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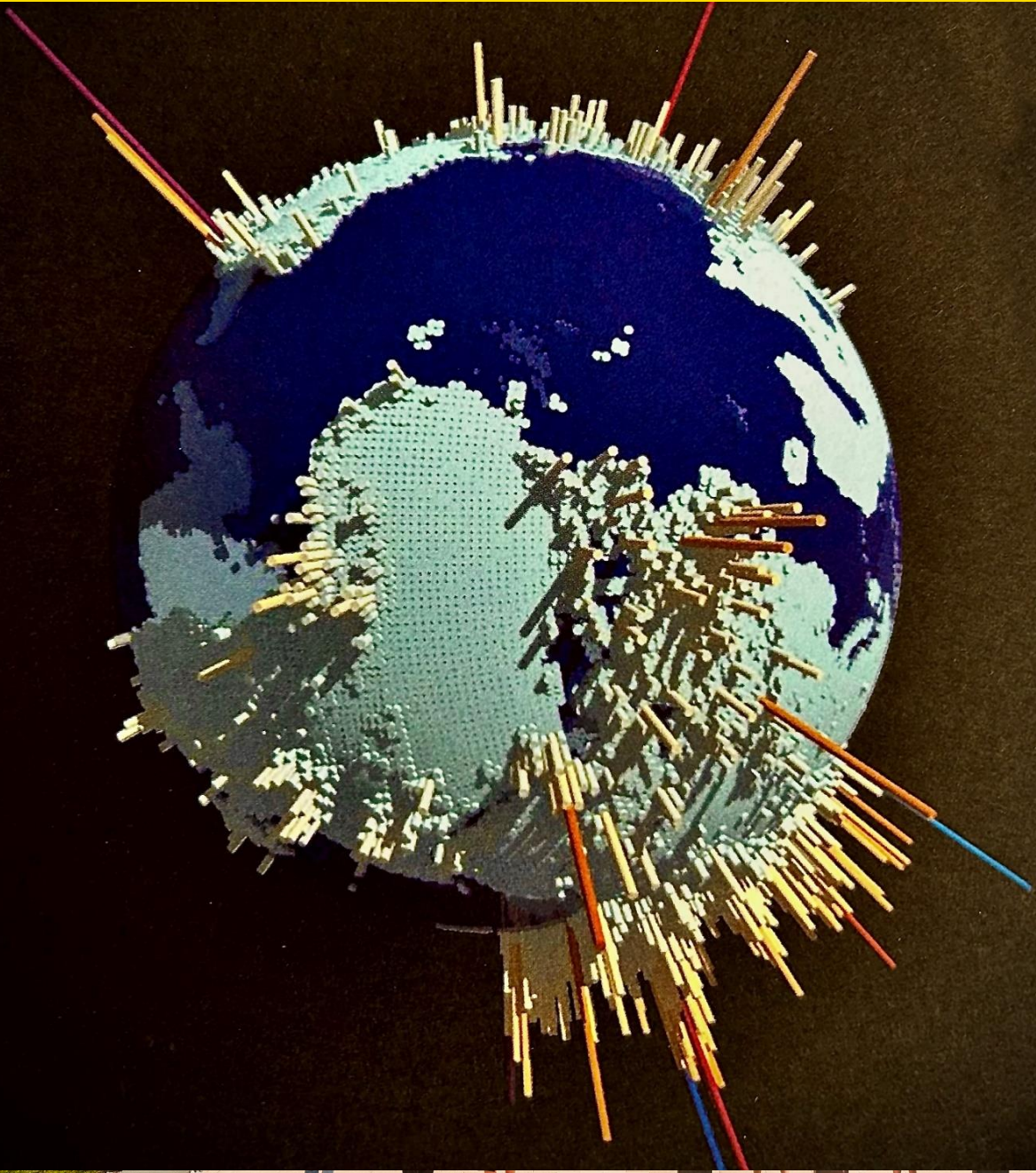
**GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
CONGRESS**

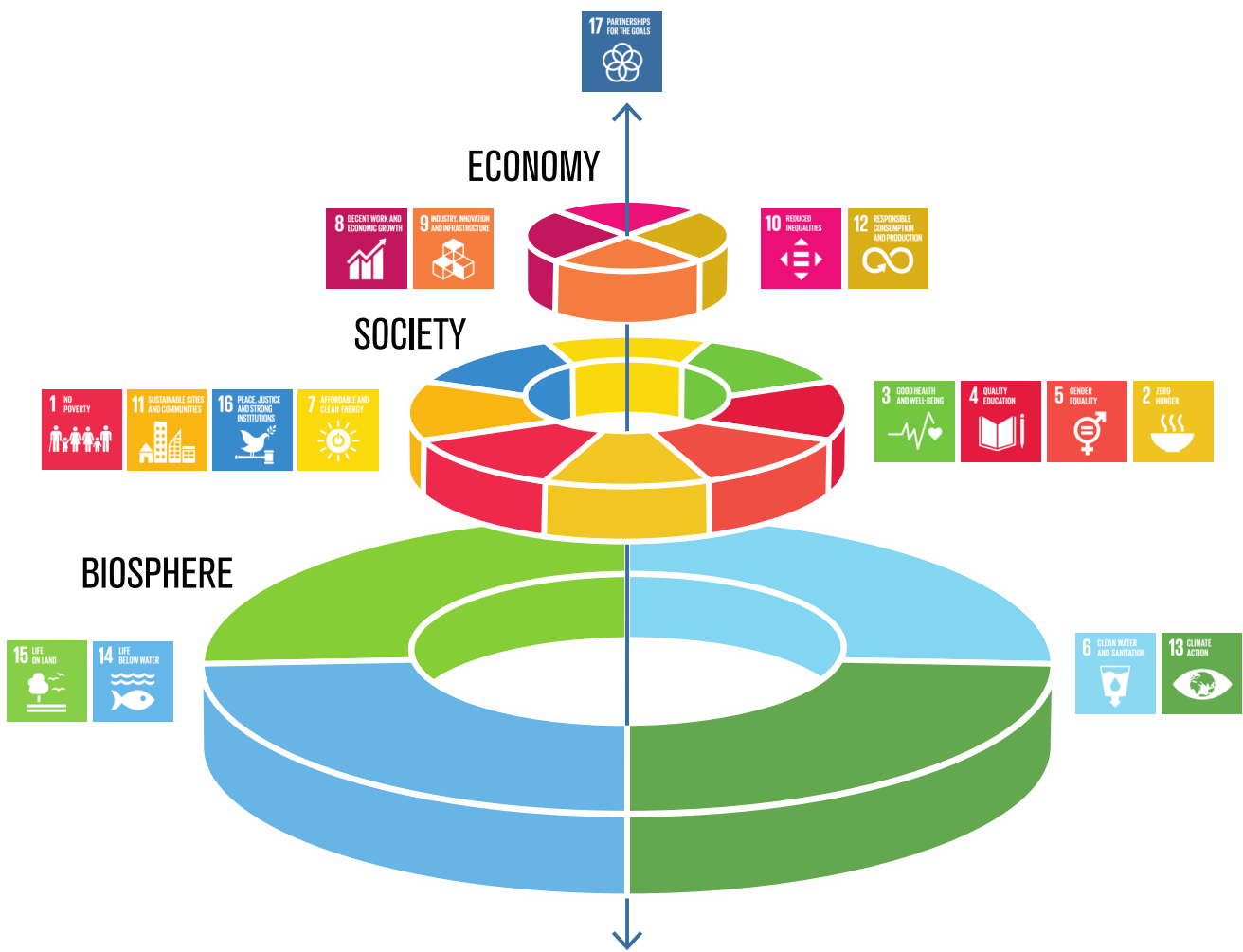
# The last urban migration:

## What do we measure and for whom?

UNSW Engagement at the Times Higher Education Global Sustainable  
Development Congress

June 2024





**Figure 1** Environmental systems and functions are essential to supporting subsequent societal and economic SDG aspirations (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2016).

