

UCD, Dublin

From *ad hoc* to evidence-based policy in urban management

The results of a four year Urban Environment Project funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published today (20 Dec 2010) examine the wider urban environmental implications of planning and development in the Greater Dublin Area.

The findings which appear in a special edition of the Journal of Irish Urban Studies explore: urban sprawl, air quality, biodiversity, climate change and transport.

The research set out to develop a generic land-use model for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) which could be applied to other urban areas in Ireland, and compared to international models.

The research team included experts from the Urban Institute Ireland at UCD, Trinity College Dublin and NUI Maynooth.

“New Planning and Development legislation introduced in 2010 indicates a firm intention to move away from *ad hoc* development decision making towards more evidence-based approaches with compliance issues to be addressed in the future,” says Professor John Sweeney, Department of Geography at NUI Maynooth who, together with his colleague Dr. Ronan Foley, co-edited this special issue of the journal.

Research and the examination of evidence-based policy-support tools used in Europe and internationally demonstrate that it is possible in many jurisdictions to develop reliable data analysis and evidence to support policy choices in the planning and development area.

“It is clear that improvements in our flawed planning and development processes need to be followed by immediate and unambiguous conflicts of interest legislation with automatic review and decision mechanisms built into the guidelines to deal with breaches,” states UCD’s Dr Brendan Williams, Director of the Urban Environment Project.

The final report of the Urban Environment Project will be published in early 2011 by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The five research papers published in the special edition of the Journal of Irish Urban Studies include:

“The Development of the Functional Urban Region of Dublin: Implications for Regional Development Markets and Planning”

Brendan Williams (UCD), Cormac Walsh (UCD), Ian Boyle (UCD)

This paper focuses on models of urban form and the differences in the drivers creating urban form and settlement patterns. The notion of a more fluid and expanded urban form provides an interesting view of currently experienced development patterns. Within the paper there is a strong focus on functional urban regions (FURs) and sprawl patterns of development, framed against how FURs are in turn shaped by policy and governance.

Perhaps the key finding is the impact on meaningful sustainable development of the ongoing disconnect between both transport and planning and functional and administrative spatial units. This is expressed on the ground in the types of urban sprawl

identified in Dublin. To manage this more effectively into the future, the paper suggests improved governance systems are required.

“Changing office location patterns and their importance in the peripheral expansion of the Dublin region 1960 – 2008”

Andrew MacLaran (TCD), Katia Attuyer (TCD), Brendan Williams (UCD)

This paper examines the evolving pattern of office development in Dublin between 1960 and 2008, thereby addressing a key component in the evolution of the city’s space economy, that of office-based employment. It highlights the shifting balance of the city’s modern office stock between inner-city and suburban locations, providing a discussion of the key causative factors underlying those locational shifts. These include changes in planning and development policy, local-authority reorganisation and economic pressures, all of which are implicated in accounting for the spatial shifts described. The paper then examines the wider impacts associated with the emerging geography of large-scale peripheral office developments at ‘Edge City’, notably in terms of the complexity of commuting patterns and implications for environmental sustainability.

“Simulated future development of the Greater Dublin Area: consequences for protected areas and coastal flooding risk”

Michael Brennan (UCD), Tamara Hochstrasser (UCD), Harutyun Shahumyan (UCD)

This paper explores the impacts that residential and commercial expansion has on natural environments. Modelled land use futures are shown to be particularly serious for habitat loss and fragmentation in coastal County Dublin where adverse impacts may be exacerbated by an increased risk of coastal flooding.

Adaptive solutions are available and should be assisted by forthcoming planning legislation. The breathing space provided by the current economic slowdown, it is argued by the authors, offers an opportunity to implement a more far-seeing sustainable planning approach.

“Biodiversity in Dublin: A case study approach”

Carmel Brennan (Natura), Sheila Convery (UCD), Michael Brennan (UCD)

This paper explores the linkages between various stages of urban development and biodiversity in the GDA. Green infrastructure is increasingly seen as an integral component of urban planning and this paper addresses the practicalities of how best to incorporate biodiversity considerations into urban design.

“Regional governance and the challenge of managing socio-economic change”

Deiric Ó Broin (Nordubco)

As city regions increasingly become the dynamic foci of economic and social activity within countries, issues of governance assume greatly increased importance. This is further complicated by globalisation blurring the jurisdictions between local, regional and national priorities and reducing democratic inputs into the planning process.

This paper explores these themes for Dublin, identifying structural deficiencies and democratic deficits which hinder Dublin's performance on the international urban stage as it faces challenges such as climate and demographic changes, a shift to a low carbon economy, reorganisation of the global financial system, and the necessary restructuring of the city-region's economy.

Democratic renewal and meaningful partnership are seen as the essential ingredients for tackling these issues and ensuring that a future Dublin prospers in a sustainable manner.

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The Special Edition of the Journal of Irish Urban Studies will be available to download from www.uep.ie on Monday 20 Dec 2010

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