

# PATSY HEALEY

Patsy Healey

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 2009

by

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*Fellow of the Academy*

*Summary.* Wherever she went and whoever she encountered, Patsy Healey was a breath of fresh air. She exuded charm, intelligence, and commitment to her peers, and was supportive of everyone engaged in what she called the ‘Planning Project’. The scope of her munificence extended to all those who professed support for improving our cities and regions, as well as those who knew little about the profession of town planning but could appreciate its concerns. In a life dominated by many different activities focused on establishing the intellectual foundations for such a turbulent landscape of ideas, the many contributions to planning that Patsy Healey made will ring down the years. Without doubt, she is one of very few who have grappled head on with the complexity of cities and regions and their planning, pioneering new ways of thinking about how we can improve the places that define our communities. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition of planning, she stands alongside the greats – Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, Patrick Abercrombie, and Peter Hall amongst others – who sought to establish a robust and relevant basis for the design of better environments and their communities. Patsy, however, ploughed a somewhat different furrow from her predecessors, standing astride the paradigm change which moved planning from its physical orientation to that of the social sciences and their practice. She was instrumental in accelerating this change.

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Patsy Academy

## Early years

Patsy Healey was born on New Year's Day in 1940. Like so many who arrived at the beginning of the Second World War, her formative years in the 1950s were marked by a country recovering from profound shock but also engaged in an experiment in social transformation based on the modernism and socialism that had emerged and begun to mature in the first half of the 20th century. The contradictions of those times were felt in her intellectual upbringing which she articulated in her own biographical essay. She said:

I came from the English professional middle classes and a family with a nonconformist and a scientific aesthetic background but went to a school for the daughters of missionaries (Healey 2017: 108).

This irony in her upbringing was never lost on her and she combined this with an acerbic wit. Her father, Terence Ingold, was a well-known academic, honoured for his intellectual contributions to science many times over. He was Professor of Botany at Birkbeck College, London for 28 years from the early 1940s and one of the world's experts in mycology, but he also played a major role in the administration of the University of London system. The fact that Patsy's education was almost entirely in the London system, at UCL for her undergraduate education, Regent Street Polytechnic for her Diploma in Town Planning, and then at the LSE for her PhD, must have been due in no small part to family loyalties, the dominant influence of her father, and of course growing up within commuting distance of London. Until she went to be Professor of Town and Country Planning at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne much later in the 1980s in the last half of her life, her geographical space revolved around the greater Southeast. For someone like me growing up in the north of England, I often wonder how living in or near a world city all your life must dominate your nationhood, influences what you do, and how you do it. This London-centric focus must have been especially pertinent in Patsy's chosen area of town planning where London dominates. To an extent, it was a straitjacket to jump out of and as I will emphasise in this memoir, she certainly jumped.

When Patsy went to study Geography at UCL in 1958, she found a course that was already struggling with its identity. Geography then was strongly historical and regional from one perspective but physical in another. In many respects, it was a practical subject with little obvious theory, but that world began to change literally through the years when Patsy took her degree. In particular, the subject area began to see itself as divided into human and physical geography, while the emergence of quantitative methods influenced both. Regional geography began to embrace economics, the city emerged as a focus of interest, and there was a sense that the subject area could equally well be treated as a social as well as a physical science. Into this maelstrom came computers. But it

would be a while yet before political economy and cultural concerns and even computers began to reveal the outlines of the subject area that exists today. During these university years, Patsy met her future husband through their left-wing political interests, and after graduation in 1961 they married, he embarked on his PhD in South Wales, and she trained as a schoolteacher.

