Preface

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In the few last decades, major issues as climate changes, economic gap, and social disparities have become so relevant that we have had to rethink established paradigms that have guided our actions until now. The global commitments to achieve energy neutrality¹ and the sustainable development goals of the UN 2030 Agenda² have accelerated with the allocation of substantial economic resources to start implementation. For instance, the “Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” of the UN 2030 Agenda could represent an incentive to a crosswise change, starting from the urban space, making them smarter and inclusive. Some of Goal 11’ targets³ are mentioned below: by 2030, will need to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory; ensure access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums, and accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, etc.

This direction is shared by many states because of the covid-19 pandemic crisis that has widened the gaps and shown the unsustainability of the current development model. The changes imposed by the pandemic emergency have led to a new interest in the smart city model in terms of efficiency and safety. It is no coincidence that the digital transition is one of the main objectives to be achieved in the short term to ensure greater accessibility to services, especially health services, mobility infrastructure, and more liveable cities in general. In recent years cities are playing an increasingly important role as privileged places to initiate the necessary transition towards new models of economic development and renewed forms of coexistence and citizenship. This is because the city is a favorable dimension for launching new projects where integration between supranational and local policies takes place. Many European experiences⁴ show that cities are capable of being more ambitious and incisive than national governments in bringing local intelligence into dialogue with large-scale policies.

Recently, it was also launched the European Union’s flagship Research and Innovation program, the Horizon Europe (2021-2027), part of the EU-long-term Multianual Financial Framework (MFF). It has a budget of €95,5bn, including €75,9bn from the MFF and €5bn from the Next Generation Europe, to spend over seven years. In detail, the Next Generation EU (NGEU) plan⁵ for the period 2021-2027, is a tool for the fair, sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic recovery of the Member States with funding programs aimed at reforms and research on resilience and transition fields. Other voluntary initiatives are been launched by European Union to guide the transition toward inclusive and accessible spaces after the pandemic, as the New European Bauhaus, a creative and interdisciplin ary initiative based on circular economy and oriented to create proactive and collaborative societies.

The challenges posed by these complex programs can be met if multi-level governance of coordination and continuous interaction between the national directorate, regional authorities, research, and economic and social stakeholders is put in place. From this perspective, it is crucial that the actors involved in the co-creation process work in networks with each other to develop holistic visions for increasing the innovation and smartness of the cities.
The International Journal of Urban Planning and Smart Cities promotes interdisciplinary research, essential to encourage the dissemination of virtuous processes and results because it favors international exchange and collaboration and improves the territories’ quality of life. The research could guide the overcoming the crisis.

In this direction, the contributions collected in the First Issue, Third Volume, of the IJUPSC outline integrated governance approaches and strategies in response to various contemporary questions such as housing needs, demographic contraction, and privacy in smart cities. In detail, the issue starts with an article that outlines the evolutionary framework of disciplinary scientific research and its development in defining the Smart City concept and the main evaluation criteria of smartness and smart urbanism in Europe, by analyzing the EU development programs and highlighting the innovation introduced by European policies across three European programs. Two manuscripts explore, then, by adopting an international perspective, the affordable housing issue, and the urban housing crisis. They propose alternative building technologies to overcome economic difficulties to purchase and maintain a house and define sustainable strategies and policies to address the shrinkage urban phenomenon. Other contributions of this Issue focus on the evolution of the smart city, which is increasingly oriented towards integrating the urban structure with information and communication technologies (ICTS). If it is true that the use of technologies and sensors guarantees greater efficiency, and high quality of life, at the same time the continuous collection of data relating to the city and its citizens raises questions about the protection of privacy.

To summarize, the topics addressed in this Issue are various, but all recognize that the urban areas and the smart development could be an opportunity to restart. Scientific research has a central role because can contribute to achieving strategic goals established at the international and European level. The manuscripts offer multiple ranges of interesting insights, allowing lectors to investigate some themes and to open others.

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ENDNOTES

1 In the race to reduce emissions, the EU and the US have renewed their commitment to achieving energy neutrality by 2050 as set out in the Paris Climate Agreement.
2 The UN 2030 Agenda is a world’s action program for people, the planet, and prosperity that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and 169 Targets.
4 For example, the European green capital award saw many cities committed to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
5 This instrument required each member state to set up a recovery plan tailored to its criticalities and potentials in order to speed up the transition. In Italy, for example, the PNRR recognizes cities as key players in launching effective sustainable development policies.