



The ESRC Urban Transformations Programme:
An Overview



Introduction to the Urban Transformations programme

In setting new priorities in 2014, the ESRC recognised urban studies was an increasingly important subject of interest across the social sciences, yet it had not been the focus of major council investments for over a decade by the early 2010s. After commissioning a series of position papers, the research council tendered the role of director of a potential new programme of urban studies responsible for:

- making an academic case for social science investments that drew on the work carried out by the position papers;
- identifying research priorities in the urban domain;
- optimising the impacts of existing ESRC investments, in that significant numbers of urban research projects were already funded through different programmes and there were thought to be benefits from mutual awareness, linking up or even potentially collaborating.

Following this logic, the ESRC Urban Transformations Programme was launched in 2015 with two aims:

- First, to maximise ESRC research investment in cities research addressing the most innovative areas of high quality, blue skies work that could speak to both academic audiences and the multiple stakeholders and publics concerned with and affected by global processes of urban change.
- Second, to curate existing and emerging urban studies research projects that had secured funding through many different programmes with full or partial ESRC funding.

In developing a case for funding, I was privileged to work with great colleagues at the ESRC to produce a horizon scanning exercise that argued for exciting and impactful new investment to prioritise research that was:

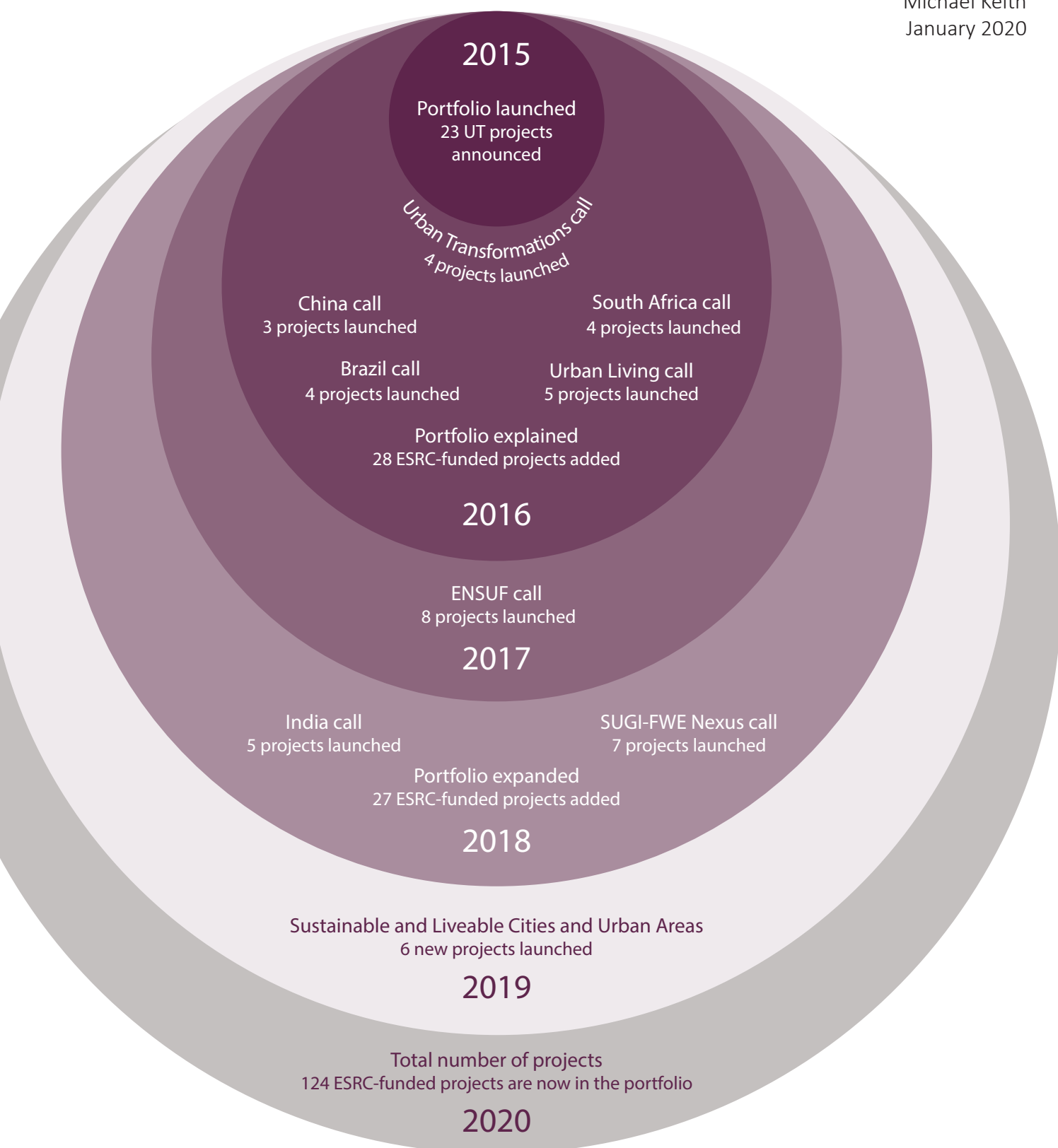
- **Interdisciplinary**, recognising the combinations of culture, craft and science in the shaping of the city, bringing together the strengths of the social sciences in working with the natural sciences and the humanities.
- **Working across urban professional interests** to address policy communities and city stakeholders.
- **Multi-scalar**, recognising the challenges of geographical scale that structure the contemporary city globally, from the renewed interest in neighbourhood studies to the complex systemic formations of the mega city.
- **Internationally comparative**, acknowledging that urban studies has moved beyond both a celebration of the iconic urban experiences of the global north and a valorisation of scholarship of the global south.
- **Future oriented**, working not only from the projection of past trends but also through an analytical focus on the challenges of the emergent city.

