

Urbanise Your Thinking

Urbanisation-Sensitive Programming (USP) for an Entirely Urban World

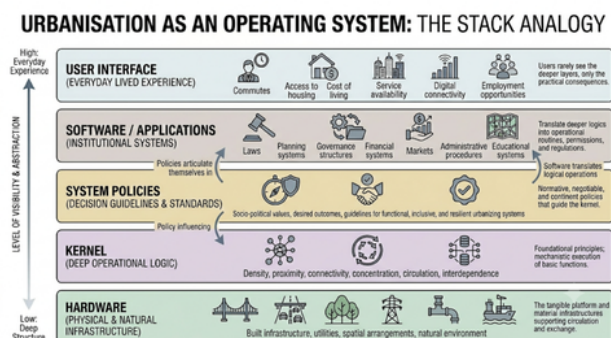
Marc Steinlin, Jeffrey Craft & Kari Kankaala – COMPLEX(c)ity

Urbanisation used to mean cities getting bigger. It doesn't anymore. It has become the operating logic the entire planet now runs on – and most practitioners are still working from a map that no longer matches that new reality.

Why This Book

Too often, development, planning and policy work is still segmented sector by sector: housing here, transport there, environment somewhere else. But a "rural" village today runs on satellite weather data, mobile remittances and global commodity prices; a protected wilderness is financed by carbon markets and tourism economies headquartered elsewhere. The line between wild, rural and urban hasn't shifted – it has dissolved. Interventions built for a world of separate sectors keep producing side effects nobody accounted for, because the dynamism of urbanisation has knitted the sectors together, making them less separate than ever before.

The Core Idea



The book names this condition the Urban Operating System (UOS): a coordinating logic, borrowed from computing, that increasingly runs beneath every territory, urban or not. UOS is descriptive – it explains how the system works, not whether the outcome is good or bad.

Deciding what to do about it is the job of Urbanisation-Sensitive Programming (USP) – a diagnostic framework and tool built on a ten-dimensional model and thirty indicators, read against a normative quality framework: does an intervention make a place more functional, more resilient, more inclusive?

What's New

© One systemic vocabulary for describing and understanding how urbanisation shapes the entire territory, that overcomes the dichotomy of urban and non-urban spaces.

© A working diagnostic – a ten-dimensional model, thirty indicators, a radar-chart self-assessment tool – not just a metaphor.

© A method already proven in the field: the approach and model, including the causal-chain approach, were developed on live urban development programmes and strategies, producing an analytical understanding, more targeted and considerate interventions and eventually more coherence.

© A strict separation between describing the system (value-neutral) and judging it (explicit, normative) – so the tool stays honest before anyone decides what to prioritise.

Who It's For

Politicians, public administrators, economists, development specialists, urban planners, engineers and designers — anyone who commissions, designs or signs off on programmes, policies, projects or investments that touch territory. No prior background in urban theory required.

What's at its Core

- A working answer for why single-sector interventions keep producing unintended consequences.
- A versatile method to inspire design and plans beyond conventional limits, engage stakeholders in profound conversations, examine proposed interventions before commitments are made, and eventually evaluate interventions from 360 degrees.
- A practical way to build coherent strategies, plans and designs that hold up under the scrutiny of funders, boards or political actors.
- A shared frame that lets institutions with different mandates negotiate priorities on the same map.

How It's Structured

Each chapter runs three layers side by side: a narrative thread following recurring characters whose daily lives make the argument concrete, a conceptual layer building the case, and a practical layer converting it into steps and questions you can apply. It reads as a working manual, not a study to be cited.



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Is this an academic book?

No. It's written for practice, not peer review. Concepts are built from first principles and made operational immediately.

Is this just for urban planners?

No — it's written for a mixed professional audience, planners and non-planners alike.

Is USP a theory, or something I can actually use?

Both. The ten-dimensional model, Thirty Indicators and Self-Assessment Tool are built to be applied to a real programme, policy or project — not just read about.

Does it include real cases, or is it all conceptual?

It builds and draws from real cases, including a full walkthrough of how USP restructured a fragmented urban poverty-reduction programme into one coherent, causally defensible one.

How is it structured?

In three movements: the case that urbanisation is now the operating condition of the planet, a diagnostic tool for reading and using that system, and a normative framework for judging whether an intervention actually makes things better.

Who's behind it?

COMPLEX(c)ity, authored by Marc Steinlin, Jeffrey Craft and Kari Kankaala, drawing on the authors' live consulting work with international donors and municipal governments.

When and where can I get it?

Look out for it in the next year - sign up to our mailing list!