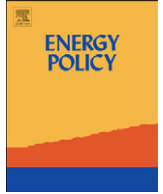


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Introduction to Section 10—Living in the built environment

How will people use the built environment in the next few decades? In the final section of this special issue, we point to existing as well as possible future trends that may point the way. One key determinant of energy use is urban density, as Gordon shows here. The more people there are per square kilometre, the lesser the energy they need, the more likely they are to be near public transport, and the more they recycle. While inner-city living is fashionable for young professionals, older people continue to migrate to the suburbs, and this trend poses its own perils for energy use. On the other hand, large detached houses unquestionably have more scope for wind generators, solar heating and ground source heat pumps, so the question of which way of life is greener is not fully answered.

As well as where people live, this section examines how people spend their time. Pratt analyses the relationship between work and energy use, while Loveday takes up the topical issue of 24/7 culture. It may seem that non-stop living adds to energy use, as lights, heating and equipment run non-stop. But if it also spreads demand for services and reduces peak consumption, is it necessarily a bad thing?

Another future trend that is set to continue, and for which there is evidence all the way back to the Middle Ages, is the falling size of the average household. Roberts, of the Centre for Sustainable Energy, explores the energy impacts of such change. People who live on their own still want a television, a computer, a cooker and all the other devices that larger households also need, even if they sometimes get smaller versions of them. So this trend means that energy use may continue to rise even as equipment becomes more energy-efficient. And as Ward points out, we are still learning just how people actually use the energy-consuming equipment that surrounds them in the modern developed world.

Finally, Coaffee points out here that the present era of concern over climate change is also one in which buildings are being rethought because of the perceived threat of terrorism. These pressures might be thought to act in opposite directions. A warmer world surely needs more open windows. But they need not. Buildings that are both cooler and more secure will need more space between them, bulkier structures to capture heat and add impregnability, and secured local power supplies. This case study perhaps encapsulates all the concerns of the Sustainable Energy Management and the Built Environment project better than any other, with people, politics, energy, buildings and climate change each playing its connected part.