

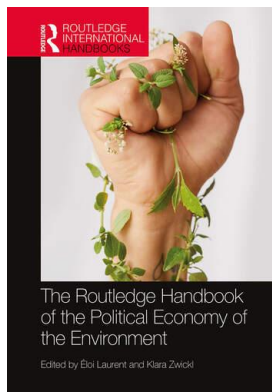
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Éloi Laurent, Klara Zwickl

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Ian M. Cook, Tamara Steger

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DESIGNING URBAN
SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental justice in EU-funded projects

Ian M. Cook and Tamara Steger

Urban sustainability initiatives in European cities generally aim to promote ecological and social well-being and nurture a competitive edge. Still, urban sustainability efforts lag behind in their attention to social equality even as urban environmental disparities continue to run deep across race, class and gender lines. Low-income populations in European cities, for example, tend to be exposed to more air pollution, noise and extreme temperatures than are wealthier segments of the population (EEA, 2018; WHO, 2019) and have less access to green space (The Marmot Review, 2010). Immigrants and slum dwellers, in particular, generally tend to live in the most polluted areas (WHO, 2010). Women, children and the aged can face more hardships when it comes to certain environmental living conditions (WHO, 2019). Efforts to improve urban sustainability, furthermore, may backfire in cases, for example, where ‘green’ initiatives result in gentrification leading to further exclusion of disadvantaged communities (Anguelovski et al., 2018a).

Participatory approaches in urban sustainability initiatives can play a fundamental role in not only explicitly incorporating social equality or equity as an important concern or goal, but also building in the perspectives of struggling communities, for example, based on ‘livability’ (Trudeau, 2018) to overcome persistent, institutionalized inequalities. Based on a review of 94 articles on stakeholder participation in urban sustainability governance (2013–2016), Soma et al. (2018) affirm the importance of stakeholder participation in assuring green livable cities and legitimate, accountable and transparent decision-making but point out that not all participatory approaches sufficiently engage sustainability principles, such as social justice. Rather, there is an emphasis on the urban built environment (John et al., 2015), and “it remains unclear how to proceed in marginalised urban areas when the context is ‘inequality’, ‘social exclusion’, ‘poverty’, ‘high conflict levels’, ‘high corruption levels’, ‘pollution’, ‘water shortage’, and/or ‘lack of institutional capacity’, among others” (Soma et al., 2018, pp. 444–445).

In the last decades, the European Union (EU) has invited project proposals that can advance participatory or inclusive governance processes as a means to promote urban sustainability. We believe this offers an interesting analytical entry point for upscaling findings from a project-specific scale to the dominant project-led governance approach. By looking at the design of EU-funded urban governance-related projects, we can learn about the potential and limits of the wider trend for projectification, especially as it relates to environmental justice in urban

contexts. We thus explore the participatory mechanisms of select EU-funded urban sustainability projects based on an environmental justice framework.¹

In this chapter, we articulate the conceptual and methodological boundaries of the research. Then, we provide an analytical discussion of projectified participatory mechanisms while evoking examples of select projects to demonstrate our emerging findings. In conclusion, we provide a summary of our insights for building urban sustainability based on participatory approaches from an environmental justice perspective.

Methodology: an ‘optimistic’ approach

Methodologically, we drew on our involvement in the EU-funded project “UrbanA – Urban Arenas for Sustainable and Just Cities” that aims to distil approaches from EU projects that focus on either sustainability or social justice in urban contexts.² For the most part, the projects were funded under the Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development 4–7 (FP 4–7) and Horizon 2020 schemes, but also included other EU and non-EU projects that were relevant to the aims of the project. This involved a mapping of EU projects, as part of a wider consortium, before honing in on select projects and/or approaches. As a consortium the authors played a role in a multistage process that mapped projects advancing approaches that sought to tackle urban (un)sustainability and (in)justice. The process’s wider goal was to broker knowledge across ‘city-makers’ in European cities, thus helping the cities transform into becoming sustainable and just places. As such, aside from drawing out approaches from the projects, the mapping also identified individuals and groups, some of whom we brought together at ‘urban arenas’.

