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## EDITED AND REVIEWED BY

James Evans,  
The University of Manchester, United Kingdom

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

Mari Vaattovaara  
✉ mari.vaattovaara@helsinki.fi

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# Editorial: Insights in social inclusion in cities

Mari Vaattovaara<sup>1\*</sup> and John Rennie Short<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geosciences and Geography, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland, <sup>2</sup>School of Public Policy, University of Maryland Baltimore County, Baltimore, MD, United States

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

### Insights in social inclusion in cities

It is urgent that we understand the causes and consequences of social differences and social exclusion. The need to promote and encourage social inclusion in cities has become that much more visible and pressing during the third decade of the 21st Century. Increasing migration and the COVID pandemic are just two factors that have highlighted deep-rooted and growing systemic inequalities. Despite the expressed will toward social inclusion, the pathways are still far from known, let alone implemented.

Within cities and in their segregating neighborhoods there are groups that cannot fully participate in political, economic, and social life. Barriers are created, maintained, and reinforced not only through discriminatory or stigmatizing attitudes but also by the everyday and taken for granted operations of legal systems, housing, and labor markets. Unless the root causes of structural exclusion and discrimination are addressed, it will be challenging to support sustainable inclusive development in cities.

There are now major advancements in the fast-growing field of Sustainable Cities. Climate change and energy issues have made the need for a green transition that much more pressing. Cities are key actors in a historic and definitive turning point toward a cleaner, more affordable, resilient and more equitable way of life.

There is still much to do, even within the Nordic welfare states. Nordic studies on immigration, integration, and segregation report social inclusion as a still distant goal for most cities.

Three particular themes emerge from this collection of paper. First, there is the issue of planning and participation. Participation and citizen involvement have been at the center of planning studies and local legislations for decades in many countries. However, recent research suggests that instead of a democratic form of participation, planning is becoming more authoritarian. [Fearn and Davoudi \(2022\)](#) suggest an authoritarian turn in spatial planning in England. As [Sennett \(2021\)](#) wrote in his Preface for the reprint of *The Uses of Disorder*, the top-down city needs to be challenged. In this Research Topic, two of the four articles discuss participation and participatory planning. The paper by [Hoffman](#) examines the potential of narrative-driven engagement toolsets in urban development circles. She explores the value of co-production, and worldbuilding, a design approach with origins in fiction.

Second, is the sense of engagement. The paper by [Tuominen](#) focuses on meaningful encounters in the lives of the inhabitants in a residential working-class district in the periphery of Helsinki, Finland. Based on his long-term ethnographic fieldwork he argues that agency predominantly promotes a strive for normality, not a challenge to the

system. He asks; How do people living in the stigmatized periphery establish sense of belonging in a segregated city? How is it possible to retain a sense of decency and dignity in unpredictable circumstances?

A third theme is the use of data analysis. Although common to all the papers, two make it a primary focus. Müürisepp et al. employ an activity space approach that enables the use of new data sources and associated technologies in understanding the dynamic processes linked to segregation. They ask several questions. How segregated are individuals' activity spaces? How segregated are human mobility flow patterns between activity locations? They provide an interesting review of a growing body of research and offer concrete development perspectives to challenge top-down urban planning and advance the understanding of life within or beyond the statistical or administrative localities. The "promise of experimental richness" and disorder advocated by Richard Sennett can maybe be spatially redefined within the urban multicentral physical form. Examinations of internal mobility allow a fuller understanding of the essential dynamic nature of cities. By examining activity spaces, we can move beyond neighborhood borders, maybe even toward more inclusive spaces and perhaps even toward an inclusive city.

The paper by Zhang et al. identifies, classifies, and compares the sustainable development models of over 100 Chinese cities. The paper sheds light to the different dimensions of sustainability and quantifies the variance across the cities in China. Given its huge urban population, the experience of China has global implications. The paper highlights how we can quantify and assess sustainable development.

## References

Fearn, G., and Davoudi, S. (2022). From post-political to authoritarian planning in England, a crisis of legitimacy. *Trans. Inst. Br. Geogr.* 47, 347–362.

The manuscripts in this Research Topic went through a rigorous, transparent, peer-review process. From the many submitted, only these four were accepted for publication. Individually and as a collection they provide valuable insights into the importance of social inclusion in the creation of sustainable cities. They provide useful ideas for researchers working on the joint themes of social inclusion and sustainable cities.

## Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Sennett, R. (2021). *The uses of disorder: Personal identity and city life*. Verso Books.