The Bartlett School of Graduate Studies

UCL

The Past, Present and Futures of the High Street

Report on the Closing Conference of the Adaptable Suburbs project

© The Adaptable Suburbs Project
University College London
EPSRC: EP/I001212/1

Executive Summary

The Adaptable Suburbs Closing Conference, the culmination of four years' research into the factors that influence the success of town centres, heard from a wide selection of international high street researchers. A number of themes emerged with direct relevance to current policy debate on the future of the high street:

> Despite the obituaries the high street is still very much alive. High streets have proved resilient, surviving centuries of social change to remain the functional centre of most towns and cities.

> High streets have changed in order to survive but, while buildings and businesses may be different, the mix of uses has remained very similar. This mix is essential to a successful high street.

> Cities function as movement networks, and because movement creates activity it determines whether high streets succeed or fail. If pedestrians and traffic are diverted away, high streets wither and die.

> High streets are poorly understood, but they represent a combination of complex influences creating enormous economic and social benefit, which is both under-recognised and undervalued. They are an asset that we need to appreciate, and to invest in.

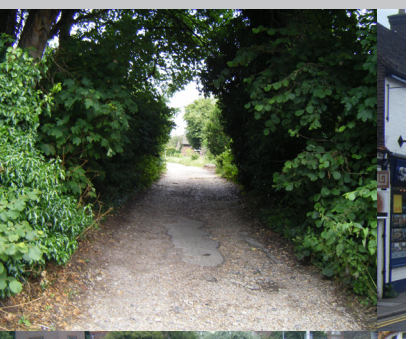
> High streets are threatened by poor planning. Standard planning definitions of high streets miss out large areas of business and other non-domestic activity. This leaves them unprotected, and pressure to convert commercial premises to residential use could permanently undermine their viability.

> Not all high streets are healthy. Many are suffering and will need intervention and investment to support them. Policy should focus on bringing people back to high streets, generating the activity needed to support businesses.

> Planners and policymakers need to take ordinary, small-scale high street uses more seriously. Ignoring small businesses and local activities means ignoring the important social role they play and the people who make a living through them.

> Both the economic and the social value of high streets need to be measured and represented better, and communicated clearly to investors and decision-makers.

> The future of the high street is an international issue, and an international research agenda is needed to help understand and address common problems.



Orpington

Introduction

This report is a summary of the discussions that took place during the **Past, Present and Futures of the High Street Conference** on 28th April 2014, held at University College London.

The contributions made by an audience of over 80 attendees from a wide range of organisations and professions have been summarised by Tom Bolton.
The following account therefore may not represent the views of all participants.

Aims

The conference marked the completion of the four-year Adaptable Suburbs research project, funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Council (EPSRC)[1]. The project studied outer London town centres, analysing changes in land use, built form and street networks from the 19th century to the present day. It aimed to understand how suburban high streets have changed and adapted over time, and the role played by spatial movement and social interaction in their development. The research focussed on the role played in the functioning of local centres and local economies by ordinary, small-scale activities and uses, often hidden beyond official town centre boundaries and often overlooked by policy and planning processes.

The Adaptable Suburbs team was led by Prof. Laura Vaughan of the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, with co-investigators Prof. Muki Haklay and Dr. Claire Ellul (Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering), Dr. Sam Griffiths (Bartlett) and Dr. Victor Buchli (Anthropology). It built on a predecessor UCL project, Towards Sustainable Suburban Town Centres, also EPSRC-funded, in which several members of the core research team analysed the historical and spatial development of 20 London suburban centres.

The closing conference placed the extensive findings from the Adaptable Suburbs project into a wider context. International researchers presented findings from their research analysing high streets around the world, highlighting common themes and questions. They were joined by architectural, planning and urban design practitioners and policy-makers who debated the relevance of the findings to current decisions on the future of high streets.

A clear theme emerged from the conference: a global impetus to understand the high street better, and to value the role it plays. Despite predictions to the contrary, the information age has not rendered the physical co-presence of people redundant. Cities around the world, providing the spaces that allow people to meet and interact both formally and informally, are growing in size and importance as generators of economic and social value.

