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URBAN PLANNING

Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together

Edited by Jua Cilliers, Ana Maria Vargas Falla, Gareth Wall, and Paula Barros

Volume 9

2024

Open Access Journal

ISSN: 2183-7635

Urban Planning, 2024, Volume 9
Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together

Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2° Esq.,
1070–129 Lisbon
Portugal

Design by Typografia®
http://www.typografia.pt/en/

Cover image: © jacoblund from iStock

Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/urbanplanning

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2024 • Volume 9 • Article 9344
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.9344

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EDITORIAL

Open Access Journal

Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together

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Submitted: 30 September 2024 **Published:** 15 October 2024

Issue: This editorial is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

As the tier of government closest to people, local government plays a key role in answering local needs and aspirations. However, local governments are often under-resourced, leaving them inadequately responsive to many of these critical local demands. Moreover, accountability to their citizens, which is the core of a well-functioning local democracy, is often lacking because the necessary formal laws and informal norms do not enable citizens to influence the decision-making process in a collaborative, creative, and evidence-based process that promotes collective learning. Through innovative case study analyses from around the world, the 12 contributions in this thematic issue delve into the multifaceted ways in which local governments can bridge the gap between people and politics, offering innovative perspectives on participatory governance, co-creation, and collaborative decision-making for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. The cases showcase innovations and challenges in the urban environment, capturing different ways to bring people and politics together in an attempt to co-create solutions for a sustainable and resilient urban future. The insights provided by this plethora of cases provides lessons that can help revolutionise international, national, and local urban policy to empower local authorities and their local communities to address the increasingly urgent challenges faced by municipalities around the world, ensuring an inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable future for the generations to come.

Keywords

accountability; inclusive cities; local democracy; local government; localisation; participatory democracy; sustainable development; urban transformation; vulnerable groups

1. Introduction

The growing distrust in state institutions and a democratic decline in a growing number of countries (V-Dem, 2024) is highlighting the need to re-think the potentially transformational role of local governments in addressing the multitude of acute urban challenges faced by towns and cities globally (Dano et al., 2020). This collection of 12 articles delves into the multifaceted ways in which local governments can bridge the gap between people and politics, offering innovative perspectives on participatory governance, co-creation, and collaborative decision-making for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. Through examining diverse case studies from around the globe, this collection highlights the transformative potential of local governments to understand and effectively respond to the evolving needs of their constituents (Anthony Jr., 2024). As cities are faced with complex issues such as inequality, climate change, and social fragmentation, the imperative for inclusive and accountable governance becomes ever more pressing. This editorial seeks to illuminate the pathways through which local governments can bring people and politics together, thereby revitalising democratic processes, and restoring public trust in an increasingly polarised world.

The interconnection between ever-changing and pressing urban issues shaped by global and local forces makes participatory urban planning complex. It is well-acknowledged that such collective endeavour benefits from interdisciplinary approaches informed by evidence. If we are to achieve inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities, it is essential that we embrace learning, diversity, inclusion, justice, and rights. Co-designed education is crucial for preparing future professionals to promote genuine participation of all parties involved in urban planning processes. To end merely tokenistic involvement in decision-making processes, models of effective participation must provide the tools to prompt all parties to express and negotiate their views with those who have the ultimate power to make the final decision count and means of ensuring different perspectives are given the due weight are welcome (Lundy, 2007). In this overlaying of opportunities and challenges, the articles of this thematic issue offer insights into reimagining policy, planning, design, and management as educational grounds for expression, negotiation, dissent, and learning.

The germination of this thematic issue took place during the Local Democracy Academy 2022 hosted in Visby, Gotland, by the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy and brought together 45 researchers from 27 countries. Our interest in calling for this thematic issue was to explore trans-disciplinary case studies that could illuminate the role of participatory democracy for local governments to better understand and respond to the needs of their constituents. The articles presented in this issue show a variety of cases exploring the dynamic interplay between proponents of citizen engagement and critics who caution against its potential pitfalls. On one hand, several studies highlight the transformative potential of participatory mechanisms. For instance, the development of a "Child-Focused Cities Analytical Framework" emphasises the importance of amplifying children's voices in urban planning, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Similarly, research on urban agriculture policies in Brazilian cities showcases how local government entrepreneurs can drive sustainable food systems through collaborative efforts. On the other hand, the issue also critically examines the challenges and limitations of such participatory approaches. This includes articles which, through discussing the implementation of human rights policies in Australia, and the negotiation of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces in Helsinki and Vienna, underscore the risks of tokenistic participation and the complexities of achieving genuine accountability. By juxtaposing these varied insights, this thematic issue contributes to the ongoing debates in participatory urban planning by providing a balanced view that acknowledges both the potential and the

limitations of citizen engagement in local governance. Collectively, these articles underscore the need for innovative, inclusive, and accountable governance practices that can navigate the delicate balance between empowering citizens and ensuring effective, meaningful participation.

2. Overview of the Articles

This issue starts with three articles that look into the potential of participatory local democracy to address the global challenge of climate change. These articles link local solutions to global challenges and illustrate both the possibilities and constraints that local democracy has for wider societal transformations that go beyond the case. We have grouped them in Table 1 below as examples of "transformative governance." In the first article, Buschka et al. examine the challenges faced by civil society across Europe in driving initiatives aimed at meeting human needs within planetary boundaries, within the prevailing growth-oriented urban development paradigm. They highlight one key capacity limitation: the time commitment of the dedicated, often voluntary citizen members required to realise the potential of these important initiatives. Similarly, the article by van Eldik et al. exploring local spatial planning and water management among local governments in the Netherlands show the strategic challenges associated with long-term planning. However, their research illustrated how the co-creation of long-term visions has fostered more climate-aware dialogues between local government authorities and civil stakeholder groups. Complementing these, Smith et al. criticise the role of external experts in participatory climate events, such as climate assemblies. They argued that rather than externally imposed participatory design processes, it is the building of ongoing relationships between local communities and the local governments, and an embedding of an institutional culture that is willing to trust local citizens and ultimately cede decision making power, that will produce the enabling conditions needed to realise the necessary change.

The second group of articles delves into innovative practices that try to move beyond tokenistic involvement in decision-making, exploring models for effective participation, and highlighting tools that encourage co-governance. We start with Capra-Ribeiro and his tour of innovative best practices in urban Latin America and the Caribbean. Through exposing the most prevalent recurring issues and successful actions from the analysis of 45 case studies, the author underlines the importance of stakeholder collaboration in policy formation and the need for local authorities to utilise policies that foster cooperative relationships among the public, private, and community sector actors if we are to advance a wide variety of urgent sustainable urban development goals. Focusing on access to housing, Schmid et al. develop an interdisciplinary perspective on the interplay between collaborative housing organisations and municipal housing policies. In this exemplary case study analysis, the research shows how an innovative cooperative housing initiative in Freiburg, Germany, is integrated into the co-productive process between housing policy, planning law, and collaborative housing groups, and that local decision makers can show a high degree of political determination to enable and promote such initiatives as a new approach to urban development.

The next two articles also use collaborative governance, but here it is possible to see a more top-down approach, as both cases focus on the role of local bureaucrats. First, the study on urban greening in Europe by Chapman et al. collected a set of 126 indicators for collaborative governance and tested 80 of these in specific European cities. This study shows the possibility of addressing a more equitable distribution of benefits of green initiatives by using co-governance indicators to monitor success. However, this study also highlights barriers to such equitable distribution such as the limited agency of local government staff to

influence the results and the need to politicise practice-based research projects on urban greening. The second study by Alonso Ferreira et al. on urban agriculture policies in Brazilian cities highlights the role of local government bureaucrats as "policy entrepreneurs" in advancing sustainable food systems. Through a comparative case study of Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba, the research identifies strategies such as collaboration with civil society, partnerships, and leveraging media to secure resources and legitimise actions. These policy entrepreneurs introduce resilient programs and integrate urban agriculture into planning regulations, demonstrating their pivotal role in shaping sustainable urban policies.

The third set of articles look into the role of participatory urban planning and design in bringing local governments and people together to address urban challenges. The article by Cairns et al. emphasises the critical role of local governance in facilitating children's participation and inclusion in urban environments. It introduces the "Child-Focused Cities Analytical Framework," developed through an interdisciplinary approach, to advance the concept of child-friendly cities. The framework aims to address the complex challenges of child participation, aligning with the SDGs. The research highlights the potential of children to drive social and environmental change and underscores the importance of amplifying their voices within social, physical, and relational spheres. Similarly, the study by Cilliers et al. on school spaces in Australia explores the potential of public schools to serve as shared spaces that benefit local communities socially, environmentally, and economically. It highlights the need for a collective reimagining of school facilities as pivotal urban nodes, emphasising the importance of collaboration between education and urban planning disciplines. The research identifies managerial and legal challenges in shared use agreements and underscores the role of local planning authorities in facilitating a multi-disciplinary approach to reposition school spaces as focal points for sustainable city and community development.

Hanzl and Olczak's study on transportation inequalities in Łódź, Poland, employs social-ecological urbanism to analyse the transformation of the tramway system. It integrates communicative planning theory with a detailed case study to understand the roles and attitudes of stakeholders. The research highlights the importance of public participation in strengthening transportation equity and emphasises the need to combine communicative planning methods with strategic planning. This approach helps in understanding the specific roles of various system components, aiding future redevelopment efforts.

The last group of articles takes a more sceptical look into the role of citizen participation in achieving inclusion. Dekker et al. provide a detailed account on the challenges and opportunities for a local government in implementing a human rights policy within a local government in Melbourne, Australia. They argue that successful implementation requires strong leadership, accountability, and operational capability. The authors show how lack of leadership, overreliance on quantitative monitoring, and diffused operational capability hinder progress. The authors argue that in this case example, there was tokenistic participation because the involvement of residents and community representatives is often superficial and does not lead to meaningful influence on policy decisions.

The collection concludes with Haselbacher et al.'s study on public spaces in Helsinki and Vienna and identifies four key challenges in negotiating inclusion and exclusion, highlighting the perspectives and tensions among various stakeholders. It underscores the critical role of public spaces in fostering sustainable and resilient urban futures, emphasising the need for local governments to balance universal and particularistic policy measures. The authors argue that proactive involvement of diverse stakeholders is essential to address vulnerabilities and effectively manage the overlapping and contradictory effects of policies.

Table 1. Overview of the articles.

Article Title	Category	Countries	Notes
Sufficiency Initiatives and Municipalities: Opportunities and Limitations for Bringing People and Politics Together (Buschka et al.)	Transformative Governance	EU Member States	Explores civil-society initiatives in fostering sufficiency and sustainable urban living.
Transition Processes in Dutch Spatial Planning and Water Management: A Shift to the Natural (van Eldik et al.)	Transformative Governance	Netherlands	Examines co-creation and public participation in climate-adaptive spatial planning.
Participatory Climate Action: Reflections on Community Diversity and the Role of External Experts (Smith et al.)	Transformative Governance	UK	Reflects on the role of researchers in participatory climate action projects.
Prevailing Issues and Actions in Urban Best Practices Across Latin America and the Caribbean (Capra-Ribeiro)	Collaborative Governance	Latin America and the Caribbean	Highlights community engagement and collaboration in urban best practices.
Towards a "Freiburg Model" of Housing for the Common Good? Fostering Collaborative Housing in Urban Development (Schmid et al.)	Collaborative Governance	Germany	Discusses collaborative housing and community involvement in urban development.
Towards More Equitable Urban Greening: A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Co-Governance (Chapman et al.)	Collaborative Governance	Europe	Provides a framework for monitoring and evaluating urban greening co-governance.
Cultivating Urban Agriculture Policies: Local Government Entrepreneurs' Strategies in Three Brazilian Cities (Alonso Ferreira et al.)	Collaborative Governance	Brazil	Emphasises local government actors in promoting sustainable food systems.
Laying the Foundations for a Child-Focused Cities Analytical Framework: Reflections From an International, Interdisciplinary Collaboration (Cairns et al.)	Participatory Urban Planning	International (Sweden)	Focuses on incorporating children's voices in urban planning.
Going Back to School: Reflecting on School Space as "Shared Space" to Shape Cities and Communities (Cilliers et al.)	Participatory Urban Planning	Australia	Discusses the potential of shared school spaces to enhance community engagement.
Social-Ecological Urbanism as a Research Perspective to Analyse Transportation Inequalities in the Region of Łódź, Poland (Hanzl & Olczak)	Participatory Urban Planning	Poland	Highlights public participation in addressing transportation inequalities.
Challenges and Opportunities for a Local Government Implementing a Human Rights Policy in Australia (Dekker et al.)	Tokenistic Participation	Australia	Examines the challenges of implementing a human rights policy in local governance.
Inclusion and Exclusion in Urban Public Space: Contemporary Challenges in Vienna and Helsinki (Haselbacher et al.)	Tokenistic Participation	Finland, Austria	Analyses the complexities of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces and urban governance.

3. Critical Reflections

This thematic issue aimed at collecting studies on "Transformative Local Governments" that were addressing social urban challenges by bridging the gap between people and politics. The cases presented looked into concreate needs of citizens related to housing, water, transportation, green urban spaces, human rights, climate action, and children participation. The local governments featured in these studies have demonstrated varying degrees of success in fostering transformation. By implementing co-governance models, they have made strides in moving beyond tokenistic involvement towards a wider involvement of citizens and ensuring diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. However, the extent of these transformations varies, with some local governments achieving more substantial changes than others. This highlights the need for continued research and policy development to re-think and reflect on different models and approaches to citizen participation in local governments.

While the enthusiasm for innovative models of citizen participation is commendable, it is crucial to remain cautious about the potential pitfalls of buzzwords and superficial engagement. To avoid tokenistic involvement in decision-making processes, it is essential to ensure that citizens genuinely have the power to influence outcomes. This means creating mechanisms that give due weight to diverse and dissenting perspectives, particularly those of marginalised groups, whose needs are often overlooked. Additionally, there is a significant risk that participatory forums could inadvertently replace democratic institutions, such as locally elected councils. It is vital to recognise that citizen participation in more direct democratic practices should complement, not replace, representative democracy. Effective citizen participation is a means of enhancing democratic processes by providing a platform for voices that might otherwise go unheard, thereby enriching the decision-making landscape. Ensuring that participatory models are designed to work alongside traditional representative democratic structures will help maintain the integrity and effectiveness of both.

It is our hope that readers, scholars, and policymakers critically engage with the findings of this thematic issue, challenging the status quo and pushing for genuine systemic change. By rigorously scrutinising and refining participatory frameworks, we can enhance inclusive urban governance, where the voices of marginalised communities are not just heard but have a tangible impact on decision-making processes.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 7960
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.7960

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Sufficiency Initiatives and Municipalities: Opportunities and Limitations for Bringing People and Politics Together

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Submitted: 23 January 2024 **Accepted:** 3 September 2024 **Published:** 3 October 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

This article examines the potential and challenges of sufficiency initiatives within the urban environment, focusing on their ability to bring people and politics together. Drawing on research from the EU-funded "FULFILL" project, which includes surveys, interviews and case studies in five EU Member States, this study explores the role of civil society initiatives in fostering sufficiency—a concept that advocates for meeting human needs within planetary boundaries by altering lifestyles, societal norms, and regulatory frameworks. Sufficiency initiatives find themselves in a precarious position against a backdrop of growth-oriented urban development and face barriers such as lack of resources, legal and regulatory challenges, measurement difficulties, and inertia of municipalities. However, the study also identifies examples of fruitful cooperation between municipalities and initiatives and identifies enablers for successful collaboration, including aligned goals, engaged individuals, and effective communication. By providing an outlook for short-, mid-, and long-term governance perspectives, this article argues for strategic niche management in the short term, development of metrics for sufficiency in the medium term, and a systemic shift in urban dynamics in the long term. As urban sufficiency initiatives offer services and infrastructure to promote sustainable living, they are critical players in guiding cities towards ecological and social resilience. This article contributes to the discourse on urban sustainability by highlighting the importance of municipalities in nurturing sufficiency initiatives that can drive social well-being and environmental stewardship.

Keywords

civil society; initiatives; local governance; municipalities; planetary boundaries; social innovations; sufficiency; transformative governance; urban sustainability

1. Introduction

Cities are accountable for a significant share of energy consumption and contribute approximately 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions (European Commission, 2019). Consequently, they are at the forefront of climate action. However, cities' growth-oriented policies often conflict with their sustainability goals (Böcker et al., 2020).

Sufficiency is increasingly acknowledged as an essential complement to prevailing efficiency and consistency measures in combating the climate crisis (IPCC, 2022; Sachverständigenrat für Umweltfragen, 2024). This article builds upon the conceptual groundwork established within the "FULFILL" project (Pagliano et al., 2023), defining three key areas of impact on sufficiency based on Sahakian and Wilhite (2014): habits, infrastructure, and the societal framework. Thus, the researchers of the "FULFILL" consortium have worked on the basis of a common understanding that sufficiency aims at creating social, infrastructural, and regulatory conditions to change individual and collective lifestyles in ways that reduce energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions to an extent that they remain within planetary boundaries and simultaneously contribute to societal well-being.

Initiatives aiming at sufficiency challenge how communities meet their needs and advocate a conscious shift in consumption and infrastructure towards less resource-intensive lifestyles (Moser et al., 2018). This shift may not always align with the prevailing patterns of urban development and municipal agendas which commonly focus on growth. Yet, if initiatives for sufficiency weave their way into the urban fabric and find synergy with municipal policies, they can incite significant changes in societal norms, practices, individual behaviours, and the built environment. This is where civil society initiatives can bring people and politics together. Through developing and testing innovative solutions, sufficiency initiatives not only reduce the environmental footprint of citizens but can also maintain—or even enhance—quality of life and social equity (Moser et al., 2018).

This study addresses two interconnected research questions:

1. How are the lifestyles of individuals and communities affected towards more sufficiency by initiatives promoting sufficiency?
2. How do municipal structures and policies influence the work of these initiatives, including the impacts of the first research question?

In this article, we suggest that sufficiency initiatives can serve as a focal point for municipalities, offering opportunities to shift away from the contemporary growth-oriented urban paradigm towards a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient city life. We delve into the transformative potential of urban sufficiency initiatives and their capacity to forge stronger bonds between citizens and urban policymaking and planning. Through an exploration of findings from the EU-funded research project "FULFILL," this article examines the opportunities and limitations of cooperation between municipalities and sufficiency initiatives, highlighting the impacts in various urban settings across Europe.

While the research design employed a multi-method approach to capture a broad spectrum of sufficiency initiatives across the EU, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. First, the selection of initiatives, although diverse, may not fully represent the total population of sufficiency initiatives within the EU. Second, the study relies on self-reported data from the initiatives themselves, potentially introducing bias

and hindering a comprehensive understanding of the actual impact of the initiatives and the perspectives of collaborating municipalities.

2. Sufficiency in the Urban Environment

Mainstream economic theory is characterised by a remarkable paradox: the more economies become dependent on natural resource exploitation, the more economic theory and practice disregarded nature as a primary source of productivity (Immler, 1985, 1990, 2014). This led to an economic core belief system that established productivity, growth, and expansion as an end in itself and thus as indication of economic success. Even though this theoretical construct makes no sense in a physically limited world, it prevailed as a hegemonic dogma of mainstream economic theory, repressing notions of sufficiency, human scale, or meaning. Economic system rationality progressively colonised human life and interactions (Habermas, 1987), and has been contested by various authors (Bahro, 1977; Polanyi, 1975; Schumacher, 1974). In particular, the underlying assumption that ever-increasing production and consumption of a growing amount of goods and services indicated by GDP (Lepenies, 2013) would increase quality of life was challenged (Fromm, 1976; Illich, 1973) and gave rise to the modern conceptualisation of sufficiency contesting hegemonic core beliefs, norms, and values (Princen, 2005; Sachs, 1999; Sachverständigenrat für Umweltfragen, 2024). Meanwhile, sufficiency discourse has matured into a broad scientific debate (Jungell-Michelsson & Heikkurinen, 2022). There is increasing consensus about the potential of sufficiency for achieving climate neutrality (Faber et al., 2012; IPCC, 2022; Samadi et al., 2017), and first attempts to quantify this have been made (Akenji et al., 2019; Creutzig et al., 2021; Vita et al., 2019). Additionally, sufficiency is characterised by a dual focus including multiple effects on (mental) health and urban attractive spaces (Wiese et al., 2022). Conversely, sufficiency discourse acknowledges potential drawbacks for gender equality. It argues that individual behavioural changes may lead to a greater dependence on unpaid care work, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles (Spitzner & Buchmüller, 2016).

Cities are examined as venues where the challenges of social transformation are evident and competing rationalities of responses to global environmental changes materialise (Hodson & Marvin, 2017). Transition research focuses on cities and towns where sustainable lifestyles are initiated and tested (Wolfram & Frantzeskaki, 2016; Wolfram et al., 2016). With regard to climate change, local responses have become vibrant fields of experimentation (Castán Broto & Bulkeley, 2013; von Wirth et al., 2019). Experimenting on sustainability transitions is perceived as an "inclusive, practice-based and challenge-led initiative designed to promote system innovation through social learning under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity" (Sengers et al., 2019, p. 161), taking into account local heterogeneity and interactions between actors and structures (Sengers et al., 2019, p. 161). In this context, Lam et al. (2020) refer to the "sustainability initiative" as an umbrella concept for manifestations of urban sustainability experimentation, such as grassroots innovations, social innovations, transition experiments, and transition initiatives. Led by local actors, they provide new ways of thinking, doing, and organising local solutions to sustainability problems with global relevance (Lam et al., 2020). Transition research has analysed the conditions and context under which local initiatives emerge as well as their potential for scaling (Augenstein et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2015; Naber et al., 2017; Westley et al., 2011), including options for policy interventions to increase their impact (Wiek & Lang, 2016).

This article is about a specific subgroup of urban sustainability initiatives, namely, those that contribute to sufficiency. Thus, we use the term "local sufficiency initiatives" as an umbrella concept for urban

experimentation where citizens test routines and actions using new technologies, infrastructure, and social practices at the local level despite the restrictive external conditions and incentive structures that make these lifestyles difficult. Moser et al. (2018) assessed the potential of sufficiency initiatives in the areas of housing, mobility, nutrition, and everyday consumption. In line with Best et al. (2013), they perceive sufficiency not only as an individual but also as a political challenge to transform framework conditions so that the realisation of sufficient lifestyles in cities and towns becomes simple, attractive, and accessible to all. While Moser et al. (2018) only considered sufficiency initiatives in the vicinity of Zurich and comparable regions, "FULFILL" has expanded the scope of research to five EU Member States with the expectation of producing knowledge and insights for the EU.

When approaching the relationships of sufficiency initiatives within the urban system, we must consider that sufficiency initiatives have emerged in urban and rural town settings that are anything but sufficient. Physically, the metabolism of cities or rural towns almost completely depends on the primary productivity of their environments. Cities and towns absorb growing quantities of material and energy from complex, globally organised production and supply chains and excrete harmful emissions and waste in return. In sum, modern cities have the ecological properties of parasites (Rees, 1997) and seem to follow their reproductive behaviour, by definition, at the expense of their host systems. Cities and towns tend to expand and spread as a dominating manifestation of human colonisation of the planet (Kraas et al., 2016). The paramount objective of municipalities seems to be economic and physical growth. An analysis of municipal spatial policies in Germany has shown how the governance of cities and towns of industrialised societies is characterised by a number of mutually reinforcing inherent political, fiscal, and legislative rationalities that drive their physical expansion (Knak, 2021).

Local initiatives aiming for sufficiency are essentially utopian, defying the core values and structures of their growth-oriented urban environments. Can sufficiency initiatives thrive in a system that is inherently hostile to its cause? Our hypothesis is that because economic and physical expansion is a systemic property of modern cities and towns, urban sufficiency initiatives are characterised by inherent vulnerability. By design, sufficiency initiatives represent a vulnerable group, not because their members suffer from material deprivation or social exclusion, but because they are continuously fighting an uphill battle against an unsustainable system. For reasons we will further explore in the article, we argue that they deserve special attention and protection in modern cities and towns.

3. Methodology

This research on sufficiency initiatives was carried out across five EU Member States represented by the "FULFILL" project consortium. Denmark, France, and Germany represent the wealthier north-western countries in the EU (Eurostat, 2022), with different energy and political foci. These countries demonstrate well-established efficiency measures and greater potential for sufficiency interventions compared to further efficiency gains (Lorek & Spangenberg, 2019). Italy represents a southern EU Member State, facing distinct economic challenges, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Zeneli & Santoro, 2023). Lastly, Latvia is a relatively new EU Member State with the transitional experience of a former Soviet republic.

This study employed a sequential, multi-method research design to refine the analysis from a broad overview to an in-depth examination. Each method built upon the preceding one, ensuring that the

approach and selection of sufficiency initiatives for subsequent stages were informed by the findings of the previous phase.

1. *Mapping*: Identifying sufficiency initiatives across participating EU Member States.
2. *Survey*: Using sufficiency initiatives identified during mapping.
3. *Workshops*: One in each of the five EU Member States. Deepening key themes identified from survey.
4. *Case Studies*: Five case studies, one in each EU Member State. Validating and enriching the insights from the survey and workshops.

Our research had two main objectives:

1. *Qualitative analysis of the impact of urban sufficiency initiatives in the EU*. The design and questions employed in the survey, workshops and case studies aimed to identify the self-perceived impact of these initiatives on the environmental footprint, quality of life, and social equity (Moser et al., 2018). Statements from the workshops and case studies were extracted to not only solidify the survey findings with concrete examples but also to uncover further unforeseen impacts. Due to the open-ended discussion format and the initiatives' primary focus on drivers and barriers, the workshops provided less data for impact analysis than the survey and case studies.
2. *Identifying enablers of and barriers to cooperation between municipalities and EU sufficiency initiatives*. The design of the survey, workshops, and case studies also aimed at identifying perceived barriers to and enablers of initiatives regarding their cooperation with municipalities. Specifically, the survey employed a predefined list of categories (e.g., financing, public acceptance, time, etc.) inspired by the findings of Moser et al. (2018) to enable participants to categorise the encountered barriers and enablers. Workshops and case studies adopted a semi-structured discussion format, intentionally omitting predefined categories, to explore whether additional, unforeseen barriers and facilitators might emerge. By analysing survey responses alongside protocols and recordings from the workshops and case study interviews, the most prevalent barriers and enablers faced by the initiatives were identified.

3.1. Mapping

The objective was to identify 45 initiatives across the participating countries (see Table 1) to be included in the survey, workshops, and case studies. The target number aligns with the research design of the "FULFILL" project (45 initiatives with nine per participating EU country). It is important to note that this list does not represent an exhaustive list of sufficiency initiatives but rather serves as a foundation for subsequent research stages.

The selection of the initiatives aimed to achieve a broad spectrum of topics and sectors, thereby reflecting the diversity identified in previous research in Moser et al. (2018). Consequently, the definition of "sufficiency initiatives" within this study encompasses both volunteer-driven and professional initiatives, along with other similar types of organisations such as intentional communities and non-governmental organisations. The primary criterion for inclusion was the initiatives' contribution to promoting sustainable and sufficient lifestyles in a broad sense. This approach resulted in the selection of sufficiency initiatives across five key sectors, as defined by Zell-Ziegler et al. (2021): housing, mobility, food, consumption, and cross-sectoral.

Table 1. Initiatives from the mapping by sector.

Sector	Number of initiatives	Type or topic	Sufficiency in terms of
Housing	14	eco-village, coworking, community, tiny house, shared housing, education on energy and housing, co-housing, reuse/refurbishment of (abandoned) buildings	reduction of waste, reducing energy consumption, reusing buildings, sharing space
Mobility	9	car sharing, cargo-bike sharing, ride sharing, mobility transition	sharing, reduction of car use, transition to eco-friendly mobility
Food	11	food bank, food sharing, food saving, urban gardening, agriculture, permaculture and traditional practices, community-shared agriculture	reduction of waste, cultivation, land preservation, ecological agriculture
Consumption	8	clothes sharing, repair cafe, phone repair, reusable packaging, zero waste, free shop	reduction of waste, repairing items, reusing products, sharing
Cross-sectoral	3	education, research, transition towns, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation	sufficient behaviour, community building, outreach

3.2. Survey

The survey addressed two main subjects: (1) the aims and impacts of the initiatives and (2) their interaction with municipalities and city administrations. Closed and open-ended multiple-choice questions provided initial insights and hypotheses for the subsequent workshops. Participants were also offered the opportunity to complement the survey by providing more detailed information. The survey was translated into five languages (German, French, Italian, Latvian, and Danish). The surveys were completed online, except for the Italian survey which was completed through in-person interviews to enhance response rates. Based on the initial mapping of sufficiency initiatives, a target of approximately ten survey responses per participating country was established. This target proved to be largely achievable, as most countries successfully attained it (see Table 2). However, Denmark and Germany encountered minor difficulties in achieving this goal. Even though the research team invested a significant amount of time, not all of the initiatives identified in the mapping were willing or able to respond to the survey; one possible reason could be that some initiatives are run by volunteers. To reach the target of ten surveys per country, additional initiatives were contacted, resulting in 64 responses with an overshoot of 16 additional responses from Germany (see Table 2).

Table 2. Survey responses per country.

Country	Answers	Initiative sector (listed in descending order of frequency)
Denmark	8	Consumption, housing, food, cross-sectoral, mobility
Germany	26	Mobility, consumption, cross-sectoral, food, housing
France	10	Housing, consumption, cross-sectoral, food, mobility
Italy	10	Food, mobility, cross-sectoral, consumption, housing
Latvia	10	Cross-sectoral, food, consumption, housing, mobility
Total	64	

3.3. Workshops

Following the survey, the research team organised five workshops (online and in-person) in each participating EU Member State, inviting local policymakers and representatives of initiatives to validate and complement the survey results. While engaging with the identified sufficiency initiatives, the research team observed significant variations across national contexts. These discrepancies included factors such as local-level political structures, types of initiatives encountered, and responsiveness and availability of participants. To address this heterogeneity, each participating country developed a workshop design specifically adapted to its national circumstances (details provided in Table 3). Following the completion of the workshops, each partner prepared two summaries in English: one focusing on identifying the impacts of the sufficiency initiatives and another exploring the barriers and drivers. These summaries were then reviewed and the results subsequently compared across the EU Member States. This analysis aims to identify common topics across the EU and specific differences between the participating countries.

3.4. Case Studies

To deepen the insights gained through the survey and workshops, five case studies on sufficiency initiatives were completed. The case studies were selected from a pool of sufficiency initiatives identified in the previous research steps. The primary objective of this selection process was to achieve comprehensive coverage of the diverse content areas. The selection was subject to discussion among the project consortium to ensure a balanced sample. Furthermore, preference was given to initiatives demonstrating a degree of success or established experience, particularly those with strong and ongoing connections to their respective municipalities. Finally, pragmatic considerations led to the selection of responsive initiatives with whom good contact had already been established during the previous research phases. This prioritisation aimed to enhance the quality and depth of the data extracted from the case studies (Table 4).

To comprehensively address the research questions for each case study, the consortium developed a project-specific questionnaire and an impact chain model based on Zell-Ziegler and Thema (2022). The questionnaire was designed to facilitate comparative analysis across cases and provided guidance for semi-structured interviews conducted with members of initiatives and respective municipalities, as well as for completing the impact chain model.

Table 3. Workshops.

Country	Participants (thematic focus of initiatives)	Format	Workshop structure
Denmark	7 (housing, mobility)	online + in-person	First part: Open discussion about identifying barriers. Second part: Open discussion about identifying drivers. Additional statements obtained through direct contact with initiatives that could not attend the workshop.
France	21 (housing, mobility, consumption, cross-sectoral)	online	Two workshops: Workshop 1: First meeting, classifying actions, drivers and barriers relevant for participants. Workshop 2: Sharing personal experience gained from interactions between initiatives and municipalities, exploring recommendations.
Latvia	12 (consumption, mobility, food)	in-person	First part: Open discussion about the impacts achieved by participant initiatives. Second part: Open discussion about barriers and drivers to cooperation with municipalities.
Germany	15 (housing, mobility, food, cross-sectoral)	online	First part: Open discussion about impacts achieved by participant initiatives. Second part: Open discussion about barriers and drivers in the cooperation with municipalities.
Italy	10 (housing, cross-sectoral)	online + in-person	Open discussion of research topics: impacts, barriers, and drivers. No given structure.

Table 4. Case studies.

Country	Initiative
Denmark	Eco-village
Germany	Cargo-bike initiative
France	Tiny house initiative
Italy	Clean air advocacy group
Latvia	Freecycling initiative

The impact chain model was derived from Zell-Ziegler and Thema's (2022) model for analysing energy sufficiency policies, which shares a conceptual foundation with other forms of theory-based evaluations commonly known as theory-of-change or program logic models. These approaches have been widely used for evaluating and planning projects and processes since the 1970s (see, for instance, Rogers & Weiss, 2007; Weiss, 1972). The developed impact chain model guided the analysis and improved visualisation of sufficiency drivers, barriers, and intricate interactions across micro-, meso-, and macro-policy levels by visualising inputs, outputs, outcomes, and the multifaceted impacts of each sufficiency initiative (see Figure 1).

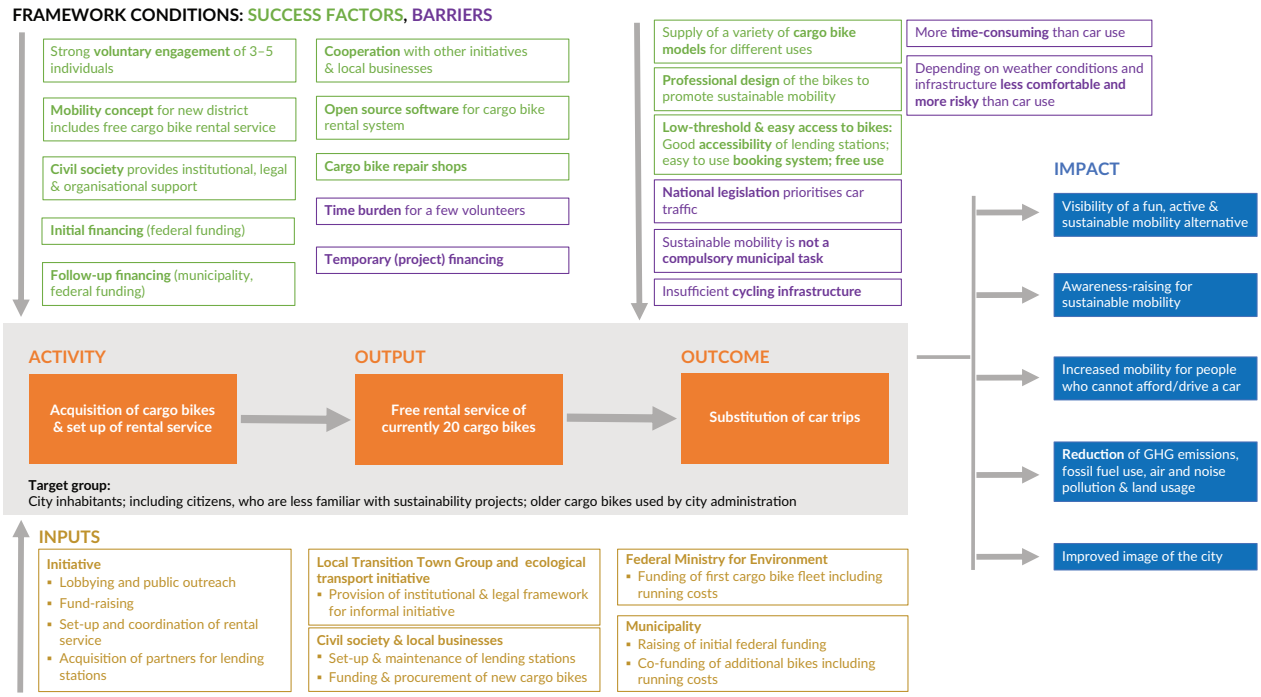

Figure 1. Example of an impact chain (cargo-bike initiative, Germany). Source: Own figure based on Zell-Ziegler and Thema (2022).

After the initial round of semi-structured interviews, members of the initiatives were presented with the model's initial versions, allowing them to suggest changes through an iterative process to prevent misunderstandings or the omission of crucial information. Consequently, the model not only guided the analysis but also informed the methodology by shaping questions for the semi-structured interviews.

4. Results

The surveys, workshops, and case studies in the five EU Member States informed the results, which allow the impacts of local sufficiency initiatives as well as drivers of and barriers to sufficiency in their urban environment to be outlined. While the results from the participating countries exhibited a high degree of similarity, Latvia presents a noteworthy exception. Its historical background appears to have exerted an influence on the acceptance of certain sufficiency measures (see Section 4.2.2).

The findings from the survey, workshops, and case studies demonstrate high convergence levels, with all methods pointing in the same direction. While the survey provided quantitative data and baseline information, workshop discussions and interviews facilitated a deeper understanding of the survey results and allowed for a more profound exchange. This was particularly relevant for clarifying terminology, for example "sufficiency" and the distinction between individual habit changes and societal framework shifts, which presented interpretation challenges for some initiatives. The open dialogue format of the workshops enabled discussions on both barriers and drivers. Interestingly, the workshops revealed high interest among the initiatives in discussing barriers, suggesting a preference for addressing challenges rather than drivers.

4.1. Impact of Initiatives on Lifestyle Changes

The survey results indicate that the participating initiatives mainly aim to influence sufficiency habits ($n = 28$) and infrastructure ($n = 20$). Although a relatively small number of initiatives directly identified societal frameworks ($n = 5$) as their main target, responses to detailed questions regarding the nature of their influence overwhelmingly pointed towards "demonstrating to society and decision makers that more sustainable and sufficient ways to live are possible" ($n = 41$). This suggests that initiatives take a bottom-up approach to promoting broader societal change, prioritising the transformation of individual or small-group habits. The workshop discussions showed a similar tendency, with participants primarily expressing concern regarding the scalability of their bottom-up approaches to achieve a "broad impact."

The survey responses identified "explaining and showing the benefits of a more sustainable and sufficient lifestyle to individuals" ($n = 37$) as a key strategy for influencing individual habits. Many sufficiency initiatives within the sample appear to cultivate environmental and social values, potentially impacting the mindsets and behaviours not only of initiative members but also of individuals beyond the organisational boundaries. For instance, one case study initiative provides accessible data on urban air quality and the health effects of pollution, coupled with practical solutions for mitigating these issues.

Another important impact of sufficiency initiatives on individual habits is enabling active participation and engagement. Most of the initiatives analysed, especially those from the workshops and case studies, are volunteer-driven grassroot initiatives that encourage personal investment in collective efforts to live sustainably. A noteworthy example from the case study interviews is the concept of shared decision-making employed by one eco-village. This approach requires a commitment of effort from all residents, particularly regarding financial and management choices. Moreover, this can generate positive spillover effects, resulting in active citizenship and additional pro-environmental behaviour beyond the initially targeted impacts (Elf et al., 2019). For example, residents of an eco-village who were interviewed are not only provided with sustainable housing but also access to sharing services such as car sharing and shared tools that further reduce consumption. However, some initiative services may pose a risk of negative side-effects. For instance, an interview with a freecycling initiative revealed that the availability of free items sometimes leads users to acquire more than they would if they had to pay for them, eventually encouraging additional consumption.

Furthermore, sufficiency initiatives can offer various benefits to participants beyond environmental impact. Consistent with the dual focus of sufficiency, sufficiency initiatives can provide health advantages such as improved (mental) well-being (Wiese et al., 2022). This can be seen in initiatives fostering a sense of community and belonging. For example, a resident from an eco-village stated that:

> It gives me so much meaning living here. In contrast to living in the city, when it comes to the climate agenda, it just makes so much sense being part of working the land, living more sustainably. Feeling like I am a part of this. I felt more alienated before, and more powerless.

Promoting "the tiny house way of life" is another example from a tiny house initiative. This initiative emphasises that the collaborative construction of tiny houses not only fosters the acquisition of new skills but also strengthens community. Such collaboration reinforces shared values and promotes connectedness among participants.

In terms of infrastructure, sufficiency initiatives can offer resources to facilitate sufficiency habits on a small scale, both for their members and the public. The case study involving a cargo-bike initiative exemplifies this approach. The initiative provides citizens free access to cargo bikes and related service infrastructure without membership requirements, promoting sustainable transportation of goods. Similarly, the freecycle initiative from the case studies demonstrates an alternative to consuming new goods. This platform facilitates the circulation of unwanted items within the community with the aim of waste reduction by offering citizens the opportunity to acquire free items and dispose of unwanted goods.

4.2. Barriers to Cooperation Between Initiatives and Municipalities

Through an inductive analysis comparing the results of the survey, workshops, and case studies, four key areas emerged as potential barriers to cooperation between initiatives and municipalities.

4.2.1. Lack of Human and Financial Resources

A significant challenge identified for sufficiency initiatives within the sample is the lack of financial and human resources. This is evidenced in the survey data, where the most commonly cited barriers include "financing" ($n = 36$), "finding motivated staff or volunteers" ($n = 32$), and "too little time/overload of members" ($n = 30$).

While the workshop and case study participants generally reported positive experiences when securing funding, two key obstacles emerged. First, many initiatives identified the process as time-consuming and lacking transparency, further compounded by a lack of available information regarding potential funding opportunities. Second, participants expressed concerns about the structure of public funding. Typically, public funds are provided as one-time project grants, which initiatives perceive as less beneficial than continuous support, particularly for staffing needs.

Although most of the initiatives presented in the workshops and case studies do not have difficulties recruiting volunteers, they experience a high membership turnover rate. Some administrative tasks are often described as very time-consuming and require a certain level of experience, which is why the initiatives would like to have paid staff dedicated to these tasks and for communicating with authorities.

4.2.2. System Inertia

The survey further highlighted the lack of "support by politicians and administrations" ($n = 28$) as a significant barrier, particularly considering that 34 initiatives rated such support as "very important." Workshop discussions and case studies revealed a similar pattern: local authorities are often reluctant to support initiatives, and initiatives struggle to identify appropriate municipal contacts. The interviewed initiatives attributed this lack of support to potential risk aversion among municipal employees or limitations in their capacity. Historical factors may also play a role. In the Latvian workshops, participants noted that the country's Soviet past has significantly impacted public acceptance of single sufficiency measures like communal living and food sharing, potentially influencing municipal attitudes towards related activities. While our analysis did not extend to a detailed historical examination of all five countries, Latvia stood out in this respect. Nevertheless, we assume that national contexts, including historical and socio-cultural factors like social trust and economic equality, likely influence participation in voluntary organisations and

interactions with local governments (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). By exploring these national contexts, future research may contribute to a deeper understanding of the underlying system dynamics.

4.2.3. Regulatory and Legal Hurdles

Depending on the sector, the collaboration between initiatives and municipalities is also affected by legal and administrative issues (n = 13). For instance, the workshops revealed that eco-villages and community-supported agriculture initiatives face challenges related to local zoning regulations and city planning processes. In addition, workshop discussions highlighted how existing insurance policies, such as those designed for individual car ownership, and utility regulations can hinder car-sharing initiatives.

4.2.4. Lack of Independent Evaluation and Measurable Success

The case study analyses revealed another challenge for initiatives: the limited resources available for conducting independent evaluations of their impact. Specifically, initiatives often lack the capacity to quantify their contributions in terms of avoided carbon emissions, resource savings, and citizen well-being. The absence of robust evaluation metrics hinders efforts to demonstrate results and, consequently, can impede the acquisition of municipal support.

4.3. Enabling Cooperation Between Initiatives and Municipalities

By comparing the survey, workshop, and case study results (see also Section 4.2), we identified two main enablers to good cooperation between initiatives and municipalities.

4.3.1. Engaged Individuals and Effective Communication

The survey, workshops, and case studies consistently identified two key enablers of the initiatives' success: engaged individuals and effective communication. The survey data reflected this, with several initiatives selecting "motivated staff/volunteers" (n = 32) and "shared vision within the initiatives" (n = 38) as facilitators. These findings are supported by workshop discussions and case studies. Representatives from local initiatives emphasised that the quality of cooperation with municipalities is often driven by individual motivation and engagement by municipal staff. Additionally, good communication and established personal contact points were identified as beneficial factors. Networking with other initiatives, both within and beyond their sector (n = 45), was also viewed as crucial for the success of initiatives within the sample.

4.3.2. Aligning Goals

Successful cooperation between initiatives and municipalities are facilitated by common interests. For example, municipalities struggling with housing market challenges may be more willing to collaborate with housing initiatives to address related legal and regulatory issues, as demonstrated by the case studies. Municipal decarbonisation strategies and reduction targets were also identified as a helpful element for motivating cooperation with sufficiency initiatives, as initiatives can help municipalities reach their sustainability targets.

5. Discussion

This article delves into the transformative potential of sufficiency-oriented initiatives and their capacity to reshape habits, infrastructure, and societal frameworks as the three main impact areas for a more sustainable and sufficient urban future. By drawing upon the insights gleaned from the "FULFILL" research project, the discussion explores our two interconnected research questions.

5.1. Impact of Initiatives on the Lifestyles of Individuals and Communities Towards More Sufficiency

The findings highlight the multifaceted impact of sufficiency initiatives. They primarily target a shift in consumption habits (e.g., sharing goods) and influence existing infrastructure (e.g., provision of cargo bikes). They represent and demonstrate, in their specific domains, a frugal lifestyle as an alternative to the dominant lifestyle of abundance (Sachs, 2022). While not directly targeting societal frameworks, sufficiency initiatives usually represent an approach to social change that works under the assumption that bottom-up diffusion of changes in individual behaviour and lifestyles accumulate in a critical mass that can induce cultural shifts and eventually set the right conditions for change (Lage, 2022). Similar to previous studies like Moser et al. (2018), this research identifies significant benefits for participants beyond environmental gains. Initiatives can foster a sense of community, belonging, health, and improved well-being.

5.2. Influence of Municipal Structures and Policies on the Work of Initiatives

Given their potential societal and environmental benefits, sufficiency initiatives can make valuable contributions to the challenges faced by urban systems during the climate crisis. However, these initiatives are inherently vulnerable because they operate contrary to the prevailing rationalities of growth-oriented societies (see Section 2). The analysed cooperation between sufficiency initiatives and municipalities reveals numerous barriers that confirm their vulnerability in urban systems. This is particularly evident in the lack of support, manifested by the often reluctant behaviour of municipalities towards these initiatives and their difficulty in identifying appropriate contacts. Furthermore, funding, regulatory, and legal frameworks are generally unsupportive of these initiatives. The few successful initiatives underscore the substantial benefits of effective and supportive cooperation while simultaneously highlighting the systemic inequalities present in other cases. These successful collaborations are primarily facilitated by engaged individuals on both sides, effective communication, and a dedicated municipal contact. Moreover, the alignment of goals between the initiatives and municipalities can significantly enhance their effectiveness.

5.3. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of our survey, workshops, and case studies, as well as a review of the literature, we have developed a set of policy recommendations with a subsequent short-, medium-, and long-term perspective.

In the short term, municipalities can support local sufficiency initiatives through strategic niche management, protecting them from the full force of prevailing selection pressures within unsustainable urban systems (Kemp et al., 2000). In the medium term, the challenge lies in translating sufficiency concepts into measurable metrics and indicators essential for evidence-based policymaking. In the long term, the aim is to redirect urban system dynamics towards favouring sufficient solutions over growth-oriented approaches.

This requires a comprehensive policy approach that integrates price signals, infrastructure development, legal frameworks, and social norms to foster systemic change.

6. Conclusion

This research contributes to a better understanding of sufficiency at the local level and its impacts at the individual and community levels and provides insights into the necessary conditions for sufficiency initiatives to be upscaled. The rich tapestry of civil society initiatives across European cities showcases the multifaceted potential to contribute to climate neutrality goals set by the European Green Deal, as emphasised by the growing body of literature. However, the inherent vulnerability of these initiatives stemming from their opposition to the prevailing growth paradigm of modern cities necessitates special attention and protection.

Our research collaboration highlighted a key resource constraint: the time and personal investment required by initiative members, many of whom are volunteers. While their interest was evident, limited time availability sometimes hindered their full engagement. Financial compensation, e.g., for attending workshops, can boost motivation.

Additionally, our research identified the need for further investigation of the complex impacts of sufficiency initiatives on gender equality. Similar to the concerns raised by Spitzner and Buchmüller (2016), reliance on volunteer work may unintentionally reinforce gender disparities. Conversely, some initiatives, such as eco-villages, can alleviate the burdens associated with unpaid care work by promoting fairer task distribution. Furthermore, the presence of women in leadership roles in some initiatives suggests the potential to challenge traditional gender norms.

This study builds upon the findings of Moser et al. (2018) by extending their analysis to the EU level and opens doors for deeper research in the EU and other global contexts. Understanding the diverse approaches and impacts of sufficiency initiatives across the world can be a crucial asset.

In conclusion, this research provides a foundation for further investigation of sufficiency initiatives. By fostering their growth and collaboration with municipalities, we can accelerate the path towards a future where cities prioritise sufficiency and can positively contribute to climate change and justice.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Additional research data can be found at https://fulfill-sufficiency.eu.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8056
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8056

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Transition Processes in Dutch Spatial Planning and Water Management: A Shift to the Natural

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Submitted: 12 January 2024 **Accepted:** 17 July 2024 **Published:** 15 October 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

Climate change is causing more extreme weather conditions in the Netherlands. In response, local governments such as Provinces, Municipalities, and regional Water Boards are encouraged to explore more nature-inclusive ways to keep society safe from flooding and drought. This is considered a transition from the earlier belief that environmental and societal challenges can be solved solely through technical engineering. Instead, landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions offer alternatives on how Dutch regions can maintain water security while also incorporating space for biodiversity, climate mitigation, healthy livelihood and expanding populations. So far, not much is known about the challenges project leaders from different organisations and local governments are facing during the development and implementation of such visions. To address this gap, we used the concept of learning history to build an archive capturing the insider perspective of project leaders tasked with co-creating landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions for future spatial planning and water management across four regions of the Netherlands. By observing and interviewing project leaders, we noticed how co-creating long-term visions enabled more climate-conscious dialogues between local government authorities and civil stakeholder groups. Reflecting on this archive, we gained insights into the strategic challenges associated with adopting biophysical processes as a foundational framework for future spatial development and policy-making. Furthermore, we documented examples of tactical approaches employed by project leaders to navigate these challenges effectively.

Keywords

climate adaptation; landscape-based visioning; Netherlands 2120; water management

1. Introduction

On the 17th of May 2022, the Dutch Minister of Public Housing and Spatial Planning sent a letter to the House of Representatives in which he announced that the soil-water system should be the guiding principle for future spatial planning policies (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2022). Elaborating on this announcement, it was stated that the Dutch government should no longer rely on the belief that surroundings can be manufactured and technically manipulated without consequences. Recurring events such as flooding, desiccation, heat stress, biodiversity loss, and soil and water pollution have proven this, and will likely occur even more due to climate change. Therefore, to turn the tide and to achieve sustainable, healthy, and attractive living environments in the long term, it is important to "listen" to what the soil and water "have to say."

The letter represents one of many signals that the Dutch government is breaking with the popular belief that spatial planning policy is no longer needed in the Netherlands because the layout of the country was finalised ("Nederland is af"). This belief emerged around the turn of the millennium and led to abolishing national responsibility for spatial planning and dissolving the Ministry of Public Housing and Spatial Planning in 2010. Several Dutch advisory boards, however, have since been addressing the need for the return of coordination of central spatial planning, and strengthening of the role of local governance (Algemene Bestuursdienst, 2021; Interdepartementaal beleidsonderzoek ruimtelijke ordening, 2021; Planbureau voor de leefomgeving, 2021; Raad voor de leefomgeving en infrastructuur, 2021; Raad voor het openbaar bestuur, 2021). Without exception, these reports also point towards the acknowledgement of ecological and environmental limitations, stating that if the goal is to build towards a sustainable layout of the country, governing institutions cannot ignore soil and subsoil boundaries. The idea is to respect the limits of the natural system with a long-term sustainable land management strategy instead of repressing undesired environmental dynamics with often temporal technological solutions (Baptist et al., 2019; Visser et al., 2019). However, using the natural system as a prerequisite for spatial planning and development would mean drastic changes in the Dutch landscapes, which would coincide with a need to restructure the roles of particular governing and/or executive institutions.

1.1. Earlier Shifts in Water Management

A similar shift in attention and attitude towards a more integral and eco-friendly approach has taken place before, when the implementing agency for the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, called "Rijkswaterstaat," welcomed ecologists and biologists to work alongside technical engineers on the construction of the Dutch Delta Works (van der Brugge et al., 2005). Biodiversity goals, next to water safety goals, became integrated with the work of Dutch engineers dealing with rising water levels and their mission to obtain safety for a society partly situated below sea level. Conditions for this turn of events have been linked to a wave of socio-political environmentalism (Disco, 2002; Lintsen, 2002). Even though this wave ended, Rijkswaterstaat has proceeded to combine ecological principles within technical engineering during the development and construction of the Sand Motor (Rijkswaterstaat, 2021) and the execution of the Room for the River programme (Rijkswaterstaat, 2019). In both projects, ecological principles were used to strengthen biodiversity and coastal or river defence. In the Sand Motor project, this was done by stimulating natural deposit processes that provide sand to beaches and dunes. In the Room for River programme, riverbeds were widened to capture or divert abundant rainwater and strengthen the resilience of biodiversity within floodplains. From the perspective of national water management, Rijkswaterstaat will

likely continue to play a key role in safeguarding the main Dutch aqua structures. However, when it comes to the local organisation of water management and the coming challenges regarding climate adaptation, responsibility also falls under the Dutch Water Boards.

1.2. Spatial Planning and the Role of Dutch Water Boards

The Dutch Water Boards are democratically elected regional governments with similar sizes as provinces, but different geographical boundaries. Their primary task is to protect civilians from floods at a regional level. In the past, this has led to a focus on drainage, mostly for the benefit of agriculture. Nowadays, increasing droughts and heavy rainfall are pushing the agenda toward a different, more climate-adaptive and nature-inclusive view of water management on a local scale (Deltares, 2021). This includes a certain responsibility for land use beyond agricultural production, which also imposes new demands on the style and perception of water management. The role of Dutch Water Boards is therefore becoming broader, focusing more and more on the spatial conditions that are important for safeguarding consistent freshwater quantity and quality. This can be considered as a "transition" in local water governance.

2. Problem Statement and Research Questions

The developments described in the introduction represent a significant societal shift towards a future where climate change is prevented, biodiversity is promoted, and water is managed adaptively. A transition generally goes through several phases: pre-development, take-off, acceleration, and stabilisation (or breakdown; see, e.g., Rotmans, 2005). Typical of the take-off and acceleration phases is the complexity of developments that, due to coincidental combinations, can take on a multitude of forms and directions. Until a breakthrough is reached and old regimes start to phase out, stakeholders often find themselves in a state of chaos (Visser et al., 2019). For example: In an evaluation of 14 innovative land consolidation and development processes, it was found that the innovation was often set in motion by unexpected and unpredictable occurrences outside the process itself and thus out of the scope of project leaders. Moments of acceleration were located at different scales that can vary from very personal or local to global (Timmermans, 2013). Another crucial aspect of a transition is the scaling and integration of local technical or social innovations into new practices, technologies, and institutions (Geels, 2011; van den Bosch & Rotmans, 2008). Usually, transitions are not initiated from a single point. Therefore, transition management (e.g., by local governments) occurs on multiple fronts, with a multitude of strategic, tactical, operational, and learning activities occurring in a dynamic and alternating manner (Loorbach, 2010). Much has been published on phasing, upscaling, and transition management, but mostly from an outsider's perspective, looking back at the course of transition processes from a distance and trying to discover some general mechanisms in them.

The objective of this article is to present a supplementary perspective from the standpoint of project managers who are engaged in this type of process and are required to make strategic, tactical, and operational choices regularly, often with limited time for evaluation and learning. They lack the luxury of an overarching perspective and the capacity to exert influence beyond the limits of their project. Frequently, they must navigate their way forward with only a rudimentary sense of direction. They are working in an area full of pitfalls and risks, where long-term sustainability goals are continuously challenged with often unexpected societal changes (e.g., a pandemic breaks out). Vallance and Edwards (2021) describe this area (for urban planning) as tension between strategic planning and tactical urbanism. In our study, this refers to

the tension within the transition management cycle (Loorbach, 2010), articulated here as the tension between strategic transition challenges and tactical and operational ways to deal with those challenges. As this can be a major problem in practice, we examined how project leaders deal with those tensions in four cases in the Netherlands. In particular, we focus on two questions:

> Strategic question: What are major developments and areas of tension that may boost or hinder the shift to the natural, i.e., taking biophysical processes as a starting point for future spatial developments and policies? This question relates to the possibility of building long-term coalitions with other developments in society.
>
> Tactical question: What are the tactical elements that contribute to acting successfully in the area between transition goals and operation? This question relates to utilising transition-enabling factors and mechanisms.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Gathering

Every project followed developed future visions in which landscape properties play a prominent role in their benefits to avoid/minimise climate change effects (Pedroli et al., 2021; van Rooij et al., 2021; Timmermans et al., 2022). The goal of our research, however, was not to assess or evaluate the visions themselves, but to investigate the experience of trying to mobilise and being in the middle of a (potential) transition. In this regard, we perceive the role of project leaders (either from scientific and/or governmental institutions) as important transition intermediaries who facilitate niche-regime interaction through their capability to tactfully convey how strategic transition challenges will require a more nature-based governance style (Ehnert, 2023). Our research, therefore, concerns how project leaders actually *do* future planning instead of the plan itself, including how they can figure out the context of situations and improvise in case of unexpected events (e.g., Forester, 2023). To gain insight from this insider's perspective, we have adopted a qualitative, inductive approach. The approach includes observing six senior project leaders in their daily work in connection to the development and promotion of landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions, and questioning them twice a year through semi-structured interviews. Three of the project leaders that were studied were employees of Wageningen University & Research (WUR), two were employees of Dutch Water Boards, and one was an employee of the municipality of Arnhem. All project leaders have been anonymised. During the interviews, a topic list was used, comprising preliminary, open-ended questions aimed at exploring their perceptions of factual events that occurred throughout their projects. Specific attention was given to what, according to them, could point towards a shift or transition in different domains of their work. Linking to the framework for steering transition experiments (van den Bosch & Rotmans, 2008), questions were asked to determine whether new ideas or ways of acting had emerged (deepening), whether visions had to be adapted due to often unexpected events (broadening), and whether these visions were leading to new interventions or new coalitions (scaling up).