## Universities play a critical role in accompanying change and progress as creators and disseminators of knowledge and as drivers of innovation.

*Alongside government and industry, universities contribute significantly to economic development and societal wellbeing. As the global community begins to look to a post-Sustainable Development Goals agenda, universities must now be at the vanguard of those considering diverse world views of change and progress.*

*As a global research-centred knowledge resource, UNSW is committed to strategic accompaniment with key partners such as the United Nations (UN), and other multilateral and regional organisations to support community- determined outcomes in the Asia-Pacific region (APAC). These partnerships, alongside government and industry, seek to provide practical support and solutions for resilience to some of the most divisive contemporary global sustainability challenges such as climate change exacerbated displacement; environmental and health issues in small island developing states; water, energy, food security; and coastal/marine adaptation. Emphasising a community-centred approach, UNSW research and training partnerships place community capabilities and dignity at the centre, while also acknowledging contextual factors that cause vulnerability.*

*Since 2022, UNSW has adopted a whole-of- institution approach to support the UN to accelerate sustainable development. In collaboration with the United Nations Development Coordination Office, UNSW has jointly curated and convened interactions in Australia, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji between the UN and academia to pilot knowledge partnerships on development priorities in the Asia Pacific region.*

*Alongside our partners at the UN, UNSW honours the global effort to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and accepts that success will be partial. Notwithstanding the fact that the SDGs have provided a multi-decade framework for collective action on sustainability across the world absent any other, now is the time to consider other orientations of change and progress as they relate to human beings and nature. As a content partner for the Times Higher Education Global Sustainable Development Congress 2024, UNSW is committed to conversations that intentionally provoke self-critical reflections of knowing and encourage new imaginings of how change and progress may be indicated.*





# THE LAST URBAN MIGRATION: WHAT DO WE MEASURE AND FOR WHOM?

## ABSTRACT

The Asia Pacific region (APAC) is home to almost half the world's population. External investment and proactive planning are driving the region's cities to rapidly transition to more technologically complex, dense, multicultural and innovative economies and communities. Migration has often been conceptualised as having a certain permanence – in logics, demographics and crises. But the rapid transitions in our region (social, demographic, age etc.) put additional and unforeseen pressures on the shape and nature of our booming cities.

There is an urgency around enabling city systems in the APAC to transition at pace to respond to significant stressors for the wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants. Our cities will need new measures that encompass emerging, global and local paradigms, for intergenerational equity.

The scale of climate impacts, number of people at risk and economic forces in the region, significantly due to demographics, are unique and pressing. There will inevitably be the need for decisions and trade-offs about how we understand indicators of change in a transparent and fair way.

## ENGAGEMENT DESCRIPTION

UNSW hosted an interactive workshop at the Times Higher Education Global Sustainability Congress in June 2024. The event aimed to understand key challenges and open a conversation about how cities transition. It united scholars from across UNSW and its partners with grassroots experts and global multilateral organisations. It was convened by the UNSW Cities Institute, with a leadership team grounded in urban practice and policy.

In the Pacific, current SDG progress is not on track to achieve any of the SDGs by 2030, with major progress needed across all environmental, societal, and economic realms. Progress towards each of the SDGs should not come at the expense of the others. Adding further complexity, new methodologies to meet recent national targets for net zero greenhouse gas emissions under the 2050 Paris Agreement are now also being developed.

The workshop drew on good practice to showcase key emblematic issues that researchers from UNSW and our partner institutions are grappling with: climate behaviour, risk and stress; urban migration (both in developing and developed contexts); listening to Indigenous knowledge; and wellbeing. These issues will be framed by:

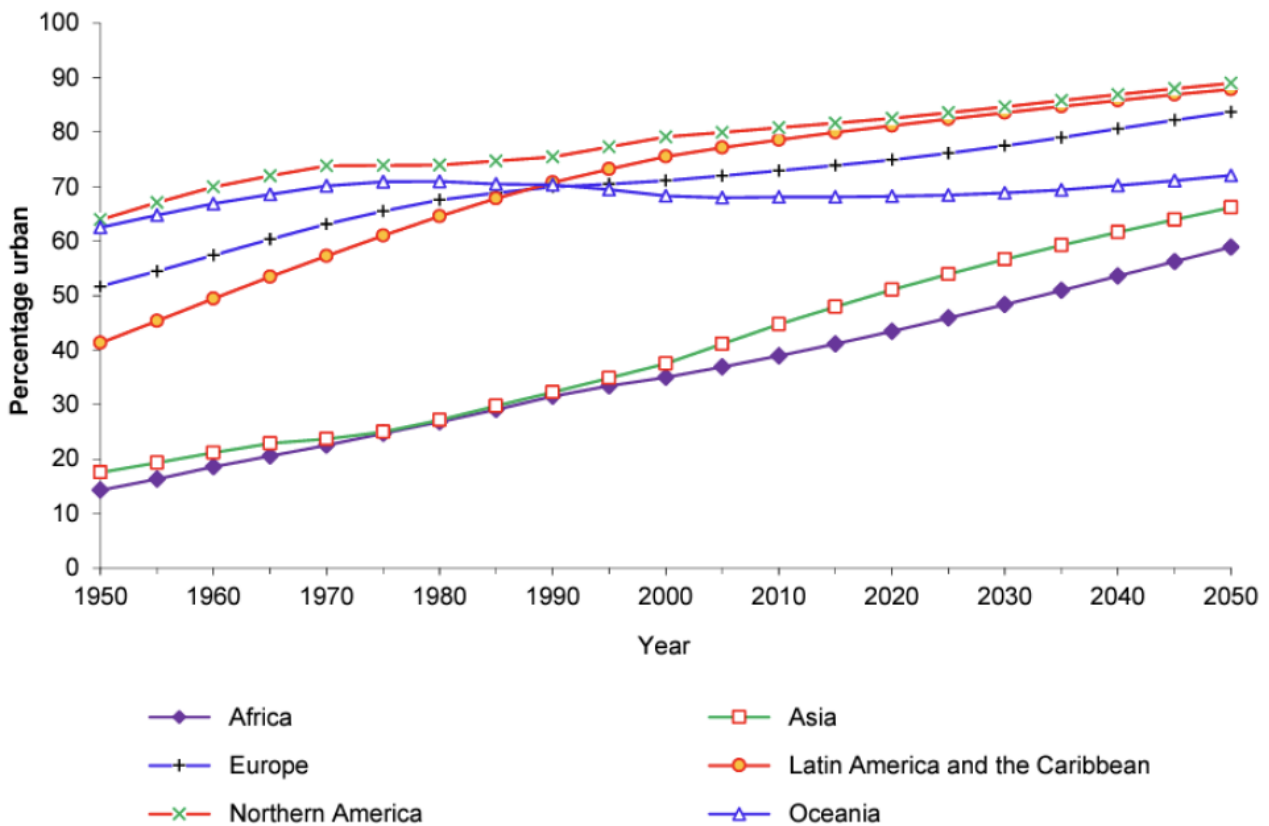
- **How we measure progress in APAC cities:** The region will need measures that are specific to context and place given traditional measures are not encompassing. This is because of the scale of climate impacts in the region, the numbers of people at risk and the spectacular financial and economic opportunities on offer in the region, in part due to demographics.
- **How we facilitate long term intergenerational equity through multiple knowledge systems:** The region can learn from multiple knowledge systems, understanding that in places with long-standing or Indigenous populations, sustainability for intergenerationality is built into the ways of knowing (ontology), being (epistemology) and doing (axiology).