Although the high street has changed and continues to do so, it still plays a role that has remained recognisable for centuries. Theorists have called for greater attention to be paid to the way suburbs function and evolve, and the conference demonstrated how the suburban high street has provided a rich subject for research, shining new light on places where supposed familiarity has bred disregard. The conference demonstrated that the findings from the Adaptable Suburbs research into outer London high streets form part of a body of international investigation seeking to understand and value the everyday activities driving the functioning centres of towns and cities.

What do we know about the high street?

1. High streets are alive

The death of the high street is a ubiquitous theme of both media discussion and policy debate. Since the 2008 economic crash, which is often said to have accelerated the switch from traditional forms of high street retail towards online shopping, numerous policy initiatives have attempted to save the high street from inevitable demise. However, this narrative represents a simplistic view of how high streets function and change, and paints an inaccurate picture of their health. High streets are still with us, despite the prophecies

Notes:

[1] UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council reference: EP/I001212/1.

of doom. They have shown themselves to be distinctive, historically resilient and capable of reinvention over long periods of time[2].

The history of the high street does not involve revisiting an idealised past. Rather, the past is implicated in the present and the future, and is therefore still with us. Understanding the way that high streets have changed over time can provide important lessons that are relevant now.

2. High streets are under threat

The health of local high streets reflects the health of cities as a whole. While high streets more accessible to the centre of London or to routes out of the city are in relatively good condition, others are suffering. High streets outside London are often in a much worse condition.

In their 'High Street London' study, Matthew Carmona and Gort Scott identified 702 retail streets more than 250 metres long in Greater London[3]. Many of these high streets lie partly or entirely outside planning definitions of town centres, and are not recognised either in their local plan or in the London Plan. The latter identifies Greater London town centres as clusters rather than as linear structures. It therefore fails to recognise much of the economic activity taking place across the city. This narrow definition creates monocultures with non-residential uses increasingly confined to official town centres. The study found that 75 per cent of mixed use in London is located outside town centre boundaries. Mixed use provides built-in resilience to economic change.
Mixed uses located along linear routes are threatened in particular by the recent relaxation in Change of Use regulations, allowing conversion from commercial to residential use. The preservation of employment uses in mixed use development presents a major challenge. Small plots are essential for the development of enterprise, providing flexible, affordable spaces, but are particularly vulnerable to conversion. Once commercial space become housing it is very unlikely to return to its former use. Industrial areas in outer London, studied by Gort Scott, were shown to contain many specialist local industries but very complex political negotiations are involved in trying to retain local employment as part of redevelopment[4].

High streets are also threatened by factors other than economic change. Pollution in particular is a major problem in cities, and can only be addressed through state intervention. However, this represents a major challenge as many high streets are located along core arterial roads, particularly in London.

Matthew Carmona has made an analogy between the demise of the canal system and the future of the high street, suggesting that it is possible for a spatial network to become redundant and disappear within a very short timescale, and that high streets could experience comparable change. Nevertheless, while canals were single-use routes dedicated to a single type of transport, the high street derives its strength from the multiplicity of uses it supports, one of the reasons it has proved incredibly resilient to date. However, current threats to the high street should be taken seriously, particularly where smaller high streets are focusing on fewer uses.

3. High streets are adaptable

The adaptability of high streets and their ability to reinvent themselves is central to their success. High streets have had to change over time in order to continue to play the same role within cities. The Adaptable Suburbs research has shown how many unregarded high streets located in outer London suburbs have shown themselves to be highly robust, maintaining their significance throughout the socio-economic changes that have taken place since the Victorian era.

Streets that were at the centre of their place in the nineteenth century remain as significant in the twenty-first. Although the individual businesses and uses located on high streets have changed enormously, the Adaptable Suburbs project has shown that the proportion of space given over to different types of use has remained, crucially, very similar. A mixture of retail uses, offices and commerce, community

Notes:

[2] Griffiths, S., Vaughan, L., Haklay, M. and Jones, C. E. (2008), 'The sustainable suburban high street: Themes and approaches'. In *Geography* Compass, Vol. 2, pp.1155-1188. Available at: < http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/5294/ >

[3] Gort Scott and UCL Bartlett School of Planning (2010), *High Street London*, (Design for London, Greater London Authority, London).

