

Living Sustainably with Water: An Interdisciplinary Challenge

Water and Value Workshop – 13th May 2022

Organised by
Dr Minty Donald, Professor of Contemporary Performance Practice
and Dr Jill Robbie, Senior Lecturer in Law

Abstracts and Biographies

Dr Rachel Clive, University of Glasgow and Dr Kirsty Stansfield – “For Freedom Space with Rivers: a Sharing of Artwork(s)”

For Freedom Space with Rivers is a six-month intergenerational arts project being led creatively by artist-researchers [Rachel Clive](#) and [Kirsty Stansfield](#).

Freedom space for rivers thinking is an approach to river/ flood risk management which seeks to work with rivers as they respond to a changing climate, rather than against them. It advocates, where possible, for “more space for rivers to migrate and flood naturally” (Biron et al, 2014). When rivers have the freedom space to find their own way, they enrich the environment and nurture biodiversity in the process. But what happens to freedom space for rivers thinking in urban contexts, given the constraints on rivers in built up areas? And how do our personal, social and/or material circumstances affect our experiences and understandings of freedom space for rivers?

The *For Freedom Space with Rivers* project is exploring these questions through a series of arts-based workshops and individual arts commissions, in connection with the River Clyde and its tributaries. The first workshop series, which started as [COP26](#) was ending, is evolving around questions of diversity (especially neurodiversity). The second workshop series is evolving around questions of health and care, and is based at the [Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice](#). The third workshop series is focussing on global questions of migration, safety/asylum and solidarity and is based at [Interfaith Glasgow](#). From these group workshops around 15 small-scale individual artist commissions are being supported by the project. These commissions are being developed collectively with reference to a large travelling scroll and will be shared publicly at the end of May 2022.

For Freedom Space with Rivers is a [Dear Green Bothy](#) (Being Human/[University of Glasgow College of Arts](#)) COP26 legacy project. In the Water and Value Workshop we will share artworks evolving through the project and some of the questions and processes which have been emerging.

The *For Freedom Space with Rivers* project is building on Rachel Clive’s ecological/riverine theatre practice-based research at the University of Glasgow in collaboration with Kirsty Stansfield’s arts in health practise at the Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice, and Lynnda Wardle’s writing practice and creative programming work at Interfaith Glasgow. It is developing collectively in partnership with workshop participants and artwork commissions.

Prof Veronica Strang, Durham University – “Water, Democracy and Diversity: Bringing New Voices and Values into Contemporary Water Governance”

Water carries some core meanings that, because of its essential role in the lives of all biological organisms, have persisted over time and are broadly shared across cultural and sub-cultural boundaries. But there is a great deal of diversity in how different groups articulate

these meanings, and in what they choose to valorise (or ignore) in their relationships with water. There are also wide variations in the extent to which diverse perspectives are incorporated in decision-making. Discourses about water use and management are generally dominated by economic and techno-managerial perspectives, in which water is positioned primarily as a resource providing 'ecosystem services' to humankind. This reflects the social and political arrangements and the power relations that pertain within societies, and compose their engagements with the non-human domain. But this exploitative approach has led to unsustainable practices that disadvantage less powerful human communities and fail to meet the needs and interests of non-human beings and ecosystems.

It is now a matter of urgency to ensure that human relationships with water shift their focus from short-term political and economic aims to meet the long-term needs of all human and non-human beings, and the living systems on which we all depend. A key question, therefore, is how to create decision-making processes in which the needs of all living kinds are fully represented and given value and attention, to the extent that sustainable practices are prioritised. Drawing on ethnographic research with indigenous communities in Australia and New Zealand, and engaging with debates about human and non-human rights, this paper therefore considers how to ensure that the diverse actors and voices previously subsumed in water governance, including the non-human actors who co-produce our lifeworlds, are democratically included in collective decisions about water.