This document is arranged into three sections. First, we frame the challenge in the Framing section (pg. 5). Second, we delve into three emblematic issues (pg. 12). Third, we summarise the themes that emerged during interactive group discussion and via an anonymous Slido engagement tool.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Pacific is at the forefront on both the call for increased ambition to address anthropogenic climate change as well as its ultimate and irreversible impact: forced migration. By bringing together a different configuration of knowledge, both in research excellence and in the connection between research, policy and practice, the intended outcomes of the workshop are to:

- elicit priorities and indicators of change for APAC cities who face a growing climate adaptation emergency and intergenerational inequalities.
- identify questions and measures for sustainable cities and communities in our region to support city and regional governments, and businesses to drive adaptive, inclusive and regenerative practice.
- ignite a community of practice for change making in our region, connecting research to policy and practice to impact.



**Figure 2** Percentage of population residing in urban areas by geographic region, 1950-2050 (World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2018 Revision)

# FRAMING

## THE LAST URBAN MIGRATION

**Professor Peter Poulet**, *Director, UNSW Cities Institute*

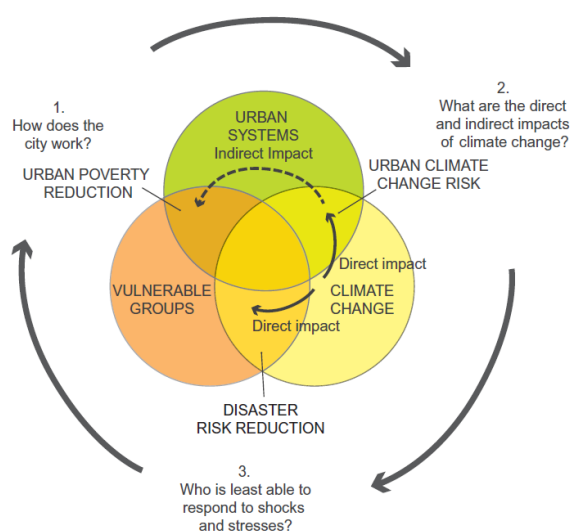
**Hannah Bolitho**, *Manager Strategy, UNSW Cities Institute*

For millennia, cities have been incubators of culture and civilisation. Crowded, complex and rich in humanity, they have driven prosperity, inspired innovation and are constantly being re-shaped by economic, demographic and climate stressors. It is estimated that by 2050, more than two thirds of the global population will seek to build their lives in cities (see Figure 2), but pressing social, environmental and economic crises, headlined by the global climate emergency and political unrest, are contributing to rising inequality and increasing tensions in these urban centres.

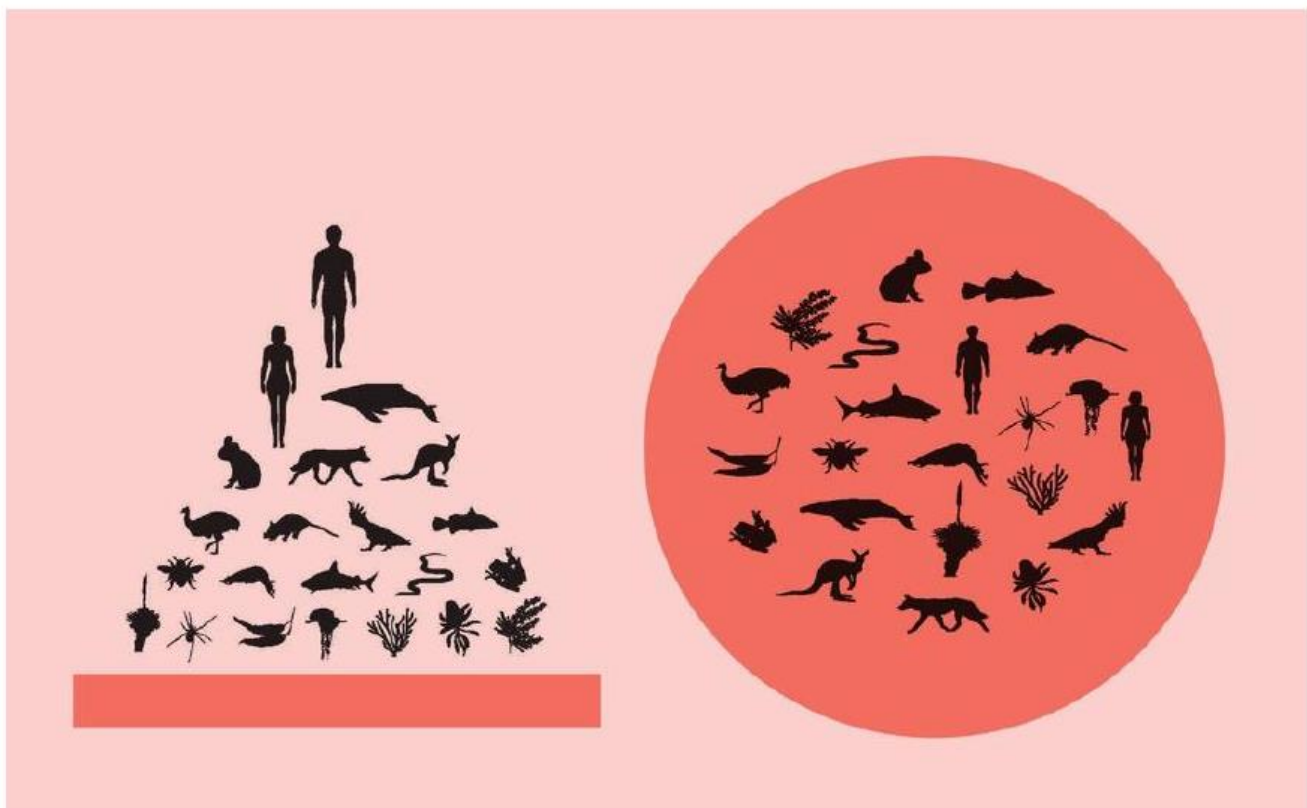
The last urban migration is happening here and now. The APAC is the fastest growing region, with 17 mega cities, some highly advanced and prosperous and others with significant migrations pressures from rural and remote populations driven by any number of factors: from climate change to economic opportunity.

