



# UNFOLDING DILEMMAS OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACES

Recommendations by  
JPI Urban Europe's AGORA

Edited by Johannes Riegler and Jonas Bylund



**Policy Paper:**

# **Unfolding Dilemmas of Urban Public Spaces**

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# FOREWORD

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe just about when the writing team of the AGORA Policy Paper on Dilemmas of Urban Public Spaces established and started working on the publication in February/March 2020. Far reaching measures to counter the exponential rise of the cases led countries to announce a state of emergency worldwide. In urban areas, the COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruptions, challenged many aspects of urbanity and caused in (temporary) transformative shifts. And, by the time of writing this, it is not over yet! For that reason, the editors decided to reflect upon the current (July 2020) situation and the experiences of the last months in this foreword.

## Authors:

Johannes Riegler

Jonas Bylund

One might see the effects of the rapid COVID-19 outbreak on urban areas as a real-time stress test to shocks, as an analysis how cities are vulnerable to disruption and through what means city and other authorities are prepared to take actions to ensure the wellbeing and safety. The pandemic shows which infrastructures and practices are the most vulnerable, but also of highest importance to ensure the necessary services and responses in times of a health crisis that affects vast areas of life.

At the same, the major disruptions caused let observe positive and effects resulting from the decrease of global footprint of Western urbanism. Examples include an increase in air quality (Mahato et al., 2020), decreasing of noise levels (Andrews, 2020). COVID-19 restrictions and the therewith connected change in urban practices which “offer

a glimpse of what the city could be like without so much congestion (Hu, 2020).

The accessibility to safe urban public spaces has been widely identified as an essential service functions for urban populations in times of the pandemic. With human distancing measures in place, the pressure on spaces in cities increased.

From the first weeks of the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe, the fundamental role of accessible, inclusive and safe public urban spaces for tackling further spread of the disease and to tackle trade-offs caused by measures which aim at slowing down the speed of infections (flatten the curve), such as increased risks of mental health issues (Wessel, 2020) became evident. Providing safe public spaces which allows for sufficient human distancing, yet provide the infrastructures and features to exercise, cycle and walk, as well as, take a break from being at home in (semi-) lockdowns and became a key priority for ensuring public (mental) health.

The enhanced demand for high functional public spaces in times of the pandemic has resulted in actions around the world such. The shocks which the pandemic caused urban public administrations to act quickly and show flexibility to implement (temporary) measures.

Adaptations which in pre-pandemic times might have taken months to years to design, build and implement were realised almost overnight. To name a few: The City of Bogotá, capital of Columbia, opened 76km of temporary and 22km of new bike lanes to reduce crowding (Wray, 2020), Oakland (USA) restricted cars on almost 120km of streets (Rasmus & Fernandez, 2020), London took similar measures (Mayor of London, 2020), Bucharest closed streets on weekends (Romania-Insider Newsroom, 2020). In New Zealand, the government announced plans to fund extra wide sidewalks (Orsman, 2020) and in New South Wales, Australia parks and streets are reshaped to meet the requirements (Stokes, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic underlined the role of public spaces in shaping urban robustness (From Urban Resilience to Robustness is one of JPI Urban Europe's priority areas. For more see JPI Urban Europe (2019:21) Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda 2.0). Accessible, inclusive, well designed public spaces provide essential services to mitigate shocks and effects of crisis to those living in a city. While the COVID-19 pandemic is a truly disruptive crisis, it is likely only one of many in the increasingly turbulent world of the Anthropocene. However, due to the rapidity of the spread of the virus and subsequent measures to break down chains of infections, the effects of the crisis were evident and could be felt immediately. In contrast, the climate change crisis truly has disruptive effects around the world such as weather extremes, rising sea levels, droughts, etc.. However, its impact is slowly but steadily emerging whose results may affect a habituation in society: humans are unfortunately quite good at getting used to longer term piecemeal worsening situations. While COVID-19 disrupted urban life within days, climate

change, if not addressed significantly by cutting emissions and appropriate adaptation and mitigation actions, will result in a gradual worsening on local, regional and global level towards the inhabitability of vast regions around the world and a dramatic loss in biodiversity (see e.g.: Union of Concerned Scientists (n.D.); European Commission (n.D.); Falk, J. & Gaffney, O. (2019); National Geographic (n.D.); Bradford, A. & Pappas, S. (2017))

A phenomenon which has been coined as the "tragedy of the time horizon" Elliott, L. (2015). In regard to urbanism, one of the main questions for the way forward will be what can be learned from the current COVID-19 crisis to create more robust urban areas and societies?

The science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson (2020) recently points in the New Yorker Magazine: "The Coronavirus Is Rewriting Our Imaginations. What felt impossible has become thinkable. The spring of 2020 is suggestive of how much, and how quickly, we can change as a civilization." Robinson further argues that the measures to condemn the outbreak of COVID-19 is what is required to substantially address the climate crisis: act quickly even if measures are painful in the short run to prevent even larger disasters at a later point in time. In the case of COVID-19, in many countries and cities, measures have been taken at a tremendous speed, disrupting almost every aspect of life, with one aim in sight: to flatten the curve.

Robinson's point is very well adaptable to robust urbanism. Currently, the term "resilience" is widely used in connection with the effects of COVID-19 on urban areas. While it is understandable that many people are longing for "going back to the old normal", what is too often conveyed by this use of the term 'resilience' misses out on a sound recovery that is truly sustainable.'

The Oxford Dictionary provides two definitions of the "resilience":

- *the ability of people or things to recover quickly after something unpleasant, such as shock, injury, etc.*



*The two editors out and about in public space in Stockholm in early March, just before the big outbreak / lock down. Picture by Caroline Wrangsten.“*

- *the ability of a substance to return to its original shape after it has been bent, stretched or pressed*

The former definition implies that the recovery after a shock does not necessarily mean to go back to the state before the shock occurred. It describes the ability to shake off something unpleasant quickly, potentially coming out stronger. In contrary, the second definition describes resilience as the ability to go back to “the old normal”. Too often in (non-academic) debates on urban resilience, the second definition is applied.

In this regard, the term “urban robustness” might provide a better suited meaning. Urban robustness anticipates a challenge in how urban societies handle increased and ‘deeper’ turbulence and crisis. In this line of thinking, resilience is desirable but risks being too weak: as it may purport a kind of ‘save what we have’ which counters transformations and positive or ‘good’ disruptions. Robustness in this context is as a driver to make city liveable and sustainable as far as possible in the first place: that is, to prioritise on how will our future sustainable and liveable cities look like, and then see, how to make them resilient. With this

understanding of resilience there are way more aspects of urban complexity included. For example, in terms of societal cohesion and public health; it limits the risks of understanding resilience as a defence in the first place.

With COVID-19, people around the world are at an increased reflexive moment in time. With obvious exceptions such as the Black Lives Matter movement and related actions in the USA, which were practically forced out on the streets and squares – during lockdown! – to step up the game demanding equality for exactly the same reasons of shaping change! As Robinson pointed out, the measures to prevent the disease to spread and to “flatten the curve” has rewritten imaginations on transformative change. We are seeing a sudden opportunity to have a hard look at urban and societal practices. It is where the “collective scale of events highlights the irrelevance of individuals” (Melandri, 2020) Further, the COVID-19 pandemic showed that “there are no “quick technological fixes” to grand societal challenges that can ignore societal values” (Novitzky, 2020). The momentum might ease the political tasks of sorting out what practices seem reasonable to keep on doing and what we could – or should – do very well without. For example, Mariana Mazzucato (2020), in her Opinion in the Guardian saw the chance in the current crisis to transform to do capitalism differently as it strengthens the roles of governments to levels unwitnessed in the 40-50 years.

Now, in July 2020, it is too early to say what kind of long-term transformations the COVID-19 crisis has in terms of sustainable development. However, an honest view of the lessons to be learnt for driving urban transitions is called for. Otherwise, the experiences made in the past months may be in vain unless harnessed to build urban systems which are robust to immediate shocks while transforming towards sustainable practices in the longer run. While the current crisis, as pointed out, offers opportunities to learn collectively, draw conclusions and get real transitions towards sustainability going, one must not fall in the trap of thinking that reflection and learning will come undisputed. There will be enormous pressure due to interests to go back into a pre-COVID-19 without any substantial lessons learned implemented on a larger scale.

The chapters of the AGORA Policy Paper do not address consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak directly. However, all chapters provide angles on specific dilemmas and synergies in public spaces which, if addressed and implemented, contribute to robust urban areas which are prepared to mitigate shocks and provide services needed in terms of a global pandemic.

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# ABOUT THIS POLICY PAPER

The objective of this policy brief is to provide an accessible text which breaks down the complexity of the development and maintenance of public urban spaces into ‘bite-sized chunks’: a selected number of dilemmas which is not exhaustive of all issues and concerns. These chunks are to be seen as entry points for urban policy makers, practitioners, civil society organisations, the research community and all other urban actors. The report should inspire to look at interrelated urban challenges through the lens of urban dilemmas.

## **INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES FOR URBAN LIVEABILITY**

Urban public spaces fulfil important societal functions and shape many of the characteristics of cities and urban areas. However, there are several dilemmas (competing goals, interests, strategies, wicked issues, etc.) involved in their development and maintenance. In simpler terms, addressing one issue/challenge in an urban context might have negative effects in another realm. Regarding urban public spaces, for instance, typical crossings of concerns relate to everyone’s right to the city, openness to different societal groups, climate change actions and how to cater for safety and security without promoting increasingly exclusive spaces.

‘Inclusive Public Spaces for Urban Liveability’ is one of the thematic priorities of JPI Urban Europe’s Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda 2.0 (SRIA 2.0). In the SRIA 2.0, the four thematic priorities are described as urban dilemmas. An urban dilemma is defined as “two or more competing goals, such as stakeholder interests and related strategies which potentially fail to achieve their aims as imple-

menting one strategy hampers or prevents the achievement of another” (JPI Urban Europe, 2019:14). a dilemma driven approach allows urban actors to address complex contexts of development, to shape and provide knowledge and evidence that efforts to minimise reductionism and increase the challenge articulation by the problem owners, and opportunities to exchange on emerging urban transition pathways. Each dilemma addressed by JPI Urban Europe illustrates the need for action by policy, research, practitioners, and other stakeholders driving or being affected by urban development.