Back in London where her husband gained a lecturing position, she took a job as a planning assistant in the London Borough of Lewisham in 1965. The transformation of British society noted earlier was leading to new administrative structures of which the 1947 Town and County Planning Act and the reform of local government led to an increased demand for planners in practice and this is the way Patsy entered the planning profession. On graduation in 1961, on her own admission, she said: 'I contemplated doing a graduate planning course in London ...' (Healey 2017: 109), but only after she had sampled the delights of school teaching – not for her – and only after she entered local government, did this happen. To train as a planner, she entered the part-time Diploma course in planning at the then Regent Street Polytechnic, soon to be called the Polytechnic of Central London and now the University of Westminster. From Lewisham in 1968, she went to the Town Development Division of the Greater London Council (GLC), and by the end of the decade Patsy was a fully-fledged professional card-carrying town planner.

It is hard to speculate on what she thought about the wider context of planning education at this time, although there was an implicit sense that practice not academia was where all the action lay. The course at the polytechnic was a mixture of *ad hoc* lectures, often imported from practice and delivered by practitioners who had little sense of what a curriculum should be. The number of full-time lecturers in planning was small, and although planning like geography was beginning to change, there were few textbooks of any kind that addressed the rapidly burgeoning issues that grew almost daily with respect to the functional operation and the quality of life in our cities. Cities did not completely dominate the debate, for the countryside too was inextricably tied up with urban development, and as Patsy eventually championed, town and country could not be divorced from community which she argued needed to be considered as a relatively seamless whole.

In fact, Patsy already had in mind the idea that she would pursue a PhD. She was intrigued, indeed baffled by the fact that, although planning in practice purported to produce better cities, there was no clear sense in which one could tie what planning attempted to achieve in practice to what actually happened or was happening. The tension that she felt over the avowed intent of planners to create better cities and their inability to do so dominated her thinking right from the start, and it propelled her directly to understand the failures of planning and the need for something different that would grapple with the contradictions inherent in the process. In this, she would walk the road less travelled,

working out that it was the process that we needed to understand rather than its product.

In the late 1960s, there was already a very strong sense that the great experiment in providing decent housing for the population at large, through the slum clearance programme and through the growth of private sector housing, was in trouble. There were never enough resources in terms of hard cash, public housing did not let those for whom it was designed have any control over their own environment, the quality of building was poor, often based on cheap materials, and many of the other features that planning ascribed to provide to make all this function properly – appropriate transport, open space, good schools and health care – were often sadly lacking. Patsy, like many, felt we could do so much better, and at the end of the 1960s she decided to seek the counsel of an enlightened group of academics at the LSE, amongst them Peter Hall and Derek Diamond who would help her embark on a PhD. As she said in her autobiographical paper in 2017, it had taken 8 years from her graduation to finally make the jump into academia. As with many graduates in planning, if they do a PhD at all, this is usually on a part-time basis which is much more normal than embarking on a doctorate as soon as one finishes an undergraduate degree. I never asked her why she chose the LSE but, although Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle were possible planning schools, the London focus offered a much wider set of opportunities for research, particularly as the number of planning academics in these other places who even had a PhD was tiny. In 1970, it was probably no more than half a dozen.

### A doctorate, lecturing, and the Planning Project

Patsy decided immediately to focus on development and change in cities as reflected in the various planning systems and processes that provided the institutions that enabled plans to be implemented. In what she came to define as the ‘Planning Project’, her view of planning was largely based on how institutions which ranged from agencies, local authorities, and many *ad hoc* regulatory bodies provided the glue that enabled problems to be defined, scenarios to be generated, plans to be chosen, and thence implemented (Healey 2010). Patsy invoked the idea of structure and agency which manifest themselves in both formal and informal ways. Questions of power were to the fore, and all this was entirely consistent with her prior experience of planning in practice. But it also broke somewhat with the dominant model of planning which was still largely based on the physical manipulation of the environment.

There was another twist in the focus that her PhD took, and this related to context. For a year she had been in Central America where her husband was studying entomology in the jungles of Panama, and she grasped the opportunity to examine national economic

and urban development in different cities in Venezuela and Colombia. These case studies provide strong parallels particularly with respect to land ownership and urban development in comparison with the strong developer focus that was beginning to define the planning system in Britain, increasingly dominant to this day. Her focus of course on urbanisation in her thesis reflects the fact that much of her subsequent work is in fact applicable to planning systems both globally and locally.

