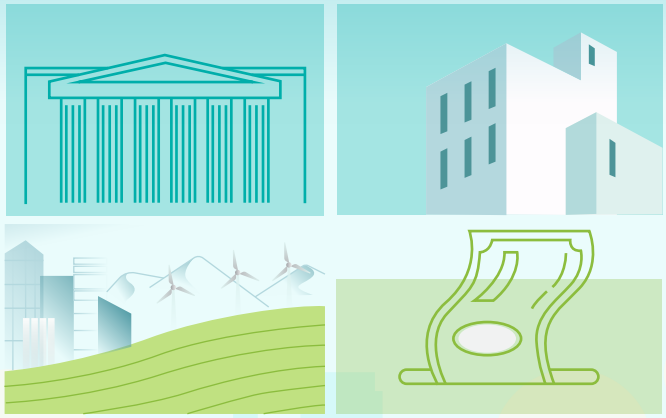
Legislation, Governance and Finance of Public Spaces



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Public space for children inaugurated in Mozambique © UN-Habitat

Executive summary

This publication examines the role of legislation, governance, and financial frameworks as critical aspects of public space management and development. It provides a detailed analysis of how the above frameworks influence the creation, management and sustainability of public spaces.

Public spaces are vital for the dynamic social, environmental and health need functions as part of public life of diverse user groups, as they provide areas for social encounter, civic and political engagement, recreation (including work, play and study), shelter needs and other forms of community engagement.

However, in many countries globally, current legislative, governance and financial approaches often fall short of effectively managing these spaces, leading to neglect, deterioration, and ultimately privatization of public space.

In essence, legislation provides the overarching framework, while governance determines the specific mechanisms and actors involved.

Financial frameworks, in turn, allocate the necessary resources, thereby facilitating effective public space management and development.

Problem statement

Current public spaces face significant and complex challenges that must be comprehensively addressed:

Insufficient allocation and inequitable distribution: Many cities fail to allocate enough public spaces, prioritizing other urban development needs or commercial interests over green spaces and open areas. Additionally, there is inequitable spatial distribution of public spaces which means that even where public spaces exist, they are often located in wealthier communities or in city centres away from lower income neighbourhoods.

Limited sense of belonging: The use of public spaces needs to be equitable. Legal or administrative restrictions on activities, which are often vague and subjective, disproportionately affects underprivileged population groups and disproportionately amplifies marginalization.

Inadequate management and coordinated governance: Existing public spaces are frequently mismanaged, leading to neglect, deterioration, and eventual decline. Also, many public spaces are managed through multiple complex arrangements, many of which are rarely purely public or private. This not only reduces public access but also undermines the original purpose of these spaces as communal areas for all.

Financial constraints: Insufficient and unstable funding results in inadequate maintenance, reducing the functionality and aesthetic value of public spaces.

These challenges are exacerbated by **outdated legal frameworks, fragmented governance structures, and inadequate financial models,** all of which hinder effective development, management, and use of public spaces.

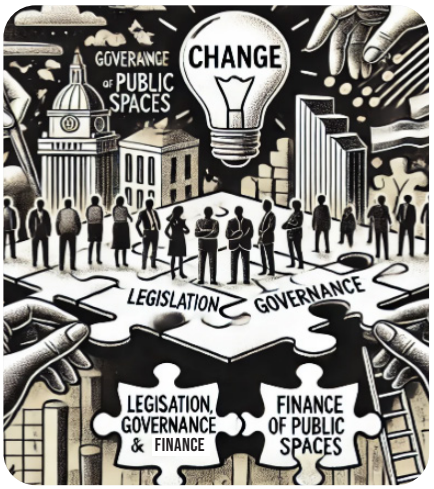


Figure 1. Need for a public space policy change. Source: Authors, 2024

Need For a Policy Change: Public Spaces

Reforming the current policy approaches to public spaces is crucial to both comprehensively address the challenges set out above and to promote effective management and development. Legislative frameworks must be effective and up to date. Governance models need meaningful community input and the incorporation of multilevel governance approaches to foster collaboration across government levels for policy coherence. Finally, there is a need to establish more sustainable and robust funding mechanisms for the proper maintenance of public spaces.

Purpose and alignment with SDGs and the New Urban Agenda

This publication aims to address the critical issues surrounding the legislation, governance, and financing of public spaces, with the overarching goal of enhancing their contribution to community well-being, environmental sustainability, and economic development. These objectives are directly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities,**

which emphasizes making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, with public spaces playing a crucial role in achieving these outcomes.

Special focus is given to **Target 11.7** which aims to **"By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities".**

The publication also takes cognizance of the principles of the New Urban Agenda on public space which notes that "*We envisage cities and human settlements that…. are participatory, promote civic engagement, engender a sense of belonging and ownership among all their inhabitants, prioritize safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces that are friendly for families, enhance social and intergenerational interactions, cultural expressions and political participation, as appropriate, and foster social cohesion, inclusion and safety in peaceful and pluralistic societies, where the needs of all inhabitants are met, recognizing the specific needs of those in vulnerable situations*" (para 13.b).

Recommendations for robust public spaces

1. Strengthening legal frameworks:

Revision and harmonization of laws: Develop comprehensive, unified urban legal frameworks, in which the roles and responsibilities of diverse actors involved in developing and managing public spaces are clearly spelt out. Ensure that these regulatory frameworks prioritize flexible, adaptive, inclusive, and equitable access for all urban residents.

Rights-based legislation: Enact urban laws that uphold human rights and protect underprivileged communities from discriminatory practices by keeping public spaces open and accessible to all. This also means locating public spaces within a walkable distance of where people live. Furthermore, rights-based legislation has the capacity to foster a sense of belonging towards public spaces enhancing social cohesion and inclusion.

Effective public space standards: Urban laws should ensure that an average of 45-50 per cent of urban land is allocated to streets and public open spaces, which includes 30-35 per cent for streets and sidewalks and 15-20 per cent for public open space. The laws should also provide diverse mechanisms to acquire additional land for public space such as expropriation, subdivision exactions, land

readjustment, compulsory dedication of part of the land, negotiated exactions and planning incentives including modalities for fair, timely and adequate compensation.

2. Improving governance models:

Promote multilevel governance by establishing clear roles and responsibilities: Governance structures (e.g., municipal departments, specialized public space agencies, community boards) are crucial as they define who has the authority to make decisions and who is accountable for the outcomes. Additionally, it is important that strong collaboration between national, regional, and local governments be fostered to ensure rational and consistent management of public spaces. This will involve embedding public space management and development in broader urban development strategies to make clear differing roles and responsibilities.

Promoting transparency and responsiveness: Effective governance ensures that decision-making processes are transparent and responsive to public input, fostering trust and ownership among the public.

Increase community participation: The active and meaningful public participation of local communities in the planning, design and management of public spaces should be encouraged. This includes methods such as participatory budgeting, public consultations, community involvement in implementing acupuncture projects, and community-managed spaces. Methods should consider the intersectionality and power dynamics within the community to ensure sustained and equal involvement from different groups across the community.

3. Developing sustainable financial strategies:

Addressing privatisation and commercialization: Governance frameworks are crucial for managing the increasing involvement of the private sector in public space provision and management, ensuring that public access is maintained.

Diversify funding streams: To maintain and enhance public spaces there is need for a steady flow of resources from various sources like People-Public-Private Partnerships (PPPPs), community-based financing or green bonds that provide stability and diversification.

Innovative financial mechanisms: Land-based financial instruments such as land value capture approaches, impact fees and incentives for private developers to participate in creating and maintaining a facility. Additionally, alternative sources of funding such as philanthropy and crowdsourcing should be promoted.

For a robust, inclusive and sustainable public space, it is crucial to address legislative, governance, and financial challenges highlighted in this publication. Cities and communities can therefore enhance the quality of urban life, promote social cohesion and realize key SDGs through the implementation of these actions. This policy document provides a roadmap for decision-makers, policy actors, urban planners and designers, and stakeholders committed to revitalizing public spaces and ensuring they serve the needs of all urban residents, particularly those from underprivileged groups.