[4] See e.g. http://www.gortscott.com/project/blackhorse-lane/.

Surbiton

All images are taken from the archive of © The Adaptable Suburbs Project.
For more suburban vistas from the project, visit *burbsblogger* at www.flickr.com.

uses (from schools to religious institutions), 'third place' venues (pubs, cafés etc.) and industry is found in outer London suburban centres from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day[5].

Changes in the way people do business continue. For example, the Adaptable Suburbs team identified that in Surbiton 30 per cent of people in 'third space' venues were using them as informal offices, working on their laptops. Just as in the past home-working or travelling sales may not have featured in the business directories, many activities fall below the policy radar today – whether people working from home part of the week, or small start-up businesses appearing only periodically on the high street, such as at a weekly market. However, despite changed working methods the demand for work and meeting spaces on high streets is consistent and may indeed be on the increase.

4. High streets form part of a network

High streets do not operate as isolated elements within a city, and can only be understood fully as part of a network of streets. Space syntax analysis of the street networks in cities shows a close match between the streets that are most accessible from other parts of the city, and the location of high streets. As the accessible centres of cities, high streets generate urban activity by forming parts of regular routes as well as attracting movement specifically to their location. The movement economy in turn creates a multiplier effect, bringing together people, commercial uses, and development.

Adaptable Suburbs research has demonstrated the extent to which movement on high streets matters at different urban scales. Car-dependent centres develop at a larger scale. However, the highest density street segments with lots of land uses are consistently the most accessible for walking, short trips, as well as being sited on wider-reaching urban routes[6]. This means that the centrality of a high street within a place is crucial to its function. When a high street loses its significance within an urban movement network, it loses its relevance[7].

When it is no longer necessary to use a high street as a route to somewhere else, people only visit when they have a specific reason. The loss of movement can remove the rationale for a high street, and result in decline. Ilaria Geddes' research with Nadia Charalambous shows that the historic high street in Limmasol, Cyprus, has been superseded by a street further from the centre, originally built as a bypass, which gradually became a commercial centre. The former bypass has drawn accessibility away from the old centre at both the largest and the smallest scales, with the result that the old high street has lost its status both for local visitors and within the city as a whole.

Notes:

[5] Vaughan, L. and Griffiths, S. (2013), 'A suburb is not a tree'. In *Urban Design (Urban Design Group Journal)*, pp.17-19. Available at: < http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1366640/ >

[6] Vaughan, L., Jones, C. E., Griffiths, S. and Haklay, M. (2010), 'The spatial signature of suburban town centres'. In *The Journal of Space* Syntax, Vol. 1(1), pp.77-91. Available at: < http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/150485/ >

[7] Vaughan, L., Dhanani, A., Griffiths, S. (2013), 'Beyond the suburban high street cliché - A study of 150 years of London's network adaptation to change'. In *The Journal of Space Syntax*, Vol. 4(2), pp.221-241. Available at: < http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1417189/ >

In Toledo, Spain Borja Ruiz-Apulánez and colleagues have shown how the development of the main street into a place used primarily by tourists has coincided with wider changes to the city's street network. As a result, the high street has lost much of its integration within the city and is no longer the single most accessible street in Toledo at multiple scales.

5. High streets need to be walkable

Pedestrian activity on high streets is a significant element of their continued success. Accessibility on foot provides local interfaces between multiple scales of movement and between different modes of transport. Adaptable Suburbs researchers, looking at London's town centres in High Barnet, South Norwood and Surbiton, have shown that the greater the street connectivity, the higher the levels of walking. Where there is a choice of walking routes, people will prefer to walk alongside non-domestic uses, whether a nursery school, post office or shop. High streets sit at the centre of overlapping routes and activities around a town centre, and it is their pedestrian accessibility that ensures that they are the central component in the movement economy of an entire place[8].

