



Sustainable Places Research Themes: Sustainable rural-urban communities

Many fundamental aspects of sustainable place-making, including the development of more sustainable systems of transport, food production and distribution, energy and waste management and housing provision, depend on where and how people live. Understanding differences in community context (particularly urban versus rural) and governance processes are therefore crucial in exploring sustainable work and living.

Our work in this area looks at sustainability from small communities through to cities and city-regions. This will take forward our research at the city-region and community scales, exploring the role of communities and spatial scale in sustainable place-making. More specifically, we are looking into four key areas: community led transitions and adaptations, Fairtrade Towns, sustainable mobility and community and environment.

Community led transitions and adaptations

Key transition and adaptation questions explore how we encourage social innovation in production and consumption. This work links to the new University Energy Systems Research Institute and Water Research Institute in relation to sustainable production and consumption systems within communities.

Our earlier work is being continued, looking at Cardiff as a city-region and other national and international examples of city-region sustainability initiatives, linking into complementary research and capacity within the School of Geography and Planning.

Fairtrade Towns

Fairtrade Towns represent a rapidly growing initiative that seeks to improve the social and environmental sustainability within producer communities, usually in poorer countries, through changes to marketing and consumption practices.

Our research investigates the operation of the Fairtrade Towns movement as an innovative place-based marketing network, to derive lessons that may help in future efforts to market sustainability orientated goods and services in specific local markets.

Sustainable mobility

Transport systems are central to sustainable place-making. Our work relating to transport integrates existing Cardiff research strengths in the field of sustainable mobility and electric vehicles by working with the School of Engineering, the School of Psychology, the Business School and the School of Geography and Planning. This work encompassed the potential of electric and alternative vehicle systems to tackling challenges such as sustaining the viability of remote rural communities and reducing carbon emissions within eco-cities.

This work connects to the Energy Systems Research Institute, exploring relationships between energy and transport within communities and with the Health, Infrastructure and Wellbeing Programme in considering the relationship between mobility, wellbeing and particular transport modes (such as cycling).

Community and environment

Our work examines the socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental factors which structure and shape the relationships between communities and their local environments. Part of this work focusses on community food system relationships forming a bridge to the Food, Land and Security Programme and other complementary work within Cardiff School of Geography and Planning.

This research builds upon our existing work with an emphasis on integrative research methods for sustainability science, international and multi-stakeholder research engagement and collaborative research relationships with a range of external stakeholders. It includes research work on citizen science and participatory approaches to environmental education, exploring how to develop relationships between communities and their environment that promote a greater understanding of sustainability and sustainable lifestyles.

Key projects within this research theme are based on strategic partnerships with other organisations. This includes work with the Canal & River Trust to understand and develop community use of and engagement with waterway spaces, and work with the Brecon Beacons National Park focussing on sustainable education and community development. Other UK partnerships involve Welsh Government and the Community Land Advisory Service. Ongoing international collaboration with academic partners in mainland Europe, North and South America creates further opportunities for cross-disciplinary knowledge exchange amongst a wide range of national & international stakeholder networks.

Research team



Professor Ken Peattie
Sustainable Places
Research Institute

peattie@cardiff.ac.uk
+44(0) 29 2087 7293



Dr Hannah Pitt
Sustainable Places
Research Institute

pitt2@cardiff.ac.uk
+44(0) 29 2087 9632