She also learned to work with little supervision during those years, notwithstanding that her mentors were key to her learning how to do research, but she also combined her day job at the GLC with a vibrant interest in planning education more generally. I think I first met her at the inaugural conference on planning education that set up the Education for Planning Association (EPA) held in Birmingham University in January 1970, but I cannot be sure. From 1969 to 1970 as she embarked on her PhD, she became a part-time lecturer at Kingston Polytechnic and then a full-time senior lecturer in 1972. Because there were very few lecturers in methods in planning, she must have known I worked in this area, and she enticed me to give the requisite lectures to her students. In fact, Patsy moved from Kingston to the Oxford Polytechnic planning school in 1974, taking the position in planning theory that Andreas Faludi had vacated, and from then on she became central not only to planning systems and development processes but to planning theory. In fact, it turned out that it was development processes that dominated the rest of her career.

When I first knew Patsy, I was convinced that her focus was primarily on planning theory. At Kingston she had linked up with Joe Bailey (1975) who was writing an influential text on *Social Theory for Planning*, and very early on she combined these ideas with the rational comprehensive model that was dominating planning theory at the time. This was largely based on theories of decision-making as popularised by the systems approach to planning advocated by Chadwick (1971) and McLoughlin (1969). It was Faludi (1973) however at Oxford Poly who really pushed this positivist perspective in terms developed largely in the US by policy analysts and social scientists within the context of city and regional planning. In fact, my interpretation of Patsy's focus which I assumed was planning theory, was as much influenced by the fact that she picked up the mantle of planning theory and took the lead in organising the significant research group in theory at Oxford.

Her way of impressing this as a research theme was dominated by a series of conferences that established the department there as a leader in this area (Healey, McDougall, & Thomas 1982). This was notwithstanding Patsy's slight reticence in picking up this mantle although she recognised the need for this sort of continuity in what was still then a fairly vulnerable disciplinary area. In fact, if you dig down a little to Patsy's own contributions, she was primarily publishing somewhat different material on development processes. For example, the comparative work she initiated in Latin

American cities taken from her thesis (Healey 1974; 1975) formed her first two journal articles, and she began a major research programme on the development of the UK planning system through her interest in how institutions, land ownership and development conditioned the way plans were developed, successfully or otherwise. These would ultimately come to define the pillars that supported her theories of the planning system and the way planners should approach it in theory and practice.

During her years at Oxford Polytechnic, she rebuilt much of the planning degree programme at graduate and undergraduate level, linking the department to urban design and to real estate development, while she also acted first as Associate Head and then from 1983–1986 as Dean. Despite these important institutional contributions, her work on processes within planning authorities with Jackie Underwood (Healey & Underwood 1979) showed the direction her research was going, and she cemented this with her first major book on one of the core themes in British planning *Local Plans* (Healey 1983). By that time, such plans had become the most important planning instruments in the array of planning regulations that could be used to implement relevant plans designed to increase the sustainability and quality of life in cities. Her critiques of the system that had developed in British planning were incisive and were beginning to be picked up in government, particularly her conclusions that the development process was often improved by the existence of plans rather than inhibited by it. These limitations posed by plans and planning still provide the dominant impression of the problems that many political and public interests seem to assume of planning in practice. But there is more than a sense of myth about the idea that the development plan system inhibits good planning, for as Patsy began to illustrate, the planning system was not just complicated but complex. It both constrains and motivates development. It was and is characterised by what Horst Rittel and Mel Webber articulated as ‘wicked problems’, problems that once you begin to address them, instead of getting better, get progressively worse (Rittel & Webber 1973).

