



HOW TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE AND JUST CITIES?

ENABLING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR LOCAL INITIATIVES

PRODUCED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF FREIBURG THROUGH THE URBANA PROJECT,
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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet presents the work done by UrbanA partner, the University of Freiburg, on governance for sustainable and just cities. We hope that it is useful for city-makers of different strokes (municipal officials, civil society members, private sector members etc.) as they design and implement local initiatives.

You'll find short explanatory videos, [underlined links to the individual case studies](#), and colourful vignettes (by Carlotta Cataldi) as well, to make the pages fly by!

ABOUT URBANA

Urban Arenas for Sustainable and Just Cities is a three-year H2020 EU-funded project to map, assess, distil and communicate a portfolio of approaches and tools to city-makers, in order to support them in transforming their cities into sustainable, just, and thriving urban and peri-urban environments. Our goal is to synthesize and transfer knowledge, breaking silos and building new networks for transformative change.



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GOVERNANCE

All the formal and informal political processes (involving communities, civil society, public, and private actors) that aim to enable and direct collective action.



WHAT ARE ENABLING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS?

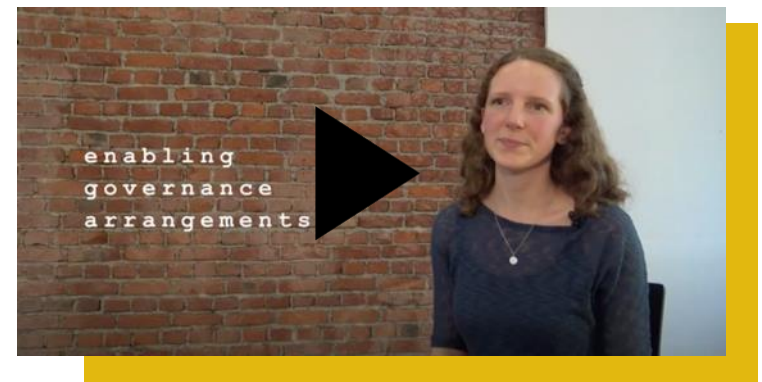
Many inspiring and successful initiatives are working to make our cities more sustainable and just. **What do they have in common?** What helps these renewable energy communities, community land trusts, food sharing schemes, and so on, come to fruition and have a positive impact? This is a question we have asked ourselves here at the University of Freiburg, Germany.

Through our work on governance for sustainable and just cities in the UrbanA project, we identified six Enabling Governance Arrangements. We also heard from participants at our online “Berlin” Arena in March 2021, who had a look and related the Arrangements back to their own experiences.

We think that these Enabling Governance Arrangements can serve as general principles for the governance of sustainable and just cities. **Do you employ them in your local initiative? Does your city act on them?**

A small disclaimer: While these Enabling Governance Arrangements can be applied in different cities, we are not saying that they will always lead to positive outcomes and that they are the only factors needed for success. Instead try them out according to your needs and based on your situation.

Check out our **three-minute explanatory video:**





THE MAKING OF ENABLING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

We created six Enabling Governance Arrangements by reviewing many different initiatives for urban sustainability and justice and identifying patterns of what was enabling positive change.

What exactly did we do? First, our team conducted a review of eleven **Governance Interventions**, featured in previous EU-funded projects, which aimed to improve urban sustainability and justice. To get a closer perspective, we talked to many of the people who were directly involved in these initiatives or who had studied them previously. Then we noted down different actor groupings and processes that helped initiatives achieve positive outcomes and sorted them into categories. After some refinement, these became the six **Enabling Governance Arrangements**.

Of course, these arrangements were reviewed and added to by the UrbanA community through the online “Berlin” Arena, thus leading to the final versions in this booklet.

Feel free to also explore our wiki page to read about the initiatives themselves and view our other work.



Group shot from the “Berlin” Arena, March 2021



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ENABLING
GOVERNANCE
ARRANGEMENTS

#1 CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE VISION OF CHANGE

FUTURE



Image description: Create a comprehensive vision of change



WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

A comprehensive vision guides individual initiatives and often highlights links with others to create a wider perspective of change. Visioning can include abstract processes to address fundamental questions, as well as working out practical details. A shared vision is necessary for an initiative's success ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). A shared vision can be developed at multiple levels of governance, ranging from community to municipality level. While these visions encompass different scales and sectors, positive change is most likely when they overlap and complement each other.

City-wide visions are built by integrating several small-scale interventions from different sectors. Interaction between different scales of urban planning and policy making is key. The comprehensive vision can be reflected in policy and law. Small, tangible successes in the short term can also maintain engagement and motivation for achieving long-term overarching visions ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Community-based organizations generate grassroots visions of change by collecting residents' ambitions and images of the future. This process fosters personal connections and generates momentum towards positive change.

As guides for the future of our cities, visions need to include as many voices as possible. Inclusive, safe spaces allow for different groups to collectively express their ideas and wishes

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). The arts can help create such spaces and overcome language and education barriers ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). The process of creating a shared vision can be used as a tool for tackling injustice, for example by integrating diverse voices and equity concerns in urban sustainability planning ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Although different stakeholders may have conflicting visions of an area, or initiative, it is important to avoid zero-sum game situations. Instead, work towards a solution that addresses social priorities without compromising ecological sustainability. At its core, visioning is about balancing different topics and needs of people in creating sustainable and just cities.

