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Editor's Note

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EDITORS' NOTE

For the first time in history, more than half the world's nearly seven billion people live in cities.¹ The growth of cities and the numbers of people living in them pose significant challenges to both the environment and humans. Problems presented by the urban environment for city dwellers, as well as the populous as a whole, include traffic congestion that leads to smog and respiratory problems, lack of water supply and wastewater treatment that contaminates the water supply and causes waterborne diseases, and increasing energy use that depletes resources and contributes to climate change. Although urban environmental and development problems are numerous and varied, urban growth can present opportunities for improving global sustainability. Commuting via public transport or cycling produces far fewer emissions than individual motorized travel and apartment buildings generally impact far less land than suburban or rural housing for the same numbers of people. A growing awareness of the need to make cities more sustainable has led to a wide range of initiatives on energy efficient building, urban planning for mixed use city centers, and maintaining urban greenspace. Cities are also leading the way on climate change mitigation and adaptation in the absence of a global agreement.²

Articles in this issue on Sustainable Development in the Urban Environment tackle some of the key problems and opportunities for cities. Many articles indirectly address the climate change impacts of increasing urban resource consumption, and one proposes a mitigation effort based on increasing reflectivity in cities. A number of authors address resource issues, from reducing waste to modernizing the electrical grid to Brownfields. Transportation is, of course, an essential element of transitioning to sustainable cities and authors consider the possibilities for expanded use of trains, challenges related to a car congestion tax, and car-free cities. The relationship between urban migration and remittances to rural areas is examined and alternatives to rights-based approaches to informal urban settlements in developing countries are presented. Two articles consider the key role of forests, both urban and rural, for maintaining healthy cities and minimizing effects of natural disasters. Other articles propose expanded roles for youth and public health considerations in urban planning.

With the myriad concerns presented by urban growth and its impact on global sustainability, we hope that the articles in this issue of *Sustainable Development Law & Policy* contribute to the wider debate on the role of cities in the green economy and the work to make progress on addressing climate change.


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¹ U.N. Population Fund, State of World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth, U.N. Doc. E/31,000/2007, U.N. Sales No. E.07.III.H.1, at 1 (2007), http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2007/presskit/pdf/sowp2007_eng.pdf.

² See Cynthia Rosenzweig et al., *Cities Lead the Way in Climate-Change Action*, 467 NATURE 909 (2010).