Orpington

Rickmansworth

The design quality of high streets and their connecting network is also significant to their success. Adel Mohammed Remali, Sergio Porta and Huyam Adubib's analysis of three areas of central Tripoli, Libya, demonstrates a strong correspondence between social activity on foot and street quality. Streets that are designed to encompass the desire for a range of activities, and to provide opportunities for sitting, standing, and walking, generate significantly more street activity than those that purposely limit options for activity.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the adoption of hierarchies of movement in street design meant the high street became excluded from the planning process. The multiple roles played by the high street within the movement economy of their places did not fit within a conception of city streets that saw them primarily as conduits for various levels of traffic. However, unlike bypasses, high streets maximise both movement and access. Yodan Rofé and colleagues' research on Tel-Aviv suburbs shows that the majority of users on case study suburban high streets arrive by foot or bus, despite the general wealth of the neighbourhoods and the presence of a major freeway network. High streets can retain their important even when they serve heavy traffic. However, the question for many high streets is how to combine car and pedestrian use and protect pedestrians, without separating the two modes of transport and isolating high streets within their wider movement network.

6. High streets depend on variety

Recent conversations about the future of high streets have focused almost entirely on their role as retail centres. Yet high streets provide much more than just retail. A combination of uses is essential, bringing people together in the same place for many different reasons. The Adaptable Suburbs project has shown that around half of people visiting case study local centres were doing so for multiple reasons, including journeys to work and to collect children, for healthcare, to visiting libraries and parks, or to eat, drink and socialise. Under half of the people

Notes:

[8] Geddes, I. and Vaughan, L. (2014), 'Why do people walk in the suburbs? An analysis of how spatial configuration and land use diversity contribute to walkability', (University College London, London). Available at: < http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1418543/ >

interviewed had visited to go shopping while Gort Scott's research for the Greater London Authority found that 75 per cent of visitors to the London town centres studied were not there to shop.

An example of a place where a lack of variety is undermining the high street is Toledo, Spain. The historic centre, a World Heritage Site, is apparently vibrant and successful. Pedestrian flow is high on Toledo's central street, vacancy rates are low and buildings are in good condition. However, Borja Ruiz-Apulánez's research reveals that this façade hides a damaged urban fabric. While the population in the historic city has dropped by a third in the past 30 years, the proportion of visitors on the high street at weekends has increased by a factor of seven since 1994. The proportion of shops serving local functions has decreased by half and, as a result, the mix of uses that previously supported the high street has declined leaving an increasingly tourist-dependent monoculture. A mix of uses that characterises healthy high streets is a core component of their success.

Bexleyheath

South Norwood

7. High streets are an important economic resource

The conference focused on the role played by 'ordinary' uses, the activities either taken for granted or seen as insignificant. An examination of 'ordinary uses' shows that broad use categories, such as 'industrial', conceal a great deal of variety and value. Gort Scott's research assessed the 15-mile length of high street connecting Uxbridge to Romford across Central London, and found that it is home to 80,000 jobs and 6,500 businesses – more than Canary Wharf. Small plots behind high street frontages contained 60 per cent of total uses.

Suzanne Hall's research into Rye Lane, London shows that while the Westfield Shopping Centre, Stratford hosts 300 businesses and has created 8,500 jobs, Rye Lane has 2,100 businesses and 13,400 jobs. However, despite their economic contribution places such as Rye Lane are almost always represented as being in deficit, requiring redevelopment. Their role as skills incubators and generators of value are not taken into account. Rye Lane is home to a mix of traders, ranging from the long-term to the recently arrived, and the variety of space available within this structure allows people to establish and grow businesses, develop contacts and skills, and find a place in the economy of the city.

High streets are places of rapid change but also great potential. Matthew Carmona shows that 66 per cent of Londoners live within 500 metres of a high street, while half of London's brownfield sites are within a 2½ minute walk of a high street.

As well as their strategic importance, high streets represent sunk investment, and building on their potential provides a direct route to maximising public value.

8. High streets are an important social resource

High streets operate as conceptual as well as functional places. In addition to their commercial uses, they provide accessible civic space which acts as a platform and a place for protest. In the high street it is possible for people outside the power structure to have a voice. It is also possible for them to create and occupy spaces where collective social value can be generated.

