



Urban Transitions

Cities are constantly changing, often attempting to reach environmental and health goals, such as Net Zero for carbon neutrality, Zero Waste cities for embracing circularity, Vision Zero to eliminate traffic deaths, or City Cancer Challenge to improve access to cancer care. While various policy options are usually available, sector-specific initiatives that target each goal separately are typically favoured, while multi-level approaches that concurrently address cross-sectoral needs are often overlooked. In fact, despite mounting evidence and growing urgency for cities to transition towards healthier and more sustainable urban environments, progress remains slow. This may be due in part to single-policy targets that enable relatively simple solutions to be implemented, but miss out on the opportunity to engage cities in more transformative solutions. Urban transitions involve policy shifts alongside structural, cultural, and institutional changes that unfold over time. They depend on a range of factors such as existing infrastructure, institutional inertia, and coordination among multiple stakeholders. The systems thinking approaches that are required to develop solutions that consider multiple benefits and tradeoffs, however, are complex to develop and to implement.

Urban Transitions is the journal for those who are keen to advance positive urban transformations, by bringing together interdisciplinary insights and generating the evidence needed to make these changes happen. Its goal is to present and integrate new understandings of the process of change, and of multiple benefits and trade-offs of alternative urban forms, to support the implementation of effective urban transitions.

In both current research and practice, siloed thinking remains a persistent barrier. When decision-making is driven by narrow sectoral goals, unintended consequences and missed opportunities emerge. Narrow viewpoints may lead to direct negative effects in other sectors, or to complex chains of events across sectors, including lock-in effects. Conversely, some solutions only reveal their true value when holistic or systemic perspectives are taken.

For example, promoting diesel cars over gasoline cars in the past may have made some sense from a carbon emission perspective. However, this has worsened health-related impacts, and created a system of constituencies and stakes around diesel production and use which is now difficult to disengage from. The single-dimensional focus has shifted attention away from other solutions that have multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral benefits. A policy alternative, for example, could introduce measures to encourage modal shifts from cars to active travel. This could promote physical activity, reduce pollutant emissions, remove the perpetrators of most traffic injuries, create space for alternative land uses such as greenspace and public spaces - all of which in turn have multiple benefits, including the potential to reduce inequities. Active

travel, despite clearly having value from a holistic perspective, may, however, appear to contribute only marginally to narrowly focused targets such as air pollution or traffic injuries. The accumulation of benefits may not help make the case for a particular approach if no mechanism is in place to account for synergies and tradeoffs across sectors in urban policy making. Considering this, what are the most promising urban interventions from a systems perspective that could drive meaningful change? Will evidence on proposed interventions and their impacts, however, suffice for taking action? Change is difficult, especially when it requires overcoming real or perceived opposition, making solutions seem politically infeasible. Active travel promotion is a case in point. A systems understanding of the dynamics of urban transformations is essential. What makes for controversial or attractive solutions and to whom, what will create alliances across groups, what arguments will work to convince different stakeholders, what institutional arrangements and governance structures will facilitate ambitious change? These are only but a few of the many questions *Urban Transitions* would like to investigate to promote impactful research that leads to the implementation of just, healthy and sustainable solutions in cities.

Urban Transitions aims to explore these questions by publishing interdisciplinary research and evidence that supports a systemic view on healthy and sustainable cities. It will bring together research that builds a holistic case for healthy and sustainable cities, and demonstrates how just transitions are possible and attainable. It will publish papers in a wide range of areas that will show benefits, unintended consequences and processes of urban transitions. Some of these overlapping areas, in addition to cross-cutting issues such as complex systems, societal engagement, societal developmental goals and systems thinking, include:

Social systems, justice and governance. Papers will address social justice, governance structures, and community engagement to promote inclusive and equitable urban development. The interrelation of these themes implies attention to the substantive goals of urban communities and equity-seeking groups, the mechanisms by which these goals are pursued and opposed, and the underlying power dynamics which structure social life in cities. We expect papers to address these questions in the context of theoretical and empirical exploration of topics such as gentrification and displacement, housing affordability, local socio-ecological change, local and multiscale governance, cultural representation, policy acceptability, polarization, and the right to the city.

Climate Action and Resilience. Papers will explore strategies for climate mitigation, adaptation, and building urban resilience in the face of environmental and climate challenges. This includes impacts of extreme weather events in cities (e.g., heat, flooding, wildfires), adaptation strategies directed at these risks, multi-dimensional benefits of

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low carbon and net zero cities, evaluations of the impacts and benefits of interventions intended to promote adaptation and/or mitigation. The ongoing and accelerating pace of climate change, as well as of the rapid transition of the global energy system towards low-carbon, renewable sources, together will have profound impacts on the health and well-being of cities in the next several decades. This journal will showcase the best research documenting impacts, benefits and innovations related to these transitions.