Patsy’s work on patterns of urban change in the UK and the impact of the planning system dominated her research once she established her presence at Oxford Poly. Her book *Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change* (Healey, McNamara, Elson & Doak 1988) provided a series of typical case studies. This also intersected with her work on local plans, and although much of this work was non-quantitative, it revealed a strong systematic bias. Her research work at Oxford Poly began to take a more directed stance during her years there and the role of community and communications became more significant. This ultimately emerged during the early 1990s as ‘communicative planning’, which drew on theories from Habermas (1981) popularised in North American planning by Forester (1989) and Innes (1995). To an extent, this movement supported and sustained the idea for her book *Collaborative Planning* which she was beginning to fashion as a framework for planning theory and planning systems.



As Patsy's reputation grew, she was besieged by requests for many advisory duties in education, research and practice, covering the research councils, examining of all kinds, and of course guest lecturing. The intensity of work that she built up at Oxford was consistent with the nickname of 'Hurricane Healey' that her research colleagues bestowed on her. She still led the move to build up planning education to a stronger base and one important development she initiated was the foundation of the Association of European Schools Of Planning (AESOP) in 1987. This pulled together what had become a large proliferation of planning schools and some means to emulate the success of the American Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) was urgently required. The EPA, the British equivalent association, merged with AESOP which is now the key focus for not only planning education in Europe but also for research. Patsy was central to its foundation and continued success.

### Moving north, moving ideas

I never quite knew why Patsy applied for the Chair at Newcastle University and moved there in 1988. Certainly, this chair was perhaps more 'prestigious' than the one she held at Oxford Poly, and perhaps she had the foresight to see she might really break the mould there and get the school back up to the top. In fact, in this she was eminently successful, but this is always a risk, and she had a long legacy of her own achievements at Oxford Poly to live up to. She had built up the Oxford school in teaching and certainly in research to the point where arguably it was the best in the country. I am not sure anyone finds it easy to unpack the reasons for such moves and we can no longer ask her, but in her own words she said:

The Newcastle programme had been little touched by emerging ideas about the nature of the planning project and the intellectual tools for developing it. But the challenge of transforming an academic department attracted me, with my interest in transformative processes. (Healey 2017: 115–16)

In fact, Newcastle did have a much wider range of talent than many other schools in the UK. It probably had the best landscape design and rural studies programme, and in the early 1970s it had established the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) which was funded by a prestigious programme grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (then known as the SSRC). CURDS built on the positivist tradition involving regional and urban methods and analysis, and it was integrated with the planning programme through researchers who moved back and forth between planning and geography. There was a strong interest in the technology of cities, local economic development and in regional innovation when Patsy arrived.



Complementing this, there was the engineering school that trained successive generations of experts in remote sensing and digital survey, all of which complemented the focus on cities, regions, the countryside, and buildings and their architecture.

It is impossible to reverse engineer the reasons why we make choices in life after we are no longer here and all we can do is search and interpret the past actions of those who have long gone. To an extent from Patsy's writings, she was ardent in her pursuit of relevant theories and philosophies from across the social sciences which could be used to underpin planning practice. At Oxford Poly, she began to articulate a variety of critical theories associated with such luminaries as Doreen Massey and David Harvey, and to fashion them as elements of her 'Planning Project' which by the time she left for Newcastle in 1988, she had made her own. The essence of her contributions involved using various theories associated with structural thinking such as those associated with the sociologist Anthony Giddens. This led her, by her own admission, to return to

... philosophy, sociology and geography to strengthen my understanding of social dynamics in the public sphere. It was in this period that I really came to grasp what was involved in taking a relational interpretative and institutional perspective on social phenomena such as planning practices. (Healey 2017: 115)

As she was fond of pointing out, her move to Newcastle, far from taking a rest from the rigours and often futility of bureaucracy, was almost like doing a second PhD while building and redeveloping a large university department at the same time. There are so many dimensions to her Newcastle experience that they are almost impossible to catalogue. The development process was central to her work on building up a theoretical picture of planning practice, but the role of feminism, the complexity of a world based on multiple relationships as formulated in many of the critical theories which embrace political economy, the role of community, and the emergence of new kinds of social action, were key to her mission. All these defined the elements of an approach that she was gradually beginning to put together in what is probably her major work *Collaborative Planning*, which appeared first in 1997 with a second edition in 2006.

