

Editorial

# Human Geographies in Action: Insights into Migration, Development, Culture, and Sustainability

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## 1. Introduction

Human geography today goes beyond traditional mapping, integrating environmental, social, and economic factors to tackle real-world issues. One critical aspect is the way urban spaces can be designed to balance ecological health with human development. Urban green infrastructure is a key solution, with research showing how these spaces contribute to air pollution removal while adding significant economic value through ecosystem services [1,2]. Green infrastructure thus offers a dual benefit, improving public health and supporting long-term sustainability goals. Another layer of complexity in urban sustainability is addressing vulnerabilities due to climate-related hazards [3]. Coastal urban areas are particularly at risk, and cities must incorporate resilience strategies that address these unique vulnerabilities [4]. Climate risk assessments for such regions show that effective planning can reduce the impacts of flooding and extreme weather, underscoring the importance of proactive approaches to urban development in the face of climate change.

Financial services, as part of urban infrastructure, also play a critical role in sustainable development. The spatial arrangement of financial institutions affects economic growth and equitable access to resources, a dynamic that is crucial for urban economic health [5]. The clustering of financial services has implications for wealth distribution within cities, shaping the broader patterns of urban development and supporting or challenging sustainable growth. Additionally, robust smart network implementation and security enforcement ensure that financial enterprises operate efficiently and securely, further enhancing their role in urban infrastructure and economic resilience [6]. In addition to these infrastructural components, public willingness to support environmental initiatives has become essential to sustainable urban management. Studies on people's willingness to pay for ecosystem services show that community support is fundamental for long-term environmental stewardship [7]. When residents are willing to financially contribute to watershed management or green spaces, it demonstrates a shared commitment to sustainability, further encouraging participatory approaches to urban planning.

Understanding how resources flow within cities also supports sustainability. Research on tourism revenue in the Yangtze River Delta, for instance, illustrates how economic activities can be aligned with environmental goals [8]. Tourism, when managed with sustainability in mind, can be a source of revenue without compromising urban green spaces and local resources. Spatiotemporal analyses like this provide urban planners with insights on maximizing economic gains while safeguarding environmental assets. The practical applications of sustainability frameworks can also be seen through the index of sustainable functionality (ISF). This tool evaluates the sustainability of urban areas by analyzing their ecological, social, and economic health, offering planners a roadmap for improvements [9,10]. In regions such as Urat Front Banner in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China, where the ISF was applied, this approach effectively highlighted areas for improvement, showcasing how cities can leverage data-driven assessments to more strategically advance sustainability goals.



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**Citation:** Cirella, G.T. Human Geographies in Action: Insights into Migration, Development, Culture, and Sustainability. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 9955. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16229955>