Buildings and Housing: We must learn from holistic building performance evaluation that considers impacts on a broad range of stakeholders and domains to be able to design, construct and operate buildings which are both people- and climate-positive. Papers will examine innovative approaches to sustainable housing and buildings, including sustainable building design, architecture and construction, affordable housing solutions, energy-efficient urban infrastructure, and smart cities. They will address, for example, multi-domain performance, occupant/operator/owner interactions, alternative forms of financing and housing/building types from a systems perspective. We consider broad conceptions of human impacts including health, comfort and wellbeing, and encourage life cycle perspectives to evaluate climate impacts. We welcome submissions in a variety of settings, such as informal settlements or commercial and residential developments. We encourage a variety of methods, such as field studies conducted in occupied buildings and communities using mixed methods to elucidate broad impacts of design and operation decisions.

Transportation: Transportation and urban planning sit at the very heart of urban transitions, both as a source of systemic challenges and a catalyst for deep societal change. From climate emissions to air pollution, from traffic violence to social inequalities in access to opportunities, transport systems encapsulate the multiple externalities of modern urban life. Yet transforming them is anything but simple. Urban transitions demand a fundamental inversion of the current mobility hierarchy to prioritize walking, cycling, and public transport as the foundation of urban accessibility. This means moving beyond technological fixes to confront the spatial, political, and cultural inertia of our car-centric environments. Transportation is a domain where structural inequalities are produced, reproduced, and contested; where issues of distributional and procedural justice, travel satisfaction and dissonance, and competing visions for public space play out in intensely politicized ways. With their density and mix of uses, cities offer fertile ground for rapid change and a rich canvas for diverse solutions but at the same time, they are hotspots of fierce contestation, gentrification pressures, and uneven capacities to act. *Urban Transitions* invites contributions that illuminate both the pathways and pitfalls of mobility reform: evidence for example on how walkability, micromobility, intelligent transport systems, and public transport interact across metropolitan scales; research linking built environment with travel behavior, accessibility and satisfaction; and studies that critically interrogate who wins, who loses, and who decides in this era of mobility transformation. We seek in particular interdisciplinary and action-oriented work that helps decision-makers chart feasible and just routes out of car dependency, without compromising on equity, inclusion or democratic legitimacy.

Healthy Cities. Papers will demonstrate health and wellbeing benefits and trade-offs of different urban forms and of urban transformations from a systems perspective. Understanding the role of health in making these transitions possible, including through the role of health impact assessments, will be an important feature. The systems perspective will include investigations in inter-linkages between urban form, exposures, behaviours, societal engagement, governance and health. Papers will consider how both physical and mental health feature within the dynamics of a range of areas such as urban design, architecture, liveability, transport systems, greenspace, air pollution, noise, social interaction, physical activity, accessibility, housing quality and affordability, land use change, urban food systems, diet, equity, and governance. We welcome transdisciplinary research and studies employing a variety of fit for purpose qualitative and quantitative

methods such as natural experiments, modeling, documentary analysis, interviews, etc.

Nature-Based Solutions and Ecosystem Services: Nature-based solutions and ecosystem services represent critical interventions for simultaneously safeguarding population health, enhancing wellbeing, and delivering co-benefits for planetary health and climate change mitigation. We particularly welcome research investigating the potential of equigenic approaches—interventions designed to reduce health impacts and inequalities through environmental modification—in addressing persistent socioeconomic and geographical disparities in health outcomes. The scope encompasses rigorous evaluations, equity impact assessments, and predictive modelling studies focused on nature-based solutions within urban planning frameworks, biodiversity conservation strategies, and climate resilience initiatives. We welcome interdisciplinary research demonstrating methodological innovation in measuring, implementing, or evaluating nature-based interventions that bridge traditional divides between public health, urban design, environmental science, and climate adaptation policy. Studies examining the pathways through which these interventions influence health determinants across diverse populations are especially encouraged.

Circular Economy and Resource Management: The transition to a circular economy poses significant and urgent challenges. Urban systems are deeply embedded in linear paradigms of production, consumption and management. Structures must be dismantled and reconstructed to recover value in ways that are economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sound. Achieving this requires more than incremental change. It demands a systems-based approach capable of mapping, unpacking, and rethinking the interconnected challenges of solid waste management, pollution control, water conservation, sustainable governance, and integrated food-energy-water systems. Only by identifying systemic leaks, feedback loops, and entrenched practices can we chart pathways toward meaningful, long-term transformation. This is not a simple task. It requires transdisciplinary collaboration to overcome disciplinary silos and language barriers. We therefore welcome bold, out-of-the-box research that advances the frontier of knowledge, particularly work that demonstrates novel approaches to mapping, analysing, modelling and assessing systems and evaluating interventions that support sustainable circularity and systemic change. We are keen on receiving and supporting research that connects diverse disciplines and generates actionable insights for urban transformation.

For further information on submitting an article to the journal, please refer to the Guide for Authors.

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