

What is the public value of the humanities?

The humanities and the discipline of history, more specifically, have recently experienced heightened pressure to justify their position in the university and their broader purpose to the public. This comes as no surprise to historians, who seemingly suffer identity crises on a regular basis, leading Funke to observe that the discipline ‘seems to die every fifty years,’ with historians cyclically evaluating their work and their role in society.¹ The present crisis seems unique, however. In the context of the increased marketisation of higher education, historians are facing pressure from numerous angles to justify their work. On the side of funding, they are urged to carry out cost-benefit analyses on their research in order to persuade funding councils of their ‘value,’ while in reaction to increased tuition fees, history as a discipline is having to present itself as economically viable to new influxes of students who are increasingly viewing their degree as a private investment in their future career. The distinctive character of these threats has created a tendency for the value of history to be defined in economic terms, whereby its worth is rooted in its ability to provide a return on investment. In the first part of my essay, I will critique this narrow conception of ‘value,’ and instead argue that we can use history itself to destabilise this paradigm, making reference to Foucauldian theory in particular and the way this can be used to challenge current discourses. Beyond this, I will engage in a discussion about how we might best conceptualise the ‘public’ that is so often referred to in justifications of the humanities, before moving on to a specific case study of the relationship between history and the sphere of policy-making. The key theme that arises from my work is that we are, in fact, asking the wrong questions of the humanities, and instead there is a pressing need for historians to take an active role in reframing the current discourses around ‘value’ and ‘impact’ so that they might better fulfil their broader role in society.

A key point of contention when examining the public value of the humanities manifests itself in debates around how we should actually define this notion of ‘value’. In recent decades, ideas of ‘value’ and ‘worth’ have been reduced to primarily economic definitions, as non-economic arenas have come to be reviewed by equations of cost and benefit. In the context of academic research, justifications of the humanities have often focused on their contribution to the ‘national innovation system’ and increasing ‘human capital’, as referred to in the Arts

¹ N. Funke, *Megalophilia and the Historian*, <<https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/responding-to-the-history-manifesto/nick-funke/>> [accessed 12/11/17].

and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)'s report, 'Leading the World'.^{2,3} This unprecedented infiltration of economic ideals into the academic sector is representative of the current neoliberal agenda of governments across the world, whereby public institutions, including universities, are exposed to market mechanisms as governments withdraw from the public sector. In the case of the humanities, this can be identified most prominently in the 'Impact Agenda', which was formulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and is based on the assumption that academic research, including that of historians, must provide evidence of 'impact' if they are to receive funding and, in turn, demonstrate 'value for money' for the taxpayer.⁴ More expansive marketisation occurred following the decision to increase tuition fees in 2012, meaning that students were to pay up to £9,000 a year for a degree at English universities. As a consequence, students have come to see themselves as customers of the university, with many choosing their degree on the basis of the contribution it will make to their future earning potential. This was intensified further by the decision in 2015 to include both universities and their student-customers in the Consumer Rights Act.⁵ Consequently, the public value of the humanities has shifted away from broader connections to critical and imaginative skills, and has instead centred on their contribution to one's future career. If we are to challenge this contemporary paradigm, and extend public understanding of the value of the humanities, we need to hold this economic ideology to account. It is with the help of the humanities that we can achieve this, and more specifically with reference to the work of Michel Foucault.

By reference to Foucauldian theory, it becomes possible to dissect the neoliberal paradigm and to demonstrate the role that historians have in undermining reductive definitions of value. Foucault facilitates this in his discussions on discourse, a concept used to describe broad language frameworks of so-called 'truths', which are disseminated through various institutions including the media and education, and which determine how individuals think and behave.⁶ By carrying out an 'archaeology' of past discourses, including those surrounding madness and

² Arts and Humanities Research Council, *Leading the World: The Economic Impact of UK Arts and Humanities Research* (2009), p.3.

³ Arts and Humanities Research Council, *Leading the World*, p.6.

⁴ Higher Education Funding Council for England, *REF Impact* (2016), <<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/REFimpact/>> [accessed 31/10/17].