The SRIA 2.0 dilemma of Inclusive Public Spaces for Urban Liveability is understood in the following way:

*“Public spaces are ideally attractive to all, these are spaces for wellbeing and health (stimulating people to move), increasingly green public and shared places for people, where different groups and communities meet, preconceived ideas of the Other are challenged, and where citizens control their streets and shared spaces. Urban development can be used to increase urban quality of life by design, public space management e.g. walkability. Public spaces may*

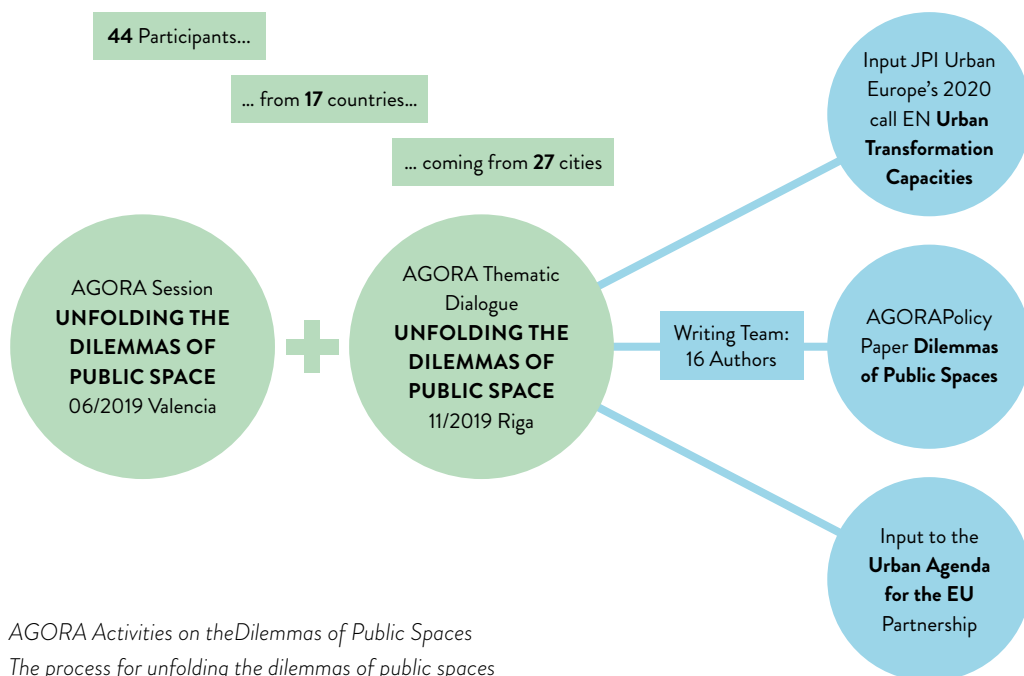
also retain and emerge as second living rooms (as housing living areas get smaller). However, a dilemma regarding every- one's right to the city is that public spaces are constantly influenced by power balances and the needs of different groups and communities. A specific concern is how to cater for safety and security concerns without a widening of exclusive spaces. Furthermore, strategies and policy to progress and enhance city status and attractiveness does not always support urban liveability. The dilemma here, then, foregrounds archetypal concerns with urban public spaces around inclusion and security, mobility and morphology, openness and integrity, urban green and density – with the current aspects of e.g. the impacts of increased concerns in digitalised public protection and control, autonomous vehicles, qualities of design, green accessibility, urban demographics, and increasing privatisation in the every- day settings and use of public spaces” (JPI Urban Europe, 2019, p.27)

## PURPOSE, SCOPE AND AUDIENCE OF THE AGORA PAPER UNFOLDING THE DILEMMAS OF PUBLIC SPACES

Urban public spaces are connected to a great

number of urban issues at the centre of various disciplines, interests and strategies. The paper at hand aims at highlighting a selected number of these interrelations. The dilemmas and potential synergies discussed in this report are not to be understood as comprehensive and exhaustively reflecting all wicked issues (cf. Rittel & Webber, 1973) attached to urban public spaces. The topics addressed were identified and co-created by a multi-stakeholder group of urban actors. Each chapter reflects one (group of) dilemma(s) or synergy(-ies), trade-offs and connections between different perspectives of urban public spaces.

The paper aims wraps up the main topics of discussions of the **AGORA Workshops on Dilemmas of Public Spaces** and combining different perspectives, expertise, knowledge(s) and experiences by the participants (the workshops and sequence is presented below). After the co-creative exercises in the workshops, the writing team of the paper further developed the topics which were identified as the most pressing issues by contributed theoretical frameworks, references and literature as well as



AGORA Activities on the Dilemmas of Public Spaces  
The process for unfolding the dilemmas of public spaces

SAFETY	INCLUSIVENESS	FINANCING & PLANNING	SOCIAL COHESION	LIFESTYLES AND DENSITY	ACCESSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring <b>safety</b> in open public spaces</li> <li>• Increased safety due to better design vs. Increased <b>noise levels</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placemaking as a participatory tool for designing public spaces</li> <li>• <b>Flexibility</b> in governance for <b>co-creating</b> high quality public spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Speed of change</b> vs. long term planning processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pressure on public</b> spaces by certain user groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High population <b>density vs. green spaces</b></li> <li>• Counter-acting urban sprawl vs. natural green spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical and mental accessibility of/mobility to green spaces</li> <li>• Efficient mobility flows vs. high quality of public spaces</li> </ul>

*Dilemmas connected to urban public spaces identified in the AGORA session in Valencia, June 2019*

practical examples, cases and initiatives which deal with the dilemmas described in the chapter.

The AGORA Policy Paper does not provide a clear definition of what is understood under urban public spaces throughout the publications. The chapters address interconnected issues from a different angle. Providing a too rigid definition / understanding seemed to be limiting. However, combined one can observe that the individual chapters reflect bring together the notions of “building” of and “dwelling” in urban public spaces (Sennett, 2019). The interplay between the two, how places are produced by collective practices, have been subject to many theoretical concepts and analyses (Cf. Lefebvre, et al. (1991); Bourdieu (2018)). The collection of the chapters reflects the relevance of bringing together building and dwelling to create inclusive and sustainable urban areas.

**PROCESS: UNFOLDING THE DILEMMAS OF PUBLIC SPACE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

Involving change makers, city makers, representatives of urban public administration, the research community, civil society organisations and other urban actors in the strategic development of JPI Urban Europe is an important part of the initiative. Therefore, JPI Urban Europe organises activities in

the scope of **AGORA – Stakeholder Involvement Platform**. AGORA activities typically bring together urban actors with diverse backgrounds. The aim is to co-create perspectives which resonate with the knowledge(s) and experiences of the participants. The sum of the experiences and expertise allows to reflect the wicked nature of urban development in more holistic ways.

From June 2019 to July 2020, JPI Urban Europe organised a series of AGORA activities to generate strategic intelligence on the dilemmas connected to urban public spaces. Combined, about 65 urban actors working on issues connected to the topic joined the process. The figure informs sums up the main cornerstones of this process.

**AGORA SESSION AT THE EUROPEAN PLACEMAKING WEEK IN VALENCIA, JUNE 2019**

During the 2019-edition of the European Placemaking Week in Valencia, Spain, JPI Urban Europe organised a 2h-long AGORA session. The aim was to bring together people involved in Placemaking from across Europe and get the conversation and thinking about the dilemmas of public spaces starting. Seven participants, of which six were working in and with public urban administrations on various dilemmas participated in the workshop. The graphic



*Participants of the AGORA Workshop in Riga in November 2019*

below wraps up the main dilemmas and challenging urban issues discussed in AGORA session in Valencia in June 2019.

### **AGORA THEMATIC DIALOGUE IN RIGA, NOVEMBER 2019**

In order to provide a platform of exchange with the opportunity to combine various experiences and knowledge(s), JPI Urban Europe organised an AGORA Thematic Dialogue for unfolding the dilemmas of public spaces in November 2019. In total, 44 participants across Europe (plus Canada), joined the programme in Riga. The workshop brought together people working in research & innovation, civil society organisations, local public administrations, the private sector and knowledge institutes.

Prior to the workshop participants submitted an abstract / position paper on their perspectives on public space dilemmas. This publication is useful resource of further information on current developments, challenges and local initiatives/projects of public urban spaces. The booklet can be downloaded here [[https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/app/uploads/2020/07/AGORA\\_PS\\_Booklet.pdf](https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/app/uploads/2020/07/AGORA_PS_Booklet.pdf)].

### **AGORA POLICY PAPER: DILEMMAS OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACES**

After the most pressing dilemmas were identified and discussed in the workshops organised, a writing team of experts and urban actors working in the field formed. The aim was to wrap up the discussions of the workshops by developing a report which informs about the main outcomes of the workshops and provides practical ways of tackling dilemmas and concerns in the form of recommendations for urban actors, policy makers, the research community etc.

Each chapter sets out one (or more) specific dilemma(s) connected to the creation and maintenance of inclusive public urban spaces. They highlight the interlinkages of urban public spaces to wellbeing, public health, inclusive societies, urban robustness, mobility, green spaces, etc. More concretely, Chapter 1, Reconfiguration of public spaces via Nature-Based Solutions by Aksel Ersoy (Delft University of Technology) and Ruth Yeoman (University of Oxford and Northumbria University) discusses the synergetic effects the implementation of Nature-Based Solutions in public spaces have to address environmental, social and economic challenges. Karin Peters (Wageningen University) and Dahae Lee (TU Dortmund) highlight the dilemma

of ensuring inclusive and accessible public spaces in an austerity context in Chapter 2. It concludes with recommendation on how to encourage multi-stakeholder engagement for developing and maintaining public urban spaces to address the dilemma. Why Targeting the Gender Inequality Dilemma in Public Space is a central consideration when assessing urban sustainability is outlined in Chapter 3 by Caroline Wrangsten, (JPI Urban Europe), Chelina Odber, Joe Mulligan (both Kounkuey Design Initiative), Emma Hill (University of Edinburgh) and Maria Angeli (Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies). Chapter 4 by Ruth Yeoman (University of Oxford) and Karin Peters (Wageningen University) highlights how Inclusive Design and Public Urban Spaces can enhance the safety in neighbourhoods. Sandra Guinand, Yvonne Franz (both University of Vienna), Johannes Riegler (JPI Urban Europe) and Zala Velkavrh (prostoRož Cultural Association) address the potentials and limitations of co-creative temporary use projects in public urban spaces and what should be considered to prevent from effects which contradict efforts towards sustainable and liveable urban areas in chapter 5. Rethinking urban public spaces and re-allocating streetscapes for sustainability and liveability is discussed in chapter 6 by Florian Lorenz (Smarter Than Car) and Josh Grigsby (University of Vienna). Finally, Christoph Gollner (JPI Urban Europe) and Ruth Yeoman (University of Oxford) highlight the interrelation between inclusive, high quality public environments, the Meaningful City concept and the energy transition in chapter 7.

The chapters conclude with recommendations for local policy makers and urban public administration, urban practitioners, the research community, research funders as well as local urban initiatives which provide practical ways to address the dilemmas. Besides the writing team, many more experts with various backgrounds contributed to the report by exchanging and discussing on unfolding the dilemmas of public urban spaces in the workshops organised. Their names are listed on page xx.

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*Cheonggyecheon in Seoul, South Korea.  
A former highway turned into a 10.9km  
long green and blue public space.  
Photo by Johannes Riegler*



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# RECONFIGURATION OF PUBLIC SPACES VIA NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

In recent years, many policies, programmes and projects of governmental and non-governmental organizations strive for solving problems associated with urbanisation and global warming. There is a growing consensus that we should adapt the way we design our cities due to the increasing impacts of external events. It is essential to think how to mitigate the negative effects of external events and adapt our cities while maintaining better quality of public space. Nature-based solutions have been proposed to help societies address a variety of environmental, social and economic challenges via adapting natural principles in sustainable ways. However, due to their complex governance such as functions, uses, regulations, public spaces pose a series of challenges against implementing more environmental solutions. This chapter summarises how nature-based solutions can be used to address some of the unprecedented issues we are facing today.

