

How value is considered and used in urban development with implications for the levelling up agenda.

The issue

Examining how value is considered and placed in the decision-making process for urban development reveals who shapes the rationale. Where is the influence and how does this affect urban development? What does this mean for health in decision-making processes?

We wanted to understand how value is produced by key actors and institutions that shape the everyday geographies and spaces of urban development in England and what this means for the levelling-up agenda.

Our response

Using mapping work produced through phase one of TRUUD we interviewed 24 key informants such as senior civil, politicians, local government representatives and third-sector representatives who had specialist knowledge of the urban development system in England.

We found that:

- HM Treasury is central to the understanding and operation of values in urban development. This helps to prioritise short-term, financial outcomes despite an awareness of the need to be sensitive to temporal and spatial concerns.
- Encouraging devolved decision-making is important for meeting the objectives for the levelling up agenda.

- Value and how it is enacted should be central to efforts to levelling up because to work effectively, it requires a concept of value that can be used by all actors from public and private sectors in their efforts to develop urban space and work towards reducing spatial inequalities.

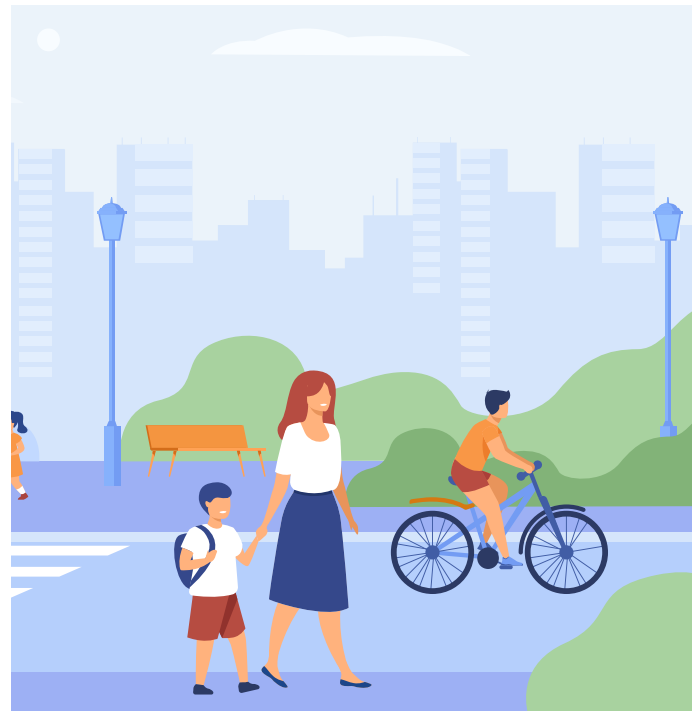


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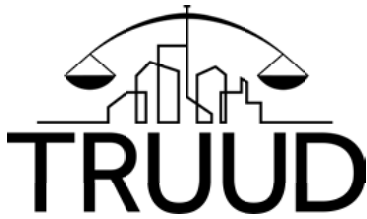


Local authority partners



University consortium





The evidence

In England, local authorities play a key role in planning, developing and managing the built environment within their administrative boundaries. Local councils develop a local plan, to outline their planning policies and allocate sites for different types of development. There are, however, national elements to this system. The local plan, before adoption, is required to show that it agrees with national planning policy and guidance.

This means that local government plays a key role in shaping priorities and spatial developments. However, they do so while working inside the confines of a framework of national policy. Urban development in England is largely funded through the allocation of money from central to local government. It is through these funds that the central government can exert influence over what is built and where it gets built.

The Green Book, value and investment

Following a review in Spring 2020, a new Green Book, the terms and conditions for local government, was launched with greater weight assigned to applications making a strong strategic case.

The revision of the Green Book prepares the ground for the Government's Levelling Up agenda by including place-based analysis: mitigating the regional impacts of policymaking with a focus on helping less well-off regions draw nearer to better off places.

The policy problem

In urban development funding in England, **HMT is extremely influential**. This includes the way funding streams are designed and administered as well as the guidance documents and funding criteria. This has led to specific ways of working. There is a need to find a way of making the argument in a way that Treasury will understand which is a big barrier.

Introducing new ways for how money is awarded, administered and evaluated would be required for deeper change. **Change will be a slow, incremental process**. While change is happening, current funding structures and procedures are set to stay in place for some time.

The current funding guidelines and criteria have placed tight restrictions on funding projects that have more than financial benefits. However, there is a recognition of the need to promote more than financial benefits.

Health, for example, is not an intangible impact when considered in terms of ability to live as well as possible. It has implications for working, community involvement, and for society at large. Re-working intangible/tangible would lead to enacting value differently.

To enable urban development and associated funding to be more responsive to inequalities and regional disparities, public actors suggested that **alongside a more sensitive conception of value, a broader development in how funding is allocated and how local and national priorities can fit together is needed**. This would require more devolved powers to enable local and regional actors to be able to set local agendas, work collaboratively, and have the resources to shape spaces in ways that are sympathetic to local needs.

Policy recommendations

The insights from this study can be used to design evidence that meets the requirements of different urban development actors and persuade them to **think more about health in decision making processes**.

A key piece of levelling up involves thinking about value and how it can be employed in different places. Encouraging decision-making to be **devolved from the highly centralised state** is important for meeting the demands objectives for the levelling up agenda.

Value and how it is enacted should be central to efforts to levelling up because to work effectively, it requires **a concept of value that can be used by all decision-makers** from public and private sectors.

Levelling up requires devolution across and within the central government as well as down and out towards local government and non-government actors. **The influential forces in placing and using values for urban development should be broadened to embrace more than HMT rules and procedures**.

About Truud

'Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development' ([TRUUD](#)) is a 5-year, £6.7m research project that aims to design policy interventions to support the development of healthier urban environments. Our research seeks to promote a fundamental shift in thinking about how to prioritise healthy urban development. We are funded by the [UK Prevention Research Partnership](#).

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