"We need more storytellers to inspire and gather people to build a shared vision of change."

"People in power have to be challenged in the construction of a vision of real change."

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)



WHERE HAS THIS WORKED?

Barcelona Superblocks

When creating and implementing “superblocks”, Barcelona embedded the concept in multiple city-wide policies. For example, the “Citizen Commitment for Sustainability”, signed by over 800 public, private and civil-society organisations, defines superblocks as an action, thus gaining public support. Otherwise, superblocks are connected to different policies e.g the Municipal Action Plan, the Barcelona Mobility Pact (1998), the Urban Mobility Plan of Barcelona (2013-2018), the City’s current Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Plan, and the Barcelona Commitment to Climate, which includes superblocks as one way to fulfil their vision of change.

Co-creation of a sustainable neighborhood in Freiburg

Prospective residents as well as project proponents of Freiburg’s Vauban neighbourhood developed a shared vision on how to design a more sustainable living space e.g., parking free areas, sustainable mobility, affordable and inclusive housing etc. This shared vision was possible because of shared municipal priorities and community aspirations for the new district.

Regeneration of a deprived neighborhood in Rotterdam

In workshops organized by local organizations, residents were invited to develop a shared vision of the Carnisse district redevelopment and establish an agenda for transformative and experimental actions e.g., create a community center, a shared garden etc.

Source: Erwan Hesry
on Unsplash



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 822357.



TIPS FROM THE “BERLIN” ARENA (03.2021)

- Use science-fiction in a project with young people to make them imagine a future world (300 years from now).
- Digital diaries, such as this art-based diary of imagination, capture collective visions of the future.
- Sets of principles, like the Fab City's, set out a vision of urban sustainability and livability.

RELATION TO JUSTICE

Broad yet integrated visions of change may overcome injustices caused by unfit institutional structures and uneven and exclusionary urban intensification and regeneration.

A comprehensive, inclusive vision built on integrated planning should help overcome siloed thinking and guide a city in balancing its environmental, social and economic goals. Furthermore, community organizations are particularly well-positioned to include voices of underrepresented groups in their area which are less able to express themselves in other settings.

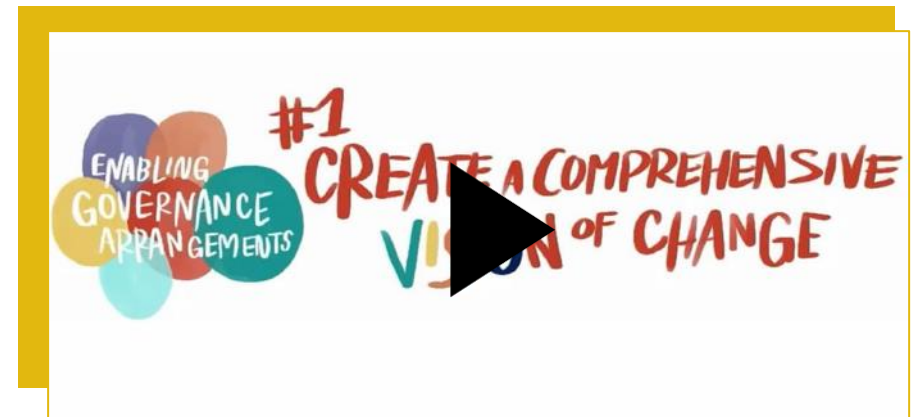


WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR?

Implementing visions is challenging. Especially with broader visions, there may be a gap between their big ambitions and what is actually being implemented on the ground. Economic considerations often dominate the design and implementation of small-scale sustainability projects, possibly leading to unfavourable justice outcomes. The task then is to not only develop a comprehensive vision of change, but to also consistently empower it to shape small-scale interventions and honour the interlinkages between sustainability and justice ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Additionally, developing a comprehensive vision of change is a significant task for community-led organizations. Since it requires investing often scarce financial and time resources, visioning processes require commitment, effort and belief in their value. Community projects that rely on voluntary work might not have the capacity to do this.

As a more fundamental concern, some people believe that current narratives and economic models limit our abilities to develop truly alternative, "out of the box" visions ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).



Click for video





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ARRANGEMENTS

#2 MAKE SPACE FOR ADAPTATION AND EXPERIMENTATION



Image description: Make space for adaptation and experimentation



WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Adaptability within initiatives for sustainable and just cities means leaving space for careful modifications and detours along their path to fulfilling overarching visions. In other words, initiatives may benefit from continuously and collectively deciding how much they are willing to adapt their plans based on new information and circumstances.

Initiatives should be responsive to both external and internal changes ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). This requires regular internal reflection amongst initiative proponents on shifting political, social, ecological and economic conditions, as well as on new developments and knowledge from within the project. Long-term goals may also need adaptation to reflect the priorities and opinions of different stakeholder groups (e.g. concerns about gentrification from urban greening processes) ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Openness to adaptation entails striking a balance between sticking rigidly to pre-set agendas and a lack of persistence with former decisions. A reflexive approach to adaptability can support initiatives' efforts to remain viable, gain influence, and stick to their transformative ideas.

