

PERSPECTIVES

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND
THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT (SCUE)

RESEARCH
COMMUNITIES



TOM COHEN

LEADER OF SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT (SCUE) RESEARCH COMMUNITY

There are four Research Communities at University of Westminster. They share the goal of promoting interdisciplinary research and knowledge exchange for social benefit, drawing on increased links within the university and between the university and a range of external stakeholders. I have the pleasure of leading the Research Community known as SCUE – Sustainable Cities and the Urban Environment. And I'm delighted to be able to share in this document 12 distinct perspectives on what SCUE means, reflecting the disciplines and views of colleagues across the university's 12 schools. The perspectives reveal the varied ways in which SCUE can be interpreted whilst accentuating the richness and diversity of voices in our university. I hope you will enjoy reading them.

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ABDULLAHI SAKA

SCHOOL OF APPLIED MANAGEMENT

In my area of research – the construction industry – there is a tension between productivity, environmental sustainability and safety. Productivity gains have tended to come at the expense of sustainability, safety, or both. This is a concern because the industry has a huge carbon footprint, an indifferent safety record, and has shown sluggish productivity growth. But it doesn't have to be like this: we can find efficiencies in our construction projects by using technology (both hardware and software) more effectively and through better planning. I strive for cities and towns where the buildings are created in this way, with safety benefits for construction workers and end users alike, and improved performance against our environmental goals.



ANASTASIA ANGELOPOULOU

SCHOOL OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

To me, sustainability means reusing resources and avoiding waste. Making sustainability happen relies on employing equitable policies – people need to see that the system promoting sustainability is fair to all. For example, if a system is seen as favouring certain groups over others, public trust erodes, and participation declines. For instance, if a city introduces a congestion charge to reduce traffic and emissions, revenue from this could be reinvested into expanding bus and train services, offering subsidised fares, or improving bike infrastructure. It also needs to make the sustainable behaviour easy. For example, if we employ charging to provide a financial incentive to take the socially desirable path, the reasoning for the charge must be clear and the process for payment user-friendly. Computer scientists can help with all of this, by designing smart systems that learn individuals' preferences and remove friction from transactions. For example, by using machine learning to analyse a user's travel habits a smart system can suggest the most cost-effective and sustainable transportation options in real time. The system could notify the user when a congestion charge is in effect, show the cost of different routes, and offer personalised alternatives such as public transport, E-bikes/E-scooters, walking or cycling—based on the user's preferences and daily routines.



ANASTASIA DENISOVA

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

The communication about sustainable urban interventions needs to be studied from three angles. 1) The progressive initiatives – such as the ULEZ in London, for instance – need to be scrutinised; we need to measure their effectiveness among various groups in the population. 2) Another asset of my vision is looking at the ‘dark side’ – examining how traditional fuel-powered transport companies use campaigns and advertisements to encourage the sales of cars and the use of aeroplanes. 3) Greenwashing is the third component to be investigated and researched.



DAN GREENWOOD

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

How can urban governance and policy effectively foster a balance between economic, environmental and social objectives? For example, how to ensure that urban planning takes sufficient account of public health goals, ecological challenges and enables social inequalities to be addressed? In forming and delivering policy objectives, how can urban governance processes suitably capture and consider local level concerns and knowledge? What kind of policy decisions are best taken at city level? How can wider governance arrangements at national and regional scales provide a suitable context for city governance?



KATE CHEYNE

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND CITIES

I'll start with a provocation: we shouldn't be using the word sustainable because it's an outmoded concept; regenerative would be better. And, whilst we're on terminology, I argue that our understanding of cities and the urban must also embrace the suburban and rural environments with which they are inextricably linked. If a city or town works, this will be because it is in harmony with its surroundings. As for the SCUE mission, the school I lead is all about the environment (understood in its broadest sense), about making successful places that enable a good life for all inhabitants.



