ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
IMPACT REPORT

The Impact Report should be completed and submitted using the grant reference as the email subject to, reports officer@esrc.ac.uk on or before the due date.

Please complete each box as fully as possible, adhering to the word counts, please do not include images within the text. Appendices are not accepted.

Principal Investigators are expected to consult with co-investigators on the content of this report.

Grant Reference: ES/J010618/1

Investigator/s: Dr Peter North

Project Title: Building the Low Carbon Economy on Merseyside: Follow on funding

Description

Please include a short overview of the projects impacts (max 2000 characters with spaces).

ESRC-funded research at Liverpool University enhanced policy making and governance structures around low carbon policy in Liverpool, UK. The Low Carbon Liverpool Knowledge Exchange Partnership included the University of Liverpool, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, the city’s economic development company Liverpool Vision, and environmental NGO Groundwork Merseyside. It explored how Liverpool’s economic development agencies can facilitate the transition to a low carbon economy, combining a healthy, vibrant and socially inclusive economy with mitigation of dangerous climate change. The Partnership was a focussed attempt to shift the framework of public policy and shape the terms of public debate within Liverpool around the challenges of climate change and the need for cities to embrace a low carbon approach to sustainability. The Partners worked together to develop common understandings of the issues through secondments of university researchers to the partners, through participant observation of the policy making process, and through action research. Results were published in a report and presented to an audience of some seventy local policy makers in February 2011. The report’s recommendations were welcomed by local partners who felt it and associated consultations provided a strong evidence base which helped catalyse a coalition that is determined to ensure that Liverpool creates the conditions that enable the city to reap the rewards from such an approach. Specific research findings included an audit of the city’s environmental performance; an institutional innovation (a more widely supported public/private
Liverpool Green Partnership) to carry through the changes in policy identified in the audit; and a methodology for involving business people as ‘catalytic individuals’ to progress the transition to a low carbon economy at the level of individual businesses which is being progressed by Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and Industry with ERDF support.

1. Scientific impact

A Please summarise below the scientific impact(s) your project has had. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The need to avoid dangerous climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and concerns about the depletion of fossil fuel reserves are two of the ‘grand challenges’ facing humanity. While the International Panel of Climate Change has documented the dangers associated with anthropogenic climate change, action to reduce emissions at a global scale has been disappointing. Cities have emerged as central sites for achieving concrete reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in line, in many ways as a direct response to concerns about the lack of action at the global scale. Studies of the transition to a low carbon economy too often focus on the success stories, the cutting edge cities, not on those where there is more debate and contestation about the need to engage with climate change policy as the need to reignite growth and to address social exclusion takes precedence of climate change in cities where emissions are not seen to be high, and there is no existential threat from climate problems. Liverpool is one of these places, a city where securing economic growth and addressing social exclusion is the priority. The city’s responsibilities to avoid dangerous climate change are not understood. Thus the contribution to social science of the two rounds of funding has been an empirical study of how a city not at the cutting edge of policy making on low carbon issues has engaged with the need to secure economic development and prosperity for its cities while also doing what needs to be done to avoid dangerous climate change. The project examined what the barriers to an engagement with the transition to a low carbon economy are, what competing agendas might mean that the necessary policy changes are not made, and how elites in cities which do not see this transition as a priority can be helped to engage with it through the identification of effective policy processes and programmes that go beyond growth, uncritically conceived, as the object of urban policy.

B Please outline the findings and outputs from your project which have had the scientific impact(s) outlined in 1A. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Papers in peer reviewed journals include:


2. North, P 2010a: “Eco-Localisation as a progressive response to peak oil and climate change – a sympathetic critique” in Geoforum, vol 41/4 pp 585-594. These two publications underpin the
research problem addressed in the project: the viability of local economic strategies as tools to avoid dangerous climate change developed by environmentalists and the need for more strategic approaches to be developed.

3. North, P 2010b: “Unsustainable Urbanism? Cities, climate change and resource depletion: a Liverpool case study” in Geography Compass, vol 4/9 pp 1377–1391. This publication outlines the situation in Liverpool before the research was undertaken and the need to take action to avoid dangerous climate change was not understood.