Consequently, the Urban Transformations programme assumed an onion configuration. At the heart of the onion, in addition to 23 existing ESRC-funded projects that were selected as the initial basis for the portfolio due to their strong urban focus, were projects that emerged from one UK call and four partnerships and associated research calls that were developed with collaborative funders in Brazil, China, India and South Africa. The programme worked at the national (UK focused research), the European (with links to the JPI Urban Europe programme) and the international (Newton funded) scales with associated focus at each level on programmes linking investments and maximising research impact. The main programme ended in 2018 with more than £120 million in ESRC research investment. Since then we have maintained our web presence to facilitate communication among an emerging urban studies community.

In the context of the major changes in the research ecosystem and the progress of the programme over the years, the ESRC thought it timely to reflect on the research impacts generated by Urban Transformations projects and assess the priorities that might structure future cutting-edge work in the urban space.

It is not possible to summarise all the 124 projects now on the programme here, but I hope that the timeline below and the summaries of some of the projects nearer the ‘heart’ of the ‘onion’ will shed further light on the programme’s research.

Michael Keith
January 2020



Urban Transformations Timeline

2014

- *Five scoping studies commissioned by ESRC on research priorities in cities-related social science:* 'Civil Society, Inequality and Exclusion' (Diana Mitlin), 'Economics and Finance' (Henry Overman), 'Governance and Government in an Age of Austerity' (Michael Parkinson), 'Urban Informatics and Big Data' (Mike Batty) and 'Urban Resilience' (Jon Coaffee).
- *'Developing and Narrating the ESRC Urban Transformations programme: Research Priorities and the City':* following consultation with a select panel of experts, this report for the ESRC recommended that research funding should prioritise cities research that was interdisciplinary, working across urban professional interests, multi-scalar, internationally comparative and future oriented.
- *First ESRC Urban Transformations Research Call opened:* four successful projects were announced in 2015, focusing in particular in governance and structural change in the UK and elsewhere.

2015

- *Scoping workshops on international urban research:* these were held with potential funding partners in India, South Africa, Brazil and China
- *Formal announcement of the first ESRC-funded programmes included in the Urban Transformations portfolio:* this included a total of 23 projects on different elements of urban research.
- *Scoping of an interdisciplinary call on the 'grand challenge' of Urban Living:* Urban Transformation consultancy was commissioned by the seven Research Councils and Innovate UK.
- *ESRC and National Natural Science Foundation (NNSF) of China Newton Call for Collaborative Research - Urban Transformations in China opened:* three projects were subsequently awarded ESRC funding.
- *ESRC-National Research Foundation Newton Call for Collaborative Research: Urban Transformations in South Africa opened:* four projects were subsequently launched with ESRC funding in early 2016.
- *Healthy Urban Living and the Social Science of the Food-Water-Energy Nexus - UK-Brazil Calls for Collaborative Research:* four projects received funding, beginning in early 2016.
- *ESRC Urban Transformations and Foresight Future of Cities Knowledge Exchange Fellowship:* Nicola Headlam was appointed, holding the post until May 2017 before being seconded to the Northern Powerhouse as a strategy lead. The post supported coordination within the Urban Transformations portfolio and also with the Foresight Future of Cities programme.
- *RCUK-Innovate UK Urban Living Partnership Call for Pilot Phrase opened:* following scoping with stakeholders including Urban Transformations coordinator Michael Keith, five projects were announced in May 2016.
- *JPI Urban ERA-NET Cofund Smart Urban Futures Call (ENSUF) opened:* the projects were announced in December 2016, including eight ESRC-funded projects incorporated into the Urban Transformations portfolio.

