

Climate histories: communicating cultural knowledge of environmental change (Steering Committee 1) Interim report prepared for November 10, 2010

This seems an opportune moment to review with the Steering Committee what the Network has accomplished thus far, and to consult with them about the ways in which we are proposing to consolidate as well as further the Networks – and address emergent issues.

The story so far

We received notification of the award in March 2010 and in accordance with the targets set out in our original proposal, we are generally satisfied with the results.

The June methodological virtual forums incorporated participation across social sciences (geography, social anthropology, archaeology, social studies of science), engineering, education, natural sciences (climatology, biology, ecology) and English. Participating universities and individuals were based in the UK, Italy, Australia and the USA.

There were 3 outcomes: a) as planned we have been able to initiate a project website, to which all participants have been invited to subscribe (if any members of the Steering Committee have not registered and at least taken a look, we should rectify that as soon as possible); b) the participation of Heather Cruickshank from Sustainable Engineering in the June methodological virtual forums has generated a further interdisciplinary proposal focused on humanitarian assistance for natural disasters which incorporates architecture, social anthropology, engineering and land economy, as the 4 major participating departments. In addition, Dr Cruickshank presented at the October work-in-progress workshop (see below); c) methodological issues which continue to be addressed: ranging from questions regarding the relative benefits of documenting information about extreme events or routine practices - to questions of communication across various sorts of boundaries.

In October, we hosted a one-day interdisciplinary work-in-progress workshop which was Cambridge-based and included papers from social anthropology, archaeology, engineering, and geography. Out of, or alongside of, that have emerged quite fruitful sets of interdisciplinary network connections through Richard Irvine's current interest in Anglia Fenland oral histories. In addition, a sub-group of the Cambridge social anthropologists put together an hour-long presentation for the Cambridge *Festival of Ideas* (for a general public audience of approximately 60-70 people) which in itself generated a number of requests for further engagement with local projects.

Each of these events has pulled our own members into further Networks; and has pulled others into ours.

The rest of the story

We are currently beginning the process of applying for clearance in order that members of the Network can begin to make school visits – we feel that both the presentations made in the October workshop and at the *Festival of Ideas* can easily be worked into stimulating bases for such visits.

The final formal event of this year-long project is the 2-day conference confirmed for January 21 & 22, 2011. You have all received a draft program which reflects our thinking so far and about which we welcome suggestions. As you can see, the thematic focus of the 4 sessions directly reflects a number of the issues we have been discussing in over the past months. At the same time, we have been fortunate to attract the participation of a number of new people who will enrich the discussion to a significant degree.

As the draft states, we have concrete interest on the part of soon-to-be Head of Department Henrietta Moore for considering publication of a volume through the new William Wyse series; we will also have the participation of the current editor of *Current Anthropology* and are hoping to excite interest in a special issue (or at least a joint *Current Anthropology* comment lead article). But we should also be thinking about publication(s) in non- social anthropological media and would welcome suggestions about that.

Questions of continuity

If the humanitarian assistance project is successful, we will have managed to build in some continuity (there is a strong anthropological emphasis for the need to understand historical context in the generation of appropriate responses, for instance) to the existing project. The existing Fenland project led by Christopher Evans (archaeology) may well be able to offer Richard Irvine some real support for being able to conduct research in the near future. We will most certainly have established Networks of Networks. But in order to give substance to them, we need to continue to think about how those Networks can contribute to concrete research, concrete results, and concrete outcomes.