Suzanne Hall's research identifies Rye Lane and Walworth Road in London as examples of high streets where diversity converges, with no dominant ethnic identity. Here people do business in 'micro-spaces' shared with relative strangers, and cafés provide public spaces for people to meet. Hall's ethnographic study of a Walworth Road café has demonstrated how it is used as a social space

by different groups of people throughout the day, including those with no space at home and nowhere else to go. The local connections which emerge from such social spaces provide an informal network of support for the more marginal members of the community.[9]

Angela Piraguata has researched Wards Corner in Seven Sisters, London. A disused former department store, it became host to a predominantly Latin American market in the early 2000s. As well as small shops, the market also provides sites for social interaction and for locating jobs, access to advice, networking and integrating into the city. However, its social role was not recognised by the local authority and it was proposed for demolition and redevelopment. Demolition was prevented only after a local campaign during which the market users and local residents were able to organise themselves politically and make use of the community capital created by the market.

Places such as markets and cafés provide space for people to hone their social and economic skills. However, the role of the high street in providing informal work and social space is not officially acknowledged or valued.

Notes:

[9] Hall, S. M. (2012), *City, Street and Citizen: The Measure of the Ordinary*, Routledge: London and New York.

What needs to change?

1. High streets need to be understood better

High streets suffer because they appear to be familiar and easily understood. They are often dismissed either as dying, or as uninteresting. Because it is assumed the factors that make a high street work are already known, there is a tendency to treat them as blank spaces for redevelopment.

Borehamwood

However, the conference clearly demonstrated that high streets are far from straightforward. They form part of a complex ecology of movement, social activities, land use, and even memory. This means that decision-makers need to take the time to understand them. Simply walking around a place and discovering what is really going on, often just out of sight, can make a huge difference to perceptions of value. In particular the importance of high streets as social spaces fails to register with decision-makers. Speaking directly to people makes it possible to understand how streets work as lived environments.

Ann Legeby and Meta Berghauser's research in Gothenburg, Sweden, has shown how a full understanding of the failure of high streets in segregated, outlying neighbourhoods has led to strategies to address their particular problems. Because the city's high streets were planned according to strict Neighbourhood Unit principles, with small, unviable centres surrounded by only residential development and situated away from the main streets, they failed to generate the activity required to function. This meant that the poorest people in Gothenburg also have the poorest access to resources and services. Measurement of social sustainability and of movement networks has been used to make the case for investment to repair high streets by adding buildings, activating uses and creating space for social interaction. Intervention in high streets can create change for better and for worse, but it is more likely to build on existing value if it is based on complete information.

2. High streets need to be valued

The widespread failure to understand the complex, sometimes problematic roles played by high streets leads to their being undervalued. High streets act as places of political and cultural exchange, generators of real estate value, creators of movement and reservoirs of physical fabric, but planners, policymakers and investors

Whetstone

value them less than other elements of the city that are more easily understood.

Matthew Carmona pointed out that in London, while there has been policy recognition of high streets through funding from the Mayor's Regeneration Fund, the London Growth Fund and the Outer London Fund, the amounts involved do not compare to the investment in, for example, any of the Westfield shopping centres, despite the fact that the latter generate less turnover than many of London's more 'prosaic' high streets.

High streets are seen as a problem by some councils, who are anxious to prevent sub-division of property and to tidy up functions and spaces seen as irregular, whether or not they are sites for socio-economic innovation. In London, high property values lead to economic and political pressure from wealthier residents for high streets to change. However, if local authorities were to recognise high streets as assets they could provide vital support at limited cost, for example by supporting trade associations that enable businesses to help each other. According to Suzanne Hall, if the trading model represented by the Walworth Road was endorsed rather than ignored or opposed, prospects for retail in London could be transformed.

3. High streets need to be measured differently

If the high street is poorly understood and undervalued, are the techniques and tools currently used to measure value partly to blame? If the cumulative value of small activities could be measured, it might be recognised better by policy-makers.

Yvonne Rydin's research into non-prime property investment has assessed the wide distribution of ordinary uses on Hornsey High Street, London at a total capital value of around £20 million. However, she suggests that investors fail to value the sustainability of high streets such as these. Non-prime property investors in particular see sustainability as relevant to property value only in terms of energy consumption. However, environmental performance measures act as labels for marketing individual buildings and cannot be applied to the wider sustainability of the area.