In many cases, a basic level of adaptability is required to keep initiatives afloat in difficult circumstances, such as the removal of important subsidies. In others, short-term flexibility may allow initiatives to take advantage of beneficial windows of opportunity.

While this type of adaptability is reactive, many innovative experiences benefit from proactively adopting an experimental approach to project design and implementation. An experimental mindset uses a "probe and learn" approach. It allows room for mistakes and new developments, while still working towards long-term visions. Furthermore, in celebration of "mistake culture", failure can be normalized as a natural part of experimentation and innovation ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)! Such a mindset can be embodied in an organization's culture and structures. A critical mass of initiative supporters who uphold an experimental ethos will allow for more learning opportunities and creative ways to tackle seemingly unchangeable injustices and unsustainable practices.

"Failure is a natural part of experimentation and innovation!"

"Experimentation often means risk, who can afford to take a risk?"

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)





WHERE HAS THIS WORKED?

Community-led affordable housing in Brussels

The Community Land Trust in Brussels is a social real estate developer that builds affordable housing projects on collectively owned land in Brussels for people with limited means. While they try to develop standardised procedures whenever possible, the Land Trust team finds it essential to reflect and adapt to internal learning and external change. Furthermore, from the beginning, the Brussels Capital Region, a major financial supporter of the Land Trust, was responsive to the initiative's interests, allowing it space to develop its innovative ideas.

Holistic neighbourhood development Augustenborg

An experimental approach where project members were open to learning from mistakes was crucial. In the beginning, many people shared this experimental mindset. However, when certain individuals were replaced by others without this mentality, (e.g due to changes in department heads) adaptivity and experimentation started to diminish. There was no longer a critical mass of people who held a shared sense of responsibility, and there was more fear of making mistakes.



"We are constantly reflecting on things... For every part of the operation, we regularly rethink how to do it. This happens at the level of the team, and also on the level of our working groups, partner associations, experts and other stakeholders, and the level of our board."

Image and quote source:
Geert DePauw





TIPS FROM THE “BERLIN” ARENA (03.2021)

- At conferences or gatherings, discuss processes, challenges and failures instead of outcomes. This helps learn about adaptability.
- Ensure that co-creation processes have some structure and flexibility at the same time.
- Networks like ENOLL (European Network of Living Labs) connect and support 150+ Labs which experiment and innovate in real life settings.

RELATION TO JUSTICE

Adaptability in project design and implementation allows for responsiveness to changing social and economic conditions and allows initiatives to meet the shifting needs of those it serves.

Leaving space for adaptation and experimentation may be a salve for unfit institutional structures. In lieu of risk-averse and rigid project management approaches, experimental mindsets based on ideas from various actors may allow for more innovative thinking around how to tackle injustice.



WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR?

When initiatives adapt too well to an environment that is structurally unsustainable and unjust, they risk losing their transformative potential and integrity, e.g. as a 'counter model'. Calls for adaptability can also help to pursue other agendas under the disguise of vague commitments to sustainability and justice.

Furthermore, adaptations of initiative design and implementation can lead to unanticipated costs and challenges. Projects working with vulnerable groups may be more risk averse and try to minimize risk from experimentation as to avoid harming these people (i.e. low income residents developing social housing) (Interview with practitioner). Experimentation in social justice initiatives can also be a sensitive topic, since those involved already face discrimination and should not feel like they are being "experimented on". Instead, projects should create arrangements where people can adapt, learn and grow ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Additionally, projects may not allow for real experimentation and adaptation ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

"No-strings attached" funding is rare, and instead most funded projects are predefined and follow a pre-established framework, consequently limiting adaptability.

Finally, while stoically sticking to a pre-set agenda might limit creative opportunities for overcoming problems, being "too flexible" could give an impression of incompetence and disarray, therefore reducing stakeholder confidence and commitment to the project. Especially with social media, some project leaders may be afraid of innovating due to negative public feedback ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).



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#3 BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN SEPARATE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS



Image description:
Build bridges
between separate
stakeholder groups



WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Building bridges between separate groups of stakeholders requires setting up various informal or formal roles (e.g., intermediary, information broker, language translator, etc.) to enable communication, build trust, and increase mutual understanding through “on-site” engagement. At its core, building bridges is about furthering democratic participation on a decentralised, local level.

Such bridging roles can be filled by diverse actors (e.g., a project manager, a committee, a dedicated organization, esteemed community member, etc.) who are sensitive to the needs and perspectives of others, self-reflective of both their own privilege as well as their intermediary role, and generally humble ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Community members, for example, are important intermediaries because they are familiar with the local dynamics and can help to keep things going after a project is over ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Additionally, civil society groups play important roles as intermediaries and information brokers between local governments and community members by creating ways for sharing knowledge about political activities and community needs and wants ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). In some cases, local governments can serve as intermediaries between different stakeholders in a community.