Received: 9 November 2024

Accepted: 13 November 2024

Published: 15 November 2024



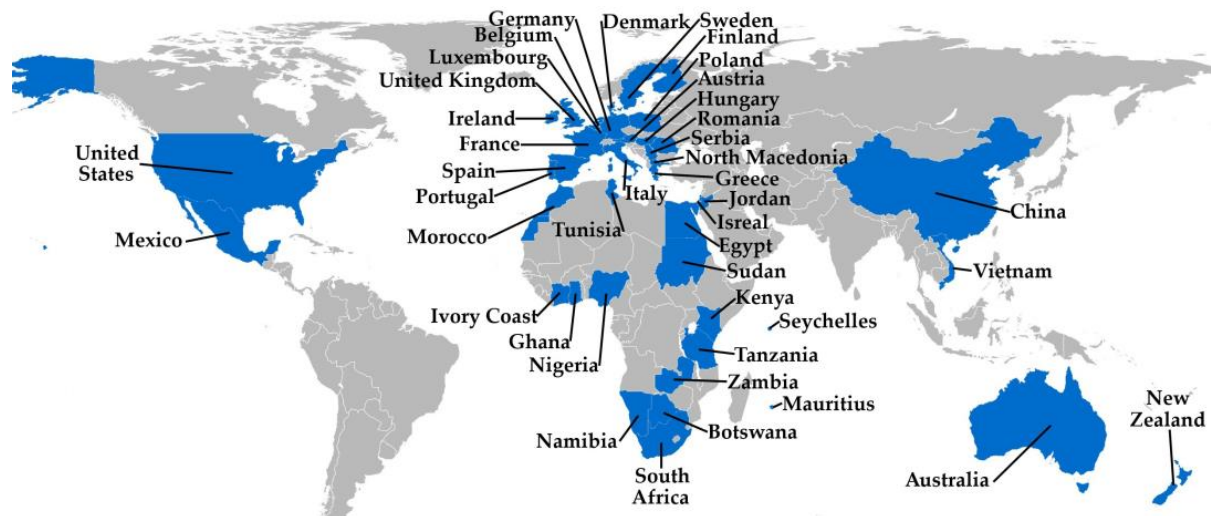
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On a broader scale, fiscal management plays a crucial role in shaping sustainability outcomes, particularly in post-communist European Union (EU) countries where balancing debt, deficits, and urban development presents an ongoing challenge. Cities in these transition economies face tough decisions as they juggle immediate financial stability with the need for sustainable growth [11]. Financial strategies in these areas must therefore be adaptive, addressing short-term budget constraints while keeping an eye on long-term environmental goals. Parallel to these economic strategies, regional and local approaches to sustainability, like water management, offer models of how sustainability can be deeply integrated into urban growth. In Northern China, for instance, merging water management with wetland restoration not only preserves crucial ecosystems but also supports urban expansion, creating a mutually beneficial solution [12]. These combined strategies underscore the adaptability of human geography, where solutions are uniquely tailored to harmonize both environmental preservation and urban development.

Achieving these sustainability objectives requires both effective strategies and efficient implementation, as highlighted in performance management systems. Cities need systems that balance the long-term vision of sustainability with the practical demands of everyday governance [13]. These systems help ensure that sustainability initiatives are both feasible and impactful, creating a strong foundation for lasting change. Together, these insights reveal how human geography provides the analytical and strategic tools needed to shape sustainable cities. By understanding the interconnections between ecological health, social equity, and economic stability, human geographies offer a comprehensive approach to the challenges cities face today. Research in environmental management, climate resilience, economic systems, and community engagement highlights the vital role human geography plays in crafting cities that are both thriving and sustainable. By integrating these areas, human geography moves from theory to tangible action, creating a foundation upon which urban areas can grow resiliently, equitably, and sustainably in an increasingly complex world.

## 2. Synopsis of Contributions

This Special Issue (SI), titled “Human Geography: Interrelationships between People, Place, and the Environment,” represents a significant advancement in human geography scholarship. Comprising 25 contributions, it offers a thorough and nuanced examination of the field, blending both foundational ideas and emerging perspectives. Each article provides fresh insights that deepen our understanding of human geography, with a particular focus on the key concepts of people, place, and the environment, as well as the dynamic and interconnected relationships between them. Through these diverse explorations, the SI encourages readers to engage with innovative ways of thinking about spatial and temporal connections, highlighting how human experiences are shaped by complex and interdependent environments. The SI is organized into five thematic sections: migration and population studies, urban and rural development, cultural and social geography, political and economic geography, and environmental and sustainability studies. Figure 1 illustrates the global distribution of research and authorship, emphasizing the broad geographic reach and collaborative nature of this work. Collectively, these contributions underscore the international scope of the field and the increasing value of cross-cultural insights, reinforcing the importance of diverse perspectives and methodologies in tackling the spatial and social complexities of contemporary human geography.