1. Introduction

Designing better outdoor public space. Source: Archistar

What is a public space?

Defining a public space is inherently complex, as no single definition can comprehensively capture its full scope.

Nonetheless, public spaces can broadly be categorized as: *"areas that are publicly owned, intended for public use, accessible and enjoyable by all without charge, and not driven by profit motives"* (UN-Habitat, 2015).

The three main categories of public spaces include: streets (e.g., sidewalks and footpaths), open public spaces (e.g., parks), and public facilities (e.g., public markets) (UN-Habitat, 2020).

Public spaces are crucial for individual and social well-being, serving as venues for a community's collective life. They express the diversity of a community's natural and cultural richness and form the foundation of its identity.

The fundamental characteristic of a public space is that it is intentionally crafted to be accessible to all, irrespective of a person's economic and political standing, ethnicity, nationality, or any other factor. Consequently, public spaces can possess the capability to enhance the equality and inclusiveness of a city (Garau, 2014), generating social interaction and building cohesion and social integration.

Importance of public spaces

Public spaces are vital for the dynamic social need functions as part of public life of diverse user groups, as they provide areas for social encounter, civic and political engagement, recreation (including work, play and study), shelter needs and other forms of community engagement.

In fact, they play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life in cities and communities, promoting social cohesion, and contributing to environmental sustainability.

Over 55 percent of the world's population currently live in urban areas, a figure projected to rise to 68 per cent by 2050 (United Nations, 2024). Due to this rapid urbanization, governments at all levels must acknowledge the importance of high-quality public spaces as essential components for urban prosperity (UN-Habitat, 2020). Additionally, research indicates that well-maintained public spaces contribute to improved physical and mental health, reduced crime rates, and increased property values (UN-Habitat, 2023).

For instance, Central Park in New York City, United States, attracts millions of visitors annually, offering a green oasis in a bustling urban environment and boosting the local economy through facilitating tourism and offering events space (NYC Parks, 2024).

Hence, public spaces hold the potential to not only make a city more equitable and inclusive, but also economically prosperous.

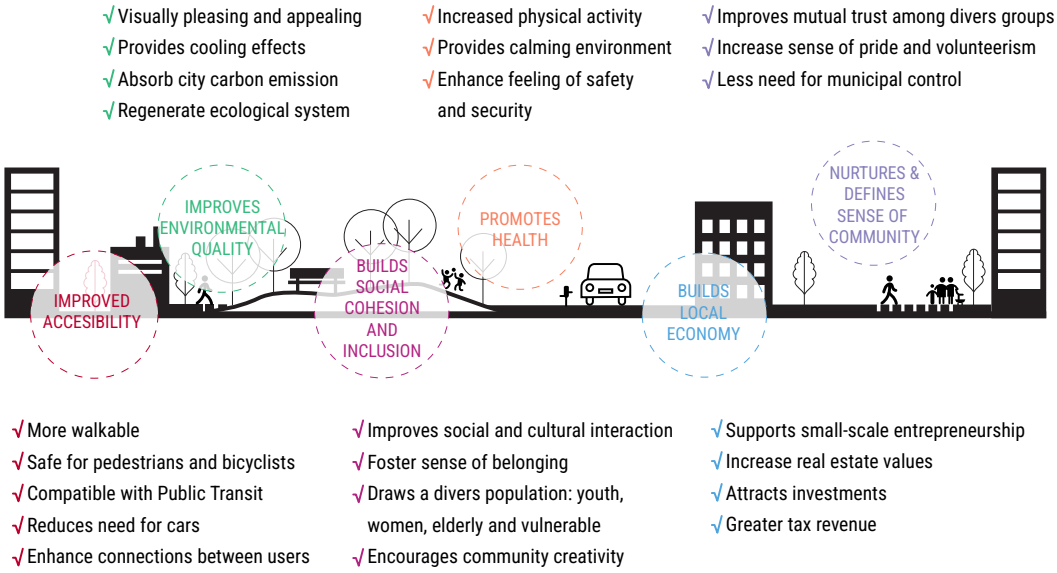


Figure 2. Benefits of public space in cities.
Source: UN-Habitat, 2020

Current public space challenges

In contemporary urban landscapes, the crisis of public spaces is becoming increasingly apparent (UN-Habitat, 2018). Despite their importance, they face significant and complex challenges that must be addressed. As urban expansion progresses globally, the prioritization of street allocation, green spaces, and open areas frequently diminishes in city planning agendas.

Most cities fail to allocate adequate public space, including for streets (UN-Habitat, 2014). Even when these elements are incorporated into urban designs, the execution of these plans tends to be irregular, lacking uniformity and inclusivity. Furthermore, many cities do not prioritize purchase and maintenance of public spaces in their budgeting. They are also unable to acquire the land needed to create public spaces, as attractive sites are often privately owned, and city administrations lack the financial resources to purchase these privately owned areas. This creates a clear link between the availability of public spaces and the financial capacity to secure land for such purposes.

Additionally, there is inequitable spatial distribution of public spaces which means that even where public spaces exist, they are often located in wealthier communities or in city centers away from lower income neighbourhoods. **Inequitable use of public spaces.**

The concept of public space is now preconditioned on the removal of "difference" and "unpleasantness," from the public view.

An example of this can be seen by crime control policies and laws that seek to forbid any "nuisance" or "annoyance" in public spaces. The term "annoyance" is vague and subjective and can mean playing music, protesting, wearing certain types of clothing, skateboarding, ball games, talking loudly, walking dogs, public drinking, among other reasons. The rationale is that these "nuisances" have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of the public. Local authorities must ensure that underprivileged groups have equal rights and opportunities to enjoy these areas. They must also bear in mind that restricting certain practices in public spaces can lead to indirect discrimination of underprivileged groups.

For instance, criminalization or restriction of street vending involves the deprivation of income for groups who do not have access to alternative sources or to formal employment, such as migrants, women, older persons, subsistence agriculture workers, indigenous peoples, and other ethnic groups. Inaction also has significant implications on the equitability of public space. For example, despite its legislative intentions, failure to effectively implement the **Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990 (ADA)** means accessibility of public spaces

frequently does not meet envisioned standards. Deficiencies in ADA enforcement and a lack of legislative updating allow physical barriers to persist in many areas, limiting mobility for individuals with disabilities (Williamson & Blanck, 2024).

The **inadequate management of existing public spaces** often results in their neglect and deterioration, eventually leading to their privatization and restricted public access and enjoyment. Moreover, the management of many public spaces often involves complex, hybrid arrangements that blur the line between public and private control. These governance structures can restrict equitable public access and compromise the fundamental role of such spaces as inclusive, shared environments intended for collective use.

Financial constraints as mentioned above are another significant challenge. These constraints do not merely affect the maintenance and sustainability of public spaces, but also the acquisition of land required to develop such spaces.

For instance, fiscal constraints often lead to inadequate maintenance, resulting in the deterioration of public spaces, thereby reducing their functionality and aesthetic value (Hue City, 2023). Additionally concerns over the financial implication of managing public spaces are used to justify the lack of public spaces, or to justify decisions not to develop additional public spaces.

In summary, the challenges to public spaces are interrelated and cross-cutting. Solving one issue often requires addressing others.

However, they can still broadly be categorized into **legislative, governance, and financial concerns**, all of which if not addressed, hinder the development, management, and equitable use of public spaces.

Figure 3. Legislation, governance, and financial challenges for public space.
Source: Authors, 2025

2. Purpose, Objectives, and Outcomes

Guiding principles

What is a successful public space?

To effectively develop the publication's goals, it is essential to first understand the key principles of a successful public space. Creating such a space requires integrating various principles such as:

1. Evolving (whether formal or informal in nature).

2. Diverse (avoiding one-size-fits-all).

3. Free (with secure rights and responsibilities).

4. Delineated (clearly public in their use).

5. Engaging (designing in active uses).

6. Meaningful (incorporating notable amenities and features).

7. Social (encouraging social encounters).

8. Balanced (between motorists and pedestrians).

9. Comfortable (feeling safe and relaxing).

10. Robust (adaptable and distinct in the face of change).[1]

These guiding principles lay the groundwork for the following key goals, which are crucial to creating public spaces that serve diverse communities and their future needs.

