

Work Package C: Multi-level decision making processes, expertise and sustainable urban regeneration

Objectives

This project explores the ways in which - within a multi-level context for action - political, policy and decision-making processes deal with the concepts of environmental risk and sustainability in relation to urban brownfield regeneration and contaminated land. In pursuit of this aim, three general **objectives** have been adopted:

1. To assess the processes by which planners and other land allocation and development experts identify and define brownfield sites and negotiate their (re)use and exchange values.
2. To examine the institutional mechanisms and decision-making processes that characterises brownfield site development and the remediation of contaminated land sites.
3. To examine the interaction between different forms of knowledge and the ways in which expert-knowledge is promoted by development agencies and translated by local user-communities.

Conceptual Model

The political, policy and decision-making processes by which brownfield sites are defined and identified and their associated risks and opportunities assessed and communicated are complex. This project explores two key characteristics of this complexity.

- The multi-level nature of the processes. Four interrelated levels of action are in the process of being analysed: national, regional, local and site levels. This project is examining how the structures, actors and processes at these levels influence one another. It analyses how the actual articulation of decisions and policies is contingent upon the detailed circumstances and interplay between actors and organisations at and within each institutional level.
- The multi-faceted nature of the concepts. Different actors construct, defend and promote different notions of environmental risk and sustainability. Knowledge, understanding and communication of the various perspectives between the actors that hold them are limited and problematic. These differences, and the conflicts to which they give rise, are an essential feature of policy and decision-making processes.

This project aims to develop a better understanding of the interrelationships between multi-level governance and decision-making, on the one hand, and competing notions of environmental risk and sustainability, on the other, in the hope of contributing to more sustainable and inclusive urban brownfield regeneration.

Method

In order to capture the many dimensions to the processes with which this project is concerned, the research is being undertaken in the following way:

National policy frame. In the first six months of the project, a literature based analysis of the political and legal framework for sustainable brownfield redevelopment and contaminated land in the UK (laws, policies, responsibilities, funding, guidance) was conducted. Also, interview and document based analysis of the role of conceptions of sustainability and competing interpretations in relevant national policy was undertaken. This covered the relevant policies and positions of central government departments and agencies, national professional bodies and interest groups.

Regional/ Local negotiation and decision. At this level, a literature review and elite interviews were undertaken to analyse the background to the politics of the redevelopment of local brownfield (case study) sites. This was followed by further interviews and document analysis that explored the role of conceptions of sustainability and competing interpretations in local political processes and (spatial / planning) policies. The work focused on regional and local government bodies (for example, GORs and RDAs; local authorities; specific regeneration agencies); and business and third sector organisations active at this level.

Site action, stage 1. This phase of the research involves interview and document based analysis of the 'story' of site redevelopment (positions, negotiations, compromises, winners and losers, results); interview and document based analysis of role of conceptions of sustainability and competing interpretations; interview and document based assessment of the 'sustainability' of resulting projects; and reflexive interviews with researchers on other projects. Four sites, two in Greater Manchester and two in Thames Gateway, are being studied. In addition to actors in the organisations listed above, particular emphasis is being given to the roles of local community and business groups and activists.

First round of analysis and site action, stage 2. We will then undertake an initial analysis of empirical material. Interviews and focus groups with local residents; large-scale postal questionnaire surveys of local residents to identify views on sites and their redevelopment and, in particular, on environmental risk and sustainability are currently being prepared.

Further research and analysis, and initial writing-up. Follow-up research will be undertaken to plug gaps and / or pursue particular issues further. We will then write up the results in draft paper and / or working paper form.

Analysis and Interpretation. The qualitative material will be analysed using standard techniques including discourse analysis, triangulation and the application of relevant software (eg Nvivo, Nudist) to textual information. SPSS will be used to analyse the results of the postal survey. The findings will be interpreted from three complementary theoretical perspectives: political ideology, cultural institutionalism and attitudes in psychology.