# Is your urban sustainability approach socially just?

A question-based tool to integrate social justice into urban sustainability approaches

## Introduction

An urban sustainability approach that does not actively integrate social justice runs the risk of deepening existing inequalities, leading to the burdens and benefits of sustainability being unfairly shared amongst the urban population[1].

This tool offers an actionable method to integrate social justice into urban sustainability approaches. It builds on UrbanA's keys for sustainable and just cities. These are 17 cross-thematic and interdependent elements to support the integration of social justice in urban environmental sustainability.

### Who is this tool for?

This tool is designed for local policy-makers, local government administrators, public servants, practitioners, project managers, researchers, urban planners, civil society representatives, and anyone else who is engaging in urban sustainability.

### How to use this tool?

This tool allows you to brainstorm a wide spectrum of perspectives, while using your context related knowledge.

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[1] You can read more here about the 10 drivers of injustice that manifest in the context of sustainability specifically

*A question-based tool to create sustainable just cities*

> *"Neuroscience has shown us that the brain is capable of making complex connections which result in powerful ah-ha's that lead to action. These ah-ha's are triggered through questions."*
>
> Donna Birghton

You can use this tool, alone, or in group, to:
- Evaluate an ongoing or past project, policy, plan, or process.
- Create or co-create a future urban sustainability project, policy, plan, or process. In this case, you will find a lot of inspiration from the knowledge harnessed by each key profile.
- Integrate justice and sustainability in your on-going processes, e.g. services, events.
- Have a discussion within your communities (from work to family) on how social justice can be mainstreamed in urban sustainability in different settings.

Keep in mind:
- **Not all questions may be relevant for your context.** After reflecting on some questions, you might come to the conclusion that some are not relevant in your city and community context.
- As you answer the questions, you can identify some of the social justice gaps in your urban sustainability approach. To find inspirational examples, existing approaches, and concrete actions to reduce these gaps, we suggest to consult this list of 17 keys for sustainable and just cities https://sustainablejustcities.eu/keys
- Answering these questions requires you to have honest and, at times, uncomfortable conversations: Keep an open mind and stay critical and reflective, while also being kind to yourself and others! To navigate difficult conversations, stay open to the possibility of working with an expert facilitator.
- To honestly answer these questions make sure, as far as possible, to involve people who can represent their own lived experience in order to avoid assuming on behalf of other

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**Example: Who can use this tool and how?**

Sally is a local civil servant working on mobility projects in a medium-sized Northern European city. She recognises that her local government has put much effort and money into supporting transition towards sustainable mobility, mainly in response to the threat of climate change and to support decarbonization efforts. Yet she observes that while the efforts attend well to the more technological, infrastructural and efficiency issues, there is a need to engage more diverse city-makers and dwellers to improve mobility at a human scale, for example, through accessibility.

For example, she notes that the new green corridor and its cycling infrastructure in the central district of town is hardly ever visited, or used, by migrants, or people of color. The prices of the nearby housing estates also seem to be climbing up, which has made the lives of the elderly long-term residents there increasingly difficult. The voices and needs of historically marginalized communities are often ignored.

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Sally shares the question based tool with her team and they convene on several occasions to identify gaps and assert priorities for strengthening the city's mobility plan from a social justice perspective . Each team member works carefully with one or more of the 17 keys for sustainable and just cities (https://sustainablejustcities.eu/key) to share action strategies as the team collaborates to generate next steps.

Get Inspired!

Based on this document, we created an **inspirational poster** to guide you through the main questions that you find here. The poster makes use of arts and visuals to help you have the important conversations around justice and sustainability. You can **download it for free** here.

Have fun!



# Glossary

**Sustainability Approach**: We use this term to generally indicate the subject of scrutiny. This cross-cuts all kinds of thematic fields under urban sustainability: energy, mobility, buildings, infrastructures, climate, biodiversity, etc. The approach could be anything: A project, a tool, a planning process, a vision, a mission, a policy; by "approach" we generally mean the way you deal with something.

**Justice**: The definition of justice we use mainly builds on three dimensions of justice:
- Distributive justice (Concerned with inequities in the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits. It asks: *Who gets what?*)
- Procedural justice (Concerned with the way decisions are being made. It asks: *Who is involved in decisions and how? Who gets excluded and why?*)
- Recognition justice (Concerned with the marginalization of communities / people based on their identities (e.g. ethnicity, race, gender...). It asks: *Whose needs are recognised and represented?*)

However, we invite you to also be flexible with these terms and adapt them to your context.