⁵ L. Bunce, A. Baird and S. Jones, 'The student-as-consumer approach in higher education and its effects on academic performance', *Studies in Higher Education*, 42 (2017), 1958-78 (p.1959).

⁶ M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, tr. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p.193.

sexuality, Foucault demonstrates that all discourses and 'regimes of truth' are established in particular contexts, and have changed form over time. From this, he highlights that knowledge and discourse are, in fact, temporary and that what we might accept as 'truth' in contemporary society is not stable or neutral in any way.⁷ Consequently, by applying Foucault's work to contemporary frameworks surrounding 'value', we can understand that the value of the humanities has not always been reduced to cost-benefit analyses, and instead that the present discourse is informed by a specific set of power relations which can be challenged. Therefore, the emphasis placed by research councils and the government on the need for humanities to prove their public 'impact' on a primarily economic basis is destabilised. In contrast, we, as academics, can distance ourselves from these discussions, using our critical skills to dissect the power relations that inform them. Helen Small, a Professor of English Literature, achieves this effortlessly in her book, *The Value of the Humanities*, as she dissects the language surrounding 'value,' before undertaking her own archaeology of past relationships between humanities scholars and their sense of value.⁸ The effect of this is to implore readers to extend their perspective in examining the role of history in the public. Hers is not a polemic approach and she is able to remove herself from the sense of crisis imposed on the humanities from outside to enrich our understanding of their value. In my opinion, these discussions about how we might unpick the discourse which is currently undermining the humanities are much more valuable and instructive than what seems, in the present day, to be a continuous cycle of self-reflection on how history might better prove its economic merit.

The remaining part of this essay examines the role that history might play in the policy-making process, which acts as a starting point from which we can conceptualise how the humanities, and history specifically, enrich our lives beyond the notion of 'value for money'. More specifically, it examines the way that we might use historical work to create a better policy-making atmosphere, which not only enriches the work of Whitehall, but also holds value for wider groups in society. This ties in with discussions about who we refer to when we talk about the 'public', and while this essay attempts to explore a broader definition of history's value in society, the term 'public' is much too generalised to encompass the diversity of history's contributions within and beyond the university. Instead, it is crucial to acknowledge the way in which historians and their work will have a different meaning to the different groups that exist within society. The purpose that a politician derives from historical study will differ considerably to the value of history to marginal groups, for example. In view of this, I have chosen to focus on an individual case study, rather than a discussion of the relationship between history and

⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology*, p.27.

⁸ H. Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

the public more generally. By doing so, I hope to demonstrate the unique value of history to individual scenarios, whilst also highlighting the inaccuracy of reducing the 'public' to a singular group of people. By setting historical work within a specific context, it becomes possible to identify the particular, nuanced ways in which it holds value, as opposed to work that regards the 'public' as a collective with internally consistent interests and intentions. Moreover, this acts as an additional critique of contemporary efforts to reduce the public value of the humanities to a singular, economic definition; the diversity of actors engaging with history in the public testifies to the limitations of a narrow conception of 'value.' With this in mind, I will now move on to an exploration of my own experience of incorporating history into the work of policy-making through a local think-tank in Bristol. From this, I will then examine how we might use history to create a more balanced and tolerant society.

In the autumn of 2017, I carried out a period of volunteering for the Schumacher Institute, during which I was asked to write a report (see Appendix) on what I believed to be the value of history in the policy-making process. Throughout my research, it became clear that both the content and the skills cultivated by historical study could contribute to creating a better policy-making process characterised by inclusiveness and foresight. One of the principal aims of the Schumacher Institute is to consider the impact of policy at a human level, focusing their attention on the ground-level implications of particular policy changes and how we might better understand subjectivities from a top-down perspective. I took this pillar as a key theme for my report and examined the ways in which historical study, particularly the more recent social and cultural histories, can facilitate a more in-depth, nuanced understanding of communities. This is even more crucial given the tendency of Whitehall to adopt a detached and often cold approach to social and environmental problems, framing their work on objective data received through particular channels. In favouring this 'evidence-based policy', Whitehall displays a preference for solutions which are both cost-effective and supported by reliable data, yet simultaneously fails to consider the human impact of their decisions. Historians on the other hand, particularly those who derived their success from the cultural turn, can promote a more balanced interpretation of policy issues. As mentioned in my report, the writings of Darnton and Zemon Davis showcase analytical skills which enable them to investigate broad historical trends from the perspective of one individual.^{9,10} These are not the only examples, however, as recent socio-cultural histories have achieved considerable success in shifting perspectives away from the grand narratives of the nineteenth-century to deeper and more nuanced

