

Guest Editor Preface

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The call for Special Issue was announced in Spring 2025 with the purpose of inspiring original research exploring how civic engagement, education, governance and digital innovation can shape the next generation of sustainable urban development. A specific goal of the initiative was to highlight interdisciplinary approaches that foster transformative change in cities and communities through inclusive, participatory and forward-thinking practices. By the end of 2025, a total of 11 contributing papers were collected, all of which underwent a rigorous double-blind peer-review process and were subsequently approved by the Guest Editors and the SACE Editor-in-Chief. The final collection represents the collaborative effort of 30 authors from 15 institutions, spanning nine countries across Europe, Asia and Africa.

The research included in this Issue addresses various aspects of the resilience of the built environment, spanning a spectrum from macro-scale governance frameworks and decolonial theories to micro-scale participatory mechanisms, technological innovations and site-specific heritage studies. By integrating diverse perspectives, the collection facilitates a holistic understanding of resilience in human settlements, one that transcends physical infrastructure to encompass structural, procedural, technological, educational, perceptual and temporal dimensions.

Collectively, the papers within the Special Issue underscore a definitive paradigm shift in contemporary urban planning, that is, the transition from rigid, top-down mandates toward adaptive, iterative and context-sensitive methodologies. The Issue demonstrates that in truly human-centered environments, the synthesis of lived experience, indigenous wisdom and community-acquired knowledge serves as a vital foundation for the planning and preservation of living space. When harmonized with cutting-edge technological tools, such as Urban Digital Twins and environmental performance metrics, human factors provide a robust framework for creating inclusive, safe and culturally resonant urban futures.

The Issue begins with the work of Buttner, Mphambukeli and Nel, who point to the need to challenge Western ‘scientific’ hegemony in planning theory, curricula and practice in South Africa. By focusing on the decolonization of planning education, the authors argue for the integration of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) to make urban theory and practice relevant to the lived experiences of contemporary social groups and communities. While moving away from rigid frameworks, it is also necessary to examine how modern governance structures can be redesigned to become more flexible and more effectively placed in the service of achieving resilience. By exploring macro-scale resilience through the lens of ‘soft geographies’ in the UK’s West Midlands, Kulashri

demonstrates how multi-level governance reform and territorial cooperation can provide a foundation for resilient and sustainable territorial development in metropolitan regions.

Governance provides the necessary framework, but real, long-term success depends on how citizens are integrated into resilience-building processes. In this context, Edip examines the institutional shift from socialist top-down systems to democratic bottom-up planning in Skopje, North Macedonia, highlighting the requirements for the establishment and successful functioning of participatory bodies that serve to include communities in urban planning. However, legal requirements to include citizens do not always translate into meaningful engagement. In this regard, Dokuzova et al. critique the 'procedural compliance' found in the same city of Skopje, contrasting limited formal consultations with active, informal civic initiatives. Their findings demonstrate that true resilience requires integrating informal practices and lived experiences into formal planning mechanisms.

The introduction of digital tools and methods represents another complementary approach to resilience building in social environments. Le, Trinh and Pham introduce Urban Digital Twins (UDTs) via the Night Time Economy Platform in Vietnam, demonstrating how real-time simulations can boost community approval by making planning data interactive and accessible. Nevertheless, digital tools are also useful for visualizing technical standards that often remain invisible, thereby allowing for better civic understanding. Bacheva and Grau address this aspect by proposing a taxonomy for the visual communication of sustainability metrics, such as embodied carbon, within architectural workflows to ensure these factors are integrated into early-stage decision-making.

Social resilience is fundamentally rooted in how inhabitants perceive and interact with their environment. This relationship is explored by Kaselimi, Tousi and Mela, who investigate how urban design directly influences feelings of safety in the City of Athens, Greece, proving that 'eyes on the street' and vibrant mixed-use spaces are essential for fostering social trust. Building on the street-level experience in Athens, Mela et al. further use ENVI-met microclimatic simulations to show how temperature and sun exposure dictate the patterns of use of public squares, emphasizing the need for inclusive design that accounts for thermal comfort. Finally, Savchenko, Itchenko and Gavryk observe that the pressure of population growth and changing social needs requires adaptive management of the urban green areas. They provide a model for the adaptive transformation of green zones in Ukraine, ensuring that these green spaces evolve alongside the communities they serve.

In their study on resilience visualisation, Primayudha et al. use Pictorial Narrative Mapping to document the Jami Mosque of Mentok in Indonesia. They argue that by treating heritage as a living social space rather than just a monument, communities become capable of using cultural identity as a tool for urban resilience. Indeed, the preservation of built heritage and the active inclusion of the community in that process signifies, ultimately, the collective management of resilience. To that end, heritage-rich environments, like Pagėgiai in Lithuania Minor, studied and presented by Marozaitė and Mlinkauskienė, stand out as prime examples of the need for meticulous architectural documentation and the recognition of local urban identity. Such efforts safeguard a settlement's significance against the erosive effects of political upheaval and time, ensuring that historical continuity becomes a functional pillar of a resilient future.

In summary, the collection "The Future is Resilient: Transformative Change Through Civic Engagement" provides a multi-disciplinary roadmap for the future of urban planning, demonstrating that the path to resilient settlements lies in the synergistic integration of institutional governance, digital innovation and the invaluable lived experience of the communities they serve.

It has been a great pleasure for us, the Guest Editors, to work on this Special Issue, and we express our sincere gratitude to all the authors and reviewers whose dedication and insights have made this transformative collection possible.

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