Veronica's research as a cultural anthropologist focuses on people's engagements with water, particularly in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. From 2012-2021 she directed Durham University's Institute of Advanced Study and has written extensively about interdisciplinarity. Her major books include *The Meaning of Water* (2004); *Gardening the World: agency, identity, and the ownership of water* (2009); and *Water, Culture and Nature* (2015). She recently completed a major comparative study of societies' changing beliefs in water deities over time, elucidating different trajectories in human-environmental relations. *Water Beings: from nature worship to the current environmental crisis*, will be published by Reaktion in 2023. Website: <https://www.veronicastrang.com/>

Prof Andreas Bieler, University of Nottingham – “Water as an Economic Good? Interrogating the Fight over the Value of Water”

Economists argue that allocating the right price to water would allow us to ensure optimal use of this finite resource. However, empirical reality does not confirm this expectation. The transformation of water into an economic good through privatisation has generally had negative consequences. While consumers have experienced drastic price increases of 100% and more at times, investment into infrastructure has been insufficient. The quality of the private service is poor, efficiency levels are lower, and there is a lack of investment finance. By allocating a price to water, access to water has been limited to those, who can afford to pay for it. The environment has generally lost out, as costs of pollution are externalised. The only positive consequence from a private company's perspective is the maximisation of profit.

The purpose of my paper is twofold. First, I will discuss what the real dynamics are underlying the push towards transforming water into a commodity. Second, I will explore alternative possibilities as the result of moving from treating water as having exchange value towards emphasising the use value of water. When doing so, I will also draw on the notion of the commons as it emerged from the struggles against water privatisation especially in Italy as well as Thessaloniki/Greece as well as discuss the wider push towards democratising public water services. Ultimately, it is in these moments of struggle that concrete alternatives to private water are formed.

Andreas Bieler is Professor of Political Economy in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham/UK. His general expertise is in the area of resistance to neo-liberal globalisation with a particular emphasis on the possible role of labour

movements understood in a broad sense. He is author of (with Adam David Morton) of *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) as well as *Fighting for Water: Resisting Privatization in Europe* (Zed Books, 2021). He maintains a blog on trade unions and global restructuring at <http://andreasbieler.blogspot.co.uk>

Emma Ash, Senior Water Policy Officer, Consumer Scotland – “Exploring the Barriers for Consumers to Value Water”

What barriers exist that prevent consumers valuing water to the extent that is needed in the current climate? As the consumer body in the water sector in Scotland, using our consumer-based research, we examine what it means to value water in Scotland. The carbon and environmental costs of water use are not always clear to consumers. This can impact people's ability to make informed decisions - not knowing why behaviour changes are needed, or even how they might compare to other carbon intensive activities.

Many people have heard about water efficiency practices but the reasons why we should not waste water, are perhaps less clear, particularly when water appears abundant in Scotland. Raising awareness of the need to value water and empowering people to actively participate in what this means, is an essential part of building resilience to climate change impacts.

Emma Ash is Senior Water Policy Officer, currently at Citizens Advice Scotland (from 1st May 2022 the water, energy and post policy teams will be moving to the new Consumer Scotland public body). Originally qualifying as a solicitor, I now work in consumer policy and advocacy and have worked in both the energy and water sectors.

Since 2020 I have had a focus on water quality issues and climate change adaptation in the water sector. As the consumer representative body, we use research as well as working collaboratively with sector stakeholders to advocate for people and communities. Recently, I have published our private water supplies, policy insight report - [A framework to deliver universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for all](#) - and worked with water stakeholders to improve their resilience. I recently published the report – [Building Back Blue](#) - exploring community engagement in the emerging use of blue-green infrastructure as part of protecting communities from surface water flooding. I am also working with stakeholders and using our research in relation to engagement approaches for water efficiency.