*Collaborative Planning* had its roots of course in her work on development processes begun way back during her PhD on urban change and urbanisation in South America. But this was also considerably strengthened by her empirical work and case studies largely related to urban and rural development in southern Britain. This book that pulled many of her ideas together is her most widely read text, with 9000 citations. What is particularly appealing about the book is the effort to synthesise so many different threads that dominate planning, and this is achieved through the idea that planning is 'collaborative' although it may not at times appear to be so. This must have pre-occupied Patsy almost as soon as she got to Newcastle in 1988, although I think she expended enormous effort to get immersed into the department of which she was head for four years from

1988 to 1992. The book must have been almost finished when she arrived at Newcastle, but her new colleagues there and elsewhere still had an impact on her ideas. Jean Hillier for example, who worked over many years with Patsy, relates that the book was still very much in draft form in the mid-1990s. Yet despite being put together in Newcastle, the book does not distinguish a regional dimension between north and south in Britain. In fact, it focuses on the complexities of local government relations and interactions that define the planning system at local and strategic scales across the UK, as well as taking an avowedly non-partisan position with respect to the role of physical planning.

Most scholars and practitioners involved in the research or practice of planning tend to consider the activity as systematic, but it is unusual to find researchers and planners who ascribe to more than one school of thought. Pluralism, meaning the adoption of more than one idea or ideology, is basic to highly diverse human activities but there is considerable tension between such competing perspectives. Patsy Healey's mission across all these domains was to discover how different pluralities might be put together, and her *Collaborative Planning* book was her main attempt at doing so. As such her views were defined by her peers as pragmatic rather than theoretical. As her work continued and matured at Newcastle, she assembled a series of pragmatic perspectives that provided a reasonably integrated theoretical infrastructure on which to understand as well as operate and evaluate the development planning system. There are, however, significant viewpoints on the planning system that she does not include but skirts around their edge. For example, planning for most of its life as a professional and governmental activity has been about how to manipulate – indeed optimise – the physical environment by moving its parts around to capture the best quality of life possible. This physical determinism has gradually sunk into the background of institutionalised planning. But its instruments still largely reflect such physicalism with all the debatable questions that suggest that this kind of planning can never grapple with the complexities of how we actually locate in space and utilise our technologies to provide financially sustainable outcomes.

A second theme that relates to collaborative planning, particularly in the last decade, involves the impact of new technologies. Collaboration has taken on a very different complexion due to the widespread existence of new communications technologies that make participation online very different from traditional media. New forms of communications have emerged, crowd-sourcing and digital public participation are now significant, and new kinds of virtual institutions at different scales are rapidly emerging such as platform economies. In fact, developments that build on economic geography, on transportation systems, on network technologies, social media, and on new forms of energy powering the city, are fast emerging. These represent a focus that is largely on cities and regions as spatial and physical systems, not particularly as social systems, and certainly not as bureaucracies or institutions. The jury is still out on whether planning is

largely physical or social or both or neither, although there is little doubt that when Patsy first began work on her 'Planning Project', she shifted the ground considerably towards the social sciences.

The method of attack on newer conceptions which focus more on the city system than the planning system is largely analytic, and, in this sense, it is systematic. It builds on simulations, forecasting and design rather than on behavioural and administrative systems. Insofar as it relates to collaborative planning, some models of the city system attempt to simulate the way agents and aggregates behave in terms of spatial, locational and physical outcomes associated with naturally growing and planned cities. But generally, these positivist dimensions are not discussed in any of her books and her view of the Planning Project was somewhat different from these other schools of thought. The fact that, in planning, no single school of thought can ever become predominant was largely taken as a rite of passage by the late 20th century, and this was certainly borne out by the alternative conceptions of the planning system that emerged largely from North America. These were part and parcel of the industrial-military complex where many of these decision tools were being developed from the mid-20th century, but this style of rational decision-making also attempted, as Patsy did in *Collaborative Planning*, to generate a 'comprehensive picture' of what the planning system was designed to achieve, notwithstanding that there were many variants of what this comprehension was all about.

