

“Developing a Network for the Development of Sustainability Education in the Humanities”

Final Report – December 2007

Project Aims

The purpose of this project was to build capacity – a network - within the humanities in understanding the relevance of sustainability education to issues facing the fragility of our common material resource, and on the basis of this network to develop strategies/proposals for the development of teaching materials that would have salience for discipline-specific teaching, which could then seek funding on their own merits. The project planned to achieve this by bringing together discipline-specific specialists (both academic and professional) with a record of interest in sustainability as a network, both real and virtual, for discussion and development of sustainability issues within a range of humanities disciplines in higher education. The project recognizes that if the issue of sustainability education is to take root in the heart of humanities education, the issue of sustainability itself must be both practically identifiable throughout the humanities, as well as a topic worthy of critical debate.

The proposed network planned to draw upon the existing knowledge base of one particular discipline – archaeology – to stimulate productive debate within cognate disciplines. The discipline of archaeology has a long history of rigorous concern concerning the sustainability of the archaeological record as a finite and non-renewable resource, and the impact of this recognition on conservation issues related to planning development in the UK. Within archaeology, knowledge of sustainability issues has become part of the benchmark for the discipline in higher education, and some degree of sustainability literacy is a common requirement expected by archaeological curators and contracting organisations of potential candidates seeking work in contract archaeology. For other disciplines, though, the study of material remains (material culture) and their interpretation in relation to human practice in both the present and the past lies at the heart of a range of the humanities, including archaeology, history, classics, anthropology, and art history, and the fragility of this resource could form a cornerstone to appreciating sustainability issues.

Proposed Activities

The proposed network was planned around two meetings. At the first meeting, subject specialists would be invited to present a discipline-specific perspective on sustainability with case studies of current teaching approaches, and a discipline-centred perspective on the meaning of sustainability. On the basis of this meeting, the delegates present would identify common themes across the disciplines and also work towards developing potential grant bids for a future round of funding. At the second meeting, delegates would present a series of critical responses to the common themes for a cross-disciplinary approach to sustainability education in the humanities, as well as the presentation of a series of project proposals for the development of teaching materials for sustainability education within the humanities, with a view to seeking further funding related to education for sustainable development.

Proposed Outcomes

The project outlined above planned to build capacity in sustainability education in the humanities through:

- (i) The recognition of successful instances of sustainable development education in specific humanities disciplines;
- (ii) The identification of common themes in sustainability education that cross-cut disciplinary boundaries and stimulate critical thinking in sustainability education in the humanities;

- (iii) The development of a series of small projects for the development of teaching and learning materials, both discipline-specific and interdisciplinary that can then seek funding in their own right and further embed the teaching of sustainability in the curricula of local higher education institutions.

First Meeting

London 6th June 2007 – Petrie Museum University College London,

Representatives from

Humanities Disciplines: History, Archaeology, Archives, Museums, Continuing Education

HEIs represented: Newman College of Higher Education, Birmingham; the School of Antiquity, the University of Birmingham; School of Conservation Sciences, Bournemouth University, Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, Glasgow University; Centre for Archives, University of Liverpool; School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool; Department of Continuing Education, University of Oxford; School of Lifelong Learning, Reading University, Institute of Archaeology, University College London; Petrie Museum, University College London.

Presentations and key points –

John Carman - “*Sustainability & Archaeology: an unhappy partnership?*”

- Archaeology approaches the teaching of sustainability issues through three topics: (i) the creation of a sustainable historic environment (with an emphasis on necessary development, planning issues and the fragility of the archaeological resource), (ii) human response to environmental change in the past, and (iii) the sustainability of archaeology as an activity (as a discipline in higher education in the context of declining student numbers, and as a community interest through clubs, stories, memories, and projects).
- There is a need to separate out and consider the issue of ‘survival’ of the historic resource and its ‘sustainability’ into the future.

Steven Bulman – “*Teaching sustainability to history students through the decline of empires*”

- Teaching individuals to understand the potential causes of collapse of past civilisations provides an engaging way in which to bring the importance of (i) climate change, and (ii) the (over)-use of resources to the attention of history students more used to a focus on understanding patterns of social change and the strategic nature of individual choices.
- Books by Joseph Tainter (1988) *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, and Jared Diamond (2006) *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*, worked as good introductory course texts, supplying examples such as:
 - The collapse of the western Roman empire
 - The failure of Norse settlement on Greenland
 - The collapse of the Egyptian Old Kingdom
 - The collapse of Mesopotamian civilisations
 - The collapse of the Sudanese states in Western Africa
 - The collapse of civilisation on Easter Island
 - The collapse of Mayan civilisation
 - The mid-West dust bowl of the 1930s in the USA
- Students work in groups exploring one case study and preparing a poster and presentation on their work. A seminar is used for students to draw out common themes/principles that underpin the case studies presented.

