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Transience and permanence in urban development

Call for abstracts

Applications are invited for fully funded places in a small, research-intensive workshop examining transience and permanence in urban development, which will result in a significant joint publication.

Cities must cope with continual change. The rigidity of the urban built environment contrasts with the relative fluidity of the socio-economic processes that it accommodates. Ultimately, the former adapts to the latter through the redevelopment of land and buildings to meet new requirements. This involves various combinations of change of use, renovation, alteration, demolition and new construction, and so on. However, physical, social, economic, political, institutional and cultural factors frequently cause a hiatus between the decline and obsolescence of land uses and buildings and their redevelopment. Thus vacancy and/or dereliction is a common stage in the urban development cycle.

Post-industrial cities have experienced a dramatic growth in vacant/derelict land and buildings, raising questions about how such sites may be used temporarily for social, economic or environmental benefit, and about how these transient uses may affect the long-run trajectory of urban development. A burgeoning literature on temporary uses has evolved. It has considered the causes, nature and effects of vacancy and dereliction, their exploitation by various types of temporary uses, those uses' impact on the city, and the challenges they pose for standard approaches to urban policy and planning, and real estate investment and development.

Work on temporary uses has been pursued mainly by architects, urban geographers and urban sociologists. It has prompted some response from planners and political scientists, but has received little acknowledgement from the disciplines of economics, finance and real estate, for example. Indeed, conventional urban economic theory has little to say about vacant/derelict land or buildings. Hitherto, it has not engaged adequately with the heterogeneity of urban character and experience or with factors other than the economic and the financial. The fragmented nature of research in this field is unfortunate. A rounded rather than a partial consideration of the subject is required, because a diversity of disciplinary perspectives may prompt new thinking about vacancy, dereliction and temporary uses.

Overall, research in this field is in need of consolidation and development. The aim of the workshop is to provide an opportunity for critical reflection on transience and permanence in urban development. Perspectives are sought on following issues from a range of disciplinary perspectives: conceptualisations of transience and permanence; theories of urban development, especially their treatment of obsolescence and redevelopment; the causes and consequences of vacancy and dereliction; temporary uses and processes of displacement, exploitation, commodification, valorisation, transformation, benefit, innovation, experimentation, inclusion, exclusion, insurgency and challenge; the relation between shorter and longer term uses, including the embedding of temporary uses, their re-casting of the urban agenda and their subversion of or appropriation by the mainstream; and evolving informal and formal planning, policy and practice in relation to temporary uses and redevelopment.

The immediate objective of the workshop, which will take place in Sheffield over two days in mid-January 2015, is to share ideas and produce a significant joint publication (such as an edited book or similar). In the medium term it could evolve into an enduring network of researchers who aspire to develop joint funding proposals and plans for other publications.

We invite proposals for original papers to be presented at the workshop and subsequently to be considered for inclusion in the joint publication. Please send a 300-500 word abstract to John Henneberry (j.henneberry@sheffield.ac.uk) or Simon Parris (s.parris@sheffield.ac.uk), explaining how the paper will address the aims of the workshop. The deadline for applications is 14 July 2014. Decisions on the workshop invitations will be made by 28 July. Full papers will be required by 31 December 2014 for circulation to the participants, allowing an informed discussion to be pursued at the workshop. Reasonable expenses of lead authors will be met. Other authors are free to attend at their own expense.

Papers are welcome from authors in any discipline, whether established or under-represented in the subject area, from early career academics and research students, and from those able to offer comparative studies (e.g. examining the application of different approaches in one location or vice versa).

Organisers: Professor John Henneberry and Dr. Simon Parris, Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK.

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