

## ● Features archive (2008)

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### 🕒 Living near nuclear power stations



Many people living close to nuclear power stations express only reluctant acceptance of nuclear power and of new nuclear stations being built there, according to work carried out by researchers from Cardiff University and the University of East Anglia.

With the Government and energy companies preparing to build new nuclear power plants, the 5-year study shows that residents near nuclear stations at Bradwell (Essex), Oldbury (Gloucestershire) and Hinkley Point (Somerset) hold mixed views about nuclear power.

The study found that locals held a range of opinions, from considering nuclear power to be beneficial and safe to finding it threatening and being distrustful of the nuclear industry. For instance, a survey of people living near Oldbury and Hinkley Point found that they were likely to see the benefits of nuclear power outweighing its risks, yet the majority of local people still thought that nuclear power and radioactive waste present risks.

In interviews the research found that, on a day-to-day basis, many residents in Bradwell and Oldbury see the

nuclear power plants as familiar, unremarkable and feel confident that local operators are running the plants safely. Indeed many were emphatic that they would rather live near a nuclear power station, than a coal fired one or other 'dirty' industrial sites. However there were also times when many interview participants felt the power station could be threatening due to perceived risks of terrorism, health concerns and incidents such as Chernobyl.

Although over half of those surveyed at Oldbury and at Hinkley Point supported a new nuclear plant in their local area the vast majority of people surveyed, regardless of their views on nuclear power, wanted the industry and Government to fully involve local people in plans for locating new nuclear power stations.

- 🕒 This research is part of the [Understanding Risk research group](#)
- 🕒 [Cardiff University](#)
- 🕒 [University of East Anglia School of Environmental Sciences](#)
- 🕒 [Research funded by SCARR](#)

### 🕒 Queen Mary geographers recognised for ethical campus campaign



The Department of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London has been named 'Best University Academic Department of 2008' for its research into low paid migrant workers in London, and championing the living wage campaign to ensure they receive better pay and conditions.

The award, from community alliance London Citizens, was presented to Professor of Geography Jane Wills and



a team of academics and students on 4 December 2008.

In 'Making the City Work: Low Paid Employment in London', a joint report with London Citizens, geographers at Queen Mary highlighted the disadvantaged position of many of London's migrant workers, underpinning the need for a living wage and its likely impact on London's economy and development in the rest of the world.

The award recognises not only the department's innovative analysis of the effects of globalisation on local communities, but also its efforts to take responsibility for better working conditions and job quality on its own turf.

The department has been part of a successful fight to bring jobs, like cleaning, back in-house at Queen Mary and ensuring those employees are paid the living wage of £7.45 per hour.

Professor Jane Wills commenting on the award said, "We are proud to receive recognition for the work we do with London Citizens. There is no better place to study human geography than the East End of London, and being part of London Citizens means we can teach our students and do our research through active engagement in the city around us.

"Belonging to London Citizens opens doors to develop closer relationships with people we didn't know; it allows us to do research that makes a difference; and it teaches us what it means to be an active citizen in a multicultural city like London."

The University is also in the running to become the UK's most socially sustainable institution after being shortlisted for the final stage of the prestigious Green Gown Awards 2009. The awards recognise exceptional initiatives being undertaken by universities and colleges across Britain to become more environmentally and socially sustainable.

- Professor Jane Wills is director of [The City Centre at QMUL](#)
- [Research on global cities and migrants in low paid work](#)
- [Geography research on the London living wage campaign](#)

### Complaints about rubbish, waste and pollution in Kazakhstan owe more to politics than environmentalism, according to new research



Dr Catherine Alexander, of Goldsmiths, University of London, spoke to residents, bureaucrats and architects during annual fieldwork from 2000 to 2005 in Almaty – former capital of Kazakhstan, once dubbed the 'third greenest city in the Soviet Union'.