The mapping process involved exploring possibilities through a consortium-generated ‘gut list’ ($n = 25–30$), an open call on social media and a systematic scanning via the Cordis³ database of EU-funded projects to create a basic long list ($n = 100+$), a ‘quick scanning’ of these projects to create a final long list ($n = 100$), a desk study of these projects and the approaches contained within them to produce a hotlist of approaches ($n = 30–40$), and finally a distilling of this research to produce a Wiki database of approaches.⁴ These were then shared with city-makers at an arena event for validating and co-creation, leading to changes to the Wiki. In this chapter we draw from our role within this process and a further reanalysis of specific projects and approaches covered within UrbanA.⁵

The mapping was focused around four central themes – urban, sustainability, justice and transformative potential. Regarding (in)justice, we looked for exclusion and attempts for inclusion with an intersectional eye (i.e. ethnicity, age, gender, income, etc.) based on an environmental justice framework (see later). In our further review of the projects and approaches for this chapter, we reanalyzed the materials with a specific focus on participatory approaches. Based on this analysis of the project documentation of select urban sustainability projects, we identified several key themes: inclusivity, diverse roles, integration, networks and networking, and different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing. In addition, we sought out reflections upon completion of various elements of the projects or the projects as a whole to identify ‘lessons learned’ from the perspective of the project partners who were responsible for implementing the project work packages.

As such, this is not a comprehensive (or quantitative) analysis of all potentially relevant projects. Such an analysis would require, we believe, a much more detailed ethnographic approach, including extensive interviews that capture a project’s unfolding in real time and how it interacted with its target groups and the wider social, cultural and political context within which it is embedded. Rather, our aim here is tightly circumscribed to how project partners present their

projects –in both their planning and their self-evaluations through the required documentation found on their respective websites and within the Cordis database. We treat the project documentation as a textual representation of an ideal project which, though it may not fully reflect how those involved or affected by the project experienced its activities, nevertheless reveals how environmental justice is written into project conceptualization and design.

Our ‘optimistic’ approach is one in which we emphasize elements that enhance environmental justice in the participatory approaches to promoting urban sustainability. We identified three main tenets through which the projectification of urban sustainability straddles an environmental justice framework. (1) Urban sustainability is historically based on the concept of sustainable development that asserts overlapping economic, ecological and social spheres. However, researchers and practitioners alike have been increasingly compelled to add ‘just’ or ‘justice’ to the term sustainability to overcome the emerging predominance of the economic and ecological spheres. This further coincides with the long-standing debates and discussions around the conceptualization of the ‘environment’ and the relationships across nature and culture manifest in a projectified context, in which culture may be either central or peripheral to urban sustainability initiatives rather than assumed as an integrated and mutually informed dynamic. (2) Projects may design and/or test participatory mechanisms that attempt to build in or emphasize one or more of the following: inclusivity, diversity, integration, networking and different approaches to knowledge building that may or may not deliberately address the discriminatory, racist and/or classist basis that environmental justice remedies. (3) Finally, environmental justice is challenged by the perpetuation of structural inequalities that take time to transform. In a projectified context in which many EU projects last three years, the rigidity or limited elasticity of such structures can only yield to environmental justice over the long haul with an enduring persistence.

Urban sustainability, environmental justice and projectification

Urban sustainability, from the standpoint of sustainable development,⁶ is configured as three separate but overlapping spheres: economic growth, environmental protection and social equity. However, from an environmental justice perspective, economic, ecological and social equity do not constitute separate, overlapping spheres; rather, they are integrated fundamental aspects of everyday life and survival (Di Chiro, 1996). Di Chiro refers to “living environmentalisms” (2008) to assert a more integrated and dynamic understanding of sustainability from an environmental justice perspective reasoning that the separation of economy, ecology and society does not reflect the reality of our existence in place, and such a separation sets the stage for the forces that assert economic growth as central.⁷ Inequalities are thus manifested by the forces that preclude or deny this interrelationship. Green city initiatives that compartmentalize environmental and economic issues, for example, tend to emphasize energy efficiency inspired predominantly by climate change and the economic principles of competitiveness with little or tangential attention to equity or justice (see, for example, Winter, 2016; Pearsall and Pierce, 2010). Thus while the greening of cities can benefit all, in practice as some cities become greener, their residents can become whiter and wealthier. Greening cities have thus been increasingly challenged to assure proportionate access to green spaces while avoiding the displacement of poorer subordinated communities (Anguelovski et al., 2018a; Gould and Lewis, 2017; Winter, 2016; Wolch et al., 2014; Curran and Hamilton, 2012; Checker, 2011), which raises questions about the distribution of green space and if greening could be done in a more even and holistic manner.