2016

- *ESRC Future Cities Catapult Mid-Career Fellowship announced:* the selected candidate, Paul Cowie, works with Urban Transformations and the Future Cities Catapult to strengthen urban partnerships among government, academic and business stakeholders in the UK.
- *'Urban Governance and Its Discontents':* this conference, jointly organised with the Oxford Programme for the Future of Cities, was held in Oxford in February and brought together a wide range of urban thinkers and practitioners from the UK and internationally.
- *'Bridging European Urban Transformations':* Memorandum of Understanding signed between Urban Transformations and the Brussels Centre for Urban Studies (BCUS) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) for a series of workshops, 'Bridging European Urban Transformations'. Between November 2016 and February 2018, four events exploring smart cities, urban living labs, migration and the urban commons are held in Brussels with portfolio researchers and European partners.
- *Urban Living Partnerships:* five funded projects from the RCUK-Innovate UK call are launched, based in Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Newcastle and Gateshead, and York.
- *Habitat III:* Urban Transformations engaged in a range of activities during the Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador, in October. This includes organising a side event, 'Transforming Research into Practices and Policies: Dialogues on Implementation and Evaluation of the New Urban Agenda'.

- *JPI Urban Sustainable Global Initiative (SUGI)/Food-Water-Energy (FEW) Nexus Call opened*: the funding decisions were announced in late 2017, including seven ESRC-funded programmes incorporated into the Urban Transformations portfolio.
- *'The Urban Lens: Research Ecosystem, Innovation and Interdisciplinary research - The Urban Living Global Challenge: A Prospectus'*: this report, by Michael Keith and Nicola Headlam, presented the opportunities of extending the Urban Living Grand Challenge internationally in the light of GCRF funding.

2017

- *'Migration and Urban Transformation: Boundaries in an Age of Resentment'*: Urban Transformations hosts a series of seminars in Oxford between January and March, showcasing a range of talks around cities, migration and belonging.
- *The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)-ESRC Newton Call for Collaborative Research on Urban Transformations in India opened*: In April 2018, five new projects are announced with ESRC funding.
- *'Comparative International Urban and Living Labs – The Urban Living Global Challenge: A Prospectus'*: this comprehensive survey of the global landscape of urban and living labs, commissioned by the seven Research Councils and Innovate UK to inform the development of the Urban Living programme, was authored by Michael Keith and Nicola Headlam. The report is available here: <https://www.urbantransformations.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Comparative-International-and-Urban-Living-Labs---The-Urban-Living-Global-Challenge-A-Prospectus.pdf>
- *Building Capacity for the Future City in Developing Countries (PEAK)*: this ambitious programme, led by Urban Transformations coordinator Michael Keith, is launched. This applies many of the key insights around interdisciplinary and global approaches, with collaborations between academics in China, Colombia, India, South Africa and the UK.
- *Research and Metropolitan Health in Unequal Cities*: Urban Transformations co-hosts a seminar in Rio de Janeiro with Brazilian partners, showcasing some of the ESRC-funded research in Brazil. The event also provided the basis for the forthcoming volume *Urban Transformations and Public Health in the Emergent City*, to be published in 2020 with Manchester University Press (MUP).

2018

- *JPI Urban Europe and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) Sustainable and Liveable Cities and Urban Areas Call opened*: the projects were subsequently announced in 2019, including six ESRC-funded projects now included in the Urban Transformations portfolio.
- *'Cities in Transition: Unequal Innovation in African Cities'*: Urban Transformations hosted a workshop in Cape Town, South Africa, presenting some of the research of ESRC-funded projects in African cities. Many contributions will subsequently feature in a forthcoming volume to be published in 2020 with MUP.
- *'The Good City: Urban Transformation, Comparison and Value'*: this three-day event brought together researchers from the portfolio with other prominent academics and practitioners to explore some of the key challenges in cities across the world. The conference provided many researchers within the Urban Transformations portfolio to present the findings of their research.
- *'City Futures and Contemporary Urban Research'*: Urban Transformations co-hosts an event in Beijing with the Kaifeng Foundation, featuring Urban Transformations project researchers focusing on China.

2019

- *JPI Urban Europe Urban Migration Call opened*: this call was announced in December and will include projects from UK partners on urban migration research.
- *JPI Urban Europe ERA-NET Cofund Urban Accessibility and Connectivity (ENUAC) Call opened*: this call was announced in December for proposals for research on urban mobility and connectivity, and will include UK stakeholders.

2020

- *'Urban Futures and the Future of Interdisciplinary Urban Research'*: two-day event is held in January.
- *'Urban Transformations and Public Health in the Emergent City'*: this is the first in a series of books from leading urbanists in the fields of mobility, sanitation, gender-based violence and health. The texts are based on ESRC-funded research and presentations in previous Urban Transformations events, and will be published in partnership with MUP.