⁹ R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

¹⁰ N. Z. Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).

analyses of human societies. As my report argues, historical knowledge promotes empathy, which in turn encourages greater understanding of other cultures and norms. Thus, by injecting an awareness of subjectivity into the policy-making process, historians not only foster a less detached response to policy issues, they also highlight the diversity of perspectives at the ground level. In turn, Whitehall can be pressed to adopt a more balanced and inclusive attitude in its work. By integrating this approach into Whitehall, historians can promote sensitive responses to policy issues, which consider a variety of perspectives and levels of impact.

As well as taking a parochial view towards the impact of their decisions, policy-makers have shown a tendency towards narrow conceptions of what issues are serious in the present moment, focusing almost exclusively on the near future. In line with the neoliberal context outlined above, Whitehall leans towards those issues which are seen to provide short-term economic or political gain, ignoring concerns that could have disastrous consequences for later generations, most notably climate change. Where the realms of policy are dominated by opportunist and reactive approaches, the work of historians can provide both the content and the analytical skills necessary to shift our attention to an extended timeline, contemplating the policy matters that will concern us in years to come, as well as analysing the longer-term effects of our current policy trajectory. My report draws on a recent example of foreign policy adopting a short-term perspective, which had catastrophic implications on an international scale, yet which could have been remedied had governments and policy-makers appealed to the foresight and analysis provided by history. In reaction to the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, both the United States and Britain made the decision to invade Iraq under the premise of a 'War on Terror,' arguing that the international terrorism of the 21st-century had never been seen before. Tony Blair himself commented in 2003 that, 'there has never been a time when, except in the most general sense, a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day', arguing that the novelty of the contemporary threat made history redundant.¹¹ In stark contrast to the world of foreign policy, however, historians used their knowledge base and analytical skills to highlight that Holy Terror, as was seen in 9/11, had a much longer history, stretching well beyond the 21st-century, thereby destabilising claims that the threat to the Western world in 2001 was unprecedented.¹² More importantly, however, historical study also showcased their foresight in suggesting that the invasion of Iraq would

¹¹'Tony Blair's speech to the US Congress,' *The Guardian*, 18 July 2003, available online at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/jul/18/iraq.speeches>> [accessed 04/11/17].

¹² C. Andrew, 'Intelligence analysis needs to look backwards before looking forward', *History & Policy* (June 2004) <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/intelligence-analysis-needs-to-look-backwards-before-looking-forward>> [accessed 11/11/17].

not solve the issue of international terrorism, instead it would perpetuate the problem further. One example is the research of Milton-Edwards, which made a comparison between Iraq in 1918 and 2003, predicting that the 'War on Terror' would condemn 'Iraq and its people to repeat the undemocratic cycle which began in the 1920s.' Shifting our attention away from the economic value of history and instead promoting a more consistent interaction between Whitehall and academia will provide us with a stronger foundation from which to approach long-term policy issues at a human level, avoiding short-sighted and ultimately destructive decisions like the ones taken under Bush and Blair in 2003.

