

# MONOTHEMATIC ISSUE 2026

## E & M ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

### Sustainable Cities

Cities are increasingly expected to reconcile economic development, environmental responsibility, social inclusion, technological innovation, and resilience to climate change. Although sustainable urban development has become a central objective of international and European policy, translating ambitious strategies into practical and measurable improvements remains a persistent challenge. Rapid urbanisation, changing mobility patterns, climate-related risks, digital transformation, and growing inequalities require cities to move beyond isolated interventions and adopt integrated, evidence-based approaches.

This monothematic issue brings together interdisciplinary research that examines sustainable cities from technological, environmental, economic, institutional, and social perspectives. The contributions demonstrate that urban sustainability cannot be reduced to the deployment of smart infrastructure or the improvement of environmental indicators alone. Sustainable urban transformation also depends on governance capacity, financial institutions, universities, citizen participation, digital literacy, behavioural responses, and the ability of public authorities to translate strategic ambitions into implementation.

Several papers explore the relationship between smart-city technologies, innovation policy, and urban governance. Korzeb, Szpilko, and Di Pietro provide a bibliometric and thematic review of the role of banks in smart cities. Their analysis identifies direct, indirect, and advisory or educational activities through which financial institutions can support urban transformation. The study emphasises that banks are not merely providers of capital but may also act as strategic partners in financing innovation, supporting sustainable investment, and improving the financial literacy necessary for smart-city development.

The contribution by Volosin, Koren, and Kubak evaluates how the European Union's smart-city agenda has been translated into funded urban projects. Based on an analysis of 725 projects implemented under FP7, Horizon 2020, and Horizon Europe, the authors reveal substantial geographical and thematic concentration. Digitalisation, energy, and mobility dominate the portfolio, while governance and social participation receive comparatively less attention. Their findings highlight an important tension between excellence-oriented innovation policy and the objective of territorial cohesion, particularly for medium-sized and peripheral cities.

Urbanik, Horalek, and Otcenaskova examine similar implementation challenges from the perspective of Czech regional development strategies. Their assessment shows that smart-city principles are present across regional strategic documents, but their integration varies considerably in depth, structure, and operational clarity. The identified barriers, including conceptual fragmentation, inconsistent methodologies, limited stakeholder involvement, and gaps between strategic intentions and implementation, demonstrate that technological ambition must be supported by institutional capacity, methodological guidance, and effective coordination.

Sustainable mobility represents another central theme of this issue. Surmikova and Dzupka apply the 15-Minute City concept to university campuses and examine how universities can become active agents of proximity-based urban development. Combining walking and cycling isochrones with spatial analysis of shared micromobility, their study identifies infrastructural and behavioural barriers to sustainable campus mobility. The paper positions universities not only as educational institutions but also as major mobility generators and potential urban living laboratories capable of initiating broader changes in travel behaviour and infrastructure planning.

Perez-Pulido, Mena-Nieto, and Vides investigate bicycle-sharing demand in Seville using self-organising maps and environmental data. Their analysis reveals how precipitation and thermal comfort influence bicycle use and demonstrates the potential of artificial intelligence for operational planning and demand forecasting. By connecting mobility data with climatic conditions, the study

provides a practical framework for improving the management and resilience of shared transport systems.

Aguilar-Moreno, Palos-Sanchez, Pozo-Barajas, and Duarte-Atoche focus on the digital dimension of public transport. Using natural language processing, sentiment analysis, and topic modelling, they analyse user reviews of public transport applications in major European cities. Their findings show that users prioritise intermodal integration, accessibility, real-time information, seamless payments, environmental engagement, and overall user experience. The study illustrates how citizen-generated data can support the design of more inclusive and user-oriented mobility services and confirms the growing importance of citizen participation in digital service development.

The attractiveness of sustainable cities to emerging mobile populations is explored by Palos-Sanchez, Lezcano-Calderon, Folgado-Fernandez, and Giraldez-Puig. Using machine-learning models and data from 668 destinations, the authors identify factors that influence the attractiveness of cities to digital nomads. Gender equality, entrepreneurship, safety, accommodation costs, connectivity, and social inclusion emerge as important determinants. The paper broadens the sustainable-city discussion by showing that contemporary urban competitiveness increasingly depends on the ability to combine digital infrastructure and economic opportunity with safety, affordability, and social equity.

Universities and knowledge networks also play a prominent role in sustainable regional development. Stefanikova and Fedak investigate joint study programmes developed within European university alliances and their relationship with regional innovation performance. Their findings suggest that alliances support academic integration, knowledge transfer, and cross-regional collaboration, while also connecting institutions located in regions with different levels of innovation capacity. Joint programmes may therefore serve not only as instruments of internationalisation but also as mechanisms for strengthening human capital, regional competitiveness, and territorial cohesion.

Environmental resilience is addressed by Toth, Sebova, and Sabosljajova, who develop a composite index for assessing the vulnerability of Slovak cities to extreme heat. Combining climatic, land-cover, socioeconomic, and governance indicators, the study provides a systematic assessment of heat-related vulnerability across 141 cities. The proposed methodology offers an evidence base for targeted adaptation policies and demonstrates why urban climate resilience requires both environmental data and an understanding of the social and institutional conditions that shape cities' capacity to respond.

Finally, Zanabazar, Mohi Ud Din, and Hong examine the relationship between political awareness, civic engagement, digital literacy, and political participation. Their findings show that political awareness does not automatically translate into participation. Digital literacy strengthens the pathway through which informed citizens become civically engaged and politically active. This contribution underlines a fundamental dimension of sustainable urban governance: smart and sustainable cities require citizens who possess not only access to digital technologies but also the competencies necessary to use them effectively and participate meaningfully in public life.

Several common messages emerge from this collection. First, sustainable cities require integration across sectors and policy domains. Mobility, finance, climate adaptation, digitalisation, education, governance, and civic participation cannot be addressed independently. Second, data analytics, artificial intelligence, spatial modelling, and digital platforms offer powerful instruments for urban decision-making, but their effectiveness depends on institutional capacity and responsiveness to citizens' needs. Third, universities, banks, public authorities, and European networks can function as important intermediaries connecting knowledge, finance, policy, and implementation. Finally, technological advancement must be accompanied by social inclusion, territorial balance, public participation, and resilience.

Rather than presenting a single model of the sustainable city, this monothematic issue offers a multidimensional perspective on the actors, technologies, policies, and behaviours that shape urban transformation. We hope that the contributions will stimulate further interdisciplinary research and support policymakers, urban planners, researchers, financial institutions, universities, and citizens in developing cities that are not only smarter, but also more inclusive, resilient, accessible, and sustainable.

## Guest Editors

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