Bridge-building roles, such as intermediaries, foster efficiency and help to avoid repeating the same mistakes that often come with short term,

project-by-project municipal based approaches. Intermediaries who know their city and its history and inhabitants well, for example, carry over knowledge and experience about how things work and what has and hasn't worked in the past. In this way, communication between residents and municipalities as well as different municipal departments can understand each other better, retain lessons learned when moving between projects ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021), and work together more effectively.

Conferences like UrbanA Arenas, virtual and local forums or platforms, and face-to-face community gatherings (e.g., children's and neighborhood parliaments, food and arts festivals) all provide opportunities to build bridges: freely share information, build ideas, chat and make new connections (or find comfort in old ones) and enjoy yourself in a safe space ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

“Building bridges takes a lot of time, it doesn't happen overnight. Often this time is missing.”

“To get everyone on board we need to start by understanding them.”

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)





WHERE HAS THIS WORKED?

Inner-city community energy in London

Several well-respected middle-aged women who lived in the area were important bridges between the *Repowering London* initiative and the community it was acting in. These “Estate mamas” offered their support and helped to establish trust (Interview with practitioner).

Barcelona Superblocks

While designing superblocks in several neighbourhoods, working groups were formed to facilitate decision-making processes between residents and other local actors. These working groups responded to the lack of participation processes in the Poblenou neighbourhood and the municipality retroactively realizing that individual superblocks must be adapted to local settings.

Co-creation of a sustainable neighborhood in Freiburg

During the new neighbourhood's formation, the “Working Group Vauban”, a consultative committee consisting of municipal actors, local parliamentarians and residents, provided a place for discussion and mediation between stakeholders.



Source:
Philipp Späth





TIPS FROM THE “BERLIN” ARENA (03.2021)

- Create spaces where people can informally gather and find common ground.
- An open-source platform, such as this one in Barcelona, allows communities to self-organize and facilitates dialogue between policy makers and residents.
- A political body, such as Freiburg’s Migrant_innenbeirat (Migrant Council), can help to represent the interests of immigrant residents in the city council.

RELATION TO JUSTICE

Building bridges between different stakeholder groups may address injustices associated with a Lack of effective knowledge brokerage and stewardship opportunities as well as Unfit institutional structures.

Building bridges can assure that useful knowledge and pressing concerns about urban development projects, for example, are shared in meaningful ways. Additionally, translating between municipalities, practitioners, academics, and diverse community members helps to build mutual understanding and respect that makes collective action possible. Importantly, building bridges opens a channel for disadvantaged groups to express their needs and potential fears around these projects.





WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR?

Intermediaries ideally trust that a good process will bring a good outcome when it comes to urban sustainability and justice. Without this trust, they may steer efforts in certain directions, favoring some voices over others. History has shown that certain entrenched interests easily gain priority at the cost of sustainability and/or justice, especially since it can be difficult to recognise barriers if you come from a position of power yourself. Intermediaries may also be problematic if they overlook differences in objectives between actors (e.g., achieving 'green growth' vs. 'overcoming capitalism') for the sake of harmony, a feeling of common purpose or the success of tangible projects.

Intermediaries might be biased in favor of certain approaches or networks, affiliations, or institutional logics (ways of doing things). Consequently, the intentions of an intermediary may be called into question, causing conflict and undermining the bridging efforts ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Example: Co-creation of a sustainable neighborhood in Freiburg

Collaboration between residents and the municipality was not always easy because each group had to adapt to the institutional logic of the other. For instance, when a joint working group of city administration, parliamentarians and civil society organisations invited a representative of the Vauban working group to take over a permanent seat in a consulting role, residents were expected to adapt fully to the logic of urban planning as it prevailed in the city administration.



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#4 COMMIT TO A MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION PROCESS



Image description:
Commit to a meaningful
participation process



WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Meaningful participation values inclusivity and diverse perspectives to inform urban sustainability and justice in practice, rather than merely “on paper”. In other words, participants’ inputs visibly shape initiative outcomes, and thus influence the status quo in urban sustainability and justice. Attention to inclusivity and diversity is needed throughout the process and is supported by consideration for race, gender, age, and class among others ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). It can require confronting and accepting multiple points of view and listening to people’s issues, concerns and experiences, thus avoiding feelings of tokenization ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Here, it can also be key to “do rather than say” ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Practical, ‘hands on’ participation opportunities can help make projects more inclusive as they allow for people from diverse backgrounds to contribute. Public participation in the form of volunteering can be crucial for the initiative’s operation and legitimacy. Fun and creative participatory mechanisms such as art, music or games can bring different people together and build trust in a common endeavor ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

This may be especially true for engaging children and teenagers who can make a powerful contribution ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021) and potentially ensure the sustainability of an initiative with their ongoing participation ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Meaningful participation nurtures communities in all kinds of ways but can also take a lot of time and energy. There should be a clear benefit to those taking part. To maintain enthusiasm and engagement, participation processes can arrange for sharing a meal together ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021), learning useful skills together ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021), keep a positive outlook, and produce concrete and tangible outcomes (e.g., tactical urbanism) ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).


