

One Planet Living: A Tale of Three UK Urban Sustainability Initiatives

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The One Planet Living framework is a planning, design and assessment tool for urban sustainability initiatives. It was developed by BioRegional, a UK-based and internationally active social enterprise, jointly with WWF; at its centre are ten principles informed by ecological footprint criteria and related socio-economic sustainability dimensions. To date, over twenty One Planet Living initiatives have been launched internationally; these variously relate to business organisations, new urban developments, and cities and city-regions. One Planet Living is one of a growing number of so-called 'eco-city frameworks' aimed at providing practical guidance and assessment tools for urban sustainability innovations within particular local and sectoral contexts.

This paper reports the preliminary findings of a comparative case study of three UK urban sustainability initiatives using the One Planet Living framework: the Brighton & Hove One Planet Region framework, the North-West Bicester One Planet Communities initiative, and the Sutton One Planet Living Plan. The overall aim of the case study was to assess the One Planet Living framework's capacity to contribute to facilitating and co-ordinating urban sustainability innovations within these three urban locations. Based on a series of in-depth interviews with policy-makers, planners, entrepreneurs, interest groups and community organisations, as well as on-site visits, the research analysed the extent to which the framework contributed to new, or additional, networking capacity among local stakeholders, and enabled the emergence of innovative urban sustainability practices. The research also included a close analysis of the framework's governance functions within the innovation process, relating to issues such as design and planning, community engagement and assessment. By deploying a comparative approach – the same framework analysed in three different UK contexts – the case study helps to discern context-specific factors and dynamics in play and, conversely, identify common features of the innovation processes at work across the three sites. This provides useful insight into the potential of urban sustainability frameworks, such as One Planet Living, to act as generic templates, or models, for implementing innovative solutions. It also provides insight into local capacity requirements to adopt and implement such frameworks to effect urban sustainability innovation.

The case study reported here was undertaken as part of a multi-centre research initiative co-ordinated by the University of Westminster (London) and involving seven international academic partners. Funded by the Leverhulme Trust (UK), the research seeks to map and compare systematically the use of replicable 'eco-city frameworks' – a total of 46 frameworks are included in the study – and to analyse their contribution to urban sustainability innovation.