay and expert knowledge. Emerging from a number of different disciplines are key questions about context and the wider contingent issues that are crucial to understanding any siting controversy or dispute. It has also become clear that considering the situation before and after a renewables development is built is also vital.

The differences in public attitudes and behaviour towards wind energy developments can be considered in terms of value pluralism and incommensurability, and this is being explored.

Potential research tools to assess these issues



are being highlighted and disciplinary commonalities and possible interfaces between them considered. Also being taken into account are cross-national comparisons and understanding of how and why attitudes towards wind energy differ in countries such as Denmark and Germany where developments are more prevalent. The innovative interdisciplinary nature of the project is already allowing parallels in themes and approaches to be drawn out and reflection upon this at a meta-level has also begun.



## **Andrea Revell/Robert Blackburn Kingston University** UK Small Firms and Their Response to Environmental Issues

Constituting around 99% of all firms in the UK (SBS 2002), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) undoubtedly have a significant environmental impact. In the UK it is estimated that as much as 60% of carbon dioxide emissions from business result from the activities of SMEs (HMT 1998). Globally SME's may collectively contribute to as much as 70% of all pollution (Hillary 2000).

This study examines small firm responses to growing environmental pressures from markets and state regulations. The relevance of 'ecological modernisation' (EM) theory as an analytical framework for understanding the environmental practices of SMEs is being explored. A central tenet of EM theory is that we have entered a new industrial era, one of radical restructuring of industrial processes along ecological lines. It is postulated that the 'greening' of industry is being encouraged by a market economy and an enabling, decentralised and participatory state which seeks to create partnerships with business to protect the environment as well as ensure economic growth. Due to certain kinds of reform (entailing a heavy emphasis on technological innovations), it is argued that both economic and environmental gains have been made, providing evidence that economic growth can be de-linked from environmental degradation. If ecological restructuring of the UK market place is indeed taking place as EM theory suggests, theoretically this should be reflected in the practices of small firm owners, given that they make up such a huge proportion of industry. The following core tenets of EM theory (Mol & Sonnenfeld 2000) are of particular interest to this study:


- The increasing importance of market dynamics and economic agents in ecological restructuring. Are small firms in the UK ecologically restructuring? Are market pressures and/or state regulations stimulating change?
- Changing discursive practices and emerging ideologies. Are owner-managers increasingly seeing economic and environmental interests as harmonious? Is there evidence of an emerging environmental ethic?
- Transformations in the role of the state. Are small firms included in environmental policy networks in the UK? Is the government becoming more consensual with regards to the small firm sector?

To explore these themes, data is being collected using face-to-face interviews with 'key informants' (drawn from relevant industry organisations and government) and 40 small firms within the construction and food industries. It is hoped that the findings will help to inform policymakers of the kinds of policy approaches that might persuade small business owners to reduce their considerable collective 'ecological footprint'. The study will also make a timely conceptual contribution to the business and environment literature by providing a broad theoretical understanding of environmental reform amongst small firms, an area that has attracted little attention from scholars despite the sector's pivotal role in the UK economy.

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- SBS (Small Business Service) (2002) Press release: *Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) Statistics for 2001 in the UK*, <http://www.sbs.gov.uk/>

# project information



**John Foster**  
**University of Lancaster**  
Natural Capital: Metaphor,  
Learning and Human Behaviour

The Natural Capital: Metaphor, Learning and Human Behaviour project is a collaboration between colleagues from the Institute for Environment, Philosophy and Public Policy at Lancaster University and the Centre for Research in Education and the Environment at the University of Bath. It seeks to gain insight into the currently stalled momentum of the environmental agenda and the potential of new kinds of institutional and social learning to restore that momentum, focusing particularly on the role of the 'natural capital' concept and associated ideas such as intergenerational stewardship in framing mainstream sustainability discourse. Can our mainstream institutions use such ideas creatively? Are bureaucracies bound to be uncomfortable with metaphor? What are the implications for the learning society and for behaviour change?

