

Tackling urban sustainability on global scale

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Michigan State University's Igor Vojnovic says poor countries have much more to think about than saving resources for future generations when so many of their people are dying today. Credit: Michigan State University

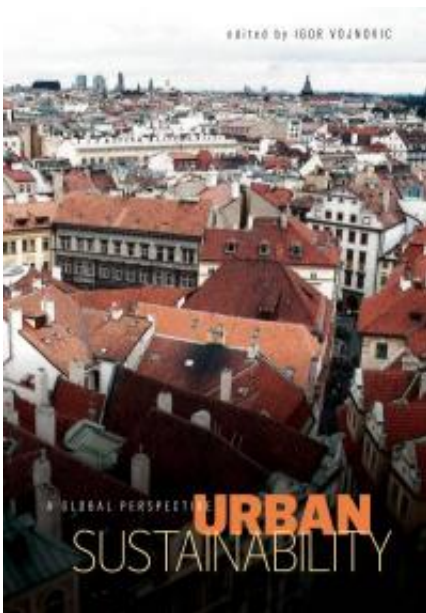
As the world's urban areas continue to grow, evidenced by rampant poverty and squalor from Shanghai to Rio de Janeiro, the question becomes: How can we focus on protecting environmental resources for future generations when so many kids are dying today?

That's the dilemma posed by "Urban Sustainability," a new collection of essays by eminent scholars from around the globe. The 714-page book, edited by Michigan State University's Igor Vojnovic, probes the balance between managing city growth, [environmental degradation](#) and inequality.

Vojnovic, associate professor of geography and urban and regional

planning, said a child below the age of 5 dies every three seconds of poverty-related issues.

"We're not going to have the capacity to deal with urban sustainability if we do not begin to address these fundamental issues of poverty," Vojnovic said. "[Poor countries](#) have much more to think about than saving resources for [future generations](#) when so many of their people are dying right now."



In "Urban Sustainability," Michigan State University's Igor Vojnovic and fellow scholars from around the world probe the balance between urban growth, environmental degradation and inequality. Credit: Michigan State University Press

The book's more than 40 authors explore how urban areas from China and India to Africa and the United States are dealing with environmental and socioeconomic urban pressures. Depending on the city, these pressures can be vastly different, making urban sustainability an

incredibly complex issue to tackle on a global scale.

"Sometimes the issue is racism, sometimes poverty, sometimes political representation – and most times the issues are intermingled," Vojnovic said. "And then there is the issue of dealing with resource conservation where a small group of people – mostly wealthy [urban residents](#) – consume a vast majority of resources while many in the world do not have drinkable water."

According to World Bank data, while the wealthiest 20 percent of the world's population accounts for 77 percent of consumption, the poorest 20 percent accounts for just 1.5 percent.

Further, the [global population](#) is expected to increase from 7 billion to 10 billion by the end of the 21st century – and most of those 3 billion additional inhabitants will live in burgeoning megacities, MSU scholar Harm de Blij writes in the book.

Contributing author Jeb Brugmann – who founded Local Agenda 21, one of the largest community-based planning initiatives in history – said the book "presents a more holistic view of the city as a socioeconomic and ecological phenomenon to be developed in an integrated fashion."

"The body of research presented here sheds extensive light on the potential and challenges for re-engineering" the world's cities, Brugmann writes.

More information: "Urban Sustainability," published by Michigan State University Press, is part of the Global Urban Studies Program, or GUSP, book series.

Provided by Michigan State University

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