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## INTERDEPENDENCY OF CITIES

Cities and their regions in particular can be considered as highly interdependent urban systems, with multi-scalar components of social, ecological and technical sub-systems that go beyond the jurisdictional or built-up boundaries of the individual city (de Roo and Boelens, 2016; Meerow et al., 2016). It is generally assumed that such sub-systems have coevolved over time, influencing each other. Often-

times a distinction is made between intangible (cultural or ethical) and tangible components, the latter consisting of both natural/ecological and artificial/manmade parts (de Roo & Boelens, 2016; Holling, 2001). These components cannot be understood in isolation, and the interaction between subsystems of an ecological, technological and societal nature is key to understand the overall system's behaviour (van Bueren et al., 2012; Cumming, 2011; Cumming and Collier, 2005; Senge, 1990; McLoughlin, 1969).

Climate Change and natural hazards are challenging the way we have produced our cities and public spaces (Nightingale et al., 2019). It then also chal-

lenges their design processes making it necessary to work together at different structural levels of decision-making and expertise in integrated ways (see Savaget et al., 2019). We are confronted with the fact that we need to climate proof our cities, and thus public spaces. Unfortunately, in most urban areas, the effects of climate-proofing have been neglected, which have impacted on human health, the quality of life and the well-being, particularly amongst the disadvantaged group of the society. With the accelerated urbanization, the natural landscape inside as well as outside urban areas become more ecologically fragmented which affects the environment but also their supportive role to our society and economy. Nature-based solutions (NBSs) aim to help societies address a variety of environmental, social and economic challenges via adapting natural principles in sustainable ways.

Earlier examples of NBSs can be seen from American landscape infrastructure designer Frederick Law Olmsted, and his famous designs for Central Park in New York City in 1858 and the Emerald Necklace in Boston in 1878. In an overall view, NBSs do not only deliver the performance from a functional and environmental point of view but also include the potential benefits for the society and the economy.

**In this way nature-based solutions bring together the three elements of sustainability: environment, society and economy, through the design of structures which are based on natural processes. However, the main dilemma remains as the trade-off between these elements.**

For instance, urbanisation has direct consequences on land use changes such as increasing surface sealing and loss of green spaces that lead to environmental degradation. The ongoing pressure on green spaces and surface sealing is continuously affected by increasing air temperatures, reduced storm water retention, increasing levels of air pollution, poor access to green space, and diminished potential for outdoor physical activity. As a consequence, a number of human-health-related issues can be

identified: reduced outdoor physical activity can lead to obesity, hypertension and diabetes, as well as to associated psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and burnout; increased air temperatures can lead to hypertension, dehydration and increased risk of cardiovascular diseases and air pollution can result in respiratory diseases.

At the society level, the contact with nature via increasing the presence, quality and access to green, blue and natural settings can help reduce some of the psychological problems citizens are facing such as increasing stress levels, social isolation and exclusion (Haase et al., 2017). Accessing nature supports urban liveability, especially when citizens participate in caring for nature and creating nature-based solutions. When promoting nature-based solutions, it is aimed that cities benefit from deliberative processes that are designed to be inclusive, fair, and respectful of differences although gentrification can be one of the main challenges. Social trust, collective knowledge and social learning is more likely to occur when people are able to express how their lives are affected by nature-based solutions. Deliberative processes rely upon activated citizens, an urban ethos, and participatory governance (Kenter 2016; Ranger et al., 2016). Similarly, high quality public spaces and nature-based solutions can stimulate long term economic benefits for cities' green infrastructure which involves 'connected networks of multifunctional, predominantly unbuilt spaces that support both ecological and social activities and processes.' In the long term, this will maximize the inclusion of green spaces in planning and as a means of increasingly urban liveability. Nevertheless, it is essential to integrate the green infrastructure within the broader strategies of cities for more inclusive development (Florida, 2019).

## **APPROACHES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE**

Unfortunately, the strong focus of public and private actors on economic growth as driver for human development and prosperity have led to an unsustainable development mode of cities and their regions, resulting in climate change, growing inequalities,



### PRACTICES OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Below are two examples where integrated understanding of nature-based solutions have been implemented. The first example is a water square in Rotterdam, Netherlands which combines water storage with the improvement of the quality of urban public space. Here the public space is used for recreational reasons, i.e. this water storage facility provides opportunities for leisure. Also, it generates opportunities to create environmental quality and identity to central spaces in neighbourhoods. The second example is a public space in Tainan, Taiwan. Here the square is surrounded by an urban lagoon. It not only provides opportunities for leisure and fun but also enable access to improved pathways and a reduction of traffic.

unhealthy living conditions, increasing inaccessibility and an ever-growing ecological footprint and exhausting natural resources. As a solution, there is an increasing focus on local responses that tackle problems associated with our production and consumption patterns. For instance, the UN SDG 11 and the UN New Urban Agenda call for accessible greener and cleaner cities, with attention for the urban and hinterland connections and the role of local innovation in providing solutions that work in a particular context. Better urban planning, improved resource management and improving local responses are key in delivering SDG11 and the New Urban Agenda. In the light of these responses, NBSs can bring the urban use of land and resources more in balance with nature by strengthening the positive relation-

ship between environmental, social and economic links between cities and resource use. Local arenas play a crucial role in developing new ecosystems where innovation and adoption takes place between people who understand that sustainable outcomes require relationships based upon cooperation and shared values. However, it is important to note that the development of such ecosystems might depend on the efficacy of different goals of nature-based solutions such as rewilding, conservation, ecosystem services. These goals may sometimes conflict, requiring people to make trade-offs and difficult decisions. A robust system of deliberative procedure and participatory governance can help cities navigate such challenges.



*Tainan Springs, Tainan, Taiwan: A former shopping centre transformed into an urban lagoon. Architect: MVRDV.  
Photo by: Daria Scaliola*

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- There is an urgent need to acknowledge the interdependent nature of public spaces and how they should be addressed in cities
- Nature-based solutions are one of the ways to provide opportunities for adapting our cities while maintaining better quality of public space
- Applying nature-based solutions necessitates incorporating a variety of economic, environmental and social challenges
- Public spaces are the most visible and lively component of the built environment for cities; hence they are ideal locations for experimenting various nature-based practises.

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# ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SPACES IN AN AUSTERITY CONTEXT

Since the financial crisis of 2008 cities have had to rapidly adapt to a new more uncertain reality (Carmona, et al., 2019). The austerity context has considerably affected public spaces in European cities, from its design to delivery, and use to management. In particular, the governments, who were once the main supplier of public spaces, have seen the lack of budgets, incentives or capacity to maintain adequate investment in public space (Webster, 2007). As a result, co-production of public space has become popular, between public authorities and private entities ranging from individual citizens to large-scale corporations (see Van Melik & Van der Krabben, 2016; Nissen, 2008; Klemme et al., 2013).

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Well-designed and maintained public spaces offer enormous economic, social and environmental benefits (CABE, 2004). In order to preserve the quality of public space in an austerity context, non-municipal actors are increasingly engaged (Berding, et al., 2010). They not only bring in resources but also new ideas and expertise. Public spaces that are provided as a part of urban (re)development projects are good examples. In this case, the public-private development model for public space is common in terms of project organisation, financing and ownership (Carmona, et al., 2019). In other words, the public

and private sectors involved share the costs, rights and responsibilities of public space within the project area.

Public spaces have become a key component of many regeneration and (re)development schemes (Carmona, 2019). The engagement of private actors both in a (re)development project as a whole and public space within the project is desirable especially in an austerity context. Whilst it might help achieve the high quantity and quality of public space, it does not always bring intended effects. In fact, inclusiveness and accessibility of this type of public space is often called into question as expensive and fancy looking public spaces exclude undesirable populations. Two goals seem to be competing as private

actors who play a decisive role in the design and programming of public spaces in urban (re)development projects have other values as well then inclusiveness and accessibility only.

Hence, the dilemma arises between two goals. How can public spaces be inclusive and accessible for all whilst engaging the private sector to secure budgets? How would public spaces in this case look like? What is the role of the governments, municipalities, developers and communities?

### APPROACH TO ADDRESS ISSUE

The role of the public sector in public-private cooperation is important. The public sector plays a role as a regulator and clearly sets rules on how public spaces should be used. It may exercise formal and informal instruments. For instance, a design guidance may be prepared to make sure that public spaces within the project area are open and inclusive to all. Public participation may be legally enshrined to have meaningful input from their side. As an example, many disabled citizens are and/or feel not fully able to engage in their communities because public spaces often are not designed with those who struggle to navigate around in mind. This element is even more difficult because getting information is crucial. Data is not always available (Vale et al., 2017). Public

participation ensures inclusiveness and accessibility of the vulnerable population. Moreover, inclusiveness and accessibility of public space can be better secured as contracts are clearly written between the public and private sector. Contracts set roles for the involved parties and they play an important part in this form of public space provision.

For private actors, especially real estate developers, it is important that they have good reasons to make the space more inclusive and accessible. Depending on the type of public space, they might recognise the value of providing inclusive and accessible public space by themselves or incentives may be given by the government. Also, the third sector can play a role in showing the added value of inclusive and accessible public spaces. In addition, the quality of public space also depends on the function of public space. Spaces that can accommodate multifunctional uses and diverse users are more inclusive and accessible (see the example 2 below).

Coming back to the discussion of the navigation in cities, it is something that comes back in other studies as well. Basha (2015) concludes in her study in two cities in Kosovo that in documents and plans technical aspects of making public spaces more accessible are often included, but discussions around accessing and navigating public spaces by disabled

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Actively engage non-municipal actors in producing and maintaining public space and encourage collaboration between actors by facilitating multi-stakeholder participation processes;
- Use of formal and informal instruments, e.g. design guidance, right of way, incentives and public participation;
- Contractual agreement helps clarify the role and responsibility of each stakeholder and can be used as a way of sustaining inclusiveness and accessibility in the long term;
- Give diverse uses to the space, e.g. by creating subspaces, organising different programmes (multi-functional use);
- Robust design for flexibility and in doing this focus not only on technological solutions but also on visibility and navigation; and
- Stimulate creating more/better data: very detailed built environment data are required to be able to identify all possible barriers that might exist in public space, which is often absent.





