

Institution: Bath Spa University		
Unit of Assessment: 27 - English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Changing Practice: bringing arts and humanities perspectives on nature, wellbeing and environmental crisis into new spaces		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Samantha Walton	Reader in Modern Literature	27/1/2014 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Walton's work is dedicated to demonstrating the value of arts and humanities perspectives in providing a new and useful lens in environmental policy and research contexts, particularly at the intersection of nature, wellbeing and health. Connecting public audiences with researchers, creative practitioners, policymakers and campaigners, Walton cultured new networks and nurtured collaborations, and contributed to the reframing and revival of neglected nature literature in light of the environmental crisis. This work led to arts and humanities conceptual frameworks and perspectives being consulted and valued in novel settings, including policy task groups, health and wellbeing conferences, mountaineering festivals, and interdisciplinary teams of scientists including representatives of the World Health Organisation and the United Nations.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>In an era of climate catastrophe and worsening mental health crisis, what role might the arts and humanities have in transforming ecological perception and helping people engage with these disturbing realities? Walton's research is concerned with creating space for discussions about the ethical, emotional, personal and political aspects of environmental and health crisis, and ensuring insights from the arts and humanities are given due weight in scientific and policy settings - effectively, changing practice and expectations about whose voices should be heard, and which perspectives count. Her underpinning research can be grouped into 3 core strands:</p> <p><i>Landscaping Change (funded by the British Academy)</i></p> <p>Between 2015 and 2017, Walton led a project exploring how the arts and humanities can help people express feelings about changing places and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Through public engagement events held at the Arnolfini and Hamilton House community centre in Bristol and a conference at Bath Spa University (BSU), this project connected creative practitioners and academics with communities experiencing disruption and change in the fabric of place. The aim was to nurture new collaborative networks amongst creative practitioners and to raise the profile of arts and humanities approaches in policy discussions about the meaning, ecology, and distinctive cultural characteristics of place. The underpinning research derived from the collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches of the environmental humanities, and were theorised in a peer-reviewed creative-critical journal article (R4) and a statement in a policy document (R2).</p> <p><i>Cultures of Nature and Wellbeing (funded by the AHRC)</i></p> <p><i>Cultures of Nature and Wellbeing: Connecting Health and the Environment through Literature</i> (2016-2018) focused on bringing cultural perspectives to bear on public and policy discussions about the value of nature and ecology in healthcare and wellbeing. Events included a Nature and Wellbeing Forum (Bristol), Workshop (BSU), Symposium and Speculative Lunch (Edinburgh) focused on creating non-hierarchical, multi-expertise, public forums to capture the personal and political dimensions of seeking nature for wellbeing, including reflecting on how gender, race, disability and class influences access to nature. Walton gave workshops at nature and wellbeing events geared to grassroots practitioners and policy makers, offering prompts for discussion from poetry, and telling the long history of the nature-wellbeing relationship, from ancient medicine to modernity. Underpinning research included a peer-reviewed article (R3),</p>		

public writing, and collaboration with scientists to co-author a major new conceptual framework for assessing how biodiversity influences human health and wellbeing (E1).

Nan Shepherd

Walton's work is also concerned with the ecological value of literary revival. Walton has been researching the Scottish nature writer Nan Shepherd since 2013, delving into her archive and writing an environmental humanities-informed monograph on her work, looking at representations of ecology, deep time, environmentalism and the vitality of the living world (R5). Walton has given talks at public festivals of mountaineering in Kendal, Braemar and Glasgow, and cultural venues including the Scottish Poetry Library and National Library of Scotland, as well as contributing a 5-minute segment on Shepherd's writing to the BBC's *Winterwatch* (E9). Walton has also contributed poetry inspired by Shepherd to the *Shared Stories: A Year in the Cairngorms* anthology (2019) produced by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. Walton's assertion is that Nan Shepherd is a vital and undervalued environmental writer, whose understanding of mountain ecology needs to be revived in this moment of climate crisis and the Anthropocene.

3. References to the research

R1. Walton, S ed. (2016) [Landscaping change: an anthology of writing and images](#). Sad Press, Bristol.

R2. Walton, S (2017) '[Landscaping change: exploring the transformation, reconstitution and disruption of environments through the arts, humanities and social sciences](#).' In: *Where we live now: perspectives on place and policy*. British Academy, London, pp. 52-55.