The substantive research papers outlining the projects research findings and their contribution to the literature are under production for submission to journals.

C. Please outline how these impacts were achieved. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Findings have been or will be disseminated at the following academic events:

- War Stories’: morality, curiosity, enthusiasm and commitment as facilitators of SME owners’ engagement in low carbon transitions, University of Leicester, March 2014
- ‘Political-Economies, Eco-localisation and Eco-state Re-structuring’, Graduate School of the Environment, Centre for Alternative Technology, Machynlleth, Wales, January 2012.
- ‘Alternative currencies, alternative economies, and heterotopian space’, Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany, December 2011.
- Building the low carbon economy on Merseyside, Royal Geographical Society, August 2011.
- Building the Low Carbon Economy in the Capital of Culture, Association of American Geographers Conference, Washington DC, 2010

Please outline who the findings and outputs outlined above had an impact upon. This can include specific academics/researchers through to broader academic groups. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The bulk of dissemination work has focussed on impact within wider society on Merseyside. However, the papers referenced in section 1C above presented at Royal Geographical Society and Association of American Geographers Conferences and at invited presentations at the Universities of St Andrews, Exteter, Leicester and Oxford and at the Centre for Alternative Technology have impacted on a geographers working in particular on the transition to a low carbon economy at the urban scale. A second major academic group is geographers working within ‘diverse economies’ paradigms who wish to explore what prosperous low carbon economies that enable citizens to thrive within the limits of the planet’s ability to provide resources and absorb wastes. More recently with the publication of the ‘War Stories’ paper in Geoforum early in 2014, the Low Carbon Liverpool project has influenced scholars of SME engagement of the transition to a low carbon economy. Of the papers associated with the project, according to Google Scholar North (2009) has been cited 7 times, North (2010a) has been cited 120 times, North (2010b) has been cited 9 times, and North (2013) has been cited 6 times. It is expected that further academic impact will follow the project’s academic findings which are currently being produced.

2. Economic and societal impact

Please summarise below the economic and societal impact(s) your project has had. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Our partners feel that the impact of the project has been to catalyse a coalition that is determined to ensure that Liverpool takes the necessary steps to engage with the low carbon agenda. The Low Carbon Liverpool partners worked together to develop common understandings of the issues through discussion at Green Partnership meetings. Eight public meetings were organised, with 70-100 attendees each. Results were published in a report and associated policy briefs, and were written into local strategic documents. In particular, a proposal for a Green Partnership and for an exploration of a proposal that the city should bid to be European Green Capital caught the imagination locally, and received press coverage. The Primary Care Trust provided funding for a Strategic Policy Officer to take the research findings forward. During Follow On Funding a wider range of partners emerged who established a new multi-agency Green Partnership which continued to use processes of co-production to research the advantages of the European Green Capital bid process to catalyse low carbon policy making in the city. This process became a motor for focussed action and engaged a whole range of institutions and public and private
bodies with the project, drawing more partners into the project. Research included an analysis of the experiences of previous Green Capitals and other examples of good urban practice. It included an audit of Liverpool’s environmental performance, which was presented in March 2013 and identified four areas of poor performance which were widely discussed in the city. The implications of which were discussed with partners and proposals for taking the process forward were developed by and owned by the partners themselves. Findings were presented at public meetings. The Green Partnership continues to meet independently of ESRC funding, and processes of co-production which were felt to be invaluable by partners continue to drive the process forward.