### CHESTER'S HISTORICAL CITY

Chester in north-west England is renowned for its two-mile circuit of Roman, Saxon and Medieval walls and its elevated walkways, called Rows. But the city's historic status belies its role as an accessibility champion: last year it became the first British city to win the European commission's Access City award. The Rows are accessible with ramps, a lift and an escalator, while the council's 15-year regeneration strategy prioritises accessibility in new developments. [...] The hotel will include a changing places facility for people with complex or multiple and profound disabilities. (Unlike standard accessible toilets, these include a height-adjustable changing bench, adjustable sink, a toilet designed for assisted use and hoist.) Chester already has six such changing places facilities, including one at the recently opened bus interchange, and more are planned around the city. (source: Salman, 2018)

persons was absent. This is mainly due to an absence in planning for accessibility. She then states that: *"Adaptations tend to complicate, extend and reroute to backdoors, storage entrances and service lifts the paths of disabled people, thus contributing to their invisibility in the public realm."* (ibid., p.63)

One example of this is the issue of accessible ramps. For many with a physical disability, a ramp is their only means of getting in and out of premises, going up and down levels and navigating around a city. Without accessible ramps, those in wheelchairs, with visual impairment or walking difficulties will struggle, or find it impossible to get up or down stairs.



### SPITALFIELDS MARKET IN LONDON

The regeneration programme in 2005 brought new public spaces to the historic market – Bishops Square, Crispin Place and the modern market. This was a joint venture between the City of London and a private developer. Later on, the City gradually departed from the scheme, eventually leaving it in fully private hands. Both the market and square have a high degree of accessibility and inclusiveness. Even though it is privately owned and maintained, it is not very corporate looking. Moreover, it has multifunctional uses – it is home to a fashion market, an arts market, as well as restaurants and other retailers. In addition, the market and square accommodate various uses and users. In fact, it encourages a wide variety of groups and ethnicities in the local area to come by providing extensive programmes and events that target the inclusion of people. Spitalfields management has an incentive not to make the space a more exclusive space, as doing so would make the space less vibrant, with possible negative consequences for retailers on the site. Two things that can be learned here:

- Multifunctional use with subspaces and different programmes aiming to encourage the local community to get involved
  - Private actors having good reason to make the space more accessible and inclusive
- (source: Langstraat & Van Melik, 2013)

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# TACKLING GENDER INEQUALITY IN PUBLIC SPACE: SUSTAINABILITY IN GOVERNANCE AND DESIGN

**A truly sustainable city is one where everyone – of all genders – has equal opportunity to be safe, healthy, and prosperous. Gender equity, therefore must be a central consideration when assessing a city’s sustainability. What is the dilemma with gender and public space, and how can it be approached policy wise?**

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Concretely, public spaces—usually referring to streets, public markets, parks, public squares, and beaches—can serve as hubs for community life. Ideally, they promote good health and well-being (Beyer et al., 2014; Roe et al., 2013; Ward Thomson et al., 2012; Hobbs et al. 2017), provide opportunities for decent work (Cities Alliance, 2018; The Trust For Public Land, Center for City Park Excellence, 2010), and host important occasions for (face-to-face) civic engagement. They are viewed as a “vital ingredient of successful cities” (Daniel, 2016).

Certain public spaces have an added dimension of private control to them and referred to as semi-public (Madanipur, 2004). At the same time, public space is more than the built environment itself, and needs to be understood as a process as opposed to something fixed. Public spaces are produced and reproduced continuously and can hence be dominated and appropriated by different interests and groups. On this note, the famous notion ‘right to the city’ is not only about the right to use and inhabit space, but about the right to participate in the continuous production thereof (Olsson, 2008; Buser 2012) And yet, public spaces do not provide the same level of comfort, access, and opportunity for growth, for women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities, as they do for what has been their dominant stakeholder group, heteronormative men. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 11, target 11.7, which seeks to “... provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular

for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” by 2030, affirms this imbalance. It is therefore critical that policy efforts aimed at reaching target 11.7, not only increase the inventory of public spaces across cities, but act with a shared objective to change the process by which public spaces are designed, re-produced and realized – in both existing and newly built environments.

### **WHAT IS THE DILEMMA WITH GENDER AND PUBLIC SPACE?**

There is a general consensus that we will only achieve gender equality when all genders enjoy the same opportunities and rights in all aspects of life – public and private. Public spaces are ideally centres of civic life, defining a “public,” and providing an environment where people engage with urban politics, economy, environment, and residents. It follows, then, that providing public spaces that are equally accessible to all genders is a key component to creating the type of equity that is foundational for a sustainable urbanisation.

**One of the longstanding misconceptions of public space is that it just exists as a kind of neutral space, freely available to anyone who chooses to visit it.**

One of the longstanding misconceptions of public space is that it just exists as a kind of neutral space, freely available to anyone who chooses to visit it. In reality, though, public space has similar barriers to access that have beset other areas of society. As the World Bank’s recently published Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design demonstrates, “Space is not neutral, and hence (its) design can either facilitate or impede usage, appropriation, and safety for women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities” (Odbert et al., 2020). In practice: a public town square is accessible to all by law, but in reality, if a group of young men occupy the square and signals that it belongs to them, the practical outcome is that not all gender groups will use and produce the characteristics of this, publicly owned, area.

Feminist scholars have repeatedly shown how women throughout time have been excluded from public space in various societies (Rose, 2003) and that urban development projects do not appreciate them as a ‘user’ group (White Architects, 2017). Scholarship has also indicated that this exclusion is intersectional, so that racialised women and gender minorities experience both racialised and gendered barriers to public space, as well as the exclusions resulting from their interaction. These exclusions have persisted so long because white, heteronormative men have historically occupied, defined and shaped the public realm and public spaces, inadvertently, and at times intentionally, prioritizing their needs and desires over other genders (Greed, 1994; Fainstein et al., 2005; Rose, 2003). This absence of women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities in planning and design decisions around public spaces, has served to further encode traditional gender roles within the built environment and public spaces in particular (Moser, 1993). These actions are part of a patriarchal system, a system that contains an urgent sustainability crisis in more aspects.

**These actions are part of a patriarchal system, a system that contains an urgent sustainability crisis in more aspects.**

Today, as we set a goal to create public spaces that are equitably enjoyed and shared by “all”, we are however confronted with a scarcity of policies, processes, and practical procedures to get us there. Few practitioners and policymakers are equipped with concrete strategies to help those who have been historically left out or overlooked to exercise equal power in public space-related processes.

### **URBAN GOVERNANCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Focus on the process, rather than template solutions for gender-equal public space.** Implement a participatory and inclusive design process that explores how a city is experienced and used from the perspective of all citizens: women, men,

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TACKLING GENDER INEQUALITY IN PUBLIC SPACE: SUSTAINABILITY IN PLACE AND PROCESS

To work out this dilemma, we must radically reorient who defines the goals, priorities, and forms of urban public space. The aim of anti-racist, gender equal policies and feminist approaches in public space design is not to pit groups against each other, but to create sustainable and liveable public spaces for all.

To provide universal and equitable access in public space that works for people of all genders, we must transform decision making so that the contributions and needs of women and gender minorities are equally valued and represented- both at the professional and community level. We must also consider how the intersections of race and gender create additional barriers for racialised women and gender minorities. We must then reorient design and resource allocation priorities to change what is considered “good” and desirable public space. To help cities achieve sustainability goals, the following policy recommendations therefor address both decision making and process (“governance”) - the way in which we make decisions around public space design and planning, and the principles of inclusive public space design. Certain cities in Europe and the world, have indeed progressed further than others on the topic of gender and public space. Nevertheless, the following are a few areas that most cities can attend to.

girls, boys, sexual and gender minorities, racialised minorities, people subject to immigration controls, and people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Ensure a process where people of all genders are represented and explore what they would wish for in the built environments of their neighbourhoods.

- **Ensure women’s, gender-minority and minority groups with gender specialisms are meaningfully included in design and decision-making processes.** Moving policy design beyond ‘consultation’ with gender groups, and towards sustained, meaningful interaction avoids making gender a ‘token’ equality issue and places gender expertise at the heart of the planning process.
- **Ensure that the inclusion of women and gender minorities in policy solutions is intersectional and robustly addresses the needs of racialised and bordered minorities.** Although gender is a site of inequality in urban landscapes, racialised and bordered gender minorities experience additional barriers to public space. To create an equal gendered-approach to public space, these barriers must be treated seriously and tackled in parallel with gender inequality issues.
- **Align gender equal public space processes with overarching sustainability goals.** Gender-inclusive design processes should be planned in a way that

integrates with broader sustainability goals for the city - otherwise there is the risk of “gender equality” becoming a siloed concept and losing its impact.

## URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recognize the broad expertise within civil society organisations, feminist NGOs, women migrants groups, research teams and universities that work on gender and integration.** There is great value in developing synergies among those groups that can better articulate the needs of women, girls, and minority groups and can inform the gender mainstreaming in urban planning- and the maintenance of places. Be place specific and avoid “gender coding”- do not assume the preferences of different genders: include them and discover preferences and needs jointly.
- **Awareness-raising to combat persistent racism and sexism through the use of urban space.** Awareness raising activities such as exhibitions and public discussions, can contribute to combating persisting racism and sexism that is faced by women and girls disproportionately.
- **Create safe spaces for women, gender minorities and minority groups.** Although the avoidance of stereotyping ‘gender’ issues as ones of safety

is important, the provision of safe public space in which women, gender minorities and minority groups are not excluded or under threat is of vital importance. Anti-Racist, feminist scholarship shows that the provision of 'safe spaces' for racialised gender minorities supports their access to public space and public life. What type of space this is, however, is place-specific and needs to be understood from the viewpoint of the group at hand/ in place. Policymakers and planners need to create innovative solutions to facilitate this.

- **Focus on leisure, not just safety.** Simplifying women, girls and minority groups into entities that need safety and protection is not only diminishing and un-dignifying, but also incorrect.
- **Focus on the long-term programming and maintenance.** It is no good building a park that appeals to people of all genders if it quickly falls into disuse or disrepair - in such situations, public spaces are often co-opted by dominant social groups and for antisocial activities. Critically examine how, and by

whom, a specific place can be taken care of and be re-produced in the longer run. Who has, or will have, stewardship in this place?

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*Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design* by KDI and The World Bank: The Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design sets out practical approaches, activities, and design guidelines on how to implement a participatory- and inclusive design process that explores the experiences and uses of the city from the perspective of all citizen: women, men, and sexual and gender and other minorities: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33197/145305.pdf>

*Urban Girls Movement Catalogue and Handbook:* An encyclopaedia of good examples, a guide to inclusive urban planning and to the process behind #UrbanGirlsMovement: <https://www.globalutmaning.se/rapporter/urbangirlsmovement-catalogue/>

*Handbook:* Find the necessary arguments and tools to challenge set norms in your specific urban development context: <https://www.globalutmaning.se/rapporter/urbangirls-handbook/>



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*Daily scene in a Hutong in central Beijing.  
Photo by Johannes Riegler*







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# INCLUSIVE DESIGN/ PUBLIC SPACES FOR SAFE NEIGHBOURHOODS

*'Design is the human capacity to shape and make our environments in ways that satisfy our needs and give meaning to our lives' (Professor John Heskett, 1937-2014)*

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## CONTEXT

Neighbourhoods that provide city residents and workers with vital services for living a good life in the city are safe neighbourhoods. The importance of safe cities is enshrined in SDG Goal 11 which aims to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Ideally, public spaces are open and accessible commons that facilitate satisfying encounters between people who may be very different from one another. They can be material and/or virtual (online and digital public spaces), and are provided through private as well as public initiative. People experience safety in public spaces when they trust that their physical and psychological well-being will not be harmed by their interactions with others. In a safe city made up of safe neighbourhoods, public spaces are rooted in an urban ethic of mutual respect, fair-

ness and care, and are co-created and maintained by residents and workers who share a concern for one another's safety.

