

Interview with Prof. Martin Dijst

Prof. Martin Dijst is an urban geographer. In 2009, he was appointed as full professor of Urban Development and Spatial Mobility at the Utrecht University, the Netherlands. He started his position as Head of the department Urban Development and Mobility at LISER, Luxembourg, on December 1, 2017. He is also Affiliate Professor of Urban Development and Mobility at the University of Luxembourg. He has an outstanding track record in international peer-reviewed publications and citations, and in large interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research projects.

His research focuses on mobility, housing, Information and Communication Technologies, immersive Virtual Reality, climate change, weather conditions, urban metabolism, and health. His recent work on health includes analysing the impact of exposures to environments on health and studies on the meaning of new digitalized sensors, monitoring techniques and self-management methods to stimulate health behaviours.

Prof. Dijst: Why did you choose to focus on the topic of urban health? Why was it so important for you in terms of research?

One of the key challenges in urban health for the years to come for all researchers, employed in academic or non-academic sectors, is to handle the complexities in the dynamic urban health system. Developing knowledge and skills to be able to interact and co-create with representatives of different scientific disciplines and stakeholders from different types of organizations in society is fundamental to understand the urban health system and to be able to identify and to implement effective interventions at the urban and individual level. Equipped with these expertise and skills will set up the early stage researchers to take the lead in the further development of urban health approaches.

Among the health problems that seem to be inherent to cities, which do you think are the most worrying, and why?

Two major urban health issues can be distinguished. First, the accumulation over the day and over the life course of exposures to health risks, such as pollutants, fast food, and mechanical transport modes. So far, most often in research and policy-making environmental exposures are dealt with separately. A comprehensive understanding of these exposures to environments is missing. Second, across European cities striking inequalities in cardiovascular and mental health between residents of deprived and affluent neighbourhoods are of major concern. To effectively inform policy how to tackle these inequalities, a better understanding of the complex interplays between individuals and their environments is needed and can be achieved via original conceptual and methodological innovations.