Call for Papers: Cities and the Environment (CATE) Special Issue: Bridging Organizations in Urban Ecosystems

Special Issue Editors: Michele Romolini, J. Morgan Grove, Nancy F. Sonti, Dexter H. Locke
Submission deadline: March 31, 2027

Overview

Urban environmental work rarely happens within a single organization. Community groups, nonprofits, city agencies, universities, and cultural institutions each hold different resources, knowledge, and relationships, yet they are often poorly connected to one another. Cities and the Environment (CATE) invites contributions to a special issue on **bridging organizations in urban ecosystems**: the organizations that connect diverse actors who would otherwise remain disconnected, and that help move resources, information, and power toward community stewardship.

This special issue grows out of the Baltimore Ecosystem Study (BES) Summer Quarterly Meeting, *Building Bridges and Breaking Barriers: Organizations Connecting People to Power*, held on June 17, 2026 in Baltimore, Maryland. That gathering brought together researchers, practitioners, and community partners to examine how networks and collaboratives act as social infrastructure for stewardship, and what makes bridging organizations effective. We welcome submissions from Baltimore and from cities around the world.

Background

Research on urban environmental networks has shown that stewardship networks are often fragmented. Network analyses in Baltimore, drawing on long-term stewardship network data collected over more than two decades, have revealed many silos and peripheral organizations. In this context, three related concepts from network research are useful:

- **Bridging organizations** bring together a large and diverse set of actors who would otherwise be disconnected.
- **Brokering organizations** go further, acting as intermediaries between two unlinked organizations or clusters of organizations to facilitate a connection between them.
- **Boundary organizations** are bridges or brokers situated specifically at the interface of science and policy.

In social network analysis, this kind of position is often measured as "betweenness." Prior work suggests that network brokers transmit resources and information across scales and sectors, play important roles in the governance of urban ecosystem services, and can reach peripheral groups with limited contact to the wider network. Through those connections, they can help amplify and scale community-led work.

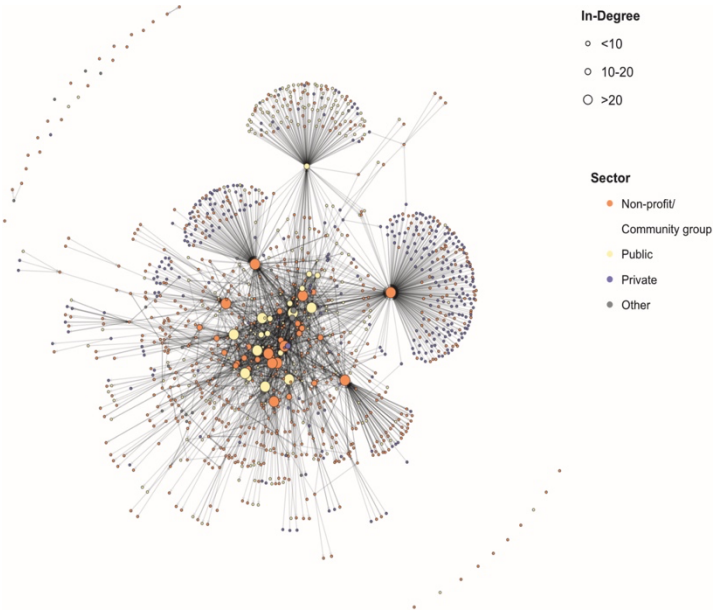


Figure 1. Baltimore's environmental network. A handful of highly connected organizations sit at the center of clusters or individual peripheral organizations (Livas et al., 2025).

Many questions remain open. How do bridging organizations come to play this role, and what sustains them? What do they offer that other organizations do not? What can go wrong? And how can cities support the partnerships and networks that connect people to power?

Themes and Topics

We seek empirical, conceptual, and practice-based contributions. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

1. **Characteristics of effective bridging organizations.** Capacities, structures, practices, funding models, and forms of trust or legitimacy that allow organizations to bridge and broker effectively.
2. **Networks and collaboratives as social infrastructure.** How networks and collaboratives amplify stewardship, and how they can be mapped, measured, and assessed.
3. **Reaching peripheral actors.** How bridging and brokering organizations connect marginalized, under-resourced, or peripheral groups with the broader network, and how that supports community-led work.
4. **Cross-sector partnerships.** Collaborations among community organizations, nonprofits, government agencies, universities, and institutions such as aquariums, museums, and parks.
5. **Connecting people to power.** How bridging organizations shift access to decision making, resources, and policy, and where they fall short.
6. **Science–policy boundaries.** The role of boundary organizations in linking urban ecological research with decision makers.
7. **Lessons learned.** Common themes, challenges, and failures from bridging work, including what happens when brokers are absent, overextended, or stretched thin.
8. **Moving forward.** How cities can strengthen and sustain bridging partnerships and networks over time.

We encourage contributions that center community partners and practitioners, and co-authored work between researchers and practitioners.

Article Types

The special issue welcomes the following CATE article types: Articles, Research notes, Practitioner notes, and Comments, perspectives, and responses.

Anticipated Timeline

Milestone	Date
Call for papers released	November 2026
Submission deadline	March 31, 2027
Peer review and revisions	April–October 2027
Publication	December 2027

How to Submit

Submit through the CATE submission portal and select this special issue from the dropdown menu.

Manuscripts should follow CATE's submission guidelines. Authors are asked to suggest at least three reviewers who have not collaborated with them in the past three years and have no conflict of interest. All submissions will undergo double-blind peer review with a minimum of two reviewers for empirical research articles and a minimum of one reviewer for practitioner and research notes. We also may ask authors to serve as peer reviewers for other papers in the special issue.

Prior to full submission, prospective authors are welcome to send a brief abstract of up to 500 words to the special issue editors to discuss fit.

Contact

Questions can be directed to Special Issue Editors:

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