R3. Walton, S (2019) '[Nature trauma: ecology and the returning soldier in First World War English and Scottish fiction, 1918-1932](#).' *Journal of Medical Humanities*.

R4. Prior, J and Walton, S (2017) '[The Bristol and Bath Railway Path: an eco-poetic sound collaboration](#).' *GeoHumanities*, 3 (1). pp. 246-249.

R5. Walton, S (2020) [The living world: Nan Shepherd and environmental thought](#). Bloomsbury, London.

Funding

- Walton (PI), *Landscaping Change* (2015-2017), British Academy, GBP13,922.50
- Walton (PI), *Cultures of Nature and Wellbeing* (2016-2018), AHRC, GBP163,892
- Walton (PI), *Cultures of Nature and Wellbeing* (2018-2019), Rachel Carson Centre, GBP25,151

4. Details of the impact

The claim that literature can shape or transform environmental perception and behaviour is heavily implied in environmental humanities scholarship, but rarely subject to practical scrutiny. Walton's research has explored the grey areas between theory and practice, insisting on the value of literature, environmental philosophy and creative practice as valid ways of understanding nature-human relations, and gathering reflective, creative and critical responses to issues of relevance in environmental science and healthcare. This work was geared towards creating new networks for collaboration amongst environmentally-concerned artists, scholars and policy makers, and changing practice around the inclusion of arts and humanities perspectives in novel contexts.

The impact of Walton's research includes:

- recognising arts and humanities perspectives as a new and useful lens
- developing new conceptual frameworks for cultural change
- culturing new artistic networks and nurturing collaborations
- transforming environmental perception
- reframing and reviving neglected nature literature in light of contemporary environmental issues

A new and useful lens

A key outcome from the *Landscaping Change* project was the inclusion of an essay by Walton in a policy document. In her essay, Walton asserts that a place-based lens is vital, as “[c]ombining global consciousness with attachments to and care for place may help to overcome feelings of detachment and hopelessness experienced when confronting massively distributed crises like climate change, sea pollution and soil depletion” (E3). The British Academy (BA) agreed, describing how the series of place-based funded projects of which Walton’s was a part “has demonstrated that, particularly in a devolving world, place can offer a useful lens to reconsider how best to deliver critical services including those focused on community support, health and wellbeing, social and benefit supports, education, skills and lifelong learning in a more integrated and effective way” (E8). As this policy document was government-facing and represented a shift in the BA’s research-informed advice on land-use and critical service provisions, *Landscaping Change* was part of novel change which centred subjective, creative and community-led responses to place for the first time.

Conceptual Frameworks

Cultures of Nature and Wellbeing (2016-2018) brought together arts and humanities researchers interested in the connection between nature and wellbeing, in order to showcase their research to policymakers and green care practitioners (therapists and educationists working outdoors). This demonstrated the value of arts and humanities in a field currently dominated by medical and public health approaches. The original project plan was to work with the Wildlife Trusts to bring about policy change, specifically telling the long cultural history of the ‘nature cure’ as backdrop to their campaign to bring in a Nature and Wellbeing Act for England and Wales. However, a change in government in 2015 and the intensified focus on the ‘Brexit’ vote meant that plan was abandoned in 2016, with the Wildlife Trusts committing instead to adopting a grassroots approach to change - influencing public opinion from the bottom up, rather than the top down.

Walton’s events and outputs re-focused exploring how literary and cultural history could participate in a cultural shift by telling the complex and captivating long history of the relationship between nature and wellbeing. Impact included encouraging green care practitioners and policymakers to use poetry and creative writing as a ‘way in’ to nature for wellbeing - for example, at a *Wellbeing in Nature* workshop led by Walton at the Bristol Festival of Nature (2018, E7), the *Nature and Wellbeing Forum* (2018, E7) and a blog post written for the prominent practitioner-focused Network of Wellbeing (E2). Walton was invited to participate in interdisciplinary fora as an outcome of this work, including the *Green Care Strategy Forum* organised by West of England Nature Partnership, and the *Biodiversity and Health Symposium* (Hanover, 2019) organised by the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research, an event focused on creating a new framework for assessing the impact of biodiversity on wellbeing, where Walton contributed to the authoring of a joint paper ‘Pathways Linking Biodiversity to Health: A Conceptual Framework’ in *Environment International* (2020) and for use by the World Health Organisation and other international and national health bodies (E1).