In response to this, environmental justice scholars assert the need for “just sustainabilities” (Agyeman et al., 2003; Agyeman, 2013) or sustainability as a focus on social justice, community,

environment and economic security “that is meaningful for all communities” (Di Chiro, 2013). While environmental justice from a social movement standpoint is a call for distributive justice, inclusive participation and recognition (Schlosberg, 2004), the environmental justice movement has a pluralistic nature embracing diversity in modes of organization, foci and action (Schlosberg, 1999) and is associated with multiple spatialities (Walker, 2009). The forces for sustainability should be diverse and contextualized based on sharing (Agyeman et al., 2016, refer to Agyeman et al., 2013). Thus fundamental to urban sustainability from an environmental justice viewpoint are the perspectives, experiences and meaningful participation of struggling communities.

Institutional and structural forces are instrumental in the promotion of environmental justice, raising questions about how to overcome deeply rooted structural inequalities and trajectories (Pellow, 2000; Schlosberg, 2004, refers to I.M. Young, 1990, 2000) and engage the importance of history (Escobar, 1996). Thus, urban sustainability from an environmental justice perspective nurtures the transformation of the structural and institutional mechanisms that perpetuate the subordination and vulnerable-ization of certain communities. This is no small task and has significant temporal considerations. It is a long-term ‘project’ central to urban sustainability from an environmental justice perspective.

In general, EU funding mechanisms are characterized by projectification – a preference for specially created ephemeral organizational forms tasked with meeting set goals within a limited period of time (Sjöblom et al., 2013). The appeal of projects, an organizational framework inspired perhaps initially from the private sector, lay in their perceived ability to both respond to specific needs in a timely manner and offer more efficiency, flexibility and innovation than permanent structures do. Projects dealing with urban sustainability are flexible coordinated efforts (in contradistinction to standing organizations) using specified tools applied toward a specific goal within a certain time frame, “delivering an idea” and solving problems in new ways (Cerne and Jansson, 2019, p. 357). Diverse and multiple ideas and goals emerging in and across different localities is methodologically well aligned with the pluralistic nature of environmental justice.

Despite the perpetuation of embedded historical structural inequalities and trajectories, a good deal of sustainability work occurs in the form of projects that are temporally challenged by the need for efficiency, deadlines and finality. The challenge is thus how to address a long-standing dynamic through multiple short-term project processes. In such projectified contexts, a delicate balance that bridges project initiatives with more permanent organizations is called for so as to benefit from the former’s flexibility and innovative capacities and the latter’s coordination and continuity (see Godenhjelm et al., 2015).

Another key to overcoming the challenges inherent in projectified work is to assure continuous and long-term advances in urban sustainability through the narratives of their participants and learning from project “mistakes and downfalls” (Vifell and Soneryd, 2012, p. 26). However, one scholar notes that dissensus, “[u]nlike methods assembled out of consensus-building exercises performed amongst the usual suspects in the comfort of well-funded frameworks”, reveals more about the needed pathways toward urban sustainability that is socially just (Kaika, 2017, p. 11). Moreover, on an EU-level this has led to varying degrees of exclusion as an expert-populated ‘project world’ has emerged with its own conventions, rhetoric, regulations and standards (Büttner and Leopold, 2016). Whilst these experts can ‘scale hop’ between the local, national and EU levels, local inhabitants are often left without the project world skills and language needed to effect change through project funding mechanisms (Szóke, 2013).

As such, in the following analysis of EU-funded projects, we explore inclusivity and participation from an environmental justice perspective. For example, in what ways, if at all, are

disadvantaged or vulnerable communities a part of the participatory narrative schema of urban sustainability projects and what challenges and opportunities have been garnered in that process?