*“Don't get *them* to come to *us*, we need to participate in the work of the people we are trying to work with.”*

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)



Municipalities require a culture of participation across municipal departments and councils ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). This type of collaborative governance entails a clear definition of roles, responsibilities and mutual respect as project partners (e.g. between municipal actors, councils and residents). Depending on the issues, participants may be empowered to shape outcomes in various ways. For technical endeavors (e.g. building a storm-water system), for example, residents can share their concerns, clarify understandings and possibly take on shared responsibility for specific aspects. An especially meaningful participation process may include giving decision-making roles to affected groups ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021), for example, as in participatory budgeting processes ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). It is important that people feel a sense of empowerment and ownership of an initiative ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Finally, trust is strengthened through meaningful participation. It can be supported through long-term, steady processes, transparency, clear responsibilities and expectations and a culture of admitting mistakes ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Time pressure, among others, is a barrier to building trust ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). A long-term commitment to community engagement (i.e., beyond a short project lifespan) builds up trust and conveys that inclusivity is essential to envisioning and making positive changes ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).



"There is lots of experience with participatory systems and processes, [in Lisbon] but they are never imported into governance. They remain in the experimental realm. We ask communities to participate, give their time, and then [there is] lack of inclusion in the actual process. There are no consequences for failing to follow through. We lose believability."

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)



[Click for video](#)



WHERE HAS THIS WORKED?

Holistic neighbourhood development Augustenborg

Plans for the neighbourhood were discussed in advance with residents, giving them the chance to comment and agree on next steps together with the municipality. Municipal authorities and 20% of all the residents collaborated on plans for developing the area. Several of residents' ideas were implemented, such as developing the open storm water system in a more natural process that enhances the area's urban biodiversity.

Key here was to strike a good balance between short-term change of the area (where residents see fast changes as a result of their own participation) and the long-term commitment of institutions (so residents gain access to the bigger vision behind the project and feel like their time and energy will contribute to something greater).

Inner-city community energy in London

From the very beginning, community members have been the drivers of the *Repowering London* energy initiative. Consultation with residents helped define its priorities (energy poverty, employment, learning opportunities). It has a cooperative-like structure that relies upon community engagement in order to function (financial investment, regular meetings, decision-making etc.). Additionally, hands-on involvement in the creation of solar panels and internships led to increased interest and participation.



Source:
Joseph Burrows ©



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 822357.

TIPS FROM THE “BERLIN” ARENA (03.2021)

- Build relationships and trust by finding an organization already working with marginalized communities. Participate in their projects before asking them to participate in yours. In doing so you can create a mutual relationship where you can learn from each other.
- Institutionalize and promote civil society participation in local government.
- Transferable structures like the Public Participation Networks in Ireland bring together different community groups in local settings.
- A low-barrier, inclusive community initiative such as the ‘Zusammen Leben’ (Living Together) garden in Freiburg engages people from 20 different countries.
- An initiative that supports engagement in sensitive areas, such as Lisbon City Council’s BipZip program, is a fantastic tool for change.

RELATION TO JUSTICE

Committing to a meaningful participation process should help overcome two drivers of injustice: Limited citizen participation in urban planning and Lack of effective knowledge brokerage and stewardship opportunities.

By increasing the serious consideration of residents’ needs and desires and the chance to take an active part in shaping initiatives, the status quo of urban sustainability and injustice can be called into question. Reducing barriers to participation for specific marginalized groups, such as single parents or low-income individuals, and providing childcare options or some form of financial compensation for their time can enhance procedural and representational justice in urban sustainability governance.



WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR?

Participation processes can be a driver of injustice if they are not planned very carefully to foster inclusivity and diversity. If participatory processes do not include marginalized voices and priorities, outcomes will not be socially just. In some cases, participation is reliant on the capacity of citizens to self-organize and advocate for their interests.

Project coordinators may need to straddle power differences as not all stakeholder groups have the same capacity, time, knowledge, or accessibility to access or fully engage in such processes ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Better accessibility through clear information and low entry barriers will help engage new people ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). However, "checking power" extends beyond the immediate participation process itself, where often neighborhood-level conversations get co-opted by bigger actors with a louder voice ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Projects are challenged to reconcile diverse perspectives and be mindful of initiatives that involve trade-offs across interest groups (for example reducing car traffic in cities could result in accessibility challenges for those who rely on it) ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021) or polarized societies where people have very different ideas ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Finally, there are several reasons why those responsible for organizing participation processes might actively avoid more inclusive and diverse participation. From a logistical perspective, meaningful participation processes can be costly and time intensive. Furthermore, some believe that politicians are not genuinely open to listening and acting based on what people or civil society has to say ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Likewise, public actors may avoid meaningful engagement in anticipation of input or feedback that is inconvenient or seemingly undesirable - for example, "if we consult people they will say no" ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

Example: Co-creation of a sustainable neighborhood in Freiburg

In the Vauban neighbourhood, housing is primarily accessible to homeowners rather than to tenants. About 76% of the district is dedicated to homeowners (including cooperatives). However, despite having a highly participatory approach, becoming an owner is not accessible to everyone because it entails very high entry costs.