## BEING SAFE AND SAFEGUARDING

People's lived experience of safety is unevenly distributed across material, psychological, and interactional dimensions, and is affected by gender and economic inequalities. Psychological feelings of being unsafe – fear, anxiety, and uneasiness – are eased when people can 'read' public places, and accurately observe the behaviour of others. When residents and visitors to public spaces are able to confidently assess their environment, they experience themselves as resourceful agents and capable of influencing public spaces for mutual benefit. By grounding a person's sense of safety in their resourceful agency, city administrators with responsibility for inclusive and collaborative design can expand the idea of safety beyond fortification and defence. Rather, they can link the sense of safety to safeguarding as a social practice, underpinned

by a collective determination that each person's life matters.

### **COLLABORATIVE DESIGN OF SAFE PUBLIC SPACES**

The right to the city is 'a right to change ourselves by changing the city (...) the freedom to make and re-make our cities' (Harvey, 2008). City administrators can use collaborative design to better equip residents and workers to be resourceful agents in making safe public spaces. Inclusive collaborative design asks: By what procedures is public space designed, and who will be included? What ways of living do specific designs promote or inhibit? Who will be responsible for maintaining public spaces?

To ensure that all relevant perspectives are included, collaborative designers need to search for, make visible, and reach out to diverse groups. Citizens experience urban spaces as distinct places that embody a web of meanings, history and culture shaping the kinds of lives they can live. Public space-making is enriched when people bring their different meanings, values, and narratives into the design process.

These narratives and symbolic meanings are carriers of local and city identity and are more commonly used to communicate a city brand within a globally competitive market for tourists and inward investment. They remain a neglected resource for creating and maintaining safe public spaces (Yeoman, 2019; Oxford Impact Case Study).

Residents and workers use symbolic meaning-making to inform narratives of how to live together in the city. When they are institutionally embedded, for example through collaborative governance regimes, meanings and narratives can motivate collective action directed at solving shared problems. This is especially important where there are marginalised and migrant groups whose contributions are under-valued, but who are bearers of potentially productive meanings. The City of Vienna, for example, has sought neighbourhood policy interventions and bottom-up initiatives to increase social cohesion of the immigrant population with the city as a whole. Issues arising from super-diverse neighbourhoods mirror city-scale challenges, and the City of Vienna has used participation tools to recast ethnic diversity



as a source of innovation and development that can help solve such challenges (Kohlbacher et al, 2014).

Intermediaries – organisations and individuals – have an important role in enabling the place-making agency of residents and workers by acting as conduits for diverse meanings and narratives. They can help realise the value of ethnic diversity in intercultural spaces by negotiating and synthesising differences (Aygeman, 2017). Successful safe spaces require partnerships and multi-sectoral collaboration that include diverse people in both conception and implementation. Barcelona’s ‘plan for gender justice’ was co-created by women’s groups and urban planners at the City Council to ensure that gender and safety risks were considered when designing safe public spaces. Safe public spaces are more likely to be maintained when neighbourhood and city levels are connected using collaborative governance. Medellin, under the UN’s women’s safe city and safe public spaces programme, created a ‘Public Safety Council for Women’ to ensure that gender mainstreaming is included in city zoning (Metropolis report, 2018).

## DILEMMAS OF PUBLIC SPACE MAKING

Participating in collaborative design is not a risk-free undertaking, and people may be anxious for their physical and psychological safety. Safety/risk tensions can arise acutely in public spaces that are open to diverse participants. Collaborative design processes can manage this dilemma by incorporating into deliberation an urban ethic that promotes mutual respect and collective learning. Key questions to ask are: how are the voices of as many people as possible included whilst also efficiently producing public space; how is the psychological safety assured of those whose worldviews may be challenged by contestation; and how are people kept safe outside the collaborative design circle?

Deliberation in public space-making challenges participants to consider diverse perspectives. This can make people feel vulnerable to changes in their values, beliefs and ways of living. One way to alleviate concern is to guarantee dignity safety by enabling participants to jointly determine the rules of deliberation, as well as group norms, expectations, and behaviours (Flensner and Von der Lippe, 2019). In





Superkilen Park in Copenhagen, Denmark



deliberation, dignity safety means respecting participants as persons, and acknowledging how they can feel intellectually and existentially unsafe when their opinions and world views are scrutinised (Callan, 2016). UN Habitat (2010), *Bridging the Urban Divide*, identity two key principles of a right to the city: first, the dignity of all urban residents, and second, holistic, balanced, multicultural urban development. In Bogota, for example, cultural diversity was used to promote social inclusion, and build collective identity and conviviality. Safe spaces can become temporary 'communities of disagreement', or 'a group with identity claims, consisting of people with different opinions, who find themselves engaged in a common process, in order to solve shared problems or challenges' (Iversen 2018: p. 10). When supported by an urban ethic of mutual respect and care, communities of disagreement help people feel confident and safe when contributing their differences to the co-design of public spaces.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND GOVERNANCE IN THE COLLABORATIVE DESIGN OF SAFE PUBLIC SPACES**

Collaborative design processes must incorporate general features of safety, including mutual respect; confidence that there is room for one's difference; the ability to maintain one's physical and psychological integrity; and knowing that participation takes

place under conditions of fairness and care. Key impact indicators of safety span digital, health, infrastructure, local characteristics and personal security (Risidiana and Susanto, 2019).

Increasingly, city administrators aspiring to provide residents and workers with a sense of safety turn to smart city technologies to augment the ability of people to observe and read the city. The Toronto Transit Commission used technology-based solutions to report on gender-based violence and disseminate information (see Metropolis report, 2018). However, a sense of safety may be reduced when smart city technologies lack legitimacy, leading residents and workers to be suspicious of surveillance and control. Safe public spaces depend upon social trust, and this means making sure that technology operates with the informed consent of residents and workers.

Residents and workers need access to a participatory toolkit to co-create safe public spaces that will help them to solve problems that they identify as relevant to their lives, and to lead meaningful lives. In addition to a locally relevant toolkit, residents have a part to play in collaborative governance and shaping the framework of rules for technology and procedures that are legitimate and trustworthy.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE CO-DESIGN**

- **Agree on an urban ethic and adopt this into governance and strategy:** undertake with residents and workers a city-wide exercise to describe the public values, meanings and narratives that make the city distinctive and valued.
- **Develop a participatory toolkit for residents to co-create public spaces with developers and city administrators:** elements of a toolkit may include techniques such as recommended deliberative processes, stakeholder mapping to find and invite participants, building communities of disagreement and urban living labs.
- **Foster local leadership and capacity building:** Create intermediary roles and recruit intermediary organisations.
- **Integrate co-design of public spaces with collaborative governance regime:** use intermediaries and local representatives to carry meanings, values and narratives into strategic decision-making at a city level.



### **SUPERKILEN AND MIMERSPARKEN**

Public space-making is a power-infused activity marked by struggle and conflict over what public space means, and often weak capacity of marginalised groups to influence concept design and implementation. The design of participatory processes affords funders, architects and administrators the ability to influence design concepts and representation of outcomes, leaving residents little decision-making capacity and control over their neighbourhoods. Power imbalances in public space-making shaped the development of Superkilen and Mimersparken, two parks in Copenhagen's multi-ethnic and working-class neighbourhood of Nørrebro, situated three miles from the city centre. In 2004, the Danish real estate association Realdania partnered with the City of Copenhagen and Bjarke Ingels Group to develop the parks. A core aim was to create safe, diverse and vibrant public spaces that would increase inter-cultural encounters, foster urban conviviality, and support social cohesion. The dilemma was how to reconcile the interests of residents for spaces responsive to the multi-ethnic reality of their daily lives, and the interests of the developers and administrators for spaces that would allow them promote an image of Copenhagen as a cosmopolitan, open, multi-cultural city (Reeh, 2012).

Superkilen is a well-known and award-winning space using colourful and ethnocultural street furniture such as benches, trees and waste bins. The space is popular with urban middle-class visitors. However, residents complain that the participatory design process was “manufactured bottom-up democracy” (Stanfield and van Riemsdijk, 2019: p. 1367). Whilst the park offers a vision of multiculturalism that is acceptable to the city, it is disconnected from the residents' everyday experience of multi-ethnicity. A vital factor for inclusive concept design is understanding the needs of different groups at a detailed and local level. Superkilen has had some success in encouraging Muslim women to access the park by including open programming that focusses on shared common activities of playing and eating (Daly, 2020).

By contrast, the Mimersparken process was highly political. After listening to residents' ideas, the designers incorporated private and secluded areas into the design. However, these were lost, together with an access tunnel, to make way for the Mjølnerparken Board's (which included local representatives) desire for full sized football pitches. Although residents now use the space regularly with a sense of safety and ownership, this has been achieved at the expense of the park being isolated from the rest of the City, with reduced public profile as a multicultural space.

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Teren (eng. terrain) is a temporary experimental space located on an abandoned construction site in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The space is run by non-profit urban design studio prostoRož. Photo by Jana Jocif<sup>ca</sup>



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# CO-CREATIVE TEMPORARY USE IN PUBLIC SPACES: THE PROCESS IS EVERYTHING.

Temporary use projects and initiatives have received significant attention by urban practitioners and scholars over the last years (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Beekmans & De Boer, 2014; Schaller & Guinand, 2019). The types of temporary interventions are diverse: From formal community gardens, to food truck festivals, to placemaking and tactical urbanism, pop up cafés and shops, cultural spaces, to informal street vendors, graffiti's, or green guerrilla, etc. What all these initiatives with heterogeneous motivations have in common is the aim to transform (semi-) public spaces through short- term interventions or activation towards alternative uses that provide counter-strategies and critical thinking to establish new “development pathways”.

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Embedding temporary use projects in co-creative planning processes aiming at addressing larger urban challenges is important for releasing the synergetic potential, as it can contribute to more just, liveable and sustainable urban environment. Co-creation in urban development might be understood as planning (for public spaces) on equal terms that applies an explorative people-centred approach (Dahlvik et al., 2017). Without the embedding into a co-creative process, temporary uses of public spaces run risk to have negative (social) effects such as exclusion, increase in land value (Schaller & Guinand, 2017)

and amplifying dilemma situations such as benefiting one group while disadvantaging other groups depending on who is identified as being legitimate to act (Douglas, 2018). Whereas some actions might be considered more socially acceptable, aesthetically pleasing or granted official and normative legitimacy, others such as street vendors or other type of uses or actions might be turned down. Co-creative temporary uses can change the functions, identities, services, perception and representation of public spaces (Mariani & Barron, 2014; Harris, 2015). It can highlight the requirements and needs of civil society in an actors-field that consists of different stakeholder groups such as in urban planning.