[1] Carmona, M. Principles for public space design, planning to do better. Urban Des Int 24, 47–59 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-018-0070-3

Goals for a better future towards public spaces

The following 4 goals set out indicators which must be considered when striving for a better future towards public spaces:

- **Goal 1: Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Public spaces should be welcoming to all, regardless of age, ability, gender, or socioeconomic background. Achieving this goal means addressing barriers—physical, social, and economic—that might limit access. This can be achieved by implementing universal design principles, ensuring access to all facilities, and providing spaces that foster equality in participation.
- **Goal 2: Building Public Trust and Transparency:** Building public trust is essential for the successful governance of public spaces. Transparency in decision-making and engaging the local community in both design and management fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. Engaging stakeholders in open dialogues and participatory design ensures public spaces reflect community needs and desires.
- **Goal 3: Sustainable Funding and Resource Allocation:** Developing sustainable financial models is crucial for the continuous maintenance and improvement of public spaces. This goal focuses on diversifying funding sources to ensure stable and adequate financial support.
- **Goal 4: Resilience to Climate Change:** Enhancing the resilience of public spaces to climate change is essential for their adaptability. A successful public space should integrate climate-resilient and adaptive infrastructure that can endure extreme weather conditions and environmental shifts. Utilizing green infrastructure, like rain gardens or solar energy systems, offers a dual opportunity to improve public space whilst enhancing environmental resilience. This also extends to community resilience where planting of trees in public spaces, for example, can significantly reduce the heat island effect. Shade trees or cooling islands could, for instance, help informal vendors adapt to extreme heat.

Figure 4. The policy goals for public space.
Source: Authors, 2025

Intended outcomes and impact

This publication aims to incorporate an effective management perspective into policymaking and strategic development, ensuring that future public space policies, programs and investments support sustainable growth. This will primarily be achieved through the key components of legislation, governance and innovative financing mechanisms.

This publication supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular:

11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

3: Good Health and Well-being

9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

13: Climate Action

In alignment with these goals this publication also builds on the aims of the New Urban Agenda which together provide comprehensive frameworks for sustainable urban development, emphasizing well-planned urbanization and integrated urban policies whilst promoting public health, infrastructure innovation and climate resilience. Local governments play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Their close connection to the community allows them to effectively manage and enhance public spaces.

Local governments use their regulatory power to ensure that public spaces are included in city planning and are well-maintained and accessible. By managing resources directly, they ensure transparency and efficiency in the development of these areas, promoting sustainable growth. The presence of local governments on the ground helps them engage with various stakeholders, ensuring that public spaces meet local needs and values.

This publication supports local governments to address these complex roles, striking a balance between public and private interests, protecting public access and preventing commercial overreach. By implementing national and international best practices, local governments can translate these strategies into practical actions tailored to their communities.

The following table sets out a framework of objectives, intended outcomes and impacts which local governments should cooperate with national and regional stakeholders to strive for. This approach will ensure that public spaces remain vital, inclusive, and reflective of the community's character and needs.

Objectives	**Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** A more comprehensive legal framework that can address inconsistencies and enforcement issues that currently hinder equitable public space management in cities (UN-Habitat, 2021a). As will be defined later in this publication, robust legislation containing international best practice spatial planning standards for access, availability, acquisition of land and management of public spaces, is crucial.	**Enhance Governance Models:** Effective governance involves coordination among various stakeholders, including local governments, private entities, and the community (OECD, 2023). Additionally, encouraging multilevel governance and decentralization to promote inclusive service delivery and efficient use of public finances while upholding transparency and accountability. Decentralized decision-making can better address specific community needs and enhance responsiveness.		**Ensure Sustainable Financing:** Innovative financing models and diversified funding streams are essential to ensure these public spaces remain vibrant and accessible
Outcome	Developed robust public space laws and policies which increase **accessibility and inclusivity in public spaces to ensure equitable access for all community members.**	Enhanced governance structures allow for **increased public trust** based on the openness of process, combined with proactive outreach mechanisms to the community, including open data initiatives, participatory models of governance, and regular reporting.	Enhanced governance structures allow for **effective engagement** of the broader community groups in the planning and design of public spaces to respond to the needs and preferences of the communities they serve.	**Established innovative financial models** that include people-public-private partnerships (PPPPs), community-based funding, and green bonds.
Impact	Equal and universal access to public spaces for all members of the community in a varied manner through the elimination of physical, social, and economic barriers.	Greater satisfaction regarding the use and management of public spaces due to transparent governance and active community engagement.	Enhanced social cohesion and community well-being due to well-designed and well-managed public spaces. These spaces become vibrant hubs for social interaction, recreation, and community events.	Stabilized and adequate funding mechanisms for public spaces, ensuring their long-term viability and maintenance through diversified funding sources.

3. Legislation, Governance & Finance of Public Spaces

The importance of legislation, governance, and finance in the management and development of public spaces cannot be overstated. Effective legal frameworks are necessary to allocate and protect public spaces. Effective governance frameworks ensure that these spaces are managed in a way that meets community needs and adapts to changing conditions. Adequate and sustainable financial resources are essential for the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of public spaces. Together, these components form the foundation of this publication, which aims for vibrant, robust, inclusive, and sustainable public spaces that enhance the quality of life for all.

Legislation on public space

This section delves into the legislation of public spaces, focusing on the foundational role of National Urban Policies (NUP) in harmonizing urban development efforts. It explores how robust urban legislation translates these policies into enforceable laws, regulating the allocation and acquisition of land for public spaces, and establishing comprehensive planning standards.

Additionally, the chapter examines the importance of a rights-based legal framework to ensure inclusivity and community participation in urban development.

National Urban Policies

National Urban Policies (NUPs) play a critical role in guiding and harmonizing urban development efforts across different levels of government and can significantly influence the formulation and implementation of urban legislation. A National Urban Policy serves as a pivotal mechanism in the legal framework of public spaces. Recognized for its ability to provide structured and coherent urban development, NUP plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality and accessibility of public spaces as explained below:[2]

[2] National Urban Policies Driving Public Space Led Urban Development: A Quick Thematic Guide for Mainstreaming Safe, Inclusive and Accessible Public Spaces into National Urban Policies, UN-Habitat, 2020. https://unhabitat.org/national-urban-policies-driving-public-space-led-urban-development-a-quick-thematic-guide-for-Global-State-of-National-Urban-Policy-2021: National Urban Policy Database, UN-Habitat, OECD, and Cities Alliance. Available at: https://nupdb.urbanpolicyplatform.org/listings/Czech%20Republic

Encouraging public participation: National Urban Policies emphasize the importance of involving local communities in the planning, design, and management of public spaces. By fostering a participatory approach as one of its pillars, NUP ensures that public spaces reflect the needs and aspirations of diverse groups, including underprivileged communities. This engagement strengthens public ownership and stewardship of these spaces, leading to more inclusive and sustainable urban environments. Australia's National Urban Policy, published in 2024, constituted a comprehensive consultation process with various groups including the First Nations people, academia, territorial and local governments, not-for-profit organizations, and the private sector. This was done through survey responses and over two hundred (200) written submissions. These perspectives built on the government's urban goals, one of which is to make cities liveable and equitable. Liveability in Australia's context includes provision of a range of safe and accessible public spaces like parks, plazas, communal spaces, and natural environments to enhance active travel and a healthy lifestyle.