Prof Andrea Ballestero, Rice University, Texas, USA – “Plumes: Following Water and Taking Responsibility for Underground Worlds”

A struggle persists among Costa Rican hydrogeologists and water activists *Plumes* (*plumas*) have emerged recently as hydrogeologists try to convey to the public the fragility and volatility of aquifers in danger of chemical contamination. Measured against human bodies, human-made disasters, and human needs, plumes guide political decisions about harm and well-being. This paper examines the assumptions about collective life in Costa Rica that are written into this figure. I what kind of imagination is needed to think life with plus and how might we think of responsibility when water worlds are shapeshifting, volatile, and in constant movement?

Andrea Ballestero is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern California. She is also Director of the [Ethnography Studio](https://ethnographystudio.org/) <https://ethnographystudio.org/>. Her book [A Future History of Water](#) (Duke University Press, 2019), examines how government officials and NGOs in Costa Rica and Northeast Brazil differentiate between water as a human right and water as a commodity. She proposes the notion of a techno-legal device as a site for future-making. She is also co-editor of [Experimenting with Ethnography: A Companion to Analysis](#) (Duke University Press 2021), a collection of experimental protocols that expand the meaning of ethnographic analysis. Dr Ballestero is currently writing a book that explores cultural imaginaries of the underground in Costa Rica, focusing on how the emergence of

aquifers into the public sphere is expanding the social world downwards into subterranean space. Her works can be found at <https://andreaballestero.com/>

Dr Kevin Grecksch, University of Oxford - “Narratives from Above and Below. Water Usage, Human Behaviour and Identity”

The human relationship with water has been a history of use and abuse. Drinking water, river navigation, irrigation, canals, cooling water for thermal power stations, dams, desalination or recreation are only a few among the many uses of water. Humans divert water, they pollute water, and it is and has been the reason for war. We trade water in reality as well as virtually, we fill it in bottles and sell it. Yet, especially in developed countries, people have lost touch with water and its value. Although we all need it, people are more aware of the price of a litre of petrol or a pint of milk than the price for a litre of drinking water from the local supplier.

In this presentation I will discuss two case studies of how we can reconnect with water. The first part addresses water efficiency and how social norms can facilitate water savings at the workplace. Presenting different themes, I will demonstrate that water saving behaviour is influenced not just by individual decisions, but social and psychological drivers such as social norms, values or group behaviour. I argue that narratives and storytelling can help us to better convey water saving messages. The second part picks up on this and looks at the German North Sea coast and explores how important the perception of the landscape and the fight against the sea was, still is, and how it shaped strong community identities. With the help of historical narratives and myths I will showcase how these perceptions can influence the adaptive capacity to climate change positively, if values and collective identities of people are taken into account, or negatively, if people see their values and collective identities not taken into consideration or even threatened.

Kevin Grecksch is Departmental Lecturer and Course Director for the MSc/MPhil in Water Science, Policy and Management in the School of Geography and the Environment. Kevin is a social scientist who specialises in normative and analytical aspects of governance, especially with regard to water and climate change adaptation. His research interests include (multilevel) environmental governance, water governance, climate change adaptation, governance of societal transformation processes, property rights and the governance of natural resources, sustainability and ecological economics. Kevin has a particular interest in why and how power relationships, institutions and knowledge shape the governance of water and climate change. Kevin is passionate about public engagement with research and his research impact. He has organised two successful drought walks in Birmingham and London, walking and discussing issues of drought and water scarcity with stakeholders at places where drought happened.

Dr Diana Valero, James Hutton Institute – “Unpacking Public Narratives of Water Security in Scotland”

Water security has not been a matter of concern in 21st century Scotland so far. However, this might change, at least in certain places, given the current and further expected impacts of climate change and the extension of dry weather periods. For example, particular vulnerability has been pointed out for households and businesses on private water supplies. However, social research on this topic has already highlighted that water insecurity issues are invisible and not even recognised as an issue by the very same people affected. In this context, it is important to investigate the narratives about water security existing in Scotland nowadays, as they provide the heuristic explanations of social realities and frame the agenda-setting issues and decision-making and implementation processes.