Participatory processes within urban sustainability and justice projects

Urban sustainability projects supported by the EU's funding schemes straddle different assumptions and conceptualizations of sustainability that have implications for environmental justice. Environmental justice activists, for example, raise questions about the purpose of sustainability and its beneficiaries (Di Chiro, 2013). Accordingly, we should ask who benefits from sustainability initiatives, and what participatory or recognition support mechanisms exist within them. Our reading of EU-funded project documentation suggests that guiding principles are asserted when it comes to particular participatory processes and methodologies in relationship to urban sustainability that include, among others:

- Inclusivity (e.g. youths)
- Diverse roles (e.g. citizen science, citizen or participatory budgeting)
- Different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing: participatory research methodologies (e.g. action research)
- Networks and networking or partnership building
- Integration (e.g. co-construction of knowledge across experts and policymakers)

These projectified points of engagement, however, reveal different assumptions about what constitutes inclusivity, diverse roles, integration, networks or partnership building, and different kinds of knowledge or ways of knowing. Further, EU project calls provide guidance on these matters that may incorporate social involvement in the form of enhancing environmental stewardship and, more recently, environmental citizenship.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity in a projectified context widely emphasizes organizational or sectoral representation (e.g. civil society, government, private industry, scientists, environmental issues such as energy), while an explicit environmental justice focus might target 'disadvantaged', 'vulnerable' and/or immigrant, youth and elderly communities. However, inclusivity is also indicated in a project's conceptualization of urban sustainability, including the extent to which social equity is engaged. Inclusivity can also be a driver of project-based research. For example, GREENLULUS (Green Locally Unwanted Land Uses) involved a review and analysis of 99 cities across Europe, the United States and Canada focused on environmental justice and gentrification. They concluded that stronger urban social policies on affordability and 'staying in place' protect community access to the benefits of green initiatives while preventing gentrification that can further exclude socio-economically disadvantaged groups (Anguelovski et al., 2018b).

Other projects have acknowledged the importance of garnering disadvantaged youth perspectives in policymaking and decision-making (e.g. SocIEty – Social Innovation | Empowering the Young for the Common Good). Meanwhile, ProGReg (Productive Green Infrastructure for post-industrial urban regeneration) focuses on "urban areas that face the challenge of post-industrial regeneration. These areas suffer from social and economic disadvantages, inequality and related crime and security problems."⁸ One of their project's participatory forums that took place in Zagreb, Croatia, also specifically included a non-governmental organization ('ISKRA')

that represents vulnerable groups and a representative from a Roma ethnic minority association. Projectified work can further build inclusivity along the lines of balanced representation across government, academia, private enterprise and civil society actors. Additional efforts from an environmental justice perspective build in representation from the perspective of community diversity in which poor and struggling communities are targeted to address liveability and the critical issue of survival.

A recent trendy iteration of an urban sustainability methodology is ‘nature-based solutions’ (NBS). While it is not defined clearly or consistently across the projects that we reviewed, it generally draws on environmental services in urban economies focusing on the built environment. NATURVATION asserts that it is “the use of nature properties of ecosystems” to “limit impacts of climate change, enhance biodiversity and improve environmental quality while contributing to economic activities and social well-being”.⁹ URBAN GreenUP describes a main part of their project: “Through the implementation of very technical nature-based solutions in large-scale districts, URBAN GreenUP aims at achieving a variety of impacts related with both environmental and socio-economic aspects.”¹⁰ GrowGreen “aims to create climate and water resilient, healthy and livable cities by investing in nature-based solutions (NBS). Making nature part of the urban living environment improves quality of life for all citizens and will help business to prosper.”¹¹ Some examples of nature-based solutions include work to build in bike paths, green roof gardens, parks that reduce the urban heat island effect and water flow management through varied porous surfaces and encatchments.

While nature-based solutions tend to emphasize technical, economic and environmental aspects, a ‘nature-based solutions’ methodology does not necessarily preclude issues of equality. NATURVATION included a literature review based on the “social and cultural benefits” of nature-based solutions and found that 11 out of 65 identified relevant articles focused on “enhancement of equality” (Maia da Rocha et al., 2017). The discourses surrounding such solutions, furthermore, have incorporated the articulation of demands for open, participatory green spaces in cities, thus exceeding the ongoing marketization of urban nature that such an approach often engenders (Kotsila et al., 2020). The project NATURVATION¹² provides guidance on how marginalized groups can be reached and included and describes what works in terms of approaches and methods to promote citizen engagement for nature-based solutions. These include citizen panels (a “large, demographically representative group of citizens that is surveyed regularly”); the use of appreciative inquiry to assess the valuable aspects of an idea or topic and see what resources already exist; advocacy planning, where specialists assist and advise citizens; and community organizing through which citizens can assert their interests. URBANAT, another NBS project, specifically engages deprived communities in their efforts by focusing on the “regeneration and integration of deprived social housing urban developments through an innovative and inclusive catalogue of NBS, ensuring sustainability and mobilising driving forces for social cohesion”.¹³

In general, however, projectified urban sustainability efforts driven by a predominance of market and ecological values proliferate, in part, because social equity is not sufficiently rooted in urban sustainability (Gould and Lewis, 2017). From an environmental justice standpoint, this integration is central from the perspective of not only articulating environmental problems, but also asserting solutions.