Responding to these challenges will require collaboration between practitioners, academics, futurists, policy makers, analysts and experts who take a holistic view of the world and our urban landscapes. Critical will be those with a spatial understanding of the implications of these challenges, those grounded in practice and urban policy who approach these problems through the lens of what matters and for whom to ensure that cities of the future are both sustainable and equitable. Understanding how we make that happen is one of the most fundamental and urgent policy challenges of our time.

This paper is designed to provoke critical thinking on the role of measurement of change and multiple knowledge systems for intergenerational, health, wellbeing and planetary equity. The remainder of this paper includes contributions from the participants that form the basis of the Workshop interaction. See Figures 3 and 4 as examples of multiple knowledge systems.



**Figure 3** Climate impacts: a compound effect combining direct impacts, indirect impacts and pre-existing vulnerabilities. (International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development · November 2012)



**Figure 4** Shifting from human centred to Country centred (Image: adapted diagram (Eco v Ego, 2010) by Steffen Lehmann)

## METRICS THAT MATTER

**Associate Professor Melissa Edwards**, *Director of Research and Innovation, Centre Social Impact*

### **Systems level – reframing our focus on principles, meaningful metrics and new economic models.**

We have long strived to achieve ‘economics with a human face’, with a recognition that GDP is only a measure of market activity that fails to guide progress through meaningful metrics, such as socio, cultural and environmental progress.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are an exemplar of the global efforts to progress from broad principles in the Global Compact to a comprehensive dashboard of measures. Yet almost halfway through the decade, despite progress towards some goals, others are stalled or in decline. Studies reveal limitations as goals may be incommensurate and may obfuscate new headwinds that emerge in locales at city, regional or community scales.

While goals are necessary parts of the solution, they are not sufficient as they focus on ends rather than means and in a hyper globalised economy their attainment can manifest geopolitical competition driven by sovereign political and commercial interests. For instance, despite the global agreement on climate action goals through the Paris Agreement, legislative and regulatory policies of regions and nations have not coalesced.

Global coordination is urgently needed to address existential threats and stressors such as anthropocentric climate change, breeches of planetary boundaries, and persistent and widening inequalities. Policies and alternate economic models are plentiful; for instance, developmental,

sociological, political and ecological economics, where energy, matter, flows and life are made visible and central. Yet resistance to these models pervades and remains. We are limited by our past in that data sets have not systematically gathered information through broader indicator sets and where this exists it is often national, making it difficult to see localised patterns and trends.

Without systemic attention to the indicators of progress that expand our collective imagination to our embeddedness in the Earth System and reliance on humanitarian virtues, and coordinated principles and mechanisms to guide sovereign decision-making, visions of thriving societies on a habitable planet are pushed aside for continued journeys on competitive trajectories that deplete the living planet and manifest humanitarian poly-crises.

### **Considerations and questions**

- How do we escape from old ideas of unidimensional metrics and end goals, and unbound the collective imagination to reset our compass and coordinate means for orienting development through meaningful metrics?
- What data sets can inform such new models and metrics?
- What institutional forms are needed to view and gather such data?
- Over what time-periods -especially to consider intergenerational matters? For whom?

### **Meso level – communities and organisations**

As we organise economies through global value chains and service-dominated activities in concentrated urban locales, optimising financial flows through investment and finance mechanisms dominate decision-making frameworks. Financial flows are directed through the efficient attainment of goals and targets that are developed, measured, and accounted for within various organised structures such as corporations, social economy organisations and government agencies.

In recent times assessment frameworks have departed from strictly measuring economic or financial performance, to include non-financial metrics through what has become a proliferation of sustainability (or Environmental, Social and Governance) metrics, frameworks and tools. Despite this proliferation of indicators, we remain divided over the assessment and materiality of these metrics. Are they to be assessed based on their optimisation of the organisation's performance? Or in terms of the difference they made in enhancing positive social and ecological impacts?

Furthermore, these metrics are once again goal-oriented, structured, and bound in technical systems that further distance us from the lived experience of the impacts of those organised activities on the lives of people in urban and regional communities and the nonliving world in which they are situated. Such technical accounting and reporting systems further distance decision-makers from the consequences of their actions in places, spaces, and cultures.

### **Considerations and questions**

- What forms of positive pursuits could guide our everyday lived experiences of the difference we make?
- What are the underlying characteristics of any form of pursuits – (1) who or what is affected or experiences the outcome of change [stakeholders], (2) scale – how many or how big an area are effected? (3) depth and breadth of change - and likely spillover and ripple effects or unintended consequences on others, (4) temporality – how soon will the effect be realised? Is it lasting? Dynamic (changes itself over time), (5) significance – how important is this for those experiencing the issue or the outcome?
- How can we prioritise organising forms that value ecologies and flourishing societies and communities?



## Individual level – recrafting logic models through a process lens, complexifying our tools and practices

Within all this complexity, we have at least made progress in measuring what matters and the difference we make over time. Alongside the recent turn to focus on outcomes and impacts, as opposed to optimising outputs, there is convergence on logic models as a mechanism for implementing and assessing programs on meaningful indicators of social impact. Most of us are predisposed to forms of action planning and goals as means to motivate and guide our activities towards certain outcomes. Indeed the entire fields of development studies, strategic planning and social impact are based on setting a focus on goal-oriented trajectories.

Yet the methods employed, for instance in measuring impact, are limited. Impact is about assessing the difference that a bounded activity set has made in addressing the problem context against the specific baseline. It is a linear model, bounded by assumptions about theories of change and causality. Impacts are presumed to occur through goals-oriented sets of activities that are siloed by topic, which themselves may be interdependent and have non-linear effects on one another. These silos do not account for the complex feedback loops, cascading effects (for instance when a critical threshold is transcended), and temporal delays or discontinuities that can emerge, and the effects that are irreversible or which could have knock-on effects for other ‘material topics’.

Underlying assumptions and beliefs about the theory of changes are rarely articulated, nor are alternate scenarios proposed or deliberated. We do very little to question our underlying assumptions, values and guiding principles and so filter out potentialities of futures unimagined to give attention to more well-known/likely certainties while preconfiguring our systems, organisations and relationships such that eventuate a future state based on our past histories.

In striving for progress toward targets and goals, those that are obtainable are more likely prioritised over those intractable issues.

