

Analysis

RTPI RESEARCH AWARD

Public spaces paper wins top RTPI research award

THIS YEAR'S RTPI AWARDS FOR RESEARCH EXCELLENCE CELEBRATE A RECORD NUMBER OF ENTRIES AND WIDE-RANGING CONTRIBUTIONS TO PLANNING KNOWLEDGE

A paper challenging perceptions about the privatisation of public space in the capital has won top prize at the RTPI Awards for Research Excellence. UCL professor Matthew Carmona's paper argues that the complex ownership patterns of publicly accessible space "defy any overly restrictive view of what public space should be".

Other awards were given to planning student Emma Thorpe of Cardiff University for her work looking at attitudes to active commuting among school students; and to Dr Paul Cowie of Newcastle University and collaborators for their use of theatre to understand how people engage with planning processes.

The awards, sponsored by Idox Information Service and the Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, highlight the best planning research coming out of RTPI-accredited planning schools. This year saw a record number of entries in four categories and, said judges, a very high standard of work.

ACADEMIC AWARD



Title: Re-theorising Contemporary Public Space: A new narrative and a new normative

- Tests the claim that the privatisation of public spaces in London is increasing
- Challenges idealistic views of public space
- Recognises diversity of public space in modern cities, its roles and audiences
- Suggests we need to recognise that good public spaces can be 'positively invaded' by other uses

Key quote: "Public space today is no longer (if it ever was) straightforwardly either open and public or closed and private, but is instead full of complexity and contradictions that defy any overly restrictive view of what public space should be."

The judges' view: "A really important piece of work challenging some of the received wisdom about how spaces are becoming privatised... It was also a good read."

Read more: tinyurl.com/ResearchAwards1

Commended: Professor Matthew Carmona, UCL – 'London's Local High Streets: The Problems, Potential and Complexities of Mixed Street Corridors'

Commended: Prof Bo-sin Tang and Dr Winky KO Ho, University of Hong Kong – 'Land-use planning and market adjustment under de-industrialization: Restructuring of industrial space in Hong Kong'

SIR PETER HALL AWARD FOR WIDER ENGAGEMENT



Title: The Town Meeting

- Uses theatre to explore how communities interact with the planning process. Mirrors consultation process for a major planning application set in a fictional town.
- Audiences of all ages have been so involved they have needed to be reminded that the play is fictional
- Fairness and transparency critical for communities. Older age groups cynical about planning process; under-30s see arguing from within better than shouting from outside
- Highlights how role of the planner has changed from expert to facilitator
- Play to be used in Town Planning masters at Newcastle University

Key quote: "Your town is teetering on the brink. Imminent destruction looms. Homes, livelihoods and an entire way of life are at stake. There's only one thing for it: a Town Meeting."

The judges' view: "By challenging communities to role play and to engage with local planning issues in a very different arena and style, [it] has the potential to move participants beyond self-interest to explore empathy and legitimacy of actions."

Read more: tinyurl.com/ResearchAwards2

Commended: Dr Lee Crookes, Dr Andy Inch, Marion Oveson, Jason Slade, Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield, and Tracey Hawley-Kirkby, Westfield Big Local – 'The Westfield Action Research Project'

STUDENT AWARD



Title: Getting Wales Active: Exploring Secondary School Students' Attitudes Towards Active Commuting

- Attitudes to active commuting and socio-economic data gathered from students and parents
- Distance, weather, pedestrian crossings, ease of car parking main influence transport choice
- Students prefer 'convenience' of cars but recognise benefits of active commuting
- Students more likely to walk/cycle over shorter distances with good connectivity and 'active travel infrastructure'
- Cycle networks considered poor, disappointment over lack of pedestrian crossings near schools
- Recommendations to Welsh Government and Cardiff Council for supporting active travel to school

Key quote: "Well-connected local environments support the perception of walking and cycling being a rational choice, in terms of speed and convenience."

Read more: tinyurl.com/ResearchAwards3

Commended: Andrew Dowell, Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, 'An Investigation of Public Realm Provision, in Particular Shared Public Space, within Urban Waterfront Regeneration and Analysis of Success with Reference to Two Clyde Riverside Areas'

EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER AWARD



Title: The Utilization of Environmental Knowledge in Land Use Planning: Drawing Lessons for an Ecosystem Services Approach

- Ecosystems services is the latest attempt to ensure the 'true value' of the environment is considered in decision-making
- Takes examples from minerals planning, ecological footprinting and green infrastructure
- Concludes that impact on planning decisions is 'uneven' and depends on institutional setting and how problems are understood.
- Emphasises importance of "policy entrepreneurs" in promoting these forms of assessment, including planning officers

Key quote: "The environmental history of the UK planning system since the 1970s is characterised by restlessness about the appropriate methodological and procedural frameworks by which to connect environmental knowledge to planning processes."

Read more: tinyurl.com/ResearchAwards4

The judges' view: "A very rounded paper indeed; this most clearly linked a planning policy issue to the tricky territory of the relationship between knowledge and action."

Commended: Dr Linda Fox-Rogers, School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy, University College Dublin – 'Informal Strategies of Power in the Local Planning System'