

# **DEVELOPING YOUR IMPACT STRATEGY**

## Reflections on 15 years of ESRC & industry- funded research on the retail sector

**Prof Neil Wrigley FBA**

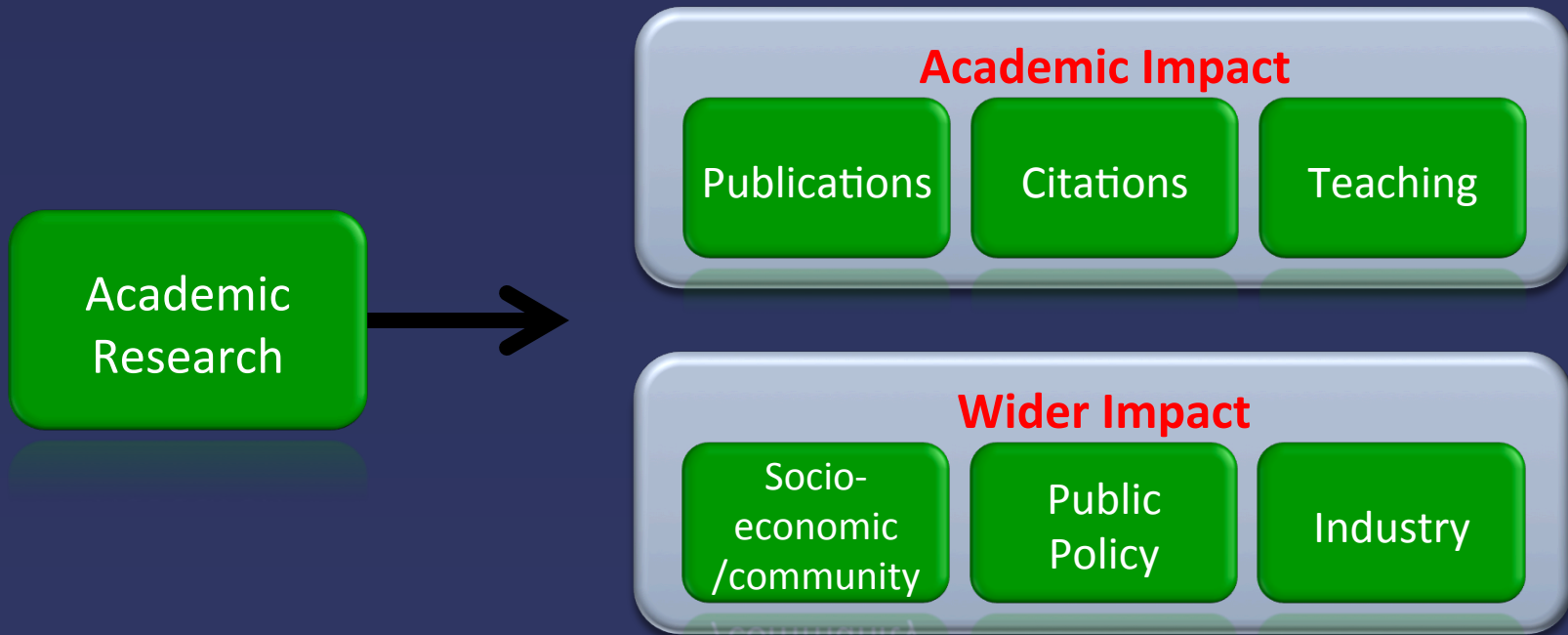
Centre for Transnational Studies Debate, Nov 25 2015

# Research impact – what a difference a decade makes

**“I have moved on from believing all attempts to measure impact to be part of a neoliberal conspiracy intended to crush academic freedom and suppress critical voices”.**

- **Trisha Greenhalgh, University of Oxford, Deputy Chair of 2014 REF Main Panel A**

# What is research impact?



- Achieving either type of impact does not automatically lead to achieving the other; however high quality research is always the starting point for both
- Non-academic impacts often require more attention & time than academic impacts

# Key things to consider when deciding on a research topic with an 'impact potential'

- **What ?**

- interests you
- is 'hot' in your field
- are the gaps in the knowledge base
- can you do to build on what you are currently working on
- funders are looking for