B Please outline the **findings and outputs** from your project which have had the economic and societal impact(s) outlined in 2A. *[Max 2000 Characters with spaces]*

The website for the project, which includes policy papers and reports is at [www.lowcarbonliverpool.com](http://www.lowcarbonliverpool.com). The main report, available on this site is:


Other reports and papers from the Low Carbon Liverpool project produced through processes of co-production with the partners available at the site include:

1. “An Environmental Audit for Liverpool”
2. “A submission to the Mayoral Commission on the Environment”

Policy Briefs produced by the research team include:

1. Policy Brief One: Overview of Findings and Recommendations.
2. Policy Brief Two: The Strategic Agenda.
5. Policy Brief Five: Connecting Low Carbon Opportunities to Areas of Social Exclusion.
6. Policy Brief Six: The Science Base

C Please outline how these impacts were achieved. *[Max 2000 Characters with spaces]*

The findings and outputs have influenced a range of institutions through the vehicle of the Green Partnership. While in early days there was a more instrumental relationship between university researchers who wanted to understand the low carbon policy making process through an empirical, place based study and the KE partners who wanted specific questions answered, in time relations of trust developed as proposals for a Green Partnership and for a potential bid to be Green Capital were presented at lively, well attended public meetings and caught the imagination. Findings were presented in ways that the partners said they would find most useful, and the academic partners developed their presentational and engagement skills through these
processes of co-production that went beyond one-way knowledge transfer.

As trust and a feeling that this agenda had potential developed partners came together to debate issues and they began to own and understand them. They understood where data came from and what it meant. Perhaps how this has been achieved is best captured by the partner who argued “the Low Carbon Liverpool project has been an interesting and innovative journey … bringing together a wide range of players into a neutral space for the improved alignment of programmes, processes and awareness.” It led to tangible outcomes which have supported improvements to joint working between the public, private, higher education, community and local government sectors in the city.

The second significant vehicle for engagement was the Green Capital bid process. ESRC-funded researchers began to work with the partners, often in their offices, to access and codify data on the city’s environmental performance and to help them make sense of it. As result the Partnership continues to meet and is driving its own agenda forward without ESRC support. A Mayoral Commission is meeting to provide a high level analysis of what governance structures should take this process forward.

D Please outline who the findings and outputs outlined above had an impact upon. This can be at a broad societal level through to specific individuals or groups. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

First, the project impacted on those committed individuals from the mainly public sector organisations who came together in the Green Partnership to enhance local policy making processes and on the audit of the city’s environmental performance. These middle level officers were able to influence senior management to engage with the low carbon agenda and write the project’s recommendations and findings into these partner organisations own strategies.

Secondly the project impacted on private sector SME owners who were inspired by the agenda as presented at partnership meetings, and especially by the work the partnership undertook with those motivated individuals taking action within their own businesses to improve their environmental performance. In an era where public sector funds for the organisations that used to support SMEs has been cut, this has been important, and this has been recognised by DECC.

Third, the project’s well attended and lively public meetings attracted a number of enthusiastic participants from the community and voluntary sector. The project’s findings were reported on in the local media. The Green Partnership continues its work and has been supported in this by a range of community activists who attended the eight public meetings organised by the Partnership and by Friends of the Earth.

Fourth, the project’s recommendations that the city’s strategic governance processes on this agenda needed to be strengthened influenced local politicians and the newly elected Mayor of Liverpool to engage with an issue which had not been seen as a priority for a city where social inclusion remains widespread and public spending cuts are impacting hard. The Mayor established a high level Mayoral Commission to flesh out the new agenda through though taking evidence from and consultation with a wider range of local partners than had been possible to
date, and produce a conclusive, agreed report and forward strategy that local partners are fully committed to.

3. **Unexpected and potential future impacts**

**A  Unexpected Impacts**

Please note which, if any, of the impacts that your research has had were unexpected at the outset of the project, explaining where possible why you think this was the case. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The project has observed the policy making process through a radically changing policy environment, the results of which could not have been predicted including the election of the Coalition in 2010 and major cuts in public spending, especially in levels of support for the transition to a low carbon economy. At a local level, this included the particularly harsh impact of public spending cuts on Liverpool, and the introduction of a directly elected city mayor which led to significant changes in local policy making processes.

A second unexpected impact has been the reaction of some of our partners to the emerging agenda. While some embraced this new agenda, we were surprised at the vehemence of the resistance to it from some at a senior level who felt it was a distraction from securing the city’s prosperity in the face of a difficult economic climate and in a city where entrenched economic problems remained. Confronted with the challenge both to their current focus and the scale of the task required in complexity, scale, duration and potential cost, some local institutions retreated into silos, erected barriers to engagement, or pursued their own agendas exclusively. While the project aimed to study low carbon policy making in a place where the agenda was not accepted, the level of resistance to it was surprising.