One of the most interesting connections I made in my report was that between historical study and the cultivation of narrative skills. This emerged upon self-reflection of my earlier research, as I questioned how historians might practically exert influence over Whitehall, an institution characterised by the Director of the Schumacher Institute as opaque and difficult to infiltrate. Given my close encounter with history, I could see clearly the value to be derived from greater interaction between historians and policy-makers, but there also needed to be a mechanism through which this could be achieved. Following reflection, I centred on the value of narrative and story-telling in communicating within and beyond Whitehall. Often, the evidence-based approach of policy-makers requires them to focus heavily on objective data and algorithms, most noticeably in their discussions of climate change, at the expense of in-depth narrative. Yet, it is primarily through the medium of story that the wider public come to understand particular policy trajectories and issues, with evidence playing only a complementary role in this. Policy-makers do not only need to explain the specific approach they are taking, they also need to provide a narrative around why they have chosen this approach, contextualising policy issues and appealing to a public audience. This is where the narrative skills of history can prove valuable, as historians are experienced in using primary evidence to formulate a coherent story, which can be used to enrich academic and public understanding of the past. This is particularly useful in the conceptualisation of future policy issues, including climate change, which requires a degree of imagination given its dissimilarity with the present-day. As historians utilise narrative to reconstruct the unknowns of the past, so they can use it to uncover the unfamiliarity of the future. An impact agenda which focuses exclusively on the economy and a rhetoric of accountability will overlook these richer contributions of historians and their work.

However, another key theme that emerged from my time spent at the Schumacher Institute was the barriers that currently exist between Whitehall and the academic world, making it difficult for historians to demonstrate their value, let alone to involve themselves in policy-making processes. The distinction between the short-term, day-to-day basis of policy-making

and the long-term, detailed research of historians emerged as a fundamental obstacle to consistent communication. It also reflected a tendency within contemporary discourse to favour short-term economic impact at the expense of long-term, more profound impact, further restricting the potential for historians to demonstrate public value on a broader scope. Given the stark differences in their priorities, it can seem difficult to imagine a mutual foundation for these two seemingly incompatible sections of society to work from. However, as is highlighted in my report, communication is the key to fostering this relationship, and efforts are being made to promote interaction, especially through the History & Policy network. By demonstrating the value that policy-makers can derive from history, historians are able to make the first steps away from restrictive definitions of economic value towards a broader understanding of the role of the humanities in the policy-making sphere. In line with this, a report by the Institute for Government, carried out by Haddon et al. in 2015, makes it clear that policy-makers perceive historical analysis to be of immense value to their work. As well as providing a long-term perspective, 'history is seen to add value, providing context and a conceptual toolkit for policy issues'.¹³ From my time spent at the Schumacher Institute and from my independent research, it is clear that history has purpose for policy-makers beyond notions of economic value. On a practical basis, it is important for historians to engage with policy-makers through existing networks, such as the History & Policy website, as well as establishing new frameworks in which greater cooperation can be fostered between the world of Whitehall and the academy. In addition to challenging limited conceptualisations of humanities' value, this engagement will undoubtedly result in a better policy-making atmosphere, which is both balanced and beneficial to a wider audience.

On the basis of this research, and of my report for the Schumacher Institute, it can be seen that the present discourse around value has distorted the broader values of history to the public in an attempt to expose the humanities to a destructive neoliberal rhetoric. Definitions of value as synonymous to cost-effectiveness are established to bolster a rhetoric of accountability and economic rationalism, and are intertwined with broader power relations between institutions. With this context in mind, historians are now faced with a choice; they can continue to structure their research and identity according to this present, reductive paradigm or they can decide to adopt a critical position, from which they are able to reframe the questions being asked of them and to challenge the discourse which is currently undermining their broader role in society. This has been the focus of my essay, which centres on a case study of my experience with the Schumacher Institute in order to showcase the

¹³ Haddon et al., 'What is the Value of History in Policymaking?', Institute for Government, (January 2015) <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Making%20History%20Work%20Report%20-%20Final_0.pdf> [accessed 12/03/2017].

complexities and nuances involved in understanding the public value of the humanities. In some ways, these challenges are starting to produce effects, as critiques from scholars such as Belfiore and Upchurch have exerted pressure over funding councils to extend their definitions of 'value.'¹⁴ The British Academy's 'Prospering Wisely' Report testifies to this, including ideas such as 'the quest for a better, deeper, more valuable life' and considering the role of the humanities in 'mak[ing] the complex intelligible, and help[ing] us understand human values and possibilities'.¹⁵ Yet, this report is still dominated by references to 'the cultural, creative and digital industries', with an obvious interest in overall national prosperity.¹⁶ Historians still have a long way to go, therefore, but it is vital that they remove themselves from the distraction of 'value for money' discourses, and instead demonstrate their wider public value.

