

PLENARY & BREAKOUT DISCRPTIONS

HERRENHAUSEN CONFERENCE, APRIL 9-11, 2025

INTERNATIONAL URBAN HEALTH SUMMIT

HERRENHAUSEN PALACE, HANOVER, GERMANY

PLENARIES

PLENARY 1: URBAN PLANNING & GOVERNANCE

Managing the pace of urbanization and promoting an approach to urban planning that fosters human health and wellbeing are at the core of the issues to be explored in this plenary session. The session will also examine ways to mobilize the political leadership to bring multiple stakeholders to the table. To advance a “Health in All Policies” approach that promotes equity is a critical challenge for the future of cities.

PLENARY 2: BUILT ENVIRONMENT & URBAN HEALTH

The built environment includes the infrastructure for housing, transportation, energy, water and sanitation and digital networking that are critical to safe and effective urban growth. This session will discuss how Rapid advancements in technology, engineering and architecture offer opportunities to create healthier and safer environments and assure equity in access to the provision of these core urban services.

PLENARY 3: NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE & URBAN HEALTH

While cities are the economic engines of the globe and most nations, they also account for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions, solid waste and energy consumption. Climate change further exacerbates urban vulnerabilities, intensifying heat effects, sea level rise and pollution. This session will discuss how a healthy city strives to balance the well-being of people, plants and animals alike.

PLENARY 4: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & URBAN DECISION MAKING

Urban governments aim to respond to the needs of their populations offering opportunities to directly engage with and involve residents in decision making that affects their lives. Community leaders, advocates and organizations are increasingly seen as critical partners in this effort. This session will explore innovative, evidence-based methods to maximize meaningful community engagement in urban decision making.

PLENARY 5: AI & URBAN HEALTH

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has enhanced the ability to analyze the vast and complex information that is fundamental to understanding and governing complex urban environments. This session will explore how partnerships across academia, private sector organizations, government and civil society offer unprecedented potential for understanding the critical determinants of health of individuals and populations. Participants will also discuss how these partnerships and provide insights into planning and implementing interventions that can promote health and health equity in cities.

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PLENARY 6: EDUCATION & URBAN HEALTH

In today's urban landscape, comprehensive educational strategies are vital for advancing urban health and resilience. The integration of education and health is essential for creating sustainable and resilient urban environments. This session will explore the connections between urban development and health, highlighting the important role of education in the well-being of communities, particularly from the perspective of children and adolescents. A key focus is on promoting inclusive educational strategies that amplify young voices in urban health initiatives, emphasizing participation and the collaborative development of democratic structures. By employing participatory approaches and community engagement, we can develop targeted solutions that address the needs of urban communities. The discussions aim to generate actionable insights to effectively link education and health, fostering resilience and contributing to sustainable urban environments.

The Plenary Sessions feature 4-6 speakers, including the possibility of an opening impulse of 3-5 minutes followed by a joint discussion.

BREAKOUTS

BREAKOUTS 1 : URBAN PLANNING & GOVERNANCE

Breakout A

Moderator: **HEIKE KÖCKLER**, Bochum University of Applied Sciences / ARL (Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association), Germany

URBAN PLANNING FOR EQUITY AND CITIES' RESILIENCE

Urban planning as one policy field addressing relevant determinants of health is dealt with in this breakout session. The focus will be on ways to reach more health equity within urban societies and to increase cities resilience towards existing challenges like climate change, housing scarcity and pandemics. Insights from Germany, Chile, India and a global perspective will be put for discussion.

Breakout B

Moderators: **CLAUDIA HORNBERG**, Medical Faculty University of Bielefeld, Germany and **SAMUEL GACHOHI NJUGUNA**, UN-Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya

ADDRESSING IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

Even with the best of intentions, urban health and sustainability cannot materialize without robust implementation mechanisms. Implementation of programs and/or legal regulations means "real world" changes – in the environment and in institutions, fostering healthy living conditions. Non-implementation, however, is widespread and needs to be addressed. This session aims to identify steps forward, e.g. via dedicated (legal) case studies concerning the implementation and evaluation of health-promoting and health-protecting tools and actions.