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5 TAP INTO EXISTING COMMUNITY NETWORKS



Image description:
Tap into existing
community
networks

WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Both longstanding and emerging initiatives can greatly benefit from connecting to and learning from existing community networks that are working on similar or complementary issues.

Tapping into networks can involve sharing tools, resources, and knowledge about organizational structures and problem-solving amongst initiatives both within and between local communities. Emerging projects especially benefit from networks providing important financial and in-kind support ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). They can gain legitimacy and political and public visibility. Established initiatives, too, have much to gain by sharing their knowledge and resources within communities: they benefit from strengthened networks, get a reputation boost, and may receive additional financial support.

Local networks of community organizations are valuable resources for government authorities and larger-scale initiatives seeking to undertake interventions within a city. They are likely to have better knowledge of local contexts and community connections and can be good catalysts for innovation and change ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Furthermore, local networks of civil society actors can offer municipalities an "outward view" of what is happening across the city and help develop stronger relationships for future knowledge exchange and collaboration ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Building alliances and good relationships between municipalities and civil society groups will balance "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches and foster more successful and integrated projects in the future ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).



"Tapping into synergies with other groups really helped us to kick-off."

"It takes a lot of time to connect with other community initiatives. Even with volunteers we need to train them. And, we have to address wider racism as well."

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)



WHERE HAS THIS WORKED?

Citizens rescuing and sharing food in Berlin

To develop locally, Foodsharing groups tapped into the resources of the national network. They used the same online platform as well as the same principles and organizational structure. Since Foodsharing is well known in the food sector, this helped regional groups to develop partnerships with food retailers such as supermarkets and gain support from local actors, such as community centers, as hosts for public fridges.

Foodsharing was able to become successfully established in Berlin because there was already a thriving sharing economy in the city. Tapping into communities engaged in sharing economies for services, mobility, clothing and other purposes provided Foodsharing with the public engagement it needed. Finally, Foodsharing has been able to extend beyond its organizational network and support initiatives starting up elsewhere. The group YUnity originated from Foodsharing and develops online platforms and tools that enable others to start their own food sharing networks.

BürgerEnergie Berlin (BEB)

The BEB energy cooperative is supported by many alliances, including with other cooperatives, ethical banks and renewable energy companies. It expanded rapidly in both numbers and donations through synergies with networks established by other energy cooperatives and movements in the field of energy and politics. The Schönau cooperative was instrumental in the success of BEB, passing on knowledge and expertise. Furthermore, BEB worked together with the media, joined a network summit called “NetzGipfel”, and took part in demonstrations and other events to inform people about their initiative and recruit participants.



Source:
Rupert Richter



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 822357.



TIPS FROM THE “BERLIN” ARENA (03.2021)

RELATION TO JUSTICE

- Engage with actors on different governance levels, from neighbourhood groups up to the local municipality. Activate networks up, down, and laterally.
- Develop a proper vision and strategy for learning from others. Otherwise learning from other places can be more of a hindrance than a help.
- Exchange and learning programs like URBACT promote sustainable development, largely through networks.

Tapping into community networks may overcome injustices caused by Weakened civil society, and Lack of effective knowledge brokerage and stewardship opportunities.

Tapping into the resources of existing community networks can reinforce and strengthen local organizations and help broaden and diversify engagement with sustainability efforts. In addition, forming alliances with other movements can help increase legitimacy and public support, which in turn can help overcome regulatory or political barriers.

Furthermore, tapping into the resources of existing community networks allows grassroot groups to stay informed and to learn about sustainable urban interventions and increases opportunities for them to engage in and benefit from them. Creating spaces and mechanisms for learning to occur can facilitate such connections and improve attention to the variety of local needs, wishes and capacities



WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR?

While networking is essential for initiatives with limited scope, developing partnerships itself can be resource-intensive. Challenges can also arise between groups with different identities if they are not sensitive to one another. The time, skills and effort needed for meaningful collaboration and open communication can also be a constraint for organizations with limited means ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). Furthermore, connecting closely to already existing initiatives may deprive emerging initiatives of their distinctive and innovative characters or limit their appeal to particular social groups. In addition, it cannot be assumed that initiatives are willing to share their information or distinctive expertise if they perceive others as potential "competitors" (for public funding, participants, etc.). Furthermore, since many initiatives for sustainable and just cities are unique "trailblazers", the relevance and value of advice from other community groups may be limited. Much learning still must take place in the context of the initiative itself.

There is also a risk that strong community networks operating in a certain domain (food, housing, etc.) alleviate, and unwittingly enable, state deficiencies. In as far as they replace the state's responsibility to organize provision, such initiatives may be instrumentalized in line with neoliberal logic by compensating for or even fostering roll-back of the state.

Example: Inner-city community energy in London

As a forerunner in its field, *Repowering London* had limited access to external expertise and therefore had to learn through its own process of innovation: **"It wasn't like we got an answer from other people and they helped us out. It was the other way around. We trail-blazed the whole sector"** (Interview with practitioner).

Furthermore, *Repowering London* offers professional services such as legal, structural, financial, and marketing aid to other upcoming community energy projects. However, there is an ongoing internal debate regarding what information Repowering is willing to share freely and what it retains as exclusive expertise.



