

Urban challenges of Europe, Africa and the Middle East

Cities are complex spatial units subject to constant change. This issue takes us through the changing European, African and Middle Eastern cities and introduces us to their challenges.

The first article presents the challenges and opportunities of strategic spatial planning in six East European cities: Prague, St Petersburg, Vilnius, Sofia, Budapest and Riga. The author Sasha Tsenkova establishes that strategic spatial planning is an efficient tool for managing post-communist cities because it provides opportunities to mobilize funds and wider support for cities' priorities and to define contextually appropriate multidimensional strategies for future development. In the second article, Hans Skifter Andersen presents the findings of a Danish survey on preferences for home locations and surroundings. He studied what qualities in home surroundings and locations are most important for selecting one's home. The main inspiration for his study was a theory developed by Thorklid Ærø, according to which people have different cultural points of reference that determine the degree to which they have strong or weak opinions concerning their home surroundings and locations. In the third article, Arup Mitra discusses homelessness in France and its labour-market implications. He demonstrates that labour-market problems together with a lack of social capital and adequate housing at affordable prices, accompanied by insufficient institutional support, have resulted in increased homelessness. The fourth and fifth articles discuss housing in Africa. Franklin Obeng-Odoom and Laurence Amedzro focus on inadequate housing in Ghana. The authors take a critical stance towards policymakers that posit that the solution to inadequate housing is to increase the overall housing stock, showing that this approach hides the pervasive problem of inadequately maintained housing and its attendant socioeconomic and health consequences. The fifth article, which also refers to housing in Africa, presents a South African case study. The authors Raeesa Moolla, Nico Kotze and Liz Block discuss the housing issue in Braamfischerville, Soweto, where the government initiated the building of housing units in order to provide housing to the previously disadvantaged. Based on a survey conducted among the local residents, the authors determined that the quality of life in the study area is low. They believe that, in order to improve it, the government should provide the necessary services and infrastructure, whereby the impoverished people would not only receive a roof over their heads, but also an opportunity to live with dignity. The last article studies the philosophy of the Local Agenda 21 program and how it is being implemented in the Turkish city of Harran. Based on a case study and an assessment of the achieved level of the Local Agenda 21 in Turkey, the authors Reyhan Genli Yiğiter and Funda Yirmibeşoğlu present proposals that the local authorities could use in the urban transformation process and that could help them develop local sustainable development policies and establish short-term and long-term strategic plans to solve problems.

Dear readers, before you is the new issue of the journal *Urbani izziv*, which discusses interesting, engaging and current topics. We hope that you find it stimulating reading!

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