### People and research

Patsy had a very wide network of collaborators and contacts that she built up from research collaborations as well as from her involvement with practitioners in planning. She began building these from her first forays into planning practice in Lewisham and the GLC from the mid-1960s. These came to be extended through her Diploma studies at Regent Street Polytechnic where she met many graduates following the part-time course, and through her PhD work at the LSE. As I noted earlier, there she met Derek Diamond and Peter Hall, both of whom were closely allied with Patsy in that they believed in a much more open style of planning education than that disseminating from the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). They also advised her on using her work on urbanisation and urban change in Latin American cities to define the major determinants of urban growth and decline in environments that were subject to extensive planning, rapid change and in which segregation played a significant role. There is no doubt she was well aware of Peter Hall's *magnum opus*, *The Containment of Urban England*. I do not know whether John Friedman (1966), one of the great interpreters of urban and regional development in Latin America where he worked in the 1960s, had a direct

impact on her work but he, as well as several key planning theorists, became a key link in her growing network of planning theorist as her range of ideas began to grow.

Even before Patsy moved to Oxford Poly in 1974, she had absorbed the rational planning models that the most significant planning theorists in the US, such as Mel Webber, Catherine Bauer-Wurster, Brit Harris and others, were espousing. The rational comprehensive model as it came to be called sought to link a systems approach to administrative procedures in what today we might call 'workflows'. Already at Oxford Poly, there were a group of academics, amongst them Glen McDougall, Mike Thomas and then Mike Hebbert, who sought to keep the theory flame alive which had been lit in the late 1960s by Andreas Faludi. Patsy reinforced, strengthened and extended this focus when she joined the department. During this time, an explicitly critical view of the systems approach had gathered pace too, notwithstanding there were few alternative paradigms to put in its place.

The group she gathered around her at Oxford Poly worked on problems much wider than planning theory, specifically on the structure of bureaucracies underpinning the planning system, largely in local government. Various processes of planning and policy-making she articulated using structuralist approaches, as reflected in her work with Jackie Underwood on planning functions in local government. She explored the wider policy context of planning at a more strategic than local level, as reflected in the work of Sue Barratt with whom she also collaborated. These researchers were not part of the Oxford Poly group but did enable her to forge links with the School for Advanced Urban Studies at Bristol university. To an extent, Patsy's network at Oxford began to grow eclectically, for there was no real consensus about what the core of local and strategic planning was all about. This was made more problematic as the UK drifted away from the socialist model of the immediate postwar years, to a more 'right wing' and private sector orientated economy and polity as evidenced by the Thatcher governments which dominated the 1980s. These forces to an extent, I think, were consistent with Patsy's move to embrace development and property analysis, where she built these ideas around a small group of researchers – Martin Elson, Paul McNamara and Joe Doak. This heralded her entry into the core basis of her Planning Project involving development processes rather than the products of the planning system. In some senses, this drift away from substantive physical concerns in development, from development itself to the ways in which it is generated, was entirely consistent with the almost insuperable problems of a planning system that required strong links between form and function which were increasingly difficult to unravel and define.

Patsy used the 1980s and early 1990s to immerse herself in the philosophies of the social sciences as articulated by Jurgen Habermas, Anthony Giddens, David Harvey and others, who developed an explicit political economy which embraced the role of planning and regulation. At Newcastle, she used these ideas as the basis of her *Collaborative*