# Key questions

**Below you will find 17 sets of questions. To ensure that we cover the most extensive sustainability and justice spectrum, we used the framework of the "17 keys for sustainable and just cities" (see here: https://sustainablejustcities.eu/key). For each key, we ask a set of questions. You don't need to read the "17 keys for sustainable and just cities" to answer these questions. However, if you need inspiration to answer, then we suggest you consult them.**

## 1. Research & Innovation

- Which social groups are relevant to and (might be) impacted by your research & innovation project (especially marginalised and vulnerable ones, e.g. lower income groups, people of colour, women)?
- How will you make sure that these groups have a voice in the process and/or access and engage with the project and its results? What safeguarding policies/procedures are in place to avoid negatively affecting marginalised/vulnerable groups? (e.g. policies to protect children, people with disabilities)

## 2. Economy

- How would you describe the central economic logic behind your sustainability approach (e.g. profit-driven, socially-driven, how profits are shared)?
- Who economically profits from your sustainability approach? Who takes the loss?

## 3. Power

- How is power distributed in your sustainability approach? Who has the power to shape it (e.g. who makes the decision, who takes action, who is involved)?
- What steps can be taken to enable those lacking power?

## 4. Responsibility

- How do you ensure the transparency of your sustainability approach (as per how decisions are being prepared, taken, executed, and evaluated)?
- What procedures do you have in place to ensure that individuals (and, in particular, decision-makers) will be held accountable for the results of your sustainability approach?

## 5. Technology

- Are digital tools in your approach needed and, if so, are they user-friendly? Consider both the development of the digital tools (e.g. understanding the needs) and the use of the tool (e.g. feedback process, alternative technologies, training, and support).
- What drives the use of your digital tools? Does the use of your digital tools make an explicit effort to foster open, transparent, and ethical forms of technology?

## 6. Accessibility

- Who can access, and benefit from your sustainability approach and its end product(s), and who does it not reach?
- How are you ensuring the financial, cultural, and physical accessibility of your sustainability approach? (e.g. safety for minorities to access green spaces)

## 7. Nature

- How is your sustainability approach integrating nature-based solutions (such as green roofs, urban forestry and gardens, pocket parks, sustainable drainage, permeable surfaces) that are accessible to diverse audiences?
- How do you integrate ecological, nature-based, low-tech, low-energy, and overall low-carbon elements in your plan, project, or policy?

## 8. Diversity

- Which groups of people are typically underrepresented in your society? To what extent are these voices included in the development of your sustainability approach? How can you ensure they are more present in the long run?
- In what ways does your sustainability approach attempt to uncover, reflect, and recognise the needs of diverse groups?

## 9. Solidarity

- In what ways does your sustainability approach relate to, and help implement, a culture of care and solidarity (e.g. supporting underrepresented and marginalised groups financially and emotionally)?

## 10. Adaptation

- How do you make sure that your sustainability approach can adapt to changing circumstances?
- How does your sustainability approach monitor the challenges and opportunities that could either hamper or strengthen it over time?

## 11. Regional
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- To what extent does your approach take a regional perspective, considering linkages to the wider urban, peri-urban, rural context to maximise effectiveness and extend its reach?

## 12. Participation

- How much of your sustainability approach is already decided on before the start of the participatory processes, and how much of it is up for discussion? How much are you willing to change in your plan as a result of the participatory processes?
- What are the motivations for people to participate? What kind of incentives could you provide to facilitate deep engagement from a diverse range of stakeholders?

## 13. Art

- Does your sustainability approach make use of the arts to deliver a message and raise awareness? If so, how do you make it inclusive?

## 14. Civil Society

- How is your sustainability approach including and enabling civil society?
- What are the implications of your actions for existing civil society groups (e.g. they are heard, excluded, recognized etc)?

## 15. Knowledge

- How is your sustainability approach building on local and context-dependent knowledge from a diversity of actors?
- How is the knowledge around your sustainability approach produced, distributed, and updated?

## 16. Translocal[2]

- How are you ensuring that your sustainability approach builds into existing learnings (e.g. nature-based solutions, social inclusion, cycling corridors, food-sharing, etc.) instead of spending time on something that already exist?
- How are you sharing your own knowledge and learning with other (governance) actors translocally (e.g. from other cities, from the nearby rural areas etc)?

## 17. Finance

- How is your initiative financed? Does it create decent jobs (e.g. contribute to social and economic stability of workers)?
- What institutions is your sustainability approach (directly/indirectly) financing and from which ones is it divesting from?
- How is your sustainability approach making use of certification (e.g. ethical procurement) to look deeper into financing? Which other justice and sustainability related criteria for funding do you have?

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[2] Translocality is the connecting of people between different localities and places: Connection between local, regional, national and sovran national levels; Connections between rural and urban; Connection between different people, e.g. policy-makers and activists.

## Did you go through all the questions? Now what?

Well done!

Now you have an overview of how your sustainability approach includes social justice.

However, you might have more questions on how to address the gaps and blind spots you have identified...

...We are happy to support you with our resources. Browse the 17 keys and find examples, podcasts, videos, articles and more to inspire you in taking actionable steps to include a strong social justice agenda in your work. All our material is freely accessible.