3.2. Data Analysis

All observations, transcripts, and reflections were collected between 2020 and 2022 and stored in an online log. This log served as a chronological archive, or "learning history" (Kleiner & Roth, 1997), of the transition process towards landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions. According to Kleiner and Roth (1997), a learning history consists of a narrative with three layers. The first layer includes the actual events in a project and contains facts such as dates, decisions, technical research, and moments of participation. The second layer includes the perceptions of different people in the project; it includes, for example, interviews on key moments. This may involve collecting multiple perspectives by interviewing different people. The third layer is the reflective one; it involves observations from people outside the process, such as, in this case, an anthropologist. An example of the application of this method is illustrated in Figure 1.

After each year of the research, the log was studied by the authors of this article to identify key moments where decisions and/or actions towards taking biophysical processes as a starting point for future spatial developments and policy were either hindered or made. Referring to common transition management cycles (Loorbach, 2010), factors and elements leading up to these moments were later categorised as strategic (long-term) transition challenges and tactical approaches used by project leaders deal with them.

3.3. Position of the Researchers and WUR

In all four cases, WUR was involved either as commissioner or as co-creative partner of landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions. The results of this article are the product of a separate project, designed to monitor and reflect on the process of developing landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions and the effects these visions can enable. Researchers in this separate project were involved in two ways: either as a linking pin between all the projects or as observers and/or qualitative researchers working on the sidelines.

4. Case Studies

Table 1 below presents a characterisation of each case that was followed and the associated interviewee or interviewees. Each case involved several co-creating partners that had their own respective roles. For the interviews, we approached project leaders that were either connected to a Water Board or WUR. In the case of "Arnhem 2120," we interviewed the program leader that was responsible for commissioning the project. Though he did not formally act as project leader, his responsibilities were similar.

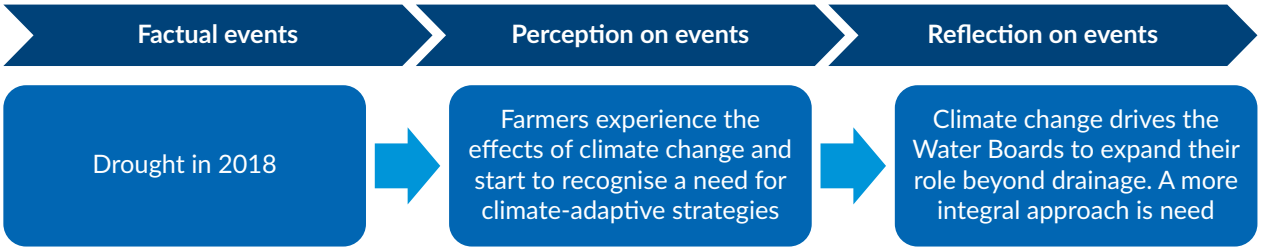

Figure 1. Example of the application of the learning history method as developed by Kleiner and Roth (1997).

Table 1. Characterisation of the cases selected and interviewees.

Case study	Vallei and Veluwe Water Board: 2120 Vision
Collaborating organisations	Partners in co-creation: 26 Municipalities, 2 Provinces, Vallei and Veluwe Water Board, North Gelderland Security Region, Vitens drinking water company, WUR
Role of interviewee	Project leader of the Vallei and Veluwe Water Board
In 2018, the "Manifest Region Vallei en Veluwe" put together a Climate Impact Atlas of the Vallei and Veluwe region as a start to set up a regional Climate Adaptation Strategy. In 2021, a project was initiated to compile a Vallei en Veluwe 2120-vision, based on the capacity of the regional landscape system. The 2120-vision was compiled in co-creation between experts of the Manifest Region and WUR. In expert ateliers, trend analyses have been done on themes that felt urgent because of foreseen friction between long-term needs and actual developments. The themes included regional water systems, housing, nature development, regional economy, agriculture, recreation, and drinking water. Intermediate results were presented to local and regional politicians every half year to open their eyes to the long-term consequences of today's decisions.	
Case study	Rivierenland Water Board: Landscape soil map in support of environmental policy
Collaborating organisations	Partners in co-creation: Rivierenland Water Board, the Province of Gelderland, WUR
Role of interviewees	Rivierenland Water Board project leader and WUR project leader
The Rivierenland Water Board lies in the heart of the Dutch Delta, between the major Rhine and Waal rivers. WUR has previously worked with the Water Board to produce a landscape soil map, designed to make the Water Board better equipped to give input into spatial planning development challenges in the region from a water system perspective. The map has not yet been accepted internally. Some relevant aspects are still missing (piping and underground sandbanks/aquifers), and the Water Board is undergoing a transition from acting in a monitoring role towards having a more steering role based on the capacity of the natural system. The objective of the project is to complete the landscape soil map, linking it to new action perspectives for the Water Board, and then establish a long-term horizon vision known as Rivierenland 2120.	
Case study	North-East Brabant, long-term vision of stream valley landscapes
Collaborating organisations	Partners in co-creation: WUR, the Province of North Brabant, the AA and Maas Water Board, the Dommel Water Board Brabant, the Southern Agriculture and Horticulture Organization, the Central Brabant Public Health Service, local authorities covert by ARK Nature
Role of interviewee	WUR project leader
WUR has been commissioned by the North-East Brabant Stream Valley Landscapes Working Group to produce three long-term perspectives for the region. The scenarios are based on five design principles: water in balance; capturing and infiltrating water in elevated areas; moving water out of low-lying areas; mitigating extremes by creating more surface space and ensuring water quality. The scenarios have formed the basis for initiating action perspectives as a follow-up to the project.	
Case study	Arnhem 2120
Collaborating organisations	WUR, the Municipality of Arnhem
Role of interviewee	WUR programme leader and Municipality representative
As an extension to the 2120 map of the Netherlands (Baptist et al., 2019), the programme director of the Climate Resilience Team at WUR assigned a research team to make a more detailed map of a city area in the year 2120. Because of its height and soil diversity, the research director offered the municipality of Arnhem the opportunity to serve as a case study. Five main principles were applied during the explorative study: nature inclusiveness, the natural system as a base; optimal water use around the city; circularity and climate-positive resource management; inclusiveness and liveliness of the city centre; and health. The Arnhem 2120 project was fully funded by the directive of the WUR Environmental Science Group.	

5. Results

5.1. Strategic Transition Challenges

During the time of research, the interviewed project leaders encountered tensions between long-term climate adaptation goals and current spatial and/or environmental policies, or institutionalised practices. We found that such tensions can lead to mutual counteraction but also to mutual support, posing strategic transition challenges. We identified five tension fields with corresponding challenges. We will describe these and then elaborate on how they either hindered or supported the project's overall aim, which was to engage in a dialogue about spatial planning according to the capacity of natural systems.

5.1.1. Drastic Changes in Spatial Planning Concepts

The first challenge stems from the tension between the current geographical order and the need for its fundamental renewal. The interviewed project leaders felt the need to develop drastic new spatial planning concepts compared to the current situation. A striking example is the process of establishing a challenging future vision of Arnhem 2120 (Timmermans et al., 2022). Besides a great water-storing and energy-generating lake and additional residential areas in National Park "de Hoge Veluwe," the proposal to abandon the residential area of "Arnhem South" was considered by the officials involved as highly controversial. A municipal representative had expressed concerns about the large gap between the developed vision of the future and the current situation several times during the vision development process. His main concern was that the vision would get scrutinised by his colleagues if major changes were presented without some type of warning.

"There are sensitivities, and I want those sensitivities expressed before the design exercise starts" (Municipal representative, June 2021). The WUR project team, however, felt this did not reflect the goal of the project and refused to be influenced by political sensitivities. Finally, at the presentation of the result, and to the relief of the municipality's representative, the alderman ended up expressing nothing but enthusiasm. The researchers accounted this to the fact that the decisions that had been made for the vision could all be traced back to an explanation based on natural soil and substrate conditions: something irrevocable. The period of 100 years also placed the vision "at a safe distance" to generate creative dialogue instead of debate. The project's goal was not to provoke demolition of the current spatial situation, but to raise the awareness of the municipality that decisions about the built environment should be made with long-term ambitions. "We are here to show how we think what a sensible direction is, without saying it should be that way" (WUR programme leader, June 2021).

5.1.2. Science, Governance, and Political Responsibility

A more abstract challenge relates to the tension between substantive insights of professionals and day-to-day politics: who is willing to carry the responsibility to take up signals from scientific visioning? In all projects, some initial hesitancy was detected from the perspective of local authorities because they were afraid to be held accountable for "reaching the vision," even though the vision was meant to initiate a substantive debate on the consequences of climate change. In the case of Arnhem 2120, some of this hesitancy was taken away by the fact that the municipality did not act as the official commissioner of the project. This gave the vision more neutrality since there was no governmental or political involvement. For the projects (partly) commissioned by

the Water Boards, however, this tension field offered a major potential hurdle between the Water Board and their agricultural constituency. During our research, farmers were protesting government plans to address the so-called "nitrogen crisis" (next subsection). Therefore, there was a significant lack of essential stakeholder support for major government interventions. One respondent even dropped out of the learning history case study because they felt that participating could jeopardise their position within the Water Board. Seen from the perspective of the researchers and designers, there were some moments of doubt concerning whether the visions could be interpreted as too overwhelming or too unrealistic and could potentially lead to a lack of involvement or a tainted relationship with their client. "It's not a policy vision, this goes beyond policy, it's quite understandable that it can cause tensions" (WUR project leader, June 2021).

The research teams, therefore, strived to base the vision development on the so-called "MAYA" principle: most advanced, yet acceptable. The application of this principle, however, was mostly intuitive.

5.1.3. Nitrogen Crisis

This challenge concerns the breadth of the task, i.e., the tension between concentrating on the spatial aspects versus broadening to other issues. Broadening offers generally more solution opportunities but makes the challenge more complex and, therefore, perhaps more difficult to solve. This is particularly relevant to the problem of the impact of excess nitrogen on biodiversity. Nitrogen surplus is threatening biodiversity in many Dutch natural areas. In May 2019, the Dutch Council of State declared that a significant proportion of building projects had to be stalled, and farms close to nature reserves had to drastically decrease their nitrogen emissions to meet European nitrogen regulations (Raad van State, 2019). Many industrial farmers started rioting against the subsequent plans for livestock and fertiliser restrictions. As a result of these events, some of the Water Board project leaders expressed that they felt they should also connect their vision to the nitrogen crisis. "It's all still fairly fluid at the moment. We are still playing chess on different boards" (Water Board project leader, April 2021).

The strategic reasoning for connecting to the nitrogen crisis was to potentially qualify for subsequent subsidies by offering (nature-based) solutions. More tactically, concerns about whether other proposed solutions could potentially counter climate-adaptive interests were also mentioned.

5.1.4. Housing Shortage

This challenge concerns a fundamental contradiction around construction tasks. Here, building in quickly available places is opposed to building in places that are more suitable from a climate-adaptive viewpoint. At the time of research, the "Dutch housing shortage" was placed high on the political agenda. This caused project developers to push municipalities for building permits so they could cater to the cabinet's ambition to build 100,000 new houses. Some also pushed for permits along river floodplains, despite being discouraged by the Water Boards. This changed, however, when in February of 2021, heavy flooding in the southern province of Limburg caused an estimated 1.8 billion euros in damages. This suddenly caused a tilt in the bargaining positions of the Water Boards.

"Fortunately, it's no longer crazy if I talk about residential safety; it is also keeping residents increasingly busy" (Water Board project leader, April 2021). Instead of getting warded off by engineers and project developers,

Water Boards starting to get invited to the table of spatial planning and building commissions. The idea of climate-adaptive building was steadily becoming the norm instead of a hurdle.

5.1.5. Terrestrial Turn in Perception Versus Practice

The fifth strategic challenge stems from the tension between ecocentric and anthropocentric thinking. This plays a role in the background of all the cases. Anthropocentric thinking often involves the search for technical solutions, while the relationship between humans and nature remains the same. However, more and more people are striving for ecocentric solutions, in which nature has its own place. In its most far-reaching form, we recognise this as "terrestrial turn." The terrestrial turn in the philosophy of technology, as described by Lemmens et al. (2017), represents the idea of an independent role for "earth" in choices about human interventions, which implies a major turn in the culture of spatial planning endeavours. The general acceptance that not everything can be "solved" with technology alone, and that the natural environment should be acknowledged in a broad scheme of problems affiliated with climate change, has only recently truly begun to take shape. The fact that ecological events such as drought are causing major socio-economic effects means that the "earth" is quite literally manifesting itself within our social reality. Or like one of the Water Board project leaders quoted: "As a Water Board, we have to crawl onto the land more and more often due to drought" (Water Board project leader, April 2021).

We understand this as a new phase in a wider transition, in which we are aware of our role in the Anthropocene and welcome ecosystems as partners in building towards a more balanced and sustainable landscape. It remains too soon to tell, however, if this newfound cultural paradigm can also induce a new culture of practice for the Dutch Water Boards. As mentioned before, it plays a role in the background but is not explicitly mentioned in debates within Water Boards.

5.2. Reflection on Strategic Transition Challenges

Creating a landscape-driven, climate-adaptive vision can encourage policymakers and policy implementers to make climate-conscious decisions. If a vision is set in a faraway future, it can offer freedom to step away from current-day issues and explore the possibilities of nature-inclusive innovation. A landscape-driven, climate-adaptive vision can act as a guideline for long-term policy strategies, but also as a ground for reconsideration in sometimes unforeseen contemporary situations, such as large construction assignments or environmental crises. However, such visions do not act as a blueprint. In addition to "listening to what soil and water have to say," democratic institutions such as the Water Boards, Provinces, and Municipalities should also consider public opinion. Public opinion at the time of our case studies favoured less government intervention, especially the opinion of an influential part of the agrarian sector. Public opinion can differ between local situations, making it even more complicated for the Water Boards to take a coordinated leadership role. Therefore, widening the playing field is essential to not only make a paradigmatic "shift to the natural," but also a pragmatic shift. A summary of the strategic transitions tensions that were observed is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Strategic transition challenges in connection to landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions.

Strategic transition challenge	Observations regarding landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions
Drastic Spatial Planning	Long-term visions and discussion of them can increase the adaptivity of lower-level governments. Though they may feel far reached, they can provide an understanding of landscape risks that inform current-day decision-making processes.
Science, Governance, and Political Responsibility	There can be tension between the public, politics, policy and professionals. This should be made explicit, without glossing it over. In practical implementation, apply the MAYA principle.
Nitrogen Crisis Housing Shortage	Unexpected circumstances can accelerate new coalitions if they are seen as an opportunity to broaden the strategic agendas. Linking interests widens the scope of opportunities.
Terrestrial Turn in Perception	Dutch Water Boards are working towards a paradigmatic breakthrough by embracing the soil and subsoil system as a basis for future spatial planning.

5.3. Tactical Elements in the Transition Process

While setting up the projects, developing the visions, and presenting the visions, project leaders mentioned several developments which were caused by, or led to, tactical actions. We perceive these as tactical elements and important lessons learned to stimulate a transition process towards a more natural and integral view of local water management.

5.3.1. Drought as a Game Changer (Use Temporary Natural Conditions)

As mentioned before, the Dutch Water Boards have a longstanding tradition of working in service of agrarian interests. Their current role is to monitor spatial development and their internal methods and expertise are still focussed on maintaining this role. Any serious form of policy formulation, strategic planning, and decision-making in favour of rigorous climate adaptation has not been widely adopted yet. A significant change, however, occurred when long periods of drought and unusually heavy rainfall in 2018 led to an unexpected scarcity of agrarian produce (van Asseldonk et al., 2020). Although the drought did not necessarily affect the income of farmers, project leaders felt that it did cause an increase in acceptance for exploring the opportunities of a transformative approach to climate adaptation because it made climate change feel more real. The 2018 drought was therefore often used as a compelling example of the effects of climate change and was often pointed out during presentations of the visions:

> Then they said drought is a problem. And if we all keep approaching it from our own silos, we won't get anywhere. So, they have approached us as a coalition to come up with a proposal on how we should tackle this drought problem together. These have been absolute turning points. (Water Board project leader, November 2020)

5.3.2. Long-Term Visioning (Use Accepted Long-Term Visions by Others)

All respondents mentioned the *Nature-Based Future for the Netherlands in 2120* (Baptist et al., 2019) as an important vehicle for transporting their message in favour of transformative climate adaptation. Primarily because the "NL2120" vision offers a non-threatening, extra long-term perspective. It is non-threatening

because the ways of reaching the vision are open-ended. This leaves room to integrate different sectors within and beyond the spatial development division. It is extra long-term because the vision is set for 100 years. This is fundamentally different from common visioning procedures (making long-term plans for the coming 10, 20, or 30 years, after practical implications and measurements are formulated) because the vision is so far in the future, that the feasibility of practical implications and measurements are no longer a precondition. Societal conditions will undoubtedly be radically different and, therefore, ideas might not seem too advanced anymore. This sets the mind free of current definitions and limitations of social reality. There is only one precondition: climate change. The NL2120 vision made the abstract consequences of climate change more distinct and tangible, but without only pointing towards potential doom scenarios. Rather than acting as another warning instrument, the NL2120 vision offers a framework which enables a positive outcome of a future under climate change:

> There is little understanding of how the big system works now, and that story needs to be told. You need a vehicle for that. In my perception, a map of 2120 captures the imagination. And there are stories to go with that. (Water Board project leader, November 2020)

5.3.3. Natural Basis (Use Layered Concepts)

Transforming a water management system will apply to—and affect—different layers of the social and physical "systems" (Meadows, 2008). One way of visualising this is in different layers, in which the bottom layer represents the slow-moving, natural state of affairs, and the top layers represent the built environment and every use of space (e.g., Visser et al., 2019). Respondents have all incorporated this layered approach in their climate-adaptive vision and recognise integrated thinking as a priority. However, not every respondent reported the same level of prioritisation from other stakeholders. Examples were given that their ambitions were perceived as too overwhelming, or unnecessary because stakeholders did not yet recognise any urgency for drastic change. However, addressing how above-ground activities are linked to underground situations was generally well received. The relative success of this approach was ascribed to the perceived objectivity of the soil and subsoil system: It is what it is. Moving social dynamics, therefore, offers a better starting point for potential transitions than trying to further manipulate the physical conditions.

5.3.4. Timing and Place (Use Accidental Circumstances)

Prescribing a transition is often too complex or difficult because transitions are prone to uncertainties. Therefore, phases in transitions are often pointed out in hindsight. However, some respondents managed to make good use of unexpected situations. For example, one of the Water Board project leaders used the fact that it was heavily raining on the day of her presentation, illustrating what weather conditions could be expected in the future. Another WUR project leader was very well equipped to convince his project's importance by incorporating certain needs of his target audience (e.g., the housing assignment or nitrogen crisis). He called this an "unconscious competency." What he refers to are not only social skills that enable a person to sense what motivates others but also the capacity to turn an idea into a potential solution that addresses a person's needs at that moment; a skill that was also recognised by the Water Boards. "Who do you talk to, and how do you talk, thinking from the other person's point of view and connecting to that. And that is a quest" (Water Board project leader, November 2020).

A more pragmatic situation where someone used timing as a technical tool was when a project leader built up momentum for her project right before regional elections. Endorsing her project became part of creating political favourability. Lastly, one project manager also mentioned that picking out an unconventional place for her presentation caused people to remember her presentation more clearly.

5.3.5. Language as Means of Mobilisation (Use Boundary Concepts)

Where the NL2120 served as a source for new ideas, the actual transition process manifested mainly in the way project leaders and civil servants started to communicate within their work domain. Instead of focusing on specific parts of the water management system and following a sectoral approach, respondents encouraged stakeholders to zoom out in search of a broad spectrum of elements connected to the soil and subsoil state of being. This resulted in the "function follows water level" argument as opposed to the idea that the water level can be adjusted to a desired function of a certain space. More theoretically, a discourse coalition shifted, and a new discourse coalition emerged (Hajer, 2005). In successful situations, different types of discourses (e.g., rational and emotional discourses, or technical and social discourses) merge seamlessly into each other (de Haas, 2006). Within this process, civil servants and project leaders play an important role as translators, ensuring that everyone understands the problem and the proposed direction for solutions. "I often feel like a translator. A translator between construction experts, hydrologists, and civil engineers who design the projects in the region. So, you try to transfer information into knowledge for the right target groups. That's a big challenge" (Water Board project leader, November 2020).

5.3.6. Digital and Real-Life (Use Personal Interaction)

It is a general trend to work more digitally. In the four cases, however, this seemingly led to a lack of personal exchange between people working in different fields. Our respondents saw this as an obstructing factor in creating added value through cooperation across the borders of work fields. Proponents of working in an office space emphasised the advantage of "coffee machine talk," where they can bring colleagues up to date on their work and create more interest. Networking was also much easier to do in real life than via a computer screen. That said, they also admitted they enjoyed the flexibility that working digitally offers.

5.3.7. Small Wins (Use Small Interventions on Decisive Issues)

A project leader mentioned they noticed an increase in top-down deals being made about transformative change. However, in their opinion, those deals rarely lead to an impact in the practice field. "Many deals are being made. Something gets concluded from these deals, but their impact and knock-on effects remain very limited. There needs to be a better flow in that" (WUR project leader, June 2021).

Sometimes, according to some project leaders, more impact was made bottom-up, via incremental initiatives or "small wins." The idea of small wins is that modest changes can culminate into bigger transitions (Termeer & Dewulf, 2019). Small wins are perceived as easy to grasp, energising initiatives, rather than large encompassing interventions. They are points of leverage that can bring about a change in an entire system. In this respect, small wins are more than so-called low-hanging fruit. Some respondents noticed small wins were enabling their transition ambitions by triggering local participation and social inclusion around topics related to climate adaptation. Two examples were a community initiative for improving green landscaping in the village of Winsum and local initiatives for decreasing paved surfaces in the city of Bunschoten.

5.4. Reflection on Tactical Elements

Although the tactical elements we distinguished are different in nature, the order indicated above is not arbitrary. Drought relates to disruptive physical developments that raise entirely new challenges, while long-term visioning and taking a deeper look relate to percipient problems and solutions to those occurring challenges. They also represent an attitude showing eagerness to look beyond day-to-day reality. For choosing actual actions, the interviews show that a smart selection of time and place is essential, with language and face-to-face contact playing a major role. For the actions that are eventually taken, realising small wins is important. These elements are summarised in Table 3. The elements are not stages in an incremental form of planning. They should be seen as nodes in a braiding river where streams coming together reinforce each other (de Haas, 2022).

Table 3. Tactical elements identified in the four cases.

Tactical element	Transformative impact
Drought as a game changer	Showcasing examples of climate change relevant to a particular audience to embed the urgency of climate adaptation in mainstream developments
Long-term visioning	Creating new definitions of reality; opening up to possibilities
Natural basis	Connecting physical and social environment
Timing and place	Adaptability to unpredictable events
Language as means	Mobilising participants; developing transition agendas
Digital or live	Speeding up or deepening collaboration efforts
Small wins	Realising impact

6. Conclusions

Five strategic transition challenges emerged during the rollout of the projects we followed. Strategic challenges often appeared relatively unexpectedly and were perceived as limiting factors at first but proved to offer opportunities for coalition building in the future. The tension between vision outcomes and current spatial layouts urged for more consideration of the long-term effect of climate change regarding spatial planning policy and implementation. This includes decisions about the placement of buildings in response to the Dutch housing shortage, and natural solutions in response to the nitrogen crisis. A hindering factor was that strategic challenges often came with high political priority and great societal pressure. This can either delay or boost a transition process depending on whether what was envisioned can incorporate a response to the urgent situation.

Various tactical elements were found in the area between transition and, to some extent, operation. We say to some extent because initiatives for physical climate-adaptive alterations of the Dutch landscape remain small. However, major shifts have been detected in acknowledging climate change challenges and incorporating natural elements in technological innovation. The role that long-term visions play is to promote climate consciousness in daily practices, but more so to provoke alternative ways of thinking, taking the natural system into account. Several practical tactics have been used to promote the visions, like choosing notable locations, strategising the timing of the vision presentation, real-life interaction, and picking out elements from the vision that address a certain audience's needs. However, using these tactics is not necessarily a "recipe for success." Instead, they should be perceived as small rapids in a larger transition flow.

7. Discussion: Supporting Transitions With Transdisciplinary Learning Histories

The methodology we chose for this research may seem unconventional concerning common transition research. Instead of studying the transition mechanisms in hindsight, we decided to view the transition process from an insider's perspective. Through this approach, we hope to contribute to building a "learning history" (Kleiner & Roth, 1997) on transition processes. Learning histories are records of factual events and different perceptions and reflections on recurring processes. Monitoring such processes offers in-depth insights from personal experiences. The emphasis, therefore, does not lay on the "truth" but on collecting diverse perceptions of lived realities.

To understand more about transition processes generally, we encourage other researchers to contribute to building a transdisciplinary learning history on transition processes. In several parts of this article, we have mentioned addressing an audience's needs to create more support and involvement within a transition process. We argue that using qualitative methods, such as learning history, contributes to understanding the needs of different stakeholders in complex or chaotic situations and can, therefore, contribute to accelerating transition processes. Eventually, the more a transformative vision matches experienced problems and needs, the more it can mobilise support for change.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all the co-creating partners involved in the making of the landscape-based, climate-adaptive visions, and especially to all the project leaders who were willing to confide in us.

Funding

This research was supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery, Foods Security and Nature of the Netherlands and the Wageningen University Knowledge Base programme: KB36 Biodiversity in a Nature Inclusive Society, under grant number KB-36–005-006 (Het Ronde Landschap).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Qualitative data, including anonymised interview transcripts and subsequent learning histories, are kept by the authors and can be accessed upon request.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8182
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8182

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Participatory Climate Action: Reflections on Community Diversity and the Role of External Experts

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Submitted: 31 January 2024 **Accepted:** 20 May 2024 **Published:** 17 July 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

Academics have often contributed to designing, running, and evaluating participatory events with publics on climate action. Whilst climate assemblies are perhaps the most well-known of such events, there is also a proliferation of smaller and more local projects suggesting scope for reflection on the role of academic researchers in this evolving space. We deploy an experimental methodology that blends personal reflections with group discussion amongst the authors to help unpack the lessons learned from a project led by the local council, where we facilitated the involvement of local people in decision-making around climate action. Reflecting on our individual and academic positionalities, we question the extent to which we are well placed to build, maintain, and sustain trust, which requires spending time in place, continuity, and ceding power. As "outsiders" with "elite connotations," our role as actors in this space is open for discussion. Indeed, our involvement could be perceived as a missed opportunity to retain more money and knowledge locally by ceding more responsibility to grassroots organisations. Our experience also suggests that framing public participation in terms of design and facilitation deficit is somewhat misleading. It is not just a process that needs to be attuned to diverse communities, but an ongoing relationship that needs certain enabling conditions to flourish, including conducive funding frameworks and a willingness to address incumbent power differentials between state and non-state actors.

Keywords

action research; climate governance; deliberation; local authority; local government; place-based; public participation; reflexivity; sustainability; transformation

1. Introduction

In the context of (the need for) climate action in democratic societies, universities have been key sites for building our knowledge base on the causes and impacts of anthropogenic climate change; making the moral and business arguments for early climate action; the identification of vested interests, barriers to change, and the risk of "unjust" transitions; the nurturing of environmental citizenship; and the development and deployment of skills for effective public engagement on this huge societal challenge. Academics have played prominent roles in designing, running, and evaluating many deliberative events with publics on climate action, reflecting the dual needs for democratic renewal and transformative governance. Probably the most well-known, emblematic, extensive, and expensive of such events are Climate Assemblies (Andrews, 2022; Shehabi & Al-Masri, 2022; Wells et al., 2021). But there is also a proliferation of smaller and more local projects, events, and initiatives involving academics, citizens, and local government, suggesting there is scope for reflection on the role of academic researchers as actors in this evolving space, e.g., on what we do well, should avoid, or could do better, and to what extent this aligns with our multiple identities (e.g., thematic experts, engaged citizens) and our positionality as non-residents and as income receivers (i.e., recipients of [state] funding to undertake this project).

In this article, we seek to shed more light on these (self) critical questions by deploying an experimental methodology that blends personal reflections with group discussion among the authors. This helps us to unpack the lessons we learned from a project with a local council (grant holders) who partnered with us to help them undertake local public engagement activities around climate action. The project did not involve formal data collection for the purpose of research. Perhaps it could be labelled as "action research," although there is no universally agreed definition for this term (Altrichter et al., 2002). Thus, we draw on the interpretation of Winter (1998, p. 53) who suggests that: "Action research is about seeking a voice with which to speak one's experience and one's ability to learn from that experience."

There is clearly scope for qualitative researchers to reflect on our own voice, as much as on our ability to capture and represent other voices (O'Sullivan, 2015). Indeed, doing so is vital in a participatory project such as this where we seek to "comanage rather than dominate the local public sphere" (Chatterton, 2000, p. 179). Whilst some have reflected deeply on their own voice (e.g., Quaye, 2007), we found very few publications which presented the individual voices of multiple researchers (for rare examples see Donovan et al., 2011; Riecken et al., 2005). By its very nature, such an article requires flexibility in structure and format. We agreed to organise our thoughts and learning in this article as follows.

We start by reviewing literature on community diversity and external expertise in relation to public participation and providing a brief introduction to action research (note that it is beyond the scope of this article to explore whether public participation around climate governance is different to public participation around any other social issue, thus we point readers who are particularly interested in this question towards Howarth et al.'s [2023] report on enabling place-based climate action and Devine-Wright et al.'s [2022] paper on placing people at the heart of climate action). Next, we describe the project, the target communities, and what we did. We then introduce the co-authors and the reasons why we individually wanted to participate in this project and article. Next, we reflect on how the project worked out, split up into two major parts. The first part is an analysis of the differences encountered between the two communities where the project was executed. The second discusses the implications of these differences for external

experts, in other words, how the diversity of a local authority area presents challenges in practice for researchers trying to support local government climate action ambitions. After these two parts, we speak back to the themes of community diversity and external expertise through our individual reflections, before moving on to conclude by synthesising our findings, contextualising them within the existing literature, and discussing what contributions academia can (and should) make in supporting "transformative" climate governance at the local level.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Community Diversity in Public Participation

Research consistently highlights the prevalence of self-selection bias in public participation initiatives (including but not limited to those centred around climate action), which are more likely to attract people who are: middle age or older, have higher levels of education, higher household incomes, live in areas with lower levels of deprivation, are employed (or retired), and identify as being from white ethnic groups (Abas et al., 2023; Bobbio, 2019; Güemes & Resina, 2019; Pateman et al., 2021). Conversely, there is often a struggle to recruit people from lower-income communities (Bobbio, 2019), even though research suggests that, in some cases, these are the very people who have the most to gain from participation (e.g., in environmental citizen science; Pateman et al., 2021); and are most at risk from climate impacts (Benevolenza & DeRigne, 2018), implying that their inclusion in decision-making on this topic is also a matter of social justice (Clark, 2017). Meanwhile, "elite" and "special interest" groups are more likely to exert influence on participatory decision-making processes than less active community members, who often struggle to be heard (King et al., 2007). There are several factors that contribute towards social inequity in public and civic participation, including: unevenly distributed social and economic capital (Saltkjel & Malmberg-Heimonen, 2013); lack of alignment of projects with local needs (Galende-Sánchez & Sorman, 2021; Uittenbroek et al., 2019); power differentials between state and non-state actors (Barnes et al., 2003; Blanchet-Cohen, 2014); lack of trust in public institutions (Clark, 2017; Scottish Government, 2022); history of exclusion and marginalisation (Clark, 2017); and even social identity (Hafer & Ran, 2016).

It is unsurprising then that research suggests the need to tailor approaches to participation around the target community (Pateman et al., 2021). With regard to participant recruitment, research suggests that traditional approaches like the use of media channels and word of mouth are unlikely to reach beyond the already engaged (Pateman et al., 2021). Instead, when trying to recruit participants from relatively deprived communities (or when targeting relatively deprived citizens residing in relatively affluent areas), it is better to leverage the knowledge and networks of third-party organisations (Sorensen et al., 2019). Offering economic incentives can also help to boost recruitment in relatively deprived areas (Pateman et al., 2021). Research suggests the need to facilitate different activities depending upon the target community or group; for example, modular and one-off activities are well-suited for people who are time-poor (Pateman et al., 2021). Meanwhile, research consistently suggests that co-designing projects with local people can help to increase participation (especially from those who do not usually participate) by improving the "validity, salience, and communication of tangible benefits" (Mullally et al., 2022, p. 26) and ensuring that aims and outcomes resonate with the needs and aspirations of (otherwise) unrepresented groups: "[Successes] come from taking the time and effort to understand the needs, daily lives, and potential barriers to participation of a target community, and working with this community to co-design a project with mutual goals and appropriate methods" (Pateman et al., 2021, p. 11).

2.2. Issues With Outsourcing Public Participation to External "Experts"

External experts are increasingly involved in public engagement projects, including both academic researchers and community engagement consultants. Research suggests that local authorities who outsource public participation often do so in the belief that "expert" involvement will secure a greater number of participants (Levin, 2022). This implies two things: firstly, that the "success" of public engagement is often perceived by local authorities as deriving from the number of people who participate; and secondly, that the lack of participation from marginalised people and communities is a matter of design, of which experts have intimate knowledge and are thus able to overcome (Levin, 2022). Both have the potential to be problematic. A narrow focus on quantity of participation (i.e., degree of participation; Shirk et al., 2012) fails to give proper attention to the quality of participation; indeed, too much participation is likely to be a detriment to high-quality deliberation (Bobbio, 2019). Meanwhile, perceiving the recruitment of less-heard voices as simply a matter of design fails to acknowledge the many systemic inequalities that restrict marginalised people from participating in the first place (Blanchet-Cohen, 2014; Clark, 2017; Güemes & Resina, 2019).

It is perhaps unsurprising then that the expectations of local authorities can be at odds with the experts to whom they outsource public participation. For example, Levin (2022) reports frustration from community engagement consultants who perceived local authority expectations, combined with inadequate resources, as barriers to the recruitment of marginalised communities and individuals. According to Levin (2022, p. 98):

> All [community engagement consultants] shared that change in the processes did not run as deep as they had hoped, especially regarding the participation of vulnerable communities. As they were expected to yield outputs within the shortest time frames possible, it was not feasible for them to reach out to citizens who thus far had been less heard.

Short time frames mean it is very difficult for external experts to build rapport and trust with target communities (Güemes & Resina, 2019; Yang, 2005). This is problematic as "trust is the missing link between dialogue and collaboration because trust is needed to move from a non-cooperative to a cooperative situation" (Güemes & Resina, 2019, p. 157). Research also suggests that long-lasting trust is a prerequisite for sustaining and maintaining community empowerment (Yang, 2005). In the absence of trust and power transfer, public participation can have the opposite effect, leaving those who took part feeling disappointed, alienated, and even cheated (Yang, 2005). This is especially likely to happen if participants feel that experts have been unfaithful in their translation of ideas into proposals (Rico Motos et al., 2021); or worse, when local authorities are perceived to have "cherry-picked" ideas and proposals that align with their own in-house preferences (Font et al., 2018; Rico Motos et al., 2021). Research suggests that such outcomes can be avoided by integrating formal review stages into projects, creating space for participants to query the legitimacy of translation (Rico Motos et al., 2021).

3. Positionality in Action Research

Clearly then, how public participation is designed and delivered is important. However, it is also important to consider the positionality of the "experts" who are responsible for project design and implementation. According to Adu-Ampong and Adams (2020, p. 583), the social sciences have broadly observed the growing

centrality of researcher positionality (i.e., the self) within methodologies in order to engage with concepts of "reflexivity, intersubjectivity, and the (de)colonisation of knowledge." Beyond the introspective nature of this reflexivity, specific personal experiences and understandings are highlighted to aid in the interpretation of research findings (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020). This process, however, can be complicated when research takes place in environments and contexts which are considered as "home"; that is to say, where a deep level of connection and identity is associated with a geographical or cultural marker, such as a country of birth or native language. It is therefore appropriate for individual researchers to reflect upon their own (fluctuating) positionality, especially when conducting action research in places that resonate with "home."

According to Kemmis (2006), action research must be critical; that is to say, it must search and be open to unwelcome and uncomfortable findings. By doing so, it contributes towards social and political conditions in which free and critical thinking, as well as courage and conviction, are nurtured within institutions. This critical dimension requires action research to look beyond the technical quality of research practice as defining the quality of the research, and instead to sharply focus on addressing important challenges in thought and action for the good of communities, persons, and societies. By taking this critical stance, action research is opened to its transformative potential, built upon "shared deliberation about important issues for our shared fate and future" (Kemmis, 2006, p. 471).

4. What We Did

We collaborated with a local authority and local consultancy firm as part of an Innovate UK competition funding programme. The project (April–July 2023) focused on engaging with local people and businesses to identify and unlock "non-technical" barriers (the funders' term) restricting carbon emission reductions and co-benefits in two project locations in Scotland, namely Aberfeldy and Tulloch (Perth City). The ideas elicited from local residents and businesses served to inform and shape a much larger follow-up funding application to the same funder (Innovate UK), to actually implement climate action on the ground.

4.1. Target Communities

Aberfeldy (see Figure 1) is a rural market town in Highland Perthshire, Scotland, approximately 30 miles northeast of the city of Perth. Sitting beside the River Tay, it is a popular tourist destination for both families and adventure seekers. The population is made up of approximately 2,000 people, is largely white, and older (National Records of Scotland, 2011). According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivations (Scottish Government, 2020), Aberfeldy is a relatively affluent area; however, its rural location means it suffers from transport challenges.

Tulloch (see Figure 2) is an urban neighbourhood in the north of the city of Perth, Scotland. It is situated within the busy A9, A912, and A85 roads and is home to St Johnstone Football Club. The population of the city of Perth is approximately 50,000, largely white, and is relatively younger than that of Aberfeldy (National Records of Scotland, 2011). The demographic makeup of Tulloch is largely similar to that of the city of Perth; however, due to a lack of more granular statistics, it is not possible to accurately report the exact demographic breakdown and population size (although it is likely to number the low thousands). According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivations (Scottish Government, 2020), Tulloch is a relatively deprived neighbourhood.

Figure 1. Map showing the market town of Aberfeldy in Highland Perthshire, Scotland. Most of the housing stock is detached or semi-detached, and low density.

Figure 2. Map showing the neighbourhood of Tulloch, in the city of Perth, Scotland. The housing distribution is much denser than in Aberfeldy and includes a significant number of flats.

4.2. Approach and Methods

The project involved us co-designing, trialling, and evaluating participatory and deliberate engagement methods around climate action that could be utilised by the local authority after the project finished (see the Supplementary Material for a granular breakdown of our approach to the project including design, promotion, recruitment, activities, and exit strategy). We explicitly informed local people and businesses that the overarching aim of the project was to generate and prioritise proposals that could be included in a funding application (up to £5 million in total) to actually implement climate action.

The University of Edinburgh led on community engagement elements, whilst the local consultancy firm led on business engagement. The local authority acted as project manager and was responsible for communications and project promotion. Regular meetings were held between the partners throughout the duration of this short (3-month) but intensive project to coordinate activities and share learnings.

Drawing courage from compelling arguments that suggest community and indigenous knowledge can complement and contextualise scientific knowledge (Black & Tylianakis, 2024; Corburn, 2007; Restrepo-Mieth et al., 2023), we adopted an underlying philosophy that the people who live and work in a place know more about the challenges and opportunities than any council or university. In line with this philosophy, we integrated local voices into the project framing and research design and were transparent with communities about key aspects of the research. This included: transparency regarding our own research interests and our motivations for working on the project; our relationship with the project partners; information about the funders and aim of the funding; and how the data would be used. Furthermore, we leveraged both offline/online approaches to project promotion and the participatory activities themselves: "in recognition of the real and virtual as a connected and integral part of our contemporary social world with hybrid/online/offline communities and boundaries" (James & Busher, 2015, p. 1). Specifically, we integrated a mixture of individual (surveys and idea submission website) and group activities (school workshops, focus groups, and refinement and prioritisation activities), making use of modular and one-off events to encourage participation of the time-poor (see Pateman et al., 2021). Activities were scheduled at different times (morning, afternoon, and evening) and on different days (midweek and weekends) in another attempt to increase opportunities to participate.

Recognising that we did not have the time or resources to develop trusting relationships with local people for whom participating in a project like this was new, we sought to adopt a position of monetary incentivisation (£100+). However, it quickly transpired that there were tensions between our aspirations (i.e., the University of Edinburgh team), and what constitutes feasible practice to a local council. The incentivisation framework was therefore subsequently revised so that everyone who submitted an idea to the website would be entered into a draw for a £50 voucher, and focus group participants could receive a £25 voucher.

Taken together then, our approach and methods were intentionally participatory and inclusive, designed to foster reciprocal relationships with community collaborators. By actively involving the community in the ideation process, we attempted to foster a sense of ownership and empowerment, ensuring that the resulting proposals resonated within the local context and reflected the aspirations of the people they aimed to serve (Devine-Wright & Ryder, 2024).

4.3. Who We Are

Connor (early career researcher): To date, much of my research has centred around citizens' and key stakeholders' perceptions of diverse sustainability challenges and opportunities, and the subsequent implications for policymakers and future research. In contrast, this project presented an opportunity to collaborate with communities and a local authority to not only (co)produce and prioritise place-based climate action interventions, but also to try and secure the capital investment required to implement local people's ideas (up to £5 million in total). In that sense, it presented an exciting and, for me, novel opportunity to be part of a project that aspired to drive tangible change from the bottom-up, rather than contributing towards an evidence base to further inform top-down decision-making. Furthermore, having witnessed first-hand the ugliness of unjust and imposed transition (I was born and raised in an ex-mining community), my positionality on this matter is also explicitly normative: I believe it is right for people to have a greater say, individually and collectively, over their futures, especially younger people. My participation in the project meant that there was scope for me to try and bring my positionality to the team, emphasising the value of co-design, co-production, and inclusivity, and lobbying partners to ensure this was central to our approach.

Dan (professor): Being in a privileged position (permanent job, promotions completed) and recognising that my career has benefitted from projects in which citizens' voices and views were elicited, collected, and analysed, I was motivated to participate as a form of "giving back" as well as "doing my bit" (perhaps an academic variant of environmental citizenship?). I care deeply about the environment and society and was thus very keen to support the council, but I was also conscious that I was out of place (a flipside of international academic labour mobility) and out of my depth, in terms of practice-oriented knowledge. I doubt I would have signed up for this project without the enthusiasm of other team members (especially the co-authors) and my confidence in their ability to mitigate my above-mentioned handicaps. The project was too intensive and practical to be of conventional academic interest and the funding level was tolerable rather than attractive. That said, it did bring some other indirect and potential benefits. The funding allowed me to assemble a temporary team (associates, PhD students, academics) with interesting and admirable skills and experiences beyond my own. More speculatively, there are elusive institutional kudos: the potential to create "impact," which is valued in the REF research assessment framework to which all UK universities are subjected every seven years.

Finlay (PhD researcher): As someone growing up not too far away from our research location, with experiences of undemocratic and unjust economic transition, I'm motivated to centre the needs of local people; to have a local government body willing to trial this process was of great interest. Our role as academics, in some ways filling in capacity that the local government lacks to facilitate democracy, is one worth exploring further. I have some hesitations as to whether we are legitimate actors in this arena; after all, we are another outsider with elitist connotations, far removed from the communities and places we were researching. The research also allows us to engage with an ongoing tension in climate governance, as both economic austerity and strained public spending are widely accepted alongside plans for economic and social transformation in order to tackle climate change and environmental challenges.

5. Group Discussion

5.1. Reflections on Community Diversity

We found that the effectiveness of the project promotion strategy diverged significantly between places. This had severe implications for levels of participation. In Aberfeldy, where we observed greater social capital (characterised by familiarity with community governance structures, and a proliferation of community organisations), levels of participation were relatively high throughout the project period (over 100 participants). Perhaps due to many individuals' (observed) high social capital, many people managed to find time to participate in the project and clearly felt able to deliberate with others effectively. We observed that the existence of community groups and community governance structures meant that many individuals were largely familiar with the concept of participating in local decision-making, and from a normative perspective, felt it was legitimate and desirable. Meanwhile, these same organisations were well-placed to help promote the project, helping to increase overall levels of participation.

In Aberfeldy, trust was earned through clear expectation management and an explicit positionality that stated, "the people who live and work in a place know more about the problems and opportunities than any university or council," in effect demonstrating that the aim of the project was to empower, not to impose. This was further evidenced by the collaborative approach to project framing/problem setting, as well as the "end game" itself, namely applying for grant funding to implement the ideas prioritised by people and businesses. Resident feedback was largely positive: The diversity of activities employed was valued, especially group activities which allowed for a broader range of perspectives to be heard and deliberated. The variety in the timing of engagements, such as scheduling activities on different days and times (including weekends) and incorporating hybrid events, was also appreciated as it accommodated different schedules and preferences thus helping to increase opportunities for participation. School workshops enabled the integration of intergenerational perspectives which was perceived as vital by both the local authority and community collaborators alike; the feedback we received from the students' teachers suggests that they thoroughly enjoyed themselves and were excited to learn more in the future. We also received positive feedback from attendees at the idea refinement and prioritisation event who were pleased to see the communities' ideas showcased for all to see, and appreciated the opportunity to refine and prioritise proposals, working towards building consensus.

In Tulloch, where we observed significantly less social capital (characterised by the absence of community governance structures, and very few community organisations), the experience was starkly different. Levels of participation were disappointingly low (excluding school workshops, fewer than 20 residents participated in the project) and it was apparent that there was a lack of awareness; without existing organisations "on the ground" who were willing to help with project promotion and communication, it was an uphill task to get the message out to a large audience. The effectiveness of visiting the area to distribute information pamphlets and knock on doors was significantly hampered by the housing stock, with many of the homes being high-rise flats that proved difficult to access (unlike in Aberfeldy where most homes were houses and bungalows). Attempts to promote the project online through local authority communication channels and social media were also relatively fruitless; this was exacerbated by fraudulent sign-ups to focus group sessions following a paid promotion campaign. The school workshop revealed a lot about what younger people think of the place where they live, and how it could be improved in the future. However, this involved a somewhat captive audience; none of the students attended other project events when they were not part of scheduled school

days thus bringing into question the extent to which they found the process valuable or empowering. It is worth noting that the few people we did engage with during other project events were very positive about their experience. This even extended to people on the street who did not participate in any of the activities, but who spoke with the research team when handed a leaflet. The consensus was that people were pleased that the local authority was working to bring about impactful change in an area that they considered forgotten, or "left behind."

We reflect that two very different stories emerged from the project locations. Community collaborators kept on telling us that Aberfeldy was Scotland's first "fair trade town," and that there were lots of community organisations in the area doing great work. This was often evidenced by people pointing at Feldy Roo, a community organisation whose founder was awarded an MBE in recognition for the work he and other local people did distributing food to vulnerable people during the Covid-19 pandemic (Barrie, 2020). Indeed, the recipient of the award explicitly stated that the MBE belongs to the town of Aberfeldy, not himself (Barrie, 2020). This appears to reinforce the narrative, shared by several community collaborators over the duration of the project, that Aberfeldy is a place where people get stuff done. In contrast, Tulloch felt like a place that stuff happens to; community collaborators, especially students in the school workshops, talked about Tulloch (and Perth City more broadly) in depressing terms: a place where people are always committing suicide, where it is not safe at night, and where there is not much to do. In their visions for the future, the emphasis was on safety and meeting basic needs. This reinforced a narrative of a "left behind" place, neglected by decision-makers who live in very different places, and whose lived reality is starkly different.

5.2. Implications of Community Diversity for "External Experts"

So how does the diversity of a local authority area, in this case the two distinct communities described in this article, present challenges in practice for researchers trying to support local government climate action ambitions through public participation and deliberation?

The challenges of a very demanding timescale proved extremely difficult in Tulloch. Without community groups "on the ground" willing to support and promote the project, we needed to spend much more time "in place," developing relationships, building trust, and leveraging more organic (and possibly informal) engagements/interactions. This was not possible within the project timeline. The demands of the timescale were less impactful in Aberfeldy, where we benefitted from supportive community groups who wanted to help. Nevertheless, it may still have contributed towards the observed lack of participant diversity (i.e., first-time climate action participants) by, as with Tulloch, restricting the amount of time we could spend "in place."

Our inability to offer significant monetary incentives to people in Tulloch also likely contributed towards low levels of overall participation. The much higher participation rates in Aberfeldy suggest that this was not as much of an issue here, but we reflect that it may still have limited our ability to hear from more people who were not already actively involved in community groups and local initiatives. However, due to the shortcomings of the project promotion strategy (particularly in Tulloch), it is difficult to know for certain; if more people knew about the project, and the £25 vouchers, then maybe that would have been enough to tempt them into getting involved.

(Lack of) continuity was less of a problem in Tulloch as there were fewer relationships to maintain after the project ended (i.e., due to disappointing levels of overall participation). However, in Aberfeldy, this proved challenging. Specifically, it was not possible to resource a formal review of the subsequent funding application to implement the prioritised proposals, resulting in a handful of particularly engaged Aberfeldy residents feeling let down. They felt that a key message (especially from the final activity, i.e., the proposal refinement and prioritisation event) was not properly represented in the funding application; namely, that there is already a lot going on in Aberfeldy, and that community organisations could do a lot more if they had greater financial support and power. This highlights that even if proposals taken forward by local authorities are supported with quantitative evidence (e.g., most votes at proposal prioritisation events), nuance can still be lost if communities are not involved in every stage of the translation process—to the extent that some people feel let down and disenfranchised. The lack of formal review of the funding application was compounded by a lack of expectation management; local people were not aware that they were not being involved until after the funding bid was almost ready to be submitted. Although the local authority went to significant lengths to patch up relationships with the handful of people who felt aggrieved, this shows just how easily hard-won trust can break down.

6. Research Team Individual Reflections

Connor: One year later, reflecting on this project, I have mixed feelings: On the one hand, it was a rich experience that provided plenty of opportunities for learning and personal growth; however, on the other hand, I'm left a little disheartened by how quickly some local authority–community collaborator relations broke down in Aberfeldy after the project ended. From my point of view, everyone who participated in the project, from the local authority to the people and businesses on the ground, had good intentions; they wanted to secure investment and make Aberfeldy a better place to live and work. The problem is, I don't know if my feelings are shared; too many people seemed mistrusting of the council, and the council itself seemed hesitant to hand too much power and responsibility to people and community groups. This speaks to both trust in (local) democratic institutions, and trust in local people (i.e., that trust goes both ways; Yang, 2005); I reflect that the possibility of nurturing each is weakened by funding crises, and that bringing in external experts to competitively chase limited funding does little to alleviate this. Trust takes time to establish, which short one-off projects are unlikely to afford. It needs to be maintained, which is predicated on continuity. And it needs to be sustained, which requires ceding power. External experts are not necessarily well-placed to do any of this. Meanwhile, the local authorities who are well placed (in theory) often lack the resources to meet this challenge in practice.

Dan: Reflecting on this project, I find myself asking if we (a university located outside the local area) are the ideal institution to play the role we played. It is a worthy cause and we learned from the experience, but is this the best way the money could have been spent, i.e., subcontracting a non-local university to deliver public engagement? If funding had been "won" to implement these proposals, this would have yielded direct community benefits and critical questions could have been more easily ignored. One of our interlocutors at the council indicated that it might be harder for them (than for a university) to pull together a new team on such short notice to deliver engagement. Nevertheless, critical notions of "outsourcing" spring to mind (e.g., Froud et al., 2017). Maybe it would be better if local grassroots organisations are (coached and) paid to undertake community engagement? This way money and knowledge are retained locally; this would have been relatively easy to achieve in Aberfeldy but would have been much more beneficial in/for Tulloch. There is of course

still plenty of scope for individual voluntary contributions from academics ("citizenship"); ideally, those who have directly useful expert knowledge and/or live locally (there are many existing examples, e.g., local Climate Commissions; see Creasy et al., 2021; Howarth et al., 2022). There are longer-term questions about the legacy of such projects; perhaps outside academics are more naturally suited to assess those.

Finlay: In reflecting on the pathway of this project, I think there are promising signs in the broad, albeit shallow willingness and engagement from participants to be part of a more demanding democratic process. Perhaps it was the pilot nature of the project, which meant that a lack of legitimacy was perceived by all parties and lasting impact was less than had been hoped for. As this project operated in a silo in relation to the UK's general democratic governance systems and was in no way affiliated with structural change, I wonder whether people projected or sensed systemic inhibitors which ultimately reduced the potential of this project. What we do know is that wherever we went, even at the younger end of the participant spectrum in schools, people felt that places, spaces, and futures are not designed or run for or by them.

7. Synthesis and Conclusions

Despite the diverse positionalities within the research team, our individual reflections reveal some common ground, perhaps most notably around the question of what contributions academia can (and should) make in supporting "transformative" climate governance at the local level. The local authority's decision to work with academics implies they see value in it, which we understood from conversations centred around (a) knowledge/expertise on climate action, (b) perceived legitimacy of the academic institution, and (c) fit and familiarity with this particular funding agency. However, on reflection, we asked whether, as "outsiders" with "elite connotations," we are legitimate actors in this space and to what extent this was a missed opportunity to retain money and knowledge locally by ceding more responsibility (and power) to grassroots organisations. Each individual reflection implies that our (relatively privileged) positions as environmental citizens and academics do not necessarily sit easily with notions of more embedded local democracy.

Another key lesson derived from our experience is that knowing how to facilitate inclusive public participation in theory does not necessarily mean it is possible for external experts to succeed in practice, especially if operating within a demanding timescale and targeting low-income and marginalised communities:

- Before the project started, we recognised (a) that traditional approaches to promotion and recruitment were unlikely to gain traction in Tulloch due to the prevailing socio-demographics (Pateman et al., 2021) and history of marginalisation (Clark, 2017), and (b) that the project timeline was always going to restrict our ability to spend a significant amount of time in-place building trust (Levin, 2022; Radonic et al., 2021). However, we did not foresee that potential workarounds reported in existing literature—including co-designing the project framing/problem setting (Mullally et al., 2022; Pateman et al., 2021), leveraging the knowledge and networks of community groups (Sorensen et al., 2019), offering monetary incentivisation (Pateman et al., 2021), and canvassing neighbourhoods (Fagotto & Fung, 2006)—would be extremely challenging in practice as well.
- We also recognised the need to integrate diverse participatory activities into the programme: modular and one-off activities that were suitable for the "time poor" (Pateman et al., 2021); group activities to encourage deliberation and exposure to diverse perspectives (Bormann, 2022); as well as ensuring that the project operated virtually as well as physically (James & Busher, 2015). However, in practice, if

project promotion and participant recruitment fail (as was the case in Tulloch) then it matters little how inclusive and well-thought-through a programme of activities has been.

- Furthermore, we acknowledged that participants needed to be given an opportunity to review the translation of ideas into proposals to avoid accusations of "cherry-picking" and ensure nuance was properly captured (Font et al., 2018; Rico Motos et al., 2021). However, despite integrating this into the project design (i.e., the proposal refinement and prioritisation activity), external experts have little control over whether communities are invited to review future translations after "the project" has officially ended. In hindsight, we could have lobbied for the funding application to form part of the project itself, thereby involving participants directly in the process. Or at least built in space for formal review. However, this would have been very resource-intensive, and as noted by Pateman et al. (2021), approaches need to be balanced against other project aims. A cynical reader may see this as a textbook example of embedded power differentials (Blanchet-Cohen, 2014; Clark, 2017): a local authority unwilling to cede (too much) power to non-state actors. A more generous analysis is that local authorities are operating in an unconducive environment, and they simply do not always have the capacity to work to best practice.

Taken together, our experience and reflections suggest that framing public participation in terms of design and facilitation deficit is itself a little misleading; it is not just process that needs to be attuned to diverse communities (design, promotion, recruitment, activities), but an ongoing relationship that needs certain enabling conditions to flourish (Restrepo-Mieth et al., 2023). Funding frameworks constitute one such enabling condition, as does an institutional culture that is willing to trust citizens and ultimately cede power. Without this, greater devolution of political power constitutes little more than another exercise in hollowing out the local state, and even the most grounded and well-thought-through project designs (which our somewhat uncomfortable reflections suggest this project was not) are unlikely to gain significant local support and secure transformational impacts. This speaks to reflections on whether community collaborators sensed systemic inhibitors and the extent to which this may have ultimately reduced the potential of this project. Thus, despite attempts to empower local people, embed co-design, and co-produce local climate action interventions, we walk away from this project feeling that our impact was limited; we know that people feel that places, spaces, and futures are not designed or run for or by them, yet we are still a long way from realising the enabling conditions that are needed to change this reality.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who participated in this project, especially the people, businesses, and community groups in Tulloch and Aberfeldy. We are also thankful to Perth and Kinross Council and Nicki Souter Associates for the opportunity to collaborate with them on local climate action. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Matt Lane (University of Edinburgh) who provided feedback on an earlier iteration of this article; and to the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive and helpful comments. We gratefully acknowledge funding from Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN; UKRI grant ES/S008381/1) which allowed us time to write this article, and from Innovate UK (Net Zero Living programme) who funded the project that the article is based on.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare but wish to explicitly stress that the article should not be read as a criticism of the project partners. Rather it is a critical reflection on the role of external experts who seek to support local authority climate aspirations.

Data Availability

A high-level overview of the original project from which this article is derived can be found at https://www.pkclimateaction.co.uk/iuk

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8130
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8130

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Open Access Journal

Prevailing Issues and Actions in Urban Best Practices Across Latin America and the Caribbean

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Submitted: 28 January 2024 **Accepted:** 15 July 2024 **Published:** 13 September 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

This research examines urban best practices (BPs) across Latin America and the Caribbean to illuminate the prevalent issues and actions associated with these locally implemented initiatives. An analysis of 45 BPs from the UN-Habitat repository was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods, organized into three phases. The first phase focused on collecting data such as BP sources, countries of origin, and years of implementation. The second phase identified common problems and actions within the BPs. The third phase involved a cross-sectional analysis to identify significant patterns and trends. The study found that many BPs originated from the Dubai International Award for Best Practices and the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation, with a notable dominance of contributions from Brazil, followed by Argentina and Mexico, while other countries in the region had minimal or no representation. The results revealed shared challenges and commonly adopted actions across diverse BPs, transcending characteristics, locations, and implementation years. The most common issues included financial constraints, bureaucratic complexities, and deficient infrastructure, while active community engagement, collaboration with various stakeholders, and garnering political support were the most recurrent actions. This research contributes novel insights to the field by systematically analyzing real-world case studies in the region, enhancing understanding of the transferability of these practices. It also identifies key similarities that will aid policymakers and practitioners in preparing and optimizing future initiatives for greater success.