**Figure 1.** Global distribution of research contributions and authorship locations in this SI.

### 2.1. Migration and Population Studies

Migration and population dynamics are central themes in human geography, where the movement of people is influenced by various environmental, social, and economic factors. Understanding these movements is critical to addressing both local and global challenges, as seen through several studies from different parts of the world. The article by Adekola et al. (Contribution 1) examines the economic drivers behind the voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North-East Nigeria, which has been recovering from a decade of violent conflict. Millions of people were displaced by Boko Haram insurgencies, and the study reveals that the willingness of these displaced persons to return home is strongly influenced by the availability of jobs upon return. This research emphasizes the economic incentives that are necessary for the reintegration process, suggesting that providing employment opportunities would significantly encourage the displaced population to return and rebuild their communities.

In contrast, Cao et al. (Contribution 2) explore a different dimension of migration within urban contexts, focusing on intra-urban residential relocation in Nanjing, China. Their study highlights the mental and physical health impacts of residential mobility on the elderly, particularly when relocation involves long distances or frequent moves. The findings suggest that relocation away from the urban core to surrounding areas may improve mental health but can negatively affect physical health, particularly when the elderly experience frequent relocations. This research underscores the complexity of migration within cities and its varying effects on different demographic groups.

A broader perspective on population migration within urban agglomerations is offered by Cao et al. (Contribution 3), who analyze migration patterns in Chinese urban areas. The study identifies various agglomeration patterns—monocentric and polycentric—and highlights how economic development and social conditions shape migration flows. This research connects population mobility with the spatial dynamics of urban growth, offering important insights into the planning of urban spaces to better accommodate these flows and foster sustainable development.

Langović et al. (Contribution 4) provide further insights into return migration, focusing on Serbia. Their study examines the factors influencing return migration, showing that emotional ties to the homeland and satisfaction with life post-return vary significantly across different returnee groups. The sustainability of return migration, the study concludes, is closely linked to life satisfaction, suggesting that policies aimed at improving quality of life and economic conditions for returnees can promote more sustainable reintegration.

Lastly, Le et al. (Contribution 5) employ geographic information system (GIS) technology to examine the spatial relationships between migration flows, housing prices, and

demographics in Greater Manchester, UK. Their analysis reveals clear patterns linking migration to housing markets, with specific age groups and housing price levels affecting where people migrate. This study highlights the potential of spatial data analysis to inform migration policy and urban planning decisions. Together, these studies illustrate the multi-faceted nature of migration and population studies, showing that economic, social, and spatial factors play pivotal roles in shaping migration patterns and their outcomes. Each piece contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics that govern how populations move and settle, both within and across borders.

## 2.2. Urban and Rural Development

Urban and rural development is a dynamic process, shaped by socioeconomic and environmental factors that often blur the lines between urban and rural areas. The relationships between small towns and rural communities play a significant role in shaping the living standards of rural populations. A study by Bogdański and Janusz (Contribution 6) explores how small towns in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region of Poland contribute to the standard of living in surrounding rural areas. The research shows that as small towns perform more functions, such as offering services and infrastructure, the quality of life in rural areas improves. However, despite these positive effects, disparities between rural and urban regions remain persistent, highlighting the challenges of reducing socioeconomic inequalities.

In urban areas, resilience to socioeconomic and environmental challenges is key to long-term development. Liu et al. (Contribution 7) focus on Beijing's central area, assessing the socio-spatial resilience of the city during its transitional period from 1990 to 2020. Their study reveals that while overall resilience increased, social divisions within the city hindered the development of social capital, particularly in highly diverse areas. This underscores the importance of strengthening community ties and building inclusive urban spaces to better handle future uncertainties.

Meanwhile, urban shrinkage, a phenomenon that affects both urban and rural spaces, has become an increasing concern in China. Ding et al. (Contribution 8) examine urban shrinkage in the Yellow River Basin, noting that cities in peripheral areas are shrinking due to factors such as economic transition and aging populations. This regional shift presents challenges for urban planning and policy, demanding attention to how peripheral areas are integrated into broader urban and rural development strategies.