ESRC Urban Transformations Research Call

Governing the Future City: A Comparative Analysis of Governance Innovations in Large Scale Urban Developments in Shanghai, London, Johannesburg

This explored the impacts of new patterns of mega-urban development, such as satellite towns and suburbs, on urban governance worldwide. Through a detailed examination of three case studies in China (Lingang New Town, Shanghai), South Africa (Corridors of Freedom, Johannesburg) and the UK (Old Oak Park, London), the project compared the social and political implications of planned urban development in these different contexts. Some of the key outputs included:

- Strengthened understanding of the role that compensation and negotiations between city governments, developers and local residents play in Shanghai, in contrast to state-led planning in China.
- Extensive research on the largely unexamined contribution of private developers to spatial transformations in South Africa, as well as facilitation of a dialogue forum to bring together different affected groups.
- Improved awareness of how communities in the UK intersect with consultation mechanisms, including policy consultations and planning applications, and potential conflicts between different stakeholders engaged in these processes.

The comparative focus of the project has therefore illuminated how competing concerns, such as market-driven financing and public participation, are balanced in these contexts and the different ways local communities, businesses and policy makers interact.

Jam and Justice: Co-Producing Urban Governance for Social Innovation

This aimed, in a context where traditional systems of urban governance are failing, to create a unique space for social innovation to co-produce, test and learn from new ways of governing cities. Bringing together academics, practitioners, citizens and political leaders, the project has supported the development of innovative approaches that engage the skills and knowledge of frequently marginalised groups. Some of the key outputs included:

- Creation of an Action Research Cooperative (ARC) in Greater Manchester, bringing together a variety of academic, activist and community representatives.
- Rollout of innovative, participatory methodologies to engage citizens, including a series of 'learn and do' sessions, live debates, learning exchange visits and other activities within the UK and internationally.
- Implementation of numerous community-led programmes spanning social entrepreneurship, care provision, spatial planning, youth exclusion and other priority issues.

The project has successfully facilitated the development of a ground-breaking approach to urban governance that engaged diverse stakeholders on key challenges confronting Greater Manchester today, with important findings relevant for cities elsewhere in the UK and internationally.

Structural Transformation, Adaptability and City Economic Evolutions

This examined the role of cities and city-regions in driving growth, with a particular focus on the potential of the northern cities to address the geographic imbalance of the British economy. The project charted the historical trajectories of British cities and the ways these have been determined by structural change and economic governance. Some of the key outputs included:

- Wide ranging evidence base on the development of different UK cities over time and the role of geography, skills and local competitiveness on urban productivity and resilience.

- Collaboration with Centre for Cities, resulting in briefing papers, two workshops and social media dissemination.
- Engagement of city-region expertise in a variety of academic and policy making platforms and fora.

By outlining the development of urban regions over the past four decades across the UK, the project has provided cities across the country with an invaluable dataset to support the design of their policies in future.

The Urban Politics and Governance of Social Innovation in Austerity

This involved a comparative study of the ongoing effects of austerity in three European cities in Germany, Greece and the UK. In particular, the project sought to identify the roles of alternative finance, grassroots mobilisation and community provisioning in meeting the needs of their citizens as traditional forms of authority are disrupted and competition for public services increases. Some of the key outputs included:

- Innovative research on the relationship between social innovation, urban politics and governance in European cities, including a comparative study of Athens, Berlin and Newcastle.
- Creation of an Urban Social Innovation Network for local practitioners, activists and policy makers to share knowledge and resources.
- Dissemination of research findings through journal articles, a research monograph and conferences.

The project helped expand the current evidence base on the links between social innovation, austerity and urban governance, supporting the development of innovative approaches in other European cities.

RCUK-Innovate UK Urban Living Partnership

From Citizen to Co-innovator, from City Council to Facilitator: Integrating Urban Systems to Provide Better Outcomes for People (BOP)

This sought to engage a spectrum of universities, research institutions and local, regional and national organisations into the Urban Living Birmingham Consortium. As the city has struggled for decades with economic difficulties, reinforced by declining expenditure and global forces, the project aimed to encourage collaborations between providers and users to create more efficient, adaptive service models in different sectors. Some of the key outputs included:

- Development of an extensive Principal Component Analysis (PCA), drawing on 248 numeric data sets and analysis of the existing evidence base used by city policy makers, to identify knowledge gaps and disconnects.
- Creation of a multi-stakeholder Urban Living Birmingham Consortium, bringing together local authorities, research organisations, service providers and businesses.
- Facilitation of user innovation through a range of arts-based activities with project partners, including an exhibition, map making, rap music and yarn bombing, with a focus on reaching marginalised populations.