Diverse roles

Indeed, recognition of different ways of knowing and their role in promoting urban sustainability is critical from an environmental justice standpoint. Citizen observatories, for example,

create the possibility “to learn from citizen experience and perception and enable citizenship co-participation in community decision making and co-operative planning” (see, for example, CITI-SENSE). Citizens or “civic scientists” collect environmental data or may participate in the development of a public municipal budget. For example, the neighbourhood citizen budgeting process introduced in Amsterdam in 2010 emphasized human rights and transparency and culminated in a budgetary output in 2014. In such efforts, “municipal bureaucracy stands next to the citizen instead of in opposite him/her” (Wittmayer and Rach, 2016, p. 8 quote Engbersen et al., 2010), “bridge the commitment between citizen and government” (interview cited in Wittmayer and Rach 2016, p. 9) which can be done, for example, in a citizens’ perspectives paper. This effort spanned years, and the budgeting process was part of an ongoing cycle involving a significant learning curve on the part of community participants. It is unclear, however, the extent to which these civic-based initiatives recognized the views and concerns of disadvantaged community members. And, a general appreciation for diverse epistemologies can be critical.

Different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing

Indeed, there is a tacit recognition in some projects that different kinds of knowledge or ways of knowing are related to inclusivity. This is another way of saying that for projects to be inclusive, they must not only acknowledge but also meaningfully utilize the knowledge brought and generated by diverse individuals and groups of people.

URBANSELF and other projects have focused on an actor-centred approach when engaging local forms of communication, knowledge and modes of survival. This is opposed to placing technical expertise at the forefront of urban change. As such, URBANSELF notes that there is a difference between, on the one hand, training inhabitants in ways that allow them to appreciate urban planning, and on the other, recognizing local citizens’ competences, knowledge and capacities. Ultimately, this is to suggest that shared visions of the future and planning possibilities should be brought forth by integrating citizens into urban governance models. URBAN-SELF concluded,

Sustainable urban development therefore requires a broader societal dialogue. A transition is needed from a rational, technocratic policy process towards a participative process of ‘messy governance’ in pursuit of ‘clumsy solutions’; one that recognises the validity of multiple, subjective stakeholder viewpoints.¹⁴

Different ways of engaging different knowledge forms may also require a reconfiguration of actor roles. IN-CONTEXT noted, “When faced with this type of initiatives, local governments can take the role of bystanders, passengers, or drivers” and “[i]n the community arena people meet as individuals, including their values, emotions and hopes on one side and their institutional environments on the other.”¹⁵ However, they note a challenge with taking on different roles for government actors in participatory processes,

Elected leaders or public servants may experience local initiatives in an ambivalent way: on the one hand they might want to support engaged citizens. On the other hand, they might see local initiatives as a threat to the self-concept of being a representative body that holds special expertise and is elected to fulfil public duties.¹⁶

However, it is further noted that local government representatives’ roles need to be asserted based on a case-by-case basis.

Still, IN-CONTEXT's approach using "out-of-town-hall" participatory forums are challenged by the organizing principles of more traditional or formal public participation processes, expressing,

[i]t is not easy to organise successful public participation processes. Rows of empty seats in public meetings and 'the usual suspects' bringing up the same issues over and over again are familiar to all those responsible for implementing participation on the ground.¹⁷

Including people with diverse roles and recognizing different ways of knowing was seen as only the first step in some projects, with also the desired need for more robust networks.

Inclusivity and integration emphasize meaningful social involvement in the production of knowledge, if predominantly originating from assumptions about common divisions made between scientists and policymakers and layperson and expert knowledge. Participatory research methodologies (e.g. action research) might serve as inspiration for both affirming and revisiting projectified governance in order to better promote environmental justice in urban sustainability initiatives. Such methodologies can convene networks that link scientists, policymakers and civil society and/or communities in producing knowledge while also recognizing different ways of knowing.