Are we missing the trees for the forest? In defining outcomes for a system of activities, might we be better equipped to value the multiplicity of values, make explicit assumptions and act through virtuous behaviours, rather than end-oriented goals?

## CENTRING COUNTRY AND VALUING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

**Samantha Rich**, *First Nations Senior Project Officer, UNSW Cities Institute*

Our cities, spaces and places need to connect to and care for ‘Country’. Country is a term we use to refer to our connection with place. It’s hard to define simply, as there is a multiplicity of meanings which will differ from Nation, Language group to individual. However, to understand the cultural context, here is a definition from Shannon Foster, Tharawal woman, and a traditional Knowledge Holder of the Sydney region.

*“Country is often misunderstood as being synonymous with land, but it goes far beyond that. It comprises of ecologies of plants, animals, water, sky, air and every aspect of the ‘natural’ environment. Country is a spiritual entity: she is Mother. She is not separate to you: All things are connected, everything is interrelated.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Foster, S., Paterson Kinniburgh, J., & Wann Country. (2020). There’s no place like (without) country. *Placemaking fundamentals for the built environment*, 63-82.

It is a commonly held practice among many Indigenous peoples across the world, that our knowing (ontology), being (epistemology), and doing (axiology) is intertwined and deeply rooted in place. How we see the world, self, and wellbeing is directly connected to the place in which we originate from<sup>2</sup>. This is articulated in research with the Yawuru community in Broome (Northwest Australia), who speak of 'mabu liyan' meaning 'good spirit', they see mabu liyan as being directly tied and connected to the health of Country, culture and community<sup>3</sup>. 'Mabu liyan' (good spirit) is a holistic understanding of positive wellbeing that incorporates personal, social and environmental aspects that contribute to a good life. A concept which is commonly held amongst Aboriginal people that links the health of Country to the health of people. This perspective shows the importance of centring Country in all our thinking, practices and policies to plan and design better, more resilient and sustainable cities and spaces.

The values and principles for how we can centre Country lie in the 4 'R's that many Aboriginal Elders speak of<sup>4</sup>;

- **Respect:** for Knowledge Holders, and Country.
- **Responsibility:** to care for Country, and community.
- **Reciprocity:** which is fundamental in our culture between people, communities, and Country.
- **Relationships and Relationality:** understanding all the relationships within Country and community which are fundamental to design a relational and holistic way.

Built examples of how to centre Country in the planning and design of spaces have started to come about from a planning policy framework in NSW called 'Connecting with Country'<sup>5</sup>. Two examples of how Country can be embedded, is in the usage of traditional place names and valuing Indigenous knowledge of place.

### Traditional place names

An ancient river located in Wianamatta (or Western Sydney) the Dyarrubin/ Deerubbun was renamed after The Baron of Hawkesbury (Charles Hawkesbury) by Governor Philip in 1789, despite Hawkesbury never actually visiting Australia<sup>6</sup>.

Traditionally, every place and distinctive feature would have a name, encoded in that name is the history, geography and cultural knowledge. These are shared understandings of Country, by those that live and use those areas, and are integral to a group or group's understanding of its history, rights, and responsibility for that place.

Place names sit in context with one another, as Country is relational, place names are part of larger naming systems, and each single name can be embedded with stories of important events and landmarks involving Ancestral beings in the landscape. They are wayfinders, and memory aiders, they are clues to the way Country was understood, used and experienced and say something about that place.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin, K., & Mirraoopa, B. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian studies*, 27(76), 203-214.

<sup>3</sup> Yap, M., & Yu, E. (2019). Mabu liyan: the Yawuru way. In Routledge handbook of indigenous wellbeing (pp. 261-280). Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Langton, M. (2002). The edge of the sacred, the edge of death: Sensual inscriptions. *Inscribed landscapes: marking and making place*, 253-269.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/connecting-with-country.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Clugston, Niall, Hawkesbury River, Dictionary of Sydney, 2008, [https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/hawkesbury\\_river](https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/hawkesbury_river), viewed 10 Jun 2024

Bernadette Hardy, a local Dharug Cannemegal woman and designer from Sydney articulates:

*"These pasts are **still** present, just because the names are changed doesn't mean the Land isn't speaking the language and Law of the Land." "By looking in the rearview mirror and understanding the deep time and wisdom held in our place names, we learn from the Law of the land to shape spaces that truly belong. This reflection demonstrates that listening and reflection **are** progress. It honours our methodologies and history, and it cultivates environments of custodianship that care for Country, where all feel connected, respected, valued, seen, and, most importantly, a sense of belonging."*

### **Valuing story & deep cultural knowledge**

Our culture is the longest living culture on earth, we carry over 65,000 years of Knowledge of the land we now call Australia. If the Australian community can acknowledge the ongoing history of its Indigenous people and value alternative knowledge systems - this will enable practitioners, policy makers and developers to design more appropriately, to broaden the knowledge of that place and understand where and how to build and design which works relationally with Country.

An ancestral story of the Newcastle area tells of a history of earthquakes that occurred in the past. The local Worimi and Awakabal groups warned settlers of this occurrence. Unfortunately, they were not listened to and in 1989 a large earthquake occurred killing 13 people and injuring hundreds. Many buildings were destroyed and damaged and the damage bill totalled over \$4 billion dollars<sup>7</sup>. If the local Aboriginal community had been listened to and their local knowledge valued, the buildings, engineering and infrastructure could have been designed and planned appropriately to prepare for this type of natural event.

There are lessons in the past that we have not learnt from, with development continuing to ignore Indigenous knowledge and advice about place in the planning and design of towns in Wianamatta. This continues to occur as outlined by Bernadette Hardy;

*"Wiyanga Matta, meaning 'mother place,' refers to the fertile waterways interconnected in Badu Dharug Ngurra, a freshwater Dharug Country. These interconnected and fertile riparian corridors are located in what is now known as South Western Sydney. These arteries travel and connect all the way up to the Dyarubbin. On this matriarchal Country, its deep-time fertility is crucial to the well-being and belonging of all life on Earth, especially as it is experiencing rapid development, aerotropolis, and the heat island effect during the climate crisis. She is the CEO, our mother, our matriarch, and must be cared for as the most important protocol of all progress."*

The knowledge system and principles of Indigenous culture designs in relational ways with Country to value more than human beings and design holistically for entire systems. It aims to design with the future health of Country and communities in mind as well as helping to address many of the challenges we face in our cities now and in the future. Planning, policy and design need to continue to adapt and embed Indigenous knowledge and values to address these challenges in order to prevent the same mistakes from occurring again.

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<sup>7</sup> Geoscience Australia (2023) 30 years on – commemorating the 1989 Newcastle earthquake, Geoscience Australia. Available at: <https://www.ga.gov.au/news/30-years-on-commemorating-the-1989-newcastle-earthquake> (Accessed: 09 May 2024).

