

Case Study in inclusive urban sustainability governance

Background

In light of the complex challenges facing cities today, it is important that they are governed and planned to be environmentally sustainable, while simultaneously becoming more equitable and inclusive. Recent EU-funded research projects have generated a body of knowledge and expertise on this topic, however, there is an urgent need to synthesize and communicate their findings.

The EU Horizon 2020 project, Urban Arena for sustainable and equitable solutions (UrbanA; 2019-2021) follows three objectives: 1: To synthesize innovative and sustainable solutions for tackling urban social inequalities and exclusion; 2: To feed innovative integrated solutions for equitable and inclusive urban areas into sustainability policy; 3: To empower researchers, policymakers and practitioners to design and implement sustainable urban development in practice embedding strong social equity and inclusion.

UrbanA aims to achieve a synthesis of existing work on sustainability governance and its effects on social equity by setting-up an Arena of city-makers, including practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. This Arena is based on (transition) governance principles and is centred on four iterative rounds of exchange, in which the consortium partners (from DE, BE, NL, ES, PT and HU) and Arena participants will co-creatively map, assess and distil the findings of relevant EU-funded projects, as well as other interventions identified by participating city-makers. The Arena is designed to generate convincing, actor- and context-specific, and actionable solutions – including in the form of policy recommendations – related to urban sustainability, regeneration and resilience, and that achieve interactional equity, the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups and deep forms of democracy and citizens' emancipation. UrbanA's vision is to promote shared economic wealth creation, green amenities, and environmentally-centred interventions, together with urban equity and inclusion.

In preparation for the various Arena processes, the consortium would benefit from research into promising cases of sustainability governance, for example in the development of a new district, which have considered sustainability concerns, distributional and exclusionary effects, and show potential for improving social coherence rather than dividing societies into winners and losers.

Such case studies could investigate past or ongoing, sustainability-oriented, city-level governance processes (e.g. around the development of a new district or of a particular smart mobility infrastructure) for the attention that is put on distributional and exclusionary or inclusionary effects. They could tentatively assess the extent to which the processes are likely to result in more social equity and inclusion compared to a conventional/average process. The nature would be clearly explorative, building on (planning/policy) documents and interviews with involved actors, yet aiming at critical reflections and a triangulation of perspectives.

Possible research questions

- What are the equity and inclusion oriented ambitions of the development or policy, and how do they interplay with environmental and other ambitions?
- What measures have been used or are foreseen to improve equity and inclusion of the development or policy?
- To what extent is this case's success due to very context specific situations, and how does this influence its transferability to wider governance contexts?

- To what extent may the inclusion oriented strategies be applicable to widespread governance situations (e.g. generally when planning for a new district or a major re-development)?
- What barriers have actors identified that so far limit the inclusion orientation of sustainability policies or plans (e.g. in district development), and how could they be overcome in a specific case or in whole classes of governance contexts?
- To what extent is the governance process addressing the underlying drivers of social exclusion and inequality?

Relevant theories/ approaches/ concepts

- Urban Planning
- Urban Governance
- Environmental Justice
- Equality and Social Cohesion

Relevant methods

- Document analysis
- Semi-structured interviews
- Actor mapping

Requirements

- For German cases, which are preferable over other European contexts, but not mandatory, proficiency in German is necessary.
- The ability to conduct interviews in German would be a strong asset.

More Information, including examples of potential case studies, will be made available on request.