Culturing new networks and nurturing collaborations

The *Landscaping Change* project developed new networks and collaborations through a 2-day conference (Bath, 2016), 4 public events at the Arnolfini gallery (2015), and a symposium in Bristol (2017, E7). In preparation for these events, Walton commissioned a number of artists and writers, connecting them with local community groups and places. As such, a key area of impact was in the creation of new artistic networks, creative outputs and collaborations. For example, 2 poets collaborated on a performance piece inspired by the demolition of the Red Road Flats in Glasgow, which was later performed at the Arnolfini and converted to a score in the *Landscaping Change* anthology and an independently printed pamphlet. Another poet was commissioned to collaborate with the Bristol environmental protest group, Blue Finger Alliance, in response to their campaign to save a track of high-quality agricultural soil from development. Her short piece formed the groundwork of a nature memoir which was published by Penguin in 2019. Walton also collaborated with a geographer and sound recordist on an ecopoetic sound tour of the Bristol-Bath Railway Path, an interdisciplinary piece (R5). One creative contributor received numerous paid invitations for events and collaborations following *Landscaping Change* events,

enhancing her profile as a writer and reinforcing networks established through this series of events (E6).

Transforming environmental perception

Between 50 and 70 people attended *Landscaping Change* engagement events at the Arnolfini in total (2015-2016) and approximately 200 came to the *Landscaping Change* conference, *Land/Change* micro-festival, and the *Nature and Wellbeing Forum* (Bath, 2016; Bristol, 2017; E7). These events explored the intersection of environment, wellbeing and social justice issues in an informative and informal setting. One invited speaker - the leader of the race equality network Black2Nature who spoke at the *Land/Change Micro-Festival* and *Nature and Wellbeing Forum* - has since gone on to develop a major public platform. These were some of the first university events to amplify this speaker's vital, though often marginalised, message and introduce the importance of environmental anti-racism to academic and public audiences. Attendees wrote in feedback forms that the event gave them an "opportunity... to be exposed to people and causes I wouldn't ordinarily hear of" and to learn how "environmental thinking is deeply environmental thinking is deeply entangled with BAME issues" (E5). Another attendee reflected that Black2Nature had changed their perspective: "As a person from the BAME community I first felt we have bigger problems to worry about, but by the end I recognised the world conservation is in all our best interests" (E5). Testimonials on Birdgirl/Black2Nature's blog attest to the influence they had on audience members: "Amazing that almost all of the feedback listed me as the highlight of the day" (E4).

Walton's presentation on Nan Shepherd at the *Into the Mountain* festival (2018) influenced the practice of attendees and organisers by inspiring them to bring environmental perspectives into their work and thinking in new ways. Talking about the impact of Walton's work on her own practice and career, one festival organiser said that "in the 7 years I have been working with this literature through this arts project, the available literature did not expand in any detail on contemporary ideas of ecocriticism. This work has given a stronger theoretical context for my art and dance making I had been so keen to find all these years of working on it" (E6). This was echoed by another event organiser, who said that "Sam's engagement with the project and her relationship to it with her own findings has propelled my thinking considerably. She has brought new focus to my interests as an artist and academic through the lens of ecocriticism, feminist theories and pedagogies" (E6). The *Into the Mountain* event attracted an audience of 100 people on the day and a considerable amount of interest before and after the event via [the project's website](#) and the production organisers' website ([Scottish Sculpture Workshop](#), with approximately 7000 visits per month over an 8-month period) and connecting social media sites (E7).

Reframing and reviving neglected nature writing

Walton's research affirmed the value of reviving neglected nature literature in order to transform ecological perception in the present moment. From 2015 to 2020, Walton worked extensively to raise the profile of Scottish writer Nan Shepherd and encourage more people to read her work in the light of environmental literary criticism and the climate crisis. The impact of Walton's work on this can be seen in her public appearances at a number of mountain festivals between 2016 and 2018 and a 5-minute segment presented by Walton on the BBC's *Winterwatch* (2019), watched live by approximately 2,500,000 people (E9) and with a 2-minute teaser segment watched over 71,000 times on Twitter (E7).