Keywords

community development; community engagement; infrastructure improvement; public policy; social inclusion; urban development; urban governance; urban regeneration; urban resilience

1. Introduction

Urban development has significantly altered society's living conditions, but disparities in the distribution of resources essential for well-being persist (UN-Habitat et al., 2022, p. 3). Latin America and the Caribbean are particularly affected, being described as "the most urban and unequal region in the developing world" (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016, p. 5). This inequality manifests as social exclusion, marginalization, and weakened community cohesion, often intensifying in urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2020, p. xvii; UN-Habitat et al., 2022, p. 8). Key goals for current initiatives should focus on fostering inclusive urban prosperity and ensuring environmental sustainability (E. Silva & You, 2022). To improve the chances of achieving these objectives, it is essential to consider the geographic scope, i.e., the spatial scale, both territorial and administrative, that allows for understanding the connections and relationships between different cities and regions (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016, p. 14). While there is a wide diversity of serious and complicated issues hindering sustainable development, there are also significant initiatives developed by local governments and other societal agents that represent interesting examples of overcoming challenges (E. Silva & You, 2022, p. VII). These initiatives, rooted in concrete experiences, serve as evidence-based examples that address the aforementioned problems (UN-Habitat et al., 2022, p. 200).

Within this framework, this research starts from the premise that good policies and practices are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (UN-Habitat et al., 2022, p. 6), and learning from them can empower transformative local governments to tackle social challenges. One of the most common ways to define initiatives with a proven capacity to improve population conditions are the so-called best practices (BPs; UN-Habitat, n.d.-a). However, applying BPs to new cases and contexts is complex and has often been criticized (Cochrane, 2011; Delgadillo, 2014; Saraiva et al., 2021). This research aims to extract new knowledge that could be effectively implemented in future initiatives by systematically studying a selection of BPs in Latin America and the Caribbean to identify the most prevalent issues faced and actions undertaken. Understanding the challenges faced by these initiatives and the strategies employed to overcome them is crucial for providing useful examples for future stakeholders (Macmillen & Stead, 2014). Additionally, this study contributes to addressing the lack of systematic research focusing on analyzing, comparing, and organizing BPs, thereby narrowing the implementation gap between research and practice.

2. BPs Background

2.1. BPs, Policy Transfer, and Benefits

Although different definitions of BPs exist, and their applicability is frequently debated (Macmillen & Stead, 2014, p. 80), emphasis is often placed on their potential for transfer to other contexts and their capacity to inform decisions on urban policies (Blake et al., 2021, p. 1254). This transferability could mean adapting proven experiences to new places, considering specific problems, resources, and potentialities (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016, p. 8; UN-Habitat, 2020, p. xxiv). Learning from BPs could also involve accessing know-how that can be transferred (Jajamovich, 2016, p. 78; Porto de Oliveira, 2021, p. 2), which might be abstract, "such as ideas, ideologies, principles, discourses, paradigms, [or] more concrete, such as policy models and designs, laws and constitutions, administrative arrangements, forms of

government, policy instruments, institutions, etc." (Porto de Oliveira, 2021, p. 7). In other words, there is more to learn from BPs than the practices themselves.

Effective policy ideas do not simply emerge by chance or because they inherently possess merit; they require deliberate creation and active promotion to gain acceptance and implementation (Temenos et al., 2019, p. 106). Validation is key to transferring BPs to other contexts (Duque Franco, 2014). Therefore, BPs can formalize or certify policies to improve their chances of accessing resources, attract investments, promote successful initiatives, support reciprocal teaching and learning processes, and even inspire other actions (Macmillen & Stead, 2014, p. 84; Nagorny-Koring, 2019). Additionally, well-guided BPs "can serve as a basis for action" and recognizing them "seeks to stimulate the exchange and diffusion of experiences among the different member countries in order to promote and move forward together towards a sustainable territorial and urban development" (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016, p. 8).

With roots that can be traced back to ancient Greece (Porto de Oliveira, 2021, p. 3), more than 100 terms have been identified relating to this policy diffusion process (Graham et al., 2013). It includes both voluntary and involuntary—when forced by another institution (Stone, 2000)—adoption of ideas, and has prompted scholars to develop concepts and frameworks to study how policies circulate globally, thus creating a new research domain in policy studies (Porto de Oliveira, 2021, p. 1). This exchange is defined as a network operating as a complex system of interactions and power dynamics, where policy is actively circulated and influenced by ever-shifting local and global relationships, ultimately blurring the lines between the local and the global (Cochrane & Ward, 2012, p. 561).

Through this active mobility, ideas mutate, not only as a result of adaptation attempts but also as a direct consequence of that exchange (Temenos et al., 2019, p. 106). That is why policy mobilization among cities needs to be critically implemented to achieve meaningful results (McCann, 2011) and to prevent the recurring similarities in urban policies that are intentionally shaped by a network of policy influencers who standardize and disseminate BPs globally (Temenos & McCann, 2013, pp. 353–354). Further, Dolowitz (2021, p. 39) notes that "with a degree of learning and adaptation, the transfer concept will be able to provide many more years of useful analytic and conceptual study."

In this regard, international organizations are key in building and maintaining these networks and, as mentioned above, in the certification process that promotes BPs (Hadjiisky, 2021). In addition to UN-Habitat, which was the focus of this research, there is a long list of organizations that contribute to this network, including the World Bank, United Cities and Local Governments, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the Inter-American Development Bank. However, many other actors are involved, from cities and countries to professionals, activists, and nonprofits. Together, they forge an infrastructure to "interpret, frame, package, and represent information about best policy practices, successful cities, and cutting-edge ideas" (McCann, 2011, p. 114). Thanks to all these actors at different scales and roles, ideas are now more actively circulated than ever before, not only from South to North or North to South but also horizontally between cities that share common needs (Stren, 2021, p. 170).

2.2. Criticism Around the Concept of BPs

While BPs have proven useful for urban policy development, it's important to note criticisms surrounding them. For instance, there is no consensus on the evidence used to define BPs, often leading to their selection being politically motivated or highly subjective (Blake et al., 2021, pp. 1267–1268; Macmillen & Stead, 2014, p. 85). Replicating BPs isn't automatic and requires case-by-case analysis, platforms for information sharing, and specific incentives (Boulanger & Nagorny, 2018, p. 326; Marsden, 2011, p. 50). Some authors assert that BPs align with the agendas of more developed countries, maintaining a global interest that can be disconnected from local realities (Whitney, 2022a, p. 477). It's crucial to recognize that BPs might only show part of the story, omitting information useful for future applications (Bulkeley, 2006, p. 1041).

It is important to critically consider BPs because the focus is generally on the practices themselves, often overlooking how they are promoted or what kind of impact they may have (Silvestre & Jajamovich, 2023, p. 321). In this regard, actions undertaken by international organizations have sometimes felt disconnected from national and local needs (Hadjiisky, 2021, p. 136), representing an issue generally defined as the "Galton problem" (Murdock, 1949). In urban policy, the Galton problem is used to discuss whether similarities in urban policies across different cities are due to direct policy borrowing and adaptation, independent development in response to similar urban challenges, or through a process of global policy diffusion driven by international organizations, conferences, and literature (Braun & Gilardi, 2006; Buckner, 2024; Porto de Oliveira, 2021).

For reasons like these, some authors have criticized BPs framed within the discourse of "technological solutionism," introduced by Evgeny Morozov, who critiques the idea that complex social and political issues can be effectively resolved through technological innovations alone (Morozov, 2013). Even design practices that profess a dedication to social justice, sustainability, and equality often gravitate towards solutions that try to be marketable (Facchetti, 2021, p. 160). This approach promotes a superficial model of sustainability that fails to address the deeper, structural causes of the issues identified, bypassing the essential and more complex task of understanding local conditions (Montero, 2020). In other words, despite technocratic arguments and narratives about BPs, the processes of diffusion and circulation of urban policies can be fraught with conflicts and incongruities (Jajamovich et al., 2022, p. 349).

2.3. The Importance of BPs for Local Governments

As demonstrated by problems such as epidemics and environmental issues, many challenges transcend political boundaries, which is why sharing knowledge is key to addressing them more effectively (Porto de Oliveira, 2021, p. 1). Being the governmental level closest to communities—compared with regional and national scales—local governments have a unique opportunity to implement innovative initiatives that emphasize community integration and enable more responsive and inclusive governance (Dywili & Draai, 2019). Collaboration between municipalities is critical for creating and implementing effective solutions, such as BPs (Silvestre & Jajamovich, 2023). It empowers communities by strengthening democracy through participatory decision-making processes that give individuals a voice in governance. This approach ensures that governance is more attuned to the diverse needs of its constituents. By bridging the gap between community needs and political action, governance becomes more effective, equitable, and sustainable (Newman et al., 2023).

Even considering the critiques discussed above, BPs can benefit local governments in several ways:

- *Knowledge transfer*: By studying BPs, local governments can learn from the experiences of others to include successful strategies for dealing with similar issues (Barton et al., 2009; Lahiri & Rajan, 2022; Lassen et al., 2023; Rauhaus et al., 2023; Young, 2023).
- *Innovation promotion*: Examining how different cities approach similar problems can inspire innovative solutions and creative problem-solving, leading to more effective and tailored policies that better address the specific needs of a community (Linton et al., 2022).
- *Avoiding pitfalls*: Awareness of the challenges faced by other cities and how they were addressed helps local governments avoid similar pitfalls (Guillaumie et al., 2024; Hoppe et al., 2015). Studies have shown that this practice can save time, resources, and effort in implementing urban policies that might not be effective or could have unintended consequences (Olivo et al., 2022).
- *Enhanced public trust and support*: By implementing proven effective solutions, local governments can build trust, as citizens are more likely to support policies that have a track record of success in other places (Puttick et al., 2022; Rutledge et al., 2022).

In summary, this research underscores that local governments can play a pivotal role in contributing to the global exchange of BPs. They are also instrumental in fostering proven strategies, leveraging local knowledge and practices, responding effectively to the unique needs of urban communities, and driving policies that ensure equitable distribution of resources and services.

3. Materials and Methods

This research is based on an analysis of a selection of BPs available in the UN-Habitat repository, hosted on the Urban Agenda Platform website (https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/best-practice). This repository was chosen because it is a globally recognized source that aggregates BPs from various renowned sources (UN-Habitat, n.d.-b). It is one of the most significant BP repositories globally, tasked with "coordinating, identifying, documenting, and disseminating best practices and enabling policies on urban development" (UN-Habitat, n.d.-a). The only filter applied during the search was "Latin America and the Caribbean" under the region's menu. No other keyword or selection method was used. The initial search yielded 56 results, covering a broad range of BPs such as the transformation of public spaces, infrastructural improvements, urban agriculture, waste management, and sustainable tourism practices. After the first screening, several were excluded: eight due to lack of information or overly brief descriptions, two for not specifically relating to Latin America and the Caribbean but having a global scope, and one because it took place in Spain. Consequently, 45 BPs were ultimately studied. Focusing on Latin America and the Caribbean does not intend to overlook the differences in such a complex region; it merely recognizes that many areas, despite their differences, face similar circumstances and could improve their chances of success by learning from experiences tested elsewhere. This complex conjunction of cultures has often been considered as a region by many international organizations, primarily due to historical links, socio-economic similarities, and similar development challenges.

After the selection, a qualitative and quantitative data analysis was conducted in three phases. The first phase focused on collecting facts such as sources of the BPs, countries of origin, and years of implementation. Aligning with the main objective of the research, the second phase entailed a detailed read-through of all the BPs to

identify issues faced and actions performed, later organizing these into groups to identify the most common ones. The third phase involved a transversal comparison of these findings to identify relevant patterns and trends. In all phases, systematic analysis was performed using strategies that included analyzing the BP reports, coding meaningful components of the data, looking for patterns that recognize similarities, categorizing groups for comparison or clustering, and reasoning aimed at compiling findings and establishing conclusions (Saldaña, 2014, pp. 582–588). For the coding process, "open coding" was favored due to its flexibility and because it involves representing concepts found in the analyzed data with the primary goal of generating categories with similar characteristics that can be classified (Blair, 2015, p. 26; Flick, 2009, p. 369; Kothari, 2004, p. 123). An "open-ended approach" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115) was maintained throughout this process, facilitating the study of the wide variety of BPs under investigation. The process was iterative, involving reviewing, grouping, and refining codes until the final configuration was reached.

For the purpose of this research, a comprehensive approach was adopted in analyzing the issues and actions associated with the BPs, i.e., issues and actions were considered broadly. For instance, rather than distinguishing between actions specifically designed to address the BPs' challenges and those integral to their planning, implementation, and maintenance, all actions were examined within a unified framework. This inclusive approach was chosen because the BP reports did not differentiate between these two types of actions (proactive and reactive), but it also allowed for capturing a full spectrum of strategies, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of how these BPs function in diverse urban contexts.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. BPs' Sources, Geographic Distribution, and Timeline

The UN-Habitat Urban Best Practices repository "contains practices that have been vetted and made available by different international award schemes" (UN-Habitat, n.d.-b). However, the research sample highlights two main contributors: the Dubai International Award for Best Practices and the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation, which together account for nearly 70% of the entries (Figure 1). A few sources have only one contribution each, and the repository does not specify the source or selection method for some BPs. The source of the BPs could be important because the profile of each contributor could influence the selection of experiences. For instance, the Dubai International Award for Best Practices accepts contributions from national and local governments, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, and individuals. However, the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation is only open to cities and local governments (Guangzhou Award, 2019).

The chronological distribution of the BPs (Figure 2) reveals a clear pattern of constant growth. A comparison and summation of the years in which the BPs confirmed their activity in the analyzed texts show this growth continuing up until 2017. However, no updating process is mentioned or evidently used, so it's not possible to determine how long these initiatives were active or if they are still active today based on the information gathered from the repository. Some may still be active, as indicated on their websites or social media, suggesting the trend of growth peaked in 2019. However, this trend should not be assumed to indicate stagnation or decline, considering that the main sources of BPs have not issued any recent awards. The last Dubai International Award for Best Practices was held in 2019, while the last Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation took place in 2020.

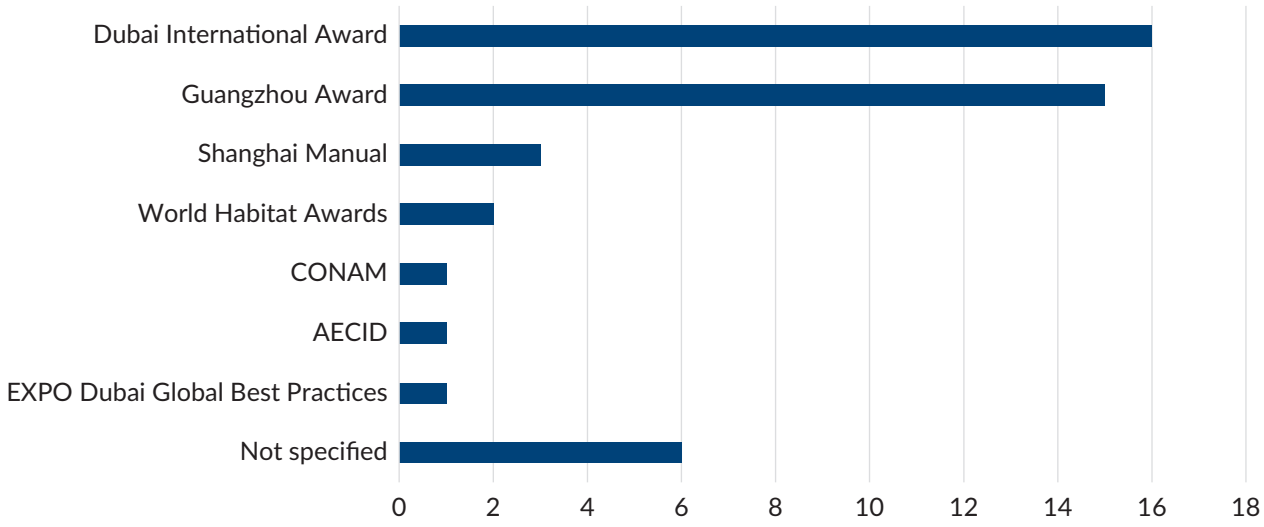

Figure 1. BPs sources as listed in the repository. Notes: CONAM = Consejo Nacional de Ambiente (Colombia); AECID = Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development.

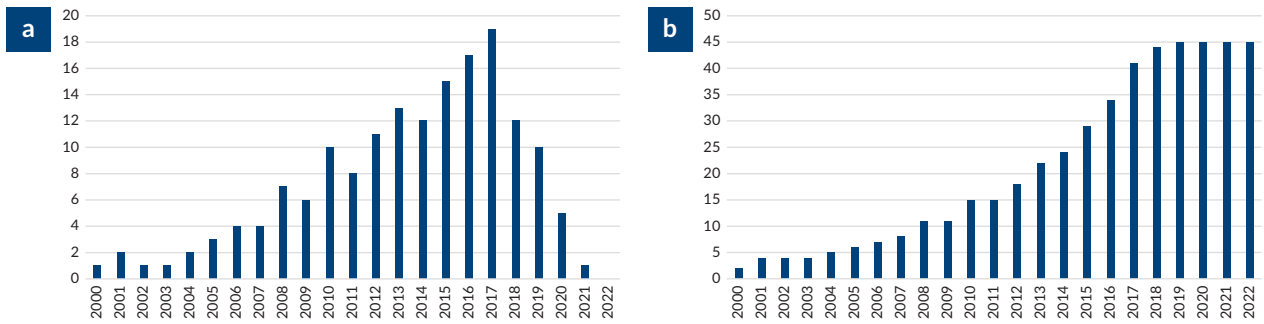

Figure 2. (a) BPs' active period as mentioned in the reports analyzed in the database; (b) BPs' active period assuming continuity after the reported starting date.

When analyzing the countries of origin (Figure 3), Brazil emerged as the most significant contributor, with a number of contributions almost tripling the average. Besides Brazil, only Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Colombia exceeded the average. In other words, only 5 out of the 16 countries were above average in terms of BP contributions to the selection. Conversely, six countries made only one contribution each, with the majority contributing one or two initiatives. It's also noteworthy that out of nearly 50 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean, only 16 (32%) have contributed to this list. These findings are important because, as observed in previous research, the geographical unevenness in policy transfer reflects disparities in resources and visibility, affecting which policies, cities, and consultants gain global recognition and influence in shaping international BPs (McCann, 2011, pp. 121–122).

4.2. BPs' Prevailing Issues and Actions

Focusing on the central theme of this research, the review of the BPs facilitated the identification and organization of a series of common issues that the BPs have had to face. Similarly, the actions implemented by the protagonists of these BPs to advance their initiatives were also identified. In both cases, the lists were ordered from most to least common. However, more than the order, it's important to consider the frequency

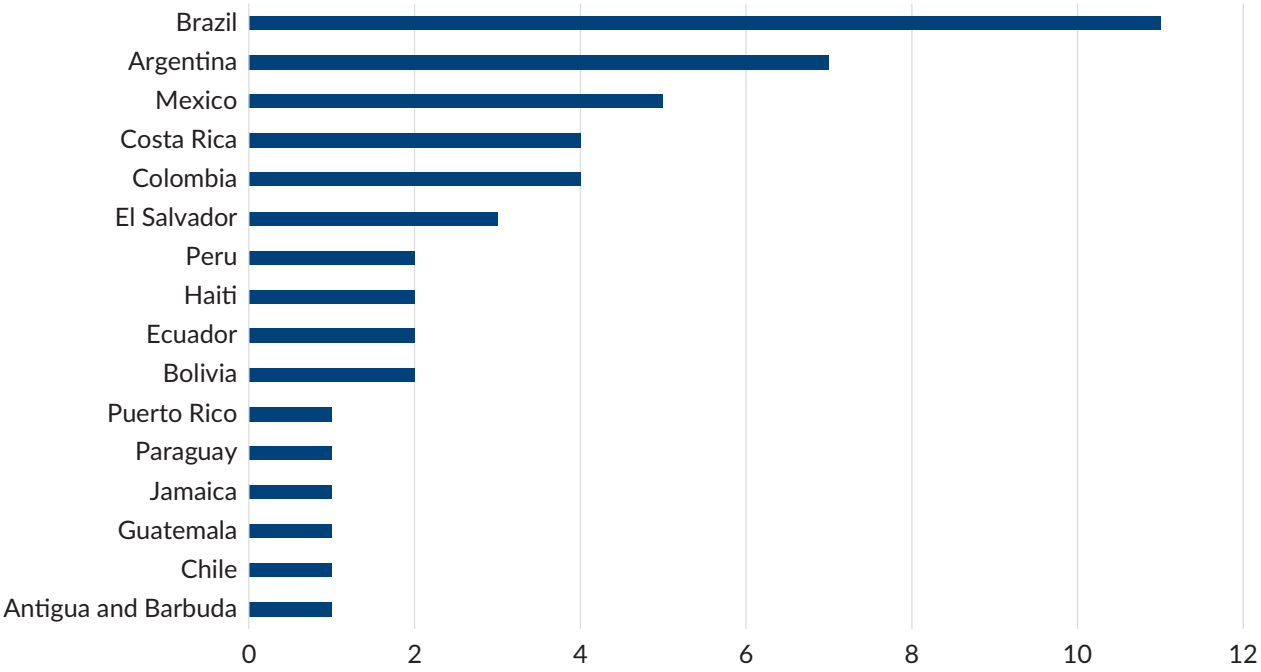

Figure 3. BPs by country of origin corresponding to the period analyzed (2001–2021).

of each occurrence, as the difference can be significant. For example, there's only a one-appearance difference between the ac1 and ac2, while there's a 17-appearance difference between the ac2 and ac3.

After reviewing the general conditions of the BPs, the following list presents the 20 most identified issues by the selected BPs, organized from the most to the least common (Table 1).

Considering the frequency of each issue, certain patterns become discernible. Economic difficulties are the foremost issue, mentioned in some form by almost all the studied initiatives, with 32 occurrences. It significantly outnumbers the next set of problems. There are three issues with nearly the same frequency: challenges in dealing with existing regulations, inadequate infrastructure, and complexities in coordinating all stakeholders. These four problems are highlighted by half or more of the cases studied. Below that, lack of awareness about issues addressed by the BPs and resistance to change each appear 18 times. Beyond this point, there is a shift as the differences in frequency between each subsequent problem become less pronounced, forming a descending staircase pattern.

Even though the list is extensive and covers a wide range of topics, these results align partially with other studies. They highlight the complexity inherent in any transformative effort, among other findings. For example, Dorst et al. (2022) identified barriers such as limited collaborative governance affecting decision-making, challenges in knowledge and awareness impacting information application, limited involvement of the private sector, conflicts in the utilization of city spaces, inadequate development of policies, lack of public resources, and difficulties in citizen engagement. Similarly, Wamsler et al. (2020) found that some common barriers for implementing policies had to do with lack of citizen awareness and interest, counterproductive citizen involvement, municipal departments working in silos, lack of monitoring from inception to completion, and the absence of top-down guidance, regulatory frameworks, and essential tools.

Table 1. Issues definition and number of occurrences in the BPs.

#	Code	Definition
32	is1	Financial constraints or poor financial structure.
24	is2	Complicated laws, bureaucratic hurdles, or slow decision-making.
24	is3	Stakeholder disagreements, poor coordination, and conflictive relations.
23	is4	Inadequate, poor, or deteriorated infrastructure or built environment.
18	is5	Lack of awareness or skepticism.
18	is6	Resistance to change or opposition to different approaches.
14	is7	Inaccessible information for the community, including the digital divide.
13	is8	Political instability or lack of institutional support.
12	is9	Poor community participation or engagement challenges.
11	is10	Inequality, including gender, social, and economic disparities.
10	is11	Technical challenges or inadequate technological framework.
9	is12	Challenges in project sustainability, including monitoring, maintenance, and accountability.
8	is13	Lack of skilled workforce or need for specialized training.
8	is14	Social and cultural barriers or differences.
7	is15	Communities with poor socioeconomic conditions.
7	is16	Challenges in scaling, adapting, and replicating unique projects.
6	is17	Lack of reliable data or data collection difficulties.
6	is18	Environmental vulnerability, degradation, and natural resource scarcity.
5	is19	Lack of trust and engagement challenges, including prejudice or negative perception.
4	is20	Economic challenges, including inflation and devaluation.

Note: Colors indicate magnitude; darker backgrounds represent most common issues.

More in detail, several of these issues have been found in previous studies, often in different but related ways. For instance, it is not surprising to find funding constraints (is1) at the top of the list, particularly in developing countries, where they are often tied to inflation and devaluation (is20). Several studies have noted similar issues, including significant ties to inequality (is10), either because interventions are focused on areas with better economic potential (Delgadillo, 2014; Whitney, 2022b, p. 19) or because these practices have been highlighted by major international agencies (Montero, 2017; Temenos & McCann, 2012). Funding issues have also been identified as obstacles to promoting awareness and engagement (Le Gouais et al., 2023, p. 6), which have been connected in previous studies to a lack of interest and participation (Deely et al., 2020; Egusquiza et al., 2019; Wamsler et al., 2020) and also appeared high on this list (is5, is6, and is9).

Another set of commonly identified issues in several BPs is bureaucracy and inadequate legislation, which ranked second (is2). These issues are strongly linked to political instability and lack of institutional support (is8). Political instability has been defined as a common factor in developing countries that hinders the maintenance of solid institutions to support sustainable initiatives (Julio & Yook, 2012; Kayode-Ajala, 2023; Roe & Siegel, 2011). Additionally, several studies have shown that underdeveloped institutional capacities affect project development, including inherited state bureaucracy and other obstacles to interinstitutional coordination (Carbonetti et al., 2014; de Vaal & Ebben, 2011; Kayode-Ajala, 2023; Singh, 2023). These issues have also been linked to a lack of human resources, insufficient training, or inadequate technical guidelines (Kayode-Ajala, 2023; Slunge & Tran, 2014) that were also identified in some of the BPs

analyzed (is13). Although all identified issues could be linked to various stakeholders, the last items related to bureaucracy, legislation, training, etc., are particularly pertinent to local governments and their potential for political leadership.

In the same format as previously discussed, the following section will present the 20 most identified actions by the selected BPs, organized from the most to the least common (Table 2).

In analyzing the actions from the BPs, certain patterns of occurrence can be recognized. The first two actions, relating to community engagement and stakeholder relations, have almost the same number of appearances, with 37 and 36 respectively. These are the only actions appearing in more than half of the BPs. Subsequently, there is a significant jump to a second group of four actions: government support, evaluation and monitoring, training, and effective communication. Another jump leads to a third group of six actions with between 15 and 14 appearances. Following a unique case with 12 appearances, the same decreasing stair-step pattern observed in the problem analysis can be seen.

As observed with the issues analyzed, identified actions show partial alignment with findings in previous studies. For instance, several studies have highlighted community involvement and stakeholder relations as crucial topics (Kayode-Ajala, 2023; Stanowicka, 2021; Wamsler et al., 2020), which in this research ranked at the top of the results and were closely related (ac1 and ac2). In relation to this, understanding local culture

Table 2. Issues definition and number of occurrences in the BPs.

#	Code	Definition
37	ac1	Engaging with the community in a participatory process.
36	ac2	Collaborating with diverse stakeholders.
19	ac3	Garnering political and governmental support.
19	ac4	Monitoring, evaluating, and measuring impact.
18	ac5	Training and educating communities.
18	ac6	Communicating effectively and building trust.
15	ac7	Developing pilot projects and promoting scalability.
15	ac8	Maintaining flexibility and adaptability.
15	ac9	Developing or adapting low-cost technological solutions.
15	ac10	Designing innovative financing models.
14	ac11	Promoting gender and socioeconomic inclusivity.
14	ac12	Considering environmental sustainability.
12	ac13	Adapting to the local context and culture.
9	ac14	Developing efficient protocols and reducing bureaucracy.
8	ac15	Adopting an integrated approach with long-term planning.
7	ac16	Seeking external support and expertise.
7	ac17	Aligning the project with existing laws and regulations.
6	ac18	Practicing multidisciplinary approaches.
5	ac19	Improving infrastructure conditions.
3	ac20	Addressing community necessities.

Note: Colors indicate magnitude; darker backgrounds represent most common actions.

(ac13; Marciani et al., 2016) and aligning with existing policy frameworks (ac17; Wittwer et al., 2023, p. 5) have been shown to be key in achieving these relations. These topics also relate to the development of long-term planning and efforts to reduce bureaucracy (ac14 and ac15), common practices in efforts to achieve better governance (Gans-Morse et al., 2018; Jennings Jr, 2007). Combining these ideas, the collaboration between communities and political entities proves crucial in implementing effective solutions. This partnership allows for the incorporation of diverse perspectives and expertise, leading to more innovative and sustainable outcomes.

Returning to the most common actions found in this research, communicating effectively and building trust (ac5) have been linked to efforts of training and educating communities (ac6) in this and previous studies (Campo et al., 2015; Polko & Kimic, 2024; Poynton et al., 2018). However, many of these efforts require several steps, which is why many of these initiatives start with short-term pilot projects to later consider scalability and replicability (ac7 and ac8; Whitney, 2022b, p. 20; Wu et al., 2023, p. 136). This complexity requires a series of important components that have been considered in the form of stakeholder involvement, but also include external support in political backing, expertise, and multidisciplinary approaches (ac3, ac16, and ac18). Other experiences have underscored the importance of these elements (Marciani et al., 2016, p. 353; J. L. S. Silva et al., 2021). By working together, stakeholders can identify priorities, allocate resources more effectively, and implement strategies with broad support. This collaborative approach not only strengthens the fabric of urban governance but also ensures that solutions are grounded in the realities of those most affected, thereby enhancing the overall resilience and well-being of urban areas.

4.3. Patterns and Interactions Between Issues and Actions

While it is not always the case, issues and actions in BPs can often find corresponding counterparts. For example, stakeholder disagreements, poor coordination, and conflictive relations (is3) could be seen as the opposite of collaborating with diverse stakeholders (ac2). This observation led to the notion that obstacles could be converted into actions, with BPs taking specific actions to counter related issues. However, the analysis revealed that issues and actions that could be directly related or generated as responses did not consistently appear within the BPs (Table 3). For instance, garnering political and governmental support (ac3) was uncommon in cases reporting ineffective laws and bureaucratic hurdles (is2). Similarly, training and educating communities (ac5) and effectively communicating to build trust (ac6) were seldom seen in cases with a lack of awareness or skepticism (is5). Interestingly, some topics that could be considered unrelated showed stronger relationships, such as insufficient funding (is1) with the development of pilot projects and promoting scalability (ac7), and poor infrastructure (is4) with multidisciplinary approaches (ac18). These observations could indicate that some actions taken were aimed at addressing issues that were not mentioned in the reports collected by the database. Considered as a whole, this complex—and probably inconsistent—relationship between issues and actions highlights the need for nuanced approaches in urban planning, suggesting that solutions require innovative thinking and a deep understanding of the interplay between various factors and actors, necessitating collaborative, adaptable, context-specific strategies.

By examining these issues and actions transversely and observing how they have been handled in previous studies, it is possible to identify groups that further help to understand the areas in which BPs implementation needs consideration. In other words, beyond individual analysis, thematic groups can be organized to better understand the nature of these issues (Table 4). While different organizations would be valid, cross-checking

Table 3. Correlation between issues and actions in the analyzed BPs. 100% indicates complete overlap, while 0% indicates no overlap.

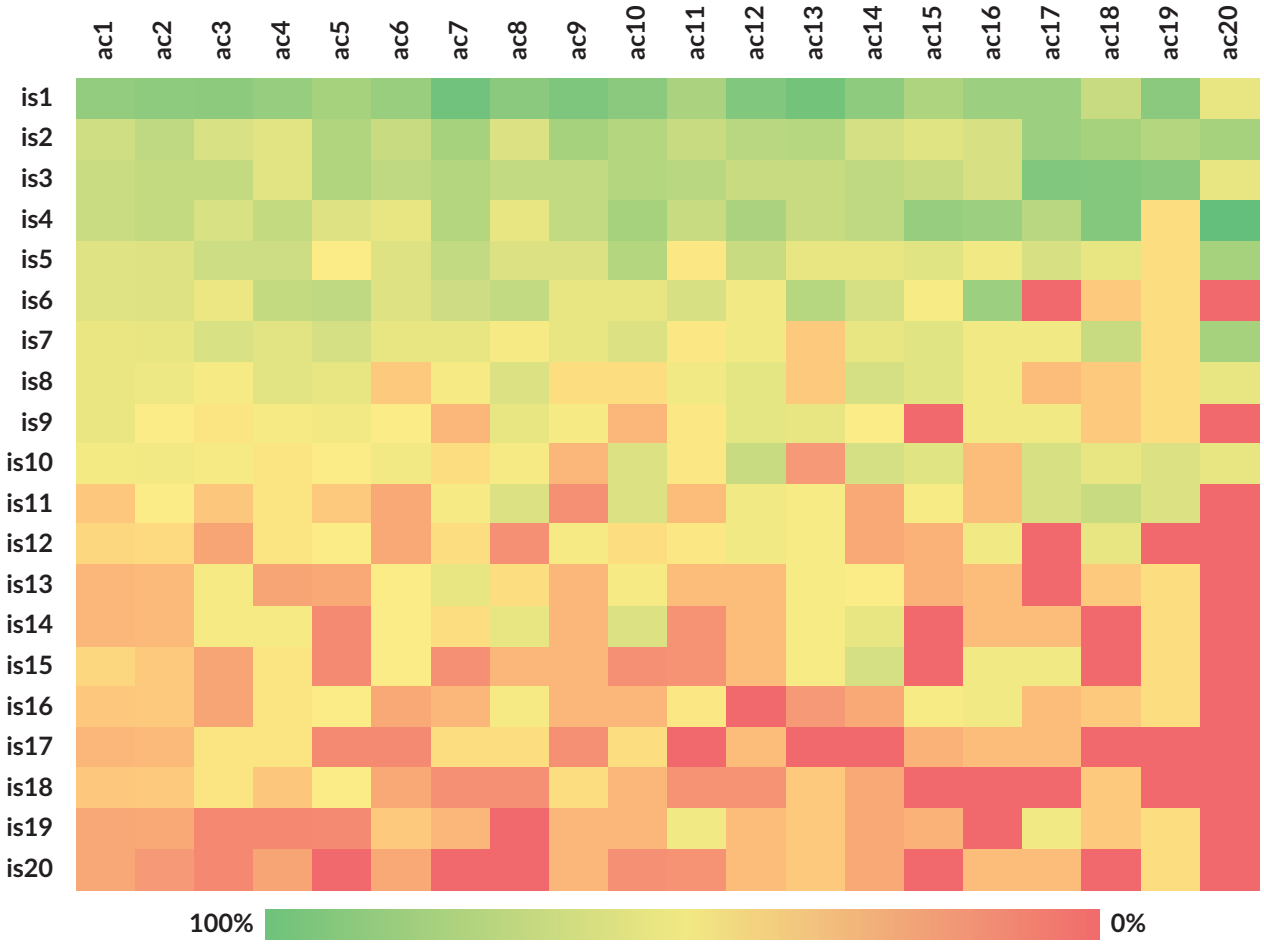

Table 4. BPs' issues and actions organized by categories.

		is1	is2	is3	is4	is5	is6	is7	is8	is9	is10	is11	is12	is13	is14	is15	is16	is17	is18	is19	is20
Management	115	34			23			14				10	9	8			7	6	6		4
Communities	103			24		18	18			12	11				8	7				5	
Government	37		24						13												

		ac1	ac2	ac3	ac4	ac5	ac6	ac7	ac8	ac9	ac10	ac11	ac12	ac13	ac14	ac15	ac16	ac17	ac18	ac19	ac20
Management	137				19		18	15	15	15	15		14			8	7		6	5	
Communities	120	37	36			18						14		12							3
Government	35			19											9			7			

the lists reveals two main themes: resource management (funds, infrastructure, information, workforce, etc.) and relations with communities or stakeholders. When organizing problems and actions according to these themes, it's evident that points not belonging to either specifically relate to government relations. Although the government is a stakeholder in many cases, these points refer to the governmental and legislative framework

within which the BPs operate. Adding up the number of appearances for each problem or action related to these three groups somewhat confirms the initial approach. The first two themes almost evenly split the nature of the issues highlighted by the BPs. Similar to previous findings, this analysis underlines the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of issues and actions within implementation. By categorizing these aspects into thematic groups—resource management, and stakeholder or community relations, with a distinct emphasis on governmental and legislative frameworks—the resulting distribution demonstrates that effective proposals require intense interactions between people and politics, where management processes are central.

The formulation of this research has certain limitations. The most significant is that the analysis and results regarding the problems and actions of the BPs are based solely on what authors have stated in reports compiled in the repository. This does not imply that these were the only problems faced or solutions found, but rather those that were highlighted. Given that these texts are relatively brief and aim to synthesize what the authors intended to express, it is challenging to estimate what has been excluded or how authors have chosen to present their BPs for different selection methods. It is plausible that some difficulties or solutions may have been omitted, mitigated, or overly emphasized. Another limitation related to the nature of these reports is that studying issues and actions broadly didn't allow this research to identify possible actions that were taken as specific responses to particular issues.

5. Conclusions

The findings from this research on BPs have significant implications for urban policy development in Latin America and the Caribbean. By identifying the prevalent issues and successful actions within the region's BPs, policymakers are equipped with a clearer understanding of the crucial factors that contribute to the effectiveness of urban initiatives. Specifically, the frequent occurrence of financial and legislative challenges suggests a need for reforms that streamline bureaucratic processes and enhance funding mechanisms. Policymakers should consider creating more flexible legal frameworks that can adapt to the dynamic needs of urban development and increase the accessibility of funds for critical projects. Additionally, the research underlines the importance of stakeholder collaboration in policy formation. Therefore, policies that foster cooperative relationships among government entities, private sector players, and community groups could be instrumental in advancing urban development goals. Implementing these recommendations could not only address the specific hurdles identified but also enhance the overall efficacy and sustainability of urban projects in the region.

This research has enhanced understanding of BPs, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. It highlighted inequities in BP representation but also revealed significant insights across a diverse range of cases. This contributes to understanding how learning from BPs becomes new, transferable information. Future expansion could greatly benefit from exploring other repositories like the Urban Sustainability Exchange and directly engaging with protagonists of BPs. This approach promises to yield deeper insights and understanding. Additionally, the study raises important questions regarding the correlation between the challenges BPs face and the actions they implement, indicating a need for further investigation. Moreover, a comparative analysis of BPs from various geographical regions could reveal crucial regional similarities and differences, thereby enriching urban planning and development strategies with a more global perspective.

Funding

This work was supported in part by the Louisiana State University Provost's Fund for Innovation in Research – Council on Research Summer Stipend Program, and by the School of Architecture and College of Art and Design at Louisiana State University.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8191
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8191

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Open Access Journal

Towards a "Freiburg Model" of Housing for the Common Good? Fostering Collaborative Housing in Urban Development

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Submitted: 31 January 2024 **Accepted:** 24 August 2024 **Published:** 10 October 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

As the social and ecological costs of capital-driven housing markets become increasingly apparent, local governments are (re)establishing collaborations with housing organizations that prioritize affordability and sustainability over profits. This hesitant re-orientation, however, takes place under conditions of strained local budgets and the inscription of market principles into existing public policies and planning law. In this article, we develop an interdisciplinary perspective on the interplay between municipal housing policies, planning and legal frameworks, and collaborative housing organizations in the district development project "Kleineschholz" in Freiburg, Germany. Promoted by the local government as being 100% oriented towards the common good, multiple elements of the project are geared towards community involvement and a close dialogue between public bodies and housing organizations. At the same time, the local government and administration navigate divergent interests within and outside municipal institutions, multi-level legal frameworks, financial constraints, as well as institutional routines. We trace how the project's common-good orientation is integrated into the co-productive process between housing policy, planning law, and collaborative housing groups. Our analysis centers on the process of concept-based tendering which is a key municipal lever for the project's orientation towards the common good. Moving beyond the situated district of Kleineschholz, we outline the potentials and challenges of translating an orientation towards the common good into collaborative district development, against the background of present political and legal frameworks.

Keywords

collaborative housing; common good; community-led housing; concept-based tendering; municipalities; transformation; urban planning law

1. Introduction

Housing provision in many municipalities worldwide bears the stamp of a decades-long prioritization of market dynamics, private property, and financial interests (Aalbers, 2017; Madden & Marcuse, 2016). As the social and ecological costs of capital-driven housing markets become irrefutable, several municipalities have tentatively (re)turned to collaborations with community-led housing groups (Grubbauer & Metzger, 2023). Such a reorientation by municipalities, however, takes place under conditions of strained local budgets and the inscription of market principles into policy and law (Balmer & Gerber, 2018). As a consequence, state institutions exhibit divergent and partially contradictory roles as (retrenching) providers of (affordable) public housing, supporters of various forms of housing development (from cooperative to profit-oriented), all the way to acting as a "real estate state" (Stein, 2019) that caters to the needs of capital.

In response to the distortions caused by market-based housing development—and exacerbated by much-needed mitigation of, and adaptation to, ecological challenges (Cucca et al., 2023)—a "third way" of housing development (Tummers, 2016, p. 2024) as a niche beyond market and state is gaining attention. Respective projects are alternately framed as "community-led," "collaborative," or "cooperative" (Bates, 2022; Sørvoll & Bengtsson, 2020). Yet, the main actors of these housing developments are diverse, ranging from large and long-standing cooperatives that navigate the spectrum between tenant orientation and business considerations in varying ways, to small groups adopting different legal forms to provide alternatives to market-driven housing development. In this article, we use the term "collaborative housing" to encapsulate various organizations that prioritize goals other than profit (see Section 2.1).

Collaborative housing groups come in many shapes and sizes and their orientation towards the common good is not necessarily reflected in a charitable legal form (for an overview see Vestbro, 2000, p. 29). This challenges public authorities to identify and address organizations oriented towards the common good. Additionally, the translation of what "common good" means in collaborative housing practice is subject to different viewpoints and positions. Focusing on a specific case of urban development, namely the district of Kleineschholz in Freiburg (Germany) that shall be developed exclusively with actors oriented towards the common good (Stadt Freiburg, 2023a), we trace the complexities behind the practical implementation of said ambitions. We address the question of how the idea of "common good" is integrated into the co-productive process and, in particular, in the concept-based tendering (*Konzeptverfahren*) for the urban neighborhood Kleineschholz. Our focus centers on the public tender as a crucial fulcrum between local housing policies, the engagement of collaborative housing organizations, and the legal as well as financial conditions within which the project is set. In doing so, we develop a critical understanding of the process of implementing an orientation towards the common good while navigating the tensions and interactions between housing organizations, local politics, and legal frameworks.

This article is structured as follows: In the next section, we situate our study within current academic debates on new forms of collaborative housing and the role of municipalities. In Section 3, we detail our methodology and contextualize the characteristics of Kleineschholz in Freiburg's housing landscape and policy. Section 4 traces distinctive features of the project's orientation towards the common good and the procedure and substance of concept-based tendering, with its special focus on eligible groups and coordination between the municipality and collaborative housing organizations. Finally, we discuss our findings regarding the role of municipalities and other state agents in enabling or hindering collaborative

housing oriented toward the common good. Moreover, we reflect upon the qualification of the case study as a prototype and its transferability, as well as its transformative potential.

2. Enhanced by Municipalities? From Collaborative Housing to Districts Oriented Towards the Common Good

2.1. Collaborative Housing

In the academic debate, new forms of collaborative housing are often framed as offering a "third way" between state-led, affordable housing, and other private or market-oriented developments (Tummers, 2016). In their study on non-profit housing initiatives' interactions with the state, Mullins et al. (2018) observe a certain hybridity in the relationship of state-led collaborations with non-profit housing organizations. Their comparison underlines that housing initiatives' forms and purposes depend on local context and welfare state regimes. Thereby, they carve out different degrees of co-production and partnership between civil society, the market, and the state. Czischke (2018, p. 59), moreover, sees a paradigmatic shift from state- and market-led housing regimes to new transformative forms of "responsibilisation." In this vein, Tummers (2016, p. 2024) states that "collaborative housing initiatives fit in the societal trends of decentralization, increased self-reliability and demand for participation and custom-made solutions." At the same time, state institutions constitute an important enabling factor and provide potential leverage for less well-established collaborative and cooperative housing projects, many of which are under financial strain (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022).

As a starting point, and to capture the multitude of forms, we follow Czischke's definition of collaborative housing as "a wide array of initiatives, including co-housing, new types of residents' co-operatives and other forms of collective self-organized housing" (Czischke, 2018, p. 56). In addition, a recent comparative study of collaborative housing (Griffith et al., 2024) in Europe emphasizes the following characteristics: First, provision and ownership ranging from user participation up to residents' control (legal); second, common values and an emphasis on solidarity (ideational); and third, common management of the estate (organizational). According to De Vos and Spoormans (2022, p. 346), further aspects might apply, including, fourth, cooperative building and planning (processual); and, fifth, collective routines and facilities (social and economic). In several definitions of collaborative housing, we find the criterion that individual housing units cannot be bought or sold on the open market, thereby creating a commons and contributing to the decommodification of housing provision (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022). Balmer and Bernet's (2015) comparison shows that the degree of decommodification and self-organization of housing varies, depending on the specific institutional arrangements that regulate the allocation of housing through public policies (e.g., subsidies) or property rights (see Section 2.2. for an overview of the possible instruments used by the state and municipalities in fostering collaborative housing).

Meanwhile, disentangling two labels frequently used in the German context sets the ground for our study. *Gemeinnützigkeit* (non-profit, charitable status) refers to an activity or entity that serves a public interest and is particularly relevant regarding organizations' legal form and tax status. *Gemeinwohl* (common good), in turn, describes an entity or action that serves public interests but less in a technical than a relational sense, based on shared values and responsibilities (Gennies, 2021). For various reasons—such as legal, financial, and resource constraints—an orientation toward the common good does not always overlap with the status of a charitable organization (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt—und Raumforschung, 2019). This can pose a challenge to both

community actors—primarily for financial reasons—and state-based actors, concerning channeling support towards collaborative housing groups.

2.2. Housing Transformations in Municipalities

The move away from market-based principles in housing reflects a broader and growing critique of profit-oriented economies (Fuller et al., 2016), often framed in terms of a "deep" or "social-ecological transformation" (Pichler, 2023). Cities are central arenas within which respective struggles and transformations play out (Schmid, 2023). Some of the most far-reaching examples of transformative practice have been observed at the municipal scale, for instance in the context of new municipalist platforms (Roth et al., 2023) in cities such as Barcelona (Spain), Zagreb (Croatia), or Naples (Italy), or the (tentative) experimentation with alternative economic models such as the Doughnut Economy (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023; Thompson et al., 2024) in Grenoble (France) or Amsterdam (the Netherlands). Housing issues are front and center in these debates (Holm et al., 2022; Nelson & Schneider, 2019; Savini, 2022).

While embedded in relations of multi-level state structures, municipalities possess considerable scope of action to influence local collaborative housing organizations (Lang & Stoeger, 2018). Where municipalities own the land, the regulatory, procurement, and planning instruments at their disposal include the application of long-term leaseholds, pre-emption rights in the purchase of properties, and concept-based tendering. Particularly in the German context, the concept-based allocation of publicly owned plots has become a crucial instrument for steering collaborative housing development through urban planning (Szemzö et al., 2019). Where land is privately owned, municipalities can require or incentivize collaborative housing, for example, through land use planning and urban development contracts with investors. In addition, public financial support is crucial for collaborative housing organizations (Lang & Stoeger, 2018). This can include public credit lines, loans, guarantees for access to private credit, and subsidies (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022, p. 161). Besides these regulatory and financial instruments, local governments' political strategies play a key role in navigating through collaborative and potentially conflictual processes (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022). In the German context, successful municipal strategies, first, involve various stakeholders in negotiations and co-production; second, pursue a transparent land allocation strategy; third, publicly support neighborhood development (Szemzö et al., 2019), as well as offering technical assistance and contributing to the co-creation of knowledge (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022, p. 161).

3. Kleineschholz Case Study

3.1. Methodology

Throughout our research on the case study of Kleineschholz (starting in 2019 and continuing until the time of writing), we combined the three empirical methods of document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. First, for the document analysis, we explored selected local housing policies and programs, public tenders and (online) descriptions of the project, minutes and decisions from the local parliament (city council), as well as newspaper articles. Second, we conducted 10 interviews with different stakeholders involved in the development project Kleineschholz. This includes four interviews with representatives from the municipal administration and politics who were involved in the substantive and legal design of the proposal for the concept-based tender. Furthermore, we conducted six interviews with

representatives from collaborative housing organizations who intend to apply for one of the properties and who underwent a preparation process to align their project with the requirements of the tender. Third, we adopted ethnographic research methods and conducted (participant) observations in several public and semi-public gatherings related to the development project. This includes public hearings, workshops addressing community-led housing projects, excursions led by members of the local administration, informal gatherings aimed at networking, and work sessions to build a permanent meeting space for collaborative housing actors (see Section 4).

3.2. Freiburg's Housing Policy

Our case study is situated in the German city of Freiburg, with 235,000 inhabitants in 2022. Between 2010 and 2015, the city experienced a population growth of 16,000 inhabitants, which was not foreseen by previous predictions for population development (Stadt Freiburg, 2012). This unexpected population growth, however, can be explained by several local specificities: Freiburg counts as a beneficiary of regionally uneven demographic change in Germany, due to its university being a center of attraction for students and a key employer, in combination with high quality of life and an academic green-alternative milieu (see also Haag & Köhler, 2012, p. 244).

Already in the 2010s, local politicians and the city government recognized the urgency of responding to the increasing housing shortage and rising rents. In 2013, the city council approved an urban housing program that included several measures, such as the promotion of housing developments in the inner city and the creation of a new district (Dietenbach); the promotion of affordable housing based on subsidies; and the allocation of public land based on concept-based tendering (Stadt Freiburg, 2013). When compared with housing policies in other German cities, these measures already indicate a post-neoliberal shift towards more regulation and social housing (Helbrecht & Weber-Newth, 2017; Metzger & Schipper, 2017).

3.3. Emerging Convergences Between Public and Collaborative Housing Provisioning

Collaborative housing organizations were already shaping Freiburg's housing landscape long before the municipality gradually opened up toward alternative forms of housing provision. In the 1980s, at a brownfield location in the city center, the early stages of what would later be recognized as the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* were taking shape (Hurlin, 2019). Over the years, and through long struggles, the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* managed to establish itself as an alliance of over 150 projects across various cities, characterized by a solidarity financing mechanism and a complex legal structure that prevents recommodification of projects (Hölzl, 2022). Whereas the relation between the municipality of Freiburg and many of its socially and environmentally minded housing projects—including, but also beyond, the *Mietshäuser Syndikat*—continued to be tension-filled, these groups grew to be increasingly important actors in urban developments. The internationally acclaimed development of the Vauban neighborhood (Freytag et al., 2014), for instance, was strongly driven by collaborative housing groups, but also accompanied by their numerous differences with the municipality.

A stronger formal recognition of collaborative housing organizations by the municipality followed within the last decade. Freiburg's urban housing program of 2013 explicitly mentions the expansion of "new urban forms" of community-oriented housing such as "Mietshäuser initiatives" (Stadt Freiburg, 2013 p. 18; translated by authors). Concept-based tendering was introduced the same year for the development project

Gutleutmatten, where three projects of the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* were realized, providing housing for over 130 people at below 7 €/m² (as of 2021)—which is considerably below the local average monthly rent of over 13 €/m². Kleineschholz's comprehensive orientation toward the common good can be seen as a logical next step of this evolution—propelled by Martin Horn's election as mayor in 2018. The latter established two new administrative units and an exchange format to intensify interdepartmental efforts towards affordable housing: the Department for Affordable Housing as a staff unit of the Mayor and the Housing Steering Group (Stadt Freiburg, 2020). In 2020, the administration issued—and the city council adopted—the *Affordable Housing 2030* strategy. It is within this broader context of an active real estate policy of the city of Freiburg that the district development project Kleineschholz is set and has to be understood.

4. Orientation Towards the Common Good Through Concept-Based Tendering

The Kleineschholz development is located in the Stühlinger district in a central area of Freiburg. Approximately 500 residential units are to be built on a 77,500 m² site (Stadt Freiburg, 2022). The planning process began in 2010 with a citizen dialogue on guidelines for the area's development. In 2016, allotment gardeners—previously the primary users of the area—were informed about the plans for housing construction and alternative allotments. A series of participation and information events were held throughout 2017 and continued in parallel to the competition for a development plan in 2018 and early 2019. The framework plan was adjusted based on the design competition and adopted in 2020 and 2021, respectively. In 2020, Mayor Martin Horn, along with the administration and the city council, endorsed the orientation towards the common good as the central feature of the project (Stadt Freiburg, 2020). In the same year, the Kleineschholz Project Group was set up as the city administration's key task force to lead the planning process. In October 2021, the project was classified as an urban development measure (§ 165 of the German Building Code). The draft land use plan was opened for public consultation in 2022 and adopted by the city council in December 2023. At the same time, the Council approved the principles for the marketing and allocation of building plots. Both key planning instruments—the land use plan (see Figure 1 and the detailed development plan with local building regulations in its annex; Stadt Freiburg, 2023b) and the allocation concept—detail several elements of the neighborhood's orientation towards the common good, which will be presented in greater detail below. Marketing of the properties is scheduled for fall 2024, with the first development measures having begun in December 2023, and construction of the first residential buildings beginning in 2025. Completion of the new neighborhood is scheduled for 2033.

To effectively synthesize and present the key procedural (Table 1) and substantive (Table 2) elements of the property allocation oriented towards the common good in Kleineschholz, we use two tables. Table 1 details the steps of the *process* of property allocation. The selection process diverges from previous approaches of the municipality, such as in the district Gutleutmatten, where projects were evaluated based on a list of previously fixed criteria (*Punktevergabe*). This foremost quantitative approach led to less diverse and less innovative approaches, as collaborative housing organizations wrote their proposals to match the criteria. For Kleineschholz, a qualitative evaluation of projects was chosen, allowing the city administration to be more flexible in steering the process to achieve an overall mix in the neighborhood. As stated in an interview with the administration:

> The concept allocation will be an open concept allocation, meaning we will hardly make any qualitative specifications. Instead, we will rely on the ideas of the projects, like a think tank, allowing them to

Figure 1. Urban development and open space framework plan. Source: Stadt Freiburg (2023b).

> create synergies and enabling us to benefit significantly more from their creativity than we have in other development areas so far. This is a huge opportunity for Kleineschholz, because we really expect to see good, innovative socio-ecological ideas and implementations. If we were to use a point system as an alternative, it would be like saying, "If you put a fir tree on the roof, you get 10 points," then everyone would just put a fir tree there instead of thinking about what else could be nicely done on the roof. (Interview 1 with administration)

Furthermore, the Kleineschholz planning process entails significant stakeholder engagement, including regular meetings between the Kleineschholz Project Group and representatives of selected housing organizations, as well as a comparatively high responsiveness of the allocation concept and land use plan to challenges and opportunities raised by those groups.

Table 2 depicts the substantive elements of the orientation towards the common good in the allocation concept and the land use plan, clustered around different themes. Compared to prior initiatives, interviewees emphasized the prominent role of common good principles, the low-threshold application requirements at the first stage, and the open concept awarding as distinctive elements.

Table 1. The property allocation process in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Phases and key actors	Procedural steps and specific features	Opportunities and challenges
Pre-tender process 2020–2023 PA, CHO, CC, and P	Regular meetings of the Kleineschholz Project Group and representatives of selected CHOs; Workshop series for professionalization of CHOs; Opening of a meeting space (*Pavilion for All*) for community groups located at the site of Kleineschholz	Time—and resource—intense, facilitated in-house, supported by two additional full-time positions; High degree of responsiveness in the public tender; Early involvement and participation of CHOs
Decision on the tendering process 12/2023 PA and CC	Two-step concept-based tendering; Low access requirements; High degree of flexibility in terms of content	Low-threshold access to the application procedure for CHOs; Promotes innovative, creative, and diverse concepts and profitability
Tender 2023–2024 PA, CHO, and CC	Allocation concept frames tender design; Public tender (incl. information event)	High transparency for CHOs; Including CHO feedback during the participation process
Selection process 2024–2025 PA, CHO, and CC	Interviews with applying projects' (CHO) representatives; Qualitative assessment regarding guidelines (no fixed criteria); Selected projects can reserve properties for up to twelve months	Flexibility; Potential for innovations arising from the openness of the process
From reservation to full proposal 2025 PA and CHO	Projects need to provide documents to receive property: design planning, measurement, building application, proof of financing, ground lease contract	Issues could emerge at later stage of the process; Unknown flexibility by potential successor groups

Notes: Own compilation based on Stadt Freiburg (2023a) and interviews with representatives of Freiburg's municipal administration; key actors are abbreviated as follows: public administration (PA), collaborative housing organizations (CHO), city council (CC), public (P).

