

# Editorial: Expanding pathways to resilient urban futures

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## 1. Preamble

Cities today are confronted by numerous challenges that range from rapid urbanisation to environmental degradation and social inequality. The revolutionary classical work of Jacobs (1961) argued for vibrant, mixed-use cities that nurture community interaction. Later scholars argued for collaborative planning approaches that engage people affected by planning and design decisions in the process of making those decisions (Healey, 1997; Innes and Booker, 2004; Sanoff, 1999). These fundamentals have informed a growing body of knowledge that postulates that urban resilience can meet contemporary challenges but should be regarded as both a reaction to crises and a positive process that roots sustainability within urban design decision making.

This issue of *Urban Design and Planning (URDP)* builds on these foundational positions and examine the way in which contemporary urbanism can employ both traditional wisdom and innovative practices to address multifaceted urban challenges. The issue features articles that echo a commitment to address questions relevant to environmental management, socio-cultural preservation, methodological innovation, and digital participation. They demonstrate that achieving urban resilience involves responding to emergencies or crises and an anticipatory approach that blends economic, environmental, and social sustainability into cohesive urban design strategies.

## 2. Advancing the discourse – evolving perspectives on urban resilience

Urban resilience encompasses the inherent ability of a city's various components, ranging from systems and businesses to institutions, communities, and individuals, to endure, adjust, and thrive in the face of persistent strains and sudden shocks (RCN, 2022). It is “*the measurable ability of any urban system, with its inhabitants, to maintain continuity through all shocks and stresses, while positively adapting and transforming toward sustainability*” (UN-Habitat, 2021). This notion urges cities to adopt a comprehensive perspective of their capabilities and vulnerabilities, fostering meaningful participation from even the most marginalised segments of society.

The discourse captured in this issue emphasises that contemporary cities must adopt integrated governance models that stimulate inclusivity and collaboration where the need for vigorous participatory frameworks has never been more crucial. Along this, recent studies are increasingly recognising that resilient urban systems hinge on empowering local communities, ensuring that every stakeholder has a voice in the planning process (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021a; Salama *et al.*, 2024). This is an inclusive approach which enriches the quality of urban environments, promotes democratic governance, and strengthens the social fabric necessary for urban resilience.

The integration of digital technologies into urban design decision making is emerging as a dynamic tool for enhancing transparency, improving public participation, and enabling real-time decision making. Innovative digital platforms (Salama and Patil, 2024) and design-led interventions (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021b) are reshaping the ways in which urban environments are conceived, assessed, and managed. These advances allow for a better understanding of urban form and facilitate the collection of data that can inform evidence-based policies and potential intervention projects. Such approaches demonstrate the possibility of integrating technological tools in understanding social dynamics.

As cities continue to evolve under the demands of globalisation and environmental change, the challenge resides to decipher complex theoretical insights into operational strategies. The four contributions in this issue provide a comprehensive overview of emerging trends and innovative solutions in contemporary urbanism. Situating these contributions within a broader, integrative framework, this editorial invites readers of *URDP* to reflect on how collaborative, inclusive, and technologically enhanced practices can serve as the foundation for resilient urban futures.

Recent studies have advanced our understanding of urban resilience and sustainability by linking design-led initiatives with comprehensive theoretical frameworks. Emphasis on the critical need for navigating place-making decisions collaboratively between scholars and practitioners has been placed (Romice, *et al.*, 2022; Elshater *et al.*, 2024), accentuating that effective place-making

requires integrating diverse perspectives to reconcile scholarly insights with real-world urban challenges (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021c). This perspective is echoed in a recent study which envisages a guiding framework based on sustainable development, with a view to alleviate poverty, hunger, and disease (Abusaada and Elshater, 2024). The study provides solid evidence that addressing socio-economic challenges is an ethical imperative and, more importantly, a practical necessity for building resilient cities; it asserts that sustainable urban design must incorporate social equity as a core element of resilience (Fainstein, 2010).

Adding another dimension to this discourse, the role of design-led events in collaborative planning has been articulated in recent studies (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b), which investigate decision making and delivery activities following design-led events and delineate that such interventions can significantly enhance post-event planning and project delivery. These studies further validate that design-led events serve as potent catalysts for collaborative planning by improving the quality of public participation and bridging the gap between design intentions and project implementation.

Accompanying the preceding findings, insights into the understanding of urban liveability emanate from the question of how quality of life perceptions are shaped by socio-spatial factors (Salama and Wiedmann, 2016; MacLean and Salama, 2021). Such studies validate the view that liveability is a multi-dimensional concept influenced by urban form, social integration, and accessibility to services, which are essential components of resilient urban environments. Likewise, decoding urban life through morphological, social, and perceptual lenses (Salama, *et al.*, 2017) highlight that understanding urban liveability is central for developing policies that enhance urban resilience and that ensure economic and ecological sustainability are integrated into diverse aspects of social well-being.

### 3. Positioning within the wider discourse on urban resilience

Urban environments continue to confront persistent challenges including climate change, economic unpredictability, and demographic shifts. These challenges need to be met with adaptive urban systems. In turn, this necessitates innovative strategies that integrate collaborative decision making, evidence-based frameworks, and participatory processes. Concurrently, the digital paradigm introduces tools that enable urban designers and planners to visualise complex urban phenomena, engage citizens, and simulate potential interventions and outcomes. This synergy between traditional planning knowledge and the digital paradigm is paving the way for more resilient and sustainable cities.

