



URBAN ARENAS
FOR SUSTAINABLE
AND JUST CITIES

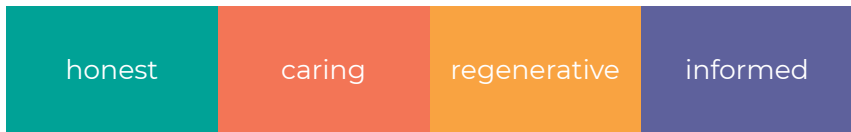
Keys to unlock
sustainable and just cities

www.sustainablejustcities.eu



In a sustainable and just city, the economic, political and social choices which created unsustainable and unjust structures are put under the microscope. Sustainable and just city-makers examine the roots of injustice and ecological unsustainability. They actively and openly address the tensions between justice and sustainability. They don't focus on fixing symptoms. They look at marginalisation and inequality, overconsumption and pollution. They address these challenges through honest and, at times, uncomfortable conversations. They shape their behaviours through the lens of justice and take concrete action, for example on climate adaptation and mitigation.

A sustainable just city is



Here are some of the keys needed to unlock a world which supports such cities.



Justice is hardwired into research & innovation projects on urban sustainability

EU research agendas are steered to investigate how cities can achieve social and environmental sustainability in a just, inclusive and equitable way. Research stems from the concerns and needs of inhabitants in urban contexts and does not impose concepts, practices or blueprints.

Research
and
Innovation

EU-funded projects aimed at improving urban planning in the field of sustainability have clear justice incentives, address the needs of vulnerable groups and include their voices in the research process, as well as its outcomes and impacts.



The economy benefits people and the environment

The economy of a sustainable and just city focuses on the creation of social, cultural, ecological and other forms of value that benefit people from all walks of life. The inclusive and fair allocation of resources ensures an economy that works for the common good. Production and consumption are organised so as to minimise negative externalities, cultivate non-consumerist values and reduce unnecessary demand.

Economy

City-makers challenge inherited neoliberal narratives that overemphasize GDP growth, and are open to post-growth and post-capitalist approaches. This openness facilitates experimentation with socially and environmentally innovative concepts such as regeneration, care, sharing and solidarity.



City-makers take responsibility and are held accountable

In creating sustainable and just cities, everyone has a role to play, as well as the responsibility to speak out and act upon current injustices and unsustainable practices, even if individual actions must ultimately be connected to systemic efforts. As such, responsibility is shared by all actors – to the best of their varying capabilities – in a city and beyond its boundaries.

Local authorities recognise the significant contribution that community-led initiatives make to achieving the city's sustainability and justice goals, without co-opting them. Local authorities also protect all citizens from exposure to pollution and climate risks. They recognize citizens' claims of harm and assist victims of pollution. In short, in the quest for a sustainable and just city, city-makers are aware of and are committed to their responsibilities, while keeping an eye to broader systems change.

Responsibility



Power dynamics are identified and dismantled for more equitable structures

In a sustainable and just city, harmful power relations are addressed for systematic and transformative change to take place. Power relations characterized by inequality, exclusion, exploitation and extractivism are acknowledged and questioned. People have the transformative capacity to challenge, alter and replace existing power relations.

Power

Transforming power is about dismantling existing structures and creating alternative practices while also being critical and transparent about new power dynamics that emerge.



Digital tools can serve everyone

In sustainable and just cities, digital technologies contribute first and foremost to environmental sustainability and human wellbeing. They provide the means of including people in deliberative and participatory decision-making processes, and support the adoption of sustainable consumption and production practices.

Ethical artificial intelligence, open data and open source tools and standards can all support digitalization for sustainable and just cities.

Technology



Solidarity is fairness in action

A sustainable and just city is built on solidarity. It fosters the sharing of abundance in time and resources through equitable redistributive mechanisms and sharing programs.

Bottom-up social and affordable housing programs are supported and strengthened through robust regulation. Shared forms of housing and care-oriented ways of living and working are encouraged and supported. Sustainable and affordable food networks are woven together to support local farmers and offer high-quality sustenance for residents.

Solidarity



Green is for everyone

Sustainable and just cities respond to the ecological crisis by developing greener infrastructure and services that are accessible to all urban dwellers. In these cities, a person's disability, gender, class, race, age, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, to name just a few, are not barriers. Everyone has equal access to urban amenities, green infrastructure, mobility, job opportunities, housing, food and energy.

Accessibility is not only a physical issue, such as access to public space, it is also an economic issue (e.g. affordability), a knowledge one (e.g. language used), a social one (e.g. homelessness) and a political one (e.g. transparency in decision-making).

