Urban and Regional responses to Climate Emergency



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Cities and urban regions are now regularly recognized within international processes on issues such as social inequality, economic marginalization, and climate change. Urbanisation and regional development processes can have negative effects on the environment, such as the urban heat island effect, increased runoff due to soil sealing, or covering soils with concrete and increased production of carbon dioxide. Landscape conservation strategies, such as green-infrastructure management and restoration of urban forest, amongst others, may

mitigate the effects of urbanization aiding in easing the effects of climate change. Massive gains, in terms of reducing harmful gases, can be made by changing how we plan, build, manage, and power our cities and urban regions. Regardless of whether we address climate change, energy transition, secure employment, affordable housing, mobility, immigration or demographic change – a holistic, inter- and trans-disciplinary approach is required to meet the challenges of securing a socially, ecologically and economically sustainable future.

In Issue 6, we were aiming to bring together current approaches at the urban regional level in counteracting the negative effects of climate change. We have been overwhelmed by the responses to our original call for contributions on to environmental governance in today's urbanized territories. The novelty of this issue is that the Regional Insights section includes a special section featuring projects of the Interreg North Sea Region Programme.

The North Sea Region has a heavy carbon footprint due to its dynamic economy and dense population. With its many low-lying areas, the region is also very susceptible to climate impacts such as sea level rise and flash floods. A culture of innovation can speed up the green energy transition and bolster the region against climate change while underpinning a future-proof, green economy. In this quest, the North Sea Region through the Interreg North Sea Region Programme plays an active role in responding to the climate emergency. Specifically, the Programme supports transnational partnerships to make the region a smarter, greener and more liveable place for its 60 million citizens. The funded projects build economic and environmental resilience in the region by innovating, building capacities, and informing policy. More than 50% of the Programme-funded projects are dealing with climate change, accelerating the green energy transition, fostering carbon sequestration, or building climate resilience in cities and rural areas. Their pilots deliver proofs of concept to catalyse buy-in and scale up solutions. The featured projects are:

- The TOPSOIL project focused on future-proof groundwater management systems;
- The SalFar project focused on soil salinisation systems;
- The COBEN project focused on promoting civic energy systems;
- The CANAPE project focused on Peatland Ecosystems.

While nations remain the formal signatories of UN treaties, including the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development, city and regional governments have also been taking a centre stage across a multitude of global processes, from the Paris Agreement to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. Therefore, the Regional Insights section includes also practice-oriented articles featuring the various responses to the climate emergency undertaken by local and regional governments.

Jim Murphy presents some emerging results of his Regional Studies Association sponsored research to examine the prospects for greenfield city investments to help spur economic development, focusing on the case of Kenya's Konza Technopolis. Scientific and technological innovations are necessary, but enabling them to make an impact requires an understanding of how people adapt and change their behaviour (Shah, 2020), and from this perspective, Sebastien Bourdin debates energy transition within the concept of circular economy.

Academics are advised to get to know how policy works (Oliver & Cairney, 2019), and following this line of thought, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado focuses on how the European Union (EU) has been transposing climate-related international agreements into EU legislation, highlighting the Europeanization of the climate local policy which has taken place mainly through the influence of cities' networks such as the Covenant of Mayors. Policy-making across sectors and governance scales, from the local to the multilateral, often struggle to gather an adequate response to the pace or specificity of urban and regional challenges (Acuto et al. 2018). In this vein, two multiscale projects are debated in this section: (i) Raúl Sánchez Francés, Silvia Gómez Valle and Nuria García Rueda introduce the URBAN GreenUP project on the implementation of nature-based solutions in strategic urban plans, and (ii) Fernando J. Rodríguez Alonso, José María Álvarez Perla and Isabel Román Martínez highlight the CENCYL network. The URBAN GreenUP project is funded under the EU's Horizon 2020 programme. Its objective is the development, application and replication of Renaturing Urban Plans in a number of European and non-European partner cities through innovative nature-based solutions. The CENCYL network is aimed at supporting inter-municipal cooperation on climate adaptation, where the cities of Salamanca, Valladolid, Ciudad Rodrigo (these three located in the Spanish region of *Castilla y León*), Aveiro, Figueira da Foz, Guarda and Viseu (located in the central area of Portugal) are working together in preparing their local strategies for the adaptation to climatic change. *This article is available both in English and*

Español.

The societal challenge to become more sustainable has many different appearances. It includes concrete issues like changing our energy provision, re-using our resources, and making our urban environments circular and climate resilient. These challenges ask for new forms of co-production and sustained collaboration between public, private and local communities. “While we face grand sustainability challenges, there is also increased recognition that many of these issues are caused by business activities and the organization of production across geographies” (Elisa Giuliani, this issue, Research Frontline section). In a thought-provoking piece – yet sober and timely, Elisa Giuliani critically advances regional studies literature by emphasizing that neither local nor distal business-related human rights infringements are properly acknowledged in regional economic growth policies. In a similar vein, Joanie Willett draws on the Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to make a case for the complex adaptive region-assemblage as a way to imagine regions, and which situates the general population as an important part of that assemblage. To this end, Joanie Willett focused on South West of Virginia, USA, and Cornwall in the UK.

The transgression of planetary boundaries can be seen as one of the greatest threats not only for the ecological systems, but for every society worldwide (Steffen et al., 2015). Global sustainability challenges offer opportunities, and especially for entrepreneurs, the ability to provide business solutions by creating value that mitigates those problems (Kuckertz et al. 2019). Therefore, in the Spotlight section, Luis Carvalho highlights how start-ups could play a role in mitigating urban sustainability challenges. Pedro Henrique Campello Torres, debates the role of urban and regional planning in adapting to climate emergency. These two articles aid in promoting the creation of more productive, livable, inclusive, and sustainable cities as a key challenge of the 21st century.

Because writing and publishing research results to reach wider audiences is increasing, in this Issue’s Research Hacks section, Joshua Barrett, who for the past two years serves as Blog Editor for the Regional Studies Association presents sound advice on publishing a blog article.

The overall message of this Issue 6 is that cities and urban regions globally are major contributors to climate change, but they can also offer to be part of the solution. Several challenges for today’s society, culture, politics, economy and

ecology are attached to the overarching topic of what our life will be like in the urbanized landscapes of the future; and as large differences in income may lead to segregated housing, concentrating poverty in some municipalities and wealth in others, and posing a serious threat to social sustainability of urban development, the forthcoming Issue 7 will be themed around *Financialization of the Urban Domain*, due to be published in late September 2020.

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