

Pathways to urban transformation

Editorial by Vita Žlender

Advances in digitalization, mobility, data availability, and knowledge exchange have greatly expanded the methodological toolkit available to urban researchers and planners. Geographical information systems (GIS), spatial modelling, and increasingly sophisticated analytical techniques allow researchers to examine urban phenomena with unprecedented precision and to develop evidence-based planning recommendations accordingly. However, although the methods continue to evolve, the fundamental aims of urban planning remain largely unchanged: the pursuit of cleaner, more liveable, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient cities.

We recently rearranged our offices and cleaned up our archive along the way – which reminded me of this continuity. Faced with decades-old project documentation, a colleague jokingly remarked that it is better not to look too closely, lest we discover that many of the ideas we consider innovative today had already been explored previously. There is some truth in this observation. Many of the challenges and aspirations of urban planning are recurring. However, each generation of urban researchers must revisit these questions in light of changing social conditions, environmental pressures, and technological possibilities. Contemporary tools allow researchers to establish evidence more rapidly and rigorously, but they continue to build on foundations laid by earlier scholars and practitioners. The well-known metaphor of “standing on the shoulders of giants” remains relevant in this context.

The articles in this issue of *Urbani izziv* illustrate several pathways through which urban transformation is currently being explored. They address diverse topics, but they all seek to improve our understanding of urban environments and identify opportunities for more effective planning, design, and governance. It is worth highlighting that this issue includes two review articles. The first focuses on identifying approaches for designing and planning more inclusive and accessible public spaces for adolescent girls. The second systematically examines the literature on regenerative urban transformation, identifying key themes, implementation challenges, and implications for policymaking. Questions of urban regeneration are also explored in a comparative study of former military sites in Ljubljana, Prague, and Pula. Through the lens of commons theory, the authors explore the potential of commoning practices to contribute to adaptive urban reuse and alternative forms of social organization. Urban vitality is another aspect of urban transformation explored in this issue. The authors develop a methodology for measuring and mapping urban vitality and test it in the city of Niš, Serbia. Environmental quality is another important dimension of urban transformation. The opening article of this issue uses GIS-based analysis and data from the city’s Green Registry to examine the carbon sequestration potential of urban trees in Bucharest, Romania. The findings demonstrate that, despite the greater sequestration efficiency of native species, the overall contribution of existing trees and shrubs remains negligible relative to overall urban emission levels. The authors emphasize the importance of targeted nature-based strategies and the expansion of native vegetation in urban carbon sequestration management.

The contributions in this issue demonstrate that pathways to urban transformation are diverse. They range from nature-based solutions and spatial analysis to adaptive reuse, regenerative planning, and inclusive public space design. Although the approaches differ, they share a common objective: improving the quality, sustainability, equity, and resilience of urban environments.