Part of the research work comprises a series of four two-day seminars, for which a "constituency" of some fifty economists, educationalists, philosophers, other academics and key people from government, agencies, NGOs and corporations has already been built up. The first of these seminars, held in April, is reported elsewhere in this Newsletter. Details of the others planned can be found on the project's main website at: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/naturalcapital/>

An important additional research element is the project's Discussion Site. Here are posted papers and other materials circulated to seminar attenders and reports of the seminars as they take place. Key research themes are also indicated as separate topic heads. Not only seminar attenders but anyone else interested can have password access to add comments and discussion points to these pages. As comment builds up on all this material and the discussion develops, further emerging themes will be identified, hopefully informing the intellectual content of the later seminars. This is obviously an open-ended process, and the organisation and signposting of the site will be kept under constant review to ensure accessibility.

Anyone wanting to join in either the seminars or this on-line discussion forum should contact the Project Co-ordinator, John Foster:  
[j.foster@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:j.foster@lancaster.ac.uk)



**Clare Johnson/Sylvia Tunstall/  
Middlesex University**  
**Edmund Penning-Rowell**  
Crises as catalyst for adaptation:  
human responses to major floods

Our research is, we believe, operating in a new field of flood hazard management in seeking to develop a model of flood policy transition which is both multi-theoretical in design and case study influenced. Since the project began, we have been exploring two inter-related themes. Firstly, we have been undertaking a contextual analysis of the four flood events (1947, 1953, 1998, 2000) that have had an acknowledged impact on public policy and popular discourse in England and Wales. This has created four 'case study files' illustrating the key contextual characteristics of these floods, their influence on public policy discourse and policy outcomes. In tandem with this, we have developed a model of policy transition drawing on a wide range of theoretical approaches to the study of policy stability and policy change.

This model articulates two distinct paths in the development of flood policy dependent on the occurrence, or otherwise, of a nation-wide flood. The first path is one of incremental policy change whereby policy change is framed as a continuous process of learning and adaptation reflecting changes in contextual factors on the one hand and human behaviour characteristics on the other. The second path is one of catalytic policy change, which explicitly articulates the role of crises as catalysts for such changes in policy and human behaviour. Here, the national flood event offers a 'window of opportunity' for increasing the rate at which policy changes, the range of actors who have access to the agenda setting process and the number of policy ideas generated by these actors. This, it is hypothesised, directly



## project information

influences the definition of the policy problem and the rate at which policies change in response to major floods.

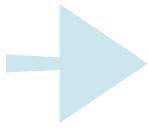
It is now our intention to apply this model to the analysis of post-WWII flood policy in England and Wales. This will be achieved through further desktop analysis of the flood policy domain and in the use of semi-structured interviews of key actor groups in each case study. This will then feed into our final policy transitional analysis.



**Heather Chappells/Elizabeth Shove**  
**University of Lancaster**  
Future Comforts: reconditioning  
urban environments

The “Future Comforts” project started at the beginning of April. The project is exploring social conventions of comfort and implications for the sustainability of the indoor environment. Initial work involves collating existing material on comfort-related issues and mapping the interests of researchers and practitioners working in relevant fields. In line with the first of these objectives, we presented a paper at the annual conference of the British Sociological Association in York. The paper outlined the historical development of current concepts of comfort and examined the problematic linkage between routinely accepted but unsustainable specifications of thermal comfort that promise to exacerbate rather than mitigate climate change. Over the next three months we intend to further review cross-disciplinary work on comfort and produce an extensive annotated bibliography designed to stimulate debate and provide a useful resource for other researchers in the field. This bibliography and other papers associated with the project will shortly be made available on a web-site. In line with our second objective of mapping current interests, we have attended meetings organised by the UK Thermal Comfort group. Participation in these events has enabled us to identify key actors (including architects, designers and building scientists) involved in the specification of thermal standards for buildings and energy systems in the UK and to take stock of their roles and objectives with regard to current and future developments. Relevant members of this group will also be the subject of in-depth interviews during the summer.





