

# On the Sustainability of Spaces, Spheres and Environment

## Editorial

The dominant notion of sustainability in the natural and built environments is ever more shaping the actions of individuals, groups and institutions on all levels of social organisation. In the examination of both the natural world and society, concepts and practical ideas are emerging with regard to the transformation of the combined or hybrid agency of various individual and collective actors when it comes to sustainability.

The search for new modes of action and connections between social actors is driven by growing “environmental anxiety”. The colour green is becoming a ubiquitous hallmark of conduct for virtually everything, everyone, everywhere and in all social matters.

In this special issue of *Social Science Forum*, the authors address a range of dilemmas concerning the actual or expected effects of relationships between actors in different social spheres with respect to spatial environmental sustainability.

In the five articles, the authors investigate: first, the effects of integration, or at least the permeation of research in science; second, the co-effects of university and city spaces; third, the outcomes of learning and employability of university students in physical vs. virtual spaces; fourth, the relationship between immovable cultural heritage and the local community while, finally, a well-thought-out idea of inclusive “renewable energy communities” that combines the effects of local, virtual and hybrid levels of social organisation.

Marjan Hočevár tackles the issue of research perspectives on environmental issues and the nature of environmental knowledge production in science. Considering the example of the dualism of nature and culture/society and applying the science mapping method, the author tests the hypothesis of a possible strengthening of interdisciplinarity between the natural sciences and the social sciences as well as between the humanities and the social sciences. For this purpose, the bibliographic descriptor considers the Anthropocene as an approach and a concept. The Anthropocene, defined as a contested and still evolving concept, can explain events between and within disciplines due to its “naturally” integrative qualities, i.e., controversiality and polyvalence. The author concludes that from the perspective of environmental approaches, the Anthropocene already reveals a connection between dualistically organised sciences.

Domen Žalac and Matjaž Uršič study the interweaving of two social spheres on the level of spatial practices, city and university life. The article proceeds on the assumption that a socio-spatial analysis of university libraries makes sense for understanding the dynamics and permeation of both landscapes. The University of Ljubljana and the University of Vienna are used as an example. A holistic approach is called for that encompasses sensory engagement, technological influences, cultural diversity, and the role of the university as an urban anchor. As the higher education landscape continues to evolve, these insights can help guide the future planning and development of universities, with a view to fostering urban campuses that effectively cater to the diverse needs and activities of their users while contributing to the urban fabric of their cities.

Samo Pavlin, in his exploration of the interweaving of physical and virtual spaces, addresses the question of why it is good for university students in “modern” times to continue to physically attend lectures and to also participate in other situational forms of study. He stresses that the development of different forms of knowledge and competencies is strongly intertwined, which explains why virtual space should complement physical space in learning processes, not vice versa. Professional competencies cannot be developed and used in isolation from general competencies. The author proves that confidence and professional identity, which are important motivational bases for successful knowledge transfer and longer-term career development, are fundamentally located in the physical premises. At the end, it is concluded that the virtual–physical space relationship should be considered a fundamental developmental issue in higher education. Through the prism of “new localism”, Matjaž Uršič explores the intertwining of spheres of interest while planning sustainable heritage-based development. The study of combined cases in Slovenia builds on the analytical insight that the declarativeness of immovable cultural heritage integration processes is exposed in spatial antagonisms based on frictions between local communities and, on the other side, conservation approaches, the development aspirations of investors, political structures and other actors who try to assert their particular interests and needs. The author preliminarily notes that local actors are not sufficiently equipped or given the possibility to learn about the issues and how to deal with the challenges they confront. Moving away from hierarchical forms of one-dimensional protection of heritage status to inclusive and locally adaptive, sustainable based heritage development is suggested.

Primož Medved explores the foundations of new policies, schemes, and solutions in order to propose an appropriate model able to assist with a quicker and stronger push towards green transition. It raises the question of how a realisable platform to improve the proliferation of renewable energy communities in Slovenia

could be structured to ensure the empowerment of the most vulnerable strata of society. The author conceptually and practically elaborates the innovative REC Platform, which foresees segmentation via three different levels or spheres of engagement: local, virtual and hybrid RECs, and represents an interactive meeting, learning and investing point – a ‘one-stop shop’ for all stakeholders involved. A REC platform would connect producers with customers, the city population with rural citizens, local and virtual members, investors with the most vulnerable part of society, as would be further supported and directed through the “inclusive enabling framework”.

Marjan Hočevár, guest editor