While we have always known that technical solutions are never uncritically accepted and that ‘politics matters’, the way some proposals for action and agendas were uncritically accepted and others rejected out of hand, or levels of proof and impact were demanded of some recommendations while the validity of other suggestions was not challenged was unexpected by the university researchers.

Finally the way the Green Capital idea took off was unexpected: it really caught the imagination and led to very deep and sustained levels of partnership working that were not sustained once the local authority decided that an early bid was not timely.

**B  Potential Future Impacts**

If you have a clear idea of the impact your project is likely to have in the future please detail these below. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The Mayoral Commission has slowed process considerably for more than a year and we do not yet know what the final impact of the project will be. Local partners are waiting to see if the Commission supports the work that has been done to date and the Green Partnership is given a
mandate to continue, or if the local partners will need to organise in a more grassroots and critically engaged manner to get the agenda on the table. Risks to future impact include that the impact to date has occurred as a result of the process of making a bid to be a Green Capital, a process which catalysed and focused the city’s policy making on low carbon issues. A decision on that has not yet been taken, and as a result progress has slowed considerably and momentum lost. The city also continues to suffer from significant and continued cuts in public spending that will further erode its capacity to act on climate in the future.

Irrespective of whether or not Liverpool does develop significant low carbon policy making capacity the results of this contested and still evolving political and policy making process will enable more to be understood about how non-cutting edge cities (in low carbon policy making terms) which lack any existential climate threats can act on these issues. This is particularly true in cities where, given the continuing existence of what are perceived to be more pressing problems, the need to act to avoid dangerous climate change is not widely accepted.

It is expected that findings about ways of involving SME owners in pro climate activity for reasons above simple profitability or efficiency can be explored further. The project’s findings have been taken up by the Department of Energy and Climate Change and more work has been commissioned on this nationally, and with the support of ERDF and the Chamber of Commerce locally. We expect to further develop our understanding of how to involve SME owners in low carbon transitions in an environment of austerity.

4. Impact limitations

A Limited scientific impact

Please state below any major scientific difficulties that have limited the scientific impact of your project. The statement should refer to an effect on impact rather than simply detail research difficulties or other project activity problems. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

This project has been an in depth relatively long term study of the policy making process in one city, and its scientific impact has yet to be realised through future academic outputs.

B Limited economic and societal impact

ESRC recognises that some of the research it funds will not have an economic or societal impact in the short term. Please explain briefly below if this is the case for your project, and refer to your grant application where relevant. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The major limitations which limited impact was the change of government and the cuts in public spending which impacted negatively on Liverpool. The institutions that we hoped would take the agenda forward have had to manage decline resulting in firefighting, a lack of capacity to act,
a loss of institutional memory, and the reinvention of the wheel. Innovation in policy making has been limited by a fear of failure. The low carbon agenda has for some been seen as a diversion from the core task of maintaining the city’s competitiveness and generating new jobs and growth in difficult economic times.

Thus the low carbon agenda has either been an arena in which institutions vied for control over declining resources with the result that at times institutions pursued their own agendas at their own pace or acted instrumentally to capture what little resource was available for themselves rather than co-operating for the greater good.

Secondly, the project focused on public sector partners, strategic governance, and the catalysing effect of a Green Capital Bid. The result was of a lack of a focus on grassroots partners where grassroots models of low carbon development might have been more widely accepted. Consequently, there has been limited take-up of these models within deprived communities locally because of a lack of the means to implement them due to a largely hostile attitude towards community-led low carbon development amongst some public sector organisations, and the strain placed on traditional community leaders as a result of the cuts.

Thirdly, the introduction of an elected executive Mayor and the resulting institutional change slowed progress considerably. Climate change has not been one of the Mayor’s priorities, and he is not knowledgeable about the issue. He commissioned a Mayoral Commission to draw in as much evidence as possible from a wide range of participants to get policy right, but this has taken time and significantly reduced short term impact.