NICOLA MANSFIELD

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL OF ARTS

In the fashion industry, the biggest issue is waste. Only one per cent of clothing gets recycled. This is having serious negative effects on UK cities (including examples of modern slavery taking place in factories) and overseas (e.g. Ghana) where much of our waste gets sent. We already have the solution: making fewer clothes, making them to a better standard, and offering repair and alteration, so that much less gets thrown away. The EU is leading the way with its Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation and the UK may follow suit. And a more sustainable approach to fashion may also serve to protect some local industries that an international race to the bottom has made precarious – think of heritage crafts such as hat-making in Luton.



PHIL HOLDEN

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

Sustainability is now a mainstream concern with 80% of people concerned about climate change and an increasing number of organisations recognising their responsibilities towards the 69% of consumers who are convinced about sustainability, but don't act on that belief. From within marketing, organisations like the Conscious Advertising Network describe a liveable future as being “the most important brief of our lives” and social marketing and behaviour change technologies are acknowledged as having the tools to bring about the behaviour change that is necessary. And where long-term, sustainable marketing inevitably starts is the city; a concentration of commerce and consumers; a market. For over half the world's population - and up to 70% in the next 25 years - cities will be the environment, the home and the workplace, in which the future of humanity is determined.



PIPPA CATTERALL

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

As a researcher in the humanities, sustainable cities means an alignment between social and physical infrastructure. I am very interested in ways of incorporating placemaking, community and inclusion in the design and organisation of public space as a means supporting that alignment and fostering a sense of identity, belonging and place.



POOJA BASNETT

SCHOOL OF LIFE SCIENCES

For me, a sustainable city (urban environment) is of course healthy – the air is clean and there is plenty of green space. But at least as important as the physical infrastructure is the social infrastructure. People are leading healthy lives but doing so because the city is inclusive and resources are sufficient for people to sustain themselves. The citizens decide how the city runs and choose collaborative and community-based ways of working, including mitigating and adapting to climate change. There is nothing extractive about this city; instead, all members of the community share the benefits of the work done.



RADHA D'SOUZA

WESTMINSTER LAW SCHOOL

Cities embody dreams. Every resident has their own private, personal, peculiar dream, each with their own trajectories, densities, tautness, fragilities. Their dreams create chaos, confusion, cacophony, fill the cities with fistfights, filth, flamboyance, fragrance, and with vibrant colours, electrifying energy, brilliant light, create spaces where muses whirl, tills jingle, scents and smells drift by lazily. City planners dream of laying out the residents' dreams in straight lines, enclose the vibrance of lights within rectangular billboards, stick signs on streets that say: 'no honking please!' Architects dream of limitless supply of Lego pieces, of Lego tower blocks, Lego shopping malls, a whole Lego world in which brutalist buildings stare into vacant spaces and geometry rules supreme. Both dream of disciplining cities, aligning them to their dreams of sustainable, planned, neatly laid out spaces and make-belief environments. Their dreams maybe different from those of the cities, but like all dreams they float in the same dreamworld. The reality is, of course, something else.



SABINE D'COSTA

SCHOOL OF ORGANISATIONS, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

I study the role of cities in determining the experiences of workers, particularly their wages and career progression, and the productivity advantages of the urban environment, thereby informing the policy debate on the role of cities. In order for urban areas to be economically and socially sustainable, they need to be thought of in the context of the entire country: towns and cities serve and depend on the rest of the country. For example, industrial policy is often focused on growing a small number of large cities however there is the need and potential to develop wider regions.



TANTAWY MOUSSA

SCHOOL OF FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING

A sustainable city is one where people live in harmony with the environment and natural systems, supported by governance, infrastructure and policies that promote environmental stewardship, social equity and economic resilience. Most cities were not designed with these aims in mind, so achieving them demands significant changes in behaviour, regulation and urban planning. Large organisations have the capacity to drive this transformation, both through their operations and their influence over supply chains. My research examines how accounting, accountability and governance shape environmental and social outcomes, exploring the role of corporate governance, board diversity and ethical leadership in advancing sustainability practices, and how transparent reporting strengthens accountability. Yet too often there is a gap between commitments and delivery, with “greenwashing” undermining trust. To address this, stronger regulatory frameworks and greater corporate accountability are essential. One particularly powerful lever for change could be linking executive remuneration directly to measurable environmental performance, accelerating genuine and lasting improvements in corporate behaviour.