Temporary uses of public spaces need to be better taken into account as momentum for deciphering and creating the meanings of public space and its



use functions. Urban planning should understand the co-creative character of the actions of these interventions as an open process for involving affected urban actors who are often residents, and (potential) users of the spaces. Only by maintaining open, transparent and co-creative processes around temporary uses of public spaces in urban planning rather than “ad-hoc” interventions driven by individual interests - initiatives and projects can create playing-field among all stakeholders and enables transitional processes in the long-run.

**Conceptual understanding of temporary use in this paper: (Counter)-Formal to informal strategies in urban development and planning that challenge established “development pathways” for a limited period of time and showcase more place-sensitive and community-led exploratory appropriation practices. Temporary use may result in new or different symbolic meanings of the spaces being temporarily used.**

**Conceptual understanding of co-creation in this paper: Open urban planning and development process that invites residents, users and local actors to engage in an easily accessible collaboration process to plan for place-sensitive initiatives. Co-produced public spaces might result from a cooperative planning process depending on the specific point of time in which actors become involved.**

Rather than an end in itself, co-creative temporary use projects need to be understood as a tool to enhance public spaces with multiple purposes in established urban development and urban planning systems. Without being implemented in a larger co-creative process with clear aims and goals, individual, ad-hoc interventions run the risk to be counterproductive in the larger scope, hence, contributing to urban dilemma situations. There are a number of essential considerations to take into account for these processes such as actors’ involvement, the balance of interest, expectations, communication, temporality and risks while realizing potentials.



## **ACTORS INVOLVED**

Temporary uses of (semi-)public spaces might be initiated by different constellations of urban actors (Douglas, 2019) by either acting on their own or collaborating with each other's: individuals, community initiatives, private landowners, developers, public authorities, informal street vendors, etc. While all are striving towards using spaces differently compared to its initial function, the motivations, as well as the needs and requirements, might be very different: fulfilling concrete needs of the community, accessibility to and representation in public spaces, experimentation and testing of use functions, branding and, but also urban renewal, land valorisation, profit-maximization, etc. (Colomb, 2012; Schaller & Guinand, 2017).

## **BALANCING INTERESTS**

Balancing interests and facilitating co-creative processes for temporary use is essential for enabling and identifying the potential of open public spaces (Sennett, 2019). In market-oriented urban development, the needs and requirements of local population risks to be underrepresented which leads to the development of exclusion of unheard user groups and individuals in urban public spaces. Here, the potential of temporary uses in (semi-)public spaces unfolds: Inviting and bringing different ideas, perspectives and interests together to collectively plan at equal levels for temporary use projects should ultimately improve the appropriation of potentially underused spaces, and thus, create benefits for more involvement (Campo, 2002).

## **TEMPORARY USE FOR LONG TERM PLANNING**

It is the process of bringing perspectives and experiences of different actors together, to co-create ideas and knowledge, while being able to experiment in public spaces what makes temporary interventions an effective tool. Thus, temporary uses allow to test ideas in public spaces, often providing the flexibility to change focus on short term, develop new ideas, draw conclusions and ideally inform long term planning mechanisms (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

Additionally, temporary use initiatives can transform the identity and perception of a public space, even if ephemeral. It allows people to test and experiment with ideas of alternative uses and therefore make visible what changes are possible of what the potentials of a specific place is (Harris, 2015; Schaller & Guinand, 2019). Long(er) term processes using temporary use as a strategy have the potential to contribute to a wider urban transformation (Griffin, 2012). They take stock of the requirements and needs in a neighbourhood/district/city/urban area, co-create temporary projects to experiment in public space. Altogether, this provides the flexibility for short-term adaptations of the planned project and in the long run change identities of (underused) spaces by showcasing what their potentials are. Co-creative temporary use projects make the development and maintaining public space more accessible to many and stimulate educational skills to participate in socio-spatial changes in urban areas (Beekmans & De Boer, 2014).

This empowerment and access capacities are all the more prevalent as means to achieve more just urban environment (Fainstein, 2010).

## **RISKS**

Temporary initiatives, per definition, are implemented for a limited period of time. While the experimenting which takes place on these sites is reversible physically, the social and symbolic effects are longer lasting. This offers the potential for synergetic effects if conducted in open, non-discriminative, co-creative ways. Informal actions are also trigger for reflections on alternative uses and practices. They convey precious information on the public spaces' social dimensions that need to be taken into account. If these elements are not embedded in a more comprehensive planning process with co-creative character, there are significant risks of contributing to dilemma situations such as social exclusion, frustration and distrust, privatization and inaccessibility, especially if individual (market) interests are over-represented in the process (Madanipour, 2019).

Not all interests of individual stakeholder / actor groups might ultimately lead to sustainable and liveable urban practices (Tonkiss, 2013) - but there should be at least an awareness for “responsible use” of scarce space which includes the potential of temporary use of public spaces.

## FURTHER READINGS

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Temporary use projects as part of long-term planning processes

For policy-makers, including, facilitating and/or allowing for co-creative temporary use projects in long-term planning processes can bring a number of benefits to their daily work. If implemented in long(er)-term planning processes, the experimentation taking place temporarily may provide important co-created knowledge for future projects and policies of the city administrations and local governments. Furthermore, temporary initiatives and projects have the potential to change perceptions of residents and urban actors, thus, contributing to collectively thinking and developing pathways for transitioning urban public space. Temporary use projects should be considered as a tool to change perceptions, to enhance appropriations by co-creating the future uses, design and functions of urban public spaces in a longer-term planning process. By taking into account co-creative temporary forms of uses in long(er) term planning processes, the synergetic effects tend to be supported while the risks of amplifying dilemma situations are decreased.

### Transparent, flexible and open regulations

Temporary initiatives and projects tend to be limited, or even prevented, by rigid regulations, access barriers and precarious (non-)planning strategies. While regulations have their reasons, higher flexibility is required to implement temporary projects which go beyond initial mainstream use functions and processes. To tap upon the potentials, the

regulative frameworks of local public administration and planning need to provide the required flexibility and openness while framing transparent regulative boundaries. Additionally, open and transparent procedure for temporary use practices are necessary. The local urban administration or intermediaries can take the role of the facilitator and broker between different urban actors which can ensure the safety of the project, the maintenance, etc. while the co-creative factor contributes to a shared ownership of the people and organisations involved. A clear communication of the local urban administration on the objectives including future scenarios and the definition of co-responsibilities is essential for facilitating co-creative temporary processes and projects.

### Team up to scale up

For facilitating projects and initiatives as part of a larger process to transform public spaces (and urban areas in general, for that matter) towards sustainable and liveable futures, the co-creative temporary use should not be understood as a single intervention. Instead, it should be implemented as a tool for experimentation to become a standard in transition processes. To make this a reality, it is important to overcome “silo-structures” in public urban planning administration and to ensure exchange and collaboration between departments. Furthermore, for enhancing the effects of the intervention(s) on a larger scale (from one specific case to neighbourhood and urban scale), the inclusion of residents and users in urban spaces, as well as the private sector is a pre-condition for taking collective action.

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### Acknowledge political representation and expression

The political role and dimension of interventions in public space should not be left out of planning considerations. Public space should remain an open space for socio-political expressions and contestations. Public authorities, planners, practitioners should avoid the temptation of taming expressions through institutionalisation. Co-creative temporary space activation should not become the next toolkit to tame contestation through consensus and normative codes of conduct and behaviour. These spaces through the interventions should remain the informative barometer of the socio-political state of our urban societies.

### Define the potential value of the initiative

Urban land is a scarce resource which results in pressures on the use and function of public spaces caused by conflicting interests. For that reason, it is essential to acknowledge the value of co-creative temporary use as a potential tool to use (public) space more efficiently. In co-creative temporary projects/initiatives, it is crucial to align divergent interests and develop a common value for the project together. This shared understanding of the value of the project should include social, environmental, economic and political aspects to ensure overall just urban environments. This step is essential to balance market and social interests, create common objectives of what is to be achieved with the temporary projects and, ultimately, how the temporary urban practice can contribute to a shared understanding of just, sustainable and liveable public spaces.

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## PROSTOROŽEV – LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

[HTTPS://PROSTOROZ.ORG](https://prostorozev.org)

**ProstoRožev is a cultural association located in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Their work focusses on improving urban public spaces by exploring the meaning of local residents and society at large. prostoRožev activated overlooked public spaces by organizing, rearranging and revitalising them according to the needs of the local population. Zala Velkavrh reflected upon the role of temporary use activities and projects to activate underused urban public spaces:**

### ***What value can be realized through temporary use?***

“Temporary use can help uncover and point to the hidden and forgotten qualities of space. As a first step in a long-term renewal process, it has the power to establish a link between residents, planners, and local decision-makers, easing the way for permanent improvement. It enables stakeholders to experience one of the possible scenarios for space in 1:1 scale.”

### ***What does co-creation require in practice?***

“Co-creation requires negotiation. The rules need to be flexible and all actors need to know how they can influence the co-creation process and the space. Beyond building the temporary space, planners, municipal officials, local residents and other stakeholders should be involved in the debates concerning the long-term vision of the space.”

### ***What are the main challenges to co-create temporary use?***

“The greatest challenge is the balance between the temporary and the permanent. In the absence of a long-term strategy, co-created temporary spaces might be (ab)used for marketing purposes. Attention should be paid to the maintenance aspect of temporary use. While local residents and other users easily embrace a space they helped to co-create, maintenance of public space should not become



*prostoRož mission is to enhance the quality of underused public urban spaces in Ljubljana, Slovenia.  
Photos by Dijana Vukojevic.*

their exclusive burden. Temporariness means that a plan for maintenance and removal of spatial intervention must be implemented together with the intervention.”

***How can outcomes of co-created temporary use be sustained?***

“Temporary use can serve as a starting point for permanent renewal and a well-informed long-term collaboration. A plan for observation and evaluation should be set up to measure the success of temporary use. The outcomes of co-created temporary use should only be sustained if the experiment is successful. The long-term legacy of temporary use does not have to resonate in the design of the space. It can resonate in new traffic plans, maintenance, and new governance of the space.”

***Why should cities make use of co-created temporary use?***

“Temporary use enables cities to test the ideas for public space quickly and efficiently. It doesn’t require a high budget and is usually simple to install and remove. As such, it provides a platform for instant feedback. Not only does this save time and money for the city when it comes to presenting and designing ideas for public urban space, but it also serves as a more effective way of understanding the needs and wishes of local residents.”