The articles presented in this issue invite us to reimagine approaches to resilient urbanism in a manner that equally consider reacting to crises while anticipating and mitigating them through

forward-thinking strategies. Oliveira and Porta (2025) reconsider the enduring debate between quantitative and qualitative methods in urban morphology. They trace the evolution of urban morphological studies, arguing that both numerical data and qualitative analyses are crucial for understanding spatial patterns. They maintain that methodological integration is essential for recognising urban regularities and informing predictive models in planning, thus offering a robust framework for sustainable urban development.

Nag (2025) examines the role of stakeholder perceptions in competitive heritage planning and urban place-making. Utilising a mixed-methods approach that includes interviews and focus groups, the study scrutinises the way in which local communities, government agencies, and private organisations influence heritage conservation initiatives in India. Findings are captured to articulate the importance of incorporating diverse viewpoints to foster inclusive strategies, which in turn, enable the promotion of cultural identity and drive inclusive urban regeneration. Along the same line of thinking, while adding the technological dimension, Sameer *et al.* (2025) assess the application of 3D digital participatory planning (3DDPP) in a real-world urban development project. Engaging in an action research methodology, the study evaluates the effectiveness of interactive 3D tools in enhancing citizen participation. Findings are drawn to establish that 3DDPP considerably advances the quality, effectiveness, and inclusiveness of the planning process through facilitating better communication between citizens and planners.

Caruso (2024) explores the River Agreement (RA) as an innovative tool for territorial governance, predominantly in managing river basins. The paper presents the RA as a collaborative, voluntary framework involving local administrations, communities, and experts to address water quality, flood protection, and ecological regeneration. Utilising the Ombrone River as a case study, the analysis demonstrates how the RA facilitates integrated planning across multiple scales which aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Within the broad perspectives on urban resilience, the articles presented in this issue are strategically positioned to contribute distinctive yet corresponding insights. Oliveira and Porta's (2025) examination of urban morphology provide a methodological lens that reconciles quantitative and qualitative analyses, an approach that resonates with the comprehensive assessments advocated by Salama *et al.*, 2017. Nag's (2025) work on competitive heritage place-making reinforces the importance of stakeholder engagement and the preservation of cultural identity, a vital component of resilient urban governance as highlighted in the collaborative planning literature (AlWaer *et al.*, 2021a). Sameer *et al.* (2025) provide evidence on the transformative potential of digital participatory planning, a finding that aligns with the technological innovations (Nam and Pardo, 2011; Salama and Patil, 2024) and the

collaborative strategies accentuated by AlWaer *et al.* (2021a, 2021b). Caruso's (2025) study of the River Agreement exemplifies how locally driven, community-based agendas can manage ecological challenges and align with global sustainability programmes, echoing the integrated approaches called for by Abusaada and Elshater (2024).

By and large, these studies illustrate that advancing urban resilience is not a singular paradigm, discipline, or approach. On the contrary, urban resilience is the product of multi-layered strategies that integrate robust theoretical underpinnings with rigorous evidence-based implementation. It is palpable that future resilient urbanism should be premised on collaborative, inclusive, and technologically enabled approaches that are capable of instigating solutions that speak to both current challenges and future uncertainties.

#### 4. Pathways to resilient urban futures

Several commonalities across the contributions to this issue can be unveiled. The four articles advocate for integrated approaches that break down traditional sectoral silos. Whether through the balanced methodological framework in urban morphology (Oliveira and Porta, 2025), the emphasis on diverse stakeholder engagement in heritage planning (Nag, 2025), the digital enhancement of participatory planning (Sameer *et al.*, 2025), or the River Agreement's collaborative model (Caruso, 2025), each study demonstrates that multi-dimensional and participatory methods are essential for achieving urban sustainability. They all stress the broader sustainability agenda, recognising that urban design and planning must simultaneously address ecological, economic, and social dimensions.

Notably, differences and dedicated scopes also emerge. Caruso's (2025) study focuses on water and ecological management as a pathway to territorial sustainability, whereas Nag's (2025) investigation centres on cultural heritage and its competitive revaluation. Oliveira and Porta (2025) eloquently engage with methodological debates, promoting the integration of quantitative and qualitative analyses, yet Sameer *et al.* (2025) emphasise the practical application of digital tools in participatory planning. In essence, this illustrates the breadth of research on urbanism, with each study contributing a unique perspective to the overall goal of building resilient and sustainable cities.

The future of urbanism is clearly predicated on integrating innovative tools, participatory practices, and comprehensive governance frameworks. The River Agreement model exemplifies how voluntary, community-driven approaches can manage natural resources effectively, while the heritage planning study illustrates the importance of diverse stakeholder engagement in preserving cultural identity. The equalised methodological insights from the urban morphology study reinforce the need for robust, evidence-based analysis, and the digital participatory planning examination highlights how technology can transform citizen engagement. When

viewed considering the broader theoretical frameworks advanced in the classical and contemporary body of knowledge, it is evident that contemporary urbanism must be evidence-based, inclusive, and adaptive. Cities need to respond to crises and proactively shape environments that promote sustainability and well-being. These research efforts elucidate important insights and real-world tools for policymakers, urban design professionals, and communities endeavouring to create cities that are resilient and responsive to the needs of their citizens.

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