

## Editorial

# Urban Landscapes for Mental Health: Intersections and Connections between Wisdom and Innovation in Design

Agnieszka Olszewska-Guizzo <sup>1,2\*</sup>, Erin Sharp-Newton <sup>1,3\*</sup>, Nelida Quintero <sup>1,4</sup>, Dan Gan <sup>1,5</sup>, Greg Rybarczyk <sup>1,6,7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre of Urban Design and Mental Health, Global

<sup>2</sup> Fundacja Neurolandscape, Warsaw, Poland

<sup>3</sup> Kean University, Graduate School of Public Architecture, NJ, USA

<sup>4</sup> Fashion Institute of Technology, NY, USA

<sup>5</sup> Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada

<sup>6</sup> Department of Geospatial Science, University of Michigan-Flint, USA

<sup>7</sup> Michigan Institute for Data and AI in Society, University of Michigan, USA

\* Corresponding Authors: [a.o.guizzo@neurolandscape.org](mailto:a.o.guizzo@neurolandscape.org), [fellow@urbandedesignmentalhealth.com](mailto:fellow@urbandedesignmentalhealth.com)

Volume 9 of the *Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health* examines the interaction between established design principles and new, evidence-based methodologies that foster salutogenic urban ecosystems. As rapid societal, technological, and environmental changes impact our cities, citizens and life, rigorous study is essential to navigating the complex intersections of mental health and urban design. To do this, we continue to highlight what has historically proved successful, as well as future innovations that are both data-informed and resilient. AI-driven advancements are transforming our capacity to analyze human responses to the built environment, accelerating at an unprecedented pace. Yet, as we embrace these new frontiers, we must critically evaluate past lessons and history's warnings, identifying strategies that foster urban well-being. We are delighted to present six contributions that illuminate this vital nexus.

The volume commences with a *Dialogue* piece – a professional portrait of Julie Moir Messervy (Sharp-Newton, 2025). Her extensive practice in both public and private landscape design reflects on the pre-digital insights into the enduring importance of beauty, meaning, and joy in shaping our outdoor surroundings. Her encounter with the abstract perfection of ancient Japanese gardens in Kyoto was a pivotal historic reference, shaping her understanding of contemplative spaces. From the acclaimed Toronto Music Garden to her contemporary explorations in augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) in landscape design, Messervy embodies a unique juxtaposition of enduring wisdom and technological influence.

Moving to the *Research Articles* section, the empirical study by Lori Pullman explores the perception of American community college students interacting on their campus landscape. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, Pullman uncovers the significant impact of spatial attributes on students' stress, anxiety, sense of belonging, and overall well-being (Pullman, 2025). Her findings corroborate the inherent value of nature connection, quality maintenance, and participatory approach to create supportive and appreciated learning environments. This study highlights the design strategies in which thoughtfully designed everyday landscapes can act as emotional, psychological, and developmental touchpoints, echoing the restorative power of nature.

Natasha Reid's contribution, unveils the author's innovative framework towards the design of *Compassionate Places*. The Compassionate Places Method emphasizes a humanistic and interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from public health, environmental psychology, neuroscience, and the arts to intentionally enhance well-being and quality of life through design (Reid, 2025). This work offers a structured methodology for designers and planners to systematically consider the human factors and impacts of their work, transcending purely physical considerations.

Continuing with an exploration of human perception, the research by Astrid Nedee, Ester Higuera, and Helena Moreno Lopez presents an innovative approach to

understanding how individuals visually engage with urban design, particularly building façades in deprived neighborhoods (Nedee et al., 2025). Employing eye-tracking technology and participatory design protocols, the study reveals how specific architectural syntax- symmetry, window design, and maintenance-can modulate subjective well-being and reported distress. By combining new tools with an understanding of human visual processing mechanisms, this research analyzes the established architectural patterns for the creation of more engaging, aesthetically pleasing, and ultimately psychologically supportive urban spaces.

Shifting focus to the broader urban context and environmental factors, the review by Peter J. Crank and Paul Coseo, offers a critical synthesis of the intricate interplay between urban configuration, climate dynamics, and psychological health (Crank & Coseo, 2025). Drawing upon the wisdom of figures such as Ebenezer Howard and Frederick Law Olmsted, who intuitively recognized the importance of urban green space for psychological well-being, the authors illuminate the significant mental health implications of urban heat island phenomena and the capacity of urban design to mitigate its impacts. This review highlights the need for the design community to consider urban climatology as a lens through which to create more thermally comfortable and equitable cities, fostering thermal well-being with both physiological and mental components.

Finally, a timely case study by Aletan and Uwala, who elaborate on the adaptive ingenuity of public urban spaces in Indianapolis in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Aletan & Uwala, 2025). By considering the lessons learned from a global health crisis, this case study demonstrates the wisdom of flexible and adaptable urban design in creating resilient and user-friendly public outdoor spaces that support social connection and well-being in a changing world.

Collectively, we believe the contributions within this volume demonstrate the influence of urban landscapes on mental health, resonating with the accumulated knowledge of prior thinkers while advancing cutting-edge methodologies and design paradigms. From the granular scale of building interfaces and academic precincts to the macro-level considerations of urban climate and post-pandemic public spheres, each manuscript offers invaluable insights for scholars, designers, planners, and policymakers striving to cultivate urban environments that genuinely nurture their inhabitants' well-being. We trust this collection will not only catalyze continued scholarly inquiry but also foster proactive engagement among practitioners at the vital intersection of urban design and mental health.

## References:

- Aletan, O., & Uwala, V. A. (2025). Post-Pandemic Urban Outdoor Dining Spaces Case Study: City Market, Indianapolis, Indiana. *W Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health* (T. 9, Numer 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15114472>
- Crank, P. J., & Coseo, P. (2024). Cityscapes, Climate, and Mental Health: Designing Cities for Thermal Wellbeing. *Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12800033>
- Nédée, A., Higuera, E., & López-Moreno, H. (2025). Beautiful, sustainable and inclusive cities: How visual attention on urban design can inform modern innovations tailored to promote mental well-being in urban settings. *Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15050668>
- Pullman, L. (2025). Landscape, Well-Being and Connection: A Qualitative Study of Community College Students' Perceptions of Campus Attributes. *Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15103773>
- Reid, N. (2025). Compassionate Places: Developing and Implementing a Method for Interdisciplinary, Humanistic Spatial Design and Place Quality Standards. *Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15075950>
- Sharp-Newton, E. (2025). Cultivating Contemplation: Public and Private Landscapes for Mental Health, Well-being and Joy. *W Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health* (T. 9, Numer 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15115033>