**Ideas presented at the  
First Programme  
Workshop  
by Susan Owens,  
University of Cambridge**

The success of efforts to develop more sustainable government policies and promote environmentally benign behaviours on the part of individuals is often held to depend on the generation of more accurate technical information about the nature of environmental problems, and its more effective communication both to policy making elites and individuals going about their daily lives. However, the findings of a considerable body of research, in a wide variety of contexts, caution against the notion that a linear process of transfer of more and better 'facts' from technical experts to policy makers and lay publics is necessarily what is required.

In terms of efforts to promote 'pro-environmental' individual behaviour, what has often been called the 'information deficit' model has increasingly been the subject of criticism by researchers – though its appeal to policy makers nevertheless appears enduring. Once an ignorant or irrational public receives the correct facts from a scientific elite, the model suggests, people will begin to recognise the imperative of behavioural change, or abandon supposedly irrational fears of beneficial technological innovation. There is not space here to elaborate on important critiques, but the tendency to play down resource and time constraints facing individuals who may otherwise be willing to change their behaviour may be noted. The model also

neglects issues of agency and responsibility: individuals may perceive, correctly, that their own actions are of little consequence, and/or reject responsibility in the absence of more supportive frameworks.

A more serious problem with the deficit model is that it ignores the new realities of the 'risk society', in which faith in expert judgement has been eroded by a series of high-profile and costly episodes such as BSE. Significantly, in the wake of these events, a scepticism towards official presentations of the 'facts' may be regarded as a rational phenomenon, albeit one based on a different kind of rationality, or 'framing' of a situation, to that which informs the thinking of the elite. Whilst lay people may not understand the complexities of the science in a particular controversy, they are aware of commercial imperatives underlying the introduction of certain technologies, and experience has taught them to be suspicious of the competence and impartiality of regulatory frameworks. Frequently it is trust, not information, that is missing.

The thinking of rival interest groups at loggerheads in particular controversies is also likely to be informed by incompatible 'frames'. Communication between protagonists in many debates is frequently characterised as akin to a 'dialogue of the deaf', which the introduction of more and better 'facts' cannot overcome. This is because what constitutes a relevant fact is itself determined by the frames through which protagonists view the world. Part of a move towards a more consensual and sustainable

future will involve the creation of more deliberative policy processes in which protagonists are obliged to reflect on their own frames, which too often are taken for granted, and on those of others. Greater attention needs to be paid to how a process of 'frame reflection' can lead to the development of research programmes and knowledge generation that is acceptable to a greater array of stakeholders than tends to be the case at present.

# report of the first programme workshop

## Paul Ekins reports

The first Programme Workshop was held on February 11th 2003 at PSI. For programme researchers only, it scoped out some of the core cross-cutting themes of the programme (see below). Another Programme Workshop will be held in autumn 2003, and will include some limited external participation. The final Programme Conference will be a public event to be held in spring 2004. If you would like to attend either of these programme events, please contact the Programme Co-ordination Office.

## Cross-Cutting Programme Themes

The themes and presenters at the Workshop were:

- **Values and Attitudes:**  
Emma Mawdsley
- **Context, Cultures and Institutions:**  
Mark Pelling
- **Information, Communication and Participation:**  
Susan Owens (*see page 11*)
- **Incentives and Sanctions:**  
Stephen Potter

At several points in the rich discussions that followed the presentations, researchers expressed their desire to interact with each other on these and other themes, which included:

- **Rapid climate change**
- **Theoretical approaches to environment and behaviour being employed by the projects**
- **Citizenship and the environment**
- **Ownership/property rights**
- **Private gain and collective benefits**
- **The scale of behaviour change required**
- **Social/institutional/policy learning**

The Programme is committed to producing a number of Research Briefings and some of these subjects might be suitable topics for some of these Briefings. The ESRC has provided some financial support to enable researchers to explore some of these themes through workshops and seminars. *Those interested in being involved should contact the Programme Co-ordination Office.*

## To be put on the Programme mailing list, please contact the Programme Co-ordination Office

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