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Breakout C

Moderator: **THOMAS WILLEMEIT**, GRAFT Architects, Berlin, Germany

GOOD PRACTICES – SMALL INTERVENTIONS AND SUBSTANTIAL RETURNS

Since 2012 the architectural studio GRAFT in close cooperation with Charité Berlin examine the influence of architecture on the healing process. Their research focusses on the relevance of daylight, noise, treatment procedures as well as spatial and temporal orientation for the wellbeing and healing of patients in two new prototypical ICUs. What expectations for healing environments do participants of the Urban Health Summit have? Which aspects do they consider relevant for the self-healing? What do participants know about the influence and the impact of environmental factors? The architect Thomas Willemeit from GRAFT and Prof. Dr. Alawi Lütz as the head of the research department of the Charité give insights into the status of the research on perception and effect of "Healing Architecture".

Breakout D

Moderator: **THOMAS GÖTZ**, former Secretary of State for Health in the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg, Germany

GOOD GOVERNANCE WITHIN THE CITY AS A COMPLEX SYSTEM

According to the Dutch public health specialist Machtheld Huber health is the ability to adapt and to self-manage in face of physical, emotional and social challenges. Hence, in the context of the rapidly growing urbanization, health promotion and maintenance should be at the center of urban policymaking. In the recent years it has become clear that health is influenced by various determinants, the concept of social determinants being the most widely known. This is reflected in the so-called health in / for all policies-approach, with health outcomes being heavily influenced by other than genuine health policies. To be healthy and to thrive, cities should focus on intersectoral policymaking and "good" governance. The breakout session will focus on the political (& legal & administrative) determinants of health and the question how „good“ governance within the city as a complex system can be developed, implemented and maintained. What gaps (in knowledge, experience and mindset) exist and how can they be reduced? Following the principle think global, act local, the session looks at the complex German political and administrative system as example with its potential role as blueprint for other countries/cities in mind.

Nature Therapy (repeating Workshop)

Moderator: **LENA GROß**, Yoga and Forest Therapist, Berlin, Germany

NATURE THERAPY AS AN EVIDENCE-BASED URBAN HEALTH PRACTICE

Nature /Forest Therapy is an evidence-based public health practice of guided immersion in forested surroundings with the aim of promoting mental and physical health whilst relaxing and enjoying nature. Its roots lie in the Japanese tradition of Shinrin Yoku. During the breakout you will be guided throughout different sensory, creative and meditative exercises to support your general health, regulate your autonomic nervous system, strengthen the immune system and relief stress in a holistic way.

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ART goes Urban Health (repeating Workshop)

Moderator: **ROMAN KROKE**, Artist, Germany/France

ART GOES URBAN HEALTH: DISCOVER A MEDIUM OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH, REFLECTION, AND STORYTELLING!

No matter if you are a researcher, policymaker, practitioner, pedagogue, community activist or any other representative of the human species: Finding a way of storytelling which fits YOUR personality helps tremendously to build meaningful connections – towards yourself and others, on a personal as well as on a professional level. Nurturing the power and identity of “our stories” provides grounding, indispensable for the psychological well-being in a fast-paced world. The art of storytelling is not just entertainment. It is an intrinsic part of being human and building sustainable communities. In this workshop, Roman invites you to experiment with his approach of interdisciplinary storytelling by applying it directly to your thoughts, questions and sensations arising during the conference.

BREAKOUTS 2 : BUILT ENVIRONMENT & URBAN HEALTH

Breakout A

Moderator: **CLAUDI BOCKTING**, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands and **MAZDA ADLI**, Charité - University Hospital Berlin, Germany

NEUROURBANISM AS A NOVEL APPROACH TO URBAN MENTAL HEALTH

In this breakout session we will focus on urban mental health and discuss new pathways that can be targeted with interventions and policy making to target mental health in urban settings. After a brief pitch of Prof. Mazda Adli, Prof. Reinout Wiers and Prof. Claudi Bockting, we will continue with a discussion to explore the potential for interventions and policy making to target mental health.

Breakout B

Moderator: **ANTHONY CLAYTON**, University of West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Today, about 1.1 billion urban dwellers live in informal settlements, most of them with low quality, overcrowded housing; poor provision for sanitation, drainage and waste collection; a lack of safe water supplies; and limited access to healthcare, emergency services, schools and policing. They are more likely to be located on contaminated soil, unstable slopes and/or flood-prone areas. Global poverty is concentrated in these settlements. These problems will be further compounded by demographic change. The world population is projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050. This growing population will be increasingly urban; about 55% of the world's population currently lives in urban areas, but this is projected to increase to 68% of world population by 2050, which will add another 2.5 billion people to urban populations. This will require the equivalent of 110 new cities each with over 20 million inhabitants (approximately the size of Mexico City today). Without the necessary changes in government policies and urban planning, much of the projected increase in urban populations is likely to be born in or migrate into informal settlements. It is therefore important to address the concentration of social, economic, environmental and health problems in the world's informal settlements and find ways that these communities can be relocated, or regularized and integrated, as appropriate.