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¹⁵ British Academy, *Prospering Wisely: How the Humanities and Social Sciences Enrich Our Lives* (February 2014), p.1.

¹⁶ British Academy, *Prospering Wisely*, p.3.

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Appendix

REPORT for THE SCHUMACHER INSTITUTE

Unlocking Policy-Making: The Key is in the Past

The policy-making process has typically been regarded as opaque and complex, encompassing a number of competing interests, yet denying the academic world consistent access. This places history in a difficult position, particularly at a time when the historical profession has been tasked with justifying its value to the public at large. Virginia Berridge's work with Whitehall's senior policy-makers proves informative here, providing a list of the unit's information sources in order of priority.¹⁷ Included in this list are special advisers at the top, the media and constituents at the bottom. History, and the past more generally, are afforded no place on this list. In fact, the head of the Strategy Unit, 'could not think of an instance where history had been used'.¹⁸ One might argue that this has become the habitual state of the humanities in recent years, faced with a 'crisis' in funding and credibility under the so-called 'Impact' agenda. However, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that history, in particular, has so much to offer in the realm of policy-making. This contribution can be interpreted most simplistically on two levels: the content of the past and its subject matter specifically, followed by the skills of analysis required in carrying out historical research. In what follows, I will examine the role of history in unlocking policy-making, using these two distinctions, while looking in more detail at specific processes, including the formulation of future narratives. This is not always as straightforward as it seems, however, as there are a number of barriers and restrictions which can often inhibit academic involvement in policy-making. Nonetheless, it is only by identifying such problematics that we can start to understand and resolve them, thus this is a beneficial procedure in itself. The purpose of this discussion is not simply a defensive justification of the existence of history as an academic discipline, but is focused on the question of how we can create better policy-making procedures that consider a range of perspectives and are thus able to make more informed conclusions, which affect communities on a human level.

In order for policy to be relevant and appropriate, its key ideas need to relate to communities on a human level, meaning that they avoid abstractions which fail to consider how change will affect people on the ground. Policy-makers and politicians often have a tendency towards this

¹⁷ V. Berridge, 'History Matters? History's Role in Health Policy Making', *Medical History*, 52 (2008), pp. 311-26, p.314.

¹⁸ Berridge, 'History Matters?', p.314.

objective, reductive approach, however, as the cultures of Whitehall and Westminster are very far detached from the realities of Shoreditch or Newcastle, for example. This is where the new histories of the 20th-century can play an important role, as historians such as Robert Darnton and Natalie Zemon Davis have had considerable success in turning their attention to more individual levels of the past, focusing entire books on individuals from non-elite backgrounds.¹⁹ ²⁰ This has become part of a much broader historical movement focused on writing bottom-up stories, demonstrating a shift away from the elitist, grand narratives of the 19th-century. In this respect, both the historical content and the methodologies used are informative in the policy-making process. Understanding the values and foundations of specific cultures, whether this be Eastern European culture more generally or the distinctive cultures of North England versus South England, is vital if we are to incorporate a wide variety of perspectives into policy. In explaining this culture-specific content, historians can encourage policy-makers to consider how different communities might respond to certain social and environmental changes based on an understanding of their values. I would argue that it was a lack of historical understanding that fuelled the hostility towards the Islamic community following the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. The prejudice and active aggression towards Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 reflected a complete paucity of cultural tolerance, something that could have been fostered had those in policy-making circles been more informed of the cultural background to Islam.²¹ In this sense, then, historical knowledge translates into empathy, which prevents us from becoming obtuse to other groups in society.