Alternative measures of town centre sustainability could help the commercial property market operate more effectively by providing measures to inform investment choices. Such measures would require a full economic appraisal addressing factors that influence the success of a town centre, such as pedestrian accessibility and local sociability. It would also address the economic opportunities for small-scale businesses and employees, and the potential for greater retention of income in areas with less competition from large chains. An assessment of sustainability in these terms would provide a better reflection of likely returns on investment in high streets such as Hornsey.

4. High streets need new planning approaches

The conference returned several times to the role of the planner in influencing the future of the high street. The shortcoming of planning designations, which fail to recognise high street activity beyond town centre nodes, was blamed partly on intractable planning culture. The limited way professional and agencies talk to each other, and create common knowledge within local and national government has resulted in restricted thinking. At the same time, the wider success of planners and engineers in creating and improving cities since the 19th century has led to a tendency to hand over responsibility for the functioning of cities to the professions.

However, planners' own visions of how cities are meant to work lead too often to

failure. Cities are naturally chaotic places, and if the element of chaos disappears the city dies[10]. People who have generated successful forms of high street living feel they are not taken into account by the planners. High streets themselves are not the problem. Instead planners and decision-makers need to adopt planning approaches that are as adaptable as the places where they intervene. Policy intervention needs to become better at retaining the 'messiness' that contributes to the strength of high streets.

There are significant tensions in many places between strong strategic forces and what people want for their local high streets. In London the need for more housing means difficult decisions have to be made on integrating housing while maintaining local vibrancy. The path dependency inherent in street networks, plot size and land ownership are strong reasons for planning authorities to work with the grain of existing high streets. Research can help to avoid or minimise damage from interventions. It can also create mutual intelligence and a common language, allowing better communication.

Conclusions

Many high streets, in the UK and internationally, are forgotten. They suffer from pollution, traffic, retail stress, loss of public services, a focus on easy regeneration, and on development that reduces their vitality. However, they also deliver unrecognised and often unmeasured economic benefits in towns and cities, and play an important social role. These contributions require much greater recognition and consideration from planners and policy-makers. Knowledge about the way high streets function needs to be communicated, and a collective agenda developed to allow the promotion of high streets as essential socio-economic resources.

The movement economy is central to the role of the high street, and needs better understanding. Planners should be informed on how connections in a city's street network contribute to the functioning of the high street. If local authorities see the high street as separate from the rest of the city, they are likely to undermine its spatial and functional roles through intervention elsewhere. They must also recognise that the high street's value lies in its mix of uses – the high street is not just for retail, and never was.

Prioritising investment in high streets would deliver significant benefits, but the opportunities and issues specific to them are being missed by planning policy. Their mix of uses needs to be designated accurately, recognising that in London and other cities it takes place in linear corridors and in combined spaces within a wider centre. A holistic view of the high street as commercial, social, cultural and political space is required.

In high streets that are already in decline, there is room for intervention. Often, however, the problem is much wider and high streets are simply a symptom. Reduced footfall due to loss of industry and jobs has a direct effect on high street viability. However, if the economic future of a place as a whole can be secured, the historic high street is very likely to be the best place for retail, commercial and social activities. Its future potential is also being increasingly recognised, with the understanding that having a lively, walkable town centre provides a vital role for an ageing population[11]. Solutions should focus on generating the footfall that drives movement economies.

Notes:

[10] Barker, P. (1999), 'Non-plan revisited: Or the real way cities grow: The tenth Reyner Banham memorial lecture'. In *Journal of Design* History, Vol. 12, pp.95-110.

[11] RIBA Building Futures (2013), *Silver Linings: The Active Third Age and the City*, (Royal Institute of British Architects, London), pp.1-38. Available at: < www.architecture.com/RIBA/Campaigns and issues/Building Futures >

Not all issues affecting high streets can be solved through limited intervention and a bottom-up approach. For example, continued high levels of pollution are a specific and serious problem that can only be solved through state intervention. The complexity of the high street means that urban form issues, policy and legislative issues, and public service issues all have an equal influence. Further research could help to categorise problems effectively and find best approaches to solving them.