- **Who ?**

- you like to work with (from Southampton and elsewhere – **interdisciplinary research usually has higher impact!**)
- can help you

- **Where ?**

- the funding comes from
- you want to publish

**+ ...is this the right time to be thinking about impact?**

...there are other factors that shape impact

**1. Academic credibility**

- Prestigious institutions, publications, citations

**2. Networking skills**

- The main factor for using research results is knowing that they exist

**3. Personal communication**

- Public speaking, political sensitivity

**4. Interaction expertise**

- Engaging with the tacit knowledge of external users

**5. External reputation**

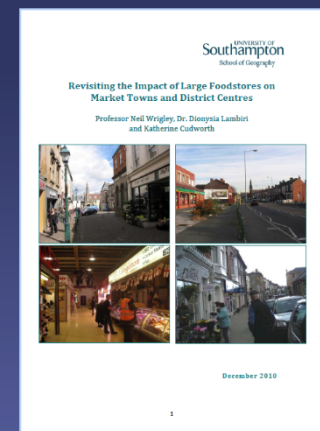
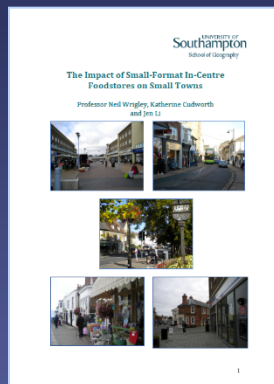
- Public profile

**6. Experience in & track record of 'impactful' research**

# Our experience

Fifteen years of inter-related research on **retail access**, **retail regulation**, **retail globalization** & **retail planning**

Pioneering mix of 100% ESRC, 100% UK industry and 50:50 ESRC/Industry funding totalling £2.5m



# Our experience – selected projects

Projects	Funding	Impact
Food deserts in British cities (2000-2004)	<b>50/50 ESRC/ industry (Sainsbury) funded</b>	Over 3000 follow-up papers published. Acknowledged by <i>Washington Post</i> and <i>Science</i> as one of the first studies on food deserts carried out
Globalizing retail & the challenge of e-commerce (2003-2005)	<b>100% ESRC funded.</b>	Facilitated an important period of conceptual reflection. Produced some highly cited papers
Consumer responses to supply chain transformation in the UK convenience store sector (2004-2005)	<b>100% industry (Tesco) funded.</b>	Evidence called in by Competition Commission – now recognised as ‘ahead of the curve’ study
Revisiting the impact of large foodstores on market towns and district centres (2007-2010)	<b>100% industry (Tesco) funded.</b>	Acknowledged to have provided state of the art findings on retail impact. Widely used in UK planning process.

# Our experience – selected projects (cont.)

Projects	Funding	Impact
Assessing the performance of UK high streets during global economic crisis and its policy implications (2010-11)	90% ESRC funded	First major empirical study (267 centres) of impact of shockwave of global economic crisis on performance of UK town centres.
High streets in crisis – terminal decline or adaptively resilient? (2012-15)	50/50 ESRC/ industry (Tesco) funded, plus 'Impact Uplift' (100% ESRC funded)	Major review of evidence base for UK Gov Dept (DCLG) to inform work of high-profile gov policy advisory group <i>Future High Streets Forum</i> .

**+ a number of local government projects (eg Romsey Town Centre Study, 100% lg funded) & international agency projects (eg OECD).**



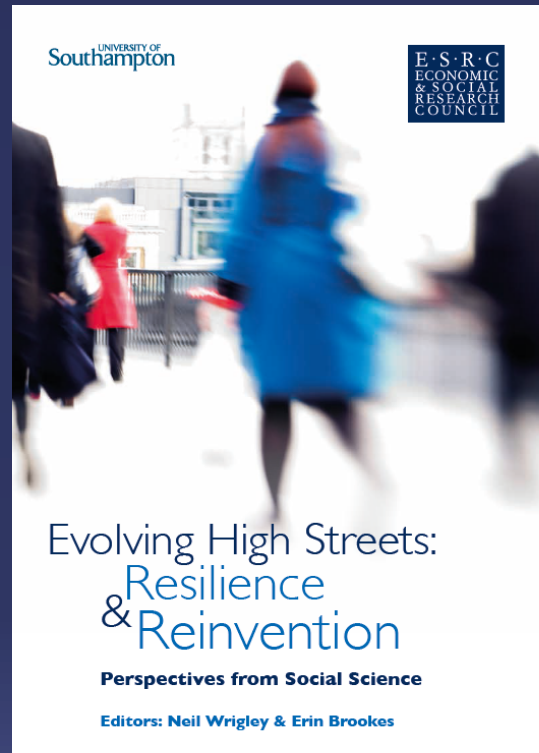
**The ESRC Retail Industry Business Engagement Network (2008-2012) acted as a platform to increase awareness & maximise the impact of the research initiatives and disseminate their findings.**



