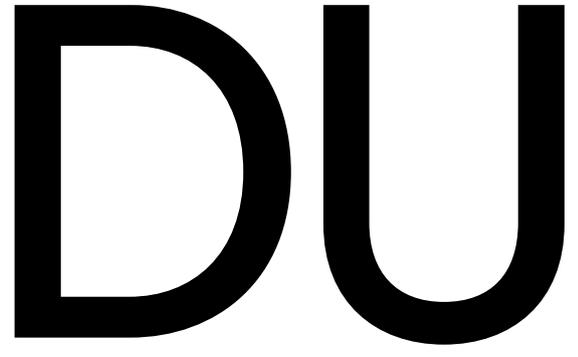


Fall | Winter 2025

Issue #06 Depletion



Journal of Delta Urbanism
Delft University of Technology

Urbanism



Ljubljana, Slovenia, nightview elaborated with Chat GPT in January 2026
original image source: European Space Agency, 2022

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Urbanism (noun) /3..bðn.l.zðm/ ¹

- the type of life that is typical of cities and towns
 - the process by which more and more people leave the countryside to live in *cities and towns*
-

WHAT IS URBANISM? THE SLOVENIAN GENIUS LOCI APPROACH.

The term urbanism derives from the Latin *urbs* (city). The concept of urbanization, also derived from the Latin *urbs*, was first used by the Spanish urbanist Cerdà in his book *Teoría General de la Urbanización* (1867), in which he explained the project for the expansion of Barcelona from 1859. After Cerdà urbanization was a new field for which he had to seek and invent new words to express new ideas (Merlin & Choay, 2005). He defined the organization of cities as an autonomous discipline and described urbanism as a set of principles, doctrines, and rules that must be applied so that buildings and their conglomerates could help promote their development and vitality, thereby improving individual well-being, the sum of which constitutes public welfare (Real Colegio Complutense at Harvard University, 2018).

The term urbanism later became established mainly in France (urbanisme), Italy (urbanistica), Spain (urbanismo), and Germany (Städtebau). In Anglo-Saxon countries, the term urban planning is generally used instead of urbanism. In the twentieth century, urbanism developed into a complex discipline, and the term itself also acquired a broader significance. According to the definition in the Slovenian Urban Terminological Dictionary urbanism is: 1. The science, art, and technique of organizing settlements; in English: urbanism, urban planning, 2. An interdisciplinary activity dealing with the planning and organization of settlements, especially their physical form, structure, land use, and functions, which ensures social and economic stability and progress (Humar & Mihelič, 2015). In Slovenia, urbanism is classified as a social science within the organization of scientific research. It is thus involved in intensive multi- and interdisciplinary interactions and challenged to develop and apply transdisciplinary methods (Mušič, 2004).

Prof. Max Fabiani, a renowned Slovenian Italian urbanist, architect, and professor at the Technical University in Vienna, submitted a regulatory plan for Ljubljana, for the city's renovation after the devastating earthquake in 1895. The plan was well-suited to the city's character and needs. He saw urbanism as a noble artistic task, while also recognizing the need to provide functional solutions and address problems related to hygiene, traffic, industry, green space systems, and architectural typology. He also stated that a city must be understood as a living organism, capable of constant transformation – a continuous process, capable of perpetual change. At that time, this was a completely novel idea. Planning can only succeed when the city is considered as a whole and viewed in its territorial and regional context. Moreover, Fabiani had a strong sense of the local environment and emphasized the need to always respect the place's character (Lat. *genius loci*), the most important expression of the soul, the people, and the site, while simultaneously ensuring its continual preservation (Mihelič, 2008).

Prof. Jože Plečnik is considered one of the greatest architects and urbanists of the first half of the 20th century (Mihelič et al., 2017). The works Plečnik carried out in Ljubljana gradually transformed the identity of the city into the symbolic capital of the Slovenian people. His works present an example of a human-centred urban design that respects the 'genius loci'. He contributed to this transformation with his personal, profoundly human vision for the city, based on an architectural dialogue with the older city while serving the needs of emerging modern 20th century society (The World Heritage Convention, 2023).

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Prof. Edvard Ravnikar, an architect and urbanist of modernism after World War II, is together with Fabiani and Plečnik, recognised as a part of the most important Slovenian architects of the 20th century trio (Mihelič et al., 2024). He emphasized that the fields of artistic sensitivity, architectural design, industrial and other forms of design, as well as urbanism, are closely interconnected. He approached all these areas of shaping the living environment in a holistic manner (Ravnikar & Zorec, 2000). His thinking on urbanism was highly visionary (Balantič, 2023).

