



POLICY BRIEF

What governance aspects help integrate justice into urban sustainability projects?

Six principles for sustainable and just cities

Summary

Rapid transitions towards sustainable and just cities are needed to fulfil EU-wide ambitions like the European Green Deal. Urban governance, therefore, must seek to integrate environmental sustainability and justice together. Much needed fundamental change will come, in part, from the shared experiences of local initiatives for just and sustainable cities that have already effectively integrated these concepts together in their activities. Based on the analysis of such positive experiences for urban sustainability and justice, the University of Freiburg has developed **six Enabling Governance Arrangements** to act as **inspiration and guiding principles for the design and implementation of new local initiatives**.

Policy Recommendations

*For **everyone** implementing local sustainability initiatives:*

- Create a comprehensive vision of change linking scales and sectors for a wider perspective
- Make space for adaptation and experimentation
- Build bridges between separate stakeholder groups
- Commit to a meaningful participation process
- Tap into existing community networks
- Develop resilient and self-sufficient financing arrangements

*For **municipal administrations** specifically:*

- Provide long-term, structural support for the governance of sustainable and just cities.

For example:

- Connect with and support smaller scale initiatives which contribute to a wider culture of public engagement and your city's wider vision of sustainability and justice
- Provide fewer-strings-attached funding opportunities for local initiatives so that they have some flexibility to experiment and adapt.
- Create 'bridging' platforms for local initiatives to use (e.g., open community spaces, interactive web forums).
- Set up and continuously support a network of community initiatives who are working on sustainability and justice issues.





Background

Municipal decision-makers across the continent are preparing to implement the European Green Deal in their cities as a part of their transition to more sustainable and just societies¹. There is thus a demand for knowledge by city-makers (municipal administrations, civil society, private sector etc.) on local-level actionable approaches.

This knowledge is already being generated and tested in countless local initiatives such as community energy projects or municipality-led neighbourhood regeneration programs - of which many are funded by the European Union. However, each city has its own special context and thus there is no copy-paste approach to transferring initiatives between places². It is, however, possible to identify generalizable knowledge from patterns that have supported initiatives for just sustainability in many cities and use these to design governance processes in tailored local initiatives.

This brief summarises work done in the UrbanA project by the University of Freiburg, Germany to identify governance arrangements which have successfully enabled many local European initiatives for sustainable and just cities to come to fruition.

Results

Six empirically-grounded and co-created Enabling Governance Arrangements have been identified (Click on a name for details and a two-minute video):

<p>Create a comprehensive vision of change</p> <p><i>Linking scales and sectors for a wider perspective</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Regeneration of a deprived neighborhood in Rotterdam</i></p>	<p>Commit to a meaningful participation process</p> <p><i>Empowering all people to visibly shape the status-quo</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Citizens share in Berlin Energy Grid for sustainable energy</i></p>
<p>Make space for adaptation and experimentation</p> <p><i>Leaving room for modifications and detours along paths to long-term goals</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Community led affordable housing in Brussels</i></p>	<p>Tap into existing community networks</p> <p><i>Enabling learning and support within and between communities</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Citizens rescuing and sharing food in Berlin</i></p>
<p>Build bridges between separate stakeholder groups</p> <p><i>Connecting to build communication, trust and mutual understanding</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Co-creation of a sustainable neighborhood in Freiburg</i></p>	<p>Develop resilient and self-sufficient financing arrangements</p> <p><i>Cultivating long-term, reliable finances for initiatives</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Inner-city community energy in London</i></p>





Methods

April 2019



April 2021

Out of a systematically-created list of **125 projects**, 10 EU-funded initiatives which focused on urban sustainability and justice were selected for an in-depth analysis of respective Governance Interventions.

After desk-research and interviews, patterns of positive governance processes and settings that were shared by several initiatives were synthesized into six **Enabling Governance Arrangements**.

60 participants and UrbanA consortium members reviewed and contributed to these Enabling Governance Arrangements at the online "Berlin" Arena for sustainable and just cities (March 2021).

A more detailed description of methods can be found in the [full report to the European Commission](#).

All of these Enabling Governance Arrangements were observed at play in several community as well as municipality-led initiatives that aimed at sustainable and just outcomes, which makes it likely that they can be useful for initiatives with similar goals in other instances as well. This potential was reconfirmed in different ways by the participants of the online "Berlin" Urban Arena in March 2021.

Conclusions

There is much to learn from experiences that successfully combine sustainability and justice across Europe. However, any lessons-learned must be taken in a carefully generalised way. For more information on (un)helpful translocal learning practices click here.

The six **Enabling Governance Arrangements** produced in UrbanA have been confirmed to be useful by participants of diverse disciplines and backgrounds. They therefore can help guide other city-makers (municipal administrations, civil society, private sector etc.) who are implementing or supporting initiatives for sustainable and just cities.





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Published in October 2021

Please cite as: Silverton, Kramer and Späth (2021) *Principles for the governance of sustainable and just cities*. UrbanA policy brief.

About the UrbanA project

Website: <https://urban-arena.eu/>

Duration: January 2019 — March 2022

Coordinator: ICLEI Europe - Local Governments for Sustainability. (<https://iclei-europe.org/>)

Consortium (Click logo for website links):



References

¹ Mannheim Message 2020 (n.d.) The Mannheim Message: Local Green Deals for a carbon neutral, sustainable and inclusive Europe. ICLEI Europe and Stadt Mannheim.
https://conferences.sustainablecities.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/_temp_/Mannheim2020/Message/Mannheim-Message.pdf

² Ansell, C. K., & Bartenberger, M. (2016). *Varieties of experimentalism*. *Ecological Economics*, 130, 64–73.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2016.05.016>