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ENABLING
GOVERNANCE
ARRANGEMENTS

#6 DEVELOP RESILIENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENT FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

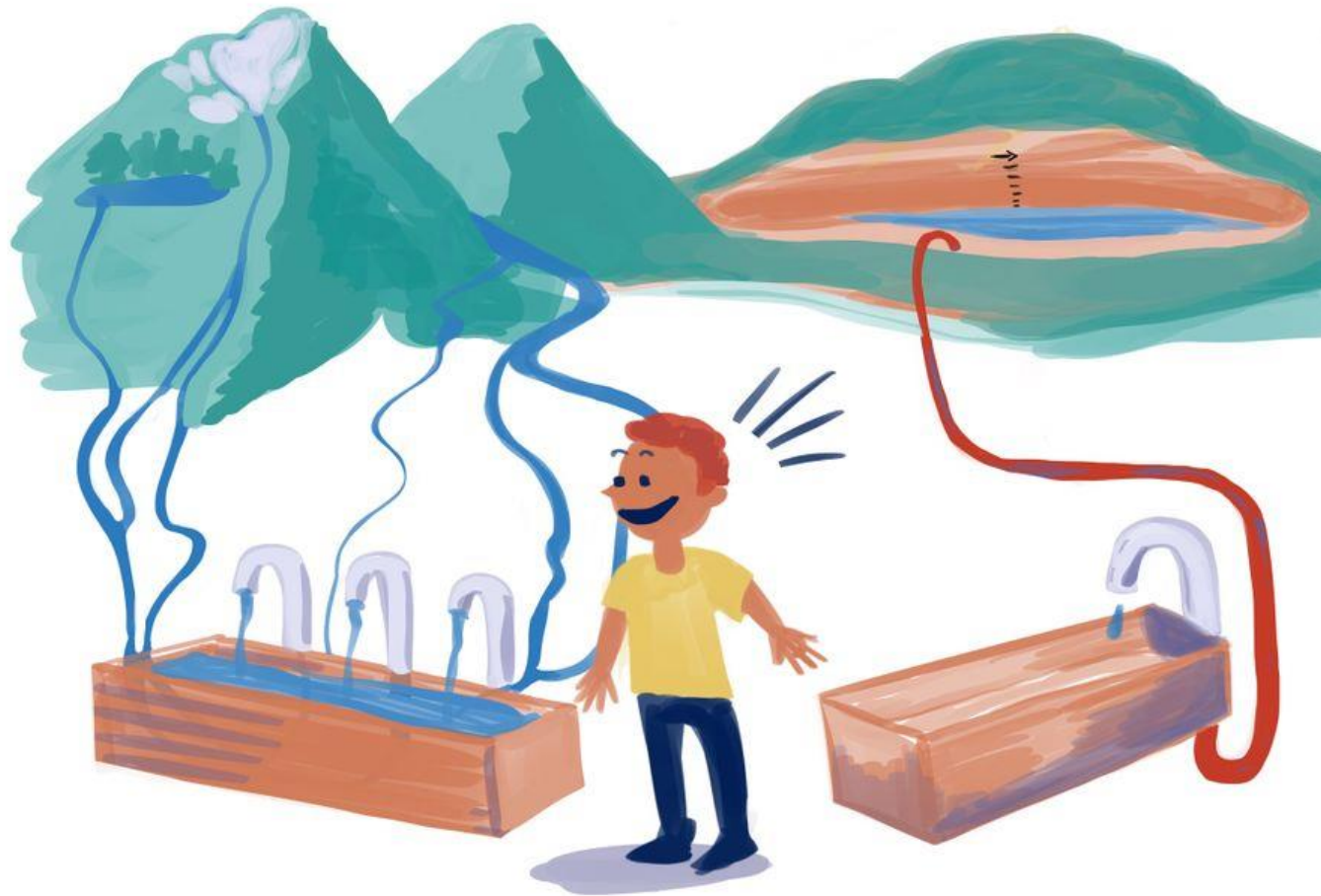


Image description:
Develop resilient
and self-sufficient
financing
arrangements





WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Many community-led initiatives for sustainable and just cities rely on public funding (subsidies, grants, etc.) to carry out their activities. However, changing political priorities and economic crises can restrict this funding. Such intermittent and unreliable funding poses existential challenges to organizations ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

A financing arrangement that contains a well-thought-out value proposition, and viable mechanisms for delivery and capture, as well as assessment of risks (such as over-reliance on specific sources of funding), will make an organization more financially resilient in the face of austerity. However, this is no easy task, since many community-led projects serve low-income residents and therefore cannot rely on beneficiaries as a source of revenue. Additionally, since funding sources and business models (often) also reflect the values of the organization using them, community-led organizations and projects may have to think carefully about accepting funding from larger institutions or private sector investors, which might conflict with their own political views and environmental and social goals ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021).

"We need to consider the intention behind private investment in just sustainable initiatives."

"Greenwashing, green gentrification, etc. can be a trap."

"Proof that alternative economic models can work is important."