# EMBLEMATIC ISSUES

## URBANIZATION, DIVERSITY, AND INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY

**Michael Rose**, *Chairperson, Committee for Sydney*

The Australian continent has a First Nations history spanning at least 60,000 years. The Australian nation on the other hand has a relatively recent history - 235 years of colonisation and mass migration. In Sydney approximately 49 percent of the population are migrants or the children of migrants. This is a higher percentage than most cities in the world, including high migration cities like New York and Los Angeles.

Sydney has expanded constantly over the last 80 years as successive generations of migrants have arrived. Many of these migrants have settled on the Western and South-western edges of the sprawling Greater Sydney area. This period of constant urban expansion has been characterised by poor planning and chronic underinvestment in infrastructure, especially in mass transit and social infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and community housing. As a result, there is a clear spatial dimension to inequality in Sydney.

Despite significant recent investment in new infrastructure and other planning and policy responses, much remains to be done. Significant challenges remain in relation to housing, access to employment and access to health and education services. In addition, the edges of the Sydney region have greater exposure to climate related risks and costs.

The spatial inequality in Sydney maps closely to the demography of migrant Sydney. Those areas with large migrant communities have a younger and faster growing population than the older and more affluent areas of the city. As a result, there is also a clear spatial dimension to issues of generational equity in Sydney.

Responding to Sydney's challenges is complicated by a three-tier system of government, with Federal, State and 35 municipal governments involved in the governance of Greater Sydney. This governance structure and the political, administrative, legal and economic structures which underpin it, are often an impediment to necessary change. In responding to its current challenges, Sydney needs to strike a careful balance. It needs to respond to existing spatial inequality, and plan for a more resilient and sustainable future, without exacerbating intergenerational inequity by transferring the costs of action to future generations. Getting this balance right (or wrong) will have significant implications for Sydney's prosperity, sustainability, social cohesion and resilience.

There is a growing recognition in Sydney that First Nations communities and distinct migrant and cultural communities can bring different perspectives to the opportunities and challenges of urban life. Communities have different preferences and experiences in areas such as housing, placemaking, sustainability and intergenerational responsibility. Finding a true voice for these different perspectives will be critical to Sydney's governance and its future.



## Considerations and questions

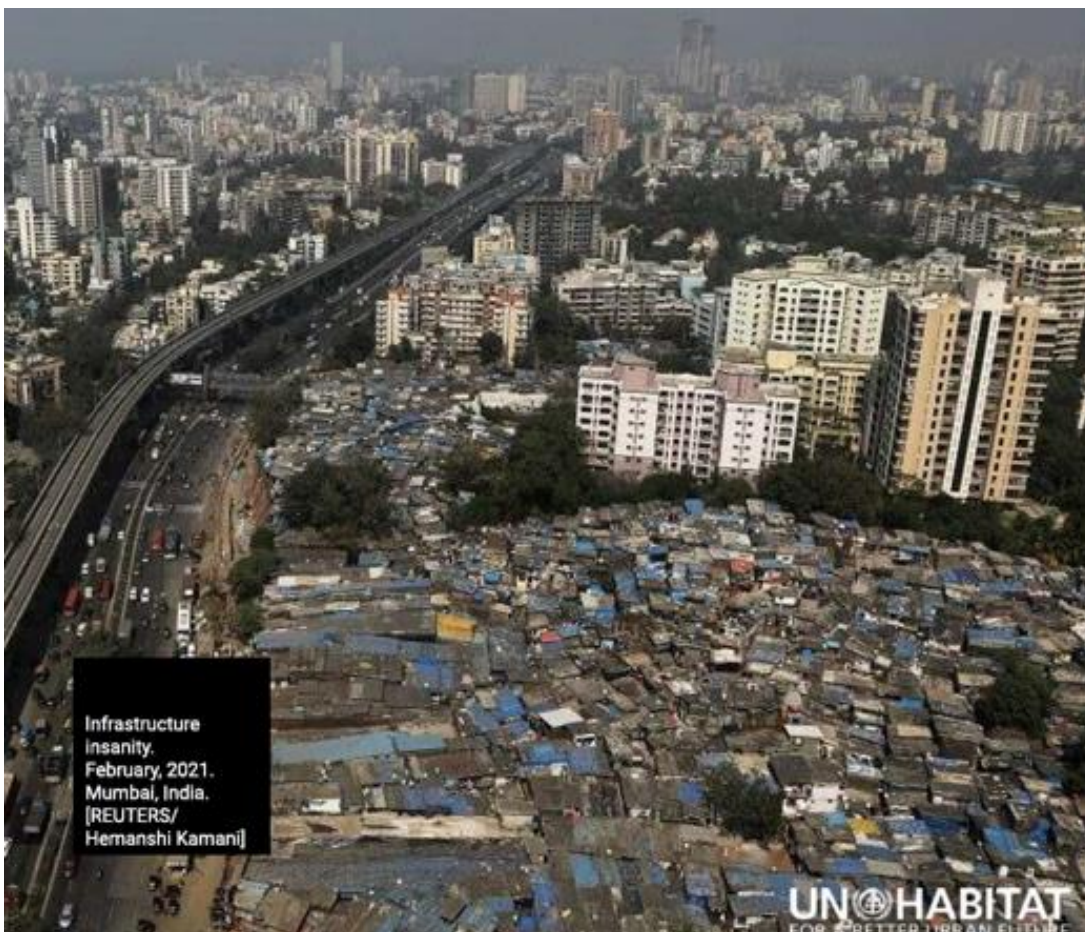
- How do you respond to significant urban challenges without pushing the costs of action (or inaction) on to future generations?
- How do you strike an appropriate balance between urgent sustainability responses and intergenerational equity?
- Who should have a say in striking this balance - First Nations, established communities, migrant communities, young people, communities outside growing cities?
- Are existing urban governance models able to respond adequately to complex urban problems and engage with communities well enough to strike the balance between the conflicting needs and aspirations of both current and future citizens?

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND EQUITABLE SERVICES

**Mr Srinivasa Popuri**, *UN-Habitat Bangkok Programme Office*

**Mr. Tam Hoang**, *UN-Habitat Bangkok Programme Office*

According to estimates by the World Bank, nearly 70% of the urban infrastructure in India needed by 2047 is yet to be built. At the same time, welfare gains from infrastructure-led integration may amount to at least \$568 billion for South Asia and Southeast Asia. What is the role of global organisations such as UN Habitat to address these issues?



**Figure 8** Infrastructure Insanity Mumbai India (UN Habitat, 2021)



**Welfare gains from  
infrastructure-led  
integration may  
amount to at least  
\$568 billion  
for South Asia and  
Southeast Asia.**

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Figure 9 UN Habitat, 2021

## WHAT IS CITY WELLBEING?

**Dr Jinhee Kim, Scientia Academic, UNSW Cities Institute**

**Professor Evelyne de Leeuw, UNSW Cities Institute**

'City wellbeing' moves beyond the mere absence of disease among urban residents. It fosters flourishing communities that are resilient; they actively contribute to the vibrancy of urban life. City wellbeing puts the complex urban (eco)system at its core and recognises the intricate and reciprocal engagement between urban morphology; climate and economy; places and spaces; and human and planetary aspiration.