At the level of methodology, these new socio-cultural histories can also cultivate imaginative skills through the construction of subjective narratives, which can pose a challenge to the reductive, unsympathetic work of Whitehall. This subjectivity is focused on understanding how individuals develop systems of meaning within their own minds, encapsulated most aptly in the recent history of mentalities. This kind of historical research moves away from seeking an objective truth of the past, and instead looks at the distinctive ways in which individuals from different cultures might perceive their own existence. As a consequence of this, a level of tolerance is fostered, which recognises that there is not one uniform interpretation of the world. If policy-makers were to incorporate a similar methodology into their work, they could achieve a much deeper understanding of policy issues, acknowledging that there is not one correct solution for every problem they face, rather it is a question of the perspective taken. One can't

¹⁹ R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

²⁰ N. Z. Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²¹ J. Bate, *The Public Value of the Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p.9.

help but think that the policy-makers of Whitehall have chosen to approach issues in a more utilitarian way, considering which solutions are least harmful and most beneficial *in general*, at the expense of incorporating the diverse collection of cultural values which will inevitably interact with any policy produced. If we are to move away from this artificial, insular approach towards a more human level policy-making process, history can most certainly lead the way.

To continue this thought trajectory, one can also consider the analytical perspective provided by historians when dealing with the rhetoric of powerful figures in society, including politicians and big businesses. Given their priorities of winning over public opinion and increasing their support base, politicians can often present policy issues, such as climate change, in a way that corroborates their short-term political priorities. This so-called 'short-termism' has been diagnosed by Guldi and Armitage in their *History Manifesto*, which argues that 21st-century Western societies are plagued by a short-term mind-set, which prevents more sustainable responses to social and environmental issues.²² Politicians, in particular, work on the basis of their five-year term, making long-term issues less pressing in an agenda focused primarily on appeasing the public in the present day. This is not unique to politics however, as big businesses are often driven increasingly by the pursuit of short-term profit, ignoring the adverse consequences of their relentless production lines until they are staring them in the face. Had these groups taken a long-term perspective on environmental issues, in particular, they might have realised that a solution to climate change was needed long before the Paris Treaty was finalised in 2015. In the face of this blatant ignorance, historical methodology can encourage us to take a more balanced view of policy issues, identifying when data are being manipulated to benefit short-term political campaigns and looking beyond parochial concerns to provide a more long-term understanding of policy issues. This is particularly useful, given that historians' priorities often stretch over hundreds, if not thousands, of years and thus they are well-trained in examining change over the long-term. Whereas politicians often have superficial concerns focused on their own popularity, historians prioritise in-depth evaluation, which allows them to dissect political rhetoric and, in effect, 'speak truth to power'. This can be demonstrated with reference to Tony Blair's 2003 speech to the US Congress, in which he argued that history was no longer of use because of the unprecedented nature of the problems facing 21st-century governments. This statement was made in reference to 9/11, claiming that the world had never before witnessed such international terrorism. However, in dissecting this speech, historians were able to challenge the novelty of the situation, demonstrating that Holy Terror extends beyond the 21st-century and has a much longer history than initially assumed.

²² D. Armitage and J. Guldi, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.2.

The analytical skills derived from historical study thus destabilise political rhetoric and encourage us to look beyond the short-term, in turn enriching policy-making procedures.

However, it would be equally ignorant to assume that this communication between policy-makers and historians in pursuit of a long-term perspective is something that is easily achieved. Most obviously, the priorities of historians and those working in Whitehall are in stark contrast to each other, as the political sphere functions on a day-to-day basis with short-term, strategic pressures, whilst academic historians are very often engaged in deep, reflective research which can take years to formulate into a book or article. Helen McCarthy expands on these issues based on her experience working in Whitehall, thus providing a useful insight into the problems we face in creating a relationship between history and policy-making.²³ During her work with the think-tank *Demos*, she found that the short time-scales became an obstacle to considering the bigger picture of policy issues. Similarly, when trying to publicise her own work, she found that interviewers would frequently simplify her ideas in order to make them more accessible to a less academic public.²⁴ How, then, are we to unite these two conflicting spheres of interest?