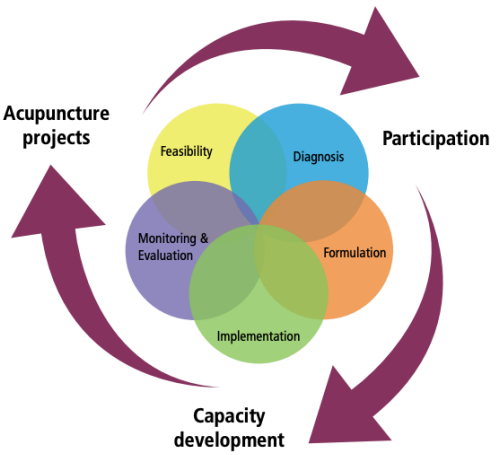
Structuring urban development: National Urban Policies offer a comprehensive framework that coordinates the efforts of various stakeholders towards an integrated vision for urban growth. This structured approach is essential for promoting more compact, socially inclusive, and better-connected cities and communities. By leveraging the benefits of urbanization, NUP helps mitigate inequalities and adverse environmental impacts, thus ensuring sustainable urban development. **Vietnam's National Urban Upgrading Strategy and Investment Plan for Urban Upgrading developed in 2009** contains guidelines requiring all residential developments to include spaces for parks to enable recreation and social functions.

Enhancing public space quality: One of the key strengths of NUP is its capacity to maximize the benefits of high-quality public spaces. Through well-defined urban patterns and regulations, NUP supports the creation and maintenance of sustainable public spaces and protected green areas. Most importantly, NUP integrates public space considerations into local development plans, ensuring these spaces are linked to broader urban environments and maximizing their positive impact on urban life. **Ecuador's National Plan for Good Living (2009)** has set planning standards for planning, designing, and management of public spaces like parks, streets, and open spaces. These standards aim at protecting the spaces from long-term private interests while upholding quality urban prosperity for the benefit of the people. The Plan is a supportive document on implementation of Ecuador's 2023 National Urban Policy (Politica Urbana Nacional) which gives a roadmap of Ecuador's realization of sustainable habitat agenda 2036.

Policy guidance for the creation of legal frameworks: Effective public space management requires robust legal frameworks that clearly define responsibilities of stakeholders from the public and private sectors. NUP can provide explicit policy recommendations that guide the development of legal frameworks to support the creation, protection, management, and enjoyment of public spaces. While these policies outline the strategic goals and approaches, the legal frameworks provide the enforceable regulations necessary for implementation and vital for fostering public well-being and enhancing urban productivity. A good example for this is the **NUP of the Czech Republic** which was first developed in 2017 and revised in 2023. It emphasizes the protection of existing green spaces from economic exploitation, ensuring their recreational and ecological roles are preserved through enforceable regulations.

Addressing challenges in public spaces: Public spaces are often overlooked in national policy discourse, leading to challenges in their maintenance and management. In many cities, especially in the Global South, dysfunctional urban planning regulations, weak institutions, lack of protection of non-financial interests, and insufficient resource allocation hinder the effective design, creation, and protection of public spaces. NUP can address these issues by integrating public space considerations into national policies, thereby raising their profile and ensuring that urban expansion is efficient, sustainable, and inclusive. **Cameroon's NUP,** launched in 2022, has integrated public space considerations especially in strengthening their design and management. In Bamenda, Cameroon, students and youths have played a pivotal role in supporting design of public spaces using Minecraft. In addition, the Self-Sustainable Development Simulator is meant to augment Cameroon's NUP by enabling digitized programming for infrastructure development along the Yaounde-Nsimalen corridor including improvement of public spaces along the highway.

Implementation and monitoring: The NUP process involves various phases, including feasibility studies, diagnosis, formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. This iterative process ensures that policies remain responsive, implementable, and evidence based on critical decisions on urban development. By continuously evaluating and adjusting policies, NUPs can effectively support the dynamic needs of urban development and public space management through implementation of acupuncture or demonstration projects. For instance, Egypt introduced a demonstration project for the construction of a playground for children in Al-Asmarat neighborhood in Cairo, Egypt to improve quality of life for children in the community. This project was part of the Egypt's NUP (2024) implementation component.



Key Takeaways: National Urban Policy is a robust tool that not only supports the legal framework of public spaces but also enhances their quality and accessibility. By providing a structured approach to urban development, promoting sustainable public spaces, and addressing the challenges of urbanization, NUP plays a vital role in fostering inclusive and resilient cities.

Figure 5. The NUP process.

Source: UN-Habitat, National Urban Policy: A Guiding Framework (2015), p. 10.

Box 1. National urban policy in Colombia

Colombia's NUP emphasizes the protection and enhancement of public spaces through coordinated urban development efforts. The policy integrates public space considerations into national and local planning frameworks, promoting sustainable and inclusive urban growth. The NUP has led to the creation of new public parks and the revitalization of existing spaces, improving the quality of urban life in Colombian cities.

The implementation of Colombia's NUP has been characterized by a strong emphasis on public participation and multi-stakeholder engagement. Local governments, in collaboration with national authorities, have organized numerous workshops and public forums to gather input from the public, ensuring that urban policies are inclusive and reflective of community needs. Additionally, the NUP has facilitated partnerships with private sector entities and international organizations, leveraging additional resources and expertise for public space projects. These collaborative efforts have not only enhanced the physical infrastructure of public spaces but have also strengthened social cohesion and community ownership of these areas.

Source: Improvement of Streets and Public Spaces: Bogota & Medellin, Colombia. Source: National Urban Policies Driving Public Space Led Urban Development, UN-Habitat, 2020.

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/national-urban-policy-review-of-colombia_9ca1caae-en.html

Robust urban legislation

Building on the strategic framework provided by NUPs, robust urban legislation translates these policies into actionable and enforceable laws, ensuring that public spaces are effectively integrated and managed within urban development plans.

Urban legislation refers to the comprehensive set of policies, laws, regulations, and practices that govern urban development and management. Urban legislation is essential for creating a structured and predictable environment where public spaces can thrive.

Urban legislation plays a pivotal role in promoting urban development by establishing clear guidelines for land use, infrastructure development, and public services, facilitating orderly urban growth. By providing a framework for addressing issues related to behaviour, rights, obligations, and governance, urban legislation becomes essential for sustainable urban development. Importantly, urban legislation is one crucial factor in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), as it ensures safe, inclusive, and sustainable cities. It also contributes to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by establishing frameworks that ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities in urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2022).

However, urban legislation faces several challenges. Poorly designed laws can result in high compliance costs, deterring sustainable practices, and unclear or ambiguous provisions can lead to unintended negative impacts, particularly affecting low-income and vulnerable communities.

Many cities face inadequate resources and expertise to enforce existing laws effectively, and rigid and outdated legal systems may not adapt to changing urban realities, hindering innovation and responsiveness. Consequently, inflexible laws and bureaucratic legal processes compel the public to engage in informal practices for land transactions, business operations, and access to services, undermining formal governance and planning efforts.

Functional effectiveness of laws

To address the challenge mentioned above, it is essential to develop sound and effective laws on public space that are clear, accessible, and enforceable (functional effectiveness). Regular assessments should be conducted to ensure that urban laws achieve the desired outcomes, and mechanisms should be established to correct errors and improve the effectiveness of these laws. Encouraging innovative solutions, such as smart systems for urban management, can support more informed and responsive policy-making processes.

These systems could include data-driven urban planning tools, internet of things (IOT) sensors for real-time monitoring of public spaces, or GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping technologies to guide decision-making and policy enforcement.

Additionally, tools like crowdsourcing platforms for public feedback, predictive modelling for forecasting future challenges, and automated systems for monitoring public space compliance can further enhance the effectiveness of urban policies. Most importantly, providing training and resources to municipal authorities and facilitating access to legislative expertise can support local governments in effectively responding to urban challenges.

In the context of public space, ineffective laws are one of the main reasons for the inadequate provision of streets and public spaces because of:

(1) Inadequate planning for urban expansion; (2) inadequate provision in planning legislation and urban plans of standards for public space; (3) over reliance of cities on expropriation to acquire land for public space; (4) the lack of regulations in planning frameworks that allow cities to dedicate private land to public use during urban development without having to pay compensation; and (5) insufficient resources and institutional capacity to implement existing frameworks effectively.