Networks and networking or partnership building

Bringing together a combination of scientists and policymakers, and possibly civic entities, is a common methodology to facilitate science-policy networks in the co-construction or implementation of knowledge in policy making. Foodlinks, for example, introduces itself as "a collaborative project . . . with the purpose of evaluating knowledge brokerage activities to promote sustainable food consumption and production: linking scientists, policymakers and civil society organizations".¹⁸ URBAN-NEXUS¹⁹ sought to engage those from different "geographical, cultural and professional backgrounds" and "different types of actors, such as municipalities, universities, national ministries, knowledge and lobby institutes and civil society organisations" in a

structured dialogue approach . . . aimed to promote a culture change in the stakeholders working in urban areas across Europe. It will introduce them, via Dialogue Cafés, to individuals, organisations and disciplines that they would not have previously encountered in their roles.²⁰

The creation of networks is one of the ways in which novel forms of knowledge are brokered. For these networks of knowledge to build in more environmental justice, however, additional participatory targets may be considered. For instance, the project URBAN-SELF's main goal was to identify working solutions for cities through different forms of self-organization and then to take these findings and spread them to various stakeholders.²¹ Self-organization can draw on pre-existing strengths and initiative and could be complemented by support mechanisms for self-organizing that attempt to overcome pre-existing barriers to participation. Such an actor-centred approach can draw on local knowledge/survival strategies first and foremost, rather than starting from technical expertise. In this particular case, for example, there was the extension of consideration "for those who are not fully integrated into a market economy".²²

A much more solidified network has been created through the three iterations project-turned-programme URBACT. The idea of the programme is to allow cities to work together to find solutions to shared challenges through co-learning and networking. It describes itself as a

network of 26 associations in 23 European countries enhancing the competences of local actors that are engaged in the social and solidarity economy, supporting a new paradigm of economic development in order to fight poverty and to diffuse an equitable and sustainable way of living.²³

There is further evidence, within the project documentation, of an understanding of the need to integrate the knowledge co-constructed from within these networks.

Integration

One way such an integration is realized is through community of practice (CoP), a concept that has gained popularity within project documentation as a specific means of promoting the kinds of diverse, inclusive and integrated networks needed to build urban sustainability. However, generally the concept has not been historically strictly defined or consistently applied (Li et al., 2009). Rather, it has evolved from initially focusing on social learning among practitioners and the professionalization of novice participants in interaction with experts to a wider emphasis on individual development in group dynamics and ultimately considered in the managerial facilitation of corporate competitiveness (Li et al., 2009, refer to the works of Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

The project Foodlinks defines CoP as

a group that evolves or is created around a common interest in a particular field with the goal of expanding knowledge related to that field. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other and have an opportunity to broaden their understanding of the matter
(Wenger et al., 2002).²⁴

Project documentation noted, however, that some participants found it difficult to bring in different ways of knowing in contradistinction to traditional scientific knowledge, acknowledging the importance of balanced representation across academics and practitioners and understanding links between government, research and civil society organizations.²⁵

Other projects such as IN-CONTEXT noted that in transition management approaches, the

cooperation of the engaged citizens and the local government needs to be on equal footing, each bringing in their knowledge, values and ideas. The nature of the relationship in transition management approaches is thus fundamentally different from the traditional forms of governance dominated by expert-knowledge and top-down policy making. It is characterised by respect, non-directivity, openness of agenda and creativity.²⁶

Some projects combine these aspects; in CITIES4PEOPLE,²⁷ for example, develop flexible 'citizen mobility toolkits' to be used in different localities when determining needs and wants for people-led transport solutions.

Calling time on projects?

A common thread found throughout all of the projects is that bottom-up participation in processes aimed at urban (un)sustainability and (in)justice requires time (and money). As reflected upon within the INCONTEXT²⁸ project, “aiming for a sustainability transition tends to be more time-consuming and therefore more expensive (at least at face value) than implementing ordinary top-down approaches”. What is less readily apparent within project documentation, however, is the different types of temporal mediation and contradictions that arise when different groups of people engage in democratic participatory processes (see Abram, 2014). This is to suggest that different groups of people have very different temporal frames through which they might imagine a particular issue and how it relates to other aspects of their lives and their city.