("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021)



Short-term, conditional funding from governments or larger institutions can also threaten to “projectify” an organization’s work or mission (“Berlin” Arena, 03.2021). However, high quality interventions can also be relatively low-cost (or even free!), in both start-up and maintenance, which reduces investment risks and administrative burdens without undermining potential positive impacts (“Berlin” Arena, 03.2021).

Income diversification (through events, membership fees, etc.) and co-financing are important ways in which organizations can diversify their revenue streams. Some community initiatives are also experimenting with and adopting alternative economic strategies aimed at increasing organisational resilience. These include a variety of legal forms with different social impact models, from cooperatives to community benefit societies, and in some cases demonetization: for example, through resource sharing (“Berlin” Arena, 03.2021) or adopting “sweat equity” and time banking schemes (“Berlin” Arena, 03.2021). There are also expanded definitions of “value” that can validate projects’ social impact: for example, value definitions that take into account externalities (e.g., reduced burden on social safety nets) or economic assessments of non-monetary community resources can help to justify funding (“Berlin” Arena, 03.2021).

Governments also have the responsibility to support opportunities for more stable, long-term financing. Through procurement and partnership, governments can provide structures for alternative financial models to thrive and sustain projects over longer periods of time (“Berlin” Arena, 03.2021).

“[There is a] need to change the funding mechanisms: now we are focusing on innovation and starting something new. Need to be more focused on sustaining and maintaining initiatives.”

(“Berlin” Arena, 03.2021)



WHERE HAS THIS WORKED?



Citizens rescuing and sharing food in Berlin

Foodsharing is run by unpaid volunteers, including developers, food sharers and food savers, and refuses any public funding or subsidies. Relying on internal resources is part of the political identity of the organization as it tries to operate without financial transactions. Foodsharing members promote the “free”.



Source:
Philipp Späth

Community-led affordable housing in Brussels

Although the Brussels Community Land Trust (CLTB) faces obstacles in growing their budget in tandem with their organization, their revenue streams are highly diverse and thus could be resilient enough to maintain stability if one funding source dries up. While 40% of the budget comes from government subsidies, the other 60% comes from a variety of sources: grants, household mortgages, membership fees, ground leases, crowdfunding and donations.

Importantly, in January 2021 CLTB launched the cooperative “Common Ground”, which partners with the social economy sector to attract private and citizen finance for land purchases and management under the Community Land Trust model. Finally, the CLTB’s first project was their pilot, but with a proven business model they are now eligible for additional, long-term support.



TIPS FROM THE “BERLIN” ARENA (03.2021)

- Develop guidelines for ethical public procurement supporting sustainable and local circuits of value.
- Use and/or acknowledge beyond-financial assessments of value, like Social Return on Investment.
- Set up time-banking or similar schemes to reward volunteering and/or enable sharing of resources.
- Local coins, such as the ‘makkie’ in Amsterdam, can be issued in exchange for voluntary work.
- Low-cost models to address urban hunger, like that of Food Not Bombs, are based on collecting leftover food from markets, cooking it, and sharing with those in need.

RELATION TO JUSTICE

Developing resilient and self-sufficient financial arrangements for urban sustainability and justice initiatives may address the consequences of Unquestioned neoliberal growth and austerity urbanism. While resilient financial arrangements do not address the root causes of neoliberal austerity urbanism, they may lessen its impact on urban sustainability and justice by enabling initiatives to remain financially viable and therefore able to continue their operations. However, special care will need to be taken to ensure that these financial schemes do not exclude low-income groups who cannot afford to pay for the benefits of the initiative themselves and are of little interest to potential sponsors.





WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR?

While developing a financial arrangement that can remain viable in the face of public funding cuts and other effects of economic crises may make an initiative more resilient and therefore able to continue delivering benefits to communities, it may set a precedent for underfunding similar initiatives, thus downplaying state responsibility for collective welfare. In other words, public authorities may be tempted to limit public funding and support in the future if they see that organizations can “make it on their own”. This could in turn reinforce injustices associated with neoliberal practices.

Some community organizations may also not have the capacity or flexibility to develop alternative financial arrangements, as they may be restricted to certain operating methodologies ("Berlin" Arena, 03.2021). There is also a risk that projects in low-income communities cannot afford to support initiatives financially nor gain the necessary start-up investment if the project is unproven. Community members may be hesitant to invest in a project without a sense of trust that they will receive a return on their investment.

Example: *Inner-city community energy in London*

One notable obstacle for the *Repowering London* initiative was the difficulty raising funds (£58,000) from community members for the first solar project. Since it was a new initiative with no track record, individuals were hesitant to invest.

Additionally, while many residents made pledges, this proved not to be a reliable indicator of actual financial support. Once the project was established, it was easier to find investors for other projects because the community had more trust in the organization and had seen an example of its success.



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FINAL WORD

Thank you to all who made this interesting work possible. This includes members of local initiatives who provided us with their insights, the “Berlin” Arena participants who energized the Enabling Governance Arrangements with their ideas and experiences and the UrbanA consortium for their collaboration.

If you have any other comments, you are more than welcome to send them to Philipp Späth: spaeth@envgov.uni-freiburg.de

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