In several countries of the Global South, subdivision regulations and minimum standards barely consider public space requirements (UN-Habitat, 2018). Moreover, in several countries, as there is no minimum public space design requirement, the creation of streets, sidewalks, open and green areas is left to the discretion of the urban planners and private developers. Some countries have only suggested guidelines with no legally binding effects.

In other countries, legal requirements exist but are extremely low and inadequate. In Egypt, for example, every land subdivision that requires the creation of new access roads should dedicate at least 33 per cent of the land for both streets and open spaces.[3] However, the exact amount to be provided in each case is highly contested and not consistently provided due to ambiguities in the law.

Legal parameters for thriving public spaces

To ensure functional effectiveness of laws[4] concerning public spaces, urban legislation must regulate the allocation and acquisition of land for these spaces and establish comprehensive planning standards for their development and use.

Allocation of land for public space involves designating portions of urban areas specifically for public use during the planning process.

[3] Executive Regulations of Law 199/2008 of Egypt. Source: Planning Law Assessment Framework, UN-Habitat, 2018.

[4] This refers to the ability of a law to achieve its intended function.

Effective allocation ensures that public spaces are evenly distributed across the city, enhancing accessibility for all residents. This should be based on the following key considerations:

1. **Integrated urban planning:** Cities need to integrate public space requirements into their urban planning frameworks from the outset. Planning law should mandate minimum public space allocations within new developments. For instance, regulations can stipulate that a certain percentage of land in new housing projects must be dedicated to public spaces. This approach ensures consistent provision of public areas across different parts of the city. An effective approach would be for laws to ensure that an average of 45-50 per cent of urban land is allocated to streets and open public spaces, which includes 30-35 per cent for streets, bike lanes and sidewalks and 15-20 per cent for open public space.[5]
2. **Effective zoning plans:** Effective zoning plans should allocate a specific percentage of land for parks, plazas, and recreational spaces. Zoning is a powerful tool that ensures public spaces are prioritized and protected as cities grow. By doing so, local authorities can prevent overcrowding of residential and commercial areas and ensure that green spaces are a fundamental component of urban infrastructure.
3. **Community involvement:** Engaging local communities in the planning and implementation processes helps to identify the best locations for public spaces and ensure that these areas meet the needs of residents.

   Participatory planning can lead to more effective and appreciated public spaces, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members. However, participation is only meaningful if certain conditions are met—such as ensuring equal access, giving all voices a chance to be heard, and preventing capital-driven interests from dominating. It is especially important to consider how gender, class, ethnicity, and race impact this process.

Acquisition of land for public space refers to the process by which governments obtain land for the creation of public areas. Cities that are successful in creating and maintaining large amounts of public space achieve this success through a combination of effective laws and sufficient resources that allow them to acquire land from private owners, particularly during the processes of urban development and land subdivision.

This acquisition is generally governed by principles such as compulsory acquisition for public purposes, which mandates fair compensation to landowners, thereby ensuring that urbanization benefits the community while also respecting private property rights.

[5] Planning Law Assessment Framework, UN-Habitat, 2018.

The legal justification for such land contributions is the public function of private property, the fairness to share the increase in land values, and the fair distribution of costs and benefits of urbanization. These obligations are often outlined in the land subdivision and urban development rules which describe a way to capture a portion of the land value increase derived from public activities.

Land acquisition can be achieved through various methods, each with its own set of challenges and advantages.

1. **Public purchase:** Governments can purchase land at market value to develop public spaces. This method is straightforward but can be costly, especially in densely populated urban areas where land prices are considerably high.
2. **Land swaps and incentives:** Offering landowners incentives or swaps for other parcels of land can facilitate the acquisition process. For example, developers might be granted additional building rights elsewhere in exchange for dedicating part of their land to public use. This method can be less confrontational and more collaborative, promoting positive outcomes for both parties.
3. **Expropriation:** Also known as eminent domain, expropriation allows governments to compel the sale of private land for public use. While this method can be effective in acquiring necessary land, it is highly controversial and must be approached with extreme caution. Expropriation often disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable groups, while wealthier landowners may have the resources to shield themselves from its impacts. As such, it should be considered only as a last resort measure and must be accompanied by strong legal protections to ensure fair compensation and transparent processes. Furthermore, safeguards must be in place to protect those without formal land titles, who are often the most at risk of being displaced without adequate recourse. If not handled carefully, expropriation can lead to significant social backlash and further entrench inequalities.

↘ **Quality requirements for public spaces** must be met to ensure they are evolving, diverse, free, delineated, engaging, meaningful, social, balanced, comfortable and robust.[6]

Urban planning legislation should establish clear regulatory standards that include minimum space requirements for different types of public areas. For instance, residential neighbourhoods may need a certain amount of park space per capita, while commercial districts might require plazas and pedestrian zones.

[6] Please see footnote 1.

These regulations should also promote accessibility, safety, environmental sustainability, and aesthetic value. Additionally, thoughtful design and layout of public spaces are essential, incorporating aspects like seating, lighting, landscaping, and maintenance provisions to keep the spaces attractive and functional over time.

Box 2. Zoning Laws in Kigali, Rwanda

Since 2013, Kigali has implemented a detailed master plan that includes zoning laws designed to guide urban development and land use. This plan, which was updated and is to be implemented from 2020 to 2050, emphasizes mixed-use development, green spaces, and infrastructure improvements to enhance urban living conditions. The master plan's zoning regulations have played a crucial role in transforming Kigali into a well-organized and clean city, promoting sustainable urban growth while addressing the challenges of rapid urbanization. Local governments were actively involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the master plan. The City of Kigali has been instrumental in enforcing these zoning regulations, ensuring compliance through regular inspections and public consultations. Local authorities have also facilitated community engagement, allowing residents to voice their concerns and participate in the planning process. This collaborative approach has led to a more inclusive urban development process, aligning with the community's needs and aspirations while maintaining the city's overall vision for growth and sustainability.

Source: Housing Solutions for Low-Income Urban Communities in Rwanda, The World Bank, 2020. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/237181582863898938/pdf/Main-Report.pdf

Kigali hills, Rwanda. (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kigali_hills.jpg)

Rights-based legislation

A rights-based legal framework emphasizes inclusivity and the protection of human rights. This approach ensures that urban development is not only systematic but also just and equitable, empowering all urban residents to participate meaningfully in the creation and management of public spaces. Public participation is a cornerstone of rights-based legislation, involving urban residents in the planning and decision-making processes that affect their lives. Ensuring that legislative processes are transparent and inclusive allows for public input and scrutiny, fostering a sense of ownership, belonging and accountability.

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) emphasizes the importance of a rights-based approach to urban development, focusing on inclusivity, participation, and the realization of human rights. Rights-based legislation aims to end all forms of discrimination and violence, ensuring that all individuals and communities are empowered. This approach promotes the empowerment of all urban dwellers, enabling them to participate meaningfully in urban development. Human rights based legal frameworks must underpin all planning and development activities.

This requires maintaining ongoing dialogue and coherence between legislation, policy, and planning to ensure laws remain relevant and effective. Local governments provide a valuable entry point for change and should be encouraged to create enabling regulations that support a rights-based approach to urban development.

Box 3. Rights-Based Urban Development in Mexico City, Mexico

In Mexico City, a rights-based approach to urban development has been adopted to ensure inclusivity and equitable access to public spaces. This framework emphasizes community participation, transparency, and accountability in urban planning. Policies and initiatives have focused on creating inclusive and accessible public spaces, ensuring that all residents, including underprivileged groups, have access to quality public spaces.

The Mexico City Constitution, enacted in 2017, includes a comprehensive Bill of Rights that emphasizes the right to the city and access to public spaces. This Constitution mandates the government to prioritize the creation and maintenance of public spaces that are safe, accessible, and inclusive. The city's urban development laws require active community participation in planning processes. Residents are involved in decision-making through public consultations, participatory budgeting, and neighbourhood councils.

Specific regulations ensure that public spaces are designed to be accessible to persons with disabilities, older persons, and children, promoting universal design principles. Mechanisms for transparency and accountability are built into the legal framework, including regular public reporting on the status of public space projects and independent oversight committees.

