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## **Preface**

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### **Luigi Fusco Girard**

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II,  
Dipartimento di Conservazione dei Beni Architettonici ed Ambientali,  
Corso Umberto I, Naples 80138, Italy  
E-mail: girard@unina.it

### **Karima Kourtit\* and Peter Nijkamp**

Department of Spatial Economics,  
VU University Amsterdam,  
De Boelalaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
E-mail: k.kourtit@vu.nl  
E-mail: p.nijkamp@vu.nl  
\*Corresponding author

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Our planet shows increasingly the signs of an urban landscape. Our world moves towards an urban world, with an increasing share of people residing in urban agglomerations. This urban orientation is a rather recent phenomenon in the history of human geography and demography, and started only a few centuries ago. From an urban population share in the world of some 10 to 15% in the Napoleonic times, the urbanisation rate has shown a structural rise, exceeding now more than 50%. This unprecedented urbanisation increase is caused by the economic, social, technological and resource advantages and opportunities created by modern cities. Over the years, cities tend to become sustainable wealth creators and are increasingly seen as engines of sustainable prosperity, not only for the city itself, but also – through its centripetal and centrifugal forces – for the broader spatial environment (including the hinterland and other connected cities) (see Kourtit and Nijkamp, 2013).

The multi-faceted benefits of urban agglomerations are partly economic in nature, but partly also social, cultural and technological. Cities appear to include creative, innovative and entrepreneurial talent which lays the foundation for wealth-creating activities of all urban actors involved. Consequently, such cities are a *sine qua non* for a healthy, wealthy and sustainable future of our planet (see also Angotti, 1996; McNeill, 1999). Clearly, it should be added that – in addition to wealth creation – also wealth distribution is a major issue in modern metropolitan areas. The development of slum areas in large urban areas is a sign that socio-economic disparities may lead to an erosion of urban sustainability.

The urban wealth-creating capacity is critically dependent on the efficient use of a great diversity of local resources comprising not only skilled labour or productive capital, but also social capital, cultural capital (e.g., historico-cultural heritage), educational capital, and environmental and energy resource capital (see also Colletta, 2012). Furthermore, it is increasingly recognised that cities are not operating in isolation, but are part of a physically and digitally connected urban network system (see Neal, 2012). Thus, the city is a complex eco-system based on man-made and natural forms of capital that

enhance the productivity of production factors and resources. Economies of density, interactivity and connectivity appear to be the core mechanism of urban agglomerations and form the critical rivers of urban wealth creation. In this context, a strong urban community sense may contribute significantly to the prosperity and welfare-creating potential of cities, as such a synergy offers promising conditions for creative, resilient and sustainable urban futures.

The idea that cities are living organisms is not recent, but already advocated by the great German philosopher and sociologist Max Weber (1958), who in his book on *The City* argued that cities are dynamic, complex and adaptive systems in human history. Not only do they house people – and their amenities – but also they are the seedbed of democratic institutions and military powers, and offer as such the essential ingredients for modern civilisation. Consequently, cities are the necessary platforms of contemporaneous economic development.

In a recently published book, Angel (2012) brings together in one framework a series of topics on urban dynamics, supported by much empirical evidence on many cities all over the world. His study is useful for understanding the urban performance condition of cities, their ecological resilience and the differences in urban developmental patterns. Based on the so-called ‘containment paradigm’ (endogenous forces for enhancing the urban growth potential) and the ‘making room paradigm’ (by reducing environmental threats in the city), the author argues that cities may turn into vibrant, inclusive and positing settlement patterns all over the world. And therefore, the design of policy-relevant indicator systems deserves much attention.

It seems plausible that the current urbanisation trend will continue as a robust trend, to the extent that many modern areas will become nodes in a global network (Taylor, 2001, 2004; Burger et al., 2009), in which regional and national borders will play a less prominent role (Kourtit and Nijkamp, 2013; de Noronha Vaz et al., 2006). Clearly, the urbanisation megatrend does not imply that there are no exceptions; some cities may even shrink (‘ghost cities’), but others will continue to grow, so that the net outcome will be one of continued urbanisation. This trend poses enormous research and policy challenges: what are the conditions to make cities fit and able to adapt to and prosper in a globally connected urban system? Our ‘century of cities’ needs clearly solid and accessible data systems to monitor and manage urban evolution all over the world.