- Feedback suggests that students begin to appreciate the importance of sustainable development better once they understand the long-term consequences of unsustainable development in the past.

Joe Flatman – *“Maritime Archaeology & the Global Economy”*

- Archaeology/Heritage Conservation faces a significant challenge in the near future. Surveys of new fuel deposits and for the placement of off-shore renewable energy plants will have a significant impact on the most productive places of the maritime environment in terms of the preservation of the evidence of past human maritime activities. Most of these locations lie beyond national territorial waters and so fall outside of current legislative frameworks for planning valuation. How are we to deal with these conflicting demands for future energy needs and the future survival of the historic record of this understudied area of human activity?

Kate Prendergast – *“The global background to sustainability studies”*

- It is possible to teach archaeology as a succession of periods of human engagement with the natural world, and their climatic consequences For example:
 - Period 1: the small scale hunter-gatherer past of hominins in Africa,
 - Period 2: the human colonisation of the whole world and the extinction of megafauna, and
 - Period 3: the development of agriculture and settled life and the beginnings of significant exploitation and physical manipulation of the natural world.
- However, this takes a limited view of ‘sustainability’ and there is a need to problematise sustainability as a theme, recognising its roots in the unfettered rise of globalised markets, multi-national corporations, and international institutions set up to sustain and develop a world free-market economy. In this context, globalisation can be seen as the primary illness that sustainable development must cure.

Discussion

A rich debate developed along with the presentation of the papers centring on:

- The moral/ethical dilemmas between public responsibility and the rights of individuals (including corporations) as property owners to use their resources. These moral concerns might also be expanded to include the desire to exploit historical resources for academic interest.
- The lack of understanding of a historical dimension (from the past) within present debates about climate change and sustainable development. In particular it was felt that archaeology could offer a long-term perspective on the nature of human social change in the context of abrupt climate change and over exploitation, whilst there were clear documentary sources to suggest that individuals at previous times (the mid-19th century, for example) had also recognised that contemporary social and economic patterns of development were not sustainable.
- There was a greater need to understand the political/economic and educational context behind the current drive towards developing an education for sustainable development. In this context, it would make strategic sense to understand how universities were developing university-wide policies to introduce such an element of teaching into their current curricula.
- Sustainability needed to ‘embrace’ a community which would include both encouraging a community to become involved in and passionate about the sustainability of their own resources, and the sustainability of active communities of practice in their own right. This latter element was particularly relevant to a number of humanities communities whose work is of fundamental value to a population in general, and yet apparently little valued within the contemporary political, social and educational context due to their perceived marginal or esoteric or ‘useless’ (in a utilitarian sense) nature.

Proposals for Second Meeting

Two factors in June 2007 necessitated a change to the originally planned proposals for the second meeting. Firstly, the smaller number of delegates and range of disciplines represented made the possibility of preparing bids across a range of humanities difficult. Secondly, at the time of the date of the first meeting, it was clear that there was to be no second round of funding for Education for Sustainable Development, as originally envisaged, and so the preparation of bids for a future funding round seemed inappropriate for the second meeting.

It was decided by those present that a second meeting could productively move forwards by exploring three themes that had been important in the debate surrounding the day's presentations:

1. Sustainability and consumption; private right and public good

The conflict between respect for the individual's right to dispose of (consume) their own private resources and the need to preserve such resources for posterity and a 'wider good'. Presentations should have a focus on aspects of private property ownership and the sustainability of cultural resources. They might also consider how we judge what can or should be conserved and sustained and what might be left out of public control.

2. Sustainability as a recurring theme

Presentations would consider past occasions when individuals and societies have recognised that over-consumption needs to be identified and/or controlled, and how this was communicated and acted upon by individuals and institutions at the time.

3. The institutional need and local delivery

Presentations that consider the current efforts of higher education institutions to develop policies on Education for Sustainable Development and the potential impact of these policies on local degree content and teaching.

Meeting 2

Birmingham, 29th November 2007, Conference Centre, University of Birmingham

Representatives from

Humanities Disciplines: Archaeology, History, Information Sciences, English

HEIs: School of Antiquity, University of Birmingham; Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Glasgow; Department of Archaeology, University of the Highlands and Islands; Department of Information Sciences, Kingston University; Subject Centre for English, Royal Holloway, University of London ; School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool.