Ciclovia in Bogota, Columbia.  
Photo by Florian Lorenz



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# RETHINKING URBAN PUBLIC SPACES: HOW TO UNLOCK THE POTENTIALS OF STREET SPACES TO IMPROVE SUSTAINABILITY AND LIVEABILITY

Policy makers working in the urban realm often deal with negotiating the repurposing of streets as public spaces. Transforming street spaces – by re-allocating space from motorized individual transport to other uses – appears as effective strategy to improve on sustainability and liveability goals. Yet such a re-allocation of public space faces several dilemmas in a real world setting that relate to timescales of urban transformation, fairness of street space allocation, fossil-fuel based mobility as personal comfort, as well as, mobilizing of political capital for long term urban transformation projects. This chapter explores how the transformation of streets into sustainable and liveable public spaces can be expedited and made more efficient. New urban imaginaries and narratives that integrate small steps for success can foster streets as public spaces that are built in participatory and co-creative projects.

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## STREETS AS LEVERS FOR URBAN TRANSFORMATION

Since the mid 20th century, urban mobility has rapidly motorized and individualized, resulting in an enormous rise in the number of privately owned motor vehicles in cities. Since a single-occupant car moving at 50 km/hr occupies 30 times more

space than a bicycle at 15 km/hr, and 20 times more space, per person, than a bus with 40 riders (Litman, 2019), this shift would not have been possible without new spatial arrangements.

To accommodate individual motorization, and often to encourage it, cities re-allocated vast swathes of public space for dedicated motor vehicle lanes and on-street parking. Streets ceased to be “the main public places of a city” (Jacobs, 1961) as lively, diverse, interactive public spaces were replaced by



Performance during a car free Sunday on Avenida Paulista, Sao Paulo, Brazil. Photo by Johannes Riegler

mono-functional transportation strips dominated by motorized vehicles and protected in this use by societal practices and legal regulations.

Now, another transformation of city streets appears to be both necessary and inevitable in the light of sustainability (climate change, public health, social equity) and liveability (climate comfort, inclusive public realm, etc.) challenges. Cities must not only adapt themselves to changing climatic conditions but also anticipate and prepare for the impacts of fundamental changes in energy systems, supply chains, economic structures, demographics, and more. The reconceptualization of streets as postcarbon urban ecosystems has been proposed for research and innovation projects and urban policymakers alike: *“The design challenge of postcarbon urban mobility [...] is to facilitate the mobility needs of people while inviting the production of urbanity and enhancing adaptive*

*capacity in the face of systemic change. In practice, this means rejecting the monolithic car-based system in urban areas in favour of redesigning streets, parking areas, and networks of streets so that the greatest proportion of city dwellers can maintain a high quality of life even as energetic, economic, and environmental conditions shift.”* (Grigsby & Lorenz, 2017)

Streets are the predominant and most ubiquitous form of public open space in cities, and despite appearances to the contrary, they remain available for policy and planning interventions. Indeed, many cities are leveraging street transformations to reduce the urban heat island effect, improve microclimates, reduce air and noise pollution, support social cohesion, encourage public participation, and foster transitions to sustainability mobility. Yet, neither the rate of change nor its scope and scale are congruent with the challenges ahead, and the overall vision of



transformation tends to be fragmented, leading to conflicting policy aims and strategic planning goals that never make the jump from paper to pavement.

The COVID-19 pandemic with its disruptions in mobility patterns and public space usage shows that cities can change quickly and radically in the face of crisis. Yet, COVID-19 is not the only challenge humankind faces in the 21st century as climate change, resource depletion and biodiversity loss constitute a “long emergency” (Kunstler, 2005) that requires systemic change towards deep sustainability in the Anthropocene. Streetscapes constitute the largest and most pervasive spatial tool at the disposal of public authorities for catalysing – or resisting – socio-ecological transformation.

## **RE-ALLOCATING STREET SPACE: FOUR DILEMMAS**

Despite the potential benefits, the re-allocation of street space remains a contentious and highly politicized process. There is no clear consensus concerning which (or whose) needs the design of public space should prioritize, or how public space fits into larger societal challenges. Streets, in particular, are deeply symbolic spaces associated for many people with notions of modernity, progress, cars, and speed. Public space is a limited resource, and its allocation always favours certain practices and meanings at the expense of others. Any significant change to public space requires negotiation between different interests, thereby presenting dilemmas from the outset. An inclusive dilemma-oriented approach identifying such hurdles can help to consider multiple sides and motivations involved in such a process. This has the potential to produce engaged change-coalitions and expedite co-created visions of sustainable, liveable futures.

### **Dilemma #1: Consolidating urban transformation timescales and required pace of change**

Perhaps the main dilemma for urban policymakers and planners is how to achieve rapid transformation, given the scale and complexity of changes needed. Simply achieving consensus on the nature

of the problems can take decades, and previous socio-technical system transitions have tended to unfold over 40-60 years or more (Kanger and Schot, 2019). In order to avoid runaway global warming, however, near-total decarbonization within the next 10-20 years appears to be necessary (Steffen et al 2018, IPCC 2018). This leaves very little time for cities to envision and implement alternative paradigms. At the same time, if cities act too fast and push too hard, they risk making mistakes that increase human suffering, even if only in the short term. If the support of the public is lost, entire long-term agendas can be delegitimized.

### **Dilemma #2: Striving for fairness in street space allocation**

Creutzig et al (2020) provide useful insights into the challenge of “fair street space allocation” arising in the context of “emerging concerns about transport emissions, global warming, public health and urban sustainability [which] have reinvigorated public discussion about the function and fairness of street space allocation”. The authors describe street space allocation in Berlin, Germany, where motor vehicles (moving and parked) take up about 60% of street space while only 17% of daily trips are made by car. A similar mismatch can be observed for Vienna, Austria, where 66,5% of street space is dedicated to motor vehicles (Furchtlehner & Licka, 2019) despite them accounting for only 27% of daily trips. Far from being outliers, these cities appear to be more the rule than the exception.

However, the car system has been locked in to the point that reducing or dismantling it will have adverse impacts on large numbers of people, particularly those from poor and even middle-class neighbourhoods at the urban fringe without access to quick, reliable, and inexpensive public transport who rely on cars to reach places of employment, schools, and essential shopping such as supermarkets. The reality is that street space allocation will never be fair in the sense of providing equally to all transport modes and non-transport demands; societal and political priorities will always produce “winners” and “losers”.

### **Dilemma #3: Contemporary comfort versus inter-generational fairness**

While we enjoy moving upon wish in a convenient and personalized manner we also want to maintain planetary health for future generations. Planetary sustainability requires addressing climate change and decarbonisation goals and is ultimately incompatible with individual, car-based and fossil-fuelled mobility. Likewise, citizens appreciate improvements in the public space at their doorsteps but may also want a cheap and easily accessible parking space.

This dilemma is manifested by lock-ins and path dependencies in infrastructure (as well as financial and fiscal systems) that are currently skewed towards incentivising car-based mobility (Mattioli et. al., 2020). Streets dominated by fossil-fuelled private motor vehicles reproduce a “system of automobility” (Urry, 2004) based on the unsustainable burning of vast quantities of fossil energy. Structural changes in this system need to be framed in innovative ways to overcome the resistance of car owners and automotive lobbies (Gössling, 2020).

### **Dilemma #4: Short-term political capital versus long term societal benefit**

Interventions that make perfect sense from a long-term perspective and would bring benefits for society in the long run are often hard to “sell” in a short-term political timeframe. Replacing on-street parking with urban greenery makes perfect sense in the long run as trees will bring real benefits (shading and cooling) in about 10-20 years after planting. Politicians deciding to implement such an urban policy, reasonable in terms of climate change adaptation, may have a hard time to build political capital on long-term benefits within their tenure but are still faced with a potential backlash from citizens that want to keep “their” (inexpensive) on-street parking.

To encounter this dilemma the (necessary) short-term political capital need to align with long-term societal benefits. Meeting today’s challenges in a proactive way does provide positive outcomes for decision-makers and politicians to communicate the co-benefits of urban transformation (better

health, high liveability, localized economy, etc.) to constituents. In this context it will be important to nest short-term transformational projects in long-term narratives and imaginaries of sustainable urban futures.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Develop strong narratives and imaginaries for streets as public spaces**

Amplifying the pace of urban change requires “transformational urban projects” (Zografos et. al, 2020) that deliver on many aspects of urban life. As such projects entail the redevelopment of vast amounts of urban space over long periods of time, new imaginaries will be needed that envision streets to become vital public spaces. Big changes will be required to transition into a sustainable world – similar in scale to the industrial revolution – with a transformation of economy, mobility, urbanity and social relations, amongst others. The street can be the place where we tell the locally nested story of transitioning into a sustainable urban future.

### **Make streets an issue of wellbeing and environmental quality**

Fostering a new zeitgeist about streets as public spaces requires changing the conversation from streets as traffic spaces to streets as public spaces. Rather than being a space that merely serves traffic, streets should (again) be a public space servicing the public good. Policy makers should apply wellbeing and environmental fairness principles to argue for street space allocation and redistribute street space towards slower speed uses (Creutzig et al 2020). Integrating non-transport stationary and mobile functions – such as street vending, food trucks, markets, artistic interventions, political expressions, comfortable benches, green spaces – typically not considered by urban (traffic) planners today (von Schönfeld and Bartolini 2017) will be vital for creating streets for wellbeing and environmental quality.

### **Re-allocate parking space towards other uses and active modes of transport.**

In many cities the use of street spaces is skewed



*Parklet2Go: an urbanistic tool for testing, evaluating and discussing the transformation of specific (parking) spaces in an effective and informal way. Photo by Florian Lorenz*

towards stationary vehicles that occupy public spaces. A straightforward policy with long-term impact is to reshuffle the land-use hierarchy (and the aligned imaginary) within streets by implementing on-street parking schemes to reduce on-street parking gradually shifting the spatial balance towards more sustainable and lively uses. This will free space to revalue streets as public spaces of wellbeing and environmental quality while at the same time accelerating a wider shift in mobility behaviour towards sustainable forms of transport.

Critically in this process is having land-use alternatives (parklets, greenery, social infrastructure, etc.) at hand to quickly replace on-street parking with uses that are of immediate benefit to residents. For doing so, a participatory approach raises local ownership for those new (public) street spaces thereby improving overall sustainability.

**Develop visions, projects and milestones to be reached within short timeframes**

To overcome the dilemma of mobilizing short-term political capital from long-term projects and their

future effects, such long-term projects may be constituted of smaller projects targeting the immediate-, short- and intermediate-term. Such quickly feasible interventions can be nested within the narrative of long-term urban transformation creating identity and agency as well as understanding for the necessity of transformational urban change. Such smaller projects can also be communicated more effectively in a (local) political context.

Next to established mechanisms of implementing projects in stages, urban transformation projects can integrate short-term actions following a tactical urbanism approach (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). Such temporary (and inexpensive) interventions enable the experimentation with a new normal of street space allocation. Long-term and more costly interventions can thereafter build on the experiences and expectations of citizens who also develop a better ownership for the transformation process.

**Support co-creation of new street space usages.**

For successfully implementing transformational projects the buy-in of residents is vital. Therefore,



*Superblock in Barcelona. Photo by Florian Lorenz*

the imaginary for communicating urban transformation should be as diverse as the users' needs in regards of future urban spaces. To build this local alliance and raise the sustainability of interventions, the transformation of streets as urban public spaces should be co-created together with citizens. Various approaches for street transformation can be experimented with (Bertolini, 2020) making the potentials of urban transformation more tangible for residents.

