

Resilience and Urban Living



The University of Birmingham is making a major investment into the innovative research area of Resilience and Urban Living which bridges the social and physical sciences. Building on existing research strengths, Birmingham's investment in Resilience and Urban Living will create a unique research activity that positions the University at the forefront of an emerging field.

The initiative brings together geographers, engineers and social scientists exploring the material nature of the built environment and the social, economic, cultural factors underpinning urban living, with psychologists working on cognitive, affective and social processes that influence behaviour and support adaptation to and utilization of urban environments. Our work seeks to influence the working practices of a variety of key stakeholders and policy communities and to engage with a wide variety of social and community groups.

Our work is focused at the scale of the city and city region. Urban areas, their populations and their governance structures increasingly have to respond to major challenges and a vast range of contemporary risks resulting from environmental change, threats to national and international security, an array of challenges associated with contrasting demographics, and from enhanced global economic turbulence. There is now increased emphasis on responding to such major challenges with a long-term view, rethinking risk assessment and mitigation strategies, giving increased focus to developing adaptive human behaviours and facilitating individual and institutional coping strategies.

Central to the strategic response to such global urban challenges is the concept of resilience. From the Latin *resilire* 'to leap back' this refers to the capability and capacity of social and physical urban systems to withstand change and rebound from disruptive challenges. Resilience is thus a response to perceived or material vulnerability, insecurity and, ultimately, change, and is operationalised through a cyclical process based upon anticipation, prevention, preparation, response and recovery.

According to Professor Thomas Elmquist, Deputy Director, Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University, 'Birmingham has the potential to develop a unique niche within a strong and expanding network of scientists... and the initiative has the potential to create internationally visible and leading research activity that would have a long-standing impact'.

Professor Jon Coaffee "Urban resilience is a concept incorporating a vast range of contemporary risks and is increasingly important to our understanding of contemporary planning policy and practice."

Professor John R Bryson "This is the century of the city and of sustainability, but also of behavioural adaptation that will enhance resilience."