**Notes from 2015 ORN Research Seminar:**

**‘Values in Outdoor Recreation’**

Hosted by: Countryside and Community Research Institute & Canal and River Trust

30 January 2015, University of Gloucestershire

**Introduction**

This seminar was designed to explore the concept of ‘values’ in outdoor recreation, both in terms of economic value and the wider social and cultural value. Four expert speakers gave presentations covering the ecosystem and other approaches, bolstered by two group discussions delving deeper still into the arguments made by our speakers. In the afternoon, delegates split into three groups to consider a potential strategy for more effective relationships between ORN members and the academic community. Recognising the mutual benefits in ensuring a strong dialogue going forward, the groups were asked to identify what resources we currently have, what are the priorities and how do we coordinate outputs.

**Presentation 1**

**Title:** Measuring social outcome: managing the 'science' of indicator selection

*By Dr Alex Franklin and Dr Ria Dunkley, Cardiff University*

From the Sustainable Places Research Institute at the University of Cardiff, Dr Ria Dunkley and Dr Alex Franklin, gave an overview of what is involved in their work and the various tools at their disposal for measuring the values of outdoor recreation. While this includes standardised methods such as SROI, their focus on bespoke approaches was heralded for yielding tailored and meaningful research data. They reinforced the importance of a personalised and thoughtful approach to research; one that connects with, and is influenced by stakeholders beyond the commissioning organisation and its funders, but includes their user groups and communities. The need to spend time on carefully structuring the evaluation framework was emphasised, which both argued can return in-depth data and indicators and qualitative information on outdoor recreation values when correctly designed.

**Presentation 2**

**Title:** Economic valuation of cultural services and wellbeing: a case study from the Canal and River Trust

*By Olivier Vardakoulias, NEF*

Representing New Economics Fund (NEF) Consulting, Olivier Vardakoulais talked about the Canal and River Trust’s research into measuring the social value of Fradley Juntion. Olivier outlined the project and the research objectives, which included determining the health, wellbeing, heritage and aesthetic value of the site, but also, to discover what would be lost if the HS2 plan were to be implemented. Olivier discussed the importance of using a number of research techniques, and explained why they chose questionnaires for the qualitative research, and the ‘travel cost method’ and ‘contingent value’ measurements for the quantitative part. Although some of the research results were presented and discussed, these are not yet ready for wider circulation and as such, cannot be included in this paper or the presentation links.

**Discussion session 1**

**Discussant:** Brian MacAulay, Canal and River Trust

The two presentations addressed what many see as two distinct poles of a spectrum of methodologies. Alex and Ria highlighted the strengths and application of qualitative research approaches for unveiling the detail and contexts of problems faced. Olivier presented results drawn from the application of quantitative methodologies based on orthodox economic thinking of how we can monetize the non-marketable services embedded in public spaces like the canals.

While listening Brian was reminded of 3 key contributors who have shaped his thinking given that he approaches this from a heterodoxical economics background. The first, Prigogine and Stengers’s ground breaking work and the foundation of complex systems - Order out of Chaos. In this important work a new ‘La Nouvelle Alliance,’ the coming together of ‘two cultures’ within science, is proposed. It highlights the changes in our understanding of the world around us. A break from classical determinism and a static perspective of time, to one which sees science from a humanistic and evolutionary perspective; economists, so often accused of ‘physics envy’ could learn huge lessons from the work of Prigogine….

The second, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, whose seminal work The Entropy Law and the Economic Processes , argues effectively that we should consider economic processes from the perspective of thermodynamics rather than from the continued orthodox approach of using Newtonian mechanics. This is fundamental when considering the relationships between society and the environment.

The third is Friedrich Hayek’s The Use of Knowledge in Society. The central theme of this paper is that knowledge is dispersed and contextual and so it is not possible for experts to claim they can possess all the information necessary to make optimum decisions. From an economist’s perspective this means we should engage with people, through qualitative research as well as more formal mathematics in order to tease out the contexts and personal experiences that shape decision making.

The two presentations provided us with insights from both sides of the methodological spectrum. In Brian’s view we should be embracing the challenge from a complexity perspective and put in place systems to enable us to align the two cultures.