Against the background of the above observations on urban evolution and the importance of cities for creating a more prosperous world, the present special issue aims to bring together a varied set of original research contributions on the assessment and experiences of new urban initiatives that serve to enhance welfare and sustainability for all stakeholders in the urban agglomerations concerned. The focus will be on the crucial importance of density, interactivity and connectivity as the drivers of the wealth creating capacity of cities. The first part of this issue (Part A) addresses conceptual and methodological aspects, while the second part (Part B) offers more case-study oriented approaches and urban planning lessons. We will now briefly summarise the main elements from the various contributions.

The first contribution on the conceptual issues of sustainable urban development is written by David Throsby. He highlights the importance of livability, vitality and sustainability of cities from an economic perspective, with a particular focus on cultural capital, and its consequences for sustainable development. Next, Charlie Karlsson and Urban Gråsjö address the role of creativity for urban growth and development, with specific emphasis on Swedish experiences. In a subsequent article, Luigi Fusco Girard

pays attention to the wealth-creating and preserving potential of cities, in relation to city landscapes, supporting institutions, innovative governance and urban planning. Hans Westlund and Yuheng Li then treat the urban-rural divide and the necessary policy visions and strategies for sustainable urban life across the world. Then, Vicente Royela Mora and David-Enrique Castells-Quintana introduce international migration in the development of urbanisation patterns across the world and the impacts on urban growth. In a subsequent article, Roberto Camagni, Roberta Capello and Andrea Caragliu analyse the economic foundations of city size in a spatial equilibrium context. Next, Tomaz Ponce Dentinho focuses the attention on public investments and property rights in relation to urban growth and foreign migration. And finally in Part A, Iva Mrak presents an integrated evaluation model for cultural heritage in spatial planning, using multicriteria and heritage evaluation models and applying this approach to a case study in Croatia.

In Part B, several case studies will be presented. The first contribution in this part is offered by Karima Kourtiti, Peter Nijkamp and Frans van Vught; the authors investigate the synergy of knowledge creation among different urban university clusters in the Netherlands, termed ‘supernova stars’. Next, Marina van Geenhuizen analyses the critical factors in urban health innovation, from the perspective of the importance of social networks for urban sustainability. In a subsequent contribution by Steven G. Craig, Janet E. Kohlhase and Adam Perdue, the authors highlight the importance of entrepreneurship in urban development, using empirical data on Houston, Texas. Then, Attila Fábián and Balázs István Tóth address the issue of measurability of culture in a regional context, by performing an empirical analysis for Hungary. Daniela-Luminita Constantin, Marius Profiroiu, Mariana Dragusin, Constantin Mitrut, Alina Elena Iosif and Raluca Mariana Petrescu discuss issues on the real property management in cities in East European countries. Next, Assia Lamzah presents a study on the impacts of the French protectorate on urban developments and architecture in Morocco. In another study, on port cities and urban wealth, Carola Hein presents logistic aspects related to global networks and local or urban transformations. Finally, Joe Ravetz highlights inter-connected responses for inter-connected problems of port cities in a global urban system, on the basis of so-called synergistic thinking.

The various contributions in this special issue differ in scope and orientation, but they share the common view that urban agglomerations may act as ‘wealth machines’ (in socio-economic and cultural terms) which are offering a decisive impact on the future of our world. The development of urban agglomerations leads to many research and policy challenges, not only from a local but also from a global networks perspective. There is a clear need for new creative conceptualisations of urban agglomerations, based on the physical, technological, economic, social, virtual and cultural cornerstones of modern urban areas. Indicated urban development strategies will be needed to create the foundations for sustainable development and to cope effectively with unacceptable poverty conditions in modern cities, while still preserving the economic assets embodied in historico-cultural heritage and landscapes in cities. The urban ecosystem is a fragile system, which may be exposed to various resilience trajectories, but which may flourish if it is able to overcome inherent vulnerabilities. This task calls for new integrated planning frameworks for sustainable urban development.

A useful design of such an integrated framework can be found in the so-called ‘urban piazza’ concept (see Kourtiti et al., 2014), which offers a dynamic symbiosis image — in a stylised form — of the interacting forces in historical and modern cities. It turns out that

social capital, entrepreneurial capital, heritage capital and connectivity capital are the drivers and critical success factors of resilient, creative and sustainable urban agglomerations.

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