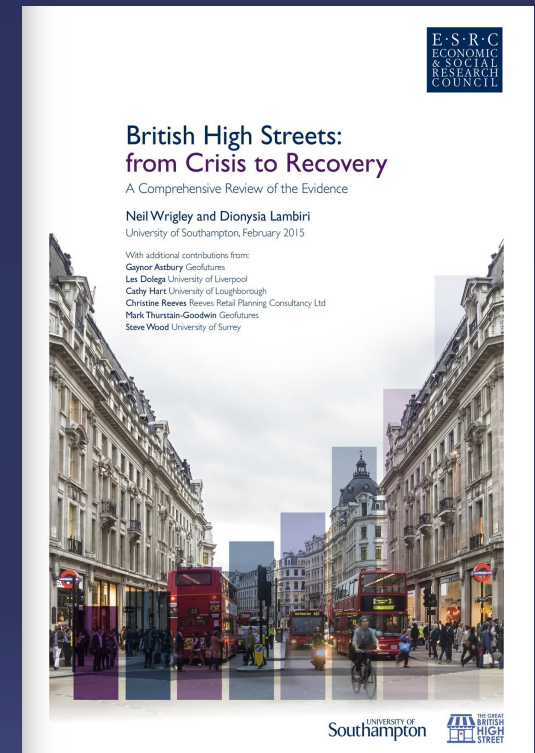
# Recent outputs - ESRC Impact Uplift Grant



A guide summarising robust evidence on recent town centre and high street performance. (July 2014)



An edited volume of short opinion pieces by a range of academic experts. (October 2014)



A comprehensive review of the available evidence on the factors that shape the performance of UK town centres & high streets (March 2015)

# Lessons Learned

- **HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH THAT EXCITES YOU IS ALWAYS THE STARTING POINT FOR ACHIEVING IMPACT...**

**...BUT THE WAY YOU COMMUNICATE IT IS KEY**

Robust, but easily explained methodology helps you to reach a wider audience. Results 'packaged' in familiar concepts

Dissemination/engagement platforms: our experience from RIBEN showed that a well-designed & active website is an extremely important tool in the maximisation of impact, increasing awareness of the research & generating new opportunities for collaboration (and additional funding!)

Need for a clear dissemination & communications plan:  
Coordination between you (the research team) – funder (e.g. ESRC) – Industry/gov partner is key

# Lessons Learned

- **CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE WITH INDUSTRY & GOVERNMENT PARTNERS MAXIMISES IMPACT...**

**...BUT CAN BE VERY CHALLENGING**

Timing issues: Outcomes need to be available at the right time. Non-academic partners are more comfortable with shorter timeframes...

Costing issues: Working together with industry and government partners can sometimes draw you into costs which may not have been anticipated – expectations often do not equate with resources available to you

# Lessons Learned

- **NON-ACADEMIC IMPACTS REQUIRE A LOT OF ATTENTION & TIME**

Dissemination: face your demons! E.g. Radio interviews can be scary but are extremely important for reaching a wider audience


Learn to be proactive with the media & try to handle your own media requests

**IT IS VITAL THAT YOU RECORD YOUR EVIDENCE OF IMPACT AS YOU GO ALONG - IT WILL BE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO RECONSTRUCT IT AT THE END**



**“The story of impact is rich and complex;  
we must do more to tell it”.**

**Trisha Greenhalgh, University of Oxford, Deputy  
Chair of 2014 REF Main Panel A**



**“A mature research group is typically embedded in a complex network of relationships and interactions and puts ongoing work into developing synergies that set the stage for further positive interactions. The measurement of these will not be straightforward but it is unlikely to be impossible”.**