Presentations and Key Points

The papers offered to the meeting touched on all three themes to different degrees, while also opening up significant discussion about the philosophy of knowledge of the concept of sustainability.

John Lindsay "*Humanitarian Sustainabilities*"

- There is a need to 'problematise' the concept of sustainability that is burdened by a debate that veers between post-modern and fundamentalist approaches that emphasise and criticise scientific approaches or business-centred approaches with a consequent focus on climate change or economic 'reality'. Sustainable development is not simply about low energy consumption light bulbs or developing public transport systems and their take up.
- In order to problematise the concept of "sustainability" we shall need to develop arguments that are not constrained within the current academic structuring of disciplines that create

'silos of academe'. We might also develop arguments that are rooted in the language of the humanities. We need to identify key concepts and track their methods and approaches – a philosophy of knowledge.

- We might begin by taking inspiration from the work of AF Blunt's "A Method for Documentation in the Humanities" collating 'facts' into 'threads' and 'threads' into 'ropes'.
- To progress the cause of education for sustainable development further, the Higher Education Academy will need to bring humanities disciplines and their practitioners together so that we can understand the key concepts in full.

Jane Downes "*Sustainability and sustainable communities in Orkney*"

- Management of the sustainable development of Orkney has previously been tackled in a non-joined up manner, with separate groups of cultural resource managers on the one hand, and natural resource managers on the other.
- Best practice from Scandinavia and Canada suggests that a joined-up approach is better with a focus on 'cultural environments'.
- Recently, Orkney has been taking an audit of its sustainability (through the Essence Symposium in Stirling) examining the opportunities and threats across a range of cultural environments exploring opportunities and threats.
- Taking an example of the sustainability of archaeology, it is important to recognise that we need to preserve and make people aware of, not just the physical remains, but the broader totality of people's engagement with their environments.
- Sustainability in the 21st century will need to consider a number of key elements. These include:
 - 'Ownership',
 - Methods of 'valuation',
 - Understanding 'places' – both in a range of disciplinary terms and through the local community,
 - 'Change',
 - 'Views' – views have always been important to communities, and so far as is possible they need somehow to be valued and sustained, and
 - 'Cuddles' – recognising that things have always gone together and must be valued together rather than separately.
- A sustainable archaeology is key to the sustainable development of Orkney: 23% of visitors go to Orkney specifically to visit the archaeological sites, and 63% of visitors will visit the archaeological sites while they are there.

John Carman "*Issues of Cultural Property: how can the past be owned?*"

- An understanding of the concept of property should be central to debates about the sustainability of the cultural heritage, but this is not the case and most debates centre on broad-brush ethical concerns about the destruction of 'context' and the dispossession of indigenous communities of their heritage.
- Property rights depend on forms of ownership (private or state, open-access or closed-access) and of themselves determine associated rights of use and duties of conservation.
- Current cultural heritage legislation in most countries favours state ownership and common access.
- We might explore other forms of property type as appropriate for archaeology – for example, a community's understanding of its relationship to its own cultural heritage might be a form of intellectual property.

Discussion

A rich debate grew out of the papers presented. Key themes considered included detailed discussion about:

- the nature of property ownership;
- the differing value of landscape studies in humanities disciplines (currently very high in archaeology, and low in history) and the centrality of landscape and community to sustainable development;
- the value of developing a 'sustainable education for career professionals' within the humanities – exploring the ways in which elements of subjects, learning, research, the humanities and ownership might relate to the rights of such bodies as the Higher Education Academy, Professional Societies, Professional Individuals, NGOs, HEFCE, the State and the Media; and,
- the limits created by disciplinary boundaries and module/course boundaries.

The Way Forward: A Critical Appraisal

This network came out of an archaeology background, making the assumption that an emphasis on the fragility of the material record could provide a common base from which discussion could positively develop that could encompass all the humanities. The purpose of the original proposal was to bring individuals from a variety of different disciplines and backgrounds within the humanities together, and on the basis of this to develop a network of productive relationships for future projects related to the teaching of issues related to sustainable development. The number of attendees at the first meeting (see discussion below), and the absence of a clear second round for which to prepare bids for the development of specific teaching resources (as noted above) necessitated a change to the originally-intended purpose of the second meeting, with a new focus on the extended discussion of key themes identified at the first meeting.

