Editorial Sarah Clement and Thomas B Fischer

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this issue of IAPA, which includes three papers examining how green infrastructure (GI) and urban green space (UGS) concepts play out across different contexts and projects. Both, GI and urban greening are increasingly seen as important for addressing a wide range of social, economic, and environmental ills. From addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and economic development (Clement, 2020) to enhancing health and wellbeing (Fischer, 2016), using ‘nature’ to solve challenges instead of engineered solutions is an idea with political purchase (O’Sullivan, Mell, and Clement, 2020). GI is presented as a multifunctional concept and practical tool for addressing many of the challenges cities face. Its importance has become particularly acute during the current COVID-19 pandemic, as people have turned to green spaces for their daily exercise and socialising. It has also brought into sharp relief the fact that access to green space is still highly inequitable, with those who could benefit from them often having little access to green spaces near their homes.

GI and urban green space are concepts that have been integrated into policy and planning, and yet they remain less connected to practices of impact assessment (IA). IA could potentially play an important role in ensuring that GI is considered in developments; as well as evaluating the impacts of GI on urban environments and communities (see e.g. Fischer et al, 2018). GI and other urban greening concepts are interpreted differently across the world, and authors from the UK, USA, and Australia tend to dominate the GI literature. If the promise of urban greening is to be realised in practice, it needs to be adapted to local contexts and meaningfully embedded an environmental assessment and management practice.

The first GI and UGS paper, ‘Progressing Green Infrastructure planning: understanding its scalar, temporal, geo-spatial and disciplinary evolution’ by IC Mell and S Clement, explores the conceptual development of GI and its alignment (or lack thereof) with IA practice. As a concept that aims to integrate ecological, socio-economic, and political concerns together, GI is meant to be flexible and useful across diverse places, disciplines, and temporal and spatial scales. Whilst this flexibility is useful, the paper describes how this limits the extent to which GI is embedded in landscape and environmental planning. Building consensus through discourse coalitions could help harmonise the concept to some extent and advance practice. However, the authors argue this should not come at the expense of ensuring that it is adapted to local contexts and accommodates variation across different communities of practice and knowledge domains.

The importance of considering local needs is brought into focus in the second paper, ‘Using green infrastructure to add value and assist place-making in public realm developments’ by GH Donaldson and E.M. João. This paper explores how GI can add value and assist place-making in public realm developments, focusing on a case study in Glasgow, UK. Their study found that GI can assist in place-making by providing additional benefits in the public realm, and the multiple functions and benefits were recognised by both the public and practitioners in their case study. Both groups also agreed that community engagement is critical not only because GI needs to be locally adapted, but also because it can facilitate community ownership of public realm developments, benefiting all stakeholders. IA, they argue, could support the integration of GI into place-making efforts by supporting better public understanding, facilitating public involvement in the implementation of GI, and informing better design of developments.

The third GI and UGS paper focuses on strategic-level integration of urban green space. In ‘Exploring the role of Urban Green Spaces in 'smartening' cities in India’ by RMR Turaga, U Jha-Thakur, S Chakrabarti, and D. Hossain, the authors examine how urban green space has been considered in the context of India’s Smart Cities Mission. This is one of the largest urban planning programmes in India, with ambitious political commitments to increase quality of life in Indian cities by upgrading them into “smart cities”. They looked at both national-level guidelines and examined documents from four cities (Gwalior, Bhagalpur, Chandigarh, and Udaipur) in depth to understand how the guidelines are being interpreted in practice. They found that, whilst the importance of urban green space in supporting the mission was recognised, there is a lack of clear objectives and targets to increase the quantity of green space. They also found that the multiple functions of green space are largely unrecognised, with the focus primarily on their role in recreation and supporting physical health. The authors argue that, like spatial planning more generally in India, the smart cities programme is undervaluing green space in the planning process, limiting both the provision of green space and its multiple benefits for urban communities. The authors suggest that Strategic Environmental Assessment could provide an important tool in supporting more effective and holistic approaches to planning, greening the smart cities mission – and Indian cities – in the process.

# This issue of IAPA includes two further papers. In the first, C Joseph, T Gunton, D Knowler and S Broadbent (all from British Columbia, Canada) look at the role of Cost-benefit Analysis (CBA) and Economic Impact Analysis (EcIA) in Environmental Assessment (EA). They observe that whilst EcIA is frequently used in EA, CBA is rarely applied. However, they suggest that the latter has a number of comparative strengths that are currently not realised. Following on from this they argue that the Canadian EA system requires reform.

In the final paper, TS Aung (Harvard University, US) and TB Fischer (University of Liverpool, UK) reflect on the quality of EIA systems in 65 countries participating in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), using an EIA quality index. They observe that there is great disparity between the different EIA systems. Poverty, civil war and institutional instability tend to lead to countries having lower quality systems in place. They also observe a positive (albeit weak) correlation between EA quality and GDP per capita.

We hope that the first three papers of this issue can begin a dialogue about how GI, UGS and other urban greening concepts can be usefully transferred across different contexts, here with regards to IA. Although limited at present, there is likely an important role of impact assessment tools to support efforts to expand the quantity, quality, and multifunctionality of urban green space.

Enjoy your read

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**References**

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