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SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES (SDG 11)
Projects, research, synergies, and trade-offs with the 17 SDGs

AGATHÓN is an international, open-access Journal of Architecture, Art, and Design, indexed in SCOPUS and listed by ANVUR as a Scientific and Class A Journal, as well as numerous other international databases. Following up on what has been started with the last volumes, the International Scientific Committee has decided to launch a new call on **Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11) | Projects, research, synergies, and trade-offs with the 17 SDGs**, to select contributions that will be published in volume 20 in December 2026.

The theme relates to one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in September 2015 by the Member States of the United Nations (UN, 2015), which was promoted as a call for urgent action to reconcile prosperity, equitable development, and planetary protection. It underscores the importance of cooperation and partnerships among different countries, national governments, local Administrations, public institutions, private enterprises, civil society, and individual citizens. However, only five years before the target date for their achievement, this call seems not to have been fully heeded, if not ignored altogether. The scientific community, therefore, cannot and must not refrain from reflecting on 'where we have arrived', 'where we are heading', 'where we might still be able to arrive'.

A data-based assessment of progress was carried out by the Global Sustainable Development Report, which in two successive documents (IGS, 2019, 2023) called for appropriate course correction and an urgent acceleration of implementation policies. Without these efforts, humanity will face prolonged periods of crisis and uncertainty, further threatening the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and the protection of the entire ecosystem. While the 2019 Report found that, for some goals, the international community needed to speed up its efforts, and for many others, the world was on track, the situation described by the 2023 Report is significantly different. It states that on some goals progress has not accelerated sufficiently, and on others – food security, climate action, and biodiversity protection – the world is still heading in the wrong direction.

In view of this scenario, it is more urgent than ever to evaluate 'what needs to be done and how it can be achieved strategically', considering that, according to the stance put forward by the United Nations when the SDGs were established (UN, 2015) and reaffirmed by the 2019 Report itself, most goals are interconnected. Notably, the social and environmental ones have systemic impacts that drive overall progress towards the realisation of all other SDGs. Although the scientific literature on SDG interrelations has expanded rapidly, and many studies argue that synergies outweigh trade-offs, there remains significant, and as yet insufficiently explored and utilised, potential to achieve simultaneous progress across multiple goals through integrated planning and appropriate strategies. Specifically, Goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), and 17 (partnerships for the goals) are identified as strategic, as they can generate benefits across numerous other goals (Barbier and Burgess, 2019; Randers et alii, 2019; Pham-Truffert et alii, 2020).

Achieving the SDGs also involves trade-offs, which often lead to critical issues that current practices do not resolve. Examples include actions and strategies promoting Goal 2 (zero hunger), where land cultivation and intensive agricultural practices cause soil degradation, pollution, and biodiversity loss, or those related to Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), when unchecked growth and development result in the exploitation of natural resources beyond sustainable limits. These critical issues are confirmed by the latest Global Sustainable Development Report (IGS, 2023), which states that progress on Goals 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land) is more negatively impacted by advances in other sectors than positively driven by targeted actions.

It should be noted that the nature of connections, in terms of synergies and trade-offs among different goals, can vary greatly depending on the dimensions of 'space' and 'time', as well as across different income levels and population groups. For instance, the scientific literature indicates that poverty reduction generally yields positive effects on the 2030 Agenda in low-income countries. Conversely, integrated strategies that address climate change and inequalities tend to make it easier to achieve the goals in high-income countries. However, these countries often face more trade-offs, which may partly explain their slower progress towards the SDGs (Lusseau and Mancini, 2019; Nilsson et alii, 2022; Kostetckaia and Hametner, 2022). It is also important to recognise that many interconnections are transboundary in nature: according to the OECD (2019, 2024), 57% of the 169 targets achievable in one country can have repercussions in other regions or countries, crossing borders through flows of capital, goods, and human

and natural resources, thereby influencing their future and development prospects – positively or negatively. From this perspective, we must avoid causing negative and costly impacts elsewhere, but we should also acknowledge that neglecting potential positive spillovers in 'distant' places represents a missed opportunity.

All these variables require a careful understanding of interconnections among synergies and trade-offs, both to guide scientific research and to define methods and tools that reduce trade-offs, address uncertainties, and leverage the specific opportunities of the context. This also supports strategic decision-making and promotes 'transformative' interventions. Many tools and methods are currently available for the integrated analysis of the Goals, decision support, and progress monitoring (Barquet et alii, 2022), such as the toolbox with guidelines for the ex-ante assessment of impacts promoted by the European Commission (2023). However, what is needed is a greater capacity to think in systems terms, that is, to consider the systemic effects of policies, pathways, measures, and actions, which represents the most effective approach to optimising SDG interactions. Integrating the SDG theme with Digital Humanities also opens up innovative perspectives that can enhance synergies across fields of knowledge and reduce trade-offs among the SDGs. Indeed, by providing a new framework where digital tools and methodologies are applied to the study of the humanities, Digital Humanities promote a systemic and integrated approach to addressing global challenges and analysing the complex dynamics among various goals. These approaches offer different ways to monitor, understand, and improve not only the interactions among the Sustainable Development Goals but also the relationships between these goals and strategies / actions.