Therefore, conventional human-centered health metrics such as life expectancy, mortality rates, morbidity, and health behaviours alone are insufficient indicators of city wellbeing. Similarly, data on multi-dimensional urban environments—such as access to urban green spaces, housing affordability, and environmental quality – are on their own inadequate for capturing this wellbeing dynamic.

To address the challenge of measuring progress in city wellbeing, a scoping of urbanisation trends is required.

### **Urbanisation in the Asia-Pacific region and its wellbeing impacts**

Urbanisation in the Asia-Pacific region is characterised by its speed, scale, and diversity. Urbanisation in the Asia-Pacific happens faster than anywhere else. The proportion of Latin American urbanites grew from 10 percent to 50 percent in 210 years; in the Asia Pacific this took 90 years, and some countries took just 60 years.<sup>8</sup> This unprecedented growth makes provision of infrastructure, jobs and services an ongoing challenge. And these factors are core prerequisites for wellbeing. A major consequence of this development lag is the growth of informal settlements (i.e., slums). These exacerbate the dearth of almost any wellbeing parameter, from water and sanitation to education, services (in health, social and economic realms) and mobility.

The Asia-Pacific region is also home to 17 megacities, more than half of all global megacities. The number is expected to grow to 22 by 2030.<sup>9</sup> Approximately 2.5 billion people, constituting one-third of the global population, reside in Asian-Pacific cities. Policies and decisions that affect city wellbeing – including national, commercial, and global – have large-scale impacts for urban populations in this region. For example, inadequate public transportation planning can lead to greater car-dependencies, which subsequently have large-scale impacts on city wellbeing such as accessibility to services, air pollution and other environmental and health impacts.

The region's cities are home to great diversity. They include high-income countries, megacities, as well as very high small island population densities and pressures, each presenting distinct challenges and priorities.

Urbanisation has also disrupted traditional social and cultural norms, leading to changes in family structures, increased rates of single-person households (as seen in Japan and Korea), and heightened social and mental health issues. Other factors, both human and environment driven, add further pressure to the challenges. Such factors include rapidly ageing populations, climate change, and ecosystem disruption.

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<sup>8</sup> UNDP. Urbanization and Climate Change (Asia-Pacific Issue Brief Series on Urbanization and Climate Change No. 1). 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Habitat-III Regional Report. Asia Pacific Region Quick Facts



## Addressing city wellbeing through boundary spanning

These complex problems cannot be addressed through assemblages of isolated solutions, or with a 'complicated' perspective that suggest the feasibility of series of sectoral and isolated fixes. What is needed is a transdisciplinary approach that applies multiple knowledge systems, involves academic and non-academic actors, and bridges different paradigms.

In practice, different models to promote wellbeing in cities are being utilised such as investing in medical-industrial clusters as economic drivers of urban development, analysing the association between the urban environment and wellbeing, strengthening urban planning codes and regulations and policy tools, and promoting value-driven action for city wellbeing. City wellbeing is also addressed through the lenses of sustainability, ecosystem services, resilience, public health and urban planning. A transdisciplinary approach bridges these knowledge systems and their academic and non-academic actors with the goal of bringing transformative change. And here lies another challenge on metrics and power.

Critical to address immediately are institutional governance structures and visionary leadership to foster transdisciplinary boundary spanning that transcend knowledge systems for city wellbeing in the Asia-Pacific region. The UNSW Cities Institute will act as a catalyst in forging these interactive and transdisciplinary solutions in collaboration with key regional stakeholders such as the Alliance for Healthy Cities (AFHC), World Health Organisation Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WHO-WPRO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and others. Collectively, we need to consider those governance parameters that allow for boundary spanning and transformative actions to measure progress towards advancing city wellbeing.

### Considerations and questions

- In our region, the densest populations on earth live on small independent developing islands in the Pacific. What are the challenges of density (even if overall numbers of people are not high) and the challenges when numbers and density are high (i.e. in mega cities). Which of these two should we focus on and why?
- Can we make cities better places by moving away from 'nature based solutions, to a focus on embracing indigenous cosmology that taps into the actual way things work at a local level?
- How can we make unforeseen costs and trade-offs transparent?



#### One Health

The story that nature, people, animals and ecosystems are interdependent and connected



#### Healthy Cities

The story of a social movement that aspires to put health high on urban social and political agendas



#### Cosmologies

Stories about the reason we (that is, the world; planet; country; land; spirit) exist and make sense



#### One Urban Health

The story of urban settlements being dynamic ecosystems in a planetary context

**Figure 10** Health narratives of the future: One-ness (E.deLeuw, 2024)



## BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE STRESSORS: IS THE INDIVIDUAL OR THE SYSTEM RESPONSIBLE FOR DRIVING CLIMATE-POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR?

**Professor Ben Newell**, *Director UNSW Institute for Climate Risk and Response*

Psychology is the science of mind and behaviour. Its *raison d'être* is to go beyond our common-sense understanding achieved via introspection. Measurement is crucial in this endeavour: without measurement we cannot assess changes in attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and most importantly, behaviour. Measurement allows us to test our theories and build an understanding that can effect change.

The application of psychological theory is essential to drive behaviour change in response to the climate crisis. Growing awareness of the impacts of climate change is increasing the appetite for large-scale behaviour change. But how do we reach the 'social-tipping points' in behaviour required for real impact on emissions and thereby the future evolution of the climate?

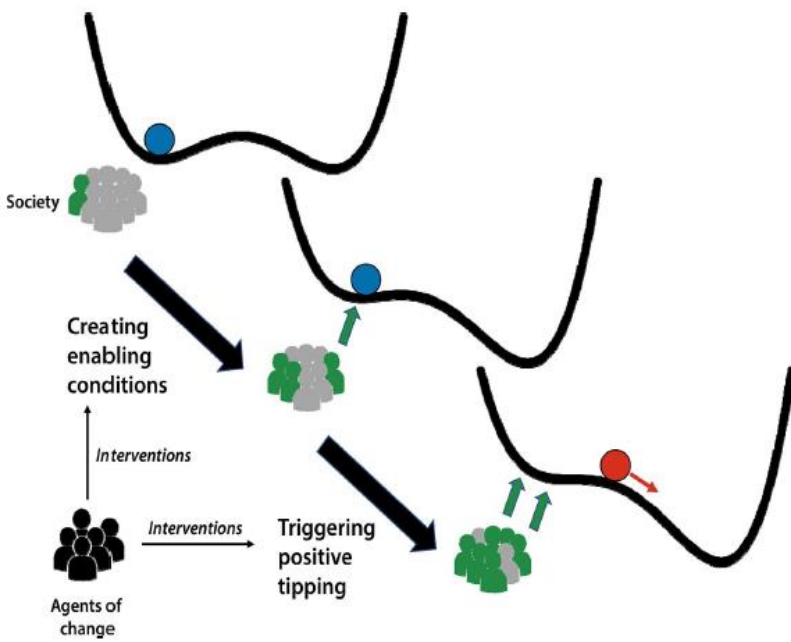
Social tipping points are often compared to climate tipping points – physical changes in the Earth's systems that can precipitate cascading, non-linear impacts at a devastating and unprecedented scale, such as the melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet. We need the same unprecedented, fundamental and wholesale change in the social fabric of our world if we are to avoid the worst outcomes of climate change. We need positive social tipping points (see Figure 11).