Citizens complained about air pollution, litter and rubbish, laying the blame firmly on the emergence of unregulated capitalism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. They claimed that new billboards and high-rise buildings owned by foreign companies clogged the city's air flow, unregulated *shashlik* (kebab) stalls burned foul-smelling fuels, while unlicensed petrol stations belched black smoke. Migrants from rural Kazakhstan were accused of littering the streets and canals.

Parks and trees, the city's green lungs, were being decimated by authorities selling public land to businessmen for petrol stations, offices, casinos and leisure centres.

However, according to Dr Alexander, these complaints often overlook a more complex geography that stretches back to Perestroika, and before, with pollution often being a direct legacy of the city's socialist past.

Shrinking subsidies from Moscow during Perestroika, for example, resulted in the unchecked growth of trees and bushes in the city's central parks; fountains dried out and cracked, the grass grew to meadow height.

Before 2002, many of the higher buildings in central Almaty were in fact built during the Soviet period. Toxic soil in the city centre resulted from the factories scattered throughout the city, which leaked chemicals





into the land. The proximity of un-engineered waste dumps and industrial zones to residential areas – despite Soviet planning norms to the contrary – led these areas to be characterised as ‘time bombs’.

The complexity continues when many companies that were said to be foreign owned were often subsidiaries of Kazakh holding companies, that were in turn connected to an elite that spans Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

Citizens' nostalgia for Almaty's once green garden-like city is thus intertwined with realisations of the negative effects and legacies of the various political regimes they have been, and are, living through.

➤ [More on Catherine Alexander's work](#)

➤ Dr Alexander's research is published in a chapter of *Enduring Socialism: Explorations of Revolution and Transformation, Restoration and Continuation* edited by Harry West and Parvathi Raman, and published by Bergahn Books. [Details](#)



### ● Cold baths, and bathing in the landscape



Research by Dr Clare Hickman of Bristol University has brought to light the little-known geography of Britain's cold baths.

A fashionable folly of Georgian Britain, cold baths were plunging pools set in panoramic landscapes, dotted across the country. The baths were filled with cold spring water to ensure purity and preserve good health.

Medical writers of the period promoted cold bathing as part of an exercise routine, fuelled by a trend at the time

for more interaction of nature due to concerns that luxury and civilization caused ill-health amongst the wealthy classes.

Water wasn't the only attraction at these precursors to lidos. Occupying commanding views, cold bathers walked through the landscape to reach the baths. Their enjoyment and appreciation of the landscape was thought to contribute to health and wellbeing.

Cold baths' popularity declined in the early 20th century, to be replaced by lidos and swimming pools, which can be thought of an extension of cold baths, carrying on the linkage of health, water and landscape.

### ● Geographer develops curriculum for Vietnamese integrated rural development course



Charles Howie, a PhD student from Royal Holloway University of London's Department of Geography, worked with teachers at Vietnam's An Giang University to develop the country's first undergraduate integrated rural development course.

The curriculum, the culmination of four years' work, has already proved to be a success, with most of the graduates employed by the government of the province, commercial banks and a growing number of seed and aquaculture companies.

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Some 60-70% of Vietnam's 85 million people live in the countryside. The largest concentration live in the Mekong Delta. Here, An Giang University (AGU) offers the course enrolling 80 students annually into its four-year programme.

On completion of the curriculum's first draft, Charles led a consultation process to hear the views of local government and private enterprise - the potential employers of the graduates - and to find hands-on experience for students during training.

Once the curriculum was completed, Charles had a chance to go into the field with students to find out how it worked out.

"The students have an huge thirst for knowledge and learning", said Charles. "This was one of the most exciting experiences of my life. It drew on skills and knowledge gathered over 40 years. Vietnamese farmers are ambitious for their children and realistic about how many people the land can support, so the need for more off-farm employment is crucial. I hope these graduates will have an understanding of how to bring that about and will, in time, come to occupy senior positions in the delta.