Against the background of these reflections, **AGATHÓN**, addressing the disciplinary areas of Landscape, Urban Planning, Architectural and Urban Design, Engineering, Architectural Technology, Design, Restoration and Rehabilitation, and Representation, proposes the theme Sustainable **Cities and Communities (SDG 11) | Projects, Research, Synergies, and Trade-offs with the 17 SDGs** with the aim of fostering an open debate through the collection of essays and critical reflections, research and experimentation, projects and interventions, of an innovative, multidisciplinary, and multiscalar character that adopt a systemic approach and address process-related aspects (design, production / implementation, and management), ex-ante and ex-post evaluation methodologies and models, and the overcoming of limits, gaps, and barriers, while enhancing synergies and limiting trade-offs with other goals. The built environment, in fact, interacts with every goal. Still, at the same time it is among today's challenges because, on the one hand, it is a major consumer of energy and natural resources, and an incessant producer of harmful gases and waste, and, on the other hand, the way in which we intervene can exacerbate inequalities and affect human health; this assumes particular relevance in cities, whose importance, in terms of vulnerability and growth opportunities, is implicit in all the SDGs, especially considering that by 2050 approximately 70% of the world's population will live in urbanised areas (UN-Habitat, 2022). Once again, what is necessary and urgent is action that is strategically planned, designed, and implemented in a manner consistent with as many SDGs as possible to ensure improvements in overall quality of life, sustainability, social equity, health, and community resilience.

SDG 11 | Sustainable Cities and Communities | Within the framework of Goal 11, the call is open to contributions that interpret the theme of 'sustainable cities and communities' as a field of design and research capable of relating spatial quality, environmental performance, inclusion, safety, accessibility, and resilience. Attention is directed towards works that make explicit the relationship among goals, design choices, and outcomes, clarifying approaches, metrics, protocols, scales, and conditions of transferability. In this perspective, the built environment and its infrastructures are understood as socio-technical devices that structure practices of use, opportunities, and capacities for collective action: sustainability is not exhausted in the performance of spaces and systems, but is also measured by their capacity to enable inclusive, aware, and cohesive communities, capable of caring for places, reducing vulnerabilities, leaving no one behind, and fostering adaptation over time.

The call welcomes contributions that explore the theme across multiple scales, from architectural design to the urban and territorial levels, and that view transformation as a manageable process throughout the entire lifecycle of buildings, open spaces, products, and services. For example, research studies and experimental projects on building design and its systems are of interest, particularly those that demonstrate how such decisions influence quality of life and conditions of equity, access, flexibility, and permanence. Additionally, essays and research on public space and proximity devices – seen as community infrastructures – are encouraged, especially when they focus on making services, care, active mobility, facilities, and daily provisions practically accessible, thereby strengthening support networks, mutual aid practices, and forms of active citizenship. Special emphasis is placed on contributions addressing the regeneration, restoration, and reuse of built heritage – including cultural assets, established urban fabrics, and abandoned industrial areas – as integrated strategies for reducing land consumption, revitalising economies, and creating new civic centres. This includes works analysing enhancement models that promote social accessibility (avoiding dynamics of exclusion), experimenting with func-

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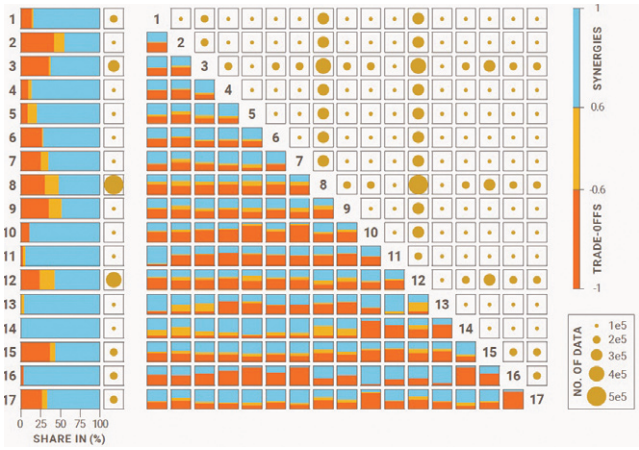
tional and residential mixing, community welfare initiatives, and shared management approaches.

From an ecological and environmental viewpoint, the call encourages contributions on the city as an ecosystem and the community as a subject of care and responsible management. It explores the role of the urban and peri-urban landscape (blue-green infrastructures, public parks and gardens, ecological corridors, renaturalisation of marginal or abandoned areas, and biodiversity restoration) in mitigating urban heat islands, managing hydroclimatic risks, and enhancing urban quality. It also considers strategies that not only provide ecosystem services but also generate use value, well-being, and inclusion, including through social activation programmes, environmental education, and participatory management of open spaces.