*Planning* book, but she was also able to relate these ideas to several practical projects dealing with local economic development and structure in the Tyne-Wear region where she served on the board of Development Corporation. These built on the wider programme at CURDS in the Department of Geography led by John Goddard, involving Ash Amin, Jonathan Murdoch, Andy Gillespie and others, while the group headed by Steve Graham, Kevin Robins and Simon Marvin brought ideas about technological change to the overall focus. These were embraced in a renewed Department of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, which merged various units which had once been closer to each other in the past, back into a much more integrated whole. Simin Davoudi, Stuart Cameron, Ali Madanipour, John Pendlebury and latterly Jean Hillier reinforced a new quality to education and research in the planning school. In fact, Jean organised with Patsy a three-volume compendium of contributions to planning theory (Healey & Hillier 2008), then edited *The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning Theory* (Healey & Hillier 2010), thus keeping the tradition of planning theory flourishing. Patsy as she had done at Oxford Poly in an earlier life was at the forefront of these developments, thus achieving her goal of rebuilding the school as a strong focus for new theories about planning and practice that had propelled her from Oxford to Newcastle in the first place. Patsy set up and led the Centre for Research in European Urban Environments in 1992. This later became the Global Urban Research Unit (GURU) and was led by a succession of academics in the school. In fact, her focus on statutory and institutional planning in Europe meshed closely with her work with AESOP and with a deep concern for how the Planning Project was beginning to manifest itself in continental Europe and indeed in the rest of the world (Mazza 1996). It is perhaps significant that her work never really embraced China, but she was well aware of the limits that culture placed on how we respond to our environments, and her shift to more rural concerns gave her little time in her later life to grapple and comment on the complexities of a different world order, despite her being well aware of what this was all about.

### Reflections on the future

Although Patsy's main work is contained in her book *Collaborative Planning*, this was by no means the pinnacle of her researching and writing. Although she formally retired in 2002 at 62, people like Patsy never really retire and, in some ways, her best work was yet to come. Her retirement was really another fork in the road where the focus shifted to a concern for community at the grass-roots level, although she could not resist taking her Planning Project further, and her focus on community was part of this. She stood back somewhat and reflecting to an extent on the methods she had developed, she produced what by her own admission she considered her best work: her book

*Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies: Towards a Relational Planning for Our Times* (Healey 2006; Healey 2017). In fact, this book is not about a complexity theory *per se*, or about complexity of cities of which there is a large literature (Batty 2005), but about how the planning process is intrinsically complex, manifesting itself in a myriad of ways that define the challenge that Patsy addressed in all her writing and reflections contained in her many contributions. It is about the complexity of decision-making and the development of administrative structures that enable planners in practice to get things done, and even in this perspective there are several different alternative views (Innes & Booher 2010). In short, the Planning Project itself is a clear demonstration of this complexity.

She followed this book with another entitled *Making Better Places: The Planning Project in the Twenty-First Century* (Healey 2010), which she argued was a translation of many of her ideas from the convoluted whole into simpler terms. This is a translation for those who wish for a more direct statement of the principles behind the planning system that she fashioned. It consists as much as a set of case studies that pertain to regeneration and economic development as strategies for building integrated communities that are resilient to technological and other forms of economic change. In fact, her first work in the Newcastle region was on quite pragmatic yet important planning issues pertaining to regeneration in Newcastle which is contained in her book *Rebuilding the City, Property-led Urban Regeneration in Britain in the 1980s* (Healey et al. 1992). Much of this work has been published under the implicit sponsorship of the RTPI which Patsy became increasingly involved in. She helped found the journal *Planning Theory and Practice*, which first appeared in 2000 as a forum for how we might develop pragmatic intellectual structures and for how we develop good theory in its most practical context. At about the same time, Luigi Mazza's own *Planning Theory Newsletter* was transformed into the journal *Planning Theory*, and since then both have competed with one another but have expanded the field across the theory and practice continuum that now dominates both. This of course echoes the maxim first associated with the psychologist, Kurt Lewin (1943), amongst many others, who said 'there is nothing as practical as a good theory'. It is in many respects a mantra for what Patsy had been attempting to achieve throughout her life, and her contributions to both these journals have been significant.