Finally, environmental factors such as land loss also impact rural and urban resilience. Hinz et al. (Contribution 9) explore the social implications of coastal land loss in Louisiana, highlighting how affected communities perceive and react to environmental degradation. Their study suggests that resilience is not just about physical infrastructure but also about how communities interpret and adapt to environmental changes, revealing the complex interaction between natural landscapes and human settlements. These studies highlight the intricate dynamics of urban and rural development, underscoring the importance of policies that can effectively address the challenges and harness the opportunities within these interconnected spaces.

## 2.3. Cultural and Social Geography

Cultural and social geography explores how territorial branding, social norms, and cultural identities influence human-environment interactions. A key aspect of this is how territorial branding impacts both the physical and cultural landscapes of cities and regions. Almeida (Contribution 10) investigates power relations in territorial brands, revealing the complex connections between branding and regional power dynamics. The study develops an analytical matrix that uncovers how territorial brands function as legitimizing mechanisms, emphasizing their role in shaping both local and global discourses and, ultimately, the identity of urban spaces.

Moving from conceptual branding to more tangible forms of heritage, Cattaneo et al.'s (Contribution 11) research investigates the territorial effects of shared-living heritage regeneration. This study focuses on the adaptive reuse of ancient community buildings, such as

the Tulou in China and the Marae in New Zealand. The authors show that regeneration projects, while fostering sustainable development, also revitalize cultural heritage and build social cohesion among diverse community groups. Through expert interviews, they demonstrate how these projects create a mix of income groups, fostering inclusivity and resilience in rural contexts.

Further enriching this theme, Liu et al.'s (Contribution 12) work examines village development types using a natural socioeconomic framework, contributing to the understanding of rural revitalization. By categorizing villages based on natural suitability and socioeconomic factors, Liu et al.'s study provides a framework for rural planning, helping policymakers identify sustainable pathways for development while preserving cultural heritage.

Finally, Vörös et al. (Contribution 13) explore how cultural stereotypes influence social behaviors, specifically in the realm of car navigation. Their study of navigation habits across Hungary, Romania, and Austria reveals that social factors like age, gender, and financial situation impact driving behaviors, suggesting that cultural assumptions play a role in shaping everyday experiences. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how stereotypes influence spatial and social practices in urban and rural contexts. The interconnections between culture, power, and spatial dynamics highlight how human geography, viewed through cultural and social lenses, plays a pivotal role in shaping the territories we inhabit.

#### *2.4. Political and Economic Geography*

In the realm of political and economic geography, the interaction between economic structures and political landscapes is critical for understanding sustainability and growth. This section delves into the economic forces driving labor market flexibility, stock exchange maturity, and human activity's environmental impact, offering insights into how economic policies can shape the broader social and political fabric. Starting with Próchniak et al. (Contribution 14), the analysis of African stock exchanges sets the stage by exploring how financial markets in Africa contribute to sustainability. The research uncovers the varying maturity levels of stock exchanges, with more developed exchanges such as the Johannesburg, Nigerian, and Egyptian exchanges emerging as leaders in supporting sustainable practices. This assessment highlights the importance of financial frameworks in shaping the continent's economic future and sustainability goals.

Next, Galik et al. (Contribution 15) shift focus to labor market flexibility, using the TOPSIS method to evaluate the adaptability of labor markets across EU member states. The findings underscore how sustainable industrial relations and social policies can enhance labor market flexibility, a critical element in fostering long-term economic growth and stability, especially in the face of challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, Aggestam (Contribution 16) broadens the lens by examining the political implications of economic and environmental policies in the EU. The study contrasts the EU's Nature Restoration Regulation with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, emphasizing the need for more integrated and effective forest management strategies. The research shows how political decisions in environmental governance impact economic sustainability, particularly in sectors like forestry.

In all, these studies illustrate the interconnectedness of economic strategies, labor market policies, and environmental governance in shaping sustainable and resilient political economies. This highlights the role of economic frameworks in fostering both political stability and environmental sustainability, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of global sustainability.

