Transnational Network of Integrated Planning Labs: co-creating knowledge on forward-looking transdisciplinary planning perspectives addressing climate change and urban life in the post-pandemic city.

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Annotating key concepts of integrated spatial planning

Urban Health

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Mainstream/Conventional Definition

Urban health is the health outcomes of urban populations, and the urban environments and conditions that influence them. Urban health considers the relationship between the built environment, social determinants, access to infrastructure and environmental exposures. Urban health can be addressed through public health strategies, planning regulations and environmental health assessments.

Contested Meanings / Debates in the Literature

Mainstream definitions of urban health tend to focus on epidemiological data, environmental risk factors and behavioral interventions. Certain scholars have argued that this focus potentially obscures deeper structural determinants such as poverty, racialized and gendered urban space, labour precarity and state disinvestment. The "healthy city" model, that has been widely adopted (e.g. by the WHO) has been criticized due to its co-optation into urban branding, green gentrification and techno-managerial solutions that neglect the needs of local inhabitants.

Furthermore, what constitutes a "healthy" urban environment is inevitably determined by cultural, ecological and political contexts. Informal settlements in the global South, for example, may not meet formal health standards, but they do demonstrate strong social cohesion and resilience. The concept of health itself is also increasingly understood not merely as an absence of disease, but as a relational and spatial condition that is co-produced via mobility, social interaction, access to public space and environmental justice.

Thus, the notion of urban health has been expanded in order to include climate-related vulnerabilities (e.g. heat islands, air quality), non-communicable diseases that have been linked to sedentary urban lifestyles and the psychosocial effects of inequality in the built environment. Feminist and decolonial critiques have called for more inclusive frameworks that highlight how lived experiences, practices of care and indigenous knowledge systems can play a role in urban health discourse.

Applications in Practice

Health Impact Assessments in Urban Projects

HIAs are used to evaluate how new developments (e.g. housing, transit) may affect public health. They help identify risks like pollution or poor walkability early in the planning process, ensuring healthier, more equitable outcomes.

Urban Resilience & Climate Plans Addressing Health Inequality

Many cities now integrate health into climate strategies by mapping risks like heat, pollution, and vulnerability. Measures such as green corridors or cooling zones aim to reduce health disparities worsened by climate change.

Spatial Tools (Space Syntax & GIS) to Analyze Health Access

Planners use tools to map walkability, green space access, or social isolation. These analyses help identify underserved areas and guide interventions that support active, connected, and inclusive urban living.

Healthy Cities & Cross-Sector Collaboration

Public health and urban planning teams work together under frameworks like WHO's Healthy Cities to design age-friendly, active, and inclusive environments that promote well-being and reduce long-term health risks.

Selected References & Key Readings

WHO (2016). Urban Green Spaces and Health – A Review of Evidence.

➔ Widely cited document linking planning and health outcomes.

Corburn, J. (2009). Toward the Healthy City: People, Places, and the Politics of Planning. MIT Press.

➔ Critical exploration of the planning–health interface in U.S. cities.

Marmot, M. & Wilkinson, R. (2005). Social Determinants of Health. Oxford University Press.

➔ Key text on structural health inequalities.

Rydin, Y. et al. (2012). "Shaping Cities for Health." The Lancet, 379(9831): 2079–2108.

➔ Seminal report on urban planning's role in shaping health outcomes.

Mueller, N. et al. (2016). "Urban and Transport Planning Related Exposures and Mortality: A Health Impact Assessment for Cities." *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

➔ Demonstrates how meeting exposure guidelines (air pollution, noise, activity) in urban planning can prevent nearly 20% of premature mortality.

Carmichael, L., Barton, H., Gray, S., Lease, H., & Pilkington, P. (2012). "Integration of Health into Urban Spatial Planning Through Impact Assessment." Environmental Impact Assessment Review, 32(1),187–194.

➔ Reviews barriers and facilitators to incorporating HIA into planning, with global examples.

Siria, J.G., & Geddes, I. (2022). "Mainstreaming Health in Urban Design and Planning: Advances in Theory and Practice." Cities & Health, 6(5), 853–857.

➔ Offers historical evolution and modern integrative theory of urban health in planning.

Ramos, A., Cirach, M., Pereira Barboza, E., Iungman, T., Khomenko, S., & Nieuwenhuijsen, M. (2022). "Health Impact Assessment of Urban and Transport Developments in Barcelona: A Case Study." Environmental Health Perspectives, 2022.

➔ Evaluates combined effects of Superblocks, climate, air quality and mode shift on public health.

Turcu, C., Crane, M., Hutchinson, E., et al. (2021). "A Multi-Scalar Perspective on Health and Urban Housing: An Umbrella Review." Build Cities, 2(1):734–758.

➔ Synthesizes evidence across spatial scales, focusing on housing, green space, transport and mental health.

Closely Related Concepts

- **Healthy Cities** – WHO-led planning framework linking urban form and public health.
- **Environmental Justice** – Examines unequal exposure to environmental risks and access to health-supporting infrastructure.
- **Walkability / Active Mobility** – Planning concepts that directly impact public health.
- **Care Infrastructures** – Emerging concept linking urban design with collective well-being and support systems.