It is important that planners speak to the people who use high streets in a coherent, systematic way in order to understand what they do and need. Delegating field work, or using headline data is no substitute for a detailed on-the-ground observation of how high streets are used and what makes them succeed. Planning engagement should be managed in a more equitable manner, to recognise social value and to take account of unexpected communities and activities that are not amenable to rationalised decisions on development.

Intervening in high streets that have evolved over time is difficult and risky. Planning and intervention has a role to play in the development of high streets, but overly prescriptive planning can be damaging. Rather than prescribing mixed use for development, planners should consider why high streets are effective at mixing uses. Planners should avoid creating high streets to fit a preconceived idea of what a high street should be, but instead should aim to allow spaces and uses to evolve and develop with minimal restrictions.

If there is a single ingredient for a successful high street it is that there must be a mix of uses. There is a case for taking active steps to ensure high streets continue to host mixed uses and to protect the value in streets through limited intervention, as is the case for example in France. If the market is allowed too much freedom to shape the high street, it is likely to build on the easiest sites, leading to reduced variety. Policies such as easier conversion from commercial to residential uses are spatially blind. If they prove unsuited to local market conditions, as is especially likely in London, they will lead to irreversible changes in the composition of high street uses.

To represent high streets accurately, their sustainability needs to be measured to reflect the full range of values they create. However, tools are only valuable if there is an appetite for their use. New approaches are needed to influence policy by representing the social make-up of places. Influencing investment should also be a central aim, showing that sustainability can create attractive investment conditions in high streets.

The issues identified in Britain are equally relevant in cities around the world, and the conference heard from Gothenburg, Sweden; Limmasol, Cyprus; Tel-Aviv, Israel; Toledo, Spain; and Tripoli, Libya, as well as London. An international research agenda for high streets can help to place local issues in context, and inform a common high street agenda based on shared solutions.

Conference papers

Matthew Carmona, *'London High Streets agenda'*.

Nadia Charalambous and Ilaria Geddes, *'Pre and post-war high streets: Shifting centrality and spatial memory in Limmasol'.*

Sam Griffiths, David Jeevendrampillai, Ashley Dhanani, Dominik Hoehn, Ilkka Torma, Muki Haklay, Claire Ellul and **Laura Vaughan**, *'London's high streets: Learning about the future from the past'.*

Suzanne Hall, *'The social life of adaptable space'.*

Ann Legeby, Meta Berghauser Pont and **Lars Marcus**, *'The street: A key component for a less segregated city'.*

Yodan Rofè, Galit Yerushalmi, Moshe Margalit and **Ahuva Windsor**, *'The pedestrian realm on major urban streets'.*

Adel Mohammad Remali, Sergio Porta and **Huyam Abudib**, *'Correlating street quality, street life and centrality in Tripoli, Libya'.*

Angela Piraguata, *'Seven Sisters' Market: Cultural adaptations of space'.*

Borja Ruiz-Apilánez, Mayte Arnaiz, José M. de Ureña and **Inmaculada Mohíno**, *'The vibrant high street of World Heritage Cities: The case of Toledo (Spain)'.*

Yvonne Rydin, *'Constructing sustainable commercial neighbourhoods'.*

Fiona Scott, *'High street London'.*

The *Adaptable Suburbs* Team:

Professor Laura Vaughan (Principal Investigator)

Professor Muki Haklay (Co-Investigator)

Dr Sam Griffiths (Co-Investigator)

Dr Victor Buchli (Co-Investigator)

Dr Claire Ellul (Co-Investigator)

Patrick Rickles (Research Assistant)

Ashley Dhanani (PhD Student)

David Jeevendrampillai (PhD Student)

Graphic design: Garyfalia Palaiologou

© The Adaptable Suburbs Project, 2014
University College London
EPSRC: EP/I001212/1

Project Links
URL: www.ucl.ac.uk/adaptablesuburbs
Project Blog: Towards Successful Suburban Town Centres
Flickr: burbsblogger
Twitter: @AdaptableSuburb

Contact
Professor Laura Vaughan
The Bartlett School of Graduate Studies, UCL

Email: adaptablesuburbs@ucl.ac.uk

The Bartlett
School of Graduate Studies

UCL