The findings, besides supporting the development of policy in Birmingham and the West Midlands, have also been built on with a range of other initiatives including a DFID-funded programme adapting the project's approach to three case study African cities.

The Bristol Urban Area Diagnostics Pilot

This focused on supporting Bristol's progress towards greater sustainability through the development of an integrated diagnostic framework incorporating mobility, wellbeing and inclusion. The project

brought together a wide range of partners, including local authorities, businesses, civic organisations, academics and other groups, to work together in a multi-sectoral consortium. Some of the key outputs included:

- Development of the Urban ID (integrated diagnostic) framework, applied to five case study areas in Bristol.
- Creation of an extensive partnership network between academic, local government and business actors in Bristol, with knowledge sharing and engagement at workshops, panels and other public events.
- Technical support and capacity development to Bristol City Council in the design and implementation of its ongoing One City Plan.

By challenging entrenched approaches and creating a space for innovation, the project assisted stakeholders in promoting more sustainable approaches to Bristol's urban management.

Transformational Routemapping for Urban Environments (TRUE)

This sought to address the pressures of social exclusion, housing shortages and environmental degradation in a context of prolonged financial austerity. By strengthening local capacity through social enterprise, institutional development and the mobilisation of a multi-sector consortium, the project supported a variety of partners from different sectors in Leeds to identify the key challenges confronting their city. Some of the key outputs included:

- Mobilisation of academic, public, private and civil society actors into a multi-stakeholder consortium, Transformational Routemapping for Urban Environments (TRUE).
- Development of the TRUE tool, an online prototype to support assessment, diagnosis and planning of urban programmes and service delivery.
- Knowledge exchange and capacity development through an online digital platform, training guidance and a national launch event in London, with engagement of local authorities in Leeds to facilitate uptake.

The results have been used by Leeds City Council to support the rollout of various 'breakthrough' projects with further exploration of how they can be used in future.

Urban Living Partnership – Newcastle and Gateshead City Region

This was designed to strengthen understanding of the complex and interdependent challenges confronting the region. Through the creation of a multi-stakeholder Newcastle City Futures Unit, bringing together government, industry, academia and civil society, it explored a range of emerging issues including ageing, sustainability and social renewal. Some of the key outputs included:

- Growth of a partnership base of 180 organisations, creating a wide and flexible network of collaborators from non-academic sectors in the region.
- Facilitation of more than 50 projects, ranging from safe refuges and green space to accessible transport design and creative arts platforms, to support citizen-centric solutions.
- Leverage of more than £10 million in further funding into the region and legacy of shared cooperation between different stakeholders.

The project provided a unique forum to support, mediate and pilot a wide variety of smart, socially inclusive programmes that have laid the foundation for continued collaboration across sectors in Newcastle and Gateshead region.

York City Environment Observatory: Diagnostic Phase

This supported the development of an innovative, multi-disciplinary data set that more fully captures the complex aspects of city environments. Focusing on York, the project brought together researchers

working in different specialisms to collate a variety of open data sources into a holistic evidence base on the city's social, cultural and natural environments. Some of the key outputs included:

- Development of a York City Environment Observatory open data platform, populated with over 1,000 publicly accessible datasets.
- Creation of a prototype software tool to monitor and assess the recreational use of York's riverside area.
- Dissemination of research findings to a range of non-academic stakeholders through workshops and public engagement activities, including a week-long event in the city.

The findings have benefitted communities, businesses, researchers and policy makers in York through the establishment of a collaborative, interconnected evidence base on the city's urban environment and its impact on local residents.

Healthy Urban Living and the Social Science of the Food-Water-Energy Nexus: UK-Brazil Calls for Collaborative Research

Brazil-UK Healthy Urban Mobility (HUM)

This investigated the implications of increased private vehicle use and the decline of walking, cycling and public transport on physical wellbeing and social inclusion in cities through a comparative study of Brazil (Brasilia, Florianopolis and Porto Alegre) and the UK (Oxford). Through detailed fieldwork and data collection in selected areas, the research highlighted how mobility can affect health and wellbeing at an individual and collective level, particularly among low income and excluded groups. Some of the key outputs included:

- Methodological trainings and participatory workshops with academics and community members in Brazil and the UK.
- Regular presentations at major international events.
- Dissemination of findings through conference papers, journal articles, briefings and a book.

By bringing a multidisciplinary perspective to public transportation issues, the project has strengthened understanding of how more equitable transport policies can enhance health, wellbeing and mobility among all sections of the urban population.