A project, by its very definition, is a temporally constrained mechanism that, once its initially agreed upon time frame has expired, ceases to operate formally. This is evident with even mundane matters. For instance, when conducting research for the UrbanA project, we struggled with this as most projects create websites that cease to exist once the project ends (thus any outcomes or learnings from the project are much harder to track down). Still, collective efforts in the context of project work can build relationships and experiences that are not forgotten or lost even after the project comes to a close.

Additional temporal issues that challenge projectified work and other urban sustainability initiatives are related to the election cycle. For example, in URBAN-NEXUS, it was noted, “[k]ey constraints for integrating urban governance include the democratic electoral cycle that reinforces a political culture of short termism and the proliferation of sector-specific funding regimes, conceived and implemented separately, which compound further the challenges of coordination.”²⁹

When dealing with issues of urban environmental justice, however, the finality of projects poses a significant challenge. It is particularly problematic because transforming structural inequalities takes time, more than is allowed for within the standard project time frames. By distilling approaches from past EU-funded projects, UrbanA seeks to alleviate this by providing the knowledge and translocal connections citymakers need to instigate transformation. This assumption about the long-term sustainability of projects through launching enduring networks is also shared by URBAN-NEXUS. As URBAN-NEXUS notes, “the strong focus of URBAN-NEXUS on integrated combinations between practices between various themes within urban sustainability will lead to long term, integrated partnerships with participants from all thematic themes.”³⁰ They conclude further, “[t]he traditional focus on ‘big bang’ policies is inappropriate. A ‘progressive incremental’ approach that focuses on how small steps cumulatively produce significant returns over time is more appropriate.”³¹ Internal and external projectified networks play an important role in assuring that efforts continue. More broadly, this points to the need to engage a longer-term effort to understand the effects of (and then integrate) the project form with more stable institutional arrangements (Munck af Rosenschöld and Wolf, 2017).

Conclusion

The project-based participatory mechanisms reviewed and discussed here draw attention to inclusivity, diverse actors and roles, different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing, networks and integration that, to varying degrees, are able to align with environmental justice principles along the lines of conceptualizing sustainability more holistically, targeting social inequalities and navigating short-term efforts to address enduring, institutionalized problems. Individual projects recognize the need for decision-making to be more inclusive, with some

specifically targeting struggling communities in a way that integrates different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that can, if done right, instigate longer-term networks of projectified notions of co-creation and co-decision-making. Following an optimistic approach in this chapter, we have highlighted how EU-funded projects have promoted approaches to inclusivity that nurture new networks and the co-construction of integrated knowledge across different actors and roles, some of which explicitly engage struggling and deprived urban communities. In the latter process, justice takes its rightful place in urban sustainability as the communities for whom urban sustainability is the most critical for survival come to the fore.

Notes

- 1 This chapter emerges from our work within the UrbanA project, which received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No. 822357.
- 2 <https://urban-arena.eu/>
- 3 <https://cordis.europa.eu/>
- 4 <https://wiki.urban-arena.eu/>
- 5 Mapping guidelines and UrbanA arena design details can be found at <https://urban-arena.eu/resources/>
- 6 See the 1987 Brundtland Report; the 1992 United Nations Conference "Earth Summit" on Environment and Development and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015–2030).
- 7 See, for example, Harvey, D. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 247.
- 8 <https://progireg.eu>
- 9 <https://naturvation.eu/about>
- 10 www.urbangreenup.eu/solutions/
- 11 <http://growgreenproject.eu/about/project/>
- 12 <https://naturvation.eu/>
- 13 <https://urbinat.eu>
- 14 <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/282679/reporting>
- 15 www.incontext-fp7.eu/sites/default/files/D5.3_Out%20of%20the%20townhall-final.pdf
- 16 www.incontext-fp7.eu/sites/default/files/D5.3_Out%20of%20the%20townhall-final.pdf
- 17 www.incontext-fp7.eu/sites/default/files/D5.3_Out%20of%20the%20townhall-final.pdf
- 18 See www.foodlinkscommunity.net/foodlinks-home.html
- 19 <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/282679>
- 20 See <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/282679/reporting>
- 21 <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/268931>
- 22 <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/268931>
- 23 <https://urbact.eu/urbact-glance>
- 24 www.foodlinkscommunity.net/fileadmin/documents_organicresearch/foodlinks/publications/Food-link-broschuere-knowledge-brokerage.pdf
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- 28 www.incontext-fp7.eu/sites/default/files/D5.3_Out%20of%20the%20townhall-final.pdf
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