At first Charles worked as a volunteer, funded by the British Executive Service Overseas. Later, a Higher Education Link, funded by The British Council, between AGU and the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, enabled exchanges of staff between institutions, including assistance for a member of staff to come to the UK for higher education. Later, Charles gained an award from the ESRC/NERC. In return for this work, AGU is assisting Charles to do a PhD entitled Farmer decision making in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam.

- [More on Charles Howie's work](#)
- [An Giang University](#)

## ○ Helping Namibian families grow own crops



For the first time, in 2008 several Namibian families have been able to harvest pumpkin, squash, carrots, onions and watermelons from their own home gardens, thanks to The Kalahari Garden Project.

Funded by a Neville Shulman Challenge Award from the Society, the project provides training and assistance to cultivate home gardens for San households. The San, southern Africa's oldest inhabitants, currently largely rely on food aid for survival.

### **Managing water in dry environments**

Managing water is crucial in their dry environment, with pumps, drums, piping provided and existing boreholes maintained. One village has seen the amount of water available daily double, ensuring supply for the households and gardens.

The 10 x 14 metre gardens, designed by horticultural technician Ian Martin, the project team and San beneficiaries, help 550 San people learn about crop growing and become sustainable.

- [More on Neville Shulman Challenge Award](#)
  - [Kalahari Garden Project blog](#)
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## ○ Mapping territorial claims in the Arctic

With Russia laying to claim to a large area of the Arctic in 2007, geographers at Durham University have drawn an Arctic Map showing where future border disputes may occur as states lay claim to the region.

As searches for new oil, gas and minerals intensifies, and due to historical and ongoing arguments about ownership, Arctic lands and seas could see increased claims – and conflicts.

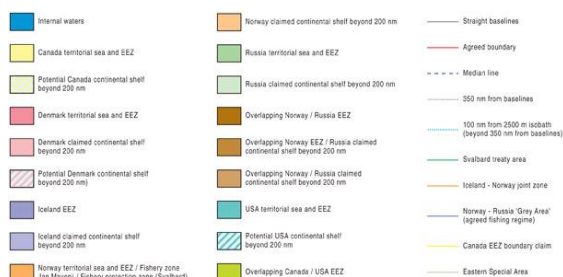
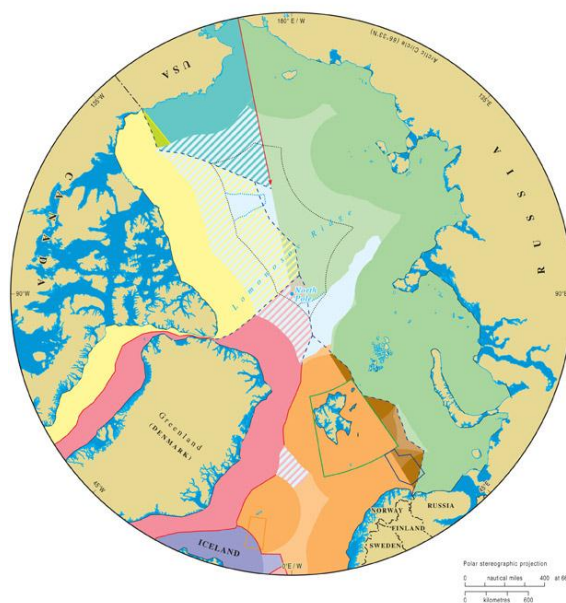
Durham's geographers believe their map is the first published map to depict maritime jurisdictional issues in the Arctic with geographic precision. The map shows where boundaries have been agreed, where known claims are and forecasts the potential areas that states might claim.

The International Boundaries Research Unit, based at the Department of Geography at Durham University, is a leading source of information and expertise on boundary and territorial issues around the world.

- [More details on the Arctic boundaries map](#)
- [More on the International Boundaries Research Unit work](#)



Maritime jurisdiction and boundaries in the Arctic region



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