Healthy, Secure and Gender Just Cities: Transnational Perspectives on Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Rio de Janeiro and London

This examined the widespread phenomenon of gender-based violence in Brazil through a comparative study of residents in Complexo da Maré, the largest favela in Rio de Janeiro, and migrants who form the Brazilian diaspora in London. The project mapped the experiences of VAWG in both contexts and the current gaps in service provision for survivors, as well as the ways that migration maintained or reconfigured patterns of gender-based violence. Some of the key outputs included:

- Extensive first-hand research with hundreds of Brazilian women in Rio de Janeiro and London, including surveys, interviews and focus groups.
- Development of a wide-ranging comparative evidence base on VAWG in Brazil and diaspora communities in London, highlighting the different structural forces contributing to its prevalence.
- Variety of artistic outputs including a photography exhibition, multi-media installation, a theatrical play and short films.

Combining testimonies, service mapping and innovative participatory tools, the project provided new insights into the factors that underpin the perpetration of violence against women in Brazil and among its diaspora communities in the UK.

Healthy Urban Living and Ageing in Place: Physical Activity, Built Environment and Knowledge Exchange in Brazilian Cities (HULAP)

This was initiated in response to the growing crisis of non-communicable diseases such as obesity among older residents in Brazil. Through a comparative study of Curitiba (Brazil) and Belfast (Northern Ireland), the project focused on the role of urban design in promoting mobility and healthy lifestyles among the older urban population. Some of the key outputs included:

- Development of online platforms including website, video and social media.
- Joint Brazil-UK workshops, conferences and policy presentations.
- Variety of publications including briefing papers, information sheets and an Older Adults Walkability Toolkit.

The findings are an invaluable resource for academics, policy makers and other stakeholders seeking to promote healthy ageing in cities in Brazil, the UK and elsewhere.

Place-Making with Older Adults: Towards Age-Friendly Communities

This explored the role of sense of place in promoting age friendly urban spaces. Drawing on a total of 18 neighbourhoods in a variety of cities in Brazil (Brasilia, Pelotas and Porto Alegre) and the UK (Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester), the project examined how the concerns of older residents could be incorporated into improved design and service delivery. Some of the key outputs included:

- Extensive collection of primary data, including hundreds of semi-structured interviews, go-along walks, photo diaries and participatory mapping sessions with older residents.
- Sharing and comparison of evidence base and through frequent Brazil-UK knowledge exchange visits, workshops and conferences.
- Development and dissemination of a range of tools, guidelines, resources and publications aimed at older adults, practitioners and policy-makers.

The findings highlight the importance of developing appropriate design interventions to enable active and healthy lifestyles for older residents, with a follow-up project now underway in India that builds on this research.

ESRC and National Natural Science Foundation (NNSF) of China Newton Call for Collaborative Research: Urban Transformations in China

Eco-Urbanisation: Promoting Sustainable Development in Metropolitan Regions of China

This sought to extend current knowledge on the connections between urbanisation, resource use and the environment in the context of the country's rapid growth, including the construction of some 30 million new housing units as part of the New Urbanisation Plan. Focusing on the case study of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Metropolitan Region, the study aimed to develop a robust conceptual framework to assess wellbeing in urban communities through a variety of indicators. Some of the key outputs included:

- Local-level mapping of spatial, demographic and transport data in Beijing to develop multidimensional profiles of selected city neighbourhoods.
- In-depth qualitative assessment of case study areas, including resident questionnaires, field surveys and interviews with leading experts, professionals and officials.
- Dissemination of outputs through a range of publications, conference presentations and the creation of bilingual online portal to share data sources.

The project has helped strengthen understanding of how urban development in the context of China's cities can be identified, analysed and effectively responded to through a multi-level approach to governance, with lessons for other countries experiencing similar levels of growth.

Mental Health, Migration and the Chinese Mega-City

The rapid growth of Chinese cities, accelerated by internal migration, poses considerable challenges for urban citizens. This project looked at the complex issues facing migrant populations in Shanghai, in particular access to public services, and their implications for mental wellbeing. Bringing together a multi-disciplinary team of researchers, the findings integrated the fields of mental health and urban studies, significantly expanding current knowledge on the links between cities and mental illness. Some of the key outputs included:

- Detailed historical, sociological and ethnographic survey of migration and mental health in Shanghai, drawing on a review of the existing literature and extensive first-hand data collection through interviews with migrant residents in Shanghai.
- Series of publications, including think pieces, policy briefings and a review paper.
- Workshops, collaborations and a major end-of-project conference in Shanghai to disseminate research findings.

The outputs of the research supported the development of targeted policies to improve mental health outcomes in Shanghai, with relevant findings for other countries experiencing similar challenges.

