Towards Hydrocitizenship in the Lee Valley

AHRC Research Project Update Spring 2017

Launch of Stream Wheel, Three Mills
3-5pm Saturday 13th May 2017, The House Mill

Lee Valley- Hydrocitizenship team has been working with several communities/ stakeholders around the Lee Valley (see Page 2) over the last three years (2014-2017) to explore their links and relations with water spaces.

Since January 2016, we have been in collaboration with the House Mill at the Three Mills heritage site to launch the Active Energy initiative led by artist, Dr. Loraine Leeson. The outflow from House Mill at the Three Mills heritage site will be being utilised to drive a floating stream wheel powering an aerator to help oxygenate the water and counteract the effects of pollution on the river’s fish and wildlife. This is a continuing collaboration with The Geezers pensioners group (Age UK, Bow) and other partners including Love the Lea and the House Mill with new engagement planned with local secondary schools and communities. Active Energy won the Best Arts and Green Energy award by Regen SW on November 2016 and supported by Big Lottery Fund.

To celebrate National Mills Weekend (14-15 May 2016), Lee Valley- Hydrocitizenship team ran a cultural mapping stall where locals shared their experiences and ideas about living, working and relaxing near the Three Mills and River Lee. Also, the Geezers worked with artist Loraine Leeson and engineer Toby Borland in front of the House Mill to construct a stream wheel for later installation in the Lower Lea.

The launch of the Stream Wheel, Active Energy at the Three Mills will take place during the National Mills Weekend on Saturday, 13 May 2017, 3-5pm by the House Mill (Three Mill Lane, Bromley By Bow, London E3 3DU).

Find out more at:
Active Energy website [http://www.active-energy-london.org/]
and Lee Valley-Hydrocitizenship website [http://www.leevalley.org/]
### Hackney Wick & Fish Island

- Monthly Hackney Wick Cultural Interest Group meetings – feedback/exchange
- Follow up on the cultural mapping at Hackney Wick Connected Communities Festival: July 2015
- Engagement plan with boat dwellers Springfield Marina, Walthamstow Marshes
- Working with LLDC Waterways Officer on new strategy/community engagement

### Walthamstow Wetlands

- Walthamstow Marshes/Springfield Marina cultural mapping – Feb & March 2017
- Firs Farm Wetlands Festival cultural mapping – July 2016
- Wetland Encounter mini surveys with participants on monthly guided walks
- LWT volunteer research skills training & cultural mapping – March 2016
- Focus group & oral histories with local fishermen - Feb & March 2016
- Working with curator for Walthamstow Wetlands education display helping informing the content on new visitor centre & pre-opening exhibition at Vestry House (including Hydrocitizenship data in exhibition) Oct 2017
- 30 semi-structured interviews with a wide range of users and project stakeholders - Nov 2015- March 2016

### Three Mills

- Active Energy - Installation of water wheel – May 2017
- Student internship (March-June 2016)
- Stakeholder engagement in the area: local schools, Age Concern (Bow) and House Mill
- Collaboration with Carpenters Lock Festival – CRT stakeholders – August 2018

### Woodberry Down Wetlands

- Cultural mapping workshop/stall @ Hidden River Festival – September 2016 and Winter Fest – December 2015
- Focus group with LWT Wetland conservation volunteers – January 2016

### Walking Narratives of the Lee Valley

Following Simon Read’s pictorial essay on the River Lee, further walks have been undertaken completing his reflections on this Cinderella River. The latest instalment covers London north section of the New (or ‘Hidden’) River - a water supply aqueduct, completed in 1613, to bring drinking water from Hertfordshire to North London. Since 1992, Thames Water has worked with local people & partners to create a 28 mile long footpath that follows the course of the New River, linking the inner city to the countryside. Simon’s narratives are published in 2005 and a new updated edition of the ‘Walking Narratives of the Lee Valley’ will be published online/hardcopy in summer 2017.

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**Above:** Emerging themes in Lee Valley, Simon Read

**Left:** Jo running the cultural mapping stall at the Winter Fest December 2015 with local residents and visitors
Methods & practice...

1. **Governance and stakeholder mapping**

2. **Interviews, focus groups & surveys:** Lee Valley Map walk reports (2014-5); 30 semi-structured interviews with WW & WD management stakeholders, volunteers, rangers, birders, anglers, local residents (11/2015-3/2016); focus groups with volunteers at WD & MHD; guided walks WW-mini surveys to support LWT engagement evaluation


4. **Cultural mapping/GIS participation**
   workshops with local communities regarding access, use, safety, perceptions/values around Lee River/Canal – Hackney Wick (05/2014, 06/2015), Walthamstow Marshes (08/2015, 07/2016) Woodberry Down (12/2015, 10/2016), WW volunteer day (03/2016), Three Mills (05/2016) - & the significance (or not) of these wetland reserves/relations with water.


7. **Water & sediment sampling** - analysis and source mapping (11 locations, inc. Bow)
Dissemination and Publications

Publications

Conferences/Seminars
• RGS (Exeter, 2015), LLDC (London, 2015)
• AAG (San Francisco, 2016)
• Museum of London (2016)
• Dartington (2016): AHRC CC (2016)
• AAG (Boston, 2017), MACCH Maastricht (2017)

Preliminary Analysis

Cultural Ecosystems Mapping:
• Value of Space: sense of place, activities, recreation
  Diversity of quiet and green spaces, cycling/walking along the marshes/canal and watching the sunset by the canal
• Cultural Use and Heritage: recreation, social relations, cultural heritage values, development/loss of assets; Olympic venues as part of culture & heritage along with locations that represent the industrial past of the area
• Problems: accessibility, safety, unpleasant environment
  Rubbish by the canal/river and safety (‘fear of crime’, swimming); confusion over responsibility for maintenance and management of pathways/towpaths and waterways
• Community Cohesion: diversity, engagement, creativity
  Strength of the community lies in ‘creativity’, ‘diversity’, ‘distinct events’ and ‘tolerance to each other’

Some of the key themes from our analysis:
• The role of the arts in interpretation of environmental and hydro-social messages to help build stronger human-nature relations.
• The ‘wild’ & ‘secret’ quality of the wetlands is treasured by many current users who view it as an ‘escape’, an ‘oasis’, & a place of ‘discovery’.
• The growth of green POPS (privately owned public spaces) raises important questions around new models of ownership of ecosystems services & resulting public access, benefits, risks & participation in governance & stewardship.
• The reliance on & prominence of volunteers, or active citizenship, raises critical questions around citizen duties, citizen labour & environmental citizenship.
• The heritage & current water resource management captures visitor imaginations, raising questions around their role in sustainable hydro-social relations.
• The diversity of possible site users places a focus on management in terms of inclusivity of engagement, & community connections, tensions & boundaries.

More information
National Project:
http://www.hydrocitizenship.com
Lee Valley case study:
http://www.leevalley.org

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Above: Simon Read at the AAG Annual Conference, 2016, San Francisco