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Breakout C

Moderators: **STEFANIE MATTHYS**, “European Network Architecture for Health (ENAH)”, Germany and **COR WAGENAAR**, Expertise Center Architecture, Urbanism and Health at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands

ARCHITECTURE & URBANISM AS THE NEW FRONTIER OF PUBLIC URBAN HEALTH - HOW DO WE KNOW IT WORKS?

Medical professionals, health scientists, and healthcare administrators agree on the value of non-medical interventions for improving public health. It's widely accepted that the impact of these strategies far outweighs that of the medical infrastructure alone. Measuring the impact of architectural and urban interventions provides solid proof that investments are justified and will result in lower healthcare costs. However, scientific proof in architecture and urbanism hardly ever meets the standards of the medical sciences. Comparative research in existing neighborhoods of different design provides valuable information: some models apparently work better than others. However, the urban model will never be the only variable that is different. Demography (age, economic position, education) are also bound to be different. Things become even more complicated when scholars want to assess the impact of planned interventions before they have been realized. This session introduces an urban renewal project in a post-war neighborhood in the city of Groningen and discusses the question: How can we test the outcome of design decisions?

Nature Therapy

see BREAKOUTS 1

ART goes Urban Health

see BREAKOUTS 1

BREAKOUTS 3 : NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE & URBAN HEALTH

Breakout A

Moderators: **REINHARD HÜTTL** Eco-Environment Innovation, Berlin, Germany, **KATRIN SCHNEIDER**, Nantesbuch Soil Initiative, Germany and **UWE SCHNEIDER**, Eco-Environment Innovation, Berlin, Germany

SOIL HEALTH – URBAN HEALTH: STUDY CASE METROPOLITAN AREA BERLIN

Within the next 25 years the proportion of people living in urban areas will account for 70% of the global population. At the same time frame climate change and its extreme weather effects present new challenges for the protection of human health in urban areas depending highly on the quality and availability of water and vegetation. In this context healthy soils play an increasingly important role which generally is overlooked. Hence, the discussion will focus on the urgent relevance of human health and the aspect of a healthy environment, particularly healthy soils, with the metropolitan area of Berlin as a study case. Soils in particular play a key role for urban greening and biodiversity, for the retention and filtering of water, as a sink of dusts and for the ‘thermal well-being’ hence fulfilling an indispensable function for urban living and health, especially with regard to mitigating increasingly frequent weather extremes associated with climate change.

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Breakout B

Moderator: **GIL PEÑALOSA**, 8-80 Cities, Toronto, Canada

CITIES FOR EVERYONE: PARKS & TREES, NATURE EVERYWHERE/CITIES FOR HEALTH: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

The way we build cities is arguably a most important factor influencing environmental quality and public health. Regrettably, most cities constructed in the last 70 years have not been good to both the environment and physical, mental, and social health. A remarkable opportunity exists to transform current cities and to create better ones. However, this opportunity is rapidly diminishing. Climate change is impacting everywhere, and urgent actions are required. Also, many cities are already experiencing population decline, and this trend is expected to become widespread; harder to improve without growth. The actions, or inactions, of the next fifty years will determine the urban environments where millions, worldwide, billions, will live for hundreds of years. Our cities must prioritize making healthy living the default and convenient choice. Gil will share experiences from having worked in over 350 cities. After a 40-minute presentation, the participants will explore concrete actions to enhance cities, using the 'impatiens and orchids' methodology.

Breakout C

Moderator: **ROBIN FEARS**, independent consultant

CLIMATE CHANGE & URBAN HEALTH

Evidence for the worsening health impacts of climate change is rapidly accumulating. These effects are particularly pronounced in cities, which account for about three-quarters of energy-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and that host more than half of the global human population. Vulnerable groups such as children, women and people living in poverty are disproportionately affected. This session will introduce work from IAP's 'Climate Change and Health' project, with a focus on urban health, and report on progress on the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities.

Breakout D

Moderator: **CHRISTIAN KESSLER**, Charité - University Hospital, Competence Center for Traditional and Integrative Medicine (CCCTIM), Berlin, Germany

Nature-based therapies: Overview on current evidence and clinical practice

Nature-based therapies are an emerging field in medicine, health promotion and beyond. This workshop addresses both current evidence and examples of clinical practice. The connection to planetary health is also part of the session.