Themes for Future Work on Education for Sustainable Development

Despite the small number of delegates at the meetings of the Network, and perhaps the over-representation of individuals from an archaeological perspective, the breadth of discussion has indicated that there is a wide range of themes and issues that would form a good basis for future development into themes that could be taken up by individuals in higher education as a means of engaging students in the issues of sustainable development within the curriculum, whilst at the same time engaging with deeper philosophical and critical issues that will be salient to specific disciplinary communities in the humanities.

For example:

1. For disciplines that focus on the understanding of events over short time scales, an appreciation of human response to change (climate change, resource change) over the longer term enables individuals to appreciate unintended consequences of action
2. Focusing on the failure of civilisations, and the problems of the unintended consequences of action that lead to un-sustained development of past civilisations
3. Historical investigation of past moments when the need for 'sustainable development' was recognised, and the particular contemporary context of globalisation and the seeming powerlessness of communities
4. Questioning the health of community engagement in disciplines such as archaeology, and in so doing develop long-term, sustainable communities of practice for heritage research and conservation
5. An understanding of the many dimensions of landscape (cultural, natural, visual, belonging), and the ways in which communities root themselves in places
6. The conflict between sustainable development and the development of a world economy, but also evaluating a discipline's research needs against the broader needs of energy supply and conservation

7. A focus on 'property' encapsulating ways of considering the effects and the potential limitations of market thinking. For example, there are problems in setting the limits on the private freedom to use in the context of public responsibility to save, and how this relates to notions of property
8. A philosophical investigation of the understanding of sustainability across the humanities so that we can bridge the disciplinary barriers that keep discussions contained within discrete disciplinary groups

Significantly, the extreme diversity of ways in which the concept of sustainability has been interpreted in all the disciplines represented at these meetings suggests that there is a need for some sustained research into the philosophical/historical underpinnings of sustainability as a concept.

A number of themes did not develop which I had originally thought would come through as important to understanding the full breadth of sustainable development:

1. The (over-) reliance on digital archives, and their inherent fragility and likely destruction without careful management. This is particularly germane to the humanities communities following the recent withdrawal of funding to the Arts and Humanities Data Service
2. The sustainability of contemporary language communities, and the loss of understanding of past languages

A Self-Sustaining Network?

When this proposal was first drawn up, an initial assumption was made that there were at least two or three individuals within each disciplinary community who had an active interest in issues related to sustainability; these individuals would be the disciplinary representatives to the first meeting following the use of our usual means of publicising events through e-mail listings around the Subject Centres and departments. These individuals would then generate the momentum for the second meeting and any subsequent development. It would be fair to say, however, that the turnout at both of the Network for Sustainable Education in the Humanities meetings has been smaller than originally hoped (and, unfortunately, considerably smaller than attendance for other meetings of our Subject Centre), despite the repeated use of all the electronic means of publication available to our Subject Centre. Indeed, the original meetings of the network had been timetabled for early March and late June 2007, and the first meeting was postponed due to what was at the time thought to be a small number of signed up delegates (10 individuals), and the hope that a longer lead-in period might allow for more attendees to sign up.

Whilst a range of the humanities disciplines have been represented at the meetings (with the exception of classics, philosophy and language studies), the significant majority of the attendees have come from an archaeology/heritage background, reflecting the longer tradition of engagement with sustainability issues within the discipline, and their greater currency within both a teaching curriculum, and a research focus in this area, as noted in the original proposal. (It is also worth noting that a number of individuals expressed interest in the session but found clashes with their timetables, and once again the majority of these came from archaeology.)

There is clearly quite a bit of capacity building that still needs to be achieved before an active and, more importantly, self-sustaining network of individuals from across the humanities could be claimed to be in existence. If the network were to proceed forwards along the originally proposed lines, experience suggests that a significantly more pro-active approach will be needed; this will require the employment of an individual whose specific remit is to locate and 'encourage' attendance at future events from disciplines beyond archaeology, and perhaps history.

Acknowledgements

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21st December, 2007

Anthony Sinclair
Subject Director for Archaeology
Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology

Expenditure

<u>Postponed 1st Meeting</u>	Liverpool	£300.00
<u>1st Meeting</u>	London	£1280.20
(of which room hire & catering -	£857.30	
travel and overnight accommodation (AS)	£422.90	
<u>2nd Meeting</u>	Birmingham	£1753.54
(room & equipment hire & catering	£919.94	
(travel and overnight accommodation	£833.60	
	<u>Total Expenditure</u>	<u>£3333.74</u>