**Presentation 3**

**Title:** Securing Multiple Benefits and Value from Nature: Observations from the National Ecosystem Assessment Follow on Project

*By Prof. Alister Scott, BCU*

Prof. Alister Scott from Birmingham City University explored the benefits of the ecosystem approach in valuing outdoor recreation. He showed that what we as people actually value is not truly measured as it is difficult to do so. Using case studies, Alister showed how this problem could be remedied through the use of ecosystem services, though he admitted that, for example, built environment professionals have not bought into this model. Alister advocated looking that the principles of ecosystem services, and bundling these together for collective use. He stressed the importance of the natural world, its biodiversity and ecosystems on our well-being and economic prosperity and insists that good long term decisions can only be made based on a holistic approach to research.

**Presentation 4**

**Title:** Health and the value of being outdoors: An exploration of the physical, social and mental health benefits of being outdoors and taking part in physical activity.

*By Prof. Diane Crone, Professor in Exercise Science at the University of Gloucestershire*

In her presentation, Prof. Diane Crone from the University of Gloucestershire explored the physical, social and mental health benefits of being outdoors and taking part in physical activity. She provided an overview of some of the staggering evidence available, including a range of qualitative data in the form of individuals’ responses and comments regarding how they felt about their experiences of outdoor recreation. Diane discussed why people feel so good as a direct result of outdoor recreation and pointed to the holistic benefits that are enjoyed.

**Discussion session 2**

**Discussant:** Jo Burgon, Independent Chairman, Outdoor Recreation Network

Both these presentations raised the need to capture an increasing range of values using a variety of means and methodologies. Alister promoted the concepts of building in social and cultural components into a model that was originally designed to capture the value of nature - ecosystem services. Layering in cultural services grows that model further.

Diane presented us with some good examples about the power of emotive and evocative words from individuals who have experienced important changes to their lives. These remarks and quotes tell inspiring stories and help us understand motivational forces. They are not easily measurable but when combined with measurable outcomes the story becomes richer. You get a more dynamic feeling of both sense of place and sense of purpose. As a result there is a strengthening of connectivity and a growing wholeness of values. The trick in presenting an array of values some of which is drawn from scientific or economic modelling, while others are captured by listening and hearing people's responses, is to become a good storyteller. We should not underestimate the power of accumulated experiences presented and communicated in an inspiring and enlightening way.

**Workshop summary**

The following points were made during the workshops and fed back to the group:

Current resources:

* We already have good examples of the values of outdoor recreation, based on past research.
* We have data, albeit in different formats.
* We have a willingness to work together to map out existing financial resources.

Priorities:

* Share good examples and data – make it accessible to Network members.
* Pool funds - channel financial resources into a Network ‘measurement and evaluation’ programme.
* Tap into key trends, such as the mental health movement.
* Develop local links for re-purposing land.
* Engage new research champions from within Network members.

Coordination of these priorities:

* ORN to share more information, examples and research results online
* ORN to explore the provision of guidance and recommendations for structuring research frameworks
* ORN to explore the provision of guidance and recommendations for interpreting research results
* ORN to collate a research prospectus, to show who is interested in what research and therefore who might fund it.
* ORN to facilitate a workshop to help practitioners and mangers improve their research practice (with help from Prof. Diane Crone).
* ORN to build stronger, more consistent links with certain academic institutions

**Summary**

In terms of how research can be effectively applied, the group acknowledged the value and importance of in-depth, robust research reports, but asked the question of whether policy makers take the time to read, digest and draw effective conclusions from this information. The question was also raised as to whether bespoke approaches to research across the board dilutes the effectiveness of their messages to policy makers and other audiences, who are often looking for comparisons and benchmarks.

Some solutions discussed included promoting the use of common language across research studies and upskilling both commissioning bodies in terms of framework development, and researchers in terms of interpretation and presentation of results – so that the same results could be presented to niche audiences in different ways.

It was concluded that ‘valuation’ is now the mainstream choice of measurement across the economic sector based on its ability to produce meaningful data. On the whole it was agreed that this is a good movement, but delegates agreed they would like to see improvements in how the results are showcased for optimum effectiveness, especially among politicians and other decision-makers.

**Further Information**

Links to the delegate pack and presentation files are available here: <http://www.outdoorrecreation.org.uk/events/44/orn-2015-research-seminar-values-in-outdoor-recreation/>