

For immediate release: 2 March 2010

Press Release

Oxford Programme for the Future of Cities announces £250,000 in funding to research ‘the flexible city’

Today, the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society (InSIS) at the University of Oxford announced the first six projects that will receive funding under the Oxford Programme for the Future of Cities. The programme, led by InSIS director Professor Steve Rayner, seeks to deliver scientifically robust, cutting-edge research into the social, technological and climatic changes cities will face over the next fifty years, and how cities can be made more flexible to meet these challenges. In particular, the programme will look at the implications this has for decision-making in boardrooms, communities, and city and national governments, in the next 5-10 years and beyond.

Following a call for proposals across the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, the successful projects draw on expertise in the areas of: ageing, migration, globalisation, governance, urban reconstruction, transportation and the built environment. By bringing together a diverse portfolio of research projects, the programme will take a wide-ranging and interconnected approach to research that reflects the concerns of city stakeholders and the real-world challenges cities face today.

Each project will receive up to £50,000 as seed money to develop rigorous interdisciplinary research that is of practical value to business, community and political leaders, and practitioners involved in shaping the future of cities globally.

Director Steve Rayner says, "Ageing, migration, climate change and other social and technological changes already underway will put intense pressure on cities over the next fifty years. By bringing together expertise from across Oxford, this research programme will develop and fund research capacity to identify the characteristics that make a city 'flexible' and better able to withstand these combined challenges. The projects that have been selected for funding are both rigorous and relevant, with implications for social policy, business and civil society."

The funded projects are:

1. Understanding the Dynamics of Urban Flexibility and Reconstruction

In the wake of catastrophic disruptions (natural disasters, pandemics or civil conflict) a city's infrastructure and identity can either be restored or radically transformed. This project, led by InSIS, will look at regions such as the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa where such disruptions are endemic to understand how cities respond to and emerge out of reconstruction.

2. Climate Change and the Ageing Population

This project, based at the Oxford Institute of Ageing, will explore conflicts and convergences between climate change and the ageing population in the UK and Japan. According to the UN, half the global city population will be over 60 by the year 2050, and many of the conveniences that address age-related changes (automobiles, elevators, air-conditioning) are also highly dependent on energy. By linking together these two drivers, this project will develop flexible responses to the combined challenges of climate and demographic change.

3. A Low-Carbon Economy: New Business Models in the Built

Environment

Buildings account for approximately 47% of UK carbon emissions, including lighting, HVAC and other equipment. This project will explore the opportunity for new business models to deliver these products and services in the context of policy and technological change. Led by Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute, the project will look at changing roles for energy companies, telecommunications businesses and the real estate sector, and the ways these organisations might reformulate themselves in a changing policy context.

4. Global Migration and the Right to the Cities of the Future

This project, developed by Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), seeks to understand changing patterns of settlement, global labour markets, and new forms of citizenship at the global, national and local level. In particular, the project will develop models for integrating migrants into local communities, improving cohesion and facing the ethical and practical tensions of allocating limited resources, such as housing and healthcare services.

5. Globalisation, Climate Change and Urban Governance: Balancing the Scales for Both Efficient and Pro-Poor Urban Futures – The Case of Brazil and the UK

This project, based at Oxford Brookes University, aims to understand the urban governance challenges arising from contemporary processes of globalisation in Brazil and the UK. By contrasting the current UK recession with the rapid growth taking place in Brazil, the project will look at both the potential and the limitations of the two countries' governance strategies, with respect to social inclusion, climate change and sustainability.

6. Visioning and Backcasting for Transport Futures in Chinese Cities

This research project will analyse policy pathways and business models to support sustainable transport in China. Transport provides essential infrastructure for development and is often viewed as “the maker and breaker of cities” yet it is the most difficult sector within which to reduce CO2. The rapid and large-scale urbanisation of China provides an unprecedented and urgent opportunity to “leapfrog” existing technology and tackle mobility on a grand scale, both for China and other economies that follow in its footsteps. This project, based at Oxford University’s Environmental Change Institute, will use visioning and backcasting to examine possible futures, outline policy options, and test the feasibility of balancing competing priorities with a sustainable, low-carbon transport system.

Funding

The research is funded by the Centre for Studies in Property Valuation and Management Trust with matching funding from the James Martin 21st Century School. The Institute is continuing to pursue further funding to expand and extend the programme’s scope and research projects.

For further details, or to speak with Professor Steve Rayner, please contact the Press Office at Saïd Business School:

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Notes to editors

1 About the Oxford Programme for the Future of Cities

The Oxford Programme for the Future of Cities seeks to understand how cities can be made more flexible in order to meet the challenges of the next fifty years. Through a portfolio of engaged scholarship, the programme researches long-term drivers in our cities such as environmental, demographic, social, economic and technological change, and investigates how governments, businesses, civil society groups and individual citizens can find more flexible ways of responding to these challenges. The Future of Cities programme is led by the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society (InSIS) based at the Saïd Business School and also part of the James Martin 21st Century School. For more information, see www.insis.ox.ac.uk/research/Pages/future-cities.aspx

2 About the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society

The Institute for Science, Innovation and Society (InSIS) researches and informs the key processes of social and technological innovation that are critical to business, governments and civil society in the 21st century and beyond. By looking at wicked problems such as climate change and the future of cities, the Institute seeks to understand the social context of science and technology, and the interconnected nature of our present day challenges. InSIS is based at the Saïd Business School and is also part of the James Martin 21st Century School. For more information, see www.insis.ox.ac.uk

3 About Saïd Business School

Established in 1996 the Saïd Business School is one of Europe's youngest and most entrepreneurial business schools with a reputation for innovative business education. An integral part of Oxford University, the School embodies the academic rigour and forward thinking that has made Oxford a world leader in education. The School has an established reputation for research in a wide range of areas, including finance and accounting, organisational analysis, international management, strategy and operations management. The School is dedicated to developing a new generation of business leaders and entrepreneurs and conducting research not only into the nature of business, but the connections between business and the wider world. For more information, see www.sbs.ox.ac.uk

4 About the James Martin 21st Century School

The James Martin 21st Century School was established in 2005 at the University of Oxford to foster innovative thinking, deep scholarship and collaborative activity to address the most pressing risks and to harvest new opportunities of the 21st Century. The School's various interdisciplinary teams of researchers work on a wide range of topics of global significance in the broad areas of medical frontiers, energy and the environment, and social change. By stimulating cutting-edge research, intellectual exchange and public debate, the School aims to understand and contribute to the management of systemic risks and to leverage the opportunities arising from technological and social innovations. For more information, see www.21school.ox.ac.uk