From an urban studies and planning perspective, the call promotes the analysis of tools, policies, and governance models that enable effective and equitable transformation, including standards and services, plans and programmes, fiscal and financial instruments, partnerships, participatory processes, and monitoring mechanisms. Contributions are especially valuable when they demonstrate how institutional and regulatory choices influence community sustainability: access to housing and services, reduction of territorial inequalities, crisis response capacity, quality of participation, and accountability, with attention to implementation, evaluation, and learning modes.

The call also aims to highlight the role of design (product, service, and communication) in making the targets of SDG 11 achievable through user-focused solutions and fostering trust: devices and artefacts for accessibility and safety, systems for mobility and proximity, urban platforms and services, communication strategies, engagement and active participation, and tools for providing data feedback to citizens and institutions. In this context, research exploring the interaction between physical and intangible infrastructures (such as data, interfaces, protocols, and services) is valuable, demonstrating how design can enhance the reliability, inclusiveness, and transparency of urban systems and, importantly, enable sustainable community practices.

Finally, contributions that reinforce the cognitive and decision-making aspects of design through drawing and representation are of interest, especially when they serve as analytical tools for examining inequalities, accessibility, and vulnerability, and for guiding collective choices. Additionally, essays on the history of architecture and the city that reinterpret genealogies, paradigms, and exemplary cases of urban communities, infrastructure development, and housing quality are relevant, as they highlight continuities, paradigm shifts, and lessons that can inform contemporary challenges.



Stato dei progressi dei diversi SDG in relazione ai target; Sinergie e compromessi determinati dalle interconnessioni tra i diversi SDG (source: IGS, 2023, *Times of crisis, times of change – Science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development – Global Sustainable Development Report 2023*, United Nations, New York).

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GUIDELINES FOR THE PROPOSAL SUBMISSION AND TIMILINE OF THE EDITORIAL PROCESS | Authors are invited to submit an Abstract (max 5,000 characters, spaces included; references are not included in the counting) in Italian, or in English in the case of a foreign contributor, which must mirror the main contents of the article. For the Abstract submission, the Authors will have to use only the downloadable file (Format Abstract_ENG) that can be found on the page 'Information for Authors'.

The Abstract must be written concisely and clearly, corresponding to the themes of the Call for Papers. The Abstract must be accompanied by: Author's references (name, surname, qualifications, affiliation, telephone numbers, e-mail); the section of the Journal (Architecture, Art, Design) and the typology of article (Essays & Viewpoint, Research & Experimentation, Review Articles, Dialogue) that is submitted for publication; 5 keywords that reflect the contents of the paper; references that will be mentioned in the article.

In particular, the Research & Experimentation proposals have to outline: originality (what is being expressed for the first time and for what target); essay and research references (the background of the study), relevance to the theme, subjects involved, financing; results (analytical aspects and proposals for discussion); limitations of research and significant developments; cultural, practical and/or socio-economic implications, if any.

In the case of Essays & Viewpoint proposals, attention has to be given to: object and aim of the proposed article; originality (what is being expressed for the first time and for what target); methodological approach; essay and research references that reveal the background of the study; analytical aspects and proposals for discussion.

The Abstract submission deadline is **July 10, 2026**, by sending a .docx file to the e-mail redazione@agathon.it. The Authors of accepted Abstracts will receive a communication from the Secretary by January 25, 2026.

Once an Abstract has been accepted, the Authors will be invited to deliver the Paper within the term set, i.e. by **September 15, 2026**. The Paper must respect the number of 25,000 or 30,000 characters, including spaces, excluding abstract, notes, and references. 15 images (300 dpi) must also be sent via 'swisstransfer.com'. For the Paper submission, the Authors will have to use only the downloadable file (Format Paper_ENG) that can be found on the webpage 'Information for Authors'.

The Authors of the accepted Papers, having been reviewed by Referees, will know the outcome by October 13, 2026; the final draft of the Paper, adding any integration following the Referees recommendations, must be presented by **October 20, 2026**. Paper, with its abstract and keywords, will be published both in Italian and English while notes, captions of images, texts of any tables and Author's biography will be published only in English. The text, bibliographic references, images and notes, must comply with the Editorial Guidelines for Authors listed on the webpage 'Information for Authors'. On the same webpage, Authors can find the review form that will be used by Referees.

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In order to cover costs of running the Journal and dealing with procedures for assessing papers using a double blind peer-review, AGATHÓN has decided to avail itself of a contribution from the Authors of the articles; they are therefore invited to contribute financially for the editorial services (APC – Article Processing Charge), only if the paper is accepted for publication, after the peer-review process and any potential revision of the paper.

The APC of a single paper is set at € 500.00. In the case of papers written by more Authors, the article publication fee will be increased by € 50.00 for each Author in addition to the first. The fee must be paid in accordance with the guidelines that will be sent to Authors at the same time as the communication of acceptance of the paper for publication.

To encourage the publication of contributions by Authors with primary affiliation to Universities and Research Institutions in countries defined by the World Bank as 'low-income or lower-middle-income economies', AGATHÓN will select a maximum of two papers for publication free of charge, subject to the positive outcome of the double-blind peer review process.