If we are to convince policy-makers to compromise on their time-scales in order to incorporate historical understanding, it is crucial to explain why they need history in their work. Reports such as this one are important in providing information, but it is also vital to create discussion between these two spheres so as to foster heightened understanding. At present, a beneficial format through which to achieve this is the History & Policy website, established by Reid and Szreter, which acts as a mediator between historians and policy-makers. At a basic level, historians are able to publish their research on the website for use by policy-makers when needed. Although this means that historians often have to make presumptions about future issues, it also allows both groups to work at their own pace. More specifically, the History & Policy network runs seminars and workshops, which provide opportunities for direct communication between historians and the policy world. It is formats like these that are beneficial in establishing the networks of interaction we need if we are to incorporate historical thought into Whitehall. From the perspective of history, there is also a need to professionalise, whereby individual historians make it their job to engage with policy-makers as part of their work. To some extent, Peter Hennessy has achieved this, creating a strong bond with the world of politics and using his work to advise past Prime Ministers. At current, however, these

²³ H. McCarthy, 'Contextualising the Past, Enriching the Present,' *History & Policy* (October 2015) <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/case-studies/case-study/helen-mccarthy>> [accessed 08/02/2017].

²⁴ H McCarthy, 'Contextualising the Past'.

networks are too ad hoc and inconsistent. A concerted effort is needed if historians are to establish a permanent and relevant position in the policy-making world.

On a more practical level, historical skills have a useful role to play in the formulation of future narratives, which are crucial if policy-makers are to convey their concerns to a wider public about what issues will need to be faced in the long-term. This is most relevant to environmental policy, and in particular climate change, whereby present policy developments are often based on an abstract conception of what kind of future world we are going to be dealing with. Despite an abundance of scientific data about environmental trends and the quantifiable implications of increasing harmful emissions, there remains a distinctive inability to actually conceptualise this somewhat ominous future. What policy-makers now require are the narrative tools, which are derived from the humanities. Scientists, algorithms and environmental analysts can provide the objective data, but this needs to be formatted in a way that is relatable, in turn promoting a more relevant and informed approach to environmental policy. The ideas of Hayden White have been fundamental to the development of history's story-telling skill-base, as his work highlights the fundamentality of narrative in the study of the past. Though there has been some disagreement within the academic world about White's assumptions, there is no doubt that one of a historians' primary roles is in explaining the past to the present, thus endowing them with valuable story-telling skills which can be applied to the process of policy-making. White defines narrative as 'a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted', thus emphasising the value of narrative in capturing the 'integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary'.²⁵ ²⁶ In the present day, the future does not exist in any concrete form. A similarity can be drawn to the task of the historian, who is trying to formulate the past, which also no longer exists in any tangible form. By employing the skills of the historian in narrativising the past, we might facilitate a much more coherent picture of the future we are facing, allowing us to plan appropriately.

To exemplify this narrative function, I draw on the work presented on the History & Policy website, simultaneously reinforcing the argument, whilst showcasing the work that is encouraged through this framework. Naturally, climate change is the typical subject matter that one draws on when discussing how we can better think about the future. However, historians have applied this logic to an array of policy issues, including that of the housing crisis, which was identified by both major political parties as a primary concern during the 2017

²⁵ H. White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), 5-27 (p.6).

²⁶ H. White, 'The Value of Narrativity', p.27.

General Election. Peter Shapely takes this as his subject matter, weaving historical analogies into his narrative in order to evaluate different government approaches to the issue of housing. From this, we not only establish that the current housing crisis is not as unprecedented as is sometimes claimed in political rhetoric, but we are also able to identify key trends which are likely to continue in the absence of effective intervention by the government. According to Shapely, 'housing policy has always suffered from damaging swings in the level of investment and subsidy', and this is unlikely to cease without 'a long-term commitment to investment and support'.²⁷ Consequently, an image of the future is created, from which arises a recommended course of action in order to effect sustained change. A similar approach was taken by David Ellis, who applied historical analysis to recent housing legislation, using this as a platform from which to consider the long-term responses to the Grenfell disaster of 2017. Narrativising a future characterised by 'high cost of housing and the insecurity of private tenancies', Ellis concludes by making a set of recommendations for change, including 'the rediscovery of historic approaches to providing low cost housing and maintaining social diversity in major cities'.²⁸ These examples tie in with the more general convention of historical writing to include reference to the future implications of historians' work, and how they might inform long-term understandings of the society we will face in years to come.