Table 2. Substantive elements in the allocation concept in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Theme	Allocation concept and land use plan	Opportunities and challenges
Common good	Neighborhood development with stakeholders oriented towards the common good, tenant-orientation, and long-term keeping of properties; Definition of "orientation towards the common good" via a catalogue of criteria bound to legal status and property use (see details below); No realization of projects that entail individual ownership, including building groups	Land policy objectives: counteract land speculation and secure long-term access to properties; Marketing and realization risk due to CHOs' limited financial resources

Table 2. (Cont.) Substantive elements in the allocation concept in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Theme	Allocation concept and land use plan	Opportunities and challenges
Design targets	Prioritizing the creation of affordable, rent-controlled housing; Eco-friendly design, pedestrian accessibility, cost-efficient use of living space; Sharing communal green and open spaces; Including wide range of user groups: from small to large family or cluster apartments, barrier-free apartments	Marketing and realization risk due to high standards; Low-threshold and digital ecological assessment tool available to applicants free of charge
Actors oriented towards the common good	Requirements for the legal status of the project (companies); Requirements for the use of the property; Public tender allows for approximately 16 projects	Flexibility of legal status of building entity; Public developers—Freiburger Stadtbau GmbH (municipal housing cooperation) and *Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben* (BImA, former owner of the land)—do not participate in the tender
Low-threshold application requirements at first stage	Project's description with a detailed concept (e.g., use, occupation structure, special features), supported by sketches, financing, residential mix, project's minimum sizes, the naming of desired plot, and one alternative plot; Sustainability assessment shall be submitted with the application	No detailed planning is requested, to keep the applicants' costs as low as possible
Open concept awarding	Descriptive holistic approach for evaluating and selecting submitted concepts based on criteria: Contribution to the neighborhood and/or urban area (mission statement Kleineschholz as a guideline); Quality of the project idea including financial feasibility; Reliable realization including the construction project's structure and division of tasks	CHOs can develop and contribute their own ideas for the neighborhood; Public actors do not predetermine concepts
Leasehold requirement adjusted through limited property sale	Leasehold model as a priority; Alternative property purchase, including the city's right of disposal (price-limited right of first refusal or repurchase by the city); Obligations to be contractually agreed and secured *in rem* in the land register	Lower mortgage lending capacity for leaseholds (land component not included in value calculation); Adjustments due to restricted project financing, especially in times of high construction and financing costs
Subsidized rental housing	At least 50% of the created residential floor space as subsidized rental apartments; Criteria of the current state housing subsidy program apply, rent control with a standard commitment period of 30 years, 33% discount on the local comparative rent	Ensures a high share of subsidized rental housing; Marketing and realization risk

Table 2. (Cont.) Substantive elements in the allocation concept in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Theme	Allocation concept and land use plan	Opportunities and challenges
Financial support	Time-limited grant from the BImA of over €6 million for subsidized housing construction measures; Municipal subsidy of over €6 million to reduce privately financed rents in the medium term; Further municipal funding opportunities	Buffers high interest rates and construction costs and deterioration of state and federal housing subsidies; Remains challenging for small projects
Energy concept	Heat supply via district heating; tender won by municipal utility company, heat supply contract concluded in December 2022; compulsory connection to and use of the grid; 35% of the building's floor area is specified as a photovoltaic module area; the roof area of approx. 1,000 m² can optionally be used by Badenova (energy company) for a photovoltaic system; Minimum of energy efficiency house standard 55 with heat recovery	Early decision on heat supply with limited influence of CHOs; Limits other options for heat supply efficiency house standard 55 corresponds to current German law. A more ambitious standard (EH 40) was discussed but dismissed due to financial constraints

Operating under the guiding principle of *Gemeinwohl*—the common good—instead of terms defined with more legal clarity avoids exclusions based on legal status. However, it also challenges the municipality to specify who is eligible for the tendering process. Applicants have to fall within one of four specified groups to participate in the selection:

1. Companies with models of tenant participation in the asset value, such as cooperative shares (*Mietshäuser Syndikat*, cooperatives, limited partnership);
2. Companies with a state, municipal, or church mandate to provide services of general interest for residential use;
3. Companies whose purpose includes the promotion of social, ecological, cultural, or comparable socially oriented projects (reference projects are required);
4. Companies providing housing for their own employees, drawn from professions crucial for the functioning of the state or social system (e.g., emergency services, nursing staff, educators, and care services).

Moreover, the projects are required to use the property as described in their awarded concept. This includes no division into partial ownership; the obligation to maintain the buildings for a period of at least 30 years; the agreement to a repurchase right in favor of the city; and resale only with the consent of the city, to purchasers who fulfill the requirements of the foreseen focus on the common good and assume all obligations. In addition, the projects sign an agreement on tenant protection (e.g., no possibility of termination due to personal use, generally no luxury refurbishments, and generally no conversion of residential to commercial space). While these criteria leave leeway for different organizations, the tendering process is geared towards the first listed group: collaborative housing groups. The administrative taks force for the Kleineschholz development stated that:

> With this approach [concept-based tendering], we open up to groups that do not see real estate as an investment good but as a consumer good. This gives us the opportunity to move further away from profitability.…Instead of focusing on profitability, they can ask, "What good can we do for the community?" This concept allows us to prioritize these aspects higher than, for example, simply meeting minimum standards. (Interview 4 with administration)

Yet, while collaborative housing groups are the main addressee of concept-based tendering, administrative actors see a challenge in (some) actors' inexperience and "degree of great idealism," alongside issues of financing—requiring additional support (Interview 4 with administration). To increase professionalism and lend support to housing organizations, the city has co-initiated and financed a workshop series in close collaboration with collaborative housing organizations. This series builds on a long-standing exchange between the municipality and housing actors oriented towards the common good. Aside from meetings with "traditional housing cooperatives," this includes bimonthly meetings with a selected group of organizations, such as the *Mietshäuser Syndikat*, to determine what they "need in order to build with us" and whether the municipality is "on the right track" with setting conducive framework conditions (Interview 4 with administration). Overall, these selected housing organizations had continuous opportunities to offer suggestions and provide feedback on the planning process of Kleineschholz. However, collaborative housing initiatives expressed criticisms in interviews that some elements were decided already quite early in the process, with little influence for housing organizations. This is the case, for instance, with the energy concept, which is based on centralized provisioning instead of decentralized solutions (such as the mandatory connection of residents to the district heating system, see Table 2). Collaborative housing groups also pointed out that the development plan regulated potential buildings in too much detail. In an interview, a collaborative housing group pointed out that:

> What I observe is that, on the one hand, they [the municipal administration and politicians] are open and say, "Oh yes, this is all innovative and great and social and ecological," but on the other hand, they are very restrictive in their specifications. This creates a bit of a contradiction. For example, the development plan is formulated in such detail that there is very little room left to think or do things differently. (Interview 6 with collaborative housing group)

Although the municipality and collaborative housing groups shared the vision of an open and creative process, perceptions of what that entails diverged. Yet, the aforementioned exchange format allowed mediation between these different positions and resulted in the flexibilization of some specifications (e.g., the requirements for façade greening). While the municipality's collaborative orientation has been appreciated by most initiatives, it also has limits when it comes to addressing the challenges for collaborative housing organizations. Aside from more specific framework conditions that can only be partially mediated by the municipality—for instance, prescribed ratios for parking—high building costs and increasing interest rates, coupled with the limited access to state and federal programs and subsidies, severely strain the initiatives' margin of maneuver. The unknown consequences of these developments unsettle both community and municipal actors. In response, the original plan to allocate municipal land for residential use exclusively under heritable building rights (leasehold) had to be adjusted. Shortly before the publication of the tender, the municipality re-introduced the option of land purchases (with a repurchase option for the municipality after 99 years). This was a reaction to the inadequate consideration of leasehold models—as originally foreseen in Kleineschholz—in the state housing subsidy program. Furthermore, the municipality mobilizes €6 million to support projects that provide price-restricted housing.

Our interviews with actors from housing initiatives underline that substantial experience within and close connections among local housing organizations contribute to navigating these challenging framework conditions. While financing remains the main difficulty for collaborative housing organizations, especially those without previous projects as collateral, Freiburg's established housing community enables mutual learning and support. The long-standing connections between key actors and groups (the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* and other established cooperatives), however, also come with a certain exclusivity. To counter this, the *Pavillon für Alle* (Pavilion for All)—a meeting space for community groups located at the site of Kleineschholz—was initiated and built by the local housing cooperative *Dachgenossenschaft* (which translates to "umbrella cooperative," referring to the primary purpose of the cooperative as providing an organizational infrastructure to collaborative housing groups, thus supporting their development). While established groups already had platforms for exchanges and meeting spaces, the Pavilion lowers the barrier for new actors to join and learn, also to participate in arrangements amongst housing organizations to lower the competition, for instance regarding what plots to apply for. Although constituting a central resource for (some) collaborative housing groups—for facilitation, learning, coordination, and integration—the Pavilion was almost exclusively realized by civil society actors. The fact that the city of Freiburg did not offer any financial support (aside from temporarily providing a space on site) and that miscommunications between different departments of municipal administration considerably complicated the process, led some actors to question the sincerity of the city's ambitions. Despite the remarkable engagement between the municipality and collaborative housing groups—evident, for instance, from the frequent presence of city representatives at public events in the Pavilion—a certain caution remains on both sides, not least because of decades of more contentious relations.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Taken on its own, Kleineschholz marks a sharp turn away from the profit-oriented housing that characterized Freiburg's development projects in the decades before 2010 and still marks the prevalent form of housing politics in Germany and internationally (Aalbers, 2017; Lima, 2021). While the development of an entire district by collaborative housing groups seems noteworthy for its novelty, it also raises a number of questions regarding process and substance. Above, we have outlined the distinctive features of the concept-based tendering that constitutes the central fulcrum in the development project of Kleineschholz. Based on our findings, this concluding section first reflects on key enabling and hindering factors in using concept-based tendering to develop Kleineschholz as "100% oriented towards the common good," as claimed by Mayor Martin Horn. Second, we discuss the relevance of the Kleineschholz case for future developments in Freiburg and beyond.

In contrast to most studies on collaborative housing, we foreground the interplay between municipal institutions and community groups. Our findings underline the relevance, not only of housing initiatives' organizational capacities (Hölzl, 2022, p. 6) but also of local governments' engagement (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022), through urban planning instruments and housing policies which can substantially contribute to enabling collaborative housing developments. It is crucial to emphasize that public ownership of land is a fundamental requirement for using concept-based tendering. Given the significance of public land ownership for this approach—central to our case study's focus on housing for the common good—municipalities looking to advance such developments should avoid privatizing public land. Instead, they should explore strategies for remunicipalization, including the possibility of repurchasing private land.

Yet, whether or not collaborative housing is effectively supported by concept-based tendering highly depends on the tender design and further contextual conditions. In the case of Kleineschholz, the city of Freiburg offers substantial support to collaborative housing organizations, by introducing favorable regulations, subsidies, and accompanying a cooperative, publicly supported participatory process.

Identifying the municipality as a key driver, however, would also fall short of the complexity of Kleineschholz. Our analysis shows that the project can only be understood through past and present interactions of city officials and collaborative housing groups. Below the surface of targeted institutional support are long-term struggles and a gradual rapprochement between housing groups and the municipality. For Kleineschholz, specifically, this manifests in a continuous exchange format which allowed municipal actors to consider the needs of collaborative housing groups and adapt the concept-based tendering accordingly—with some friction points remaining for various financial, legal, and cultural reasons. In addition to learning about the general needs of collaborative housing groups, these dialogues helped the municipality to react appropriately to rapidly changing framework conditions (e.g., the steep rise in interest rates).

The importance of the dialogue between the municipality and collaborative housing groups is further substantiated by our finding that the legal framework *as such* does not constitute a major barrier to housing development with a focus on the common good. Rather, as the case study highlights, the creative use of legal instruments can help to ensure high standards concerning the common good. Although concept-based tendering must comply with the requirements of public procurement and competition law, these provide a range of opportunities to introduce common good principles (cf. Lausen & Pustal, 2022; Däuper & Braun, 2022). The land use plan, leasehold, and property purchase agreements, as well as securities *in rem*, are used to manifest the orientation towards the common good in a legally binding manner. According to our insights, the key challenges to realizing the Kleineschholz project are the current financial constraints, especially in times of high construction costs and interest rates. To mitigate these factors of a potential failure of the entire development, the local administration, in close interaction with housing organizations, adjusted the tender conditions to respond to severe funding constraints.

However, the cooperation with and support from the city are not perceived as entirely positive by collaborative housing groups. The municipality's active and involved role in steering the process serves an important function in realizing such an ambitious project. Nevertheless, some priorities are misaligned with the actual needs of collaborative housing groups. This relates in particular to a number of regulations and pivotal decisions (e.g., on the energy concept) that narrow the scope for action of housing groups. This indicates, first, that the municipality has to carefully navigate between setting conducive framework conditions and leaving enough flexibility in planning for collaborative housing initiatives. Second, despite remarkably close coordination between municipality and housing groups, there is further potential for mutual learning. While the municipality's leadership is crucial, it is thus equally important to recognize the vibrant and fairly professionalized collaborative housing community as an essential element. An exemplary instance of this engagement is the Pavilion for All, a physical meeting space that served as a "grassrooting vector" (Hölzl, 2022, p. 9) for fostering local networks and knowledge exchange among initiatives.

In the academic debate, collaborative housing is regularly framed as a model for wider housing provision that can be upscaled to contribute to the development of larger neighborhoods (Tummers, 2016). In this sense, for some, Kleineschholz serves as a testing ground and blueprint that might be transferred to the

development of the tenfold larger greenfield urban development project, Dietenbach. At the same time, many interviewees from both local administration and housing organizations are skeptical that even a city such as Freiburg, with its strong tradition in collaborative housing, has enough professional initiatives to successfully manage a large-scale urban housing project. Instead, perspectives prevail that Kleineschholz, with its 500 housing units, remains "the right size at the right location" (Interview 1 with administration). Our contextualized case study underlines that Kleineschholz must be seen as an experimental lighthouse project rather than the new normal.

For the municipal actors, Kleineschholz nevertheless offers a learning process, stimulated by experimentation, which "enables physical transformation by changing organizational practices that commonly prevent new solutions being adopted at scale" (Evans et al., 2021, p. 177). While some aspects and lessons from Kleineschholz—such as the close collaboration between municipal administration and collaborative housing organizations, especially in and around the community-organized meeting space (Pavilion for All)—are expected to be applicable in Dietenbach, the principle of the common good will not be the guiding framework for this large-scale development. In Dietenbach, private individuals and for-profit developers will play a central role. Moreover, the transferability of the Kleineschholz approach to publicly enabled, collaborative housing development is limited due to its precondition of public land ownership, high demands regarding time, personnel, and financial investments on the part of both the municipality and collaborative housing organizations.

Just as Freiburg can derive learning opportunities from the Kleineschholz case, important insights for socio-ecological transformations can also be drawn more broadly. In particular, our case study of Kleineschholz speaks to recent debates around transformative planning practices in which housing is a central issue (e.g., Savini, 2022, 2024). For a critical assessment, it is helpful to turn to Eckersley's (2021) notion of critical problem-solving. With this concept, Eckersley seeks to connect the more radical and theoretical debates on transformation with a more pragmatic and practice-oriented outlook of transition studies by locating transformative ambitions in the identification of "the next best transition steps with the greatest transformative potential" (Eckersley, 2021, p. 12). Kleineschholz, indeed, embodies principles that can serve as general, ambitious orientations for other urban developments—such as the use of leasehold models and high rates of subsidized and collaborative housing. And yet, despite Kleineschholz's exceptional character serving as inspiration and learning ground, it is, to some extent, precisely that: exceptional. Our research finds that under the current city government, Kleineschholz might offer some opportunities for learning processes contributing to establishing wider social and ecological transformative practices. When assessing the project's transformative potential, however, two limitations remain: First, the municipality, including actors central to realizing concept-based tendering, does not "unite around an alternative hegemonic project" (Eckersley, 2021, p. 10) but occupies various positions vis-à-vis non-profit housing development. Second, building new housing developments—no matter how just and sustainable—evades redistributive conflicts by enlarging that which is to be distributed. In light of Freiburg's growing population, deep social-ecological transformations would require the re-organization of per-capita living space—a challenge much more difficult than the realization of a housing project oriented towards the common good.

Overall, local decision-makers showed a high degree of political determination to enable and promote collaborative housing organizations as a new approach to urban development. In that sense, "the new urban, mixed-use neighborhood Kleineschholz…set[s] engaged social, architectural, and ecological benchmarks

through an ambitious orientation towards the common good" labelled as a "'Freiburg model'" (Stadt Freiburg, 2022, p. 13; translated by the authors). It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the approach developed for the collaborative housing development of Kleineschholz possesses the qualities of a model that is transferrable to other contexts, or whether this housing development with a focus on the common good remains bound to unique local conditions, most importantly a wealthy, resourceful, and academic-alternative oriented milieu.

Acknowledgments

We thank the editors and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on this manuscript. We also express our gratitude to individuals from collaborative housing groups and the Municipality of Freiburg for taking the time to share their insights and perspectives on the Kleineschholz development project.

Funding

We acknowledge support by the Open Access Publication Fund of the University of Freiburg.

Conflict of Interests

Benedikt Schmid is a member of the Dachgenossenschaft Wohnen für Alle eG. Any potential conflicts of interest arising from this affiliation were carefully considered and addressed to uphold rigorous scientific standards.

Data Availability

Detailed and up-to-date data on the Kleineschholz development project are available on the project website, administered by the City of Freiburg (https://www.freiburg.de/pb/,Lde/1417623.html). All official documents related to public sessions of the city council on Kleineschholz can be found at https://ris.freiburg.de.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8184
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8184

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Towards More Equitable Urban Greening: A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Co-Governance

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Submitted: 31 January 2024 **Accepted:** 13 June 2024 **Published:** 27 August 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

Urban greening has grown in significance in Europe and worldwide as a presumed "public good" initiative, delivering a range of benefits for human health and wellbeing. To redress inequalities in the distribution of such benefits, attention has turned to the potential of collaborative governance. Indicator-based frameworks have also begun to receive attention for their ability to monitor and evaluate not only the performance of greening interventions, but also the policies, practices, and norms that influence their planning and implementation, with a view to transforming governance arrangements. Extensive sets of indicators have been proposed in the literature; however, few studies have addressed the process of adapting monitoring frameworks to the limited resources and highly specific conditions of local government. We address this gap by providing an account of an early phase in developing and contextualising a framework to assess governance of urban greening in seven European cities. Following review of existing indicator sets and literature related to co-governing urban green space, we compiled a set of 126 indicators and clustered these according to normative principles underpinning successful co-governance. We then worked with city representatives to contextualise a subset of 80 indicators and link them to relevant objectives. We found that organising indicators according to principles and applying the criteria of relevance and feasibility was useful to make an abstract concept operational and to promote strategic thinking. However, we also found evidence of likely barriers to using indicators in practice, chief among them the limited agency of responsible staff, with implications for the potential to politicise indicators and thereby guide transformative change.

Keywords

collaborative governance; evaluation; indicators; justice; monitoring; transformation; urban greening

1. Introduction

In the face of growing threats to quality of life in cities worldwide—among them global warming, pandemics, and societal fragmentation—urban greening has captured the attention of urban planners and managers for its potential to deliver a range of benefits (Thompson, 2002). Green spaces have a key role to play in mitigating heat (Rahman et al., 2020) and regulating stormwater disposal (Zölch et al., 2017), while access to nature contributes to better mental and physical health (Tzoulas et al., 2007). However, as urban greening has gained momentum, attention has increasingly turned to the recipients of these benefits, and related questions of social and environmental justice (Anguelovski et al., 2020; Bauer, 2023; Connolly, 2019; Rutt & Gulsrud, 2016).

To make sense of the different dimensions of justice, many scholars have applied a tri-partite concept, composed of distribution, recognition, and procedure (Fraser, 1998; Schlosberg, 2007). Distribution concerns uneven impacts from environmental burdens and availability of environmental goods (Liotta et al., 2020). Similarly, the formal and informal procedures for making decisions related to urban greening are not readily accessible to everyone, such that decisions inevitably privilege certain interests, while neglecting others (Anguelovski et al., 2019; Baasch, 2020). Recognition justice supports the other dimensions in that neither equitable processes nor outcomes are possible without targeting differences in resources, capacities, and needs among individuals (Fraser, 1998; Young, 1990). More recently, Anguelovski et al. (2020) have pointed to the failure of the tri-dimensional framework to adequately reflect the lived experience of injustice. They propose an analytical approach based on principles of emancipation, anti-subordination, intersectionality, and (feminist) relationality, which they argue must fundamentally underpin urban greening in order to achieve justice. Their criticism appears to stem at least in part from a tendency for previous research to focus on one or the other dimension, commonly distribution, rather than recognise the three as interdependent (Bauer, 2023; Bennett et al., 2019) as well as failing to address power relations. We maintain that the dimensions of recognition, procedure, and distribution, when considered together, remain a useful lens through which to characterise an otherwise abstract concept, particularly in the context of practice-engaged research. Evidence suggests that all three dimensions are rarely reflected in the criteria that municipal decision-makers use to determine priorities for urban greening (Fisher et al., 2021; Hansen et al., 2022; Hoover et al., 2021).

2. Theoretical Background

Training a justice lens on urban greening projects demands that we move beyond technical requirements and recognise their fundamentally political nature, paying attention to the governance arrangements that underpin their planning, design, and stewardship (Hansen et al., 2022; Patterson et al., 2017; Pauleit et al., 2017). The concept of governance inherently recognises that formal government is not solely responsible for managing affairs, but engages with a range of institutions (Healey, 2006) and non-state actors (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). For our analysis, we take collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2011) as our framing concept, in response to the deficits in collaboration identified as key barriers to delivering urban greening (Frantzeskaki, 2019; Mekala & MacDonald, 2018). We define collaborative governance as a process of actors across the public, civil society, and private domains working together towards shared objectives for positively and equitably transforming the urban environment through the planning, design, implementation, and management of a nature-based intervention (Lim et al., 2023, after Ansell & Gash, 2008; Biermann et al., 2009; Emerson et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2017). The emphasis on

equity is important, since, while collaborative governance is sometimes assumed to translate to equitable outcomes, empirical evidence is limited (Dobbin & Lubell, 2021; Toxopeus et al., 2020). To move towards making this definition operational, we rely on five normative principles (see Table 1), defined through a systematic, qualitative literature review (Lim et al., 2023).

In Europe, a number of practice-based research projects have sought to guide collaboration on urban greening interventions, often framed as nature-based solutions (NbS), a concept that has benefited from substantial European Commission research funding (Bradley et al., 2022; Collier et al., 2023; DeLosRíos-White et al., 2020; Hölscher et al., 2024). As part of such studies, indicators have typically been deployed to assess the benefits of greening (Dumitru & Wendling, 2021). Just like quantifiable impacts, e.g., a reduction in temperature or air pollutants, indicators are capable of demonstrating a shift to a more collaborative way of governing, allowing targets to be set and progress tracked (Bennett & Satterfield, 2018; da Cruz & Marques, 2017), as a basis to redirect resources where most needed (Dumitru & Wendling, 2021; Morgan et al., 2022; van der Jagt et al., 2022). Indicators can also radically simplify complex information for diverse audiences: a powerful tool for policymaking (Keirstead & Leach, 2008) and demonstrating success

Table 1. Normative principles underpinning successful collaborative governance of urban greening (Lim et al., 2023) and links with dimensions of justice.

Principle	Definition	Justice dimensions
Collaborative	Seeking out and mobilising governmental and non-governmental actors from multiple disciplines, departments, and levels; coordinating individual efforts to solve common problems adequately and at an agreeable cost (Börzel & Panke, 2007; Frantzeskaki & Rok, 2018).	Not explicit
Legitimate	Trust in and acceptance of decisions is ensured by adhering to democratic norms: i.e., equal participation of those affected; fair, transparent, and accessible decision-making processes; and accountability (Buizer & Van Herzele, 2012; Secco et al., 2011).	Participation and outcomes based on democratic norms (procedure; distribution)
Adaptive	Planning and implementation are strategic, open-ended, and iterative, involving continuous reflection, and learning from feedback loops to improve processes and outcomes (Martin et al., 2021; Mok et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2022).	Efforts to continuously improve participation and outcomes (procedure; distribution)
Empowering	Equipping less powerful actors with the agency to assert their interests, based on a dynamic, evolving process of deliberation in which public, private, and civil society actors are afforded meaningful opportunities to create and share knowledge, challenge existing ideas, and proportionally influence outcomes (Barletti et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2022).	Inequalities in resources recognised (recognition; distribution); targeted efforts to support participation (procedure)
Responsive	Actively recognising and analysing the specifics of local context at the outset of decision-making, with attention to differences in needs, interests, and values between and within communities; identifying pressing local challenges, understanding locally-specific institutional arrangements, and enabling local and indigenous knowledge to enter the process (Baasch, 2020; Graham, 2015).	Difference and plural, local knowledges recognised (recognition); participation actively enabled (procedure)

(Astleithner et al., 2004; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). However, to deliver on this potential, the indicator set must be fit for its intended purpose. Da Cruz and Marques (2017) assert that indicator sets for evaluating municipal governance should be concise, as simple as possible, and clearly related to an objective. The set should also be exhaustive, while free from redundancy, discretionary indicators, or any factors that cannot be influenced by local government. In practice, meeting these conditions involves trade-offs, e.g., exhaustiveness will likely compromise concision and simplicity. Deciding which trade-offs are acceptable depends on the purpose. While many studies have looked at ways to create indicator sets that are optimal for the purpose of delivering robust scientific data, our study aligns rather with scholarship on their potential to build capacity and open up new discussions and modes of working (Bennett & Satterfield, 2018; Holman, 2009; Zafra-Calvo et al., 2017).

Evaluating collaborative governance faces several challenges, as highlighted by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) who cite definitional inconsistency, difficulties observing change over time, and divergent perceptions of success. Further, indicator sets recently in use to evaluate greening interventions are often dominated by technical, performance-based indicators, with governance receiving scant attention (van der Jagt & Buijs, 2021). Another challenge is to define indicators that are specific, observable, and measurable (Dumitru & Wendling, 2021), without necessarily being quantifiable, since qualities of governance are often perception-based (da Cruz & Marques, 2017). Perhaps the most crucial limitation of indicator frameworks developed specifically for urban greening is their lack of uptake by municipal staff. Obstacles include lack of expertise or resources to collect and evaluate data; data being unavailable, inaccessible, or dispersed across different agencies; difficulties identifying causal links in complex systems (especially when people and their behaviour are the subject); complex and detailed monitoring requirements; insufficient alignment with local policy agendas; and incompatibility with the realities of working environments (Dumitru & Wendling, 2021; van der Jagt et al., 2022). Uptake of indicators in decision-making may also depend on political will, established working practices, and the values and interpretations of individuals (Astleithner et al., 2004; Holman, 2009; Rydin et al., 2003). Aside from the question of uptake, which indicators and analytical scale are chosen can influence their potential to help transform governance practices (Astleithner et al., 2004; Beck et al., 2021; van der Jagt et al., 2022). Indicators that demonstrate progress only for a localised site or time-limited project are unlikely to drive change at a broader, city-wide scale; a problem often observed in urban greening projects seeking to stimulate public participation (e.g., Willems et al., 2020). Turnhout et al. (2020) point out that this failure to engage with the wider context beyond the limits of a project and its inherent power structures, what they call "depoliticisation," is a key barrier to societal transformation. Van der Jagt et al. (2022) argue accordingly for greater attention to the way indicator-based assessment frameworks are created, inclusion of indicators related to environmental justice, and efforts to both locally contextualise and politicise the framework, i.e., to establish clear links with local policies and practices. In sum, indicators clearly have potential for monitoring and evaluating shifts in governance, but more empirical work is needed to understand how an indicator-based monitoring framework can be adapted to the limited resources and institutional context of local government, such that it is actually put into practice. We address this gap in the literature by reporting on our experience of developing an indicator-based assessment framework for use in seven European cities. We sought to answer the following questions:

- To what extent are proposed indicators for assessing co-governance viewed as relevant and feasible by local city teams?
- What challenges are inherent in contextualising and politicising a framework for assessment?

3. Method

This study took place as part of the practice-based research project JUSTNature, aiming to foster a just, low-carbon transition in European cities. Six city administrations and one city-owned company are involved, with their representatives working with researchers to design and implement nature-based interventions. The cities vary in size, represent a range of biogeographical and socio-economic profiles, and face different challenges related to collaboration, offering highly diverse settings from which to examine transformative urban greening (see Figure 1). Our focus is not just the technical design and delivery of interventions, but also experimentation with different approaches to engaging stakeholders in their design, implementation, and stewardship. An indicator-based framework offers a means to monitor and reflect on these efforts, with a view to fostering a culture of collaborative governance in the longer term.

We built on a key review of existing assessment frameworks and guidance on participatory indicator selection (van der Jagt et al., 2022) to define a framework for evaluating governance of urban greening. Our starting point was a compilation of existing key relevant indicator sets (Dumitru & Wendling, 2021), as well as additional indicators defined by van der Jagt and Buijs (2021). To these, we added indicators from empirical and theoretical studies (Kabisch et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2022; Secco et al., 2011), resulting in a list of 51 indicators. We reviewed each indicator for relevance in the context of what could be measured through the project, discovering some shortcomings. Several indicators insufficiently described what was to be measured and how; very few indicators related to digital technology (n = 2), despite its growing role in shaping governance interactions; and a direct link with justice could be observed for less than half (n = 19). For example, indicators for participation were often phrased in terms of generic citizens or community, without distinguishing between groups (absence of recognition justice). In light of these deficiencies, we saw scope to enrich this list by further characterising several indicators, and defining new indicators, derived from literature review (Lim et al., 2023). All indicators were then reviewed for their relationship with our five normative principles for good co-governance and assigned to one or more principles. In this way, we arrived at a set of 126 indicators capable of demonstrating progress towards co-governance according to the principles.

To translate our set into a reduced and meaningful number of indicators for each city, we drew on insights into participatory indicator selection from van der Jagt et al. (2022) who highlight the importance of seeking input from representatives of the contexts where monitoring should take place. We had laid groundwork through earlier engagement with the city partners during two online discussions—firstly introducing the concept of co-governance and secondly exploring its relevance to individual working environments—and a working session in person to discuss the principles in relation to local challenges (see Figure 1). We then reduced the list of indicators—an important step to lower the burden of participation, given that an overly lengthy list risked respondents disengaging from the content. Rather than maximise the number of indicators under consideration, our intention was to promote commitment within the lifespan of the project to working with a focused set of selected indicators, grounded in all five normative principles. Our primary exclusion criterion concerned indicators where data would already be collected through the project via established mechanisms (e.g., surveys developed to evaluate local workshops), and whose ranking was thereby redundant (n = 46), while ensuring that all principles continued to be represented. We then developed an online survey (see Figure 2) asking city partners to review each of the remaining 80 indicators for relevance and feasibility—found by van der Jagt and Buijs (2021) to be key criteria for local government

	Intervention Role (department) of city representative(s)	Key challenges for collaborative governance
Bolzano (Italy)	**Greening of existing rooftop.** Project manager (Department of Geology, Energy and Civil Protection)	Strict regulations (provincial/regional/national level) limit how citizens can be engaged. Not typical to engage citizens early in planning process. City has limited decision-making power. Intervention site not publicly accessible.
Chania (Greece)	**Greening of existing carpark façade; greening of adjacent sealed open space.** Project manager (city-owned company Kydon)	Higher levels of government can overrule municipal decisions. No legal requirement to engage with local communities. Limited communication between government levels, and with citizens. Private actors (e.g. tourist bus companies) able to bend rules in their own interest.
Gzira (Malta)	**Greening of existing façade; greening of an existing verge and bus stop.** Project manager (municipal research unit)	Citizen interactions with municipality mostly characterised by complaints. National government can overrule municipal decisions. Disproportionate power over land use held by property owners and developers.
Leuven (Belgium)	**Temporary conversion of street parking to green space; greening of an open space inside a prison.** Project manager (Department of Public Works)	Community engagement typically dominated by a limited number of loud voices. Hard to engage vulnerable and under-represented groups.
Merano (Italy)	**Conversion of an existing open space to a multifunctional 'garden for all'.** Project manager (externally contracted by the Department for Parks and Gardens)	Lack of community consensus on future environmental goals; self-interest dominates. Limited municipal culture of collaboration. Hard to engage vulnerable and under-represented groups. Reluctance of city administration to share power. Results from successful participatory processes can still be overruled by decision-makers. Unclear content and coordination of existing policies and processes for urban greening.
Munich (Germany)	**Temporary schoolyard greening; greening of a courtyard in community/residential centre for refugees.** Project manager (Department of Planning)	Limited municipal culture of collaboration. Relatively low level of citizen engagement. Mostly white, older educated people participate—other groups less engaged.
Szombathely (Hungary)	**Schoolyard greening; micro-park.** Project manager (Legal Services Department, Mayor's Office) Local councillor	Limited municipal culture of collaboration. Lack of resources to sustain continuous stakeholder involvement. "Non-expert" knowledge undervalued, by both municipality and community. Reluctance of city administration to share power. Citizens generally distrust government.

Figure 1. Overview of the cities, their representatives, urban greening projects, and key challenges for collaborative governance identified to date.

Ranking the indicators

To select indicators that are suitable to your context, we invite you to consider two ranking criteria:

Relevance: Indicators are relevant if they are linked to the local objectives defined by your City Practice Lab, to the interests of one or more stakeholder group, and/or to an existing policy or legal framework, and if they are suitable for monitoring change over time.

Feasibility: Indicators are feasible if there are adequate time and resources available to carry out the assessment and monitoring process. This also means data of an adequate quality is available, and no specialist criteria is required to collect it.

After selecting the ranking level (3 = very, 2 = a little, or 1 = not at all), please explain your choice, referring to your local context, challenges and objectives.

Indicator: Participation: Degree of Participation

Description: Following Arnstein's ladder of participation (ranging from manipulation to citizen control), participatory processes (e.g. workshops) are planned and evaluated by both participants and municipality

How can you measure it? Survey, Interview, Focus Group

Relevance: How relevant is this indicator to your local objectives? Please explain why

Feasibility: How easy is it to collect this data? Please explain why

Figure 2. Excerpt of ranking survey.

staff (after van Oudenhoven et al., 2018). Following an explanatory online session, the survey was filled out by 1–2 representatives of each city who were actively participating in the project (see Figure 1 for their roles and departments), supported by a local research partner. In three cities, the contributing local research partner had also been involved in compiling the indicators.

4. Results

The distribution of rankings across cities varied greatly (see Figure 3). Of the 80 indicators, 76 were ranked *very relevant* by representatives of at least one city, irrespective of feasibility. Seventy were ranked *very relevant* and *very feasible*, while 62 were ranked *very relevant*, but only *a little feasible* or *not at all feasible*. Considering potential transferability of the indicators between different local contexts, it is important to look at trends across the cities. No single indicator was ranked *very relevant* and/or *very feasible* by respondents from all seven cities, while only one indicator was ranked *very relevant* and *very feasible* by five cities. Seven indicators were seen as *very relevant* and *very feasible* by respondents from four cities, and 20 from at least three cities. This demonstrates significant variation in perceived relevance and feasibility across the cities, highlighting the importance of context. When only relevance is considered, the number of common indicators increases significantly. Three indicators were selected by six cities, 23 by five cities, 37 by four cities, and 57 by three cities. Table 2 provides a snapshot of commonalities, outlining the 37 indicators ranked very relevant by respondents from at least four cities.

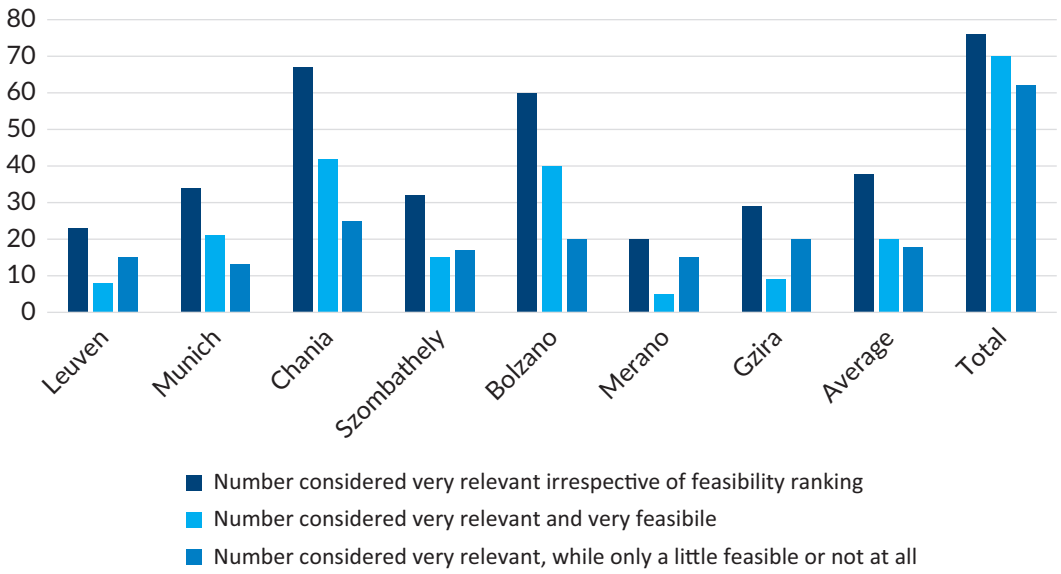

Figure 3. Results of the ranking exercise.

Respondents were asked to explain the reasoning behind their rankings. Their reflections provide useful insights into attitudes to relevance and feasibility (see Table 3 for an illustrative snapshot). Table 3 reveals at times divergent attitudes to the same indicator. Concerning cooperation with other departments, one respondent reflects on the need for more diverse departmental representation at future workshops; another hints at a disconnect between project-based activities and "business as usual" beyond; while another dismisses the possibility of engaging other departments on a more intensive or ongoing basis (Rows 6, 8). Similarly, in relation to workshop participation, two respondents signal an intent to persist in trying to reach absentees, but raise questions about the value of monitoring diversity (Rows 1, 2). Some responses focus squarely on a lack of resources (Rows 5, 6). Others indicate a readiness to explore different modes of collaboration that certain indicators imply, reflect on practical considerations about how to collect data, or self-identify capacity needs (Rows 3, 7, 8). Several responses point to perceived limited influence over an indicator, due to e.g., constraints imposed by regulations or absence of a mandate (Rows 4, 7). Responses to indicators targeting vulnerable groups reveal an absence of perceived common ground between the green space intervention and group interests (Row 2). Although work had been done earlier in the project to actively consider injustices when mapping stakeholders, the responses suggest gaps persist in knowing which groups are relevant, let alone how to effectively engage them.

While the reflections above provide insight into respondents' attitudes to working with the indicators, we found few clear explanations of why certain indicators were very relevant, although we had asked that each indicator be considered in relation to local objectives (Rows 3 and 7 hint at possible aims, but remain at a general level). In fact, the survey responses made clear that local objectives had typically either not been clearly defined, or were related to technical or environmental outcomes, such as enhanced biodiversity or cooling effect. We addressed this gap by reviewing internal project documentation gathered to date (stakeholder mapping, presentations, workshop reports, and discussions with city partners about perceived obstacles to collaboration on urban greening) to inductively define possible objectives linked to co-governance for each city, at both the scale of the intervention sites and more broadly at city level. We then reviewed the indicators each city had ranked very relevant and feasible for coverage of our five

Table 2. Indicators ranked *very relevant* (disregarding feasibility) by respondents from 4+ cities, and corresponding principles. Dark grey highlights indicate a subset of indicators also perceived as *very feasible* by 4 cities.

Indicator	Number of cities	Key principles				
		Collaborative	Empowering	Responsive	Adaptive	Legitimate
Empowering through co-creation process	6		■			
Fair treatment of people across time without bias and favouritism	6		■			■
Bottom-up initiatives: volume	6	■				
Strategic stakeholder cooperation	5	■				
Ensuring equitable access to NbS (barriers)	5			■		
Accountability	5			■		■
Different municipal departments are represented in workshops	5	■		■		
Accessibility to workshop	5		■			
Dissemination of workshops results to participants	5					■
Active community engagement	5	■	■	■		
Objectives sharedness among stakeholders	5	■				
Inclusiveness	5		■			
Inclusion of direct day-to-day-management of green spaces in planning process	5			■	■	
Knowledge brokers	5		■			
Organisational structure	5	■				
Results and experiences from maintenance and management	5				■	
Openness about uncertainties	5				■	
Attention for local conditions	5			■		
Evaluation of group dynamics and power imbalances	5		■			■
Governance ICT maturity: knowledge representation	5			■		
Participation volume	5			■		
Representativeness of participants	5			■		
Different knowledge bases, levels of expertise, and roles are recognised in knowledge creation	5		■	■	■	■
Advocate representation for vulnerable groups	4		■			
Needs assessment of residents	4			■		
Knowledge acquisition and sharing—Access to relevant expertise	4		■	■	■	
Ensuring equitable access to NbS (distribution)	4			■		
Acceptance and uptake	4				■	■
Exclusion	4		■			
Knowledge sharing: environmental education	4		■			
Integration of environmental and social agendas at all levels	4			■		
Response to the emergence of active citizenship	4		■	■		
Use of intermediate-level plans to link local small-scale initiatives with strategic plans	4			■		
Process-oriented approach	4				■	
Support of long-term cyclical processes	4				■	
Identification and involvement of diverse and vulnerable groups	4	■	■	■		■
Instruments of consent	4					■
Total occurrence of principle		**7**	**14**	**17**	**8**	**8**

Table 3. Selected reflections on the ranked indicators from respondents in five cities.

Indicator	Relevance	Feasibility	Comment
(1) Inclusiveness: Participants not being able to participate in the beginning are able or are invited to participate in future activities.	Very	A little	"Yes, we will reach out to everyone that could not attend the first workshop but was interested in it. This should be obvious and there is no need to make it an indicator." (City 3)
	Very	Very	"Participants that were excluded or were not able to participate at the first workshop are very relevant. We have been keeping track of those that were invited but not able to participate. They were noted for future activities." (City 1)
(2) Identification and involvement of vulnerable groups and actors representing different sectors: A comprehensive stakeholder map is developed and revisited periodically, with input sought from different departments. High-interest/low-influence stakeholders identified as a priority for engagement.	Not at all	Very	"More is not automatically better. We're talking about a public green space. E.g., LBGTQ+ organisations did not even answer the workshop invitation, as it is not about their issues. We must focus on who is affected with the project, not theoretical quotas that make no sense." (City 3)
	A little	No answer	"In a small town like ours, it is impossible to have stakeholders representing particular groups." (City 1)
(3) Bottom-up initiatives—volume: Number of citizen initiatives, proposals.	Very	Very	"Active participation and initiatives from the citizens would be very interesting and beneficial. We would be building towards a better relationship with the community and to their understanding of governmental policies. There is no system in place for citizens to propose green space initiatives and not yet any successful project examples." (City 1)
(4) Understandability—Coherence of existing policies: NbS policies and information are coherent and understandable for community members; information, concepts, and terminologies about NbS are clearly defined and easy to understand.	A little	Not at all	"Policies are decided upon on a national level and not at a local council level. As far as we know there are no current policies based upon NbS only." (City 1)
(5) Availability—Ease of data accessibility: Existence of accessible online platform with all relevant information concerning governance of NbS clearly structured, regularly updated, and special focus on newly established policies.	A little	A little	"As this project has no budget for such a commission, it is out of reach to reorganise the institutional homepage." (City 1)

Table 3. (Cont.) Selected reflections on the ranked indicators from respondents in five cities.

Indicator	Relevance	Feasibility	Comment
(6) Integrated governance: Strategic collaborative working relationship between different municipal departments, e.g., through a multidisciplinary hub, and between stakeholders from different sectors, e.g., participants representing different sectors attend the workshops.	Not at all	Not at all	"It exceeds the project time and budget limit to force other departments to collaborate actively in this project. Installing a multidisciplinary hub or jour fixe right now is not possible due to a serious personnel shortage." (City 3)
	Very	A little	"Participation is defined in the legal and regulatory framework." (City 2)
(7) Accountability: Public acceptance of planning choices.	A little	Very	"We implement temporary solutions and hope to create a basis for permanent solutions. Responsibility for permanent solutions lies with the building department, so planning choices are only partly within our reach." (City 4)
	Very	A little	"Although we didn't have enough citizens during our first workshop, it is important that we receive the required feedback of the public. We could collect this data through surveys or by in-person scouting." (City 1)
(8) Different municipal departments are represented in workshops: Staff from departments representing not just planning and environment, but also social services, are represented at local stakeholder workshops.	Very	Not at all	"We can only measure this in the project, meaning we will not get a realistic picture of the situation in general. Such workshops only happen in international projects, where they are mandatory. We would be interested to have guidelines for how to hold workshops efficiently and justly in the future—because there is little experience, but an openness to doing more." (City 5)
	Very	A little	"The council doesn't have different departments but these exist at a national level. So far, we had several stakeholders representing the environmental protection segment but need more representation from different departments. It is very relevant to have these stakeholders on board to represent these different interests." (City 1)

normative principles. In most cases, further indicators were excluded after defining an objective, while the "principles check" entailed some additions (e.g., for Gzira, an indicator related to the principle "adaptive" was missing; three selected indicators could not be directly linked to an objective and were excluded; while two new indicators were suggested in their place). Proposed objectives and corresponding indicators were presented to each city partner for review and adjustment (see example in Figure 4).

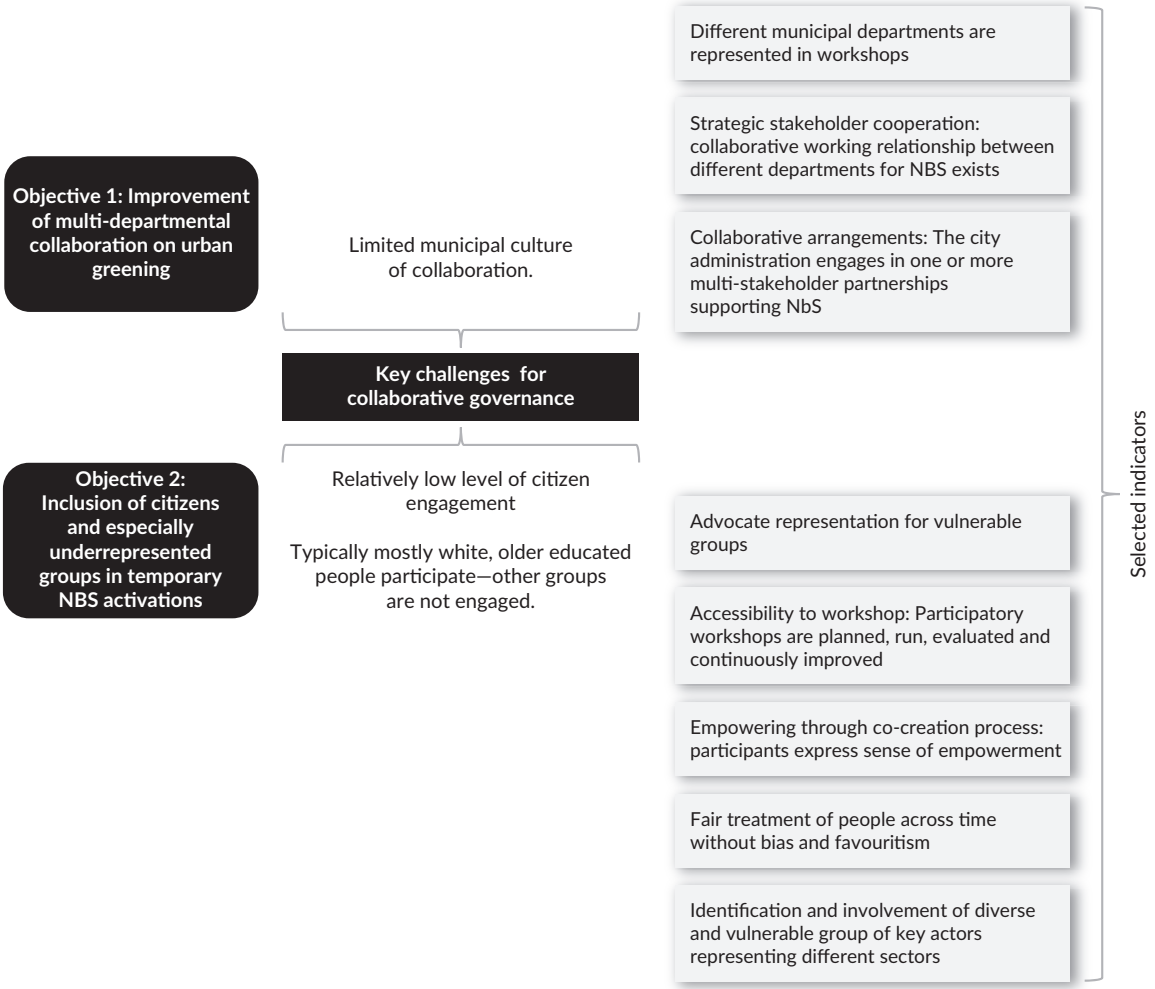

Figure 4. Sample of two local objectives (as proposed by authors) and corresponding indicators for one city.

Aiming for simplicity and concision (da Cruz & Marques, 2017), and mindful of resource constraints (Dumitru & Wendling, 2021), we further reduced the number of indicators by merging those that were deemed too similar to one another, taking into account feedback from respondents. This resulted in a total number of 48 indicators (see Supplementary File), with each city-specific set between 8 and 28. The wide variation is explained by the varied results of the ranking exercise. Our final city-selected indicator set ($n = 48$) was made up of 16 from existing sets of indicators (Dumitru & Wendling, 2021; Kabisch et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2022; Secco et al., 2011; van der Jagt & Buijs, 2021), and 32 derived from literature review. The relatively high proportion derived from literature review suggests that expanding on existing indicator sets was useful to improve perceived relevance and feasibility, while the presence of a slight majority of indicators capable of monitoring dimensions of justice ($n = 26$, or 54%) is a significant proportional increase on the 51 indicators we started with ($n = 19$, or 37%). Figure 5 outlines the process and a quantitative overview of results.

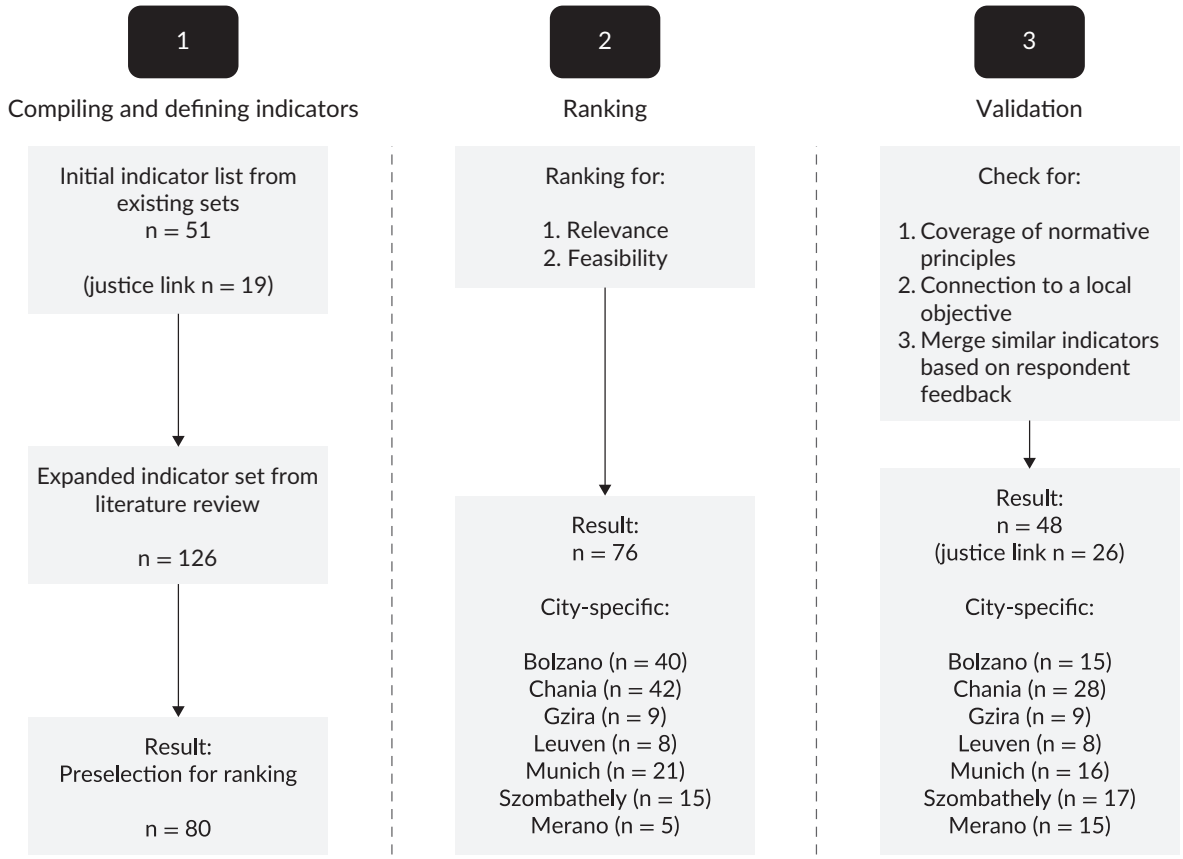

Figure 5. Overview of developing city-specific indicator sets.

5. Discussion

5.1. Perceived Relevance and Feasibility

We set out to define city-specific indicator sets seen as relevant and feasible by the people responsible for working with them. A majority of indicators were perceived as relevant in at least one city, with only four out of 80 indicators not ranked *very relevant* at least once. However, when results are averaged across all cities, only about half the indicators were viewed as relevant, and not a single indicator seen as *very relevant* by respondents from all seven cities. Although indicators are necessarily locally specific, such a low level of commonality is nonetheless remarkable. Feasibility also came to the fore as a key barrier to using the indicators, with on average only 25% of all indicators seen as both relevant and feasible. In studies where comparability between cities is critical, a productive avenue may be to explore the specific reasons behind difficulties collecting data and work out strategies to overcome these.

Respondents questioned how certain indicators could be measured, meaning feasibility may have been ranked lower where there was doubt about what data to collect or how. They also raised concerns about the workload and skills associated with collecting data, suggesting that feasibility may also have been ranked low as an expression of a respondent's concern that this burden would fall to them. Crucially, several indicators were flagged as not within the respondent's capacity to influence. This suggests that relevance and feasibility may not sufficiently characterise the local validity of an indicator, where agency (real or perceived) of the individuals

responsible for monitoring is lacking. While van der Jagt et al. (2023) have identified agency as a key category for monitoring co-governance of urban greening, our findings rather relate to "meta-level" agency, i.e., less so an indicator that measures availability of institutional support and resources (although this is important), but rather that the individuals responsible perceive that they can influence all indicators.

5.2. Challenges in Contextualising and Politicising an Indicator-Based Framework

Having concluded a key phase in setting up a context-specific framework for monitoring and evaluating co-governance, we can identify some early achievements. First, we have brought together indicators on co-governance of urban greening from dispersed sources, and structured these according to five principles, ensuring that individual indicator sets reflect a range of normative underpinnings of successful co-governance. Second, the process of ranking indicators for relevance revealed a cognitive gap between the research team's ambitions for steering a governance shift and the perspectives of city partners, demonstrated most significantly by difficulties linking indicators with clear local objectives. Exposing this gap has made it possible to bring a more structured and strategic basis to future monitoring, by defining local objectives for collaborative governance at site and city level and thereby enabling scrutiny of progress; much like environmental or technical benchmarks would typically be evaluated (Bennett & Satterfield, 2018; da Cruz & Marques, 2017). Related discussions and other engagement activities with the city partners on indicators before and since the ranking exercise also provided key lessons for our research design. For example, comments about lack of clarity and perceptions of similarities between indicators prompted us to reformulate some indicator descriptions, as well as to elaborate guiding questions and stepwise checklists clarifying how data can be collected.

Our experience also points to challenges engaging participants in contextualising indicators. First, although we align with scholars who have identified a need to expand existing indicator sets related to governance of urban greening (van der Jagt et al., 2023), we found a large number of indicators makes participatory selection difficult. Our reduced list of 80 was still perceived as overwhelming, and subtle differences between certain indicators dismissed as trivial. We support the view of van der Jagt et al. (2023) that comprehensiveness must be balanced with concision. Second, the generalised wording of some indicators offered substantial room for interpretation. As noted by van Oudenhoven et al. (2018), a problem with seeking to develop transferable indicators is that indicators often need to reflect very specific policy issues to guarantee relevance. Some indicators may have been rejected where relevance needed to be made clearer, e.g., through examples of what the indicator could mean in practice. The impact on our results we consider insignificant, given that we aimed to promote commitment to a focused set of selected indicators rather than maximise the number of indicators in use. However, there is scope for future studies to improve accessibility of existing lists, e.g., clustering related indicators, providing (concise) guidance on how to adapt a generalised indicator description to a local situation, and further distinguishing between indicators with higher and lower demands for data collection.

A future challenge is to politicise this framework, i.e., to ensure that the monitoring process integrates entry points for broader change beyond the project scale (Turnhout et al., 2020)—a frequent shortcoming of practice-based research projects engaged in experimentation (von Wirth et al., 2019; Voytenko et al., 2016). It is likely that this will play out less at the level of the indicators themselves, but rather through their corresponding objectives. In this regard, we have advocated for both site-level and city-level objectives, and provided guidance to the city partners on how to engage colleagues in structured discussions about their

own objectives, with a view to anchoring the project activities in a shared strategic context with longevity. Our results so far suggest that underscoring the agency of individuals within the project will be critical so as to ground ambition in practical, achievable actions, without losing sight of potential for broader change. Further analysis could build on studies that have explored the specific capacities needed to foster longer-term shifts to collaborative governance, and the extent to which these manifest over the course of the project (Hölscher et al., 2024; Wolfram et al., 2019).

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

A limitation of our study is that we have not yet determined exactly how suitable our indicator sets are to evaluate equitable co-governance of the greening projects. Such an analysis could deploy certain key requirements of a sound indicator set (feasibility, relevance, avoidance of redundancy, coverage of principles) to analyse and score each city's set of indicators, as well as checking that dimensions of justice are sufficiently represented. This latter aspect lies at present primarily latent in those indicators aligned with normative principles with links to dimensions of justice. Another possibility would be to weight individual indicators for their explanatory potential in connection with each principle, as a means of further reducing the indicator sets to only the most relevant, and in turn reducing the evaluation workload. Such analysis would benefit significantly from our city partners' input, based on their initial experience working with the indicator sets—not yet available at the time of writing.

Our findings are not without bias, since we have worked predominantly with only one or two individuals from each city. The survey responses, documentation from which we defined local objectives, and resulting city-specific indicator sets represent a small group and how they perceive their local realities, and in turn how we have interpreted them. Perceived relevance, feasibility, and agency with respect to indicators depend on several factors, including the degree of support available from local research partners; disciplinary background; role, department, and length of time in each; seniority; and resources available to influence strategic decision-making. Encountering capacity limits is a typical situation in practice-based research, where often only one or two people are resourced by the project, typically in technical or managerial roles rather than political ones, and in some cases engaged as contractors external to the city administration. Involving a wider range of respondents in future monitoring (Hansen et al., 2022) may well enable richer insights, and indeed be crucial to their explanatory power, since individuals within the same group may disagree on whether a collaboration was indeed successful (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

The real test of our indicator framework lies in its future implementation. We are already alert to concerns raised by city partners about the workload of data collection, and recognise that perceived feasibility to collect data for one indicator cannot necessarily be extrapolated to a whole set. Our work ahead includes developing guidance on data collection through surveys and interviews, as well as a mechanism to periodically self-reflect on progress towards objectives. Our experience to date suggests that this needs to be accompanied by support from the local research institutions in each city, along with continued efforts to demonstrate the value of monitoring and evaluating co-governance and to illustrate the agency of city partners.

6. Conclusion

Our experience working with city partners to define a framework for monitoring and evaluating co-governance of urban greening has generated some key observations that will guide our further work and may be useful to other research teams. A key achievement has been to develop an expanded set of 126 indicators, structured according to five normative principles for collaborative governance, and to test 80 of these for their relevance and feasibility in local contexts. We found that organising indicators according to normative principles and applying the lenses of relevance and feasibility was helpful to make a complex concept operational. While the indicator ranking exercise was primarily intended to contextualise the indicators and define city-specific indicator sets for further use, the results were pivotal in providing a basis to concretely define objectives for local collaborative governance. These findings add support to the case by others for more participatory approaches to creating assessment frameworks for urban greening (van der Jagt et al., 2023).

