



DESIGNING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND GREEN SPACES FOR OUR FUTURE

Planning for a sustainable future for our urban landscapes is a priority for Leeds Met's academic researchers engaged in projects across the UK and Europe.

The Centre for Urban Development and Environmental Management (CUDEM) provides a focus for the research of academics working in Planning, Housing and Human Geography. At the heart of The Centre's research is the development of conceptual frameworks and their relevance to local, regional, national and international policy. Most recently the Centre's focus has been on the turn to spatial planning and the role of urban green space and green infrastructure.

In the UK the 'spatial turn' in planning is related to two significant developments which have come to epitomize the demand for new ways of conceptualizing spatial planning and making spatial strategies in practice. The first of these developments was the RTPI's 'New Vision for Planning' which was built around the core idea of planning as Spatial, Sustainable, Integrative and Inclusive. The second impetus for change came from new legislation, in the form of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act in 2004 which,

for the first time, defined a statutory purpose for planning, stating that, planning should contribute to sustainable development.

The CUDEM members wanted to explore the fact that while there was widespread support for re-orienting planning towards space and place, there was little common understanding about what conceptions of space and place underpin approaches to spatial plan making. To contribute to this debate Ian Strange, Professor of Spatial Planning, CUDEM, School of the Built Environment, co-produced *Conceptions of Space and Place in Strategic Spatial Planning*, Routledge, London (2009), the aim of which is to examine which conceptions of space and place have been articulated, presented and visualized in the making of spatial strategies.

Ian explains the approach: "This research analyses spatial strategy making in six case study areas each exploring the potential tensions or synergies between different conceptualizations of space and place and the way these affect the mobilizing power of spatial strategies. The six cases were selected to represent strategic planning at a variety of scales, ranging from a large conurbation (London) to the regional (Yorkshire and Humber) and the national

(Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). All six cases represented a 'new' generation of spatial strategies whose formulation in the early 2000s was welcomed as a sign of a departure from land use to spatial planning."

The research has demonstrated that while the role of planning in place-making has been reinforced, little attention has been paid to the widening gap between changing conceptions of spatiality and the policies and practices of planning. Each case study provides varying degrees of evidence for this in its grounded understanding of the changing conceptions of space and place, and the ways in which such conceptualizations have shaped current and emerging spatial strategy making and thinking.

The role of urban green space has also been a key feature of recent work of CUDEM which is currently taking part in a £4.68m, project with 12 partners across the North Sea Region of the EU, including city and provincial councils and universities (Sustainable Urban/Rural Fringes – SURF). This project aims to identify ways that urban fringe areas can contribute more effectively to the economic development and competitiveness of urban areas whilst promoting environmental sustainability and social cohesion.

Kevin Thomas who is leading CUDEM's involvement says: "The project is designed to find ways to ensure that the value of urban fringe areas to the towns and cities that they surround is properly recognised, planned for and managed. The project aims to optimise the contribution of urban fringes to the continued wellbeing, growth and competitiveness of the cities they surround, taking into account biodiversity, urban amenity, sport and recreation and environmental services, such as the urban fringe role in flood risk management and climate change effects."

The Leeds City Region will be one of the SURF case study localities for comparison against other EU city regions such as Hamburg, Antwerp, Twente/ Enschede and Aberdeen. SURF is already well represented through the Aire Valley Partnership of Bradford City Council and Leeds Metropolitan University and it is intended to develop a wider SURF network in the region to explore the issues and

strategies around urban fringe sustainability and competitiveness. The lessons from this network will be shared with city regions internationally to develop ideas for future strategies.

Sharing knowledge with industry and the professions Developing sustainable communities and a commensurate infrastructure is vital to the country's stability. The Centre for Knowledge Exchange (CKE) at Leeds Met acts a key link between industry, professional associations, other organisations and the University's School of the Built Environment.

The School's professional groups offer a wealth of knowledge and skills in civil engineering, planning, surveying, construction and project management. Through leading edge research and consultation with industry, the School's professors, researchers, leading experts and scholars within the School have developed innovative products and technology, and advised government and assisted communities with their needs.

The CKE has become an intrinsic part of knowledge management hubs and networks of experts in a bid to address regional, national and international challenges and helping to ensure that the industry advances technology and management in a sustainable manner.

Through facilitation of action learning sets and adopting more creative approaches to problem solving, the CKE team ensures more holistic and successful approach to interdisciplinary problems and challenges.

The need to address the interface between buildings and society continues to grow in importance. The CKE is able to respond to this need ensuring that the industry has the skills to develop sustainable products that meet community needs. By embracing the spectrum of skills and knowledge that the School has to offer, CKE can offer a holistic approach to current issues in skills development, sustainability, business development and create effective links between industry and education.

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