This story-telling function within history is also linked to the nurturing of resilience, whereby societies build on their ability to adapt to change. This component of resilience is often key to policy-making, as it aims to instil more sustainable infrastructures on communities, so that they are better equipped in cases of unexpected change and natural disaster. A more specific example of this approach is Beer's Viable System Model (VSM), which is focused primarily on those systems which are capable of stabilising themselves in the face of unforeseen circumstances.²⁹ A key feature of a viable system, such as the human body, is identity, which is located in the metasystem and connected directly to the control centre of the system. One of the ways in which history can feed into this resilience is through the fostering of a concrete identity within individual communities, whereby citizens have a clear understanding of what their society stands for and what constitutes a threat to their value system. An essential process in cultivating a distinct identity exists in the sharing of historical stories within

²⁷ P. Shapely, 'Britain's hundred-year housing crisis: a century of uneven spending', *History & Policy* <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/britains-hundred-year-housing-crisis-a-century-of-uneven-spending>> [accessed 01/11/17].

²⁸ D. Ellis, 'After Grenfell, what can we learn from the housing policies of the 1970s?', *History & Policy* <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/after-grenfell-what-can-we-learn-from-the-housing-policies-of-the-1970s>> [accessed 01/11/17].

²⁹ D.C. Sutton, 'Viable Systems Model', *The Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 46 (1995), 1038-9.

communities, as the values we derive from the past can often ground us in the present. This can be seen in its most extreme mutation by the heavy use of past narratives by nationalists, most notably the idea of ‘making America great again,’ the tagline of Donald Trump’s 2016 Presidential campaign. History has an incredible power to unite individuals under a common message and through a balanced use of this meaning system, we can place ourselves in a more stable position from which we can deal effectively with the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Both the content and the skill-base fostered by historical study can and should enrich the policy-making process, nurturing empathy and stimulating the development of sustainable, resilient communities. This is not always an easy process, however, and a mutual effort is required in order to ensure a consistently progressive response to policy issues. Steps have certainly been taken towards achieving this goal, and it is important to acknowledge the positive implications of these initiatives. However, the current informal nature of personal networks between the worlds of academia and policy can make it difficult to guarantee any sustained influence over decision-making processes. Within frameworks like History & Policy, policy-makers must welcome the contributions of historical work, altering their time-scales where possible and engaging in discussion at every opportunity. Moreover, academic historians need to take an inward look at their own discipline, and seek professional responses to the issues discussed in this report. This is certainly possible and was exemplified by the Institute for Government seminars, carried out by Haddon et al. in 2015, which promoted constructive, and mutually beneficial conversation between policy officials and academic experts.³⁰ Moreover, these seminars concluded that, ‘Whitehall has an undeniable appetite for greater engagement with history’, demonstrating the benefits of structured discussion.³¹ Communication is so often key to the building of strong, resilient relationships, in everyday life as well as at higher levels of decision-making, thus this should form the foundation of any future collaborations between the two seemingly disparate groups. Our societies are unique and multi-faceted systems, yet we undermine this by taking a short-term, reductive approach at the various levels of policy-making, particularly when allowing important issues to be confounded by opportunist rhetoric. In the face of this, history provides a framework from

³⁰ Haddon et al., ‘What is the Value of History in Policymaking?’, Institute for Government, (23 January 2015) <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Making%20History%20Work%20Report%20-%20Final_0.pdf> [accessed 12/03/2017].

³¹ Haddon et al., ‘What is the Value of History in Policymaking?’

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which we can explore the complexity and diversity of our cultures, facilitating a much more balanced and inclusive policy-making process.

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