Prof. Vladimir Braco Mušič (Figure 1), one of the most important Slovenian urbanists and spatial planners of the second half of the 20th century, wrote in his book *Urbanism: Fairy Tales and Reality* (sl. *Urbanizem: bajke in resničnost*; Mušič, 1980) that "we must understand urbanism as a social activity aimed at creating a more suitable living and working environment, as an economic and social category, as an agreement for the aesthetic shaping of the city, and, last but not least, as a way of life in the city" (Humar & Mihelič, 2015).

Prof. Andrej Pogačnik (1999) states that urbanism is "the science (study) of city building". He emphasizes that "in city design, one should place the greatest possible emphasis on their 'genius loci', specificity, and regional typology" (Pogačnik, 1992). Prof. Janez Koželj (1992), vice mayor of Ljubljana between 2006–2023, defines the fundamentals of urbanism as follows: urbanism is "the science of cities/space, which explains the pure rationality of a settlement/whole, which is not identical to the rationality of its unit/individual part and which, therefore, applies the general framework of reasonable order to the particular". He has been emphasizing the respect for 'genius loci'.

Through the contemporary history of urbanism in Ljubljana and Slovenia, we highlight two representative projects in Ljubljana that exemplify the Slovenian concept of urbanism, which integrates the 'genius loci' and a human-centred approach. Republic Square, designed by Ravnikar in the 1960s as the new centre of Slovenia's political, cultural, and economic life, has been conceived as a modern agora with abundant tree cover on its edges. The square (Figure 2) was designed as a city within a city, linking the old urban fabric with the new grand plaza (Museum of Architecture and Design – MAO, 2021). Project's originality was recognised by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) curators, who included it in the landmark exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* (Figure 3). Šmartinska Partnership (Figure 4) is an example of cooperation between the city and private landowners. The site covers an area of 228 ha (City of Ljubljana, 2009), the largest former industrial zone, which has been gradually transformed into a district of commercial, business, housing, and leisure activities (City of Ljubljana, 2025) with public spaces, such as new large Central park (City of Ljubljana, 2009).

Slovenian urbanism is rich and diverse in theory and practice connecting the country's history, culture, and environment. From the 19th-century European roots (pioneers like Cerdà) to the contributions of Slovenia's urbanists—Fabiani, Plečnik, Ravnikar, Mušič, Pogačnik, Koželj and many others—the practice has continually evolved while integrating the "genius loci" and a human-centred approach that shows respect for local identity and modern needs, ensuring that development is both functional and meaningful for communities. Projects like Republic Square (a modern agora linking old and new Ljubljana) and Šmartinska Partnership (a collaborative urban regeneration of a former industrial area in Ljubljana into a vibrant mixed-use district) shows how Slovenian urbanism turns these principles into successful practice.

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1 Cambridge Dictionary. © Cambridge University Press 2020.

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01 Installation view of the exhibition "Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980" MoMA, 2018; Photo by dr. Bogo Zupančič.



02 Janez Kalisnik, MAO reproduction of the original photograph. Museum of Architecture and Design – MAO, 2016. URL: <https://mao.si/razstava/trg-republike>

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03 Installation view of the exhibition
"Toward a Concrete Utopia:
Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980"
MoMA, 2018;
Photo by dr. Bogo Zupančič.



04 Concept of Project Area - scale 1:10.000
City of Ljubljana, 2009;

Chamber of Architecture and Spatial
Planning of Slovenia, 2021;
URL: [https://zaps.si/wp-content/
uploads/2021/08/
SMARTINSKA_16590_1-min.pdf](https://zaps.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/SMARTINSKA_16590_1-min.pdf)

JDU is a project by Delta Urbanism Research Group and DIMI Delft Deltas, Infrastructure and Mobility Initiative Delft University of Technology

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Graphic Layout

bruno, Venice (Italy)

Typefaces

Union, Radim Peško, 2006
Jjannon, François Rappo, 2019



Publisher

TU Delft OPEN Publishing
<https://www.tudelft.nl/library/openpublishing>

Frequency: 1 volume per year

Publication Funding

TU Delft Delta, Infrastructure and Mobility Initiative

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Winter / Spring 2026

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Keywords

genius loci; slovenian urbanism; human-centered design; city as a living organism; contextual modernization

Dates

Submitted: 21/10/2025
Reviewed: 27/10/2025
Accepted: 11/11/2025
Published: 20/02/2026

Citation

Cotič, B., Jankovič Grobelšek, L., & Koščak, R. (2025). Urbanism. *Journal of Delta Urbanism*, (6). <https://doi.org/10.59490/jdu.6.2025.8586>

All published contributions are submitted to a Double Blind Peer Review process except for the sections Dialogues and Dictionary.

Type of license

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Funding Information

No external funding was received.

Data Access Statement

No external datasets were used for this contribution.

COI

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Contributor Statement

The authors contributed equally to the preparation of the manuscript.

Use of AI

There was no use of AI in the preparation of this manuscript..