The ranking exercise also brought to light some reasons that existing indicators for monitoring co-governance of urban greening might not support transformative change in practice. Some barriers can be observed through our ranking criteria of relevance and feasibility, e.g., difficulty interpreting a generalised indicator as relevant to local conditions, and expected difficulties collecting data. We also found evidence of a varied sense of agency to influence the measures of progress among those responsible for monitoring it—particularly concerning potential change beyond the project boundaries. While relevance and feasibility are sound preconditions for a contextualised indicator set, if engagement with the political landscape beyond the project is sought, then capacity-building efforts are also needed to communicate the value of monitoring collaborative governance, and foster awareness of individual agency among those responsible.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for contributions from various members of the JUSTNature consortium, especially the city partners whose insights we relied on in this article, and members of the Work Package 7 team. Thank you also to the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

Funding

The project JUSTNature is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101003757.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited). It lists the set of 48 city-specific indicators and their corresponding principles, as deemed very relevant and very feasible by the city partners, and validated by the authors. The full set of indicators can be provided upon request to the authors.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8166
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8166

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Cultivating Urban Agriculture Policies: Local Government Entrepreneurs' Strategies in Three Brazilian Cities

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Submitted: 30 January 2024 **Accepted:** 17 July 2024 **Published:** 13 September 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

Urban agriculture (UA) is increasingly recognized in policy and academic discussions for its potential to promote sustainable food systems and reduce food insecurity. Due to their proximity to citizens, local governments are well-positioned to advance these initiatives. However, the factors that drive governments in densely populated cities to develop UA policies remain relatively understudied, especially in the Global South. To address this gap, we employ a comparative case study approach based on key informant interviews and documents to examine how local government actors pursue UA policies in the Brazilian cities of Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba. We find that certain municipal bureaucrats act as "policy entrepreneurs," emerging as pivotal figures in creating, maintaining, and adapting municipal UA policies in Brazilian cities. These policy entrepreneurs use a number of strategies to advance their policy preferences, secure resources, and legitimize their actions within the public administration. These approaches include collaborating with civil society, forging partnerships within and outside of government, framing their proposals within international policy guidelines, and leveraging media coverage and external recognition. In doing so, policy entrepreneurs shape UA policies by introducing new programs, making them resilient to changes related to electoral turnover, and diversifying initiatives from direct government support for gardeners to, for example, incorporating UA into urban planning regulations. This article thus provides valuable insights for policymakers and underscores the crucial role of local government bureaucrats, particularly those acting as policy entrepreneurs, in shaping policies that contribute to making cities sustainable.

Keywords
food policy; local government; policy entrepreneurship; street-level bureaucracy; urban agriculture

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of considering food systems in urban planning (Morgan, 2013). This recognition is reflected in international commitments such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda, which identify cities as key enablers for promoting sustainable and resilient food systems. Since the 2010s, urban food policy networks have also emerged, connecting over 500 cities worldwide (Moragues-Faus, 2021) and highlighting the potential of urban agriculture (UA) to alleviate the harms of poverty and food insecurity and to contribute to more sustainable urban food systems. While the general praise of UA may overlook instances where it reinforces inequalities, this practice can critically contribute to urban food security (Horst et al., 2017).

Local governments are well-positioned to promote UA initiatives due to their proximity to citizens. They can enable, regulate, and support the growing of fruits and vegetables in urban areas (Halvey et al., 2021). Policies often focus on vegetable gardens, including those in households, schools, and communities (Marini et al., 2023), and may extend to animal husbandry and variations of garden typologies (e.g., rooftop and vertical gardens). Common strategies include providing tax incentives and financial support and removing restrictive regulations that hinder UA activities in urban areas (Horst et al., 2017). Community coordination is critical, as civil society or voluntary neighborhood groups typically initiate and sustain UA practices.

UA community practices are commonly motivated by food security concerns. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the literature suggests that limited access to land, unemployment, food insecurity, and household savings are important drivers of UA initiatives (Di Fiore et al., 2021; Simatele & Binns, 2008). In Europe, North America, and Oceania, UA's identified determinants are broader, including concerns about education, psychological health, social cohesion, and ecological issues (Di Fiore et al., 2021). While previous studies have explored why communities and civil society engage in UA, less is known about why governments promote UA through public policy (Cardoso et al., 2022; Daher et al., 2023). Thus, the factors shaping UA policies, especially in densely populated cities of the Global South, remain relatively understudied.

This article aims to fill this knowledge gap on the drivers of local UA policy by focusing on actors who can have a significant impact: policy entrepreneurs (PEs). PEs are individuals or collectives who exploit windows of opportunity to advance their policy preferences and, as such, are typically viewed as critical agents of change (Kingdon, 1984; Petridou & Mintrom, 2021). Previous research has shown that PEs are central to changes in urban policy, shifting urban planning goals (Capano & Galanti, 2021), promoting infrastructure (Ramírez et al., 2023), or land redevelopment projects (Artioli, 2023). These actors introduce new ways of framing problems and solutions, build coalitions, and mediate collective action problems.

The last few years have seen an increase in scholarship on the role of policy entrepreneurship in shaping urban food policies. Giambartolomei et al. (2021) identified PEs as key to advancing transitions in a European context by leading place-based food strategies. Another research team found that permanent staff acting as PEs in Milan (Italy) were pivotal in establishing the city's well-known urban food policy (Minotti et al., 2022).

In Latin America, researchers underscore the prominent role of civil society actors in advancing UA, including by interacting with government actors. In São Paulo, Brazil, civil society ideas and networks rendered UA visible to policymakers (de Oliveira et al., 2022). Additionally, bureaucrats with close ties to civil society were engaged in activism within the government, ultimately contributing to the gradual institutionalization of urban and peri-urban agriculture policy (Couri, 2021). These findings suggest that bureaucrats can play a critical role in UA policy.

This article examines how bureaucrats acting as PEs shape UA policy in three large Brazilian cities: Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba. We explore PEs' strategies, particularly their engagement with civil society, international commitments, local politics, and urban planning discussions, to promote UA at different policy stages. In Recife, PEs *pioneered* an entirely new policy, establishing an agency dedicated to leading UA initiatives and coordinating intersectoral partnerships, community engagement, and a plan aligned with international guidelines. In Rio de Janeiro, beyond policy creation, a PE critically contributed to *sustaining* the policy over time, actively ensuring its continuity through political transitions. In Curitiba, PEs aimed to *expand* the UA policy beyond direct support to vegetable gardens, aspiring to incorporate UA into urban planning regulations. We, therefore, argue that bureaucrats acting as PEs can play a pivotal role in *creating*, *maintaining*, and *adapting* UA policies over time.

While the significance of creating new policies is clear, ensuring policy resilience is often overlooked. Contrary to the common assumption that once initiated, policies simply endure, the reality is frequently quite different. Policies are sometimes abandoned or remain inactive, resurfacing under ideologically compatible political terms (Leão Marques, 2023). Policy resilience is, therefore, not automatic but something that is actively pursued. In Rio de Janeiro's case, this article examines PEs' involvement in pursuing such resilience. Although Curitiba's UA policy has been consistent over time, this is not specific to UA. Instead, various urban policies in Curitiba have been resilient due to political continuity over several decades (Klink & Denaldi, 2012). More unique, in this case, is the current expansion of arenas for UA policy within the municipality, particularly urban planning, as land-use regulations may hinder or enhance UA (Horst et al., 2017).

1.1. Materials and Methods

The selection of Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba as case studies was informed by a recent report overviewing municipal UA policies in Brazil (Instituto Escolhas, 2022). These cities were chosen for their substantial size and distinct phases of policy development, offering a rich comparative basis. Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba have populations of approximately 1.5 million, 6.2 million, and 1.8 million, and areas of 219 km^2, 1,200 km^2, and 435 km^2, respectively. Each case exemplifies a particular stage of UA policy: Recife pioneered a new policy; Rio de Janeiro sustained a policy over time; and Curitiba expands UA into new government sectors.

The study uses empirical data from interviews and documents. In total, 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants from Recife (11), Rio de Janeiro (7), and Curitiba (10) between April 2022 and January 2024. Respondents included bureaucrats, experts, and civil society actors involved with urban planning, agriculture, and food security policies. Twenty-five interviews were conducted virtually and three in person, averaging 60 minutes. Questions prompted respondents to discuss their involvement with UA and

their views on the specific UA policy, including its history, characteristics, and challenges, depending on their expertise. Policy entrepreneurship emerged as a relevant theme during the initial thematic analysis. Additional interviews were then conducted with respondents identified as PEs, who were prompted to detail their strategies. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were then analyzed using the analytical framework discussed below and informed all the findings presented in Section 4 unless otherwise noted. Supplementary data were sourced from academic literature, documents—especially legislation, reports, and strategic plans—and newspaper articles to corroborate interviewees' statements and inform our understanding of each policy's trajectory. The following sections present the analytical framework (Section 2), describe the UA policies (Section 3), examine PEs' strategies in each case (Section 4), and discuss the results (Section 5). The conclusion ensues.

2. Bureaucrats as PEs

Public policy literature defines PEs as individual or collective actors from the public, private, or third sectors who invest resources, such as time, effort, knowledge, or finances, to promote or prevent significant policy reforms (Frisch Aviram et al., 2020). They are willing to seize opportunities and take risks to shape the policymaking process (Kingdon, 1984) and drive changes in public policy at any stage. PEs thus bear the initial costs of collective action.

Prior research identified PEs' traits and strategies to promote policy change. Frisch Aviram et al. (2020) underscore three main characteristics: social acuity, persuasiveness, and the ability to build trust. PEs know the social and political contexts where they intervene, deploy persuasive discourses, and build trust networks to promote their propositions. They may frame the problems, offer solutions, seek specific venues for decision-making, forge partnerships, or use media coverage and civic engagement to advance their policy preferences (Frisch Aviram et al., 2020).

Recent scholarship has emphasized the role of street-level bureaucrats as PEs (Arnold, 2015; Cohen & Aviram, 2021; Edri-Peer et al., 2023). Unlike other PEs who are typically part of the elite, street-level bureaucrats are government agents (or working on their behalf) at the frontline of public service, implementing public policy and interacting directly with citizens (Lipsky, 1980). Their stable position allows them to develop leadership over extended periods, draw upon other experiences to develop propositions for their policy sector, and seek legitimacy by engaging superiors (Edri-Peer et al., 2023).

Some public policies, such as urban planning, are fully undertaken by local governments in Brazil. As they have a shorter implementation chain, bureaucrats often act as both implementers and policymakers (Alonso Ferreira, 2023, p. 10). This is also the case for municipal UA policies. Therefore, to analyze these cases, we consider the strategies identified by the literature on PEs (Frisch Aviram et al., 2020) and street-level PEs (Edri-Peer et al., 2023). We have combined these strategies (Table 1), organizing them into similar categories and incorporating findings from this study.

Table 1. PEs' strategies.

Category	Strategy
Policy design & adaptation	Defining the problem in a compelling way[1]
	Proposing a solution to the problem[1]
	Planning a long-term strategy[1]
	Taking small, incremental actions to achieve a larger goal[1]
	Doing anchor work to secure the policy through formal rules[1]
	Participating in policy evaluation and revision[1]
Exploration of opportunities	Searching for the appropriate arena/venue for decision-making[1]
	Taking risks and exposing oneself[1]
	Prioritizing the core issue and accommodating differences[1]
	Demonstrating the operationality of the policy proposal[1]
Communication & influence	Using symbols to engage the public[1]
	Using media coverage to promote policy[1]
	Strategically disseminating information to specific actors[1]
	Promoting the policy to various audiences[1]
	Seeking for legitimacy from superiors in the organization[2] and peers[3]
	Linking and diffusing the policy to national and international commitments[3]
Engagement & partnerships	Acting as team leader for the policy[1]
	Providing continuous leadership over extended periods[2]
	Creating partnerships with different sectors or organizations[1]
	Networking in government with politicians and bureaucrats[1]
	Networking out of government with private, public, and third sector actors[1]
	Mobilizing citizens to be engaged in the policy[1]
	Participating in political negotiations[1]
	Leveraging knowledge and experience from others within the organization[2] or themselves[3]

Sources: Adapted from [1] Frisch Aviram et al. (2020); [2] Edri-Peer et al. (2023); [3] findings from this study.

3. UA Policies

UA is widespread in Brazil (Santandreu & Lovo, 2007). Previous research has highlighted its multiple functions, particularly in promoting food security and nutrition (de Souza et al., 2019), collective and environmental health (Camelo et al., 2023), and political and social engagement (Biazoti & Sorrentino, 2022). The integration of UA into federal food and nutrition security policy dates back to the early 2000s with the *Fome Zero* program (de Almeida, 2016, pp. 93–96). More recently, the national relevance of UA was reinforced with the approval of the National Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Policy Bill in July 2024. Despite this recent national focus, Brazilian local governments arguably remain leaders in UA public policies, given the diversity of their initiatives (Instituto Escolhas, 2022). The following section overviews these policies in the selected municipalities: Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba.

3.1. Recife

Since 2021, the Recife municipality has been actively promoting UA through its newly created Executive Department of Urban Agriculture, attached to the urban planning department. Although relatively young compared to other municipalities, Recife's UA initiatives encompass multiple partnerships and support for different production structures (Instituto Escolhas, 2022). The city is expanding vegetable gardens by providing production inputs and training. Besides, it develops education and capacity-building initiatives that emphasize food security, guided by agroecology and solidarity economy principles (Tângari & Araujo, 2023, p. 150). The city values traditional and community knowledge, incentivizing, for example, vegetable gardens for growing sacred plants in *terreiros* (places where Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies are held) and composting projects led by grassroots youth collectives, considered replicable to other communities. Recife is developing its own production structure, the Agroecological Ranch, for vegetable, seed, and input production.

The municipality coordinates or monitors at least six types of urban gardens, including eight Community Gardens on private or public land, Productive Backyards (400 units mainly in low-income households), School Gardens (42 units in municipal and affiliated educational centers), and Institutional Gardens in social assistance and health public facilities (Instituto Escolhas, 2022). In partnership with the state government, Gardens Everywhere has about 13 units in community centers, hospitals, parks, and prisons. The Non-Governmental Institutional Gardens strand involves nine gardens located in philanthropic facilities and commercial centers. All these gardens serve various purposes, from self-consumption of gardeners, staff, and communities to pedagogical, restorative, and medicinal uses.

Besides collaborating with partners and providing capacity-building through training, the municipality supports the implementation of new structures, such as nurseries, urban orchards, herbal spaces, and seed planting areas. It also registers requests for new community gardens. To support existing structures, the municipality distributes seeds, seedlings, fertilizer, and pruning materials, provides logistical support, and organizes garden maintenance task forces. The city promotes composting by strengthening the selective collection of organic waste and operating a composting yard. Furthermore, the municipality develops social engagement activities, such as public consultations for the Agroecology Plan and community efforts to organize gardens and meetings (Secretaria Executiva de Agricultura Urbana, 2021).

3.2. Rio de Janeiro

Hortas Cariocas, established in 2006, aims to implement and support vegetable gardens in public schools and low-income communities. Half of the production in community gardens must be donated locally, while gardeners can sell the other half (Instituto Escolhas, 2022). School gardens provide produce exclusively for student meals and pedagogical activities. The municipality offers a monthly stipend to participating gardeners, coordinators, and community outreach agents. In 2023, stipends ranged from BRL 500 for the former to BRL 1,000 for the latter (USD 100 and USD 200, or 38% and 76% of the minimum wage; Instituto Escolhas, 2023b). Additionally, *Hortas Cariocas* provides technical assistance, tools, and inputs like organic compost and seeds. Vegetable gardens may integrate the program upon request from schools, neighborhood associations, or community collectives. The *Hortas Cariocas* team assesses the feasibility of the proposed site(s), determines the number of participants, and assigns coordinators for larger gardens.

The number of gardens has increased significantly. In 2022, *Hortas Cariocas* supported 27 school gardens and 29 community gardens, sponsoring 277 people producing vegetables, fruits, and leafy greens on a total of 25 hectares (Instituto Escolhas, 2022), with 119 men and 72 women in community gardens and 40 men and 45 women in school gardens (Instituto Escolhas, 2023b). Despite its size, the program represents a small fraction of the city's horticultural and agroforestry area of 1,525 hectares (Instituto Escolhas, 2023a). Moreover, the metropolitan region boasts a strong network of civil society organizations dedicated to UA (see Batitucci et al., 2019).

Rio de Janeiro had previous UA policies, such as the *Rio Hortas* project, initiated in 1992 and focused on capacity building and training (Rego, 2014). The program ended after the civil servant who coordinated it retired, and the municipality withdrew support (Beck, 2018). Some *Rio Hortas* gardens were then taken over by *Hortas Cariocas* in 2006. The same happened to other community gardens that had lost support from the state government.

Hortas Cariocas' community gardens are located on public land, usually in areas considered unsuitable for occupation, such as those under power transmission lines, prone to landslides and other disasters, or occupied by garbage dumps (Laursen de Souza, 2022). The Manguinhos community garden, considered the largest in Latin America, was implemented in a former drug trafficking and consumption area (O'Reilly, 2014). The presence of criminal groups, militias, and violent conflict in low-income neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro (Hirata et al., 2022) affects daily activities in community gardens. In one extreme case, gangs temporarily occupied part of the Manguinhos garden and began construction. The buildings were later demolished, and the garden was rebuilt.

3.3. Curitiba

Curitiba has a long history of policies supporting urban and peri-urban agriculture (Instituto Escolhas, 2023b). It started in 1986 with the *Lavoura* Program, emphasizing large-scale cultivation in the periphery; *Nosso Quintal* Program was added in 1989, supporting small-scale production. Originally implemented by the Municipal Department of Food Supply, now known as the Municipal Department of Food and Nutritional Security, these programs evolved to include gardens in schools and other institutions. In 2018, they were restructured into three categories: Community Gardens, School Gardens, and Institutional Gardens, overseen by the Urban Agriculture unit within the Municipal Department of Food and Nutritional Security. The current policy offers technical assistance, production inputs (e.g., organic fertilizer, seedlings), and soil preparation for vegetable gardens. While initial support had an indefinite duration, recent revisions limited it to one year (Instituto Escolhas, 2023b). Additionally, the policy includes a city-owned Urban Farm inaugurated in 2020, providing beds and crops for educational purposes and facilities for workshops and training sessions. Funding from the Curitiba Food Supply Fund, established in 1990, ensures continuity.

In 2023, 39 vegetable gardens were supported, and 145 had been implemented, covering 15 hectares, with community gardens accounting for 82% of the total assisted area (Instituto Escolhas, 2023b). To qualify for support, a group of at least 10 people must apply and undergo a feasibility assessment. Typically, community gardens are established on unused public land, identified and proposed by the gardening community, often under power transmission lines. Participants, mostly low-income retirees in their late 50s from peripheral areas with prior ties to agriculture in the hinterland of Paraná, grow leafy greens and vegetables primarily for

personal consumption or distribution to relatives and friends; only a small fraction is sold locally (Instituto Escolhas, 2023b).

UA practices in Curitiba extend beyond community gardeners supported by municipal programs. In addition to assisted farmers, Feniman (2014) and Araujo and Fuck (2022) identified two other important groups: politically engaged gardeners in middle- to high-income neighborhoods and remaining family or vernacular farmers in the green belt around the urban area. A recent study confirms urban and peri-urban agriculture extending well beyond assisted gardens, with over 1,000 mapped agricultural sites totaling 728 hectares (Instituto Escolhas, 2023a).

The Municipal Department of Food and Nutritional Security staff argue that supporting UA enhances healthy food accessibility in peripheries, hence the focus on low-income gardeners. While addressing food security, municipal servants recognize broader benefits, such as environmental and educational awareness and preventing undesirable uses. Although multifaceted, the UA agenda has traditionally been confined to the food and nutrition security sector. A recent movement seeks to integrate it into urban planning, expanding UA policies beyond direct garden support. Current debates within the urban planning department aim to incorporate UA into zoning laws and master plans. This article focuses on this movement in the analysis of PEs in Curitiba.

4. UA Policy Entrepreneurship

4.1. Recife

The establishment of Recife's UA policy was spearheaded by three bureaucrats from the urban policy, food security, and family agriculture sectors acting as PEs. This triad comprised two statutory civil servants (from the municipal and state governments) and an appointed employee. They came together through the municipal Food Security Council and identified the need to coordinate their sectors, playing a pivotal role in *framing the problem* from a multidimensional perspective. In 2017, they proposed creating a division within the government dedicated to UA, but the idea did not gain traction with decision-makers. When a new mayor, more attuned to the issue, took office in 2021, he embraced the proposal and supported the creation of the Executive Department of Urban Agriculture.

In 2020, the PEs adopted a participatory approach involving civil society organizations and other administration sectors to develop a *medium-term strategy*, the Agroecological Municipal Plan. They included the plan's four-year objectives in the Strategic Plan of Recife (2021–2024) to *anchor and secure the policy* into broader public administration strategies. Additionally, annual *policy evaluations* of the actions of the Executive Department of Urban Agriculture were conducted to review goals over time.

Recife's UA policy relies on *partnerships* cultivated with diverse social actors. PEs *mobilized citizens* by expanding school gardens and providing training to teachers and staff. Similarly, PEs *collaborated* with collectives, philanthropic entities, religious groups, and associations in planting vegetable gardens, which was crucial to expanding UA. The Executive Department of Urban Agriculture then contributed with training on seed cultivation, composting, and agroecology practices.

PEs largely *networked within government* to forge cross-sectoral partnerships, such as with environment and sustainability, sanitation, urban innovation, health, social development, and human rights sectors. These collaborations have been key in implementing new gardens in public facilities, providing technical assistance, and producing organic compost. PEs promoted other collaborations with Pernambuco state agencies, such as the Agronomic Institute of Pernambuco and the Agricultural Defense and Inspection Agency, to encourage healthier food consumption and monitor pesticide use.

The engagement of the PEs with *national and international platforms* has been fundamental for gaining wider recognition within the government. Participation in the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the ICLEI City Food program, and the Urban Laboratory for Food Public Policies, where Recife is a mentor city, has been pivotal for legitimization among peers and colleagues in planning and other areas.

PEs are particularly active in *exploring opportunities* to advance their agenda in Recife. For example, they focused on *garnering political support* from the new mayor and raising awareness about the UA policy. PEs are also starting a dialogue with the urban planning authority to consider fostering UA through land use regulations. Otherwise, the funding strategy indicates their willingness to *take risks*: continuous municipal funding is not guaranteed, so the PEs secured funding through other temporary sources, such as amendments negotiated with legislators. Currently, the UA policy favors building and expanding partnerships within government, civil society engagement, and environmental and nutritional education over increasing urban food production. However, the link with the food security sector is fragile since the third PE recently left the government in 2022. The other two PEs continue to pursue the integration of UA and the agroecology agenda into other policy sectors within the municipality.

4.2. Rio de Janeiro

Hortas Cariocas was initiated by a municipal civil servant who conceived, managed, and coordinated the program implementation for 16 years until 2022. The PE developed the program based on prior experience with a federally funded pilot project for food production and agronomic training at the Municipal Department of Social Assistance. Returning to the Municipal Department of Environment, the PE presented a similar community garden program proposal to his superiors, who approved it in 2006. The PE *framed two problems* overlapping in low-income neighborhoods: (a) misuse of vacant land prone to disasters or unsuitable for construction and (b) financial inaccessibility of organic produce. The *proposed solution* was to occupy those areas with vegetable gardens, thus addressing both issues. *Drawing from his previous experience* with environmental conservation programs in low-income communities, the PE suggested adopting the same remunerated task force scheme to encourage the gardeners' continued engagement.

The PE *took risks* in implementing a new program, as experimental initiatives may lack a formal basis and rely on unconsolidated legal interpretations. To mitigate these risks, the PE undertook *anchor work* to strengthen the legal foundation of a key feature of *Hortas Cariocas*: the remuneration model. In 2017, the PE temporarily assumed another position within the Municipal Department of Environment, coordinating the environmental conservation programs. He then sought to re-establish the same remunerated task force model for various programs and engaged in lengthy discussions with the Municipal Attorney's Office to establish a solid legal basis. As a result, a resolution was published in 2018 that applied to the UA program, which he soon returned to lead.

The program underwent *adaptations*. It included vegetable gardens in schools to enhance nutrition and education, as requested by the secretary who first approved the program. The PE *involved direct and indirect beneficiaries* in implementation: School boards and neighborhood associations appoint the gardeners for school and community gardens. The PE initially worked individually, eventually securing a small team of contractors and civil servants. *Consistency* in the position allowed him to learn from experience and make adjustments, such as prioritizing requests for existing community gardens, which helped reduce discontinuation rates.

The PE also established *partnerships*, leveraging his *networks inside and outside government*. For instance, he partnered with the local waste management authority to distribute organic compost to gardeners and with the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation for an aquaponics pilot project. He was also responsive to invitations for civil society events and research. Facilitated by the PE's entourage, *Hortas Cariocas* received substantial *media coverage*, ranging from community-based to international news outlets. The program has received notable recognition: a "Sustainable Entrepreneur" award for the PE in 2015, a special mention for the program from the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact in 2019, and recognition as an exemplary initiative aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in 2022. Linking *Hortas Cariocas* to *national and international policy agendas* served as a crucial means of *legitimizing the policy*. Moreover, the PE was in constant dialogue with officials seeking to establish similar UA initiatives in other municipalities.

Political shifts posed challenges to policy continuity. With each mayoral term, the political leadership of the department changed, and the PE sought to persuade new supervisors to maintain policy implementation. He mobilized media coverage and international recognition and *compiled data* on beneficiary gardeners and food production to *illustrate policy outcomes* as resources for *legitimation*. Also, the PE engaged in *political negotiations* by highlighting the electoral benefits to politicians of maintaining the program and by collaborating with municipal councilors requesting community gardens in their constituencies' territories. The PE sought to partially accommodate their interests while preventing their influence, for example, in the nomination of stipend beneficiaries. In 2023, with a change in leadership at the Department of Environment, the PE was withdrawn from coordinating *Hortas Cariocas*. The new leaders reported continuing and expanding the program with some adjustments.

4.3. Curitiba

The expansion of the UA agenda into urban planning is spearheaded by two civil servants acting as PEs at the Institute of Research and Urban Planning from Curitiba (IPPUC, acronym in Portuguese). Their objective is not a shift in policy arenas but rather an *exploration of the appropriate venue* for incorporating policies that may address a broader set of UA practices, thus moving beyond direct support and into urban regulatory tools. While their work as PEs within the government is recent, both have extensive backgrounds in UA practices and policies.

One PE, a nutritionist by training, worked at the Department of Education with the school lunch policy, where she became involved with family and urban farmers. During this period, she attended public hearings about the Urban Agriculture Law, which was approved in 2018. Her transition to the Department of Food and Nutritional Security then broadened her involvement in longstanding food policies in Curitiba. *Leveraging her knowledge* of government machinery and, crucially, her understanding of UA policy stakeholders would later be key to

networking in government and garnering support from public servants. After solidifying her expertise in UA practices and policies in her master's thesis, she joined IPPUC's socioeconomic analysis team.

The second PE was fully engaged in activism and civil society initiatives supporting UA before becoming a public servant at IPPUC. He collaborated with a collective of urban gardeners and was part of a broader UA coalition that contributed to formulating the Urban Agriculture Law. Like the first PE, he also extended his expertise in UA through academic research. Since joining IPPUC's team in 2021, he transitioned from being a PE for UA outside the municipality to an internal role.

Despite their distinct trajectories, these PEs united in advocating for the integration of UA into planning policies. Their main challenge has been *framing UA as an "urban planning" issue* to persuade superiors and colleagues at IPPUC—an institute focused on producing data and formulating urban plans—that this matter required their attention. One of their strategies has been to *put forward a more expansive view* of UA, leveraging their own knowledge of UA territories—the first PE as someone who met frequently with farmers as a street-level bureaucrat, the second as a community gardener himself—to move beyond the narrow preconception that only government-assisted community gardens require support from UA policies. They have also *sought legitimacy in international urban agendas*, notably those put forth by the UN and C40 Cities, and *in influential people in the field*, such as a well-known figure who had been involved in Curitiba's planning policies for decades.

They have successfully garnered support among superiors and colleagues, but integrating the UA agenda into urban planning is viewed as a *long-term process*. Initiating a robust research trajectory, they *partnered with an independent research organization to generate data* on current and potential UA practices. This partnership facilitated workshops attended by colleagues and superiors. With assistance from the UN's Environmental Program, they have also partnered with other departments to propose productive uses for environmentally degraded and protected land. In addition, they aim to provide specific *inputs during the upcoming revision of the master plan and zoning laws*. For example, they plan to include UA as a use that fulfills the "social function of urban property," a requirement of Brazilian urban regulations. In the meantime, their day-to-day strategy consists of exploring opportunities to raise awareness about UA by *infiltrating various projects*, such as the city's economic sector plan or the metropolitan urban development plan. Recognizing that creating a separate policy for UA within IPPUC would not make sense, they emphasize its piecemeal inclusion in existing projects and plans. They have thus *become reference points* on UA, providing input to a variety of IPPUC's initiatives.

5. Discussion

The case studies show that bureaucrats acting as PEs significantly contribute to creating new UA policies, maintaining existing policies during periods of political instability, and integrating agriculture into other policy sectors, such as urban planning. They achieve this through different strategies, outlined in Table 2. In Recife, networking was essential for PEs to build a policy from scratch. The municipality's recent policy resulted from PEs collaborating with civil society and external organizations. Once the policy was approved, they networked within the public administration, using the Food Security Council as a key venue. They adopted a multi-stakeholder approach to strengthen community engagement, partnerships, and communication. In Rio de Janeiro, external recognition and political negotiation contributed to continuing the UA policy for years. The PE focused on scaling up actions on the ground, demonstrating food production

Table 2. PEs' strategies in Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba.

Category	Strategy	Recife	Rio de Janeiro	Curitiba
Policy design & adaptation	Problem definition[1]	Framing UA as an intersectoral issue	Framing problem of organic produce cost and land misuse in low-income neighborhoods	Framing UA as an "urban planning" issue Presenting a more expansive view of UA practices in need of support
	Solution proposition[1]	Creating dedicated intersectoral department	Coupling the problem with UA as the solution Adapting existing policy instruments to remunerate gardeners	
	Long-term strategy[1]	Developing an agroecology plan with four-year targets		Setting a long-term research agenda connected to revision of urban regulations
	Small, incremental actions[1]		Incremental growth in the number of vegetable gardens	Raising the issue of UA in various planning initiatives
	Anchor work[1]	Incorporating UA goals into Municipal Strategic Plan	Working with municipal attorneys to establish legal foundation for the program's remuneration	Incorporating UA considerations into master plan and zoning laws
	Policy evaluation[1]	Assessing and disclosing achievements annually	Assessing outputs regularly	
Exploration of opportunities	Venue shopping[1]			Searching for alternative arenas to address a broader set of UA practices
	Taking risks[1]	Relying on non-continuous funding	Starting implementation despite incomplete formal regulations	
	Accommodating differences[1]	Adopting an integrative approach, engaging stakeholders, and emphasizing food education	Expanding the scope of UA program to school gardens	
	Operationality demonstration[1]		Developing the program after a pilot project	Promoting workshops with experts to discuss relevance of UA to urban planning

Table 2. (Cont.) PEs' strategies in Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba.

Category	Strategy	Recife	Rio de Janeiro	Curitiba
Communication & influence	Symbols[1]	Communication in composting campaigns		
	Media coverage[1]	Disseminating actions through municipality's media, social networks, and press	Gaining local and international media exposure	
	Information dissemination[1]			Presenting research data on UA internally
	Various audiences[1]	Promoting civic, educational, and technical engagement from different types of UA		
	Legitimacy from superiors[2] and peers[3]	Discussing UA agenda with urban planning peers	Using output data to justify program maintenance Using prizes and media coverage to leverage support from superiors	Convincing superiors and colleagues to advance topic internally
	International commitments[3]	Signing the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact to bring visibility to the issue internally Participating in the Urban Laboratory for Food Public Policies and ICLEI City Food platforms	Aligning UA policy with UN's Sustainable Development Goals and national and state policy frameworks Recognition through national and international awards	Seeking support for framing in UN and C40 guidelines

Table 2. (Cont.) PEs' strategies in Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Curitiba.

Category	Strategy	Recife	Rio de Janeiro	Curitiba
Engagement & partnerships	Policy leadership[1]	Coordinating actions, leading partnerships, and seeking solutions with other stakeholders	Gradually securing a team of external staff and civil servants	Leading partnerships and intersectoral dialogue
	Continuous leadership[2]		16 years of leadership	Being internal reference points on UA
	Partnerships with different sectors or organizations[1]	Partnering with state and federal entities for capacity-building	Collaborating with waste management and research authorities	Partnering with independent research institutions to develop data
	Networking in government[1]	Building collaborative ties with various departments	Leveraging personal networks to establish a partnership for compost distribution and pilot projects	Leveraging personal networks to gather support from other public servants/departments
	Networking out of government[1]	Formalizing existing partnerships with philanthropic, religious, and social organizations	Responsiveness to event and partnership proposals of academics and civil society	
	Citizen mobilization[1]	Offering training and encouraging participation in street markets to distribute UA production	Engaging school boards and neighborhood associations in gardeners' appointments	
	Political negotiations[1]	Seeking support from incoming mayor	Highlighting electoral benefits, collaborating with councilors	
	Knowledge from others[2] or themselves[3]	Supporting collective efforts to replicate successful UA in other locations	Integrating lessons learned and refining the participant selection process	Leveraging their backgrounds in UA to inform and persuade others

Sources: Adapted from [1] Frisch Aviram et al. (2020); [2] Edri-Peer et al. (2023); [3] findings from this study.

results in low-income communities, and he negotiated with politicians when they tried to interfere with the policy. This case had the most entrepreneurial strategies, likely due to the PE's long-term involvement. Conversely, incremental strategies sought to expand and integrate UA into urban planning in Curitiba. The city has a long-term and relatively robust UA policy led by the Department of Food and Nutrition Security in a more stable political scenario. PEs seek to integrate the agenda into various urban planning initiatives rather than creating a separate policy. They produce strategic information in partnership with external research organizations and serve as internal reference points, leveraging their trajectories.

This study makes two significant contributions to urban food policy and policy entrepreneurship literature. First, it identifies mechanisms for urban food policymaking in Brazilian cities similar to those found in Europe. Past research identified PEs as critical drivers of urban food policy (Giambartolomei et al., 2021; Minotti et al., 2022). Our study adds that bureaucrats acting as PEs may be particularly relevant for expanding and maintaining these policies, given their experience and knowledge of government dynamics. Expansion processes, such as the one documented here, are particularly relevant for understanding how food policy can achieve its potential transversality across policy sectors. The active maintenance sought by PEs, in turn, contributes to understanding how policy can be entrenched in contexts marked by political discontinuity.

Second, our findings showcase most strategies outlined by the policy entrepreneurship literature, with three additional aspects standing out. Bureaucrats acting as PEs sought validation from superiors in their organizations, as argued by Edri-Peer et al. (2023), but also from their peers. Bureaucracies often resist the introduction of new ideas into well-established policies. Therefore, civil servants may seek legitimacy from their colleagues to garner broader support for the changes they advocate. Additionally, our cases demonstrated that PEs utilized knowledge from others (Arnold, 2015) but primarily relied on their own. PEs' long-term engagement with the issue allows them to learn from their experience and advocate for policy changes. Furthermore, anchoring proposals in global commitments was a consistent strategy across cases. PEs sought to gain credibility by demonstrating their alignment with international guidelines, with awards and recognition further reinforcing this strategy. Interestingly, this strategy contributes to developing a new policy, safeguarding an existing policy from discontinuity threats, and integrating it into a different sector. This finding expands prior research on urban food policy, identifying how international commitments propel policy change when mobilized by local entrepreneurs (Minotti et al., 2022).

This study presents significant policy implications, emphasizing the importance of strengthening networks between government and civil society, as well as within government. Creating spaces for participation and exchange of experiences can facilitate policy change. The findings also suggest that the dissemination of international policy commitments is more likely to succeed when local actors embrace them as part of their own projects. However, these results may not apply universally and are influenced by specific conditions. Most bureaucrats acting as PEs in this study were statutory bureaucrats. While they may not remain in the same position their entire careers, they have a long-term commitment to the public sector. Therefore, bureaucrats acting as PEs are more likely to be found in governments where the civil service is tenured, or at least partially, as in Brazil. Additionally, PEs were all similarly embedded in civil society, which is an enduring feature in some Brazilian cities (Leão Marques, 2023), but not necessarily in other Global South cities (Bradlow, 2024). Future research could explore alternative factors influencing UA policies in this context and examine their long-term development.

6. Conclusion

This article examined how bureaucrats acting as PEs shape UA policies in three Brazilian cities. The comparative case study considered the strategies employed by them in relation to policy trajectories and processes of policy formation, maintenance, and adaptation. We conclude that bureaucrats' entrepreneurial actions sought to introduce new UA policies, sustain an existing one amidst political instabilities, and expand UA initiatives to new policy sectors, notably urban planning. To do so, they mobilize various strategies, with emphasis on developing relational networks within government and with civil society and linking their proposals to international commitments. These outcomes contribute to the policy entrepreneurship and urban food policy literature strands by identifying new strategies entrepreneurs deploy and showcasing the development of UA policies in densely populated Global South cities.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to Grant Ennis for his careful proofreading and to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions, which have substantially improved the manuscript. The authors Marcela Alonso Ferreira, Giselle Mendonça Abreu, Camila Nastari Fernandes, and Vitória Leão were responsible for the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. Part of the data used in this article was collected within the framework of two previous studies: *Urban agriculture policies* (Instituto Escolhas, 2022) and *Subsidies for developing a public policy to promote urban vegetable gardens* (Instituto Escolhas, 2023b). The first was coordinated by Jaqueline Ferreira and Vitória Leão, and Marcela Alonso Ferreira and Camila Nastari Fernandes were responsible for data collection and analysis. The second was coordinated by Jaqueline Ferreira and Juliana Luiz, and partially conducted by Instituto ZeroCem, with Marcela Alonso Ferreira and Giselle Mendonça Abreu responsible for data collection and analysis.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8264
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8264

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Laying the Foundations for a Child-Focused Cities Analytical Framework: Reflections From an International, Interdisciplinary Collaboration

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Submitted: 13 February 2024 **Accepted:** 2 July 2024 **Published:** 12 September 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

Children, a unique yet marginalized social group, hold immense potential for driving meaningful social and environmental change, both in their current lives and as future stewards of the planet. However, their significant contributions often depend on the mechanisms and opportunities adults create to facilitate their participation and inclusion. This places local governance at a crucial juncture, mediating children's involvement in shaping their urban environments. This research was initiated by the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy in 2022, gathering international scholars and practitioners to critically assess the "child-friendly city" concept. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the study sought to advance the notion from simply being "friendly" to a deeper commitment to amplifying children's voices within social, physical, and relational spheres. The methodology transitioned from initial academic discussions to the creation of a comprehensive analytical tool, the "Child-Focused Cities Analytical Framework." This framework aims to tackle the complex challenges of child participation, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in both local and global settings. This article unveils new insights at the intersection of children's rights, the SDGs, and local governance, laying the groundwork for a model that prioritizes and enhances children's perspectives, thereby catalyzing social and environmental progress.

Keywords
child-focused; child participation; children; cities; local governance; SDGs

1. Introduction

Globally, children are considered a distinct yet marginalized social group that offers great hope towards meaningful social and environmental action both in the context of their childhoods and as future caretakers of our planet (Lolichen, 2006). The vital role of children's views in their growth and development was affirmed over 35 years ago with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), hereinafter referred as UNCRC. Children's ability to express their views and participate in societal discussions significantly depends on the mechanisms and opportunities provided to them (Cilliers & Gibbens, 2023), which are frequently governed by adults. This dependency underscores the critical role of adult-designed frameworks in enabling or constraining child participation. Particularly in the realm of public governance, local governments are strategically positioned as the level of governance closest to children's daily lives. This proximity makes local governance a vital conduit for integrating children's contributions into the fabric of urban living (Chawla, 2001). The concept of local governance embodies a bottom-up approach to public administration, distinguishing itself as an apt platform for fostering child participation (Lansdown, 2009). This approach aligns with the principles of "child-friendly cities" and participatory governance, advocating for the inclusion of children's voices in shaping policies, programs, and environments that affect them (UNICEF, 2004). By fostering environments that encourage and value child participation, local governance can significantly contribute to the development of societies that recognize and respect children's rights and as active contributors to social life and urban development (Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2010).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the local urban agenda, underscoring the critical role of local governance in achieving sustainable development. In a recent declaration, UNICEF (2023, p. 1) underscored the necessity of placing children at the forefront of sustainable development efforts, framing this approach not only as a strategic necessity but as a "human rights imperative." This perspective recognizes that the SDGs are not isolated targets but a network of interconnected and interdependent goals. Successfully achieving these goals paves the way for systemic, structural, and long-term improvements that benefit children from every community. The SDGs act as a beacon for global cities and regions, guiding them towards the discovery and implementation of innovative solutions, policies, and local initiatives (Fambasayi & Katsidzira, 2022, p. 54). This directive encourages a focus on creating safe and clean environments, which will also be beneficial for children in terms of their health, well-being, and future potential. The emphasis on local solutions highlights the importance of tailored approaches that consider the unique needs and challenges of individual communities while aligning with global sustainability objectives (Mistry et al., 2019). Moreover, the integration of children's perspectives into urban planning and policy-making is essential for creating inclusive and equitable cities. Acknowledging children as key stakeholders in sustainable development ensures that urban strategies and solutions are designed with their best interests in mind. This implies a comprehensive understanding of the current challenges that affect children's participation and inclusion in local governance for achieving SDGs. It calls for a better integration of children's perspectives and needs as part of the planning process. This approach aligns with the principles of participatory governance and the rights-based perspective advocated by the UNCRC, which emphasizes the importance of considering children's views in all matters affecting them (UN, 1989).

This article aims to critically evaluate the concept of "child-friendly cities" and the role of children as catalysts for social and environmental sustainability. Initiated at the initiative of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD)—the Local Democracy Academy in 2022—it employs an interdisciplinary approach to develop the "Child-Focused Cities Analytical Framework" (CFCAF), enhancing children's participation in urban development aligned with the SDGs. By examining the intersection of children's rights, the SDGs, and local governance, the study seeks to advance a framework that amplifies children's voices, promoting social and environmental progress.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Notion of "Child-Friendly Cities"

The notion of "child-friendly cities" emerges as a pivotal paradigm in urban planning and development, centered around crafting spaces that foreground the welfare, rights, and participatory engagement of children (Cilliers & Gibbens, 2023). This concept challenges the conventional perspective of children as mere bystanders in urban settings, positing them instead as key contributors whose requirements and viewpoints are critical in sculpting the urban milieu. Anchored in the principles of the UNCRC, "child-friendly cities" commit to ensuring children's involvement in decision-making, access to tailored service delivery, and safeguarding against harm, thereby advocating for children's active role in urban and community development. The establishment of child-friendly environments is shown to markedly benefit children's learning, development, and overall growth across physical, social, and cognitive domains. The significance of creating child-centric public spaces, as highlighted by researchers such as Nordström (2010), Moore (1987), and Shackell et al. (2008), lies in their capacity to enhance children's social competencies and personal skills. Inspired by the broader "child-friendly cities" initiative, these spaces are deliberately designed and developed to cater to the distinct needs of children, aiming to enhance their health, developmental skills, and interaction with the natural world (Cilliers & Cornelius, 2019). The concept represents a multifaceted and layered approach to urban planning, advocating for environmental designs and planning strategies that actively involve children and youth in molding their surroundings (Horelli, 2007). Despite the recognized benefits and the intrinsic value of child-friendly spaces in enriching children's experiences and development, their implementation remains sporadic. This gap underscores the critical need for broader adoption and integration of child-centric planning principles, ensuring environments that not only support children's development but also amplify their potential to influence and contribute to their communities.

2.2. The Vulnerability and Marginality of Children in Social and Environmental Contexts

The concept of childhood is fluid, evolving across different cultures and historical periods, influenced by a range of social practices at micro, meso, and macro levels. Dominant views often depict children as passive and dependent, lacking agency or voice, a perspective deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms and global inequalities, including colonial legacies (Bolotta, 2020). Such perspectives are reinforced by laws, policies, and social institutions, leading to a widespread portrayal of children as non-political and passive, which in turn makes them particularly susceptible to social and environmental challenges (James, 2011). Contrary to a universal paradigm of childhood, the dichotomy of children as "being" active participants in their societal roles, or "becoming" viewed in the context of future potential, reflects varying degrees of agency attributed to them (Uprichard, 2008). The SDGs have been criticized for their limited engagement with children, with

only a third explicitly including youth targets, highlighting a need for recognizing children's roles as both present and future change agents (Montrosse-Moorhead et al., 2019). This shift towards acknowledging children's active participation in societal and environmental discourses (Currie & Deschênes, 2016; Prout & James, 2015) is essential for addressing their vulnerability and marginalization, particularly in the face of climate change.

Children, especially in high-risk environments, face disproportionate impacts from climate-related threats, such as droughts, floods, and natural disasters, leading to dire consequences for their health, security, and well-being (Helldén et al., 2021). Their experiences within urban and rural settings underline the critical need for their inclusion in discussions on climate change and environmental policies. Given their marginal status and the pressing concerns of their lived realities, children represent a significantly marginalized group globally. The emphasis on children's rights to participate and have their voices heard is crucial, as highlighted by a UNICEF review of the SDGs (UNICEF, 2022). Access to information is fundamental, serving as the initial step on Arnstein's ladder of participation, essential for empowering children as agents of change within their communities and beyond (Arnstein, 1969).

2.3. Enhancing Child Participation Through Local Governance

Local governance serves as a crucial link between central government and children, with local governments positioned closest to the young population. This proximity is pivotal for implementing and monitoring children's rights and the SDGs, particularly within municipalities and sub-national entities. The significance of cities in the global development agenda is underscored by SDG 11, which aims for more inclusive, resilient, safe, and sustainable urban areas, highlighting the role of local governance in translating national commitments into local action (Riggio, 2002). Together with the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11, there is evidence of the importance of local governance mechanisms for inclusive policies and practices, ensuring no one is left behind (Mews et al., 2018)

Despite the global commitment to the SDGs and the principle that "no one is left behind," children often remain marginalized in development discussions and local governance processes. The limited focus on children within the SDGs framework calls for a greater emphasis on integrating their perspectives into local governance to foster sustainable communities (Malone, 2015). Advocating for child-focused urban spaces involves collaborative development and resource co-production that prioritizes children's rights, sustainability, and viewpoints.

The right to participate in local governance is grounded in international human rights law, notably Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) and Article 7 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union, 1990), reinforcing the legal basis for children's inclusion in public governance. Numerous normative guidelines on child participation further stress the importance of child participation at the sub-national level for inclusive decision-making, framing it as a fundamental principle for realizing other rights (Lansdown, 2014). Achieving meaningful participation requires overcoming tokenism, where children's engagement is superficial rather than substantive (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2018). Local authorities must foster genuine child–adult interactions in urban planning and governance to enhance children's well-being, socialization, and engaged citizenship, while also promoting their understanding of rights (Lundy, 2018; Örnekoğlu Selçuk et al., 2023). Yet there are inherent challenges for children to participate in predominantly

adult-centric and adult-driven agendas. Paradigms of childhood are different across context and culture but often position children as either "being" (actively engaged in shaping the construction of childhoods) or "becoming" (not yet adult thus limited capacities; Uprichard, 2008). Such temporal dimensions get tangled up in idealized notions of children such as passivity, innocence, and dependency on benevolent adults which inhibits genuine and active participation. Children's sense of their own agency is shaped socially and spatially, challenging assumptions of agency as inherent, normative, and universal. Developing the dynamic and contextual tensions around children's agency, Bordonaro and Payne (2012, p. 366) highlight "ambiguous" agency which is "in stark contrast to established and normative conceptions about childhood, moral and social ideals about the kind of behavior young people should demonstrate, the activities they should engage in and the spaces and places deemed appropriate for them to inhabit." This is particularly relevant when we consider barriers and opportunities to engage in participatory endeavors with children and youth across contexts and varying social processes which may also stigmatize and marginalize them. Increasing participation cannot be achieved by normative, paternalistic, and universal means but grounded in "situated concepts of agency developed through understanding from the vantage point of local socio-cultural systems rather than externally derived socio-cultural assumptions about childhood and children's agency" (Edmonds, 2019, p. 202). The vision for child-focused cities is centered upon reinterpreting the SDGs through child-centric perspectives foregrounding contextually sensitive understandings that can be realized at local governance levels.

Investing in mechanisms for regular and impactful child participation in decision-making processes reflects a commitment to integrating children's perspectives in legislative, policy, and project interventions related to local SDGs implementation. Addressing barriers to effective child participation requires trained professionals, time-intensive planning, and ethical considerations. By prioritizing genuine engagement, local authorities can harness the demographic dividend of a young population for economic development, resilience, sustainability, and productivity (UN Population Fund, 2013), making child inclusion in governance not only a rights-based imperative but a strategic investment for future prosperity.

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children have the right to have their views heard in collective decision-making processes. Since the UN adopted the Convention in 1989, research concerning the meaning of genuine children's participation in these processes has increased. Different participation models (e.g., Hart, 1997; Lundy, 2007; Shier, 2001) emerged in response to this quest, many of which rework Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. For instance, Hart's version (1997) identifies eight levels of youth participation, including three non-participation forms—manipulation, decoration, and tokenism. He presents children's participation as growing from "manipulation" to children's protagonism—"child-initiated shared decisions with adults," the ladder's last rung (Hart, 1997). He also defines tokenism as "instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions" (Hart, 1992, p. 9).

While it's true that all these participation models have their limitations, such as oversimplifying participation as a mere box-ticking exercise, they have played a crucial role in sparking conversations about "pseudo" and "genuine" forms of participation. Lundy (2018), for instance, challenges the notion of tokenism as a form of pseudo-participation; the author posits that tokenism can be seen as "a useful and sometimes necessary step on the journey of a more respectful and meaningful engagement with children" (Lundy, 2018, p. 340). Birch et al. (2017) argue that we must move from giving "voice" to children, an idea that evokes one-way

communication, towards dialoguing with children, which, in turn, demands continuous power negotiations between children and adults. Aligned with this perspective, the Lundy model of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence (Lundy, 2007) sheds light on how the dialogue between children and adults might be ensured by pointing out the importance of giving space for children to express their views (space), enabling children's voices (voice), providing an audience for their opinions (audience), and ensuring their views will have influence (influence).

Freire's (2000) approach to education is another perspective that has informed the development of the CFCAF. The philosopher and educator called for pedagogical approaches where people teach and learn from each other through dialogue to enact positive changes in a specific reality—"problem-posing education." For Freire (2000, p. 51), education should entail "praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it." The CFCAF, in line with the concept of problem-posing education, involves the development of something valuable for and with municipalities keen to guarantee children's right to participate in decision-making processes towards the achievement of the SDGs. The framework is situated between academy and practice, university and community, theory and practice, teaching and learning, and reflecting and making. Furthermore, it is aimed to impel learning by exposing all parties involved in city planning and governance processes to each other's ideas, experiences, and viewpoints. By bringing all parties together to reflect and act to transform local realities, the framework affords all people involved in processes of city governance to perceive children as competent agents. Its potential to change mindsets counts in the combat of tokenistic practices. From this perspective, the framework can be read as an open, dynamic, dialogic, and collective tool whose learning-promotive capacity stands out.

3. Methodology

This article presents a reflective review of the research activities and outputs generated by the project team from its inception at the ICLD Local Democracy Academy in Visby, Sweden. It compiles and assesses the diverse array of studies, collaborative research efforts, and field visits conducted as part of the development of the CFCAF. The methodological journey, as outlined in Sections 3.1 to 3.4, has encompassed an initial gathering of international scholars (3.1); the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach to reframe the concept of "child-friendly cities" (3.2); the conceptual and practical development of the CFCAF (3.3); and an in-depth collaborative impact study, including fieldwork in partner municipalities (3.4) as explained accordingly.

3.1. The ICLD Local Democracy Academy: A Convergence of Minds

The research initiative originated from the ICLD's Local Democracy Academy held in Visby, Sweden, from 6th to 10th June, 2022. This event convened 64 international scholars from 50 universities across 28 countries, with a significant representation from the Global South. The academy fostered an intensive environment of mutual learning, critical thinking, and collaborative exploration focused on "transformative local governments" (Fallas et al., 2022). Among the varied themes, "child-friendly cities" prompted a group of researchers to critically assess the political and participatory roles of children and youth within local democracies. As part of the Academy, several scholars presented cases that foregrounded concepts of the "child-friendly city" interrogating the rights and needs of children to grow up in safe environments, with access to basic services, learning, independent mobility, and be a part of future spatial planning. Cases presented included co-designing temporary interventions in contested sites as an approach to involve

marginalized children in the process of generating child-friendly cities in Brazil, examining play sufficiency strategies in Wales and Scotland, urban governance perspectives on inclusive cities for children in South Africa, co-producing "social infrastructure of hope" to re-imagine common future with marginalized suburban communities in Serbia, and reflections on participation as protection through listening to "unheard voices" in Scotland.

The initial engagement included scholars from Brazil, the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, and Austria, and ranged across disciplines of urban design, architecture, urban planning, sociology, law and development, and urban studies. The cases presented crossed geographical contexts and disciplinary boundaries acting as catalysts for discussions of the challenges and opportunities of realization of the "child friendly city." Through these exchanges of empirical evidence, the group of scholars identified together that "friendly is not enough" as it does not go far enough leading to a collective call to action for the global discourse to progress from "child-friendly" to *child-focused*. Through discussions, including reflections on the strengths and limitations of policies and processes across different international systems, it was identified that there was an opportunity to reflect on the SDGs through the frame of child-focused cities and address the current gap to ensure children's rights and needs are foregrounded in these global goals.

3.2. Interdisciplinary Approach: Conceptual Refinement

Adopting an interdisciplinary methodology, an investigation into the "child-friendly city" concept sought to reconceptualize it as child-focused, thereby advocating for a deeper engagement with children's rights and active participation in urban planning and policy-making. This approach integrated insights from urban planning, architecture, social design, law, sociology, and social work, among others, challenging traditional disciplinary limitations and embracing innovative perspectives to better capture children's interactions with their urban environments. The move from "child-friendly" to *child-focused* highlighted a commitment to accountability and meaningful inclusion, addressing gaps in current practices and narratives around urban development and child participation.

3.3. Framework Development: From Ideation to Analytical Tool

Following the academy, the research team engaged in a series of collaborative discussions and online meetings. This phase involved reinterpreting the SDGs through children's perspectives, challenging adult-centric interpretations, and aiming for a context-specific understanding of child participation in local governance. The CFCAF emerged as a dynamic analytical tool designed to facilitate nuanced assessments of children's roles in achieving sustainable urban development, emphasizing their rights and contributions within local and global contexts.

3.4. Collaborative Impact Study: Fieldwork

A collaborative impact study involving ICLD-partner municipalities provided a practical exploration of the CFCAF's utility. Engagements in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, and Livingstone, Zambia, among others, allowed for direct interactions with local stakeholders, contextualizing the framework and identifying barriers to and opportunities for enhancing child participation in local governance. These field activities were critical in gathering insights and refining the CFCAF based on lived experiences and local challenges.

Joint reflection on various research activities (Sections 3.1 to 3.4) informed the synthesis of the findings and recommendations accumulated throughout the project's duration. This article captures the outcome of the reflective review by presenting the process and insights gained from engaging with children and local stakeholders in urban settings, as well as the effectiveness of the CFCAF as a tool for integrating children's perspectives into urban development and governance, in alignment with the SDGs and the UNCRC.

4. Findings

Thematic conclusions were drawn from the reflective review as explained in Section 3. The key themes that emerged are discussed accordingly and hold importance for academic discourse and policy implementation in urban planning and governance.

4.1. Empowering Children as Agents of Urban Transformation

This research highlighted the critical role of fostering agency among children, advocating for their active participation in shaping the cities they inhabit. Echoing Freire's philosophy (Freire, 2000), it suggests that children must engage critically with their environments to perceive themselves as capable agents of change. While not taken for granted, this participatory ethos is essential, requiring urban environments to respect and protect children's rights as outlined in the UNCRC and the SDGs. The research identifies key barriers to children's active participation, including socio-economic disparities, cultural and religious practices, and the limited availability of accessible educational and recreational resources. These barriers underscore the need for child-focused cities that prioritize children's well-being, rights, and needs in urban planning and policy-making. By advocating for the creation of inclusive, safe, and nurturing urban spaces, the study emphasizes the importance of considering children's perspectives in all aspects of urban planning and governance. Such an approach ensures cities are not merely habitable but are places where children can thrive, learn, and actively contribute to their communities' transformation, embodying the principles of sustainable and inclusive urban development.

4.2. Overcoming Barriers to Child-Inclusive Urban Planning

This research underscores the imperative of establishing child-focused cities that embody equity and social justice, ensuring every child, regardless of socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, or ability, has access to essential opportunities and resources. This approach is in harmony with principles laid out in international instruments such as the UNCRC, which accentuates the rights of children to protection, provision, and active participation in society. The endeavor is to build inclusive and equitable urban environments confronting entrenched social disparities, seeking to forge more unified and fair communities. The journey towards genuine "child-friendliness" encounters obstacles in the ambiguity surrounding its definition, measurement, and monitoring. This challenge arises from varied interpretations of "child-friendliness," shaped by distinct disciplinary perspectives, professional practices, and individual experiences. Effectively navigating these complexities necessitates a refined, adaptable strategy that recognizes the diverse requirements and entitlements of children within varying urban landscapes. Such an approach is crucial for bridging the gap between the aspirational model of child-friendly cities and the practical realities of implementing these ideals in diverse urban settings, moving towards truly inclusive urban development that foregrounds the well-being and rights of children.

Whilst the value of children's participation is widely recognised and enshrined in UNCRC, the mechanisms and meaning that are required to truly prioritize children and youth's contributions to decision-making are complex and precarious. These challenges were illustrated in various ways during collaborative discussions including issues around language, instability of participatory opportunities, and deeper dynamics of participation. Our shared interest and commitment around children and youth participation in the SDG's intertwined in the discussions with stakeholders, yet we observed that the terminology used in practice is different from the language set out by and around the UN "*sustainable developmental goals*" such as in policy and research. This leads us to question the potential incongruence around formal, global, and academic terminology that may become disconnected from the lived realities of those arguably closer to the challenges of the global goals. This is further echoed in the theme of spoken languages that emerged in many of our exchanges and the fundamental importance of respecting and valuing socio-cultural meanings but also intergenerational nuances. An example of this is from the Director of Youth Invest (Victoria Falls) who shared her reflections of working in a context with more than 16 official languages and striving towards participation centered on youth cultural and communication preferences. Our central contention of prioritizing children and youth perspectives requires consideration of "language" in local contexts but also looking beyond "official" discourses to explore child-centric meanings and understandings. Through our discussions, we understand the importance of an active conceptual interpretation within and between multiple stakeholders, actors, and audiences including children and youth.

