

Sustainable urban and regional dynamics (SURD)
Dr R Sliuzas (chair currently vacant)

The SURD theme has been developed out of initiatives of the PGM department in the course of 2005/2006 and became active in 2007. It is closely related to the MUG theme which was formulated simultaneously and it is also expected to have strong linkages with the GISA theme that was established towards the end 2007. A substantial effort has been made in 2007 to initiate externally funded research projects and PhD's in 2007 and several new studies are now in the starting blocks or have recently started to be implemented. Some ongoing PhD studies that started prior to 2007 are now integrated within SURD.

Research activities were undertaken in the following broad topics:

1. Sustainable urban transport and mobility
2. Urban poverty dynamics and alleviation
3. Sustainable urban development in China
4. Kyoto: Think global act local - Community carbon forestry
5. Payments for environmental services: Analysis and developing policy instruments towards effective management of environmental services in Mexico
6. Participatory GIS and participatory spatial planning

Of these topics only nos. 3 and 4 already had substantial activities underway prior to 2007.

Scientific level

The SURD team and its partners have invested heavily in 2007 in project formulation and acquisition of funding and PhD candidates. The theme has not yet generated a large amount of scientific output in the form of ISI papers. Several ISI papers were produced from work done under the Kyoto project, in relation to PGIS and urban poverty dynamics (accepted and published in 2008) based upon a project undertaken in 2005/2006 for UN-HABITAT. In addition one staff member and 1 PhD student successfully defended their PhD thesis in the course of the year. Interest has been shown by the CERES research school in the expertise and capacities of the work being done under the SURD and MUG themes.

Many of the new research activities have received external financing, with substantially funding obtained from NWO-WOTRO, Volvo Foundation, Interface for Cycling Expertise (I-CE) – Bicycle Partnership Program (BPP), the Dutch Government's Indonesia Facility, and DGIS (Kyoto). These funds pay for PhD's, post-docs, and staff inputs into the various projects. In addition external funds for 2 PhD's from China were obtained from CSC, China and 1 PhD is being funded through CONACYT (Mexico).

Relevance

The work of the SURD theme is attracting considerable interest from groups both outside of and within ITC. Research outputs and spin-off products in the form of short courses (e.g. PGIS) have been offered as a result of the SURD research. SURD research is strongly linked to the ITC courses of UPM and links to GFM, LA, NRM and others are also conceivable. Already in 2007 several ITC MSc students from UPM and NRM courses have been doing very useful and promising work linked to SURD projects. Team members have been active in various international fora related to urban development, the Kyoto protocol process and in a various national and international academic networks.

Partners

Dutch: University of Amsterdam AMIDSt, University of Twente, Utrecht University, Keypoint Consultancy Enschede

Overseas: India - IIT Delhi; CEPT, Ahmedabad, South Africa - University of Cape Town; Brazil - Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul; Indonesia - University of Gadjah Mada; China – Wuhan University and CAS Institute of Geographical Sciences, Tanzania - Sokoine University; Senegal - ENDA; Nepal – ICIMOD, Switzerland – Swiss Tropical Institute ; UN-HABITAT.

Coherence

Sustainability and/or poverty alleviation are central issues within SURD and they are addressed in most research projects in some manner. This focus will be maintained. Some linkages have been formed with other themes, especially with MUG in relation to the urban poverty research in India, DQUAL in relation to transport and mobility research, and DMAN in relation to PGIS and more general concerns of urban growth and spatial planning. There are certainly opportunities to expand these and to develop new linkages in the coming years as and when opportunities arise.

Evaluation

The SURD theme is one which is of a high societal relevance and the team which is now in place has shown through its success in acquiring new researchers and a considerable amount of external funding that it has considerable potential for further growth. The appointment of a professor to the vacant chair of urban and regional dynamics can hopefully be made in 2008 and this will certainly strengthen the group's position and potential. The major weakness that can be highlighted is the relatively low production of scientific output but there are already clear indications that this will substantially improve in 2008. Several ISI papers have already been published in 2008 and the research team has accepted the challenge to improve in this area. The newly appointed PhD's are all basing their promotion on published work and this will most certainly contribute to output performance.

Some new initiatives to attract additional research funding have been identified. The research of Dr. Amer was partially funded by the Swiss Tropical Institute (STI) and he has already started the process of developing new research proposals related to health planning and management issues with them that would involve SURD as well as several other ITC themes. STI is a world renowned institute in the health sector and its interest in our capability is a further sign of the scientific quality of our work. Other areas that will receive attention in 2008 are the development of new research projects related to urban poverty and slum mapping and the further expansion of the group that is involved in Chinese urbanization and spatial planning. Avenues for attracting funding for both staff time and PhD's will be explored in the coming year.