#### *2.5. Environmental and Sustainability Studies*

The intersection of environmental and sustainability studies with human geography reflects a vital effort to balance human needs with environmental preservation, especially in vulnerable and evolving regions. As the world faces increasing ecological and socioeconomic challenges, the role of sustainable practices in agriculture, land restoration, and population

health becomes even more critical. In China's ethnic minority areas, Huo et al. (Contribution 17) explore how population growth, under the country's relaxed family planning policies, impacts sustainable development. Their study in the Hotan region highlights the strain on resources and the environment, underscoring the need for integrated economic and demographic planning to foster long-term sustainability. Similarly, Ma et al. (Contribution 18) examine the relationship between women's well-being and ecological factors in North-west China. By assessing the Women's Development Index across ecologically vulnerable areas, they reveal how environmental conditions affect both physical and mental health, demonstrating the essential link between ecological balance and human well-being.

Further west, in Israel, Luz (Contribution 19) sheds light on the complexities of sustainable agriculture. This study of Israeli farmers illustrates how local practices are vulnerable to global agricultural policies and climate change. Luz argues that a broader, multiscalar approach—spanning local to global levels—is necessary to drive meaningful changes in farming practices that prioritize sustainability. In Jordan, Qutieshat and Al-Assaf (Contribution 20) take a different approach by investigating the impact of urbanization and altitude variability on disaster risk management. Their research connects the loss of green spaces and the expansion of built environments to increased landslide risks, emphasizing how urbanization can exacerbate natural hazards, further straining already vulnerable regions.

Finally, Tang et al. (Contribution 21) examine the coupling of population health and economic development in China, revealing how the two are intertwined with ecological sustainability. Their study highlights the need for coordinated efforts to improve public health while fostering economic growth, with an awareness of the spatial and temporal dynamics of these issues. Together, these studies reflect the growing need for interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability—integrating population dynamics, agricultural practices, urbanization, and health to create resilient, balanced solutions for both people and the planet.

### 3. Conclusions

At the core of this SI lies the concept of interrelationships—the intricate connections between people, place, and the environment, each influencing the other and shaping their development over time. These interconnections form the foundation of the contributions in this SI, with each article offering a unique perspective on how human geography deepens our understanding of these complex dynamics. The importance of interrelationships is especially evident in discussions on sustainability, a theme woven throughout this SI. Sustainability demands a comprehensive approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of human and physical systems and strives to find equilibrium between progress and preservation. The contributions in this SI explore critical sustainability issues, ranging from urban resilience and climate adaptation to justice and resource management.

To fully grasp and analyze the complexities of these interrelationships, a diverse range of research methods is essential. This SI highlights the value of methodological pluralism, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, alongside advanced techniques in spatial analysis, spatial statistics, and GIS. Together, these methods form a robust toolkit that enables human geographers to map spatial patterns, analyze data, and model the interactions between people and their environments.

A central goal of this SI is to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Human geography offers powerful frameworks for addressing real-world challenges, from urban planning and economic development to conservation and equity. The articles featured in this SI showcase how human geography can tackle pressing issues such as climate change, resource scarcity, and inequality, contributing to knowledge that is not only academically rigorous but also socially relevant. This SI invites readers to reflect on how human geography can inform policies and practices that support sustainable development, responsible stewardship, and social justice. By situating human geography within the broader context of sustainability, this SI underscores the need to balance human demands with environmental limitations—an essential consideration across the various subdisciplines explored throughout this SI.

In conclusion, “Human Geography: Interrelationships between People, Place, and the Environment” serves as a testament to the dynamism and relevance of human geography today. Through its 25 contributions, this SI not only advances our understanding of key themes but also highlights the importance of collaboration, innovation, and practical application. By exploring the economic, cultural, social, political, and historical intersections within human geography, this SI offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the diverse ways people and their environments shape one another.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the Polo Center of Sustainability, grant number PCS-2020-PAN-UG1001.

**Data Availability Statement:** All data pertaining to the research is contained within the article.

**Acknowledgments:** The author would like to thank the team at *Sustainability* for helping and coordinating the SI.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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