

Human Geography Research Group

Human geography at the University of Edinburgh has secured an international reputation for its work in three key areas. The first, concerned with *geographies of identity*, tackles important debates concerning the way that claims to ownership, control, and use of space divide human societies. These divisions are manifest in the variety of social categories people are assigned to and in the identities they experience: in Edinburgh we have been especially concerned with gender and sexuality, with race, racism and nationalism, with questions around mobility and indigeneity and with health and disability. The second area of work addresses related questions in a framework concerned with the links between *geography and policy*. Here the objective is to identify and monitor the uneven distribution and effects of inequality and injustice. Particular areas of expertise relate to environment, sustainability and risk, housing and urban change, labour market dynamics, and welfare and social participation. These themes are linked by a commitment to exploring the implications and effects of a profoundly uneven distribution of power.

The third area of work adds to this by charting and developing different *forms of geographical knowledge*. This part of the research agenda is concerned first, with the development and use of a range of innovative methodologies, building expertise in both quantitative and qualitative techniques, and honing skills in a variety of ‘ways of knowing’ from intensive psychoanalysis to extensive surveys, from phenomenology to positivism. Additionally, this ‘knowledges’ theme is concerned with the way that key bodies of ideas are produced: ideas about ‘nature’ and ‘sustainability’ for example, about health and wellbeing, home and work, and indeed the idea of ‘geography’ itself. An important part of this work is concerned with the different constituencies in which knowledge is developed – lay and professional knowledges, scientific knowledge, traditional ecological knowledges and so on - and with the question of how some types of knowledge come to be regarded as more important, valid, useful and used than others.

Interdisciplinary and collaborative working is an integral part of the research culture among human geographers. This has been important in the past for developing a key strength of geography as a discipline, namely its position at the interface of the natural and social sciences. At a time when the boundaries between nature and culture, people and environment, technology and society, genetics and experience are increasingly open to question, the human geography research group is in a unique position in the School of GeoScience in its capacity to work across the College divide. This cross-college element of research in human geography is manifest in several important ways. Three of these have been the subject of recent developments and these are flagged below. However staff will wish to add others as and when key opportunities arise.

1. The Centre for Society, Space and Environment

This is our flagship cross-college initiative, designed to promote research at the interface between human societies and natural environments. A working proposal for this centre is on the School’s website.

2. Research Network on the Spaces of Public Policy

Policy relevance and user engagement are keywords in all the UK funding councils research priorities. Research in UK HEIs is increasingly required to have some kind of

practical edge. The geography and public policy research cluster was part of a 5* submission to the last RAE and it forms an appealing platform from which to launch an international research network for the exchange of ideas and experiences on working at the policy interface. The aims of the network are to inform policy, foster cross-cultural understanding in the formulation of policy, understand interdependencies of policies at different spatial scales, respond to government requests for evidence-based research and develop theory about the policy process

3. Collaboration on Health and Society

A concern with health and wellbeing is high on the agenda in many areas of social research and in teaching, training and professional development across the board. Human geography has a number of collaborations in train to advance the interdisciplinary effort now being put into this theme. For example:

- * Cross college studentships
- * Counselling and society project
- * Potential Centre for the Study of Human Relations (in collaborations with Schools of Education and Health)
- * Funded projects on housing and health, geographies of health inequality, genetics and insurance

This work builds links across all three Colleges within Edinburgh University and contains the seeds of collaboration with other HEIs, in Scotland including Glasgow, Heriot Watt, St. Andrews and Dundee Universities.

Resources

Staffing is the most urgent issue. There is a legacy of underfunding for geography in relation to its income stream, and the continued rise in students threatens to stifle research.

The following posts would replenish our core skills and support new initiatives:

Rural Geography

Urban Geography

Development Studies (with specialisms in S.E.Asia, or Africa)

Geography and Public Policy (European focus)

Nature-Society relationships

Quantitative Human Geography

In addition, we seek an annual scholarship that we can use to attract visiting academics from overseas.