4.3. Fostering Child-Centric Innovation Through Collaboration

Creating child-focused cities demands an interdisciplinary strategy that merges knowledge and techniques from a range of fields including urban planning, architecture, social design, law, sociology, and social work. This collaborative approach is key to innovating and finding unique solutions that go beyond conventional disciplinary limits, acknowledging the intricacies of urban settings and the varied necessities of its youngest members. It emphasizes the critical role of connecting research with practical application to cultivate impactful and lasting urban spaces conducive to children's well-being. This research confirmed the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach that breaks down the barriers between spatial and social sciences, thereby deepening our engagement with children's urban experiences. Such methodological innovation is essential for gaining deeper insights into children's interactions with their urban environments, ensuring their perspectives are integral to urban planning and developmental initiatives. The initiative to incorporate varied contextual and disciplinary viewpoints underscores the complexity of facilitating children's active participation in urban environments. By exploring the connections between children's personal experiences and their engagement with the physical, relational, and structural facets of urban life, this research reveals the importance of a comprehensive analytical approach. Successfully addressing children's participation and inclusion demands a nuanced understanding that spans multiple knowledge areas and practices, recognizing the dynamic, interconnected nature of urban ecosystems and the pivotal role of collaboration in fostering child-centric innovation.

The UNCRC emphasizes the importance of protection and participation for children. However, social and systemic inequalities can hinder children's inclusion and participation. The concept of "mattering" is crucial to human experience (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022), and involving young people in planning and implementing projects can foster a sense of ownership and belonging. Examples of such projects include waste management, recycling, and creative hubs for youth, Junior and Youth Councils create valuable

opportunities to promote a sense of belonging and "mattering." These exchanges emphasize the essential role of participation and inclusion in the lives of children and youth and how it can help them achieve their well-being, safety, and access to social justice. Precarity intersected the various discussions around the broader context of support for projects who foregrounded children and youth participation casting a significant shadow on stability and sustainability. Municipality representatives described funding for their critical projects as resting within a dynamic nexus of financial streams which contributed to an uncertain and fragile landscape. This can impact those working at the interface between funding and service delivery, at times, creating a sense of futility such as when out-of-school youth disengaged from them after short term funded participatory projects ended. In our working paper related to the impact project (Cilliers et al., 2023) we paid tribute to the commitment, endurance, and stamina of the guardians and true heroes of children and youth inclusion who we were so privileged to learn from. Creative strategies were often employed to try to create sustainability within such unstable financial conditions. The inclusion of children and youth in the planning and oversight of projects sought to imbue a greater sense of agency and ownership. The Director of Greenline Africa (Victoria Falls) situated young users of the youth center as "owners, beneficiaries and participants" and Kwatu Trash 4 Cash (Livingstone) illustrated their inspiring youth-led recycling initiatives which prioritized investment and sustainability.

4.4. Advancing Child-Centric Urban Development

This analysis considered the deficiencies inherent in the term "child-friendly" as it applies to urban planning and governance, highlighting its failure to ensure adequate accountability and its potential to uphold a paternalistic perspective on childhood. The traditional view of children as passive recipients of adult-driven agendas is being challenged by a paradigm shift towards recognizing and valuing children as active participants in society. This shift is not just about focusing on children as individuals (child-focused), but also encompasses a broader perspective that considers "childhood" as a distinct phase of life characterized by unique needs, rights, and experiences, inextricably related to the sense of belonging in the world. This recognition aligns with emerging research suggesting perspective shift that children themselves do not necessarily see a dichotomy between their experiences and those of adults as sharply as adults do; instead, they perceive their "childhood" as an integral part of human existence, not separate or marginal. This involvement places children's needs and perspectives at the heart of urban development and governance strategies and the execution of the SDGs. Promoting "child-focused" urban development represents a move toward more deliberate and responsible planning efforts. This approach pledges to design urban spaces with a deep-seated commitment to meeting the unique rights and needs of children. Positioning children's active participation as a key priority in urban planning not only acknowledges their valuable contributions but also aims to establish cities that are truly inclusive, equitable, and sustainable for every child. This strategic shift underscores a dedication to fostering urban environments where children can thrive, and their voices heard and respected in the shaping of their communities.

4.5. Reframing Urban Governance to Amplify Children's Voices

This review underscores the importance of viewing the SDGs through the lens of children, advocating for a significant shift away from a sectorial adult-centric urban governance towards models that prioritize and enhance children's roles in sustainable development. It suggests that current urban governance frameworks often fail to fully capture or value the potential contributions of children, thereby necessitating a

fundamental transformation in policy and practice—one deriving from context-specific, everyday lived experience. This transformation involves not only recognizing but actively incorporating children's unique perspectives and experiences into the planning and implementation of urban development and governance initiatives. The call for this shift is grounded in the understanding that children possess invaluable insights into their living environments, which can greatly contribute to creating more sustainable, inclusive urban futures. The traditional "one-size-fits-all" approaches are challenged by the diverse, lived experiences of child/youthhood, highlighting the need for urban planning and governance models to become more adaptable and responsive to the varied needs of younger populations. By advocating for policies and practices that are more inclusive of children's voices, this finding emphasizes the critical need for urban governance to evolve. Such evolution entails the integration of children's rights, needs, and voices as foundational elements in the conceptualization and realization of the SDGs. This approach not only acknowledges the unique contributions children can make but also ensures that urban governance efforts are more aligned with achieving meaningful outcomes in the immediate everyday life experiences and expand the benefits to more community members.

4.6. Participation as a (Lifelong) Process

The essence of child and youth participation is its ongoing nature, which necessitates a shift towards sustained engagement and long-term strategies. This approach recognizes the significant impact of temporary funding and short-lived projects on the continuity of youth involvement in societal and developmental efforts. Economic challenges often stand as barriers limiting young individuals' ability to actively participate. Highlighting successful initiatives like Kwatu Cash 4 Trash and Olga's the Italian Corner (both Livingstone) and Greenline Africa and Youth Invest (both Victoria Falls), this research highlighted the transformative potential of creating economic opportunities that empower children and youth, fostering their meaningful engagement in community development. A nuanced aspect of participation, often overlooked, is the skepticism surrounding "participation" activities that seem more adult-driven than genuinely inclusive. True participation demands deep commitment and belief in the capabilities of the younger generation, acknowledging that participation spans from impactful involvement in broad societal issues to more localized, personal experiences that affirm their significance. These understandings position participation not just as an event but as a continuum, planting seeds that may flourish throughout an individual's life. Challenges related to funding and stakeholder interests highlight the precarious nature of youth participation projects, stressing the importance of embedding young people in project development, management, and income generation for sustainability. The UNCRC underscores participation, protection, and provision as foundational rights, emphasizing that participation extends beyond a mere obligation; it is a pathway to realizing protective rights and fostering inclusion. This perspective advocates for an inclusive model of governance where children's and youths' contributions are valued, not just for the immediacy of their impact but for their potential to inform and enrich social and environmental initiatives over time. By recognizing participation as a lifelong process, we acknowledge the diverse experiences of children and youth, emphasizing the need for strategies that support their continuous engagement and growth.

4.7. Establishing Child-Focused Cities as a Universal Right

The connection between the UNCRC and the SDGs highlights the essential role of children's rights in achieving sustainable development. Article 12 of the UNCRC which advocates for the right of children to be

heard, is reflected in the SDGs through their commitment to participatory decision-making. Yet, actualizing these rights in the pursuit of sustainable development presents complexities that require a thoughtful approach to engaging children and youth. Experiences from diverse contexts illuminate the importance of understanding the spaces where children and youth spend their time, notably schools, which serve as crucial safe havens. Concerns arise for those disengaged from the education system, particularly young people aged 17–21, who find themselves at a heightened risk of exclusion and vulnerability. The ways in which out-of-school youth seek to create their own spaces of belonging, sometimes engaging in risky behaviors, underscores the need for inclusive strategies that enhance safety while addressing the broader issues that marginalize them. Central to the SDGs is the acknowledgment that the needs and vulnerabilities of children must be at the forefront of urban planning, development and governance efforts. Child-focused cities, therefore, emerge as not just an ideal but a fundamental right, advocating for urban environments designed with the safety, accessibility, and sustainability necessary to support every child's development. Despite widespread agreement on the value of prioritizing children in urban development, significant efforts are required to embed this principle into the operational priorities of local governments worldwide. This research advocates for the CFCAF as a tool to guide local authorities, municipalities, and policymakers in integrating children's perspectives into urban planning. By placing children at the center of spatial decision-making, cities can ensure that their development strategies are truly inclusive, offering safe, accessible, and sustainable environments for all community members. Establishing child-focused urban environments as a universal right is a critical step towards realizing the comprehensive vision of the SDGs and UNCRC, ensuring that children's rights and needs are integral to the fabric of urban life.

5. Recommendations: Towards a Global CFCAF

The rich and varied discussions with stakeholders in the municipalities contributed to a synthesis of reflections that lay the foundations for our conceptual CFCAF (Figure 1). Through interdisciplinary collaboration, we developed a set of strategic recommendations with the aim of developing more child focused urban development and sustainability more broadly. To illustrate our sense making we hope to foreground the reflections of representatives we met during our project that underpin our key recommendations.

Table 1 outlines strategic recommendations drawn from the thematic analysis of this research, focused on advancing child-focused urban development and broader sustainability. By addressing key areas such as participation, protection, empowerment, and interdisciplinary collaboration, these recommendations seek to establish a comprehensive approach that ensures urban environments are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable for all, particularly for the younger generation. These recommendations encapsulate the collective insights derived from extensive research and discussions, marking a pivotal step towards reimagining and reshaping our cities in alignment with the needs and rights of children and youth worldwide.

The recommendations table serves as a blueprint for action, emphasizing the necessity of integrating children's perspectives as both a protective measure and a means to empower them as agents of change. It highlights the importance of intergenerational and lifelong participation, underscoring the role of local governance, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the establishment of child-focused urban environments as a universal right. These strategic directions are not only vital for the realization of the SDGs but also crucial for advancing social justice, equity, and sustainability within urban ecosystems. In parallel to providing strategic orientation for cross-sectoral collaboration in delivering a child-focused agenda through urban planning and

Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of the CFCAF: Understanding the multi-dimensional and inextricably world-bound experience of child/youthhood at the interplay of all 17 SDGs at once.

Table 1. Recommendations towards a Global CFCAF.

Focus	Recommendation	Description
Prioritizing children and youth perspectives in decision-making approaches	Recognize meaningful participation as both protection and empowerment	Emphasize participation as a means to wellbeing, safety, and social justice, advocating for strategies rooted in local socio-cultural understandings.
	Foster intergenerational and lifelong engagement	Encourage ongoing, intergenerational participation and partnerships that include significant roles for NGOs and community organizations.
Amplifying youth voices in urban development and sustainability	Address the disproportionate impact of global challenges on children	Integrate children's perspectives in addressing SDGs and mitigating violence, recognizing the importance of their contributions.
	Strengthen local government as a conduit for child-focused governance	Utilize local governments as key facilitators for integrating children's voices in urban planning, with a focus on context-specific responses.
	Promote interdisciplinary collaboration	Advocate for interdisciplinary collaboration between research and practice to enrich strategies for children's participation in urban environments.
	Underline the value of participation for sustainable urban futures	Highlight the importance of children's participation and protection as foundational linkages to rights under the UNCRC and critical for sustainable urban development.

local governance, these recommendations open space—rather than close—for an interpretative and mediated dialogue between global aspirations and local challenges while securing and amplifying those traditionally silenced voices in urban development.

The CFCAF presents an unprecedented opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical aspirations and practical implementations. It calls upon urban planners, policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders at all levels to embrace this child-centric approach, ensuring that our cities become not only habitable but truly nurturing spaces for the youngest members of society. This framework stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and innovation, setting the stage for an open-end transformative journey towards cities that genuinely prioritize and reflect the needs, aspirations, and rights of children and youth. By placing children at the heart of urban planning and development, we not only safeguard their present but also secure a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable future for generations to come.

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible by the financial contributions of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) Impact Research Grant for small-scale, action-oriented and collaborative projects answering to the expressed challenges of selected local governments. Any opinion, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s). ICLD does not accept any liability in regard thereto.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 7711
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.7711

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Open Access Journal

Going Back to School: Reflecting on School Space as "Shared Space" to Shape Cities and Communities

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Submitted: 23 October 2023 **Accepted:** 28 July 2024 **Published:** 15 October 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

There has been a growing interest in Australia for public schools to share their facilities (space) with local communities, driven by the understanding that these substantial public investments have the potential to yield additional social, environmental, and economic benefits to their immediate neighbourhoods. Yet, there is limited critical research on this topic, particularly from an urban planning perspective. This article reflects on schools within the broader spatial environment to understand how outdoor recreational and green spaces of schools can be enhanced to optimize their role within the city and to advance "schools beyond schools." This study deviates from prior research by examining the conceptual progress in urban planning that envisions educational institutions not merely as pedagogical entities but as pivotal urban nodes capable of enhancing the socio-spatial dynamics of shared spaces. Through a systematic review, this article exposes the concept of "shared space" in reference to educational spaces (school grounds). It draws on the Share Our Space program of the New South Wales Department of Education to provide an in-depth understanding of the "shared space" framework, analysing both the inherent advantages and potential challenges in the future evolution of this model. The findings revealed a prevalence of academic studies on shared use or joint use agreements as the primary approach for granting community access to school facilities. In these agreements, the main challenges to sharing school spaces with communities or partner organizations were managerial and legal considerations. The research emphasized the need for a collective reimagining of school facilities and a comprehensive re-evaluation of shared school space within the broader urban context, which is particularly vital in the pursuit of resilient urban futures. This will require addressing gaps in collaboration between education and planning disciplines, the participation of the communities they serve, and developing a frame of reference to guide the dialogue. Local planning authorities are crucial in facilitating and implementing such a multi-disciplinary approach to reposition school spaces as the focal point of sustainable city and community development.

Keywords
city planning; local community; joint use; school space; shared space

1. Introduction

Public schools constitute a form of public infrastructure that requires substantial investment in terms of land and construction. This is also true for Australian cities which have grown in recent decades, and where municipal governments have been under increasing pressure to provide services to communities, particularly in core urban areas where space to build new infrastructure is scarce (Infrastructure Australia, 2019). As a result, there is a renewed interest in how school infrastructure may support community services and activities (Rivera-Yevenes, 2023). In 2022, the total play space area within New South Wales (NSW) public schools exceeded 5,040 hectares (NSW Government, 2022). However, despite their classification as public infrastructure, schools frequently lack an integrated planning strategy that aligns their infrastructure with the broader community they serve. This issue is exacerbated by policies that saw the separation between schools and communities through the wide introduction of high-security fencing in most schools, particularly across NSW since 1996 (Rooney, 2015). As a result, the utilization of such substantial public investment remains confined to school premises, and strictly during school hours and terms. It is common to see vacant school playgrounds, sports fields, and open green spaces enclosed by fences, creating a sense of separation from neighbouring areas.

The idea of shared school space is not a new concept (Spengler et al., 2011). The OECD report *Schools at the Crossroads of Innovation in Cities and Regions* identified schools as an innovative space that could steer progress in community health and wellbeing (OECD, 2017, Chapter 3). The research explored how green school grounds could be opened to school children and older residents as neighbourhood parks (Rigolon et al., 2015). It also investigated how city parks could act as outdoor classrooms and how the design and planning of these spaces through participatory processes could contribute to intergenerational needs (Rigolon et al., 2015). Green open public spaces are considered public goods that provide services to not one individual (Shoari et al., 2021) but rather should be shared across communities to optimise a collective value and enhance the quality of life of everyone. In 1982, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International in the United States raised the need for schools to share their facilities with local communities. The reasons related to the demand for cooperation and collaboration are economic loss, increasing demand for services, and social change (Council of Educational Facility Planners International, 1982). Since then, there have been several programs in the United States supporting joint use agreements between schools and organisations, promoting sports and wellbeing (discussed later in this article).

In the Australian context, there is a renewed interest in the topic, recognising the need for renewed thinking about schools and community infrastructure, alongside their multifunctionality. For instance, it has been announced that the state-of-the-art sporting facilities at the Sydney Grammar private school will be shared with some of the surrounding residents, justified by the large sum of public investment in private schools (Carroll, 2023). This is not an isolated attempt, with the Share Our Space program piloted by the NSW Department of Education and the Department of Infrastructure and Environment in 2017 still in full operation (NSW Government, 2022). In this program, outdoor play and recreation areas of participating schools are open to the public during school term holidays, approximately 12 weeks annually in NSW,

Australia (NSW Government, 2022). Another project, Opportunity Spaces, in the State of Victoria in Australia, explored effective ways for the community to share school facilities (Australian Government et al., 2024). It is evident that schools are increasingly being recognised "by their nature, as public spaces" (Singhal, 2018). However, shared space programs have been approached in an ad hoc and inconsistent manner (Omura et al., 2017) and with limited research evidence. Ideas of intergenerational campuses, shared green spaces, and vertical schools are not new, yet provide opportunities to rethink the use (and purpose) of urban spaces, alongside schools as community hubs and social infrastructure.

This article is based on one of the outcomes of a research project undertaken at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia, funded by the NSW Department of Education to evaluate the Share Our Space program from 2021 to 2022. The scope of the project was to link the concepts of shared space and social sustainability and frame the concept of shared space as a community space in educational centres. As the first part of the project, this article presents the results of a systematic review of the "shared school space" literature. It provides an in-depth understanding of the "shared space" framework, analysing the inherent advantages and potential challenges in the future evolution of this model. The article examines the concept of "shared school space," departing from the theoretical discussions in urban planning and design about the role of public schools in city planning, as well as the broader concept of shared space.

The Share Our Space program commenced in 2017 to promote the communal use of outdoor spaces of schools, including sports and recreational facilities, to promote better use of school facilities and improve access to green and recreational infrastructure, supporting community building (NSW Government, 2022). The program initiated its first pilot in 2017 with 42 schools. Although the program experienced spurs of both growth and decline in the number of participating schools due to events such as the Black Summer bushfires in 2019 and the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, it showed an overall significant increase in the number of participating schools, with a total of 497 schools in the Spring school holidays of 2022. However, participation levels are still not optimized, considering that there are a total of 2,217 schools in the state of NSW.

2. A Review of Background and Context

Schools are a key social infrastructure in cities, commonly fenced away from their local areas and serving a one-dimensional educational role. As such, their significance is often underestimated, particularly regarding their contribution to broader social ideals. In this context, this research investigated public schools as shared spaces and focal community places, reflecting on the notion of "schools beyond schools" (understanding schools as part of social infrastructure and not merely educational facilities) and its contribution to the urban fabric.

2.1. Social and Economic Perspectives of Shared Spaces

The limited use of school facilities raises significant concerns from social and economic perspectives. In social terms, there is compelling evidence indicating a gradual decline in accessibility to green open spaces globally (Kabisch et al., 2015). Candiracci (2022) calls for specific attention to the demise of accessible children's play areas as a "silent emergency," as it limits opportunities for human interaction and playful learning experiences, eroding the social fabric of cities. On the other hand, green open spaces are widely celebrated in the academic literature for their contribution towards liveable, sustainable, and resilient cities,

achieved through improved microclimate, reduced urban heat, better access to neighbourhood green spaces (Wolff & Haase, 2019), and physical and mental wellbeing (Zhang et al., 2020). Other studies have recognised direct and indirect economic benefits associated with the positive social effects of green infrastructure (Cilliers & Timmermans, 2013). Public open green spaces serve a significant social function in fostering social capital within local communities. On one hand, they contribute to the formation of "bonding social capital," which arises from relationships among individuals with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. On the other hand, they facilitate the development of "bridging social capital," which encompasses networks that bridge societal divisions (Pawson & Herath, 2017). The existence of diverse social networks within these spaces cultivates friendships and fosters cohesive communities, empowering residents to realize their potential. The inherent educative role of schoolyards and school spaces adds a critical dimension beyond the accessibility to open spaces to further integrate educational open spaces in the urban fabric, potentially facilitating social inclusivity, as indicated by UNESCO's new urban ideals such as "learning cities" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it became evident that urban green spaces are crucial for supporting healthy societies and an enhanced quality of life, with inner-city parks heavily used for recreational purposes, and periodically being overcrowded (Reinwald et al., 2021). At the same time, paradoxically, schools were closed and remained empty or of reduced use during the pandemic. These abrupt changes from Covid-19 reflected significant perceptual and behavioural shifts, some of which can trigger long-term benefits. As the focus of this study, the potential of sharing open spaces and recreational infrastructure of schools with local communities represents one of these perceptual shifts that can have multiple economic and social benefits.

A more general theme in the shared-space debate, although not necessarily relating to the physical and tangible elements of schools, is the debate about shared spaces of education facilities. Shared education was conceived as a social school experiment in which several sectors, in partnership with the community, would foster and encourage opportunities for meaningful and collaborative learning practice (Gallagher, 2016). The essence of shared education is to increase the inclusivity and integration of people within a particular community, reducing segregation and promoting a more meaningful life. The model for shared education is predicated on collectivism, community-based development, and partnership. Hence, Knox and Quirk (2016) assert that shared education involves a participatory process through which involved parties share or use certain specialised facilities or services. The applicability of shared education within the shared-space agenda has been practised in Northern Ireland since 2007 (Hughes & Loader, 2015). Shared education offered some grounds to understand the benefits and priorities of the existing educational systems as not limited to students, also having a positive influence in a community and a purpose for social cohesion in a locality. In this article, the "shared educational space" paradigm is adapted with an acknowledgement that shared school spaces can work as community infrastructure and community hubs.

From an economic standpoint, governments allocate substantial amounts of public investment towards the establishment of school infrastructure, as well as the creation of open spaces, recreational areas, and sporting facilities for the benefit of communities. For instance, the NSW Government has committed an $8.6 billion investment over the next four years to deliver new and upgraded schools across the state (NSW Government, 2023c). At the same time, and in recognition of the importance of accessible public open spaces to community wellbeing, the state government has also dedicated $200 million to deliver new and improved public open spaces in communities through the Parks for People and Open Space programs.

Furthermore, the state government is investing $200 million in new and upgraded sports facilities (NSW Government, 2023a, 2023b). This is at a time when governments are grappling with intensified financial constraints in the context of current financial crises. Economic volatility, fiscal stress, credit constraints, and austerity measures mean governments need to do more with less, placing a higher priority on putting existing public assets to multiple uses. Given the relatively low utilization of school facilities and the presence of accessible recreational, sports, and open space infrastructure within schools, particularly at the local level, it is prudent to maximize the potential of existing and new assets by using them for multiple purposes.

2.2. An Urban Planning Perspective on Schools

Urban planning literature refers to the role of schools in relation to neighbourhood planning. A common narrative is the view of public schools, more specifically, as key community facilities in terms of the meaning they bear and the value they can bring to the community, and, more broadly, in relation to community building and social reforms. Vitiello (2006) historically explains, in relation to the myriad of social reforms city planners aimed to implement through design, "the most prolific and lasting antebellum reform movement of all was the revolution in public schooling" (p. 183). While societal ideals emerged within the education realm in the late nineteenth century, they inherently intersected with the built form through broader public agendas.

However, these became professionally isolated through the emergence of different professional fields, despite schools representing a vital part of urban planning. As Glazer (1959, p. 191) pointed out, "the school pretty much disappeared as an important element from planning literature and planning discussion." Since then, little attention has been given to the topic of school infrastructure in the urban planning discipline, most of the time incidental mention in larger conceptual urban debates (McShane & Wilson, 2017; Vitiello, 2006), with limited discourse on planning and design changes and proposals.

A highly cited early city planning model on the important role of schools was proposed by Clarence Perry (Larice & Macdonald, 2013). Perry proposed the neighbourhood unit to be planned around key principles, one of them being the institution's site, including the local public elementary school, "should be suitably grouped about a central point or common area" (Larice & Macdonald, 2013, p. 80) surrounded by green spaces, such as a communal park, within walking distances to all households in the neighbourhood unit. In addition, as a non-political space, schools offer the ideal public space for community encounters, gatherings, and public participation, which are key factors to neighbourhood functionality and community life and cohesion. The school transcends its role as a mere educational institution and assumes a community-oriented value and shared functionality within the local neighbourhood.

This research supports expanding the role of schools for community purposes, as education experts justify larger public expenditure for extending the educational function of schools to after-school hours and to other population groups, including adults (Engelhardt & Engelhardt, 1940). However, the discourse between planners and educators remains separate, as McShane and Wilson (2017) explain, reflecting the nineteenth-century model of schooling that segregated school-based learning from other social processes (Campbell & Proctor, 2014). The use of schools for community purposes has been limited to programmatic strategies within education, while the space of schools in neighbourhood planning has been the domain of urban planners, with government guides and regulations focusing on siting and area size but not extending

beyond the school's boundaries (McDonald, 2010). This has resulted in spatial and institutional segregations that persist to date (Vincent, 2006).

In urban planning, this dualistic approach separates the school site from the community and the roles of planners from educators. It is inherent to the modern concept of the "functional" city, which favoured rigid zoning separations and a focus on mobility and automotive highways (Barnett, 2011). This approach moves away from the social narratives that inspired planning ideals with visions of schools as integrated social and community-building instruments. Critics of the modern functional city, such as Gehl (2011), Jacobs (1961), and Whyte (1980), argued against its ramifications on the social life of cities. They pointed out that models of isolated educational communities contribute to suburban sprawl, car dependency, greenhouse gas emissions (Tachieva, 2010), and negatively impact neighbourhood sociality and walkability (Hillier, 1996). In these opposing narratives, schools potentially represent opportunities for the "integration" rather than segregation of social life.

Jacobs (1961) supports urban integration and the resulting diversity and vitality, challenging the belief that the mere presence of key social infrastructure like schools automatically results in good neighbourhoods. She emphasizes informal street life as essential to good neighbourhoods, suggesting that schools, beyond centrality and walkability, should be integrated into the urban fabric. The New Urbanism movement of the late 1980s and 1990s, started in opposition to the deterioration of urban life due to inept planning practices (Grant, 2005), referenced concentrations of civic, institutional, and commercial infrastructure, including schools, in neighbourhoods and districts, enabling walkability (Larice & Macdonald, 2013). This mirrors Perry's initial ideas about the role of schools in urban planning. Glennie (2020), Dempsey et al. (2011), and Woodcraft et al. (2011) continue to frame the role of schools in urban planning, but contributions to move the debate forward are limited.

Evidence-based urban planning studies have contributed to this discourse. Choguill (2008) demonstrated the social benefits of planned neighbourhoods with central primary schools, and Borland (2020) analysed post-disaster initiatives in Tokyo, where parks next to schools rebuilt community confidence and social bond. While these studies add evidence, they lack focused attention on spatial and governance articulation. Zamanifard et al. (2018) explore South Bank Parklands, a case study in Brisbane, Australia. This research established that formal and informal actors in public spaces drive a complex process, and public space governance is influenced by the political economy, power structure, and history of the place. Multiple aspects, such as stakeholders, governance, and legislations, are associated with shared use of school environments (Zamanifard et al., 2018).

The concept of educational urbanism and the "learning city" by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning emphasizes improving inclusivity and equality through accessible education and views the city itself as a community-based learning space (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015, p. 3). However, this often limits collaboration to school boundaries and lacks urban planning integration.

In urban planning and design texts, limited attention is given to the practices of "fencing-off" schools, which reinforce the separation between schools and the local community (Brantlinger, 2018). This enclosure reflects a wider trend of corporatization and privatization. Various urban initiatives recognize schools as a pivotal institutional infrastructure at the core of neighbourhoods, but the integration of schools as shared

spaces within their community area has not been extensively explored. The historical disjoint between school planning and city planning suggests a missing institutional framework for multi-agency collaboration (Vincent, 2006). The "shared space" debate in urban planning offers insights into positioning school space for sustainable communities.

Duncan (2021), Yarker (2021), and Barr et al. (2021) evaluate the efficiency of shared space projects in fostering community, quality of life, and safety. The sharing narratives extend to various types of spaces and include agreements between entities for wider community access to facilities (ChangeLabSolutions, 2018). This reflects the popularity of multifunctionality and collaboration, but often lacks design strategies. Cleveland et al. (2023) adopted the view that schools and urban infrastructure, including buildings and landscaped outdoor areas, matter in the context of school–community relations. Likewise, Miles et al. (2023) proposed a network model to represent relationships between schools and community infrastructure, to have more efficient models of infrastructure provision for community use, especially in areas where demand for community services and infrastructure is high but resources are limited. A mixed-use of educational spaces presents new opportunities for rethinking the dense urban environments and for understanding schools as social infrastructure (Boys & Jeffery, 2023). This research argues for such a systemic approach to redefine schools as an integral part of local neighbourhoods, enhancing social life and community wellbeing.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methods

A systematic literature review was conducted to explore the concept of "shared school space" in terms of purpose, governance, planning, and design decisions using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) method (PRISMA, 2024). This approach ensured a transparent and replicable review process, building knowledge from existing work on a narrow topic and allowing for an evidence-informed review of policy and practice (Thomas & Harden, 2008)—see Figure 1. Round 1 involved defining a keyword string related to shared space terminology, which was tested in discipline-specific databases (see Table 1). The search was filtered to include scholarly articles only, initially resulting in only a small number of relevant studies. To improve the process, a Round 2 keyword string was compiled, adding the terms "joint use" and "shared use," generating a sufficient number of studies (Table 1). Filters were applied to narrow the search to abstracts and scholarly articles only. This process resulted in 218 studies appropriate for screening after removing the duplicates (Figure 1). Databases were selected based on previous systematic studies (Harzing & Satu, 2016; Martín-Martín et al., 2021) using ProQuest and Scopus, among others. While Google Scholar was noted for its high volume but low precision (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020), ProQuest and Scopus provided reliable results. Following this, a two-stage screening process was conducted. Titles and abstracts were initially screened for relevance, followed by a full-text assessment based on predefined criteria. Data extraction captured key information, and quality assessment was conducted using adapted CASP criteria (CASP UK, 2024). The search results are summarized in Table 1, showing 27 relevant publications included for detailed analysis.

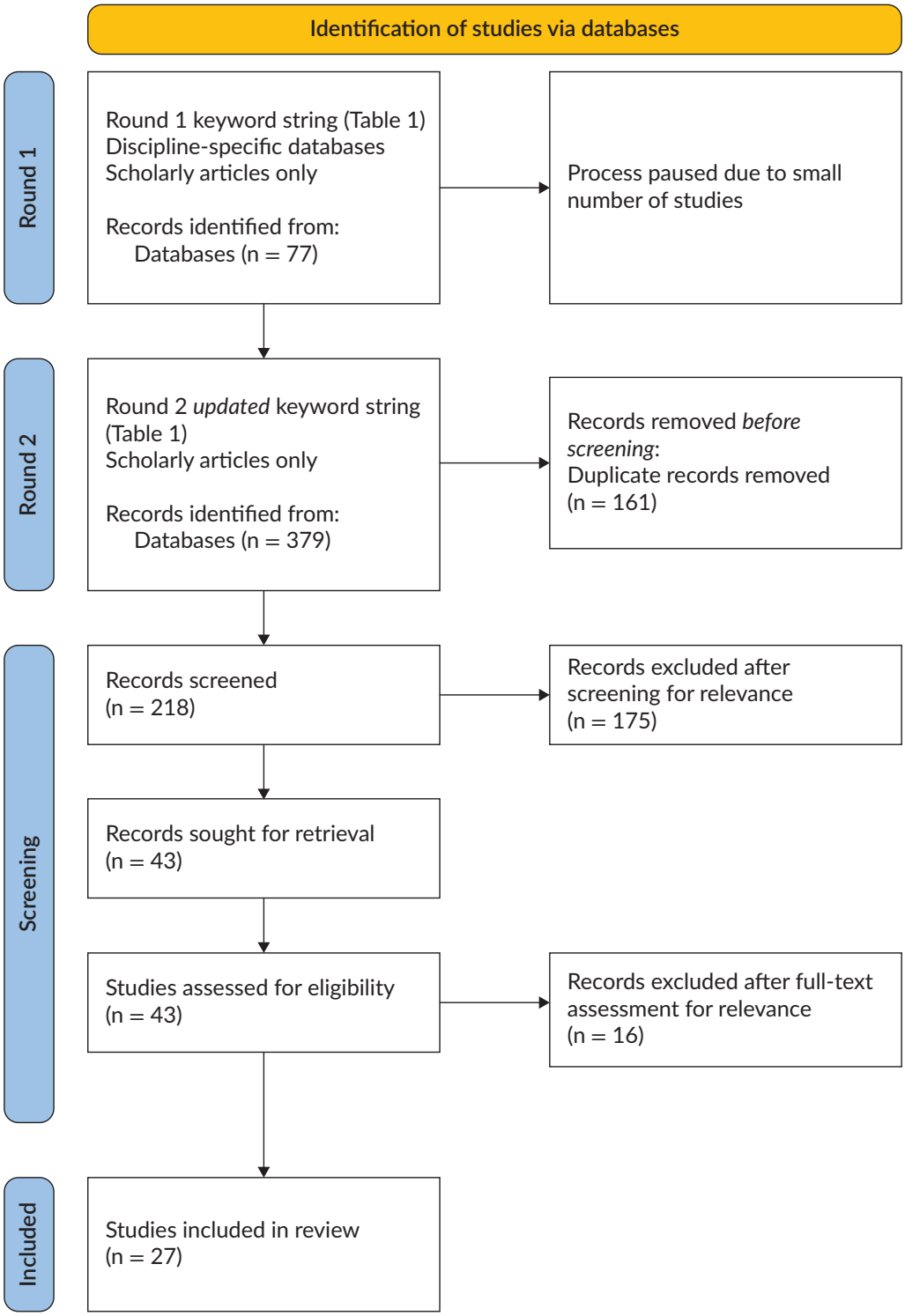

Figure 1. PRISMA diagram for systematic reviews. Source: Page et al. (2021).

Table 1. Description of keyword string and search results.

Keyword string	Filter	Databases	Results	Relevant
Round 1				
"share space*" OR "shared space*" OR "shared use*" OR "shared school space" AND "school* infrastructure" OR "school ground*" OR "school space*" OR "school design" OR "education* infrastructure" OR "education* space*"	Scholarly articles	ProQuest in Built Environment	33	2
		ProQuest in Education	10	1
		Taylor & Francis in Education	25	3
		Business Source Premier in Education	2	0
		Scopus in Social Sciences	7	3
Round 1 Total			**77**	**9**
Round 2				
abstract ("share* space*" OR "share* use*" OR "joint use") AND abstract ("school* infrastructure" OR "school* ground*" OR "school* space*" OR school* OR "education* space" OR "education* infrastructure")	Scholarly articles	ProQuest	220	21
		Scopus	134	17
		Taylor & Francis	9	2
		Business Source Complete	16	3
		Sage Journals	0	0
		Science Direct	0	0
Round 2 Total			**379**	**43**
Studies included in the review after screening and assessment for relevance (see Figure 1)				**27**

4. Results

Almost one-third of the publications (n = 9) discussed strategies for shared use of school spaces. Five publications focused on barriers associated with implementing shared school strategies. Another five publications investigated general characteristics of shared or joint use agreements to understand differences in approaches in relation to contextual and demographic characteristics. One of the publications generally discussed the costs and benefits associated with the initiative. Another publication presented a general review of school and municipality agreements. Three publications brought attention to the intersection between shared or joint use and urban planning matters. The discussions from the literature will be presented in more detail below. The discussion is organized in relation to definitions, areas of focus, benefits, barriers, and proposals for moving forward. Table 2 includes the publications used in the systematic review under different barrier themes identified and the key contributions of publications, which are further explained in this section.

4.1. Definitions and Purposes

In defining schools as shared spaces, the concept was frequently intertwined with other terminologies such as "shared use" or "joint use." Talmage et al. (2018) defined it as "a strategy implemented by schools and districts," for what Young et al. (2014, p. 1586) described as "opening school buildings and grounds during non-school hours for community use." All other studies agreed with the definition of shared school space to provide community access to school facilities. For instance, Jones and Wendel (2015) specify: "Joint use or shared use of public-school facilities provide community access to facilities for varied purposes." Within this context, it was evident that there is a distinct and defined purpose, timeframe, and arrangement that can differentiate

shared use or joint use from the earlier discourse on shared spaces. In Australia, the federal government's attention to sharing school infrastructure with local communities has a broader social purpose than health: to support community building. However, this is once again conceptually limited to "use." Therefore, despite the inclusion of terms such as "shared space" as a primary keyword, the studies identified through the search

Table 2. Barrier themes and key contributions identified through the systematic review of publications.

Barrier themes	List of references	Key contributions
Definitions and purposes	Burbage et al. (2014); DeFosset et al. (2016); Lau (2012); McShane (2012); Spengler et al. (2011); Vincent (2014); Young et al. (2014)	Shared school space as a strategy to provide community access. Shared spaces have a distinct and defined purpose. Benefits cover multiple domains of health, community cohesion, and others. American and Australian approaches differ.
Levels of success and contextual variances	Burbage et al. (2014); Jones and Wendel (2015); Kanters, Bocarro, Filardo, et al. (2014); Lafleur et al. (2013); Omura et al. (2017); Spengler et al. (2011); Yu et al. (2022)	Lower participation of schools in shared and joint use programs. School facilities are under-used by communities despite having access. Variances in access to school spaces in urban, inner city, fringe, and rural locations. Shared space and joint use programs in the United States focus on improved community health and recreational facilities.
Managerial, liability, and communication challenges	Chace and Vilvens (2015); Kanters, Bocarro, Moore, et al. (2014); Maddock et al. (2008); McShane (2012); Spengler et al. (2011); Spengler et al. (2014); Spengler et al. (2007); Talmage et al. (2018); Turner et al. (2018); Winig et al. (2015)	Maintenance and liability of shared spaces are significant barriers. The framing of managerial and legal considerations could be approached through a risk lens.
Program, participation, and engagement	Carlton et al. (2017); DeFosset et al. (2016); Howard et al. (2013); Talmage et al. (2018); Young et al. (2014)	Case-specific strategies are required to overcome the barriers. Community participation is important for community building and effective utilisation of these spaces. A participatory program planning, hard infrastructure, and an aligned planning process would be required for its success.
Governance	Lau (2012); McShane and Wilson (2017); Omura et al. (2017); Stasi et al. (2020); Vincent (2014)	Governance strategies differ for indoor and outdoor facilities of schools. Informal processes have managerial and liability issues compared to formal processes. Alternative ways of governing assets, such as multi-agency partnerships, are required.

do not define the topic from a perspective other than that of an established agreement for a purpose of use. Overall, there is limited attention paid to a conceptual framework in reassessing schools as "shared spaces."

Most studies focused on the health benefits purpose associated with schools' shared use agreements (e.g., Burbage et al., 2014; DeFosset et al., 2016; Lau, 2012; Vincent, 2014). This purpose is linked to the programs and initiatives of medical and health associations from which studies originate (Omura et al., 2017), even though it is recognized that benefits go beyond the health and wellbeing of children and young people, to also include community cohesion (Spengler et al., 2011). Young et al. (2014, p. 9) pointed out that the emergence of shared use agreements for public health purposes in America has been due to the acknowledgement of health issues among young people, the "great availability of schools in communities and their importance as a place for physical activity," and the government's recognition of the need to share such public infrastructure in challenging economic contexts and rising population numbers and demand. Somewhat differently in Australia, the earlier federal program Building the Educational Reform had broader economic and social purposes to the spending in school infrastructure for community building and identified the importance of enhancing investment value. The concept behind "shared school," as McShane (2012, p. 106) described, was to "recast civic engagement in educational terms, bringing children, families and community members within a project of learning and community building." While there is attention given to community building, there is limited reference to a broader "shared space" concept to improve spaces of conviviality and encounter, and spaces of shared meaning.

4.2. Levels of Success and Contextual Variances

A common thread observed across all the studies was the varying degrees of low participation of schools in shared or joint use programs, both at the national and state levels, along with limited adherence to the program's scope of work (Spengler et al., 2011). For instance, Yu et al. (2022) analysed the use of school recreational facilities (indoors and outdoors) between 2018 and 2019, based on a random selection of 19 public high schools in a non-specified district in the United States. By applying the System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities and seven different variables (accessible, usable, equipped, supervised, organised, lighted, empty), Yu et al. (2022) found that while facilities were accessible 53.4% of the time, they remained empty 91% of that time. Therefore, despite existing programs and relative accessibility, school campuses remain underused, especially for community physical activity.

There were also contextual variations. Omura et al. (2017) indicated that, in 2014 alone, 4 in 10 municipalities in the United States reported having a shared use agreement. Findings from their compilation and analysis of existing shared school space and use agreements revealed tendencies in the country, with a lower prevalence among municipalities with small populations, lower education levels, and located in the South. Jones and Wendel (2015) further indicated that most districts with a higher percentage of joint use agreements are in the urban fringe or larger city centres, while rural and remote areas, which often have lower resources, showed a more limited uptake of the initiatives. In North Carolina, Kanters, Bocarro, Filardo, et al. (2014) found that schools in low-income and Black communities were less likely to share their facilities. Contextual variations were also evident in studies conducted in California (Burbage et al., 2014; Lafleur et al., 2013). Therefore, while most joint use agreements have shared a common goal of enhancing community health by providing improved access to open spaces and recreational facilities, there are different levels of adherence and success in relation to contextual qualities which deserve further analysis.

4.3. Managerial, Liability, and Communication Challenges

The literature consistently inferred the main barriers and challenges to shared use or joint use of school facilities. These included concerns regarding liability, maintenance, vandalism, crime, scheduling conflicts, and the associated costs and operational aspects (Chace & Vilvens, 2015; Spengler et al., 2011, 2014, 2007; Talmage et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2018; Winig et al., 2015). Of those, maintenance and liability barriers were seen as the strongest barriers for schools to share their spaces with communities. The framing of managerial and legal considerations could be approached through a risk lens. Doing this brings focus to concerns on risks that students may face while sharing the school space. As such, Spengler et al. (2007) asserted that schools need to develop a strong understanding and awareness of legal considerations to deal with liability and managerial issues involved in shared use, achieved through a collaborative effort between research, legal assistance, and advocacy (Spengler et al., 2014). Chace and Vilvens (2015) showed most joint use programs still rely on informal agreements. Like the recommendation by Spengler et al. (2007), Chace and Vilvens (2015) also indicated that there needs to be a more centralised governmental strategy to define liability and managerial issues.

Considering the intended benefits and managerial barriers associated with the shared use of school facilities, Kanters, Bocarro, Moore, et al. (2014) published a cost-benefit analysis of 30 public middle schools in North Carolina, associated with a specific shared agreement program. The shared use was evaluated by the number of after-school programs and number of participants, measured against the costs of maintenance and management of the facilities. However, the costs did not differ between outdoor and indoor facilities. Nonetheless, the study indicated that there was no significant increase in the costs of operating the after-school programs, suggesting the potential for schools to be more open to such programs for the health benefits of local communities.

Differently, Maddock et al.'s (2008) study on the In-Motion program implemented in schools in Honolulu, Hawaii, revealed that while the initial pilot phase achieved short-term success, this did not follow through the continuance of the program. As indicated, the initial success was primarily attributed to effective stakeholder communication and program adaptation based on local community feedback, whereas sustained engagement relied heavily on word-of-mouth promotion. McShane (2012) also emphasised challenges with identified levels of engagement with the community and criticised that in the context of the Building the Educational Reform program in Australia, engagement was limited to "use" rather than involving adequate consultation processes, particularly considering that the wider purpose of the program was not only for health promotion, but for community building and improved use of public investment in schools as community infrastructure.

4.4. Program, Participation, and Engagement

Reflecting some of the mentioned barriers, several studies proposed specific strategies to overcome the barriers hindering the success of shared use agreements in schools. Some authors focused on programmatic strategies to improve the shared use of school facilities. Carlton et al. (2017) pointed to the need to include structured physical activity programs, while DeFosset et al. (2016) suggested the need for associated incentives for children and young people to use the facilities for physical activities. Turner et al. (2018) also suggested that active promotion of school shared spaces is needed to overcome barriers from community perceptions and lack of interest. These latter suggestions are focused on the purpose of using school

recreational and sports facilities to improve opportunities for health and wellbeing. However, McShane (2012) indicated that the focus on "use" to involve communities in local schools, particularly with the purpose of "community building," has limitations and higher levels of participation are required to embed programs and other strategies in community needs.

Some authors added that, beyond communication, shared school programs need to rely on appropriate participatory strategies. For instance, Young et al. (2014), Howard et al. (2013), and Talmage et al. (2018) considered broader community uses beyond physical activities for health and wellbeing. Warner and Zhang (2023) interpreted such a collaborative approach to shared school space as a more effective "power with" process than "power over" policies and budget control from authorities, also suggesting a participatory program planning process between different stakeholders, including families and seniors. Specifically, Young et al. (2014) added hard-infrastructure dimensions, claiming that, beyond managerial and liability arrangements and program planning, schools need to be designed in ways to facilitate the reality of shared use.

4.5. Governance

Within the studies on shared school spaces in this review, there was a limited review of governance strategies to enable shared school spaces or specifically shared use. The few studies approaching this topic discussed formalities of agreements, partnerships, and differences in levels of agency involvement.

The findings of Omura et al. (2017) revealed differences in strategies for indoor and outdoor facilities of schools. They identified that shared use agreements for indoor sports facilities tend to be governed by formal processes, whereas the joint use of outdoor recreational facilities is more commonly established through informal arrangements. However, informal processes are evidently more open to managerial and liability issues (Jones & Wendel, 2015; Omura et al., 2017).

Some studies considered the issue of governance from a parks and recreation services perspective (Lau, 2012; Stasi et al., 2020). Lau (2012) proposed that agencies should focus on alternative ways of providing such services to communities beyond the acquisition, ownership, and isolated management of usually large assets, by forming multi-agency partnerships. The joint use of school facilities was analysed as one of these alternatives. Lau (2012) further suggested the need for partnership and coordination to be formed in the early phase of planning. However, he recognized the challenges with negotiations and the ability of different parties to compromise in new arrangements. Stasi et al. (2020) examined the shared use of park facilities between schools, churches, and parks, and, in line with Lau (2012), suggested partnership and improved communication are vital in enabling the best use of park spaces by the community to improve public health.

From an urban planning perspective, Vincent (2014) identified three types of joint use agreements: basic joint use, joint development for joint use, and joint use partnership. These relate to basic community use of facilities, strategies to renovate schools for joint use, and formal relationships and policies for long-term joint use, respectively. The research validated the challenges with stakeholders reaching agreements. Vincent (2014) suggested that further research is needed to assess the impact of state policies on joint use, cost awareness, and a better understanding of the wider social benefits of joint use to local communities. McShane and Wilson (2017) further extended the debate to the specific context of urban schools and

indicated the alignment between urban and education policy challenges and priorities, although a disconnect between responsible institutions and governance.

5. Discussion

The systematic review reveals that the study of shared school space is under-researched in urban planning and design, with most relevant literature coming from medical and health sciences, focusing on youth health programs in the United States. It's suggested that future studies could broaden the scope by including concepts like "integrated design" rather than just shared space. Shared school space is primarily seen through shared or joint use agreements, but this has limited reach. It is not only about sharing but optimising the space. In this sense, there is a need to rethink the concept of shared school space and its use to position schools as part of social infrastructure and to enhance the multifunctionality of these shared spaces through integrated design approaches. A consistent theoretical framework is lacking in the literature to critically analyse shared school space, highlighting the need for a critical view of shared use, the role of schools as public facilities, and various identified issues like definitional, managerial, contextual, and fragmentation challenges.

5.1. Definitional Issues

"Shared use" in schools involves agreements between schools and third parties, setting specific rules and timeframes for space usage, differing from the broader "shared space" concept which aims to enhance public life and social encounters with fewer regulations. Shared use is about formal arrangements for facility use, whereas shared space in urban planning values spaces like streets, offices, or parks as assets for all. The current focus on shared use, primarily for health and wellbeing, overlooks the potential of schools as local urban infrastructure for broader community benefits, a concept suggested by Vincent (2006). This lack of planning perspective results in the absence of policies that reconceptualize school spaces for community use. The distinction between shared/joint use and shared space is crucial for framing urban planning initiatives. Policies inspired by the shared space concept could integrate schools into urban planning, considering spatial implications. The Share Our Space program by the NSW Department of Education could expand to include more spatial considerations in collaboration with other urban infrastructure departments. Future urban planning studies should apply a critical theoretical framework to explore shared school space beyond current practices, emphasizing the need to reconceptualize school spaces like playgrounds and green areas for greater community benefit.

5.2. Managerial Issues

The review underscores the importance of both formal and informal agreements for the community use of outdoor school spaces and recreational facilities after school hours. These agreements should cover aspects like injury prevention, legal coverage, and collaboration, essential for effective space sharing. Collaboration is key in defining and managing shared spaces, as noted by Warner and Zhang (2023), and is critical for the success of programs. The participatory process, emphasized in urban planning for building democratic communities and social sustainability (Choguill, 2008; Dempsey et al., 2011; Perry, 2013; Woodcraft et al., 2011), should be integrated into these discussions. Additionally, examining these concerns in the context of other public facilities is beneficial. If schools are designed with a shared space perspective from the start, issues like liability and maintenance can be more effectively addressed in the planning stages.

5.3. Purpose Issues

The literature review indicates that the primary motivation for shared use agreements between schools and organizations is the health benefits for local communities. However, recent studies reveal the multifaceted advantages of shared school spaces, positioning schools as vital components of the urban landscape. The accessibility of open spaces and recreational facilities in schools, due to their location and proximity, offers significant benefits to communities beyond health, including social inclusivity. These advantages stem from the inherent educational qualities of schools and their role as public facilities, not just from specific programs and organizations. This reimagining of school spaces calls for a multidisciplinary approach to planning, design, and management, aligning with city planning ideals that promote social cohesion in local residential areas, with schools acting as community hubs and meeting points.

5.4. Contextual Issues

School spaces, as micro-publics and key community nodes, have been underexplored in research, despite acknowledgments from theorists like Perry (2013) and Choguill (2008) about their significant role in neighbourhoods. This concept aligns with urban design movements like New Urbanism, suggesting schools as potential neighbourhood centrepieces due to their attributes conducive to community interaction and participatory activities. These ideas warrant further exploration within urban planning to understand the practical aspects of shared school spaces in neighbourhoods. This exploration is crucial for informing design decisions that position schools as vital community infrastructure and nodes within broader environmental, city, and state contexts.

5.5. Fragmentation Issues

The literature review reveals a scarcity of studies on shared school space, particularly from an urban planning and design perspective, with limited focus on schools beyond their educational roles. Three key considerations emerge: Firstly, more research and theoretical input from city planning is needed on the social role of public schools, considering their potential for fostering social inclusivity and social capital, in addition to health and wellbeing benefits. Secondly, the application of urban integration principles to schools warrants further exploration. This includes critically examining assumptions about the inherent social benefits of such infrastructure, as discussed by Gehl (2011) and Jacobs (1961), and reconceptualizing these spaces for enhanced shared use and benefits. And thirdly, a multidisciplinary planning approach, integrating educational and spatial disciplines, is essential to expand the function and purpose of schools beyond education. This holistic approach is vital for leveraging schools as shared spaces for community building and health benefits.

6. Conclusions: “Shared School Space” in City Planning and Community Shaping

Historically, schools have been some of the most underutilised assets in Australia, with many used sparingly outside of school hours or on weekends (Cleveland, 2016). This research supports the concept of shared school space in Australia and emphasizes the need to explore current approaches, challenges, and opportunities. It advocates for the “schools beyond schools” approach, positioning school spaces as crucial infrastructure for enhancing the sense of community within local neighbourhoods. The systematic review reveals limited

research from an urban planning and design perspective, identifying legal, managerial, and contextual barriers to shared school spaces. Yet, it underscores the importance of integrating schools into the broader urban fabric as focal points for sustainable community development.

School spaces, given their location, distribution, and proximity to communities, are integral to city and community shaping. Schools should be central to green space planning, reconceptualizing them as community-shared spaces. Economic, environmental, and social factors should be considered in advocating for schools as shared community resources. Leadership and evaluation are crucial to determine what types of facilities should be built on school sites to support the education, health, and wellbeing of young people and the wider community (Cleveland, 2023). Leadership would also be crucial to challenge (and enhance) current planning approaches to realise the benefits of shared school infrastructure which would extend beyond students to the entire community. Such leadership would necessitate an interdisciplinary approach to embed schools into the social infrastructure of urban planning. As cities face development pressures and population growth, rethinking the use of public infrastructure, including school spaces, becomes imperative for community benefit. This shift in urban planning calls for a new understanding of schools as community hubs, not just educational spaces. This is an emerging concept, and integrating its links to urban and community planning would be beneficial. It could take time to become an established practice in Australia, especially considering the multiplexity to embed schools as community hubs.

Future research should explore the concerns of parents and educators about student safety, public access to schools, and how participatory design with school staff and educators for shared use could be included in existing schools and at the design stage of new schools. Research should investigate specific school design and planning considerations for student access and safety and how governance issues associated with maintaining school environments could be shared with the public. It would be important for government educational authorities and schools to develop an in-depth understanding of infrastructural, spatial, and sociological differences between primary and secondary schools and location-based inner-urban, suburban, and rural schools where variations in densities and urban morphologies shape the availability of school open spaces. Schools incorporating nature through pedagogy further promote community involvement through stewardship activities that address provisioning, supporting, and cultural ecosystem services which further promote social cohesion (Hron, 2023).

These cumulative benefits highlight the growing importance of the shared space agenda in optimizing resources and public welfare. It identifies gaps in both school infrastructure and city planning, advocating for a broader discourse beyond shared or joint use. This perspective, as McShane and Wilson (2017) observed in Victoria, should move beyond functional relationships within school grounds to integrate schools within urban planning. A collaborative approach between education and planning disciplines, spearheaded by local government urban planners, can reframe the debate and enhance the potential of schools to contribute to resilient urban futures.

Acknowledgments

We thank the NSW Department of Education for providing data and funding this research project.

Funding

This project was funded by the NSW Department of Education.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8022
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8022

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Open Access Journal

Social-Ecological Urbanism as a Research Perspective to Analyse Transportation Inequalities in the Region of Łódź, Poland

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Submitted: 28 December 2023 **Accepted:** 20 August 2024 **Published:** 9 October 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

The systems perspective enables the understanding of complex transformations which take place in urban regions. Social-ecological urbanism is an analytical methodology that integrates the systems perspective and unpacks relationships between the social-ecological and socio-technical subsystems of urban regions. In this article, we look for the most suitable approach to analysing the transformations of a tramway system and its impacts on public transportation inequalities in the metropolitan region of Łódź, Poland. As a departure point, we use the classic methods of communicative planning theory. The presented method uses a detailed case study analysis that carefully follows all the activities, stakeholders, and processes. We complement this approach by looking at the ongoing transformations of transportation equity through the lens of socio-ecological urbanism and by analysing the stakeholders' roles and attitudes within the process. Our analysis indicates the role of public participation in the process, which affected and strengthened the transformations. This approach is greatly enhanced by the application of the social-ecological urbanism framework, with its analysis of services performed by various system components. Understanding their specific roles helps in planning future redevelopment. Our key finding is the necessity of combining communicative planning methods with strategic planning of the systems transformation process.

Keywords

communicative planning; mobility; public transport; regional development; social-ecological urbanism; transportation equity

1. Introduction

Equal access to transportation opportunities is one of the conditions for well-functioning cities and regions. The commonly accepted solution is the provision of public transportation to densely populated urban centres (European Commission, 2020). However, the dispersal of development due to urban sprawl creates a situation where formerly functioning public transportation networks lack sufficient passengers to sustain operations. This, in turn, can lead to transportation inequalities.

This article investigates the potential of studying the transformation process through a case study of the changing tramway system in the metropolitan region of Łódź, Poland. The system faced the challenge of tram operation stoppages and has been recovering thanks to the involvement of local citizens. The citizens' reactions prevented potential inequality problems. Our study provides insights into the process organisation and the role the systems play as services for their users, which might be useful for future change management and allows us to evaluate the analytical methods.

The study of urban transformations has attracted significant attention from the scientific community, particularly as a theoretical framework to address the demands of climate change (Keith et al., 2023; Torrens et al., 2021; Wolfram, 2016). The systems perspective has enabled the incorporation of social studies theory into the discourse on natural and urban systems adaptation. This perspective recognises cities and regional development as complex adaptive systems, in which humans play a pivotal role. The systems perspective is gradually becoming a mainstream theoretical approach (Alberti, 2008; Keith et al., 2023). For example, Nobel-winning research by Ostrom (1990) showed that social and ecological systems benefit from management practices by many stakeholders, known as adaptive co-management. This study uses the theoretical apparatus of social-ecological urbanism, which is one of the analytical methodologies integrating a systems perspective (Barthel et al., 2013; Berghauser Pont et al., 2022).

In our research, we examine how co-adaptive management and monitoring by local stakeholders translates into the care for transportation equity. Using the case study methodology (Duminy et al., 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2006) and established methods to study the political mechanisms behind the transitions, i.e., communicative planning theory (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997), we analyse and provide a thorough description of the transformation process. First, we identify the primary stakeholders and their contributions to the process. Then, we look at the services provided by the public transportation system. After examining the data, we compare them with reference case studies and put forward recommendations for improving the transportation system and point to potential paths for future research.

2. Background Research

Public transportation systems play a vital role in the intricate network of complex adaptive systems found in cities (Barthel et al., 2013; Estévez-Mauriz et al., 2017; Olsson et al., 2014; Torrens et al., 2021). The failure to consider transformation processes in urban systems can make them vulnerable, leading to disruptions and a lack of services for citizens (Keith et al., 2023). Accommodating disturbances improves the resilience of urban systems and, in the long run, improves service quality (Estévez-Mauriz et al., 2017; Folke, 2006; Folke et al., 2005). In the case of public transportation systems, this translates into more reliable and stable connections.

Barthel et al. (2013) introduced the concept of social-ecological urbanism as an analytical methodology integrating the systems perspective. Social-ecological urbanism focuses on relationships between various subsystems of cities and regions, both urban (social, spatial, infrastructural, and technological) and ecological (Barthel et al., 2013, pp. 27–29). Relations between the local community and transportation infrastructure are the consequence of services offered by the infrastructure, and, as our study shows, the local community becomes responsible for infrastructure maintenance. Ostrom (1990) argued that self-organisation entails enhanced monitoring and responsibility. Moreover, Ostrom's research indicates that implementing multi-stakeholder management practices, also referred to as adaptive co-management, holds great promise for positively affecting social and ecological systems, providing direction for the future of urban planning.

