

**‘Spatial Policy for the Post-Crisis Era’**

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**This Conference has two, interrelated aims:**

- *Bridging the rift between theory and policy: a call for putting public policy at the heart of the urban and regional studies agenda*
- *Rethinking the scope, nature and aims of spatial policies for a post-crisis era of social, economic, political and environmental uncertainty and challenges*

**Context and Motivation**

Almost twenty years have passed since Martin’s article on ‘Geography and public policy: the case of the missing agenda’ (2001), in which he called for a ‘policy turn’. Since then, although the conceptual and empirical bases of urban and regional studies have expanded apace, and geographers and regional studies scholars have become more concerned about their policy impact, policy research in these fields remains underdeveloped. Meanwhile, from the World Bank to the OECD, to the European Commission, to national governments, to individual regional and city authorities, policy bodies are increasingly recognising that ‘geography matters’ for economic prosperity, social welfare and individual wellbeing, even if these various bodies have different interpretations of exactly *how* it matters and how *far* and in what *ways* it should inform policy. We may not always agree with how such bodies interpret or use ‘geography’ or ‘place’ in their deliberations and pronouncements, but the heart of the matter is that geography and place are firmly on the policy agenda. If then there is a growing *demand* for our theoretical and explanatory insights, the nature of those insights and how best to *supply* them surely matters. The more so at a time when spatial disparities in socio-economic welfare, political orientation, environmental conditions, and access over resources have intensified, contributing to a more uncertain and divided world.

In the field of urban and regional studies there still is a strong separation and even imbalance between, on the one hand, theory-driven, more or less critical, analyses and interpretations of urban and regional change, often with an important – but typically only implicit – normative dimension, and, on the other hand, research on policy approaches, tools and impacts, which seems to remain confined to rather technical and often ex-post evaluation exercises. More importantly, there seems to be very little – and rather unsystematic – interaction between scientific research and policy-making, between universities and policy organisations, between findings and prescriptions.

There is also a certain degree of mutual distrust between the two communities, although it varies by discipline. Policy makers often perceive scientific research as too theoretical, critical or distant from the reality of policy-making and of little operational relevance; in contrast, academic researchers generally consider the policy world to be too technocratic and practice-oriented. The upshot is that there is no discernible coherent policy research agenda within the discipline, while policy-making organisations, at all territorial scales, tend to dialogue with a restricted circle of policy-focused economists, business administrators, political scientists, not necessarily committed to address urban and regional inequalities as a top priority. The situation is not helped by a widespread public distrust of the political establishment, on the one hand, and growing scepticism about 'experts' by many politicians, on the other.

This state of affairs is particularly disappointing, since urban and regional studies is often concerned with exposing and seeking to account for social and territorial inequalities. There ought, then, to be in the field a strong ethical or axiological disposition to work for redressing such inequalities, a moral duty to engage in public policy for the betterment of society and the environment. In other words, the improvement of collective welfare ought to be a priority for the discipline. We need, therefore, to bring public policy explicitly to the fore, to make a case for a progressive urban and regional studies agenda fit for the 21<sup>st</sup>C. We need to reconcile theory with policy, via theory-informed, firmly evidence-based, but strongly policy-committed analyses. We need to bridge the breach between research and policy-making and promote a systematic dialogue between the scientific community, the policy-making institutions, and the policy implementing actors, at all administrative scales.

Furthermore, we need to expand the organisations we think of as making 'public policy' – this not only includes governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, but also such bodies as trade unions, NGOs charitable foundations, and social protest groups and movements. As academics, our policy framework should embrace the policy concerns and policy work undertaken by these other actors.

There is then a strong case that urban and regional studies could do more to:

- Analyse, expose and explain urban and regional *inequalities* in all their manifestations;
- Critically examine existing *policy* approaches, tools and practices, unveiling their ideological underpinnings and evaluating their intended goals and unintended consequences;
- Based on findings, propose creative *strategies* to reduce territorial inequalities, even if this means challenging established policy paradigms;
- Pursue a systematic *dialogue* with policy institutions and implementing actors, at different administrative levels, in order to exchange knowledge and: a) gain a better understanding of existing policy implementation shortcomings (and strengths); b) formulate better policy strategies.

### **Conference Scope and Structure**

With these considerations explicitly in mind, the aim of the 2020 CJRES conference is to explore and mobilise a critical and pragmatic discussion on public policy – its mission, its domains of action, its toolkit – within the urban and regional studies community. To that end, we envisage the following themes and topics, among others (the final programme themes to be discussed):

- The *ethical dimension* of urban and regional studies and the need for more policy-committed research
- *Forms* of policy-orientated research
- The case for *spatial* policy-making; both place-based policy and the territorialisation of national policies
- *Alternative* strategies for socially inclusive and economically sustainable urban and regional development
- The spatially and socially just transition to a *low-carbon* economy
- The urban and regional policy *governance* conundrum: local vs centralised *institutions*
- The labour market: urban and regional policy for *better jobs*
- *Public services* for more competitive and inclusive places
- *Housing*: the forgotten agenda
- *Well-being* without growth

The programme structure will include a number of key plenary speakers (on the above or similar themes), which will then form the focus of a series of paper sessions. In addition, a number of panels, including policy-makers, will address ways forward in the relation to particular themes and issues.

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**Those interested in presenting a paper at the conference should submit an Abstract of about 400 words to Francis Knights [fk240@cam.ac.uk](mailto:fk240@cam.ac.uk) no later than 1 February 2020.**

Authors not attending the conference but interested in publishing in the related *CJRES* Special Issue on this theme should also indicate this to Francis Knights [fk240@cam.ac.uk](mailto:fk240@cam.ac.uk) by **1 March 2020**. Full Papers invited from among those and from among the conference papers will need to be received by 1 November 2020 for publication in March 2022. Submissions will be subject to the journal's normal peer review process. Details of *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* publication process, evaluation criteria and house style are available at <https://academic.oup.com/cjres>