How will we achieve this change in our cities of the future? Just as our behaviour is affected by the surrounding physical architecture, so too our choices and decisions are influenced by the environment – or 'choice architecture' – in which those choices are made. If an option has been preselected (e.g., green power is the default on my power bill, vegetarian foods are the default on a menu) then it increases the likelihood that a person chooses (or sticks with) that option. Such choice architectures can also impart desired behaviours to people, thereby potentially perpetuating, reinforcing and spilling over into other patterns of behaviours. These impacts may be small, but when implemented at scale harbour great potential.

Can we rely on this purely 'bottom-up' approach, where individuals retain the right to choose, but are encouraged via changes in choice-architectures? Or if we are to precipitate real social tipping points, will we need top-down regulation – the system is changed (e.g. all power is generated via green sources; a meat tax is introduced)? More fundamentally, how do we ensure that these changes – individual or system – take us on an equitable journey toward social tipping points? Not only are people's preferences heterogeneous, but so too is their ability to take advantage of alternative options. Location, socio-economic status and age, are just some of the factors that must be considered if we are to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to change behaviour for the better. How can this be done optimally?

### Considerations and questions

- Should individuals be allocated a personal annual carbon budget to be distributed as they choose but with penalties for exceeding a prescribed amount?
- Should cities introduce vehicle emission taxes, mandate public transport use and other forms of regulation to constrain climate-negative behaviour?
- How do we strike a balance between these individual and system-level changes?
- How do we design cities to make climate positive behaviour the default?



POWER CHOICE STANDARD  
**13.876**  
 ¢/kWh  
(default)

POWER CHOICE GREEN  
**14.658**  
 ¢/kWh  
(optimal)

# INTERACTIVE PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

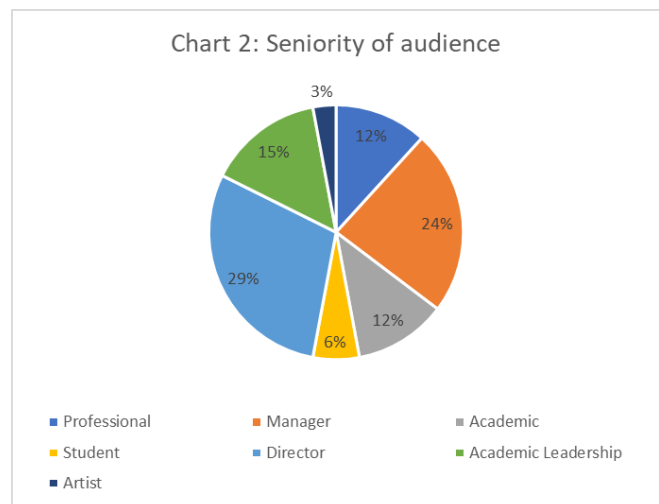
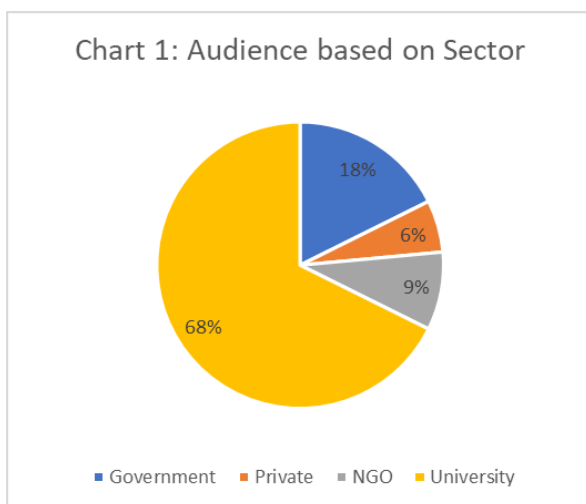
The above framing and emblematic issues were presented via a discussion panel to an audience of approximately 60 delegates at the Times Higher Education Global Sustainable Development Congress in June 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand. The discussion panel was introduced by Peter Poulet, and featured Melissa Edwards, Michael Rose, Samantha Rich, Tam Hoang, Jinhee Kim and Ben Newell (see Picture 1).



Picture 1: Members of Discussion Panel (L-R: Mel Edwards; Michael Rose; Samantha Rich; Tam Hoang; Jinhee Kim; Ben Newell)

## Audience Profile

Based on the attendee list provided by Times Higher Education, the delegates came from the following sectors: university, government, nongovernment organisations and private sector (see Chart 1).



Delegates ranged in seniority from professional staff to Vice Chancellor-level leadership. Chart 2 shows portions of audience based on seniority.

## Interactive Workgroups

Following the discussion panel, delegates were divided into six groups based on self-selected seating arrangements. Each group included two facilitators and 7 – 10 delegates. Group facilitators included:

- Melissa Edwards and Kelly Clemmens,
- Ben Newell and Smanatha Stanley,
- Jinhee Kim and Meg Walker,
- Samantha Rich and Michael Burnside,
- Michael Rose and Iain Payne, and
- Hannah Bolitho and Charlotte Cadman.

(See Picture 2 for photos from the interactive group session, which engaged all attending delegates).

The groups were asked to discuss two themes:

- Urban considerations in your context.
- Metrics that matter in your context.



Pictures 2: Photos from the Interactive Groups Session



## Individual Considerations

Concurrently, participants were asked to provide their individual considerations via Slido on the following questions:

- In your opinion and from your context, what are the urban considerations and principles that need to be taken forward for a 'post SDG' agenda?
- How should we collectively make sure these principles produce change?

Respondents were additionally asked "what table are you sitting at?".

Thirty-one delegates responded to the Slido survey.

## Key Themes

Following the workshop, UNSW Cities Institute conducted a qualitative review of the interactive workgroup notes and Slido responses. Notes and responses were organised according to interactive workgroup table. We identified "key themes" as those that arose in three or more groups. "Key themes" include:

- **Change:**
  - Intensity.
  - Pace.
  - Fear.
- **Responsibility:**
  - Leadership.
  - Communal/Collective vs. Individual/Capitalist.
  - Ownership.
  - Accountability.
  - Transparency.
- **Invisibility:**
  - Unheard voices.
  - Unseen.
  - Missing metrics / data.
  - Political.
  - Aggregated data can miss inequality and disparities.
- **Narration / Storytelling:**
  - Listening.
  - Changing perspectives.
  - Unheard voices.
  - SDGs tell a shared story.
- **Resilience:**
  - Scepticism.
  - Community.
  - Social.
- **Relationships:**
  - Local and global governance structures.
  - Separate communities living in geographic proximity (isolation / interaction / integration).

