

THE CHALLENGE OF UNDERSTANDING TOWN COMMUNITIES

In 2013, the Scottish Town Centres Review report called on town leaders to improve their strategies to enhance community, enterprise and place. The ensuing Town Centre Action Plan endorsed this, and went on to recognise the need to support the collection and collation of town centre data which will aid the understanding of towns' health and performance.

Stakeholders from different sectors across the towns debate broadly agree that the strategic decisions necessary for improving towns outcomes call for better, shared, more user-friendly information and benchmarking tools. There are no longer rational one-size-fits-all approaches to towns policy, and helping stakeholders and the wider public to understand more targeted approaches demands that local and national agencies deploy an improved armoury of accessible and relevant data tools.

Furthermore, whilst towns have their own unique function, they also have a relative interdependency, independence or dependency as regards other towns and cities. Therefore, it is hard to make a case for more targeted planning and investment without better local data on how town economies really function in relation to other localities.

THE UNDERSTANDING SCOTTISH PLACES ONLINE TOOLKIT

This online toolkit will enable towns practitioners to better understand their town within a Scottish typology, better understand their town's function and benchmark

What is the USP toolkit?

The USP toolkit is a website to help towns practitioners and communities better understand the function of the towns they live and work in. The platform primarily functions as a diagnostic tool, and beyond that offers the opportunity to compare and contrast data, and to measure the progress of a town as new strategies are developed and implemented.

Who is the toolkit for?

The toolkit is for practitioners and communities who are seeking to improve their towns. Towns practitioners are those who work across the country to design strategies for decisionmakers, and then execute and assess them. They are in local authority economic and planning teams, town centre partnerships, development trusts, traders associations, business improvement districts, and a range of other agencies and partnership organisations. They might focus on one town, or a network of towns in a locality. An additional benefit of this project will be to strengthen the network and encourage sharing of data and ideas.

progress as changes are made. The platform will clearly explain to users how to acquire and input data into each stage of the system, and will then self-generate reports and briefing aids to ensure the outputs are policy and decision maker ready and relevant. Users will be able to interact with the platform on a range of levels depending on their particular requirements. The primary aims of the USP toolkit are to enable towns practitioners to:

- **Understand their town within a Scottish typology:** identify and compare the characteristics and type of their town community within the Scottish environment, and its similarities to comparable town types in other parts of the country. Also to enable mapping of town types within the area, so that users can share and benefit from more applicable best practice and policy.
- **Understand their town's function:** measure, visualise and network the interrelationships and flows between towns. This will help practitioners to assess how economic interdependencies might better inform strategic investment, community planning and economic strategy
- **Benchmark progress:** benchmark and evaluate the cultural, social and attitudinal impacts of strategy delivery, and systems visualisation have had over time on regeneration and growth. Selected key performance indicators will be used to help determine town function and annual trends.