Applying the systems approach draws attention to the fact that cities and urban regions are not static, and that adaptation requires feedback loops and constant adjustment to changing conditions. In the process of adaptive co-management, a pivotal role belongs to groups and individuals, whose attitudes and behaviours toward the environment—both natural and human-made—directly affect changes (Barthel et al., 2013; Berghauser Pont et al., 2022). Therefore, to understand a problem, we need to acknowledge complex social relations. This requires a multilevel, flexible, and context-specific approach that reflects different life experiences and their influences on decision-making (Barthel et al., 2013; Berghauser Pont et al., 2022). In this approach, the transformation process, the main stakeholders, and the roles of the stakeholders become the key research focus.

After Barthel et al. (2013), we argue that public transport is one of the urban subsystems that strongly affect urban growth at a regional level. To limit the impact of suburban urbanisation on natural areas, the nodes of the public transportation system can function as the nodes for compact urban development (Calthorpe, 2011). Transportation equity emerges as a critical component and service for evaluating the integration of transportation systems in society. Public transport provides access to education, employment, services, and leisure. Promoting traffic safety and providing equal access to transportation is necessary to achieve equitable mobility solutions. Researchers classify transportation inequalities into two main categories: social and spatial (Lee et al., 2017). The first category refers to socio-demographic factors, such as gender, age, income level, or ethnicity. Vulnerable groups usually cannot afford individual vehicles. Therefore, their access to necessities is limited. Providing alternative mobility modes could help to solve this exclusion problem (Lee et al., 2017; Turrell et al., 2013; Zander et al., 2014).

Spatial equity refers to unequal access to diverse transportation modes (Lee et al., 2017). Development densities are critical factors for spatial equity. This is particularly relevant in suburban estates, where individual cars are often the only mode of transportation (Faskunger, 2013). Spatial equity also pertains to the environmental constraints on access to transportation. The key to successful policymaking lies in understanding the local spatial variables that affect mobility levels (Feuillet et al., 2015). In the most common situation, the combination of spatial and social inequity can be examined through a panarchy of scales, from regional to local. For example, one of the main constraints on people with disabilities using public transportation is the lack of accessibility of bus, tramway, or train stops, which may be due to a lack of lines, but also to the form of the physical environment (lack or poor quality of sidewalks), to the type of rolling stock, or to lack of proper transport information. Enhancing the accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities makes it available to everybody. It increases the ability and capacity of everyone to travel, not only marginalised groups (Haveman et al., 2013).

Factors that affect decisions in the field of transportation include fuel consumption, air pollution, and demand satisfaction. However, it is usually economic issues, such as transport cost and efficiency, that tend to dominate, while social and environmental elements are ignored (Cristiano & Gonella, 2019). Moreover, transforming infrastructure requires examining the spatial outcomes and their potential effects on social inequalities and user satisfaction (Lee et al., 2017). To address social issues and foster social cohesion, mobility policies must prioritise the well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalised sectors of society: the elderly, people with disabilities, children, and disadvantaged communities (Faskunger, 2013; Ravensbergen et al., 2022). Failing to address transportation underinvestment can lead to social equity issues and citizen protests. On the other hand, understanding local stewardship of transportation networks by analysing their services might enhance the design of future strategic transformation tools. Our efforts to analyse the selected case study of the transportation network on the regional scale of the Łódź metropolitan region contribute to current efforts to evaluate and further develop the methods of social-ecological urbanism.

3. Methodology

Our research applied the case study methodology, with an in-depth analysis of a single case and, as a reference, comparison with some elements of external case studies. The research flow is presented in Figure 1. We start with a quantitative evaluation of transportation spatial equity (step 1). This is followed by a detailed analysis of the political process behind the transformations (step 2). Next, we look at users groups and services provided by the transportation networks (step 3). We complete our study with a services comparison matrix, including reference case studies (step 4).

As background to the research, we performed a quantitative analysis to show the importance of the tramway network in the region for spatial equity. We calculated the extent of the urbanised land served by the tramway network. We used the data from the database of topographic objects. We calculated the gross building area value for all buildings. We based our calculations on the official estimates of the average number of persons per

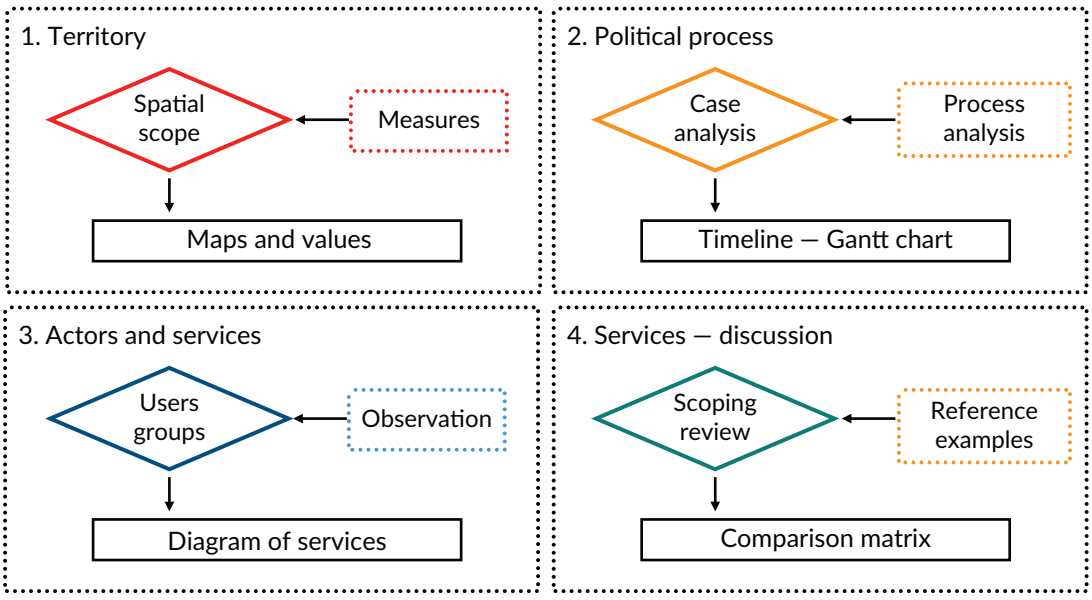

Figure 1. The research methodology.

household in the Łódź Voivodeship (2.24 persons) and the average usable area of flats in the Łódź Voivodeship (71.8 m^2). Next, we divided the gross building area by the average usable area of a flat and multiplied that number by the average number of persons per household. Subsequently, we examined the accessibility of tram (and train) stops. We set a buffer 500 m from tram stops and 1000 m from train stops. Finally, we calculated the approximate number of residents living in the buildings located in the designated zones.

Following the methodology proposed by Forester (1999), among others, we performed a detailed analysis of all the activities that occurred in the process of transforming public transport accessibility in the last two decades. The choice of the case study method stems from the fact that it enables an in-depth understanding of ongoing processes in their specific context (Duminy et al., 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Social processes are suitable for this type of analysis, contrary to the application of predictive theories and universal rules that often need to be revised for their characteristics (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The advantage of the case study method is its focus on the actual course of events and their background. The case study method is often used by practitioners who apply it to grasp a holistic picture of complex urban processes and relations (Duminy et al., 2014). The current case study exemplifies a unique category of local citizen stewardship to maintain transportation services and prevent spatial inequities. Therefore, it deserves a detailed analysis.

The research questions for the case study relate to transportation equity and its analysis through the lens of social-ecological urbanism. We aim to unpack the process in order to learn:

RQ1: Who are the actors involved in the transformation process, and what are their motivations?

RQ2: Which services are delivered by current transportation systems?

RQ3: How can future transformations be shifted into more resilient pathways?

Media and communication play a vital role in connecting with the general public. In our analysis, we pay special attention to the communication processes accompanying the studied transformation (Healey, 1997). Press articles and media coverage strongly affected the course of events and made steps towards the restitution of the tram lines possible. Therefore, we trace these processes in detail. As a source, we used a collection of press articles dating from September 2013 to December 2023, published on the platform www.transport-publiczny.pl (Supplementary File). We structured the course of action using two criteria: (a) milestones and spatial extent and (b) critical stakeholder contributions.

Following Barthel et al. (2013), we also examined the services and the stakeholder groups who use these services. This way, we learned about the origins of local actors' infrastructure stewardship and identified the structure of local groups most endangered by transport deprivation. We compared the services to other case studies of transportation networks which discuss equity versus the implementation of tramway or light railway infrastructure.

4. Case Study

We apply the social-ecological urbanism framework (Barthel et al., 2013) to analyse the transformations of public transportation networks on a regional scale. The spatial scope of the research covers Łódź and the surrounding municipalities connected by tramlines (Figure 2):

- From the south: Ksawerów and Pabianice (line 41);
- From the west: Konstantynów Łódzki and Lutomiersk (line 43);
- From the north: Zgierz, Rural Municipality of Zgierz (RMoZ), and Ozorków (lines 45 and 46).

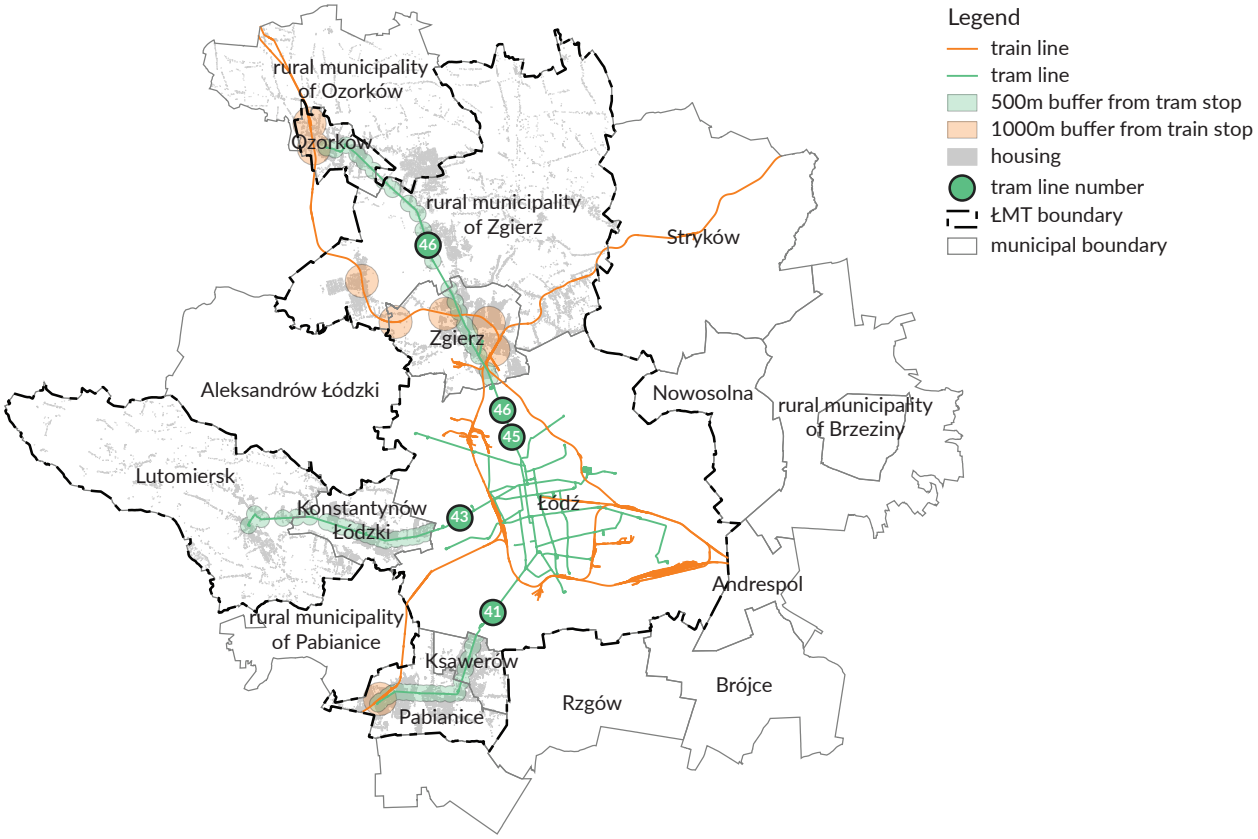

Figure 2. Spatial extent of the case study area, showing buffer zones used to calculate the number of inhabitants directly served by public transportation. The results are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of inhabitants served by trams and trains in the studied municipalities.

Municipality	Inhabitants	Inhabitants in buffer			
		Tram stop		Train stop	
		Number	% of all	Number	% of all
Zgierz	54,012	13,932	25.79%	27,677	51%
RMoZ	16,112	1,074	6.67%	1,847	11%
Ozorków	18,259	9,728	53.28%	5,797	32%
Konstantynów Łódzki	19,161	8,867	46.28%	–	–
Lutomiersk	9,386	1,323	14.10%	–	–
Ksawerów	7,652	2,108	27.55%	–	–
Pabianice	61,353	29,108	47.44%	13,162	21%
Total	185,935	66,140	35.57%	48,483	26%

Łódź and its neighbouring towns developed as textile industry centres at the beginning of the 19th century. Due to the collapse of textile production, the region has experienced significant depopulation and degrowth during recent decades. The Łódź metropolitan tramway system underwent a major disruption during the last 20 years. The lines were closed and reopened due to widespread public complaints. This was part of a larger process. Transportation management emerged as a pressing issue when Poland moved to a market economy in the second half of the 20th century. Problems related to the lack of adequately defined ownership and responsibilities resulted in the progressive decapitalisation and, often, closure of public transport networks. Since the availability of transportation infrastructure affects accessibility, spatial equity has become a significant challenge.

5. Results: Transformation Process

Public transportation in the Łódź region is provided by railway and tram systems complemented by a number of bus networks, some of them private. On a regional scale, the role of the railroad has increased in recent years due to the development of Łódź Metropolitan Railway. However, the number of railway stops is limited, and, owing to their original usage for freight, they are distant from the surrounding development. These conditions reduce the significance of rail on a local scale.

5.1. Tramway Transformations: Process Timeline

Trams have provided transportation in the Łódź metropolitan area for over a century. The first lines to Pabianice and Zgierz opened in 1901. This made Łódź the only region in Poland with a suburban tramway network. The network ran from Łódź in almost all directions, except east (Andrespol and Brzeziny). In the 1990s, two lines were liquidated: westward to Aleksandrów Łódzki (in 1991) and southward to Rzgów (in 1993). In 1993, the involved communities began a limited liability company to manage the infrastructure of the four remaining lines. Basic data on the characteristics of the tramway network are presented in Table 2, including the track length, tram frequency, and travel time to the centre of Łódź.

The lines were never extensively upgraded or renovated. The only interventions were roadway reconstructions and repairs to maintain passibility. The need for systemic maintenance is the greatest challenge for regional tramways. Due to their small budgets, suburban municipalities responsible for renovating and modernising the infrastructure cannot perform upgrades independently. Traffic sustenance also remains a challenge. At the same time, citizens perceive trams to be an essential transportation solution, providing access to basic services.

5.1.1. Phase 1: Łódź Metropolitan Tram Project

Following the method explained in Section 3, a timeline of activities that took place during the transformation of the tramway regional network is presented in Figure 3. In October 2014 [1], Łódź and the neighbouring municipalities (Konstantynów Łódzki, Ksawerów, Lutomiersk, Ozorków, Pabianice, and Zgierz) agreed on a project for building the Łódź Metropolitan Tramway. The investment continued the Łódź Regional Tram Zgierz–Łódź–Pabianice project realised in 2007–2008. The objective was a comprehensive modernisation of the suburban tram lines: renovating the infrastructure, including tracks and catenary network, installing a traffic control and passenger information system, procuring new low-floor rolling stock, and constructing integrated stops, transfer hubs, and depots. However, the challenges of inter-communal

Table 2. Characteristics of the tramway network in the Łódź region.

Municipality	Distance to Łódź centre (km)	Track length (km)	Tram line	Opening year	2001		2012–2018		2024		Type of tracks
					Frequency (min)	Time to Łódź centre (min)	Frequency (min)	Time to Łódź centre (min)	Frequency (min)	Time to Łódź centre (min)	
Zgierz	10.0	3.0	45	1901	10–20	30	24	43	20	30	double
		6.4				43		57			
RCoZ	17.1	12.6	46	1922	16–32	59	24	83	—	—	single
Ozorków	24.3	10.6				69		95			
Konstantynów Łódzki	9.4	11.6	43	1910	30	38	22–80	50	—	—	single
Lutomiersk	16.9	7.7	43	1929	60	55	60–90	81	—	—	single
Ksawerów	10.4	3.4	41	1901	20	35	20–49	25*	24	21*	double
Pabianice	13.7	7.7	41			60		47*		41*	double

Note: * last stop not in the centre of Łódź.

agreements and design delays postponed the implementation of the project, which was initially planned for 2018–2020. The main problems included obtaining a sufficient grant, over-scaling, and the coordination of activities. The communities at first declared their participation in co-financing [2,3] but later abandoned it altogether [4]. In the end, only the Łódź section was renovated. The planned extensions to Pabianice, Zgierz, and Ozorków were never implemented.

In early 2017 [6], Łódź authorities proposed to abandon the modernisation of the tram lines and replace them with electric buses on dedicated lanes. The authorities argued that this solution was faster and cheaper to implement. Moreover, it could be financed by the EU. All the stakeholders were against this proposal, including the municipalities, the political opposition, and local NGOs. The authorities of neighbouring municipalities pointed out the lack of cost estimates, issues with the designated bus lanes (spatial and legal), and insufficient development of Electric Vehicle technology. Protesters also pointed to the experience of Western Europe, where, after their removal in the 70s and 80s, tram lines are currently being reconstructed. Due to the opposition, the concept of electric buses was abandoned.

5.1.2. Phase 2: Separate Actions

In the years that followed, the activities of all involved municipalities were conducted separately.

5.1.2.1. Line 41: Route Through Ksawerów to Pabianice

The tram line to Pabianice was launched in 1901 and extended in 1905, 1924, and 1968. In 2011, thanks to the extended route, increased frequency, and the addition of carriages, the number of passengers increased by 67% compared to before the extension. The route was used by about 9,000 passengers daily and about 2.6 million annually ("Pabianice: Tramwaj coraz popularniejszy," 2013).

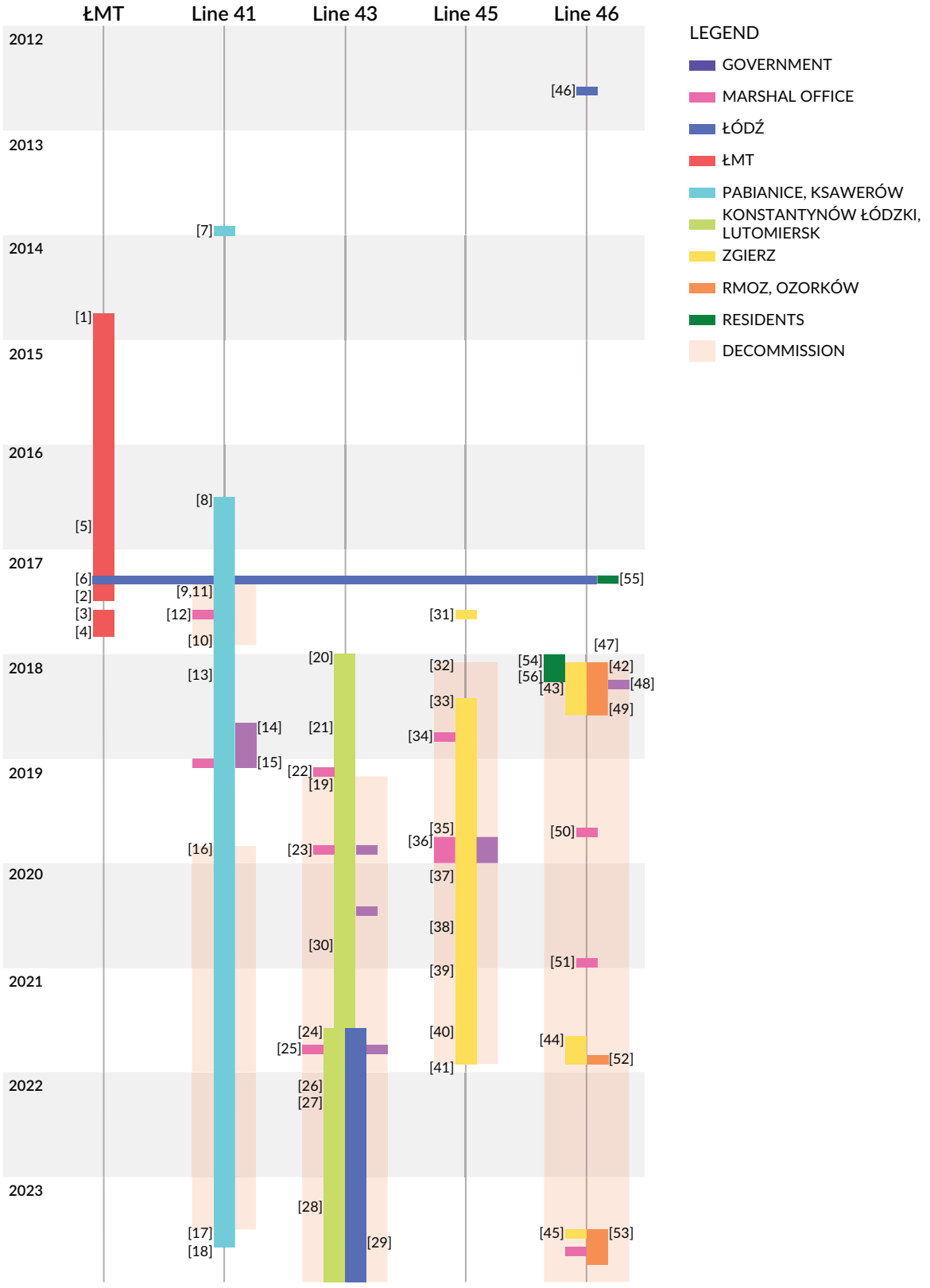

Figure 3. Gantt chart timeline of all the activities during the transformation of the tramway regional network. Major events and milestones are numbered in brackets and referred to in the text. Note: ŁMT stands for Łódź Metropolitan Tram.

The Pabianice authorities declared they would invest in tramline 41 in 2013 [7]. In 2016, they began preparations [8]. In 2017 [9, 10], an emergency stoppage of tram traffic occurred, ended by an ad hoc repair. This incident highlighted the importance of the tramway for commuters. In 2017 [11], Pabianice and Ksawerów applied for Regional Operational Program (ROP) funds to finance infrastructure modernisation, construction of tram and bus stops, separation of tram and bus lanes in the centre of Pabianice, an intelligent transport system, and bicycle infrastructure. The project received a high score for integrating various modes of transport, including trams, buses, and bicycles. The ROP funding covered over half of the required sum [12]. Implementation became a challenge for the small municipality of Ksawerów, since its contribution to the project amounted to one-fourth of its budget. The actual costs of the line 41 reconstruction significantly exceeded the planned budget [13]. The government provided local municipalities with additional funds [14, 15]. The municipalities of Pabianice and Ksawerów had to cover the remaining costs. Due to the modernisation works, tram traffic on line 41 stopped in 2019 [16], only to resume in 2023 [17, 18], after nearly four years. The current frequency during weekdays is 24 minutes. Over half of services are run by low-floor rolling stock. In addition, Pabianice launched a new bus line connecting the city's largest housing estate to the tram [18].

5.1.2.2. Line 43: Route to Konstantynów Łódzki and Lutomiersk

The tramline from Łódź to Konstantynów Łódzki was opened in 1910 and extended to Lutomiersk in 1929. The route to Lutomiersk was also a tourist attraction, because it ran through scenic landscapes. In the early 2000s, tram carriages covered the distance in about 60 minutes. In 2017, due to speed restrictions introduced in response to the poor state of the infrastructure, the trip took about 80 minutes. In 2019 [19], tram traffic was stopped entirely.

The lack of progress on the Łódź Metropolitan Tram project led to Konstantynów Łódzki and Lutomiersk launching their own initiatives. In 2018 [20], Konstantynów decided to modernise a large share of the catenary and the trackbed, as well as to add a traffic control system and bus shelters. The Łódź Marshal Office provided funding [21, 22, 23]. Additional funds came from the government. To reduce investment costs, in 2021 [24], Konstantynów entered an intercommunal agreement with Łódź on the joint implementation of modernisation. In addition to the refurbishment of tracks and networks, the project included stops adapted to the needs of disabled people. At the end of 2021 [25], the investment received co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund and the state budget. The municipalities completed the formal preparations in early 2022 [26,27]. Renovation of the tracks in Konstantynów Łódzki was completed in 2023. Due to delays [28,29], the project in Łódź was finished in the first half of 2024, and the tram to Konstantynów resumed services in July 2024.

In 2016 [5], legal, organisational, and economic problems forced the Lutomiersk authorities to turn to the Łódź Marshal Office for assistance. The provincial authorities granted permission to the municipalities to apply for funds. In 2020, Lutomiersk announced it would apply for funding [33]. However, the lack of support from Konstantynów caused the municipality to drop out.

5.1.2.3. Line 45: Route to Zgierz

The tram line to Zgierz (3 km, double-line tracks) was launched in 1901, as one of the first two lines in the agglomeration. Since then, the infrastructure has only had minor repairs. In 2017 [31], Zgierz authorities

applied for funding to reconstruct part of the railway track (1.9 km) shared by lines 45 and 46, as well as to build stops, bicycle infrastructure, and parking for bicycles and cars. In February 2018 [32], when lines 45 and 46 were halted, the municipality announced the replacement of tracks on the most worn-out shared section. Before the local elections, NGOs and politicians mobilised the authorities of Zgierz, the RCoZ, and the Ozorków municipality to take action in an open letter. In 2018 [33, 34], Zgierz successfully applied for ROP 2014–2020 funds to finance the modernisation. Since all bids exceeded the intended budget, the government and the Łódź Marshal Office promised to provide the missing funds before the parliamentary elections in 2019 [35, 36, 37]. Repairing the entire section of line 45 was necessary to resume tram traffic. In 2020 [38], Zgierz signed a contract to modernise the section of the line from the fork to the tram terminal. In 2021 [39, 40], Zgierz successfully re-applied for ROP 2014–2020 funds. Finally, tram traffic to Zgierz resumed in December 2021 [41], which increased the popularity of public transport on the Zgierz–Łódź route. The current frequency of trams during weekdays is every 15 minutes. In 2023, low-floor rolling stock was introduced on the line (Figure 4).

Tram line 46 ceased operating in 2018 [42]. The resulting difficulties in transport services to the northern part of Zgierz provoked protests by residents. In response, the authorities launched a bus line [43]. Because modernisation of line 46 remained uncertain, the Zgierz municipality considered renovating part of the infrastructure, either by purchasing two-way rolling stock or constructing a tramway loop. In 2021 [44], Zgierz authorities announced they would seek EU funding to modernise a section of line 46 within the city.

5.1.2.4. Line 46: Route to Ozorków

The tram line to Ozorków operated for 90 years, beginning in 1922. In 2012 [47], the carrier MPK-Łódź announced the liquidation of the line. The maintenance of line 46 caused problems because long route

Figure 4. Example of a low-deck 45 tram in Zgierz.

sections (8 km) ran through the Rural Municipality of Zgierz, which has a low population density. Ozorków managed less than 5 km of the route. Between 2003 and 2013, the travel time in the non-urban section increased by almost 20%, from 49 minutes in 2000 (from the border of Łódź) to 63–70 minutes in 2017. After further speed restrictions were imposed in December 2017 [48], the journey from the border of Łódź extended to 90 minutes (115 minutes from the centre of Łódź).

In 2018 [49], the authorities of the RCoZ, Zgierz, and Ozorków secured funds from the state budget. However, they could not agree on the legal formula for the renovations [50]. The Łódź Regional Assembly passed the 2021 budget [51, 52], which included funds for tram line 46. At the end of 2021 [53], Ozorków, the RCoZ, and Zgierz announced they would apply jointly for EU funding, with no results as of 2023. In 2023 [54], Ozorków demolished the tramway loop because of ownership issues. The tram route remains, and the road renovation project leaves a reserve for the tramway.

5.1.3. Community Involvement

NGOs have been reporting on the need for infrastructure improvements since 1998. Throughout the entire process, they have published statements in local media. They have also coordinated multiple demonstrations and gatherings to rally the public and local leaders to take action. The Association for the Defence of Suburban Tram Transportation in the Łódź Region (SOPKTRŁ) argued that the lack of maintenance and the resulting decline in quality was a deliberate policy to dampen demand. They also argued that decommissioning the tram would mean higher travel costs. Similarly, the Civil Affairs Institute and the citizens' movement Łódź is Ours highlighted the many years of neglecting infrastructure maintenance, claiming that traffic stoppages could have been prevented if repairs had been carried out regularly. At the beginning of 2018 [54], SOPKTRŁ, the Pro Kolej Foundation, and the Civil Affairs Institute appealed to the municipalities to take action. They recalled that, since 2012, MPK-Łódź has regularly reported on the poor condition of the infrastructure. They sent petitions to all local authorities along tram lines 45 and 46. SOPKTRŁ was the main organizer of protests against liquidation of the suburban trams, e.g., [55, 56]. One of their proposals was to involve a private entity, which would renovate and run services on the line. However, this would mean the privatisation of public transport. The tram issue also became a topic in the 2018 local government election campaign in Ozorków.

5.1.4. Other Measures: Replacement Communication

During the shutdown of tram lines, Łódź has provided substitute bus transport. The bus rides typically take longer than tram rides, even though the trams had speed limits imposed due to the poor technical condition of the infrastructure. Delays of up to an hour are common on the bus route to Ozorków, due to heavy traffic jams especially during rush hours. The tramway had the advantage of running on a separate track. In some cases, however, the introduction of substitute transportation is perceived positively by passengers. For example, on the route to Lutomiersk, the bus covers the route much faster than the tram. The replacement buses often use shorter routes, forcing passengers to change itineraries. Travel comfort declined, due to the lower capacities of buses. Some vehicles lack a ticket machine, which presents problems for some passengers, especially in rural areas. Moreover, not all temporary bus stops are adequately paved; some are located at pedestrian crossings or bicycle paths.

5.2. Process Analyses: Spatial Transformations and Access to Transportation Modes

So far, our case study analysis has focused on the roles, attitudes, and behaviours of political stakeholders. This approach follows the recommendations for case study research (Duminy et al., 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Forester, 1999). From the perspective of social-ecological urbanism, we examined stakeholders' attitudes at multiple levels (Folke et al., 2005). We now focus on spatial segregation, because the first step in tackling mobility inequalities is to promote equal travel access for all (Haveman et al., 2013).

In the initial phase of the process, the Łódź Metropolitan Tram project, with the cooperation of municipalities under an inter-municipal agreement, offered a promising solution to the issue of degraded infrastructure and possible shutdowns of tram services. However, this joint initiative failed. The failure was due to several external factors, including lack of support from higher-level authorities (the Łódź Marshal Office and the government) and unfavourable legislative conditions (no metropolitan law). Internal factors included varying degrees of involvement and motivation on the part of municipalities, the unfair distribution of costs (long stretches of tramway routes run through poorer municipalities with smaller populations), and lack of coordination. Due to the lack of progress, there were increasing speed restrictions and suspensions of trams. These internal and external factors encouraged or forced some local authorities to seek solutions independently.

Actions to restore the trams were initiated by the largest and wealthiest local authorities (Pabianice, Zgierz, Konstantynów Łódzki), involving smaller municipalities (Ksawerów) only when they were necessary for the success of the entire investment. Poorer local governments (Lutomiersk, the Rural Municipality of Zgierz) were left without support, and with disproportionately large outlays to renovate the infrastructure relative to their populations and budgets. Smaller rural communes often have no alternative means of public transport, which can lead to exclusion of vulnerable groups of inhabitants. The lack of renovation of infrastructure by the smaller communities (RCoZ) also affected the ability of larger administrative units (Ozorków) to provide tramway transportation. These interdependencies, which result from the spatial relationships of municipalities, are presented in the schematic maps shown in Figure 5.

5.3. Process Analyses: Communication

Analysing the process from the point of view of ongoing communication (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997) also brings valuable insights. The involvement of local NGOs should be emphasized, since they played an essential role in the process, putting pressure on local governments to take action. NGOs arranged protests, collected signatures for petitions, and drew attention to the social costs of lowering the quality of public transport and halting tram traffic. However, at no stage were they formally involved in the process. The lack of public consultation should be highlighted. The process should have included instances of active public involvement. Instead, the residents were treated as passive customers.

The protests by NGOs and residents together with media pressure were critical factors which fuelled the advancement of works of restoration of the tramway network. Media involvement is reflected in the numbers and dates of articles collected in Supplementary File. Interest in the process grew (Figure 6) in proportion to the lack of progress on the joint project. Most articles appeared during the period 2017–2018, when the joint initiative fell apart, tram courses stopped, and individual municipalities took action on their own. During this

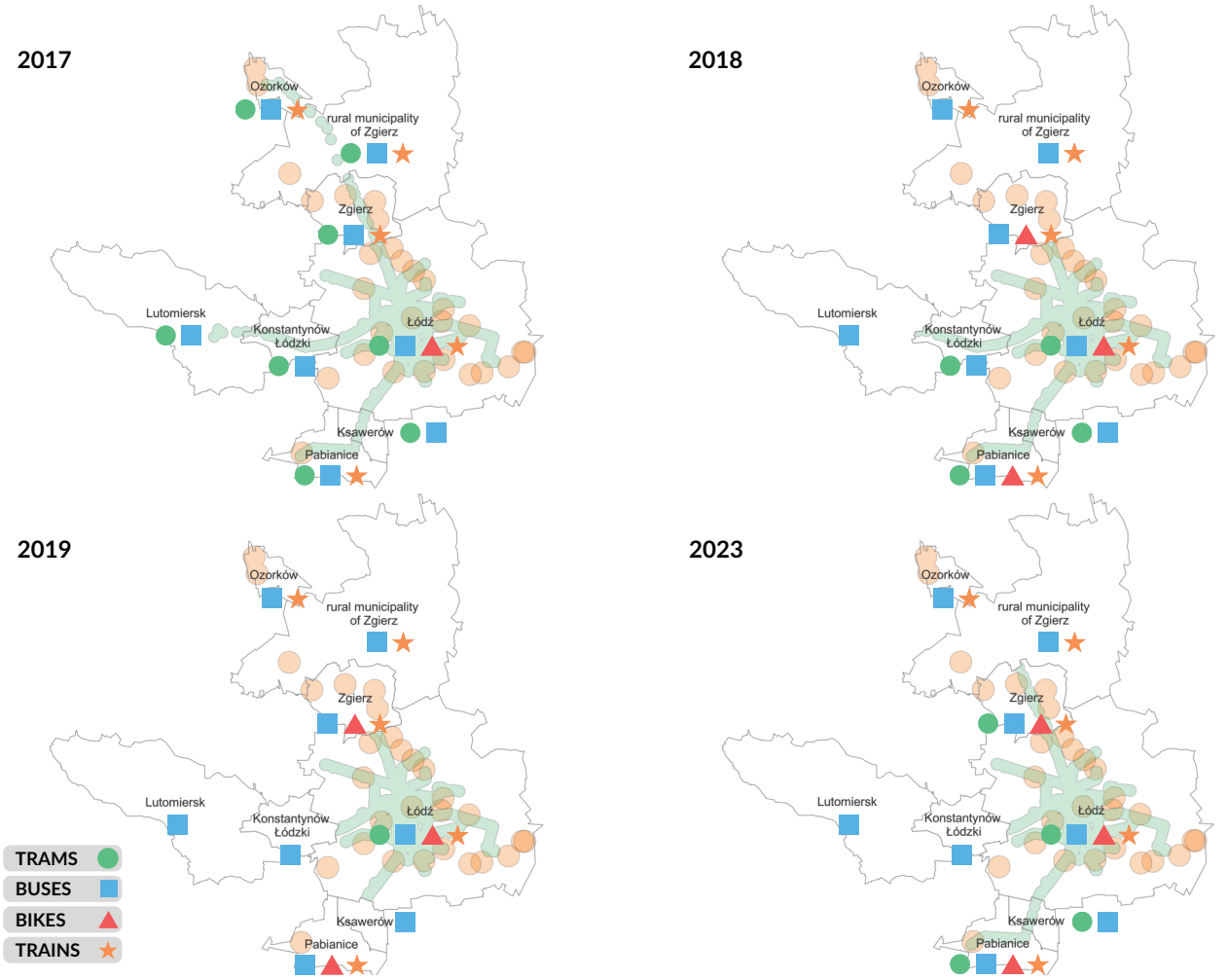

Figure 5. Maps representing the four phases of the redevelopment process: 2017 (before the closure), 2018 (first closures), 2019 (lack of tram services in several municipalities), and 2023 (return of services). Symbols indicate the availability of specific modes of public transportation in each of the administrative units.

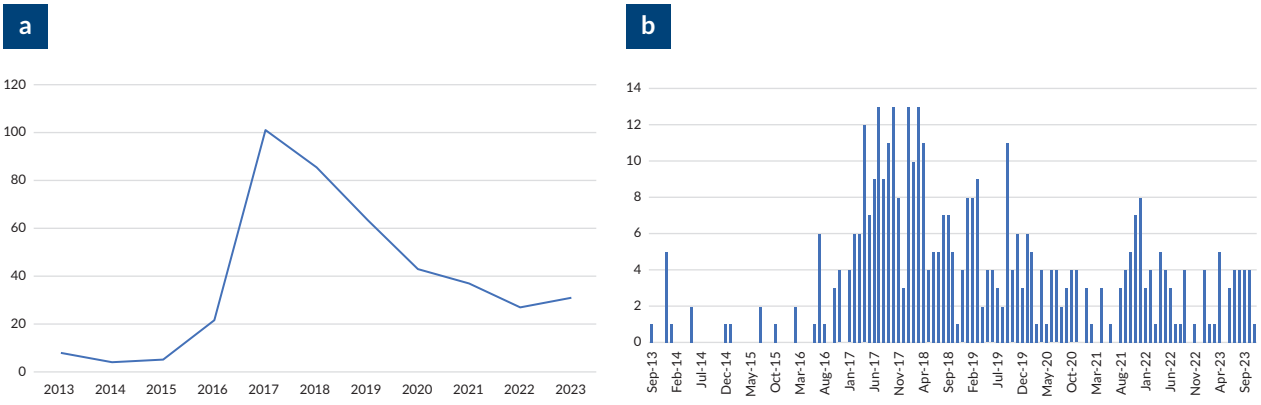

Figure 6. Number of press articles per year (A) and per month (B).

time, the media played an essential role by putting pressure on the authorities to do something. Examining the process timeline presented in Figure 4, we see that the topic of suburban trams only entered the public debate when the threat of traffic disruption became a real issue. Political factors are also evident. We see that the involvement of local- and higher-level authorities increased before the local elections in 2018 and the parliamentary elections in 2019.

6. Services Analysis and Discussion

In this section, we summarise the main threats outlined in the previous sections and address the research questions posed in Section 3. Figure 7a, modelled on an evaluation by Barthel et al. (2013), provides a detailed answer to the first research question (RQ1) by identifying the users of the transportation systems who are actors involved in the transformation process (Figure 7a, column 1). We associate the actors with the modes of transportation they use (Figure 7a, column 2). We also look at the representation of various age and sex groups in the Łódź region (Figure 7b). The juxtaposition of the two schemes provides an overview of the main groups using public transportation: commuters/students. There are also numerous elderly users, primarily female, who often have no other option than to use public transportation for individual commutes.

The motivations of specific user groups are closely tied to the services delivered by the transportation system (RQ2), which are listed in Figure 7a (column 3). The primary role of suburban trams in the Łódź metropolitan area is to provide access to labour markets, education, and services. Moreover, they play a role in ensuring integration within the region. The costs associated with decreased quality of the services (e.g., longer journey times) or the removal of connections are passed on to passengers. Higher costs mainly affect marginalised groups, such as the poorest, children, and older people, who often have no alternative modes of transport. This

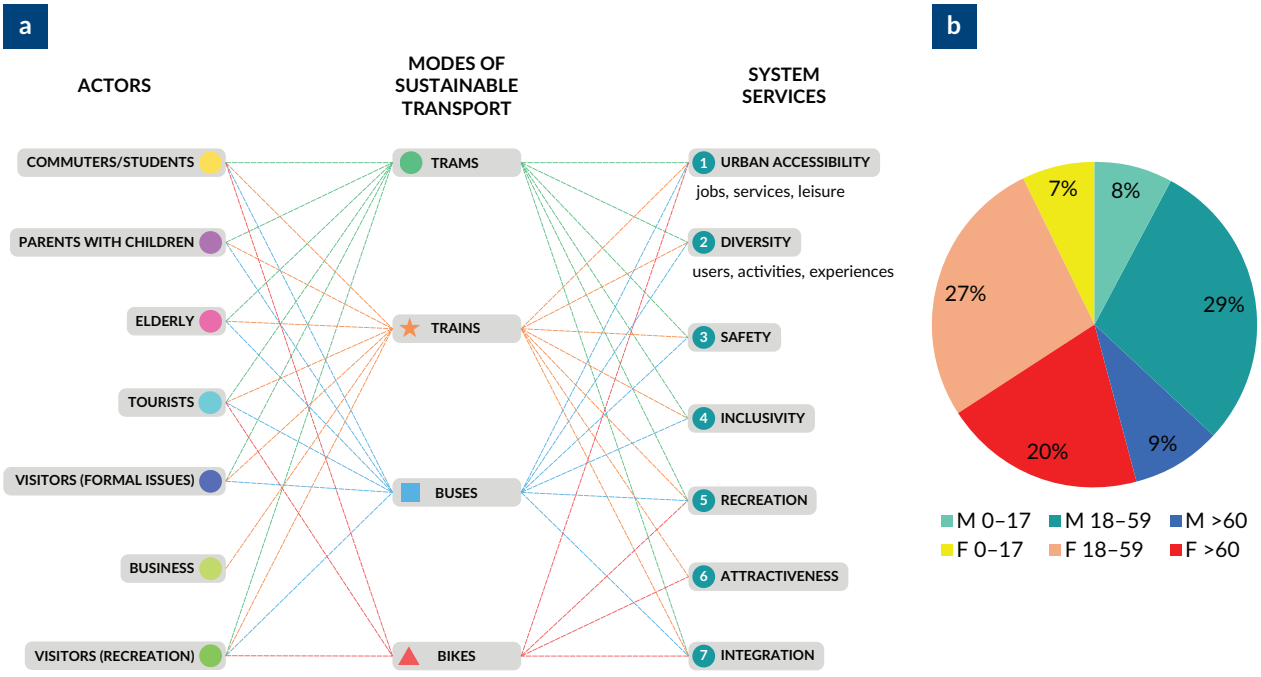

Figure 7. Visualizations of the main groups using public transportation: (a) social processes and relationships between stakeholders during the transformation of tramway systems in the Łódź Metropolitan Area; (b) social composition in the Łódź region.

affects both the diversity of users and the inclusivity of services. This is a prevalent issue in Poland, where 13.8 million Polish citizens are affected by transport exclusion. The liquidation of public transport services was one of the consequences of these systemic changes that occurred during the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy after the fall of communism in 1989 (Dulak & Jakubowski, 2018). This problem is most pronounced in predominantly rural areas with lower densities. There, long walks along congested routes increase the risks of traffic accidents and other dangers for non-motorised groups.

For the purposes of comparison and to enable more comprehensive answers to RQ2 and RQ3, we took the extra step of comparing the services in the Łódź tram network to reference cases (Table 3). The reference case studies included seven regional transportation systems that use either tramways or light railways. In the reference case studies, the trams are usually integrated with other transport systems, providing intermodal access. For instance, in the Kassel region in Germany, the multimodal light rail and regional railway systems provided significantly higher accessibility and attractiveness at the regional scale (Hamiduddin & Hickman, 2018). As a result, the development of the tramway system positively affects the local economy (Hamiduddin & Hickman, 2018; Sari, 2015). Enabling everyday commuting and, in particular, accessibility to employment opportunities is one of the primary roles provided by public transportation. This is also the case in the Łódź region. The stable tramway connection not only provides access to jobs for current residents of the suburbs but can also bring new inhabitants there, making the area more attractive, improving the social mix, and increasing density (Sari, 2015). Here, the Łódź region may grasp an opportunity, since it fulfils the basic condition needed for using the tramway system as an element strengthening its compact settlement network, which is the overlap of public transportation stops and settlement nodes.

Another important result of a well-functioning tramway system is an increase in the value of local real estate. This is not limited to transaction prices but also affects rent values (Gadziński & Radzimski, 2016). An essential outcome is the development of urbanity. Examples are given by the case of the tramline in Constantine (Algeria), which connects major commercial establishments and universities (Harkat et al., 2022), and by the case of urban rehabilitation in Medellin (Colombia; Reyes-Schade et al., 2022). Opening more mobility options to residents also means adapting infrastructure, i.e., stops and vehicles, to the needs of people with reduced mobility, such as older people, people with disabilities, or parents with prams. More

Table 3. Services provided by tramways and light rail systems in case studies used as references for the current research.

	Reference case studies							
Services	Łódź, Poland	Melbourne, Australia[1]	Bordeaux, France[2]	Medellin, Colombia[3]	Karlsruhe, Germany[4]	Constantine, Algeria[5]	Poznań, Poland[6]	Albano, Sweden[7]
1. Accessibility	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Diversity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Safety	X					X		
4. Inclusivity	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
5. Recreation	X							X
6. Attractiveness			X	X	X	X	X	X
7. Integration	X		X	X	X	X		X

Sources: [1] Lope and Dolgun (2020), [2] Sari (2015), [3] Reyes-Schade et al. (2022), [4] Hamiduddin and Hickman (2018), [5] Harkat et al. (2022), [6] Gadziński and Radzimski (2016), [7] Barthel et al. (2013).

inclusive systems become attractive solutions for these otherwise excluded groups (Lope & Dolgun, 2020). This is already visible in Pabianice (since 2013) and Zgierz, where part of the rolling stock has been replaced by low-deck carriages. Recreation is another service which draws two-way traffic. Scenic landscapes or natural forest areas attract tourists and visitors, as was the case with line 43 to Lutomiersk before it was closed. Recreation in turn becomes an engine for territorial development, as exemplified in the case of the Albano university campus in Stockholm (Barthel et al., 2013).

The process analysis in Sections 5.1–5.3 suggests that the relationships that have developed over time between users and the infrastructure have become a factor that stabilizes the system's core elements and enhances its resilience. This conclusion is supported by the observation that public involvement, as evident in numerous press articles and subsequent political engagement, consistently occurred whenever there was a threat of tram closure. Protests occurred despite the absence of formal procedures for public engagement. This can be understood as a reaction to the possible loss of services provided by the transportation system—in our case, tramlines. This observation confirms that the management practices of various stakeholders—adaptive co-management—enhance the system's resilience (Ostrom, 1990).

7. Conclusions

We have applied the social-ecological urbanism perspective to analyse the transformation of the tramway network and public transportation inequalities in the metropolitan region of Łódź, Poland. This analysis was conducted using the case study methodology and by performing an in-depth analysis of the redevelopment of four tram lines. We looked at the activities and contributions of all stakeholders and the communication processes. We also analysed the role of the tram network in providing services to the public. The findings offer a fresh perspective on understanding the spatial and societal elements of enhancing mobility on a regional level. The schema elaborated in Figure 7a provides a useful matrix for describing other similar public transport redevelopment processes. Our main observation is that the tramway system forms a nexus of services that become part of citizens' everyday lives. This nexus strengthens the system's resilience by impelling collective actions. In our analysis, we paid special attention to the communication processes accompanying the studied transformation (Healey, 1997). Press articles and media coverage were found to have strongly affected the course of events and made steps towards the restitution of the tram lines possible. In the future, similar measures, including more formal, top-down citizen involvement, could lead to further improvements in the system. This could bring additional system benefits—e.g., by attracting new residents, or by providing recreation options in locations served by the tramline.

We intend to extend the proposed analytical framework further, by applying it to the redevelopment of similar urban systems. Analysing urban services in this way can provide valuable insights for formulating legal instruments and policies. Our future objective is to provide benchmarks for strategic redevelopment processes aimed at eliminating mobility inequalities in regions where such procedures may be necessary. Our study of the transformation of the tramway system in Łódź demonstrates that the strategic redevelopment of processes of such spatial extent and significance, involving many actors, requires a more conscious process design. In particular, one of the challenges for the future is the need to propose more conscious information policies.

Acknowledgments

We express our thanks to the academic editors and referees for their comments on the initial draft of this article.

Funding

This research has been funded through support from the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Environmental Engineering of the Lodz University of Technology.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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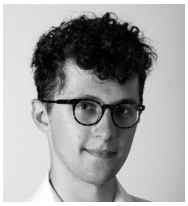

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8267
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8267

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Challenges and Opportunities for a Local Government Implementing a Human Rights Policy in Australia

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Submitted: 14 February 2024 **Accepted:** 25 July 2024 **Published:** 15 October 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

This article considers how a human rights culture in urban policymaking fits within wider theories of human rights cities. Specifically, it considers practical ways to bring together what local government officers consider the most important initiatives to enhance human rights in the city, and which initiatives are feasible to implement in the context of complex urban governance structures. It argues that principles of leadership, accountability, and operational capability are all integral to the successful implementation of a human rights approach in the city. This account is informed by empirical data from a research project undertaken in a city council located in Melbourne, Australia. This study used a mixed-methods approach combining conversations, focus groups, and a co-designed workshop with local government officers working in various departments in the city, local politicians, and community representatives. The workshop collected ideas on how to work successfully towards the implementation of a human rights policy in the city council and to understand how obstacles to implementation can be overcome by changing the culture in the organisation. The findings show that a lack of leadership, an overreliance on quantitative monitoring, and diffused operational capability hamper the implementation of a local human rights culture in this local government council. Recommendations are for councillors and CEOs in local governments to take a stronger leadership role and for residents to be more involved in the co-design of human rights initiatives in the community.

Keywords

accessible services; focus groups; human rights culture; social cohesion; social inclusion; urban governance

1. Introduction

Urban local governments in Australia increasingly apply a human rights lens to their work. Human rights policies and procedures have proliferated across the local government space ever since their declaration by the United Nations in 1948, focusing on the city's role in creating inclusive and accessible services, advancing inclusion and social cohesion in the community, and ensuring all human rights are respected (United Nations, 1948). The United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in 2022 that local councils play an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights. However, local councils face many challenges in doing so (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2022). It is yet unknown whether human rights do indeed make a difference in local government policymaking and whether we can identify policies that are directly the result of a normative commitment to human rights. This article uses the conceptual framework of "human rights cities" (Davis, 2019; Oomen & Baumgärtel, 2014) to analyse the ways in which a local government body ("council") in metropolitan Melbourne, which we will call Northfield, has worked to create a positive human rights culture and to achieve greater equality and inclusion in its area.

Creating a human rights culture at the local government level is a key challenge. Research on local human rights perspectives has been extensively carried out in both Europe and the United States. For instance, some research, particularly those conducted in the United States, underscores the challenges local governments face due to limited budgets or a lack of understanding about the importance of human rights (Blau, 2014). Other research delves into the growth of local human rights movements (Mnisi Weeks et al., 2022) or investigates participatory methods for public problem-solving that involve citizens and local government sectors (Lozner, 2004). Importantly, our research fills a void in the existing theoretical literature: The lack of studies focusing on smaller local councils within the framework of human rights cities.

To fill this knowledge gap, this study explores how local government officials charged with implementing a new human rights policy have faced challenges and opportunities in developing a "human rights culture" (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission [VEOHRC, a statutory body charged with protecting and promoting human rights in Victoria], 2023a) in their council. Four years after the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act* (Victoria State Government, 2006; the Charter), the Australian government launched the National Human Rights Framework (the Framework) in 2010, which committed to strengthening, promoting, and protecting human rights in Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010). The Framework also included a new *Australian National Action Plan on Human Rights 2012* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). At the time of writing, the Framework has not been reviewed, nor has the Action Plan been implemented, and only the state of Victoria (where this research was conducted) and the Australian Capital Territory have a Human Rights Act. Furthermore, there is no regional or national court like the European Court of Human Rights to hold these jurisdictions to account. Some Victorian local governments provide optional human rights education to their employees, but local governments are not obliged to have a human rights policy. The Charter does, however, point out that public authorities must act compatibly with human rights and give proper consideration to human rights when making decisions (VEOHRC, 2023b).

Drawing on one author's observations from her time as a researcher-in-residence in the Northfield Council's Community Development and Social Cohesion team, as well as focus groups and interviews conducted

with council workers, this study aims to inventory the practices that were most feasible and effective to implement a more positive human rights culture in this Council. Further data were collected at a workshop where local government officers, councillors, and community members reflected on the findings and provided more detailed accounts of the successful application of a new human rights policy to various departments of the council, such as public space, buildings, libraries, human resources, business development, procurement, and finance.

The importance of leadership, transparency and accountability, and operational capability in cultivating a human rights city emerged strongly from the data collected from people working within the local government. These themes align conceptually with the pillars of a "human rights culture" (VEOHRC, 2023a). We argue that developing an organisational human rights culture is essential for the successful creation of a human rights city. We show further, however, that there is a likelihood of tension between a governance-focused approach to an organisational human rights culture and the need for adaptability and flexibility in working with the community in an urban setting. Building on this, we propose that the concept of a human rights culture will help local governments understand and counter the internal and external obstacles they may face to the implementation of a human rights policy, thereby maximising their potential as human rights cities. We suggest that addressing issues relating to leadership, transparency and accountability, and operational capability within a local government organisation can improve the prospects of short- and long-term change in the community.

This article will first provide a theoretical framework introducing the concepts of a "human rights city" and a "human rights culture" and explain how these concepts relate and are used throughout the article. The methodology is then described, providing useful contextual information about the local government case study and the mixed methods approach to data collection. Three key findings are then introduced and elaborated on as components of a human rights culture that facilitate the work towards becoming a human rights city: leadership, transparency and accountability, and operational capability. A discussion and conclusion section covers the implications of this work for local governments in Australia and overseas and reflects on the limitations of taking a "human rights culture" approach in human rights cities.

2. Human Rights Cities and a Human Rights Culture

A "human rights city" is broadly defined as any "city or community where people of goodwill, in government, in organisations and institutions, try and let a human rights framework guide the development of the life of the community" (People's Movement for Human Rights Education [PDHRE], 2007, p. 3, as cited in Oomen & Baumgärtel, 2014, p. 714). Indeed, any municipality that attempts to implement human rights standards and/or law in their policies, statements, and programs, regardless of whether they formally claim the moniker of human rights city, can nevertheless be understood using the concept of the human rights city (see Oomen & Baumgärtel, 2014). In this section, we introduce the human rights city as a distinctive concept in the human rights localisation scholarship, tracing its origin and its various applications to local governments around the world.

The PDHRE's initial conceptualisation of the human rights city recommended a focus on civic engagement and community education alongside government enforcement as steps to achieving the designation (Oomen & Baumgärtel, 2014). In many cases, the process of becoming a human rights city is a complex interaction

between local advocacy, community organisations, social enterprises, and local councils. An important motivation for the shift may be that engagement with human rights can enhance a city's capacity to govern (Grigolo, 2017). For example, becoming a human rights city creates opportunities for cities to promote human rights awareness, increase participation in decision-making, and improve their own internal monitoring systems (de Feyter et al., 2011; Oomen, 2016). The World Human Rights Cities Forum (2024) and the United Cities and Local Governments (2024) are currently the global network of cities and other levels of government focusing on human rights. As cities start to take leadership roles in human rights policy creation and implementation, local governments must use human rights norms in their operations (Davis, 2019). Dozens of cities worldwide have declared themselves human rights cities, including Rosario (Argentina), Porto Alegre (Brazil), Nagpur (India), Korogocho (Kenya), Thies (Senegal), and Mogale (South Africa; see Blau, 2014).

This study is not the first to investigate human rights locally. There is an abundance of research in Europe and the United States on local orientations of human rights. A clear gap in this conceptual literature, to which our study responds, is the absence of smaller local councils in the available analyses of human rights cities. Although a human rights city can be a local municipality of any size or character, almost all the municipalities commonly profiled in the literature are larger cities such as Barcelona, Graz, and Utrecht. Other case studies can be found in African cities of Francistown, Mogale, Mutare, and Livingstone, as well as Falun in Sweden (Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy, 2024). Furthermore, there are no Australian councils formally recognised as human rights cities. The geography of Australia and the way in which cities tend to comprise major central business districts surrounded by sizeable municipalities stretching from the inner city to the outer suburbs makes a council like Northfield a particularly interesting case study of a human rights city. Northfield has a similar population to the human rights cities of York in the United Kingdom and Jackson in Mississippi. However, York is a major urban centre and Jackson a state capital, while Northfield is primarily a residential area that includes inner-city and outer-suburban areas.

The concept of a "human rights culture" has been used in different contexts with slightly different definitions. In line with Grigolo (2016, p. 276), we refer to a human rights city as a "city which is organised around norms and principles of human rights" while also acknowledging that this can be driven by either civil society, local government or both, or within a broader context. A number of studies conceive of a human rights culture as something that can be developed at the nation-state level, usually in response to and as part of a national reckoning with an atrocity. The development of a human rights culture as a national political and juridical project has been studied in Uganda (Dicklitch & Lwanga, 2003), South Africa (Gibson, 2004), and Cambodia (Marks, 2005), to name just a few. A human rights culture has also been understood in relation to the way cultural institutions, such as art and the media, have the potential to cultivate understanding and respect for human rights (Galchinsky, 2010; Nash, 2005).

Various uses of the concept share some essential features. The notion of a human rights culture appeals not just to the legal or political systems of a society but to "a set of cultural values among the populace" (Gibson, 2004, p. 5). A human rights culture is found in societies with a "popular political culture" of support for human rights, where members subscribe to a set of shared values that align with human rights instruments (Nash, 2005, p. 337). These values are not just held by elites but also by the common people, cultivated by law but "from below": from grassroots consciousness and demands (Dicklitch & Lwanga, 2003, p. 485). Indeed, they are held so deeply and so broadly that they become "integrated into the way people behave…into the prevailing moral framework" (Marks, 2005, p. 261).

In the state of Victoria in Australia, where this research was undertaken, the concept of a "human rights culture" has been formalised in the VEOHRC's instructions for the public sector implementation of human rights. VEOHRC (2023a) defines a human rights culture as "a pattern of shared attitudes, values and behaviours that influence the policymaking, decisions and practices of government to uphold the human rights of all people."