The rights-based legal framework has led to several successful initiatives in Mexico City. One notable example is the revitalization of Chapultepec Park, one of the largest urban parks in the world. The park has undergone significant improvements, including the restoration of green areas, creation of cultural spaces, and enhancement of recreational facilities. These efforts were guided by extensive public consultations and input from local communities. Another successful initiative is the Pilares (Points of Innovation, Freedom, Art, Education, and Knowledge) program, which established community centres across the city. These centres provide spaces for education, cultural activities, and social interaction. They were developed based on the needs and suggestions of residents, ensuring they serve the community effectively. Additionally, initiatives to expand and improve public transportation, along with the creation of pedestrian-friendly zones, have made the city more accessible and reduced social inequalities in mobility.

Source: Urban Resilience Profile: Mexico City 2017 (UN-Habitat, 2021).

Ana Karina Zatarain, The PILARES Program Seeks to Bring Beautiful Design to Mexico City's Neglected Neighborhoods, 2022. https://metropolismag.com/projects/pilares-architects-mexico-city/?utm_medium=website&utm_source=archdaily.com

Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, Mexico. (Source: https://c1.staticflickr.com/9/8550/8772086202_535ef68c77_b.jpg)

Legislating public spaces is a complex and collaborative process that necessitates coordinated efforts at both the national and subnational levels, alongside active engagement with civil society and all communities while aligning to global development agendas. Being closest to the communities, local governments should spearhead the stakeholder engagement process, using urban legislation to shape inclusive and sustainable development.

This effort should be reinforced by comprehensive national urban policies to ensure alignment and coherence across all levels of government. Finally, embedding a rights-based legislative approach helps to mainstream inclusion and empowers all urban residents. By integrating these elements, it will lead to the creation of public spaces that are not only well-planned and managed but also equitable and accessible to all, ultimately enhancing urban life and sustainability.

Governance and management of public space

Effective governance and management of public spaces involves decision-making processes and structures that ensure these areas are well-managed and responsive to community needs. Central to this is the meaningful involvement of various stakeholders, including government agencies, private entities, and the community.

As defined by UN-Habitat, "***Governance*** *refers to the structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. […] Governance is about how power is distributed and shared, how policies are formulated, priorities set, and stakeholders made accountable. It encompasses a diverse range of actors in decision-making processes as well as the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement decisions. In the urban context, it is the process by which governments and stakeholders collectively decide how to plan, finance, and manage urban areas.* ***Urban governance*** *is also the sum of the many ways in which individuals and institutions, both public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city in a continuing process where conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated, and cooperative action can be taken."*[7]

By contrast, **management** refers to the process of organizing, directing, and controlling resources—such as people, finances, materials, and information—to achieve specific goals and objectives efficiently and effectively.

[7] Urban Governance. Source: UN-Habitat, 2021, https://unhabitat.org/topic/urban-governance

Unlike governance, which focuses on setting policies, principles, and strategic direction, management is primarily concerned with the implementation and execution of these strategies in daily operations to ensure desired outcomes are met.[8] The table below explains the difference between governance and management of public spaces.

Table 1. Governance and management in the context of public space.
Modified from UNESCO - http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance

Aspect	Governance of public spaces	Management of public spaces
Strategic vision and direction	People involved in governance (e.g., city councils, urban planners, public authorities, community leaders) shape the strategic vision and high-level goals for the development, preservation, and utilization of public spaces.	Operational teams (e.g., facilities managers, event coordinators) operate public spaces according to the broad goals and directions set by the governing body.
Performance oversight	Oversight bodies (e.g., auditors, policymakers, elected officials) ensure that management actions align with public interests and stakeholder needs.	Management staff (e.g., department heads, supervisors) implement decisions within the strategic vision, manage daily operation, keeping governance bodies informed of operational outcomes.
Direction and oversight	Senior leadership including governing boards guide management, ensuring prudence, ethics, and legal compliance in public space development.	Operational teams respond to governance requests, providing information and adjusting strategies as needed to fulfil strategic goals and operational efficiency.

[8] UNESCO - http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance

Multilevel governance

Multilevel governance has been defined as "*the arrangements for making binding decisions that engage a multiplicity of politically independent but otherwise interdependent institutional actors (private, public and social) at different territorial levels, and that does not assign exclusive policy competence or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any level*" (Schmitter & Philippe, 2004).

Thus, multilevel governance refers to the interconnected and collaborative governance structures involving multiple levels of government—national, regional and local–alongside non-governmental stakeholders. This approach recognizes the complexity of urban challenges, including public space management, and leverages the strengths of various governance levels to create more resilient and responsive systems.

The significance of multilevel governance in public space management lies in its ability to:

a. **Enhance coordination and coherence** among different governance levels.
b. **Facilitate** the integration of **diverse perspectives** and expertise, weighing different interests fairly, and creating a balanced and inclusive vision for the public space.
c. **Improve resource allocation** and policy implementation through shared responsibilities.
d. **Foster innovation** and adaptive management practices.

Actors in multilevel governance frameworks

Multilevel governance requires the involvement of various actors who contribute to the management and sustainability of public spaces:

1. **National governments:** National governments provide guidance by translating international commitments into binding and coherent domestic actions. They play a central role in setting overarching policies, technical standards, and priorities that shape regional and local actions.
2. **Regional/provincial/subnational governments:** These subnational governments act as intermediaries between national and local levels. They align regional policies with national frameworks and address specific regional issues such as land use, transport planning, and human settlement patterns.
3. **Metropolitan governments:** Metropolitan regions can present challenges for urban governance due to their rapid development and complexity.

These areas are densely populated, culturally significant, and urban (or non-agricultural). Thus, metropolitan governments play a key role in developing, formulating and implementing strategies, plans and policies for the sustainable development of metropolitan areas.

4. **Local governments:** Local governments are crucial for implementing actions on the ground. They manage urban planning, housing, infrastructure, public spaces, tailoring actions to local needs and contexts. They also play a key role in engaging communities and local stakeholders.

5. **Civil society:** Civil society organizations and community groups contribute local knowledge, advocate for public interest, and ensure broader participation and inclusivity in public space management. They represent the voices of the public and underprivileged groups, often acting as watchdogs over government and private sector actions.

6. **Private sector:** The private sector, including businesses and corporations, brings innovation, investment, and resources to public space projects. While they play a key role in financing and development, their actions are typically profit-oriented and require careful governance to ensure alignment with public interest.

7. **Academia:** Academic and research institutions play a vital role in advancing knowledge and innovation related to public spaces, contributing to the design, planning, and management of these spaces for the benefit of communities.

   They provide expertise, conduct research, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration to enhance public space quality and create more robust and livable cities.

Coordination mechanisms for coherent public space management

Multilevel governance involves both vertical and horizontal coordination to ensure comprehensive and coherent public space management.

↘ **Vertical coordination** aligns the actions of national, regional, and local governments. This ensures that national policies are effectively translated into local actions and that local experiences feed back into national policymaking.

- **National policies guiding local actions:** National legal frameworks set the space for action, while regional and local governments determine specific details. This alignment ensures that local actions support national priorities.

- **Local adaptation and knowledge sharing:** Local governments and communities adapt national policies and legislation to local contexts and share their experiences, which can inform and refine national policies. This two-way flow of information and adaptation enhances overall effectiveness.

↘ **Horizontal coordination** refers to the collaboration within and among governments and their departments at the same level, ensuring policy coherence and a comprehensive approach.

- **Inter-departmental coordination:** Within governments, different departments must coordinate to address interconnected issues related to public spaces. For example, the urban planning and parks departments need to collaborate to ensure that new residential developments include adequate green spaces and recreational areas. Coordination between the public works department and the environmental agency is also crucial to manage public spaces sustainably, such as integrating green infrastructure to manage stormwater in parks and plazas.
- **Cross-sectoral linkages:** Policies in one sector can impact other sectors, and this is evident in public space management. For instance, transportation policies that promote pedestrian-friendly streets and bicycle lanes can enhance the accessibility and safety of public spaces.

