

## Manchester Urban Institute

Understanding the cities of the world to change them for the better

As the proportion of the world's population living in urban areas continues to grow, so do the challenges to secure an inclusive, just and sustainable set of futures. Cities and their surrounding areas in the global north and the global south face a host of challenges. These include civil unrest, climate change, education delivery, energy provision, governance, housing shortages, infrastructure investment, and poverty.

Cities, though, are also home to significant innovation potential involving co-production, the creative sector, innovative design, and social cohesion. These challenges are not only practical. They also ask questions of the academic field of urban studies, which is undergoing something of a renaissance as cities have become the centre of debates both in the global north and the global south.

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Our research brings insight and clarity to global urban challenges and explores the issues facing people in populated urban settings.

**Professor Kevin Ward**  
Director, Manchester Urban Institute

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Early 2017 sees the launch of the Manchester Urban Institute (MUI), a new flagship research institute that will build upon the work of [cities@manchester](mailto:cities@manchester) and unites the strengths of a number of long-standing research centres.

Manchester has a significant track record in pioneering urban research that uniquely draws expertise from across disciplines such as anthropology, architecture, business studies, development studies, education, engineering, geography, gerontology, history, planning, political science and sociology.

Located in a global network of academics, activists, business, charities, consultants, government agencies, labour unions and NGOs the University provides a platform for our world-leading thinkers to influence and actively debate urban policy, whilst instigating positive change for urban environments across the world.

We are home to a thriving PhD scholarly community and attract the brightest minds to study on our internally and externally-funded fellowship programmes to find solutions to today's urban challenges. We are recognised for excellent public and academic engagement, including events such as our highly-acclaimed Summer Institute in Urban Studies, competitions such as the popular #cityfuturesmcr photography competition and a sophisticated multimedia communications offer.

### Research themes

Our research agenda centres on four cross-cutting, inter-disciplinary themes:

#### **Informalities and Vulnerabilities**

(This theme houses the European Research Council-sponsored Energy Vulnerability and Urban Transitions project)

One billion people in cities outside of the global north are living in urban neighbourhoods without safe and secure housing, and with inadequate access to basic services. Many of these households are in informal settlements, which are characterised by inadequate planning and management by the state and informal or illegal land transactions. The vulnerabilities associated with informal shelter are often compounded by residents' participation in the informal economy. More recently there has been growing interest in these phenomena in cities of the global north, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in cities in central, eastern and southern Europe.



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### Smart Cities and Transitions

(This theme houses the European Union-funded Triangulum project)

The notion of the 'smart city' is increasingly being leveraged by a range of stakeholders to optimise the delivery and management of urban services such as energy, transport, and water/wastewater. Through the rollout of comprehensive sensor networks and data collection and analysis, smart infrastructure networks promise to make cities more environmentally friendly and liveable. Meanwhile, the political and social aspects of the smart agenda remain undetermined. Urban researchers have multiple opportunities to engage in the smart urbanism agenda by providing expertise and analysing and assessing data, and participating as partners in smart city trials. Moreover, as cities are pressured by multiple drivers of changes, the on-going transition process not only speaks to the smart city agenda but also a variety of experiments in new governance and planning systems.

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An innovative and energetic research hub committed to urban prosperity and social justice which fits within Manchester's historic legacy and the commitment of its citizens to an inclusive future.

**Professor Diana Mitlin**  
Managing Director, Global Development Institute  
and member of Manchester Urban Institute

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### Spatial Inequalities and Poverty

(This theme houses the University's Just Greater Manchester initiative and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation-funded Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit)

Cities across the world are experiencing wide inequalities of treatment, opportunity and outcomes that persist between different ethnic, demographic and social groups. In addition, there is considerable income poverty which are exacerbated by high levels of commodification and disadvantageous political relationships. There is thus a pressing need to develop a progressive agenda of inclusive and sustainable growth of cities worldwide.

### Urban Governance and Politics

(This theme houses the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) funded Devo Manc Hub and the ESRC-funded Jam and Justice project)

This focus on spatial development explores the governance challenges facing contemporary cities and their wider hinterland. Our research examines the relationship between spatial connectivities, infrastructure provision and economic growth; the paradox of concomitant economic development and changing forms of urban governance in the context in which a number of countries are revisiting the geographical scale at which economic, fiscal and power lies. In the UK this is seen most clearly in the current devolution agenda, particularly around "Devo Manc" and the construction of the Northern Powerhouse. While transforming the interconnectivities among cities is a vital component for spatial rebalancing in both the UK and international contexts, the gravity and spatially diverse problems in many places remain an imperative for strategic thinking.

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