Enhancing co-creation for urban transformation processes makes sense from a policy and planning perspective. Crowdsourcing ideas can help to develop a richer imaginary and identify new concepts for street spaces that serve the needs of a sustainable urban future.

### **EXAMPLE: SUPERBLOCKS AS TRANSFORMATIONAL URBAN INTERVENTION**

The Superblock model (Rueda, 2019) is a “transformational intervention” (Zografos et. al., 2019) that re-organises urban space and mobility at a human scale while reclaiming public space for meeting the challenges of urban transitions toward sustainability and decarbonisation. Superblocks limit the permeability of the road network for private motorised traffic while prioritising walking and cycling on non-arterial streets. The resulting “urban cells” are traffic-calmed with reduced on-street parking to enable the re-design of streets as multifunctional public spaces. A modal shift towards walking, cycling



and public transport is induced, while attracting additional local services and businesses can further reduce travel distances. As spatial policy tool, Superblocks affect multiple dimensions of urban life and manage to address the aforementioned dilemmas:

**Dilemma #1:** Superblocks provide a long-term urban transformation perspective and a localized narrative for urban transition that manages to integrate small and quick interventions within a long-term goal of developing a sustainable and liveable neighbourhood.

**Dilemma #2:** Superblocks offer an equitable range of transport options while redistributing street spaces in co-creative processes involving multiple stakeholders.

The scale of Superblocks can mobilize potentials for indoor parking facilities to free-up on-street parking.

**Dilemma #3:** Superblocks prioritise human-scale mobility and foster urban public spaces that are (no longer) dominated by cars thereby providing a model to live a frugal urban lifestyle that can comply with intergenerational fairness.

**Dilemma #4:** As a spatial policy tool and a political project, Superblocks integrate a visionary narrative and providing manifold options for small nested urban changes that can be leveraged for localized and more short-term political capital.

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# ENERGY TRANSITION AND THE MEANINGFUL CITY

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Urban environments play a crucial role in achieving climate and energy targets. But public spaces as such appear not to be in the centre of attention when it comes to discussing the energy transition in the urban context. Rather, the focus is on transforming the energy system, smart grids, renewable energy sources, energy-efficient buildings and user behaviour, the industry, the mobility system and other specific infrastructures. Yet, public spaces play a key role in shaping people's interactions with the energy system. Urban policies and investments in public spaces can facilitate or inhibit these interactions, with important consequences for the effectiveness of urban energy systems. In their efforts to embed smart city initiatives, such as those related to the urban energy system, participation in public spaces helps people co-create diverse meanings and narratives that influence how they adopt sustainable practices into their work and lives. An important, but neglected aspect is how people's behaviour in smart city contexts is motivated by their need for life meaning. Meaningfulness in life and work is a potential resource for public space design, and could be used to inform city strategy and governance when

managing energy transitions. Public spaces that enable people to generate meanings related to their interactions with the urban energy systems, and to use these meanings to enrich their lives, help city administrators and energy system designers to develop integrated energy transition strategies that include establishing fora for spread awareness and ownership of responsible urban policies for sustainable energy.

## DILEMMAS:

- **How to address the energy transition targets with regard to public spaces in terms of design and function, while providing inclusive, high-quality public environments and ensuring broad ownership?**
- **How to address efficiency (technical expertise seeking to act quickly and at scale) versus effectiveness (local knowledge, understanding and commitment that takes time to develop)?**

## SMART CITIES AND ENERGY TRANSITIONS

Public spaces are the essence of urban life and provide essential societal functions. As platforms for social interaction and carriers of infrastructures and mobility, they define identity, pace and functionality of and access to the city. The JPI Urban Europe AGORA Thematic Dialogue in Riga (JPI Urban Europe, 2019) has addressed a wide range of dilemmas such as global vs. local interests, planned vs. experimental

space, temporary use vs. long-term planning, the transformation of urban infrastructures and adaptation for climate change with its consequences for the design of public spaces, combining high quality with inclusiveness.

Discussing the role and function of public spaces in the energy transition starts with urban planning in general, including the aspects of density and the allocation of functions: concepts such as the Compact City (OECD, 2012) or the 15-Minute-City (City Lab, 2020) not only support liveability for its residents, but also energy-efficient and sustainable urban development. The Smart City (European Commission, n.D.) concept has significantly impacted urban development narratives: mostly focusing on digital technologies to organize cities more efficiently and sustainably. On a global level, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, n.D.), specifically SDG 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, has contributed to focusing on urban environments as main drivers for climate and energy action. However, tensions often exist between smart and sustainable city goals, especially when smart city initiatives prioritise technological solutions at the expense of people's need for meaning. By giving people voice in crafting the meanings and narratives that shape the design, implementation and adoption of technology, public spaces can use collaborative learning and public values to manage the tensions between smart and sustainable goals, and improve the prospects for energy transition.

## **MEANINGFUL CITIES**

People's need for meaning in life and work is a neglected aspect of human motivation that could usefully be incorporated in urban public policy, especially those connecting public space-making and citizens' commitment to sustainable energy practices. This is captured in the concept of 'meaningful cities' that put the lives and voices of city residents and workers at the heart of sustainable cities (Yeoman, 2019). Crucially, citizens are invited to participate in urban decision-making in ways that contribute

to life meaning. People experience meaningfulness when they are actively involved with things of independent value and significance (for example, ideas, activities, people, animals, places and organisations) that they also find emotionally engaging (Yeoman, 2014). Cities contain a dazzling diversity of values and meanings that offer opportunities for personal meaning. However, not all such meanings contribute to the common good of the city. When public spaces are informed by an urban ethic of inclusiveness, equality, rights, and diversity, they enable citizens to publicly evaluate the ethical viability of local and personal meanings against public values, and to assess how meanings express the well-being of the people and the ways that places contribute to life meaning. For example, a citizen-led study of three East London neighbourhoods finds that local meanings of 'what does it mean for everyone to prosper' diverge from economic models of material prosperity, and place greater emphasis on belonging, voice and the relational aspects of material security (Moore and Woodcraft, 2019).

This suggests that the technologies of smart and sustainable city initiatives, such as smart meters, solar panels and innovative transport solutions, are more likely to be successfully disseminated and embedded when people are able to bring their local and personal meanings into the design and implementation process. As part of meaningful place-making, the King's Cross development in London drew upon multiple sources of meanings – inclusion, culture and heritage, innovation, growth and diversity. These meaning sources provide residents, community groups, corporate tenants and other stakeholders with insights into environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions that facilitate energy transitions, and contribute to life meaning (see Oxford Impact Case Study, n.D.).

## **PUBLIC SPACES IN TRANSFORMATION**

The design of public spaces plays a key role in the mitigation of global warming effects: greening, cooling urban heat islands, adapting urban mobility. Cities that use public spaces to capture and use

citizens' interpretations of meanings are well placed to develop resilient and responsive integrations of the social and technological dimensions of smart/sustainable strategies. For example, narratives of green and blue infrastructure provide meanings to support climate and energy targets, as well as spatial qualities. Applied in public spaces to topics such as the mobility sector, meanings, values and narratives help to motivate the transformation process needed to move away from car-oriented streets towards place-making based upon collective or shared and fossil-fuel-free mobility. Many European cities, including global cities such as Paris, Brussels and Madrid, actively set initiatives for pushing back motorized traffic from their streets. Pedestrianized zones or Shared Spaces (The City at Eye Level, 2017) are having a revival – combining ambitions of economic revitalization of inner parts of the cities (already a priority in the 1970's) with climate action.

While energy efficiency aspects are increasingly mainstreamed in urban policies, the task of (local) energy production is less prominent. Developing strategies of including energy production by sensibly making use of locally available renewable sources into the design of public spaces are still very small-scaled. Public spaces have the potential to act as a main carrier for public infrastructures by providing energy grids with locally produced energy, while at the same time providing high-quality design for interaction.

Yet, top-down concepts of transformation processes on a large scale tend to be slow-moving and ignore issues of ownership, and therefore acceptance. Bottom-up initiatives, small-scale, neighbourhood-oriented approaches and interventions are equally important, usually faster in implementation, and have immediate impact. Incremental approaches – re-designing a single street, providing room for manoeuvre for local, non-governmental initiatives and temporary uses – may serve as a pool of experiments testing immediate action. A sensible integration of top-down and bottom-up strategies is needed that takes citizens and users on board and uses the innovation potential on the ground.

Local Agenda 21 (Cities Territories Governance, 2012) and similar initiatives, Baugruppen (building groups) (Spur, 2017), Local Energy Communities (Local Energy Communities, 2019) or Amsterdam's CODALoop project use workshops, theatre, on-line fora, and storytelling to activate an energy consciousness among participants. Such creative public spaces encourage citizens to generate diverse meanings, adopting these into narratives that motivate community-level co-creation of energy-conscious lifestyles. Having citizens engaged and committed addresses issues of inclusion and exclusion that impede implementation strategies. Experimental and inclusive public spaces foster a diversity of approaches, allowing for the evaluation of different methods, implementation strategies and stakeholder engagement. This provides the basis for narrative justice, or equality and inclusion in meaning-making that contributes to narrative formation and transmission, thereby helping people to incorporate smart city technologies into their lives.

To sum it up – public spaces can contribute to energy transition targets by

- **providing the backbone of sustainable, climate neutral and energy efficient mobility:** creating an urban environment that supports public transport, shared mobility, cycling, walking and moves away from car-oriented design;
- **providing space for sustainable energy production:** using renewable sources (wind, sun, water) and including them into design aspects;
- **providing space for sustainable grey, green and blue infrastructure:** focusing on integrating green and blue (water) elements to the design of public spaces, thus reducing the need for energy for cooling;
- **influencing individual behaviour through design:** supporting energy-efficient and sustainable mobility and the use of resources
- **providing meaning-making capabilities:** generating diverse meanings, shaping narratives, and crafting meaning in life and work

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Connect climate action, energy transition targets and quality urban environment:** Climate and energy action addressing urban infrastructures and mobility systems must go hand-in-hand with accessible, inclusive, high-quality designs of public spaces.
- **Mainstream energy efficiency and energy production aspects urban planning and public space strategies and design:** The energy transition targets must be integrated and evaluated in urban strategies on all levels. This applies not only to new urban developments but also retrofitting and revitalisation strategies in existing neighbourhoods.
- **Focus on local communities and the urban neighbourhood:** Active citizens and local communities are valuable and innovative actors in transformation processes, implementation success depends on broad ownership. Citizens and local stakeholders need to be informed, involved and engaged.
- **Space for diversity of approaches and experiment:** While mainstreaming energy transition targets in urban policies, there is a need for experimental space, exploring a diversity of solutions with different focus.
- **Establish an urban ethic and institutional mechanisms for evaluating meanings:** equipping citizens to use public values to assess meanings and narratives secures their ownership and commitment of technologically-driven sustainability initiatives

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