The Victorian state government supports public authorities, including local governments, to build and maintain strong human rights cultures. Given the absence of formally designated human rights cities in Australia, we suggest a human rights culture conceived and adopted formally may provide useful guidance for local governments. To do so, VEOHRC encourages public authorities in Victoria to follow its formal document, the Human Rights Culture Indicator Framework (VEOHRC, 2023a), listing a series of benefits associated with human rights cities: improving democratic legitimacy, encouraging community participation in decision-making, establishing clear non-negotiable legal standards, and improving the quality-of-service design. By presenting a case study of a local government's experience with human rights implementation, this article intends to fill a research gap. Local human rights implementation has yet to be the subject of significant research, although work is starting to emerge. A case study of European cities (Barcelona, Graz, Lund, Nuremberg, Utrecht, Vienna, and York) outlines the shared characteristics of human rights cities, which are also shared by our case study Northfield (Rayfield & Casla, 2021). First, all these cities aspire to use human rights principles to guide their work. Second, they want to allow the participation of all those concerned in governance and empower citizens as right-holders. This includes events, awards, art installations, and training and education. Another shared characteristic is the focus on non-discrimination and equality in the process of policy formation, as well as the intended outcomes (Rayfield & Casla, 2021). Finally, and this is also true for our case study, human rights cities focus on transparency and accountability through monitoring and evaluation.

In this article, we focus on leadership, transparency and accountability, and operational capability as integral characteristics of a human rights culture in a human rights city. We have chosen these three themes because our analysis showed that local government officials experienced most tension in these areas when developing a human rights culture. We analyse participants' narratives of this process against these characteristics to better understand the opportunities, challenges, and successes Northfield has experienced in becoming a human rights city. This further ensures our findings contribute to and extend the prevailing understanding of a "human rights culture" in the Victorian context and the relationship between a "human rights culture" and a "human rights city" in both a national and international context.

For example, as Gready (2019) has shown in the context of the city of York, sometimes it is important to rethink collaborations and partnerships. Similarly, Wolman and Chung (2022) focus on the work of local human rights commissions in Korea, with similar findings. What is interesting, though, is the difficulty and struggle between diverse groups in the city (Oomen et al., 2016) in many studies. How can human rights materialise in urban spaces? Who has the right to the city? Our case study illustrates this same tension with an example of a conflict between user groups in the local libraries.

3. Case Study and Methodology

In Australia, a local Council governs a locality. In urban areas, the Local Government Authority is called a city, like Melbourne, within the larger Melbourne Metropolitan Area. In Victoria, where our case study is, over half of Council funding comes from land rates, 20% from Commonwealth and State, and the rest from fees, fines, contributions, and other sources (VIC Councils, 2024). The funding is used for capital works, job stimulation, and improving facilities, community hubs, leisure centres, parks, and streetscapes.

3.1. Case Study

This article uses Northfield (pseudonym) as a case study. Northfield, near Melbourne's CBD, stretches from metropolitan suburbs to the outer ring. It includes gentrified suburbs near two universities and migrant reception suburbs near former industrial sites. Northfield is diverse and progressive, with over 170,000 residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021) and a left-leaning Council.

Northfield's population is well-educated and has above-average income. It is culturally diverse, with a third of households speaking a language other than English. The population is religiously diverse, with 23% identifying as Western (Roman) Catholic, almost 10% identifying as Muslim, and 41% as having no religion (ABS, 2021). Some estimates are that 24% of residents in this Council identify as LGBTQIA+ (Brown, 2022), compared to 3–4% nationally. A quarter of residents have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression in their lifetime (Victorian average is 21%), most likely due to higher mental health literacy (ABS, 2021).

3.2. Data Collection

Using a combination of focus groups, conversations, and a workshop event, we gained insight into the ways in which council workers refer to the human rights policy through group discussions and individual conversations. Triangulation of these methods allowed us to understand ways in which everyday workplace actions facilitate (or hinder) the development of a human rights culture that empowers local government employees to work towards a more inclusive and cohesive city.

Ethics approval was provided by the university (No. 2023–26794-21539), and data were collected between July and November 2023. Participant names were not recorded to ensure confidentiality. Consent forms were signed, or consent was given verbally. All sessions were in English and lasted 45–60 minutes. Details of the data collection can be found in Table 1.

All respondents were over 18 years old, and 40% were male. To protect the anonymity of the participants, further disclosure of age, gender, and role within the council will not be made here. We worked with the council on refining the study objectives and questions (see Table 2) for participants, as well as the workshop design. Focus group discussions provided insight into how participants constructed shared meaning on the topic of the implementation of the human rights policy.

The triangulation of data from diverse sources increased the ecological validity of the findings. First, the conversations were used to explore emergent themes and the phenomenon of the implementation of a human rights policy in this city council context. Then, the focus groups followed a structured approach,

Table 1. Number of participants per data collection method by policy area.

Participant category	Invited #	Participated #	Section of Council represented
Conversations (face-to-face and online)	13	14	Directorate of Community, Directorate of Place and Environment
Focus groups (online)	16	22	Directorate of Business Transformation, Directorate of City Infrastructure, Directorate of Community, Directorate of Place and Environment
Workshop (hybrid)	52	40	CEO, Directorate of Business Transformation, Directorate of City Infrastructure, Directorate of Community, Directorate of Place and Environment

Table 2. Focus group topic guide.

Questions for local government employees
What is your role, and how long have you been in this role?
Which stated outcome of the human rights policy are you working towards?
What is the problem you are trying to address?
Which activities are implemented to achieve the outcomes you are after?
Do you think you are doing the right things to achieve your outcomes and tackle the problems?
Can you tell me about successful activities and why they were successful?
Can you tell me about activities that can be improved and how you think they could be improved?
What would be the best ways to capture progress on the human rights policy?

asking for examples of successful implementation and lessons learned, as well as indicators of success. The transcripts of the focus groups were analysed, coded, and interpreted by a team of four researchers who debriefed iteratively as they developed the themes and verified links between the data and the findings.

3.3. Data Analysis

Sessions were transcribed and checked for accuracy by the research team, with a second researcher involved in transcription in case of unclarities. The data were analysed using thematic analysis techniques and read several times by different researchers to search for patterns and interpretations. Notes taken during the conversations were used to assist with the interpretation of the data, and themes were discovered, discussed within the team, and sorted into groups. The data were then re-interpreted based on those themes and discussed in weekly meetings to achieve a common interpretation.

4. Findings

Northfield introduced a human rights policy in 2016, which focuses on offering residents the rights and protections afforded by international human rights law. The council aims to apply a human rights lens to the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of all policies, services, programs, and infrastructure. At its core, the policy intends to address inequalities and inequities amongst the area's diverse residents, and

further considers social justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity. It specifically prioritises the following groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; people with a disability; LGBTQIA+ communities; migrant, refugee, and faith communities; women and girls; and gender diverse communities.

4.1. Leadership and Resourcing

There are many ways to define leadership (Winston & Patterson, 2006), but for the sake of simplicity, we will keep it brief and refer to leadership as:

> One or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) on the organisation's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend their spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organisation's mission and objectives. (Winston & Patterson, 2006, p. 7)

The VEOHRC (2023a) human rights culture indicator framework refers to leadership as follows:

1) Leaders demonstrate their commitment to human rights and the Charter (see above) both publicly and within their respective organisations.
2) Discussions on human rights are included at leadership forums (including at business and branch planning forums).
3) Executive performance review documents include metrics on human rights.

At Northfield, staff charged with the implementation of the new human rights policy shared a perception that there was a low level of interest in human rights among the councillors (local government politicians) and senior leadership team members they reported to. Staff described how the human rights policy was not a priority for the council's leadership: "It's just not a commitment from the organisation at this point," one employee stated. They explained that an important responsibility of their role was to increase the level of buy-in within Northfield as an organisation to encourage support for their initiatives: "We're trying to tell stories of what happens in Northfield, and we're hoping that this will get the human rights policy on the agenda…of the councillors."

The disinterest of Northfield's leaders in the human rights policy harmed the development of a human rights culture. Leadership practised by senior individuals is instrumental to how "organisations, networks and communities are mobilised" as well as the principal values of the organisation (Hoddy & Gray, 2023, p. 635). Workplace culture constructs the ethos, values, and norms of an organisation (Lagoutte et al., 2021), and the low buy-in from council leaders discursively contributed to a workplace culture that deprioritised human rights despite the stated importance of the new policy. Operationally, this translated to a lack of resourcing, which limited the capacity of council employees to apply the human rights policy: "We just don't have the resources. So, it all comes down to resourcing. Because I think we have the potential to do so much more if the resourcing was there."

The council leadership's failure to provide necessary funding and resources amplified the prevailing view of insufficient commitment to the human rights policy. This narrative, when viewed in the context of workplace

culture, further undermines the validity of human rights and its cultural significance due to this apparent lack of priority. By contrast, when projects were well funded and resourced from above, council workers felt more positive about the success of the human rights policy in improving equity and inclusion in the local area. One example of this was a transport infrastructure project that staff felt confident had been implemented according to the human rights policy, mainly because they had been able to conduct a community consultation process that ensured diverse voices and views on the project were heard. The success of this project was attributed to its resourcing, particularly in terms of support, funding, and staffing:

> So that was a very good example [of a successful initiative under the human rights policy], I think in the end…because it seemed like there was a lot of executive support for that. There was a lot of councillor support. We got quite a big budget. We seconded [staff member] one day a week to the team to do it. So just sort of putting out there, it was also backed up with those things as well.

According to many of the employees interviewed, good leadership meant an active and visible investment in human rights policy and practice backed up by adequate resourcing, regardless of political expedience or gain for councillors. Visibility in this context links to the perceived authenticity of the executive support. In other human rights cities, the institutional constraints (such as limited available funding) associated with the local government sphere have also frustrated human rights implementation (Pieterse, 2022), and the participation of stakeholders at all levels of the organisation has been key to successes (Oomen, 2016). In Northfield, visible and active engagement in human rights practice by senior leadership was similarly essential to creating and maintaining a positive human rights culture.

An executive leader affirmed her constant availability when required and her proactive support for human rights, with her team always spearheading it. Yet, at the same time, she noted that not everyone everywhere in the organisation has human rights on top of their list of priorities:

> Interviewer: Do you think there is support for the human rights policy in the organisation?
>
> Executive leader: Ooh, you know, I think there is support….But I think they're all busy. The whole organisation is just busy, and they wonder, how does this relate to me? I think we need to be better at it. [Asking the question] "How *does* this relate to you?" [emphasis in recording].

The council executive has expressed backing for the human rights policy, fostering a supportive culture for the cause. However, there appears to be minimal support from local politicians. This was evident when our human rights workshop saw the attendance of 40 council employees and two executives, but no councillors (politicians). This could be interpreted as a lack of support from councillors, yet this conclusion may be premature. Indeed, Northfield councillors were one of the first in the country to declare the City's support for the Yes vote for Indigenous Voice to Parliament. In doing so, they deviated from the State and Federal standpoint, displaying what Scholten (2015) refers to as "frame divergence": contradictory politics between local and higher government levels, using international human rights laws to decouple local politics from higher levels (Oomen & Baumgärtel, 2014).

4.2. Operational Capability: Knowledge, Resourcing, Systems, and Processes

The VEOHRC (2023a) human rights culture indicator framework indicates that operational capability is high when:

1) Staff understand the human rights charter ("the Charter" see above) and how to apply it in their work.
2) Relevant human rights days and achievements are articulated and celebrated.
3) The organisation has dedicated resources (both time and funding) to embed human rights.
4) Champions or influencers of human rights are empowered and resourced.

In line with the framework, respondents demonstrated a high understanding of international legal benchmarks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), which indicates that children and young people should have a voice in shaping their world. As one respondent stated:

> The youth Ambassador programme level…really honours lived experience and representation. And I think it, you know, gives legitimacy to Youth Voice. And I think more and more rather than us kind of pushing our young people into forums where they're being consulted…their opinions matter and make a difference in the decisions that are being taken.

Conversely, the approach towards marginalised communities, particularly First Nations Peoples and other vulnerable groups, by some respondents reveals a disparity between support for some groups and public labelling of this support as a human rights policy. A participant noted:

> Talk about First Nations….We have a couple of Socialist Party Councillors who'd always talk about…refugees, asylum seekers, and particular cohorts or communities they hear from. So, I think they do see that as important, but I don't know whether any of them will openly say: "Oh, that's in our human rights policy."

This hesitance to overtly integrate discussions about these groups into the human rights policy might point to a gap in understanding and application of the human rights policy locally.

In addition, the Economic Development Department's perspective shows this department's focus on economic viability, which reveals a tendency to prioritise economic growth, sometimes at the potential expense of a broader, more holistic human rights agenda. The participant expresses a commitment to environmentalism but a lack of understanding of the ways in which that impacts the human rights agenda—"I'm all for saving the planet," yet reveals a primary focus on economic growth: "My thing is to try to help our businesses be more economically viable, make more money, if you want to call it that."

The success of human rights cities in implementing their human rights policies or practices often depends on a single actor who is highly motivated to champion human rights and to act in a "translator" role to ensure human rights are well understood across the organisation (Oomen, 2016). As outlined by Neubeck (2017) in the case of Eugene, Oregon, members of a Human Rights Committee can also function as champions, which means that city staff feel supported in their implementation efforts by executives and managers employing a human rights lens. In Northfield, attempts had been made to create these roles. The Community Development and

Social Policy (CDSP) team took responsibility for socialising the human rights policy across the organisation and supporting different branches in implementing it. Some teams reported this functioning well. For example, one team spoke of the value of having a member of the CDSP team seconded to their branch for the length of a particular project, which was understood to have made the implementation of the human rights policy throughout that project more successful.

Community engagement and participation is one of the goals of Northfield's human rights policy. One respondent was keen to point out that the project was considered a success in this respect because of the "executive support" (leadership), "big budget" (resourcing), and the secondment (operational capability), connecting multiple aspects of a human rights culture. Indeed, working closely with the CDSP team member developed trusting relationships which allowed this branch to progress on disability inclusion. These examples show how combining government action, civic engagement, and community education collectively supports local human rights (Oomen & Baumgärtel, 2014).

The human rights culture indicator framework suggests that operational capability is high when relevant human rights days and achievements are articulated and celebrated. This is exemplified in the celebration of cultural diversity at a council event, which was inclusive, inviting Northfield's diverse community to participate, and featured a variety of activities such as performances by dancers, talks, and the sharing of international cuisine. An interviewee described it as "celebrating cultural diversity…with Greek dancers and…food from different countries….A good turnout and…people talking to each other, which was lovely."

The Greek celebration refers to local stalls set up by residents, small businesses, and artists, showcasing Greek coffee and street food, children's activities, and Greek music. This celebration not only highlighted cultural appreciation but also facilitated active community engagement and interaction, promoting understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures. Such events demonstrate a strong commitment to recognising and celebrating important aspects of, and alignment with, the principles of human rights.

4.3. Transparency and Accountability

The VEOHRC (2023a) framework indicates that organisations with a strong human rights culture:

1) Encourage good human rights practice.
2) Know what they have achieved and what still needs to be done to embed a positive human rights culture.
3) Understand and comply with human rights reporting mechanisms.

Aligned with the recommendations, Northfield collects data to monitor progress. As one participant revealed: "[They've] come up with this beautiful spreadsheet…there's a lot of data that needs to be put in there." However, the participant found the spreadsheet intimidating and overwhelming to fill out. Observations show that there is a belief that collecting data signifies an attempt to create measurable, tangible outcomes that can be evaluated and reported. The quantitative measures aim to serve as a concrete foundation upon which the impact of policies can be evidenced, aligning with the principles of evidence-based policymaking emphasised in urban governance literature (Mills et al., 2022).

However, the focus on quantitative indicators, while providing objective evidence crucial for accountability, may not fully encapsulate the qualitative impact of human rights policies. The narrow quantitative focus is shown in a participant's statement: "I'm thinking of different ways, other than just quantifying things; it's better to have a qualitative approach based on people's unique experiences."

This quote underscores the perspective that a focus only on one aspect of measurement is not able to fully encapsulate the story of the Northfield community and the services and work the employees are implementing.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned practices provide some insight into the experiences of employees and their understanding, planning, and implementation of human rights-focused services. Integrating both a pre-and-post-implementation engagement method, qualitative measures may bridge the gap that these respondents consider limiting their ability to highlight the depth and breadth of their work. Overall, we noticed a concern among council workers about the exclusive use of quantitative data to measure the effectiveness of human rights policy and practice, and a view that adding qualitative data may improve evaluation.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The Northfield findings illustrate the institutional constraints and resource dependencies characteristic of local governance in human rights policy implementation (Pieterse, 2022). This study observed a lack of commitment from the organisation's leadership to human rights practice. The staff experienced this lack of leadership as an obstacle to developing a human rights culture. These findings align with Lagoutte et al. (2021), who emphasised how a human rights organisation's cultural ethos can normalise attitudes and values that are inconsistent with the promotion of human rights. A lack of leadership commitment manifests as unclear expectations and pessimism regarding the council's human rights policy. It was also associated with operational under-resourcing, limiting the effective implementation of the human rights policy.

The findings from Northfield demonstrate an alignment with the VEOHRC's (2023b) roadmap through efforts to establish a structured approach to human rights. This includes promoting community participation and enhancing democratic legitimacy, which resonates with the experiences of cities like Barcelona and York. These cities have successfully integrated human rights into their governance models, fostering a culture that values inclusivity and participatory governance, as noted by Rayfield and Casla (2021).

The findings indicate that Northfield's staff demonstrate an understanding of human rights principles, particularly in engaging youth through the Youth Ambassadors Program. This is consistent with the theoretical framework that emphasises the importance of educating municipal staff on human rights as a critical aspect of operational capability (Neubeck, 2017; Oomen, 2016). Such understanding leads to robust, more inclusive and representative participatory practices, potentially resonating with some of the foundational principles of the Human Rights Charter, thereby displaying a high operational capability in Northfield. Observations regarding the celebration of cultural diversity and the dedication of resources to human rights initiatives align with operational capability indicators identified by Oomen and Baumgärtel (2014).

Of course, it is hard to say if actions undertaken by the local Council are the direct result of the human rights policy or if they were undertaken before that and are now labelled as part of the human rights policy. The researcher who spent three months "in residence" in the local Council believes that it is a combination of the two. Some activities already existed before the policy, whereas the increased awareness of a human rights approach through communication and education has increased the number of activities that work towards human rights.

The tension between economic development priorities and human rights obligations noted in Northfield mirrors challenges discussed in existing literature (Barker & Casla, 2022; Davis, 2019). The Economic Development Department's focus on economic growth, potentially at the expense of broader human rights, echoes Lefebvre's concerns about urban development driven by business interests (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1967).

Northfield's population is diverse, even by Australian standards. A human rights policy within councils like Northfield enables effective governance of diverse populations. Tensions within diverse populations in urban regions like Northfield can be challenging. Human rights policy focuses on preventing inequality, inequity, and injustice from becoming normalised in these environments. For instance, Northfield has suburbs known as safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ communities, with queer bookstores and businesses. Northfield's cultural events reflect an emerging human rights culture, celebrating diversity and inclusion. These principles promote cultural rights, encourage participation and non-discrimination, and foster understanding across communities. Literature often links a city's human rights culture to the acknowledgement of cultural diversity (Galchinsky, 2010; Nash, 2005). Cultural events can cultivate understanding and respect for human rights, highlighting commitment to shared values that align with human rights instruments, resonating with the grassroots consciousness fundamental to developing a human rights culture (Dicklitch & Lwanga, 2003).

This article adds to the existing body of knowledge on human rights policy implementation at a local level and provides further evidence that human rights policy implementation is rarely spread evenly across all parts of a local Council. The hesitancy among some respondents to integrate discussions about marginalised groups into official human rights policies may also be found elsewhere. Literature indicates that while local governments may prioritise certain human rights initiatives, integrating these policies across all community segments often poses a challenge (Blau, 2014; Kaufman & Kamuf-Ward, 2017). These problems with implementation are also found in other literature where the effective integration of human rights into local governance is often uneven and faces resistance or insufficient understanding among local officials, or specific departments focused more on economic than social objectives (Pieterse, 2022; Wolman & Chung, 2022).

The findings illustrate this government's focus on accountability, aiming to count all actions and put the emphasis on quantitative data for policy evaluation. We argue that the focus should be on how participants communicate and make decisions together and how these discussions relate to policy. As suggested by Fung (2006), institutional design can address issues of democratic and inclusive governance. Our participants spoke of lengthy implementation plans that provide little guidance on community outcomes and focus instead on council actions. Northfield's current approach, depending on quantitative analysis, risks overlooking the subjective, qualitative aspects of policy impact integral to addressing a diverse population's needs. Maxwell (2020) discusses the indispensable contributions of qualitative inquiry to public policies' development and evaluation, arguing that qualitative research is essential for understanding how

stakeholders interpret and respond to policies, the variability of contextual effects on policy implementation, and the processes through which policies produce outcomes. For Northfield, applying qualitative methods would allow policymakers to grasp how different community members perceive and are impacted by human rights initiatives. This understanding is crucial for adjusting policies to better meet community needs and ensuring that policies are inclusive and equitable.

Localising human rights encounters opposition during the shift towards a human rights culture. In local government, a human rights culture necessitates council leadership's belief in and endorsement of a human rights policy. It requires transparency, accountability in its implementation, and adequate operational capacity. We hope these findings incentivise further research in this field, particularly data collection amongst residents to inform successful local human rights policies and create inclusive communities. Future studies can focus on diversity, city management, and how this affects diverse community participation.

The limitations of this study are that we relied heavily on the brokering function of the CDSP team to recruit the focus group participants, conversation participants, and workshop participants. This may have resulted in a biased sample and reduced the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation is the absence of the voice of residents or service providers that collaborate with the local government. Future research could include a residents' survey and/or data collection among service providers. On the other hand, the establishment of rapport and effective communication with the local government employees resulted in respondents who spoke with ease and confidence to the researcher as an outsider in face-to-face, online, and hybrid environments.

Acknowledgments

The authors want to thank the research participants for their generosity in sharing their experiences and their time.

Funding

This research was supported by the Academic Development Fund from the College of Design and Social Context, RMIT University, Melbourne.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8291
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8291

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Open Access Journal

Inclusion and Exclusion in Urban Public Space: Contemporary Challenges in Vienna and Helsinki

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Submitted: 20 February 2024 **Accepted:** 20 August 2024 **Published:** 30 September 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Transformative Local Governments: Addressing Social Urban Challenges by Bringing People and Politics Together" edited by Jua Cilliers (University of Technology Sydney), Ana Maria Vargas Falla (Lund University), Gareth Wall (University of Birmingham), and Paula Barros (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i345

Abstract

Public spaces facilitate interactions among people from diverse backgrounds and serve as arenas that offer valuable insights into societal dynamics. They have the potential to promote inclusion, yet they can also foster exclusionary practices. Focusing on the years 2022 and 2023, and the cases of Vienna and Helsinki, this article examines how different actors, from the city administration to local stakeholders and young people, perceive and negotiate inclusion and exclusion in public space. Through a multi-method analysis, including background research, expert interviews, and focus groups, we identified four key challenges that define the negotiation of inclusion and exclusion in public space and outline the perspectives, tensions, and policy measures connected to them. Our empirical material underscores how public space is a critical resource that is essential for fostering sustainable and resilient urban futures. Local governments need to be aware of the overlapping and contradictory effects of policies on various groups, and balance between universalistic and particularistic policy measures to address vulnerabilities and diverse community needs effectively. Taking a proactive perspective helps to address future crises while identifying ways of involving the perspectives of diverse stakeholders in such processes.

Keywords

exclusion; inclusion; public space; urban policies; youth

1. Introduction

In the complex fabric of urban landscapes, public spaces stick out as highly visible and exposed arenas that provide valuable insights into contemporary urban challenges and societal dynamics. They allow for mundane encounters between broader social groups, leading to "rubbing along" (Watson, 2006, p. 8) and "forced propinquity" (Clayton, 2009) through close physical proximity. Within urban studies, the question of who owns and appropriates city spaces has been a key issue that is reflected in the broad canon of literature discussing the right to the city (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre, 1968; Mitchell, 2003). Young people and marginalised groups, such as homeless people, substance abusers, or people with an immigrant background, often face control or displacement within public spaces (Johnstone, 2017; Ye, 2019). Inclusion and exclusion in public space is thus subject to constant negotiation, and struggles over these issues serve as microcosms reflecting larger societal developments and power dynamics that have been amplified by the privatisation, commercialisation, and securitisation of these spaces (Atkinson et al., 2017; Ostanel, 2020).

Most recently, crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the accompanying economic crisis have further increased the pressure on public spaces and changed the perceptions and aspirations people have regarding these spaces (Ugolini et al., 2020). In times of (economic) crises, people are more dependent on public spaces, while lockdowns and the flexibility that came along with the introduction of home office have made urban citizens engage in social and recreational activities outdoors more than ever before. This has amplified questions about green justice, sustainability, and inequalities (Venter et al., 2020). The use, allocation, and development of public space is constantly negotiated between a variety of actors, among them the city government and the administration, as well as numerous stakeholders from civil society and businesses to residents, often with distinct needs and demands. Most importantly, not all these actors have the same powers and resources, which adds additional layers of complexity.

Taking the cases of Helsinki and Vienna, this article addresses public space and the way in which it is negotiated from the perspective of inclusion and exclusion. Helsinki and Vienna, both capital cities committed to social housing and welfare policies, offer an interesting comparison due to their differing administrative structures, population sizes, and urban landscapes. While Helsinki is smaller with a lower percentage of foreign residents and abundant green spaces, Vienna with around two million inhabitants is significantly larger, more diverse, and has been confronted with a rapid population growth (see also Section 4). Our empirical data were gathered in 2022 and 2023, covering a period of multiple crises, the intersection of which went along with increased tensions and polarisation that had an impact on public spaces due to changed needs, aspirations, and patterns of usage. Based on an analysis that combines expert interviews and participatory focus groups with diverse actors from the city administration to local stakeholders and young people, we ask the following questions: What do these actors identify as the main challenges regarding public space and the negotiation of inclusion/exclusion in Helsinki and Vienna? What effects do these challenges have, and how are they tackled by the cities? By pursuing a stepwise approach, we were able to refine our understanding progressively, as we started out from the city level and macro factors (like governance structures and policies), to then zoom in on one specific public space in each city, to study these issues in depth. In both cities, we conducted two focus groups, with the first including stakeholders who are active in the public space in question, either professionally (such as social workers, local politicians, or members of local associations) or as resident activists, and the second with young people

living or studying in that area. Hence, through this research design, we were able to contrast the perspective of professional stakeholders with the perspective of young people, whose voice is often underrepresented in politics and research, and who are often marginalised themselves.

In the empirical material, we identified four key challenges related to public space, inclusion, and exclusion, which we labelled as "complex administrative apparatus and governance structures," "availability and distribution of public space," "effects of global crises at the local level," and "security, insecurity, and securitisation." In this study, we contend that a nuanced understanding of the dynamics within public spaces is essential for local governments to address the interplay of inclusion, exclusion, and displacement in public spaces effectively. The findings shed light on public space as a crucial resource, emphasising how its absence or scarcity intensifies societal tensions, as it became evident in the densely populated areas of Vienna, while underlining the need for creative solutions to address local concerns and specific needs. Importantly, this study highlights the balance between universalistic and contextual approaches in addressing inclusion and exclusion in public spaces and the need to involve the perspectives of diverse stakeholders in the negotiation about the use, allocation, distribution, and development of public spaces.

2. Inclusion, Exclusion, and Public Space

The concept of public space in its broadest sense can refer to an abstract public sphere or realm not necessarily tied to physical space (Arendt, 1958). In this study, the focus is on physical public spaces in urban settings, which include both outdoor spaces such as parks, squares, playgrounds, and public thoroughfares (Ye, 2019), and indoor spaces such as libraries, youth centres, and community houses. Common for these spaces is that they are usually publicly owned, non-commercial, open, and accessible (Madanipour, 2023). Public spaces are also experienced and relational (Lefebvre, 2013), symbolically and mentally important (Soja, 2000), and temporarily, historically, and geographically specific. Hence, they are impacted by power structures in society, and they are constantly constructed in interaction between people (Massey, 2005).

Inclusion and exclusion in urban public space have been topical since Lefebvre's (1968) work on the right to the city (see also Harvey, 2003; Mitchell, 2003), and they have been addressed from social, physical, economic, cultural, and political perspectives (Gorgul et al., 2017; Madanipour, 2023). Inclusion covers both the co-presence and togetherness of people, and the incorporation of difference and diversity in shared spaces (Ye, 2019). However, public spaces are also sites of exclusion, marginalisation, and hostility. This can be related to physical factors such as architecture and infrastructure (Bricocoli & Savoldi, 2014), to policing and controlling "appropriate" behaviour (Carlier, 2020), and to fear of violence and harassment (Litscher, 2014). Marginalised groups, such as homeless people (Doherty et al., 2008), substance abusers, or people otherwise challenging the "public order" (Johnstone, 2017), are often controlled in, or displaced from, public spaces. Yet they depend on public spaces since they have only limited access to commercialised spaces and may lack private rooms (Carlier, 2020; Doherty et al., 2008). The same applies to young people, who are often perceived as a "nuisance" in public space and sent away from it, particularly in the case of racialised youth, who may fear violence (Galanakis, 2016), but who also depend on public spaces in their everyday life and social gatherings (Litscher, 2014).

Hence, the governance of public space includes and excludes. Although the role of public authorities is pronounced, particularly in welfare states (e.g., Tunström et al., 2016), the governance of public spaces

consists of "complex interactions among multiple stakeholders whose decisions and activities affect places' qualities" (Zamanifard et al., 2018, p. 155), with a high level of contextual variation. Some policies drive exclusion forward, such as those amplifying gentrification, the securitisation and privatisation of public space, and the prioritisation of tourist and middle-class interests (Johnstone, 2017; Ostanel, 2020). Other measures can increase the inclusivity of public spaces, including planning and housing policies (Tunström et al., 2016), cultural policies (Quinn et al., 2020), and neighbourhood-level projects and participatory processes (Kuokkanen & Palonen, 2018).

Central in these measures is the tension between universalism and particularism. Public space can refer to both general and specific spaces (Madanipour, 2023), and people using it can be approached from a generic perspective, with an emphasis on their common traits, or seen as representatives of specific groups, highlighting difference (Mukhtar-Landgren, 2012; cf. Laclau, 1992). The agency of the users of public space is also crucial in processes of inclusion and exclusion, as they can protest against public policies (e.g., Carlier, 2020; Németh, 2006) or create proactive forms of "do-it-yourself urbanism" (Iveson, 2013; see also Certomà et al., 2020). Altogether, public space and its use are constantly being negotiated between various actors (e.g., Fenster, 2006; Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, 2009).

We aim to contribute to the body of research presented above by addressing the challenges related to public space, inclusion, and exclusion in two empirical contexts of European welfare states. In the analysis, we acknowledge the manifold stakeholders and the complex processes of negotiation related to inclusion, exclusion, and public space, as well as the tension between universalism and particularism. As our empirical data were gathered during an era of several overlapping crises, we also briefly address their impact.

3. Methods and Data

For this study, we employed a stepwise mixed-methods approach that integrates various data sources and in which each step is built on the previous one. First, the Helsinki and Vienna teams undertook background research and a literature review to establish the context, identify interviewees, and develop the interview guidelines. Second, both teams conducted semi-structured expert interviews (seven in Vienna and eight in Helsinki, see table A in the Supplementary File), which lasted between one and two hours and covered questions related to inclusion and exclusion in public space, key actors, contested and best-practice areas, as well as privatisation, securitisation, and urban transformations. Based on these interviews, we selected public spaces for in-depth case studies—the third step in our research—followed by two participatory focus group sessions and participatory observations in each chosen area. For the focus groups, we used a game card approach to include interactive elements into the research design. The first focus group consisted of stakeholders who were associated with that space by work or voluntary activism, and the second group comprised young people frequently using the public space, residing, or studying in the area (see table B in the Supplementary File). For the first focus group, we created two sets of thematic cards labelled "space and locality" and "actors and processes," along with "open cards," "challenge cards," and "solution cards," allowing participants to introduce new themes, challenges, and solutions. In the second focus group, we completed the cards with the additional theme of "inclusion and exclusion." All interviews and focus groups were conducted in the respective national languages and were recorded for transcription purposes.

Our analytical approach was inspired by interpretive policy analysis, which is an umbrella concept for qualitative, holistic, and interpretive analyses of policy phenomena (Wagenaar, 2011; Yanow, 2000). This kind of analysis is particularly suitable for complex policy fields encompassing several types of actors, as it acknowledges the heterogeneity of public policies and combines policy actors' experiences and self-interpretations with the researchers' own interpretations (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Wagenaar, 2011). Our analysis was based on an inductive and thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022), through which we first read the material as a whole and identified challenges related to public space, inclusion, and exclusion, and then synthesised the challenges we had identified into four key challenges that covered some of the minor challenges, yet acknowledging the differences between the cities and between the ways in which the various research participants perceived them.

The Vienna team was granted approval by the Ethics Board of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The University of Helsinki did not require an ethical review, but the Helsinki team was granted research permission by the City of Helsinki for gathering data about its employees. We used consent forms and informed all research participants about the gathering and use of data. The interactive game cards developed for the focus groups were uploaded in the Open Science Framework repository (see Data Availability section), serving as a resource for researchers and practitioners alike.

4. Setting the Scene: Helsinki and Vienna

Helsinki and Vienna provide interesting cases for comparison: They are growing capital cities that follow a welfare state tradition with a strong commitment to social housing (Kadi & Lilius, 2022) and extensive planning and social policies aimed at preventing socio-spatial segregation and promoting social cohesion. Both cities are renowned for their high quality of life. Although Finland and Austria belong to different types of welfare regimes ("social democratic" and "corporatist," respectively; Esping-Andersen, 1990), both have comparatively liberal social policies and social engineering is pronounced towards social equality. However, both cities are currently confronted with urban transformations, which have significantly impacted various policy areas (Hewidy, 2021; Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021; Novy et al., 2001; Tunström et al., 2016).

Both Helsinki and Vienna have complex administrative and decision-making structures involving specialised sectors and numerous actors, but their specific configurations differ. Helsinki has recently merged previously more specialised administrative units and introduced a new model of resident participation (discussed in more detail in Section 5). Helsinki does not have any district-level administration or regional-level governance structures. Vienna, as both capital city and federal state, operates with dual functions and powers that are embedded within the federal structure of Austria. In addition, the city is divided into 23 districts, each of which has an elected political leader and a district assembly.

The two cities furthermore differ significantly regarding their size and population diversity. Helsinki is significantly smaller than Vienna with around 660,000 inhabitants, reaching one million with neighbouring municipalities. Vienna has grown by 500,000 inhabitants since the 1990s and, today, is a truly super-diverse city of two million people that is challenged by this fast population growth. In 2023, 44% of the resident population was of foreign origin (foreign nationality and/or born abroad; Stadt Wien – Integration und Diversität, 2023), whereas in Helsinki, 10.3% of the population had a foreign nationality and 17.3% a mother tongue other than the national languages in 2022 (Mäki & Sinkko, 2022).

A further difference is evident in the urban landscapes, with Helsinki possessing large green areas throughout the whole urban area, while Vienna grapples with a lack of public spaces in the inner districts. Although around 50% of Vienna's urban area consists of green spaces (including woods and agricultural land), not all inhabitants have easy access to green areas, particularly those living in densely built-up areas. Connected to the question of urban green spaces are the climatic conditions, with Helsinki's colder temperatures and shorter daylight hours in winter necessitating more indoor public facilities than in Vienna.

As outlined in our methodological approach, we focused in-depth on a specific public space in each city. In Helsinki, this was Maunula House, a multifunctional community hub in a typical neighbourhood in northern Helsinki, featuring a library, a youth centre, adult education facilities, and a cultural venue. It was collaboratively planned with residents and municipal officials, and now serves as a meeting point for various user groups, irrespective of weather conditions. In Vienna, we chose Reumannplatz, a typical public space in the densely populated area in the 10th district, where up to 60% of residents hold foreign citizenship. The square's recent redesign involved multiple stakeholders, including municipal departments, social workers, planners, local initiatives, and citizens. Reumannplatz is often problematised and politicised in media and political discourse, and it has frequently been a place for political assembly (see also Haselbacher & Reeger, 2024).

5. Empirical Analysis: Insights Into Contemporary Urban Challenges

In this section, we delve into the complex dynamics that define the negotiation of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces by outlining the contemporary challenges we found in the empirical material. The plurality of voices included in our study provides divergent perspectives on the multifaceted nature of negotiations over public spaces. Public spaces are never neutral, but inclusion and exclusion are intrinsically linked. Or, as one interviewee in Vienna stated: "From a critical perspective, spaces are always exclusionary, regardless of how they are created or how they are structured. The moment I take exclusion out of the picture and only look at inclusion, then I am excluding" (EI_Vienna_5). In the following, we will give empirical insights into these dynamics that influence the multi-sectoral policy field of public spaces.

5.1. Complex Administrative Apparatus and Governance Structures

While comprehensive urban planning strategies are central to the regulation and governance of public spaces, a complex and differentiated administrative apparatus can slow down the implementation of innovative ideas. Despite the comparatively inclusive approach of Helsinki and Vienna to public space, our expert interviews and focus groups revealed diverse views that were critical of the administrative apparatus. In Vienna, this concerned the complex bureaucracy, a lack of transparency in the multi-tiered decision-making processes, and inconsistent citizen participation (see also Ahn et al., 2023; Novy & Hammer, 2007). In Helsinki, the sectorised administration, the high level of regulation, and long planning processes were identified as challenges. These characteristics made it difficult for residents to become active and were perceived as frustrating.

In Helsinki, the interviewees talked about the regular work of the municipal administration in service provision, investment in public space, and residential policies of social mixing in a positive tone, and saw that the political parties in a municipality led by the National Coalition, Greens, and Social Democrats had a joint understanding about the big issues in the city. However, young people in particular saw the city as a

"bigger instance" with its own internal logic that they perceived as difficult to influence. In Vienna, the multi-level governance structure results in notable variations regarding public space policies and local governance arrangements. The participants in focus group 1 noted that local governance in the case study area was perceived as particularly well-functioning, which was not the case in other districts, where local politics refrain from including multiple stakeholders in policy processes. Several interviewees in Vienna stated that the intricacies of the administration, which involve up to 23 different municipal departments that are concerned with planning, supervising, and maintaining public spaces, slowed down and complicated processes.

Social issues have been partially incorporated into planning agendas in Vienna. Interviewees lauded the city's mission statement "social work in public spaces," which frames public space as a social space with political significance, in which the displacement of groups who are particularly dependent on it should be avoided. In practice, economic and political interests frequently challenge such inclusionary stances that would cater to the needs of marginalised groups, leading to continuous negotiations and policy outcomes that deviate from the original objectives.

The municipal officials interviewed in Helsinki mentioned the recent administrative reform, which streamlined the previously more specialised municipal administration and introduced a new model for resident participation. The participation model introduced local participation coordinators working in the districts with the residents, mainstreamed a small-scale form of participatory budgeting in the development of public spaces, required that each of the municipal units produces a participation plan, and institutionalised the (partly previously existing) councils for youth, elderly, and disabled people. So far, the most successful cases of resident involvement have nevertheless been connected to the development of specific public spaces such as libraries or multi-purpose spaces, with adequate resources and engaged administrative representatives across sectoral borders (see also Kuokkanen & Palonen, 2018). Unlike Vienna, Helsinki lacks district-level administration, and some of the interviewees were willing to increase the decision-making capacities of the districts. An alternative solution to an institutionalised model proposed by some interviewees would include more flexible collaboration between municipal units and stakeholders such as associations, companies, and residents in neighbourhoods, or in specific public spaces.

In Vienna, despite efforts to incorporate bottom-up initiatives and to encourage citizen involvement, policymaking is predominantly top-down. It was noted by some of the interviewees and the focus group participants that there is little flexibility on the part of the city to leave previous policy paths and move beyond individual innovative pilot projects. Conflicts over policies regarding the design of public spaces have become particularly apparent in relation to climate adaptation, in which young people feel that their voices are unheard, and that the city's measures do not go far enough.

Furthermore, in both Helsinki and Vienna, expert interviewees and focus group participants noted that marginalised groups are seldom actively involved in the participatory processes. It is predominantly the white, often more affluent groups, representing what was termed the "usual suspects" (EI_Vienna_2), that participate in open planning procedures. In some cases, social space analyses were carried out during planning procedures to map the needs of distinct groups (for Reumannplatz see Gruber & Jauschneg, 2016). In the case study area in Vienna, this led to the creation of niches and corners that allow several groups to use the space simultaneously. However, innovative approaches to incorporate such diverse perspectives in

the planning policies are insufficient in both cities, despite the existence of some participatory planning procedures and the introduction of the new participation model in Helsinki.

5.2. Availability and Distribution of Public Space

The second challenge concerns the availability and distribution of public spaces, which determines their accessibility to all members of society, regardless of physical ability, socio-economic status, age, gender, or other factors. Helsinki and Vienna have low levels of residential segregation in international comparison, which is connected to targeted social housing policies (see Kadi & Lilius, 2022), but there are nevertheless notable disparities between certain neighbourhoods and districts, which limit access to recreational areas for marginalised communities, and perpetuate feelings of social injustice.

In Helsinki, the interviewees positively highlighted the provision of public services, the allocation of green areas and indoor spaces such as youth centres and libraries throughout the city, in addition to an extensive public transport network. Yet, economically deprived populations tend to be concentrated in the eastern and north-eastern suburbs, where the level of services is lower than in the city centre, and people did not prove to be as mobile as was anticipated by the administration. In parallel with such universal policies, the city also conducts targeted measures to worse-off areas and fixed-term projects in the suburbs. The Helsinki interviewees saw that the combination of public and private services (such as libraries situated in shopping centres) could be positive, as the services could be reached more easily. Some of the municipal officials also stressed that collaboration between public, commercial, and civil society actors could make commercial spaces more accessible for young people. In the quote below, the interview partner recounts how an association in youth work, in which the interviewee had previously worked, initiated a systematic cooperation with the biggest shopping centres:

> And big shopping centre operators like this are also starting to pay attention to how [the shopping centre] can be made into a comfortable space for young people as well. I remember having a conversation with one of the shopping centre bosses when a Finnish operator acted really badly, as they started to evict young people from their space, without realising that they were evicting their future customers at the same time. It's kind of like social dialogue all the time. (EI_Helsinki_1)

In Vienna, due to population growth and urban densification, some public spaces and parks have become overcrowded and overused (see also Arnberger, 2012). An interviewee described this as follows: "It is simply that more people use public spaces….On the one hand, we have the demographic component, we have the component of multiple crises, we have people in cramped living conditions, who depend on those spaces" (EI_Vienna_1). Added to the shortage of public spaces in the inner parts of the city, there is also a need to increase public infrastructure and services (like additional rubbish bins or public toilets, with the latter being scarce in Vienna). Furthermore, the accessibility of public green spaces is marred by an uneven distribution that reflects socio-economic inequalities; the most affluent residential areas are located on the outskirts (characterised by large belts of greenery), as well as in the city centre, with prestigious parks and sites of cultural heritage, whereas the densely built-up residential zones face the problem of a pronounced scarcity of green spaces. The city has responded, among other things, by creating so-called micro spaces (*Mikrofreiräume*, e.g., parklets); however, this cannot level out such disparities.

In both cities, places where young people feel welcome and comfortable are limited, because they are either perceived to be a nuisance, or they feel uncomfortable due to the presence of other user groups, as our younger focus group members recounted. Those who can afford it, take to commercially used places for leisure activities, like cafés or the cinema, or to semi-public spaces like shopping malls, or they retreat to private spaces. In Helsinki, both the interviewees and the focus group participants highlighted the importance of consumption-free spaces, and the role of youth centres, particularly in the suburbs, illustrated by the following quote:

> [In an eastern Helsinki suburb], there wasn't really anywhere to go after school for young people except the youth centre if you didn't have money for the bus to visit a public space somewhere else.…In central and southern Helsinki, it's so easy for young people because everything is immediately accessible. (EI_Helsinki_3)

The focus group participants in both cities critically reflected on the different uses and functions of public space for various user groups (e.g., youth, substance abusers, ethnic and linguistic minorities, people in rental versus owned housing) and saw that certain spaces were often "reserved" for specific groups. These different usages can lead to tensions and conflicts and may result in the displacement of other groups. In Vienna, several measures have been aimed at tackling such conflicts operating at the interface of social work and community management. At the district level, so-called Fairplay teams can be established locally, working to resolve such conflicts over public spaces and their usage. In addition, during the pandemic, so-called awareness teams were created to accompany nighttime activities in public spaces, aiming to mitigate noise disturbances and ensuring the safety and well-being of residents and people partying alike.

5.3. The Effects of Global Crises at the Local Level

Global crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, or the climate crisis have profound ramifications at the local level, impacting the social, economic, and environmental fabric of local communities. These crises manifest in public spaces, as they can become arenas of protest, and undergo shifts in usage patterns, sometimes being neglected, sometimes being increasingly frequented. This raises the question of whether these spaces and public policies are capable of adapting to the challenges posed by such crises.

In Vienna, the multiple crises have increased the already imminent pressure on public spaces; the Covid-19 pandemic and the inflation connected to the war in Ukraine have especially changed the role of public spaces, rendering commercial spaces less accessible. Inequalities and poverty have become more pronounced and visible against this backdrop. The pandemic itself acted as a catalyst for societal polarisation, amplifying societal divisions and creating a new divide through the introduction of compulsory health measures, visibly manifested through mask-wearing behaviours. The initial stringent lockdowns, culminating in the closure of parks, heightened the awareness of public spaces to people who had never thought about this issue before, as the pandemic transformed them into scarce commodities during periods of enforced confinement. People spent more time outside, and new user groups took to public spaces. As one interviewee described it:

> We have groups who didn't use public spaces and then, during the pandemic, suddenly moved their home office to the park and drank Prosecco but didn't understand why there might be a homeless person drinking beer on the bench next to them. (EI_Vienna_1)

The interviewees and focus group participants in Helsinki discussed the effects of global crises less often than those in Vienna. One municipal official saw that elderly people had "covid debt" and needed to be encouraged to come back to public spaces (EI_Helsinki_1). Young people reminisced about the negative reactions towards them when they met in public spaces during the pandemic but saw that the period made their neighbourhood more important than before. The interviewees saw that the pandemic and the war in Ukraine had augmented polarisation. This, together with climate activism, was visible in public space in the form of protests. One pension-age focus group participant suggested that public spaces such as libraries could have experiments, plays, or audiovisual content on past and future crises to increase understanding about them.

Having grown up during the pandemic and spending large parts of the earlier years of high school at home due to lockdowns, the youth in Vienna were highly aware of these crises, illustrated by the following quotes from the youth focus group:

> P1: Generally, the inflation has increased poverty, and poor families struggle even more. I think that's visible here and there. I mean, these [crises] have affected us all in different ways. And we are aware of that.
>
> P2: It's really hard to ignore these topics; everyone is affected.
>
> P3: I think the effects are not only financial; the pandemic also had severe effects on mental health. For example, my panic attacks developed during the pandemic.

Although the City of Vienna acknowledges the urgency of climate adaptation measures, our study revealed a clear generational gap, as it was solely the young participants who continuously emphasised the importance of climate adaptation measures such as increased greenery and shading in public spaces. In Vienna, heatwaves will exacerbate the existing shortage of public space and will create new exclusions and displacements. Concepts need to be developed on how to deal with such issues, as this has an impact on user groups and on those working in public space. In Helsinki, the young focus group participants saw the climate crisis as a "big issue" at the global level, separate from the small-scale issues usually addressed by the actors in their neighbourhood.

5.4. Security, Insecurity, and Securitisation

In an international comparison, both Helsinki and Vienna are relatively safe cities, also stressed in the interviews. In Vienna, the terror attack of 2022 and developments of the past years have nevertheless prompted the implementation of security and surveillance measures. The topic of security is often exploited in populist discourse, whereby certain neighbourhoods are framed as being inherently unsafe, which is often intertwined with an anti-immigrant discourse, perpetuating racist narratives. In Helsinki, incidents of youth violence and street gangs have been an issue in the past few years, and have provoked an intense media debate. As the following quote shows, gangs were also seen as a failure in social inclusion:

> I feel irritated that today some people are still of the opinion that we don't have gangs…wake up, for God's sake; now quite quickly we should undertake some corrective measures in the case of youth remaining outside society, who feel this sense of exclusion. Those who then search for acceptance and their own role and place from somewhere else. (EI_Helsinki_1)

In Vienna, the interviewees highlighted that it is mostly subjective feelings of (in)security and not actual crime rates that are decisive in whether public spaces are considered to be safe or not. Such subjective feelings of insecurity are often connected to issues like cleanliness, which is why one of our interviewees proposed that the urban competence of residents should be strengthened, stating that "safety and cleanliness are often mixed up" (EI_Vienna_3). Security measures restrict individuals' rights and freedoms in public spaces and one criticism was that such measures disproportionately target certain groups, like people who are read as Muslims, people who consume drugs, or people who are homeless, perpetuating their exclusion and displacement.

A notable tension exists between suppressive security measures, such as surveillance or safety zones, and softer approaches like social work. The interviewees in Helsinki had divided opinions about the increasing use of CCTV, many of them presenting relatively positive or neutral views, particularly when it was used in "anonymous" places like the commercial city centre. However, many highlighted the benefits of "softer" measures and the importance of community work in creating safe public spaces in residential areas. In Vienna, the implementation of security measures like the institution of safety zones and alcohol bans in certain public spaces faced substantial criticism from participants in focus group 1, depicted by the following quotes:

> P1: We also witnessed that the problem was not solved, but simply moved. At Reumannplatz they reacted by putting security staff there….I think they even removed benches?
>
> P2: Yes, that's a good example of how problems are solved: "We have a problem with the youth, so we remove the benches, then they won't be here anymore."

The young focus group participants in Vienna had contrasting opinions and even wished for tougher security measures and increased police presence, as the following quote outlines: "On the side of that café, they could open a little police station, I think that would discourage people from doing anything because they'd see 'Ah, there's the police.'" In Vienna, young female participants voiced strong grievances about feeling insecure in certain public spaces due to the presence of groups of men and negative experiences of catcalling and harassment, saying that such experiences made them withdraw from using those spaces.

In Helsinki, the expert interviewees stressed both the humanity of the local police, and the violence used by some private security guards against young people, as well as the racism met by visible ethnic minorities in public space. Moreover, they underlined the need to find a balance between unsupervised spaces and social control, particularly in the case of youth. Young people in both cities mentioned being uncomfortable with drug and alcohol users in public spaces, although the young people in Helsinki said that they felt relatively safe with a group of alcohol users regularly sitting in front of Maunula House. In Helsinki, the young people stressed the differences between the feelings of safety among children in rental and owned housing, mainly due to substance abuse in the yards of the rental houses and in the public spaces surrounding them, illustrated by the following quote from a focus group participant:

> No one was ever invited to the Heka [municipal rental houses] yard because there was [somebody] with a syringe or with a can of beer; we were then at the playground, or we were at the schoolyard at the time. The need for public space was emphasized.

6. Discussion: Universalism, Particularism, and the Complexities of Inclusion

Helsinki and Vienna are both embedded in European welfare state regimes, although they represent different models (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Although the cities have extensive welfare policies and recognise the importance of public spaces for social cohesion, the comparison revealed both similarities and differences. In both cities, the administrative structures were an issue, albeit for different reasons. In the case of Vienna, the multi-level system and historically evolved complex bureaucratic structures tend to slow down and complicate processes, making it difficult to create and implement policy measures ad hoc. The interviewees and focus group participants in Helsinki perceived that it was difficult to influence the administrative structures, despite reforms such as the new participatory model. The availability of and access to public space was another theme that was yet more pronounced in Vienna compared to Helsinki, as public space is scarcer in the inner and more densely populated parts of the city, which was amplified through rapid urban development. In Helsinki, the Nordic weather puts pressure for indoor public spaces to be provided in the winter, and the city's current planning policies affect the local green spaces, particularly important during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Hence, the temporal, historical, and geographical contexts of specific spaces impact how they are experienced, and influence the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in a locality (see Lefebvre, 2013; Madanipour, 2023).

Young people rely on public spaces in their daily lives (Litscher, 2014), as these spaces provide them with autonomous environments for social interaction, where they can connect with peers and escape the supervision of family or guardians. In both cities, young people's access to public spaces was partially contested. The focus group participants at Maunula House and Reumannplatz narrated how their access to these spaces differed according to neighbourhood, gender, and social background. Many of the young participants, especially the female ones, preferred to take to commercially used spaces, or to go to the inner and more affluent parts of the city, which requires economic resources and mobility. This underscores the importance of having non-commercial public spaces in all parts of the city, both indoor and outdoor, to provide young people with opportunities for social and leisure activities, irrespective of their social and economic background and weather conditions. Furthermore, both cities rarely involve young people in participatory planning processes, which is why the youth perspective is often missing. Young people are mostly mentioned in relation to certain problematic aspects, such as party culture, noise, or youth gangs. Hence, while children are integrated into the urban fabric through designated playgrounds, teenagers and young adults are barely represented in urban landscapes. Instead, they are often viewed as a nuisance when occupying public spaces (Galanakis, 2016). Finally, the issue of security and securitisation was tension-laden, and controversially discussed. While feeling safe in public space was important for all the interviewees and focus group participants, they had differing opinions about camera surveillance and police presence. In the case of young people, a balance between control and free spaces in which to hang out was perceived as being important. However, security was also gendered, particularly in the case of Vienna, where participants withdrew from using certain spaces due to negative experiences and the fear of being harassed, but it was also a matter of class, as young people in Helsinki highlighted differing feelings of safety between children in owned and rental housing.

As noted above, marginalised groups frequently face control or displacement in public spaces (Johnstone, 2017; Ye, 2019). Although the Helsinki and Vienna cases showed co-presence of people from different backgrounds in shared spaces, they also revealed tensions and processes of exclusion (e.g., Lefebvre, 1968; Watson, 2006) that result in the constant negotiation of public spaces (Fenster, 2006; Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, 2009). Vienna and the Reumannplatz case study exemplify how multiple crises increase tensions between different user groups, resulting in a significant increase in control over specific groups that are framed as undesirable, along with various mechanisms of displacement. Our findings highlight the importance of public space as a crucial but often scarce resource, that becomes increasingly contested as its availability diminishes, underscoring the need for policymakers to invest in it. Administering public space should not be a top-down process but involve residents and users of various ages and diverse backgrounds, leaving room for bottom-up uses of the space (Iveson, 2013). In this study, we were able to incorporate the perspective of young people, who are partially marginalised, but we did not directly reach the most excluded groups. However, such a research approach which incorporates different perspectives has proven fruitful for making contradictory effects of policies visible and diverging needs more tangible. In order to effectively counteract the further exclusion of groups and individuals, policymakers should aim for creative approaches that allow for the incorporation of the diverse perspectives of (marginalised and vulnerable) user groups, even though they might refrain from taking part in participatory planning processes.

The policies of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces are intricately connected to the tension between universalistic and particularistic policy measures (Laclau, 1992; Madanipour, 2023; Mukhtar-Landgren, 2012), which involves balancing the overarching goal of promoting inclusivity and equity for all with targeted interventions to address specific needs and challenges. While the overall approach of the cities is mostly universalistic, partly due to their welfare state contexts, zooming in on specific places reveals differences in resource allocation, infrastructure, and services between neighbourhoods. The challenges stemming from the tension between universalism and particularism have implications for the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces. Our study showed that the requirements of inclusive, accessible, and safe public spaces are not identical for all user groups and providing inclusive spaces for certain groups can inadvertently exclude or lead to the displacement of others (cf. Madanipour, 2023). This raises critical questions about potential trade-offs between inclusion and exclusion and emphasises the acknowledgement of difference and the need for incorporating diverse perspectives when negotiating the use, allocation, and development of public space.

Recent crises have increased the pressure on public spaces and the tensions related to them, and will continue to do so, especially regarding the climate topic. Interestingly, the issue of climate change emerged as one of the most pressing issues regarding public spaces for the youth focus group participants, particularly in Vienna, while it was only briefly, if at all, addressed by other research participants and interviewees. Navigating future crises would imply a more proactive form of policymaking, anticipating future challenges and implementing preventative measures (DeLeo, 2016). Reactive policymaking tends to respond to immediate crises and policy issues as they become apparent, often from a particularistic perspective. It bears the risk of addressing symptoms rather than underlying systemic issues, potentially leading to unintended consequences such as the further marginalisation of certain groups. Furthermore, some challenges stemming from global crises extend beyond local capacities.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to address the specific challenges Helsinki and Vienna face regarding public space and the negotiation of inclusion/exclusion according to the views of city officials, stakeholders, and young people. Moreover, we asked what effects arose from these challenges, and how they were tackled by the cities. Our findings highlighted the complex administrative apparatus and governance structures, the availability and distribution of public spaces, the effects of global crises at the local level, and controversies related to policies and feelings of (in)security. The impact of such crises becomes more pronounced the scarcer public space is, as seen in the differences in how these issues were discussed in Helsinki and Vienna. Our findings revealed similarities and differences between the cities, with many of the challenges currently being slightly more pronounced in Vienna, where easily accessible public space in the inner city is scarcer, and migration-related diversity and urban growth are more dynamic than in Helsinki. Our research highlights the complex dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the right to the city, paying particular attention to the perspective of young people. Local governments need to be aware of the overlapping and contradictory effects of policies on various groups and balance between universalistic and particularistic policy measures, while identifying ways in which to involve the perspectives of diverse user groups in the negotiation about the use, allocation, and development of public space. Crises exacerbate the tensions related to public space, which requires a more proactive governance approach for tackling future crises. In future research, the topics above could be analysed with a broader variety of urban contexts, for instance from different welfare state traditions. Moreover, the delimitation of the study to one of the themes analysed in the current article would provide a more in-depth perspective on the phenomenon.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the interviewees and the participants in the focus groups for their time and the substantial insights they provided us with. Research assistants in Helsinki and Vienna who supported us include Pihla Kuusela, Eurídice Hernández, Jalmari Sarla, Joonas Hassinen, and Josefa Stiegler, and we would like to thank them for their valuable contributions in the D.Rad project. Finally, our thanks go to the reviewers for their constructive feedback that has helped us improve this article.

Funding

This article is based on the results of the Horizon 2020 project De-Radicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Re-Integrate (D.Rad), Grant Agreement number 959198.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The interactive game cards developed for the focus group workshops are available in the Open Science Framework repository (https://osf.io/s4vu7 and https://osf.io/9wxz3).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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URBAN PLANNING
ISSN: 2183-7635

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