This presentation will be focused on the public narratives articulated by the main players in the governance of water in Scotland regarding the access to appropriate water in terms of

quantity, quality, reliability, and affordability. Using a framework based on the storytelling components of public narratives (Ganz 2011) and policy narratives (Shanahan et al., 2018), I aim to identify what are the water-security-related issues that are being considered and rebuild the storytelling around them in order to understand how the action taken is framed and communicated.

The presentation will explore a narrative describing an almost idyllic starting situation (a water-rich country with fresh, high-quality waters, with a service provider dedicated to the community and with low chargers) that is threatened by a dangerous new element, climate change. In this narrative, the water industry actors tend to place themselves in hero or mentor roles, advocating and/or pushing specific policy choices deemed to secure the maintenance of a good water provision. Thus, re-constructing the storytelling around the water security dimensions allow us to explore the public conceptualisation of water in Scotland and its reflection in the water governance, policy, and desired changes.

Diana Valero is a social scientist working as [MDT Fellow in Rural Water Security](#) working in the Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences Department at the James Hutton Institute in Aberdeen. Her educational background is in political science, local development, and rural policy. Previously, she developed her research career in multidisciplinary teams in Spain (University of Valencia) and Scotland (University of the Highlands and Islands, University of Stirling). With a strong focus on social justice, her research investigates the reconfiguration of social practices, policy narratives, and participatory processes as drivers of positive transformative change. She focuses on understanding the drivers of cooperation, innovation, conflicts and inequalities in rural areas and their links with social cohesion and positive social change. Her ongoing research in the MDT fellowship is focused on developing knowledge about community-based approaches and social innovation to enhance the understanding of water (in)security in rural Scotland.

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Kirsty Holstead, University of St Andrews – “Delivering the Value of Water on the Frontline of Public Organisations”

There is a growing recognition that far-ranging and systematic change is required to respond to water challenges caused by depleting water quality, water scarcity and flooding. In response, a reorientation of responsibilities for water concerns is occurring in various European countries, including Scotland. Aside from governments, other actors, such as communities, are viewed as central to rethinking how we govern water and achieving policy ambitions to ‘recognise the value of Scotland’s water’.

How communities value water in water services is in part shaped by practitioners. Frontline workers within public bodies responsible for delivering water services regularly come into contact with communities. These frontline workers are increasingly expected to collaborate closely with communities to encourage their involvement in public services whilst being more attentive to their needs and concerns. In doing so, they influence how participatory processes take place, they interpret community views and represent them within public organisations and water projects. A research gap exists around how frontline actors interact with communities, what engagement involves as well as the impacts.

Using data (derived from interviews and participant observation), I explore the activities of frontline workers situated in public bodies responsible for water service provision. In doing so, I unpack the role of frontline workers and examine their pertinent position in recognising the value of water. Using concepts and literature from environmental governance and public administration, I demonstrate how frontline workers in Scotland bias, align and negotiate the conditions of public service both within and out of their organisations through interactions with colleagues and communities.

Kirsty is a PhD candidate in the School of Management at the University of St Andrews and is funded by the Scottish Government Hydro Nation Scholars Programme. Her work explores community engagement in water services and flooding in Scotland, collaborating with practitioners and community groups to understand community-state interactions. Prior to starting her PhD, Kirsty worked as a researcher in the Social Economic and Geographical Science Group at the James Hutton Institute in Aberdeen on projects related to sustainable development and making Scotland a happier, healthier and greener place to live, work and play. As well as producing theoretically driven research, Kirsty contributes to policy debates and conducts applied research. Her work informed the Water Resources (Scotland) Act 2013 to include non-monetary alongside monetary value and two reviews of evidence on flood management for the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, Westminster. Before her appointment at the James Hutton Institute, Kirsty worked in international development in El Salvador.