Accessibility

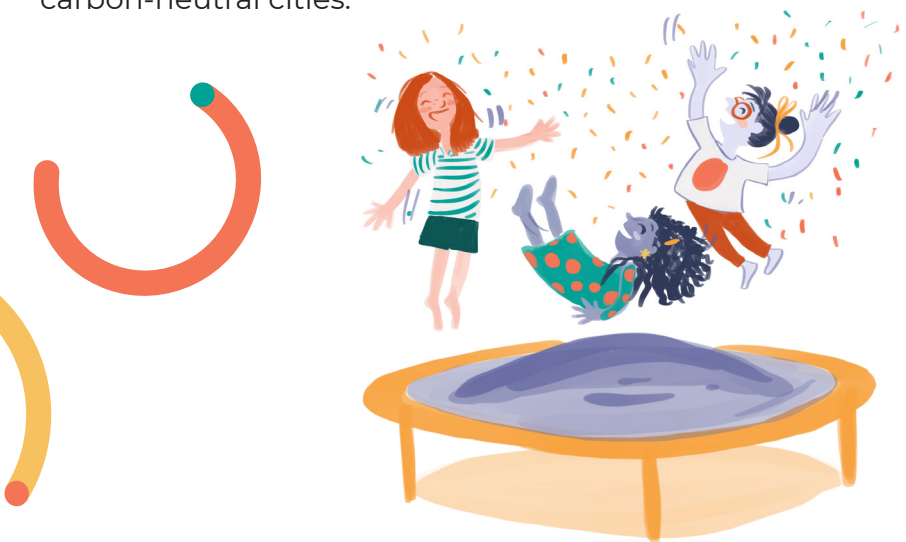


Inclusion starts by embracing diversity

Sustainable and just cities recognize and acknowledge diversity, analysing the real and diverse needs of all residents through an intersectional approach. Intersectionality helps city-makers understand combined inequalities based on the different identities and characteristics of a person or group. In a sustainable and just city, for example, a policy working to make greener areas safer for women examines not only gender-based inequalities, but also the influences of race and class.

Diversity

Such analysis is the basis for local policy solutions that lead to inclusive, people-centred and carbon-neutral cities.



Nature creates living and breathing cities

In sustainable and just cities, nature-based planning is central. Rewilding initiatives, permaculture, biodiversity and continuously productive urban landscapes intersect with social and economic initiatives. They are designed with and around blue and green infrastructure, and aim for enhanced resilience. Urban nature provides shelter to flora and fauna, which, in turn, people use and enjoy.

Natural infrastructure helps reduce hazards like urban heat islands, and this infrastructure is implemented and maintained in a way that supports the most vulnerable neighbourhoods. Harmful and polluting industries are scaled down and the use of cars is significantly reduced in order to allow human and non-human life to thrive.

Nature



Regional integration makes cities stronger

Sustainable and just cities have strong, circular and equitable links with one another in the context of a wider region, supporting both urban and rural areas. They support decentralized and collaborative economic and planning approaches, in which individual responsibility is balanced with the well-being of the region as a whole. These cities are attuned to the interconnected natural and human systems in their region: infrastructure, resource and waste flows, as well as cultural and social behaviours.

With growing translocal challenges, cities can reorient goods and services to their nearby surroundings, decreasing environmental impacts and increasing resilience to crises.

Regional



Art creates a sense of belonging, and has the power to transform places

Sustainable and just cities promote cultural, artistic and creative activities. Artistic practices help overcome verbal and emotional barriers, and can build shared values such as justice and belonging. The arts play a crucial role in political expression and education, in that they enable much needed social dialogue within and between communities. From there, people can make use of this exchange of local knowledge to promote visions for sustainable and just cities.

Moreover, a sense of belonging and togetherness created in urban cultural and historic areas helps empower communities for a just transition.

Art



Meaningful participation is empowering

Sustainable and just cities offer all people the opportunity to deliberate on and co-create plans and policies. The historic lack of platform and unequal power given to some groups in decision making are actively addressed. Participation is not just a buzzword with a standard set of expected steps or outcomes. Rather, it is an evolving process that empowers people to shape their cities in ways that respond to their needs and aspirations.

By governing through meaningful participation, outcomes are more inclusive and effective, and are genuinely supported by the public.

Participation



Change is inevitable, and adaptation essential

Sustainable and just cities go beyond being open to change, they have a spirit of continuous adaptation. Disruptive changes, such as climate change and global pandemics, aggravate systemic inequalities.

City-makers stay alert to these, as well as unintended consequences from their actions and are prepared to learn from potential failures. They embrace just transformation through a flexible and reflexive approach. They adapt along the way, based on emerging opportunities, needs and ongoing experience.

Adaptation



We need new ways of funding

Sustainable and just cities take a critical and values-led approach to the accumulation, use and distribution of capital. Individuals and local governments reorient their consumption to value positive social and environmental outcomes.

Governments at all levels play a significant role in funding sustainable and just institutions, while divesting from the ones that do not match their values. Ethical procurement and accurate certification (e.g. fair trade, organic) is promoted.

Finance



Knowledge is owned and managed by the community

Creating sustainable and just cities is a learning process. Knowledge is created through collaboration at the community level between policy-makers, planners, residents and others. All benefit from this knowledge.

Policymakers and political actors, including those from higher levels of governance such as the EU and the UN, advocate for tailored approaches and policies based on knowledge commons (collectively created information) and other forms of citizen science.

Knowledge



Sharing local learning brings transformative change

The inhabitants of sustainable and just cities learn from and with each other as they experiment with social innovation and path-breaking solutions. Though locally-rooted knowledge is vital, its translation to other locations, contexts (e.g. rural areas) and spatial scales (e.g. national, regional, global) inspires transformative change. This is also referred to as “translocal learning.”

Translocal

Cities are connected through networks, but translocally inspired solutions are neither copy-pasted nor imposed top-down; they are shared and then adapted to specific contexts. City-makers are unafraid to share their mistakes, so that all can learn from them.



Anybody can be a change-maker in their community

Sustainable and just cities support spaces and processes that empower civil society.

Grassroots initiatives and other civil society groups and individuals are at the forefront of demands for sustainability and justice. Using their grounded and place-specific experiences, they address issues relating to social inequality, exclusion and injustice alongside ecological unsustainability, often highlighting health, security, livelihoods and other at-risk considerations for the well-being of vulnerable populations.

Civil Society



Illustrations:
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