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ART goes Urban Health

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BREAKOUTS 4 : PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & URBAN DECISION MAKING

Breakout A

Moderator: **NATHALIE LAURE ROEBBEL**, WHO, Geneva, Switzerland

ACHIEVE YOUR URBAN HEALTH GOAL USING URBAN HEALTH CAPACITIES ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE RESOURCE KIT

Urban health goals are often broad and require multiple skills and stakeholders. To help cities reach their goals, WHO has developed an Urban health capacities assessment and response resource kit that equips multi-sectoral teams to assess whether a given initiative can meet its goals in a complex urban environment. It helps answer a critical question: Does a city have the right capacities in place to achieve their objectives that influence urban health — whether directly or indirectly? The breakout session will be organized as a small workshop to present the tool and get some practical insights on how to use it.

Breakout B

Moderator: **STEFAN WILICH**, Institute for Social Medicine Charité - University Hospital Berlin and World Doctors Orchestra, Germany

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ARTS

Artistic activity and exposure can stimulate community engagement for improving health and prevention. In this session we will hear some international examples and invite you to contribute with personal experience and discussion.

Breakout C

Moderator: **SAROJ JAYASINGHE**, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

INCLUDING VULNERABLE POPULATION IN DECISION MAKING

Vulnerable populations in cities—including disadvantaged urban groups, marginalized groups, women, children, the elderly, and those affected by disease—face significant barriers in accessing essential services, including healthcare and government benefits, especially during disasters, climate change and pandemics. City leadership and urban health researchers can empower these populations by understanding their lived experiences and letting the 'subaltern speak'. They could be involved in research (e.g. transdisciplinary research) and in decision-making (e.g. through political participation, inclusive health campaigns, targeted development programs, and innovative solutions). AI presents new opportunities to streamline research and evidence-building, to inform policy and intervention strategies.

Nature Therapy

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BREAKOUTS 5 : AI & URBAN HEALTH

Breakout A

Moderator: **JULIA MAYER**, SmartCity Living Lab, German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), Berlin, Germany

ZOOMING IN: LOCAL PERSPECTIVE IN SDG INDICATORS AND DATA JUSTICE

Cities are highly diverse, and small-scale data provide valuable insights into local quality of life. However, there are several challenges: Many pieces of information are insufficient or have not even been recorded, and issues of data ethics, privacy, and fair usage add further complexity. Together, we want to explore from the participants' perspective which indicators should ideally be available and what obstacles and challenges arise in this context. What solutions and strategies are needed to make the assessment of quality more just and precise at the local level?

Breakout B

Moderator: **JOCHEN BUETTNER**, Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology, Germany

UHEAL - AN AI ASSISTANT FOR URBAN HEALTH

Large language models offer tremendous potential for fields like urban health, but as generalists, they often lack domain-specific depth and can produce "hallucinations" - plausible but false statements. Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) addresses these limitations by granting language models access to domain-specific knowledge. When queried, such systems first retrieve relevant information from the literature before generating an answer.

UHeal, adapted from a system developed at the Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology, employs RAG using a corpus of around 100,000 scientific publications on urban health. Users can query this corpus with urban health questions and receive verifiable responses with citations.

At our breakout session, we'll demonstrate UHeal and discuss:

- Systematically expanding the knowledge base while maintaining quality
- Identifying target user groups (medical experts, public health officials, urban planners, general public)
- Optimizing for specific use cases
- Adapting the system for users with varying expertise levels

The session will explore ways to enable and guide UHeal's continued development.

Breakout C

Moderator: **PETER SPEYER**, Head of Data & Analytics at the Novartis Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

AI FOR CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION IN CITIES

Discover how AI can transform chronic disease prevention in urban environments! The workshop will introduce a structured framework for preventing chronic disease and leveraging AI opportunities building on key enablers. In small break-out groups, participants will then brainstorm actionable recommendations for improving heart health in urban environments. A short report-back from each group and discussion will conclude the break-out.

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Breakout Session D

Moderator: **KLAUS-PETER SCHULZ**, Association of German Media Agencies “Die Mediaagenturen e.V.”

INITIATIVE18

Freedom needs the full picture – media diversity protects democracy. Economic downturn leads to social polarization, which is radically pushed by disinformation and hate speech. We need an 18th UN sustainability goal for free, safe and sustainable media and indicated actions.

Nature Therapy

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