The Re-Making of Chinese Urban Neighbourhoods: Socio-spatial Transformation and Access to Public Services

This explored how Chinese cities are being reconfigured by migration, rapid development and widening inequality against a backdrop of far-reaching social change. With Chengdu, Hangzhou and Tianjin as case studies, the project sought to identify the shifting social composition of city districts and the effects of population movement, land development and the growth of middle-income households on urban space and society in China. Some of the key outputs included:

- Comprehensive GIS mapping, policy analysis, field interviews and sample surveys, with a database of more than 1,000 neighbourhoods in each case study city.
- Extensive capacity development and knowledge exchange between British and Chinese academics, including large-scale training of early career researchers in survey design.
- Dissemination of findings through a range of publications, including journal articles, briefings and a multi-authored book, and continuation of research aims through further funding bids including the establishment of the GCRF Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (SCHC).

The findings of the project have provided policy makers and academics with a clearer picture of the implications of migration and inequality on urban life at a local level, knowledge that will be of crucial importance in guiding more inclusive and sustainable patterns of urban growth.

ESRC-NRF Newton Call for Collaborative Research: Urban Transformations in South Africa

Changing Socio-Spatial Inequalities: Population Change and the Lived Experience of Inequality in Urban South Africa

This aimed to draw out the everyday reality of exclusion from housing, service access and employment in urban South Africa, with Cape Town as a case study. Combining historic data collection with in-depth

qualitative surveys, the project explored the city's development over the past two decades and the way these changes are felt by residents today. Some of the key outputs included:

- Comprehensive qualitative research in case study areas, including focus groups, surveys and data collection, to assess changing socio-spatial patterns of exclusion, experiences of exclusion and local attitudes to inequality.
- Development of a series of journal articles and other publications showcasing findings.
- Dissemination of learning through project website, conferences and seminars.

The research provided an innovative information source on spatial inequality and how it is experienced by the most excluded urban populations, supporting the design of more inclusive housing, planning and poverty alleviation policies in South African cities.

Community-Led Upgrading for Self-Reliance in South Africa: Integrated Construction and Environmental Management Systems in Informal Settlements

This focused on supporting communities by strengthening their capacity to guide urban development themselves. Despite an increasing emphasis on participatory upgrading, communities are often constrained by lack of resources or technical knowledge to lead these processes, particularly when urban policies are designed and implemented without a clear understanding of local conditions. Some of the key outputs included:

- Extended data analysis, participatory mapping and capacity building in selected communities in Durban Metropolitan Area, South Africa, and creation of an integrated collaborative toolkit to guide construction and environmental management.
- Development of a significant evidence base on the importance of local context to upgrading strategies, highlighting the need for municipalities to move away from 'one-size-fits-all' approaches.
- Dissemination of findings to a broader audience through events, publications, videos and online platforms, accompanied by comparative analysis with other cities.

These activities not only helped build capacity among residents on community-led approaches to construction management and service provision, but also promoted the creation of partnerships with other stakeholders such as local businesses, policy makers and academics.

Living the Urban Periphery: Investment, Infrastructure and Economic Change in African City-Regions

This aimed to enhance understanding of the specific challenges of peri-urban areas, drawing out the complex intersections of governance, investment and planning at play. Concentrating on two city-regions in South Africa (Gauteng and eThekweni) and one in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa), the project explored the lived experiences of residents in seven case study settlements. Some of the key outputs included:

- Multiple publications including journal articles, working papers and pamphlets, with translations into local languages.
 - Dissemination of findings through a range of activities, from local stakeholder workshops to international conferences.
 - Development of a project website and other media platforms.

The research provided an innovative evidence base on the drivers of change and growth in the urban periphery, with invaluable findings for local governments, communities and other groups seeking to support development and poverty reduction in these areas.

Urban Transformation in South Africa Through Co-Designing Energy Services Provision Pathways

This examined how, faced with a legacy of underinvestment and inequality, South African cities could transition to low carbon, inclusive energy systems. Through a multi-disciplinary perspective that combined social, technical and political expertise, the project built a detailed evidence base on energy access, supply and integration in a number of urban communities across the country. Some of the key outputs included:

- Development of a series of in-depth local case studies.
- Multi-stakeholder workshops and knowledge sharing events at both local and international levels.
- Series of research papers, articles and other publications, drawing directly on research.

The findings will support the development of cleaner, more effective and equitable energy systems in South Africa, with important lessons for other countries in the region.

Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)-ESRC Newton Fund Call for Collaborative Research on Urban Transformations in India

Ageing Well in Urban Environments: Developing Age Friendly Cities and Communities

This builds on existing ESRC-funded research on age and place-making in cities in Brazil and the UK with a detailed study of ageing communities in India (Calcutta, Delhi and Hyderabad). Through a range of innovative participatory approaches with local stakeholders, the fieldwork has gathered a broad range of inputs including surveys, photo diaries and community maps. Some of the key outputs include:

- In-depth fieldwork in three Indian cities (Calcutta, Delhi and Hyderabad) using participatory approaches such as surveys, photo diaries, 'go along' walks and community mapping.
- Development of tools, publications and other outputs to support age-friendly urban interventions.
- Creation of a comprehensive evidence base on ageing and place-making in urban India, complementing existing research on cities in Brazil and the UK.

The findings will provide policy makers in a variety of different urban contexts with a comparative evidence base on the challenges and opportunities of ensuring ageing urban populations are able to participate fully in the life of their cities.

From the Margins: Exploring Low-Income Migrant Workers' Access to Basic Services and Protection in the Context of India's Urban Transformation

This highlights the specific challenges that migrant groups experience on arrival in cities in India, with a particular focus on Guwahati (Assam) and Jalandhar (Punjab). Among other issues, the research will examine health care, violence, access to justice and civic rights, drawing on the first-hand testimony of migrants themselves. Some of the key outputs include:

- Comprehensive mapping of legal, developmental, human rights and welfare environments in case study cities of Guwahati and Jalandhar.
- Participatory fieldwork involving successive multi-stakeholder consultations and workshops.
- Dissemination activities, including local exhibitions with partners, to raise awareness of key rights issues.

The project aims to address the invisibility of urban migrants in India by raising awareness of their situation among decision makers and academics, supporting the development of more targeted, inclusive policies that ensure the protection of these groups.

Learning from Small Cities: Governing Imagined Futures and the Dynamics of Change in India's Smart Urban Age

This explores the specific experiences of smaller smart cities through fieldwork in Shimla, Jalandhar and Nashik. The research will examine a range of issues including how smaller cities fit into national visions of smart urbanism, the ways these are reinterpreted at a local level and the perspectives of residents on how these strategies are reshaping their cities. Some of the key outputs include:

- Collaborative research with local partners through a range of activities, including crowd sourced digital and community asset mapping with local partners, as well as stakeholder workshops in each case study city.
- Development of a series of outputs including a smart city asset toolkit, policy briefings for planners and local language pamphlets translating the project findings for grassroots communities.
- Dissemination of findings through online platforms (project website and social media engagement) as well as conferences, a public exhibition and project catalogue.

Besides placing the undervalued contribution of small cities on the map, the project also seeks to draw out key lessons from the case study research that can inform future discussions of smart cities across India and internationally.

Rurality as a Vehicle for Urban Sanitation Transformation (RUST)

This seeks to examine how the strong rural connections of many informal settlements in India, sustained by circular migration and the continued importance of traditional livelihoods, can be used to strengthen sanitation systems. Drawing on local perspectives on resource use, waste management and other areas, it will identify ways that approaches such as recycling can be adapted to these urban contexts. Some of the key outputs include:

- Participatory, qualitative and quantitative research to assess ecosystem services, sanitation and human waste reuse perceptions in a variety of urban contexts in and around Hyderabad.
- Integration of data into interactive maps using the ESRI Story Maps platform to guide co-analysis sessions with policy and planning stakeholders.
- Dissemination of findings through city stakeholder workshops, online platforms, policy briefings and academic papers.

The findings will assist providers and local authorities with the design of innovative, cost effective and environmentally sound sanitation practices in underserved urban areas of India.

UNDERstanding Indian Urban Governance REFORM: A Comparative Analysis of the Smart City Mission Reforms and Their Impact on Sustainable Urban Mobility

This examines the achievements of the Indian government's Smart Cities Mission to date through detailed comparative studies of four designed smart cities in India (Jaipur, Indore, Kochi and Bangalore). In particular, it looks at ongoing governance reforms and the effects these have had on local urban mobility systems. Some of the key outputs include:

- Development of a qualitative evidence base on governance reform, urban mobility and smart solutions in four case study Indian cities (Jaipur, Indore, Kochi and Bangalore).
- Exploratory workshops, collaborative data collection and local stakeholder engagement.
- Creation of a transnational community of researchers and practitioners in India and the UK, supported through study visits to the UK, a 'summer school' in India and a special session at the World Conference on Transport Research in Mumbai.

The project will help identify opportunities and shortcomings in the current smart cities programme, while facilitating knowledge exchange and lesson learning among academics, urban policy makers and other key actors.





Urban Transformations is an ESRC network,
coordinated from the University of Oxford,
showcasing research on cities.



Urban Transformations is based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)
University of Oxford ♦ 58 Banbury Road ♦ Oxford ♦ OX2 6QS
T: +44 (0)1865 274711 ♦ E: urbantransformations@compas.ox.ac.uk

