

Strategic Land Use: Crossing the Urban Rural Divide: A Relu/SUE Workshop, 27th October, London

As part of efforts, on the one hand, to bridge the Relu research community and its interdisciplinary research capacity into new research initiatives, and on the other, to learn from and pass on process lessons from the programme, we have initiated interactions with EPSRC's £46m Sustainable Urban Environment (SUE) Programme. A joint-workshop was therefore held between Relu/LWEC and SUE in order to explore lesson learning between the programmes on interdisciplinary programme management, interdisciplinary research practices and stakeholder engagement. The workshop was also a basis for developing new scientific agendas for strategic/joined up approach to land use, crossing the urban and rural divide, and to build links for future research.

The programmes found they had a lot in common. Researchers from both the programmes were there and there was some valuable networking in an extended lunchtime poster session. Connections were made and foundations laid for further exchanges of information and expertise.

SUE, as Head of Process Philippa Hemmings explained, aims to improve the quality of urban life, addressing the themes of the built environment, water and waste, transport and metrics, knowledge management and decision tools. But it reaches out much more widely than EPSRC or academia, with a wide range of partners among other organizations. Relu also puts an emphasis on stakeholder involvement throughout the research process and this is a key feature of the programme's knowledge transfer strategy. Director Philip Lowe explored the ways in which research uses different modes: observational, experimentation and intervention, in an era when climate change is the constant. This means, he says, that everywhere is an experimental site where science is being constantly tested. Mark Tewdwr Jones, Professor at the Bartlett School of Planning gave some incisive feedback from Land Use Foresight. Policy is fraught with problems – it overlaps, often in negative ways, and requires three times as much land as we have to achieve its aims. Then there are the unintended consequences.

Projects from SUE and Relu illustrated their interdisciplinary research practices – Chris Rogers talked about his 'Urban Futures' project and Mark Reed gave a rural perspective with 'Sustainable Uplands'. Both emphasized the importance of communication, trust and a common language if real interdisciplinarity is to be achieved. All agreed that things are going to change, but is this going to be good or bad for interdisciplinarity? The research councils are supportive of the concept – as Kendar Pandya from EPSRC endorsed.

Relu's Assistant Director Jeremy Phillipson explained how Relu's approach involves stakeholders throughout the research process – and makes this key to its knowledge exchange strategy. Different kinds of involvement have different effects. By tracking this process the team aims to exert some control on the outcomes. For Relu, people exchange schemes have been one of the keys to success. Annabel Cooper from SUE ISSUES project which leads on knowledge exchange within the programme shared some success stories and gave an insight into their findings on how stakeholders access knowledge: websites, email bulletins and personal contacts are

their top choices. Tim Allen from the Local Government Association added a local government perspective at a time when these organizations will effectively be losing 30% of their resources. It's not all bad news for research, he says, as a reappraisal of what the state should deliver could provide opportunities for research.

One overarching outcome from the day was the sense that interdisciplinarity has come of age and that an era of austerity could actually prove its worth. But researchers need to be more imaginative in framing research questions – and they must work on equal terms with the people who will be using the research to co-produce knowledge.

An overall theme of the workshop had been to consider how the extent of cross-council collaboration and interdisciplinary research varies between research council programmes. Within a number of them there has been a considerable amount of parallel research effort between research councils with different degrees of coordination. Regarding efforts to integrate the approaches of separate macroscience communities (e.g. between the social, physical, environmental or biological sciences), there seems to be (at least) two distinct models in operation: an intra-council model embodied in the SUE Programme; and an inter-council model embodied in Relu.

SUE (set up in 2006) is very much a successor to the EPSRC's Towards the Sustainable City Programme. Besides engineering and physical sciences, these successive programmes, although almost wholly financed by the EPSRC, have funded research collaborations involving a range of social and environmental sciences. The EPSRC refers to these as multidisciplinary collaborations and it has a considerable track record of running such programmes on its own. In part this reflects an engineering mentality, one that seeks to bring together the appropriate mix of expertise to solve the problem at hand. The social science that is supported as part of collaborative consortia under such programmes tends to be of an instrumental nature, aiding the solving of engineering problems with an emphasis on research that is methodologically focused and rigorous. While it is pragmatic in seeking out the appropriate social science inputs, and must not be seen to be excessively diluting its primary mission to sponsor engineering and physical sciences, over the years the EPSRC has built up its own applied social science communities in fields such as urban transport and sustainable energy production, through its own funded programmes.

Relu presents a contrasting model based in the joint funding of interdisciplinary research by its three research councils. From the start of the programme there was a commitment to pool the funding, but also, crucially, the funding decision making. This sharing of authority required specific governance arrangements, including the establishment of a strategic advisory committee, with senior scientists nominated by each of the three research councils (plus representatives of major stakeholders), to oversee the direction of the programme; and a programme management group, with senior officers of the three councils, to steer the administration of the programme. To operationalise a pooled funding pot additionally necessitated bespoke cross-council procedures for grant applications and assessment. Then, in order to stimulate interdisciplinary working and integrated outcomes, there were further developments in programme management, including the appointment of an independent

programme director to coordinate the research and internal and external communication activities; the provision of specific seed-corn funding mechanisms to support the building of novel interdisciplinary partnerships; and the establishment of a cross-council data support service (the first of its kind). These institutional innovations and procedural improvisations hybridised the processes and cultures of the three research councils and absorbed lessons from previous inter-council collaborations.

Land system and ways forward points from Mark Tewdwr Jones

Feedback from those attending was generally positive, although some said they would have preferred to hear results from the research rather than lessons on interdisciplinarity and knowledge exchange from the respective programmes. The poster sessions drew the most positive comments and ten respondents said that they made useful links as a result of these. Several people wanted more time for discussion and found the allocated slots too short.