In so rich an academic life, she was awarded many honours and given many accolades: the OBE in the Birthday Honours in 1999, the Gold Medal of the RTPI in 2006, a UCL College Fellowship in 2006, the Fellowship of the British Academy in 2009, honorary degrees from Chalmers University and Newcastle in 2015. She has had many key roles in planning education and practice, including the Chair of AESOP. Insofar as you can ever say Patsy actually retired, she spent most of the years of her formal retirement in Wooler, which is some 50 miles north of Newcastle in Northumberland, not far from the Scottish border. It is characteristic of her that she made a clean break in terms of the





Portrait of Patsy Healey by Anne Beer, 2017. Displayed in the Patsy Healey Conference Room, Henry Daysh Building, Newcastle University.



place where she chose to live, swapping urban for rural and being distant enough from the 30 years she spent in Newcastle University. To really drive this home, it takes nearly 6 hours by bus, then train (a conservative estimate!) to go from Wooler to London Kings Cross via Berwick on Tweed and this is certain to deter the hardest traveller. Then there is the time at each end of the trip. A trip to the British Academy for a two-hour Section meeting becomes difficult with such a tortuous geography.

Once she had settled into Wooler, she built many links to the local community. After some five years, she became Chair of the Glendale Gateway Trust having made a real impact on the local community in her support of many facilities that integrated the wider residential community together. Yet in a rich life with hundreds of active contacts, it was hard for her to escape completely from the kind of academia that had emerged by the early 21st century. She had built up various centres within the department at Newcastle, one of which was the focus on urbanisation, globalisation, the internet and technology, the other on European planning. Regeneration was also an active theme in her research portfolio and the problem of housing was always there on her agenda. But her focus on rural issues gained real momentum with her move to Wooler. In some senses, the range of environments which she studied covered rural to urban, small village to world city and in terms of her focus on development from brownfield to greenfield sites and from central city to suburbs. To an extent, the Planning Project embraced all of these and is only complete by considering the range of environments that Patsy's theories and tools of development were able to handle

Much of her work in Wooler was a concern for the micro-dynamics of local community. Such dynamics although present in her wider agenda for collaborative planning, were largely brushed over at quite a macro level in her own emphasis on institutions where theories are difficult to apply at the most micro level. To an extent, her approach although grounded in structuration and in political economy was still fairly pragmatic, and her theories were tinged with eclecticism. At the end of the day, the great challenge facing urban planning now and in the past and probably in the future relates to how we can change this future through spatial and physical interventions in cities and regions, and in this many of the theories that address planning as institutionalism are still found wanting. Active to the end, Patsy penned her final book based on her most recent experiences of community development in Wooler. Her book *Caring for Place: Community Development in Rural England* (Healey 2023) was still filling in more of the picture of planning in practice but from a very different standpoint: from a rural point of view but also in terms of the social micro-dynamics that are as difficult to understand in rural systems as they are in very complex systems like large cities. This is the great challenge that Patsy broached and left us with – to integrate ideas about how we plan best across the range of scales, actors and sectors – and the future of planning will depend upon her legacy being taken up by others. But she left many signposts as to how this might be accomplished.

There is still considerable integration to be achieved. In all her work, Patsy's notion that we have reached a fork in the road with respect to how we think about physical planning and what this means, is her legacy, it is the legacy of paradigm shift. Taking it further will be hard in a world beset by technical change. One dimension, however, relates to Patsy's ultimate focus on her family in the wider context of her years in Wooler, where she managed at the end of her life to rebuild the family that she grew up with during the 1950s. The place where she lived her final days is so different from the communities she knew in London, Oxford and Newcastle that this difference can only be appreciated by immersing oneself in Wooler and reflecting on its differences from other places. Moreover, there she indulged her penchant for great walks which also reinforced her love of the countryside and indeed in more abstract terms the link between town and country once again. It is hard for any of us to absorb the many types of environments she experienced in the various places she lived in. But you might have a go by visiting Google Maps and drill into and around the pictures of the village of Wooler and the Cheviots,<sup>1</sup> reflecting on the great range of experiences that Patsy encountered and how they might have influenced her theories of how such environments emerge and evolve.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Wooler/>

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