  Similarly, housing policies that encourage mixed-use development can ensure that public spaces are thriving and well-utilized, contributing to a more cohesive urban environment.

  Effective horizontal coordination ensures that actions in one area support and do not undermine those in another, such as ensuring that economic development policies do not lead to the privatization and restriction of access to public spaces.
- **Inter-municipal coordination** between municipalities can address issues crossing administrative boundaries, such as regional transport systems and shared natural resources. This ensures a more integrated and effective approach to urban public space management and is part of both vertical and horizontal coordination.

↘ **Public participation** is crucial for effective governance of public spaces. Community engagement in planning and designing public spaces ensures they meet local needs, fostering ownership and sustainability. Collaborative governance models that involve government entities and the community promote transparency and accountability.

Accessible public spaces encourage social inclusion, allowing interactions among people from different socioeconomic backgrounds and reducing segregation.

Ensuring the equitable distribution of public spaces across urban areas supports urban cohesion and efficient land use, attracting businesses and tourists and contributing to economic development.

Notable examples include the Creative District of Porto Alegre, Brazil[9] and the Oslo, Norway waterfront revitalization project,[10] which demonstrate the benefits of public participation and collaborative governance.

To achieve effective multilevel governance, both structured frameworks and more flexible approaches are essential.

Structured frameworks include policies that define roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms. These frameworks ensure accountability, transparency, and consistency across different levels of government.

Flexible approaches involve less formal processes such as networks, partnerships, and collaborations. These allow for innovation, adaptability, and the inclusion of a wider range of actors in governance, fostering a dynamic and responsive governance system.

These elements together create a comprehensive framework for multilevel governance, enabling effective public space management that is coherent across different levels of government and inclusive of various stakeholders.

[9] Culture Brings New Life to Porto Alegre, The City at Eye Level, accessed August 12, 2024, https://thecityateyelevel.com/stories/culture-brings-new-life-to-porto-alegre/; Porto Alegre: Participatory Budgeting and the Challenge of Sustaining Transformative Change, World Resources Institute, accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.wri.org/research/porto-alegre-participatory-budgeting-and-challenge-sustaining-transformative-change; Deliberating for sustainability: lessons from the Porto Alegre experiment with participatory budgeting, Taylor & Francis Online, accessed August 12, 2024,

[10] Marius Grønning, Oslo Fjord City - Oslo's strategic waterfront development, Academia.edu, accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.academia.edu/10217550/Oslo_Fjord_City_Oslos_strategic_waterfront_development;

Fjord City: A waterfront urban renewal project, Nordregio, accessed August 12, 2024, https://nordregio.org/sustainable_cities/fjordbyen/.

Box 4. Multilevel governance in Medellín, Colombia

Medellín, Colombia, has transformed from a city plagued by violence and social inequality into a model of urban innovation and social inclusion. This transformation is largely due to a multilevel governance approach that integrates efforts across national, regional, and local governments, alongside non-state actors.

One of the cornerstones of Medellín's transformation is the Integrated Urban Projects (Proyectos Urbanos Integrales, PUIs). These projects focus on improving infrastructure, social services, and public spaces in an underprivileged neighbourhoods. The PUIs include the construction of multifunctional parks, libraries, schools, and sports facilities, designed to serve educational, recreational, and social purposes. A significant transportation link, the Metrocable, connects isolated neighbourhoods to the city centre, improving access to economic opportunities and public services.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been effectively leveraged to fund and manage these public space projects. For instance, Parque Biblioteca España (Spain Library Park), an iconic library park in an underprivileged area, was funded through a mix of public funds and private donations. It provides educational resources, cultural activities, and a safe community gathering space. Similarly, innovation and business centres created through PPPs support local entrepreneurship and job creation. Community participation is a key element in Medellin's strategy. Through participatory budgeting, residents decide how a portion of the municipal budget is spent, ensuring that projects reflect local needs. Community-managed spaces foster a sense of ownership and accountability, with local organizations responsible for maintaining these areas. Medellín has also integrated social and environmental objectives into public space management. Green corridors connect parks and green spaces throughout the city, promoting biodiversity and providing recreational opportunities. Urban agriculture initiatives improve food security and foster community bonds. The creation of safe, inclusive public spaces has significantly reduced violence and crime. Public spaces like Parque Biblioteca España (Spain Library Park) foster social cohesion and reduce social tensions, while sports facilities and cultural centres engage youth in constructive activities, diverting them from gang involvement and other criminal activities. Public spaces have also increased social inclusion. Integrating educational and social services with public spaces ensures better access for underprivileged communities. Participatory processes and community-managed spaces empower residents, giving them a voice in urban development and fostering a sense of belonging.

Source: Alejandro Echeverri, Francesco M. Orsini: Informalidad y Urbanismo Social en Medellín (https://www.eafit.edu.co/centros/urbam/articulos-publicaciones/Documents/111103_RS3_AEcheverri_%20P%2011-24.pdf); Peter Brand: Governing inequality in the South through the Barcelona model: 'social urbanism' in Medellín, Colombia (https://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/business-and-law-documents/research/lgru/peterbrand.pdf)

Medellín, Colombia: A significant transportation link, the Metrocable, connects isolated neighbourhoods to the city centre, improving access to economic opportunities and public services. (Source : https://thecityfix.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/C-WRI_Colombia_070_IT.jpg)

State-centred governance

In a state-centred model, local authorities undertake public space management and maintenance with minimal external involvement. While widely adopted, this model does not guarantee sustainability in financial or organizational terms, particularly in contexts with limited resources (Kaw et al., 2020: 44). Critics argue that a state-centric model can be afflicted by inertia, with long-standing processes remaining unchanged for decades, leading to excessive bureaucracy and a lack of responsiveness (Dempsey & Burton 2012). This inertia is often compounded by path-dependence and entrenched practices, where past decisions and established routines make it difficult to adapt to new circumstances or embrace innovative solutions. Despite these challenges, innovation can offer solutions, as the case study of Barcelona highlights below.

Model:

State-centred

Key feature:

Local authorities take primary responsibility with minimal external involvement

Challenges:

Financial and organizational sustainability, bureaucracy, and lack of responsiveness.

Example:

Barcelona's superblocks for urban transformation.

Box 5. Barcelona's superblocks for urban transformation, Spain

Barcelona, a city in Spain, showcases a state-centred governance model through its groundbreaking Superblocks project, which reclaims urban spaces from vehicles and prioritizes pedestrian use. In this approach, the local authorities take primary responsibility for transforming and managing public spaces with minimal external involvement. The Superblocks initiative aims to reduce traffic, improve air quality, and create new public spaces that promote social engagement and environmental sustainability. The Superblocks concept reorganizes the city into clusters of nine blocks, where traffic is restricted, and interior streets are repurposed for pedestrians, cyclists, and community activities. Streets that once served as thoroughfares for cars are transformed into green spaces, playgrounds, seating areas, and event spaces. By reallocating space from vehicles to people, the project encourages sustainable mobility and enhances the urban environment.

To facilitate this transformation, Barcelona's local government implemented innovative urban planning strategies. The design incorporates tactical urbanism approaches, using temporary interventions like street furniture, planters, and painted roadways to quickly test new configurations. The project also integrates digital tools for monitoring traffic and air quality, enabling data-driven adjustments to improve outcomes. For instance, streets within Superblocks feature reduced speed limits, bike lanes, and enhanced pedestrian crossings, encouraging non-motorized forms of transportation. This shift not only decreases pollution but also promotes healthier lifestyles among residents. By reshaping urban mobility, the Superblocks project creates a network of public spaces that are both liveable and sustainable.

Despite facing bureaucratic challenges often associated with state-centred governance models, Barcelona's implementation of the Superblocks initiative demonstrates how innovative approaches can overcome these hurdles. The project faced initial resistance from car users, local businesses, and residents, who feared that reduced car access would negatively impact the city's functionality. However, the local government used extensive stakeholder engagement and adaptive governance strategies to address these concerns. Public consultations, urban labs, and community workshops were instrumental in adjusting designs and policies to better suit local needs and contexts.