As a result of the BBC broadcast, Shepherd's writing was discussed explicitly alongside environmental and conservation concerns. The National Library of Scotland, British Trust for Ornithology, RSBP UK and Forestry and Land Scotland all tweeted about the segment as a way of drawing attention to Shepherd's writing and her unique environmental perspective. "Poet Nan Shepherd, just mentioned on #Winterwatch, is part of a long tradition of poetry about the natural world. BTO is trying to bridge the gap between science and art" wrote the British Trust for Ornithology, capturing the distinctive concerns of the environmental humanities (E7).

Another impact was increasing the circulation and appreciation of neglected women writers. Following the segment, the poet Lemn Sissay tweeted "Beautiful piece on *The Living Mountain* by Nan Shepherd. Please more", while a bookseller wrote "What's keeping me going today

working at the bookshop is the number of customers asking for one of my all-time fav books, Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*, because of *Winterwatch*" (E7). Canongate (publisher of *The Living Mountain*) tweeted on the 31/01/19, the day after the segment aired, that the book had "just leapt to #5 on Amazon" (E7). Using Nielsen Bookscan demonstrates that sales of *The Living Mountain* jumped in February 2019 to 4,060 copies compared to 792 in February 2018, 710 in February 2020, and figures in the 2000s during the busy Christmas sales period each December between 2016 and 2019 (E3). Walton's scholarly and public-facing interpretation absolutely achieved the goal of bringing new readers to Shepherd with a marked boost in book sales.

Walton's work also had a positive impact on the ways in which festival organisers aim to give shape to future events. For most festival organisers interviewed (E6), Walton's presentations were the first time they had engaged with academic research. They commented that her engagement with the project "underlined the fact that high quality research can be disseminated to a broad audience who may not be specialists in a given subject, but have a general interest of curiosity in the subject" (E6). Subsequently, many reported that they felt "encouraged to do similar events in the future" as a direct result of Walton's contribution to their programmes. One organiser commented that "Sam was the first writer to do a presentation for us and it was so successful we included a stand-alone literary section the following year" (E6). Others echoed this response and detailed changes they had made to their festival programmes moving forward as an outcome of Walton's contribution: "It wasn't until Sam's wonderful presentation that we realised how popular the subject of Nan Shepherd was", wrote one individual. "As a result, the following year we based more events in our festival around Nan Shepherd" (E6). Another made the following comment:

Until Sam's presentation, we did not realise how interested the general public would be in the ideas of literature being connected to the mountains. It opened our eyes to this as festival organisers, but also it opened the eyes of those attending who hadn't realised how interested they would be.

Finally, Walton's work impacted communities in the Cairngorms by connecting audiences with a local writer and transforming their perception of the natural environment through literature. In particular, one event organiser highlighted that in connecting Shepherd to their local community, "Sam [brought] Nan Shepherd the woman and all she represents to a much wider audience. Particularly the fact that Nan had a local connection with our community in Braemar" (E6). This developed dialogues between those familiar with Shepherd's work and those who were new to it. Others spoke about Walton's research on Shepherd in relation to local knowledge of the mountains, noting that "as a direct result many more people in our local area and beyond have become interested in Nan's work and her connection to the Cairngorms" (E6).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1 Marselle, Melissa, et al. (2020), '[Pathways Linking Biodiversity to Human Health: A Conceptual Framework](#)', EcoEvoRxiv, 23 Sept. 2020. Web. (S. Walton is a co-author.)

E2 Walton, S. (2018), '[What Does Literature Tell Us About Nature and Wellbeing?](#)', *Network of Wellbeing* blog.

E3 Data from Nielsen Bookscan showing copies sold of Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (ISBN 9780857861832).

E4 [Black2Nature / Birdgirl Blog](#) - *Birdgirl Talks, Workshops, Interviews and Shoots 2017*

E5 Participant feedback from *Nature and Wellbeing* and *Land-Change Microfest* events

E6 Testimonials from organisers of Kendal Mountain Festival, Braemar Mountain Festival, and Into the Mountain Festival, Glasgow.

E7 Engagement summary: events information and online engagement and responses

E8 British Academy website - [Where we live now: perspectives on place and policy](#) (2017)

E9 *Winterwatch* segment on *Nan Shepherd* and viewing data