Source: Barcelona City: Reclaiming Public Spaces through the Superblocks Model. Source: Barcelona City Council, 2018. https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/superilles/en.

Figure 6. Superblocks: What we can learn from Barcelona.
Source: Hannah Walther, 2022

Grassroots management

This bottom-up approach model involves non-governmental organizations leading public space management. It includes non-profits, neighbourhood committees, associations, and community groups, implying self-governance with minimal or no government intervention. While some regulations are established, government entities primarily assist and encourage operations, enabling significant autonomy and cost savings (Marit Jansson et al., 2020: 18). This model provides high responsiveness and community acceptance, but it often remains informal and not officially recognized by the government, limiting long-term impact and sustainability.

In some circumstances this model can place undue responsibility on communities, adding a burden of responsibility without financial remuneration.

Italy offers a good example of institutionalizing bottom-up efforts with the "Path of collaboration" tool, formalizing partnerships between associations, individuals, and local governments for public goods management (Labsus, 2019). Community groups often take care of their public spaces through volunteering, grassroots activism, locally sourced funding, and event-based improvements.

For example, the Changing Faces Competition in Nairobi, led by the Public Space Network, engaged over 114 community groups from low-income neighbourhoods to transform neglected public spaces, integrating independent management schemes and organizing income-generating activities for unemployed youth (Takeshita, 2020).

Model:

Bottom-up approach

Key feature:

Non-governmental organization leadership

Challenges:

Informality, limited government recognition, sustainability

Example:

Path of collaboration in Italy, Changing Faces Competition in Nairobi

Box 6. Community-led public space management in Kibera informal settlement, Nairobi, Kenya

In Kibera, Nairobi, one of Africa's largest informal settlements, local community groups and the NGO Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) launched the Kibera Public Space Project (KPSP) in 2006 to transform neglected and unsafe areas into multifunctional public spaces. This grassroots initiative addressed the critical lack of safe and accessible public areas by engaging community members directly in the planning, design, and management processes. Through participatory design workshops, residents, especially women and youth, collaborated with designers to create spaces that reflected their needs and priorities, such as playgrounds, gardens, meeting areas, and sanitation facilities.

The project led to the creation of vibrant public spaces that significantly improved social cohesion and safety. These areas became central hubs for community interaction, reducing crime rates and fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among residents. The inclusion of public toilets and wash stations addressed critical hygiene needs, enhancing overall health conditions. Community management committees were established to oversee the maintenance and operation of these spaces, providing training in financial management, construction, and conflict resolution. The spaces also generated economic opportunities through small-scale businesses like kiosks and urban agriculture, managed by community members, thereby contributing to the sustainability of the initiative.

Source: Kibera Public Space Project Network. Source: Kounkuey Design Initiative, 2021. kounkuey.org/projects/kibera_public_space_project_network

Public-Private-People Partnerships[11]

The Public-Private-People Partnerships (PPPP), or 4Ps model, represents an evolution of the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. This approach integrates the efforts of public authorities, private companies, and community members in the management and maintenance of public spaces.

It emphasizes the importance of community engagement, co-creation, and collaborative governance, allowing for a more holistic approach to addressing complex urban challenges.

Key elements for the success of the 4P model include clearly defined roles and responsibilities, effective communication among stakeholders, and inclusive participation in decision-making processes. While PPPs often delineate responsibilities for legal clarity, the 4Ps model promotes a more flexible framework that allows for shared accountability.

This flexibility enables projects to adapt based on community feedback and evolving circumstances. The 4P model emphasizes co-creation and collaborative governance, leveraging the strengths of each partner to address urban challenges effectively.

A critical element of the 4Ps model is its focus on a sound financial structure. By distributing the financial burden across multiple stakeholders, including private companies and the public, public authorities can leverage additional resources and expertise. This collaborative approach not only makes large-scale initiatives more feasible but also encourages innovation and long-term sustainability.

Moreover, the 4Ps model enhances transparency and accountability, as each partner is invested in the project's success. This investment fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders, motivating them to monitor progress and outcomes actively. However, it is also important to acknowledge that, like all models, the 4Ps approach has its limitations.

Challenges such as prolonged negotiation times, potential misalignment of interests, and other complexities in governance can arise. Nevertheless, by prioritizing community involvement and collaborative frameworks, the 4Ps model represents a progressive step in public space management that aims to create more inclusive and sustainable urban environments.

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[11] Public-Private-People Partnerships: A New Concept to Bring Public and Private Actors and Citizens Together. Source: Nordregio, 2021.

The 5P Model: Public-Private-People-Policy Partnerships. Source: Smart City Cluster, 2022.

https://nordregio.org/nordregio-magazine/issues/people-and-cities/public-private-people-partnerships-a-new-concept-to-bring-public-and-private-actors-and-citizens-together/ ; https://smartcitycluster.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Paper_The-5P-model_Public-Private-People-Policy-Partnerships.pdf

Model:

Public-Private-People Partnerships (4Ps)

Key feature:

Collaboration between government, private sector, and the public

Challenges:

Coordination among diverse stakeholders, ensuring equal participation

Advantages:

Enhanced community engagement, sustainable solutions, inclusive decision-making

Example:

Baltic Urban Lab project, various city initiatives in Norrköping, Tallinn, Riga, and Turku

Box 7. Regenerating brownfields with Public-Private-People Partnerships in the Baltic Region

The Baltic Urban Lab project, implemented between 2016 and 2018, showcases the PPPP model's effectiveness in urban planning and redevelopment. This initiative involved four partner cities: Norrköping (Sweden), Tallinn (Estonia), Riga (Latvia), and Turku (Finland). The project aimed to regenerate brownfield sites, which are underutilized and often contaminated areas, by employing an integrated planning approach that actively involved public authorities, private companies, and the public.

Key activities included conducting participatory workshops to gather input from community members and stakeholders, developing new planning methods and cooperation models to facilitate effective partnerships. The project emphasized integrated planning approaches that actively involved public authorities, private companies, and local residents to develop sustainable solutions for brownfield redevelopment. One of the primary focuses was to create business models that leveraged the strengths of each partner, ensuring that private investors contributed to the redevelopment process through funding and expertise, while public authorities provided regulatory support and strategic direction. Risk management strategies were also developed, with each partner's role clearly defined to distribute both risks and responsibilities fairly. This collaborative approach allowed for innovative solutions to emerge, aligning the interests of all parties involved and enhancing the viability of the brownfield transformation projects.

One significant outcome of the project was the transformation of previously neglected areas into vibrant, functional urban spaces that serve the needs of the community. For instance, in Norrköping, the collaboration led to the creation of new public parks and recreational areas, boosting local engagement and improving the quality of life for residents.

Source: Co-Creation in Urban Governance: Lessons from the Nordic Countries. Source: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018. https://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1241290/FULLTEXT02.pdf

Norrköping's Inner Harbour which has served as an industrial zone has been so severely contaminated that it has no biological value. The vision for Inner Harbour was to make it an attractive part of the city with mixed functions, including 3,000 apartments combining both public and private housing, as well as new workplaces, public and private services, a marina and new canals. Source: City of Norrköping

Comparison of the three governance models

Each governance model offers unique strengths and faces specific challenges when it comes to managing and maintaining public spaces, but they are not mutually exclusive. **State-centred governance** provides consistent oversight and a clear regulatory framework, although it can suffer from bureaucratic inertia and slow responsiveness.

Grassroot management encourages high levels of community engagement and adaptability yet often struggles with issues related to informality and the lack of sustainable resources. Meanwhile, the **Public-Private-People Partnerships (4Ps) model** blends the elements of both state control and grassroots involvement, enabling resource-sharing and collaborative governance.

However, this approach demands meticulous coordination among stakeholders to align diverse interests and ensure accountability.

In practice, these models frequently overlap; state-centred initiatives may incorporate grassroots participation, while grassroots projects might rely on public-private partnerships for funding or expertise. By recognizing these intersections, policymakers can adopt hybrid governance approaches that leverage the advantages of each model while mitigating their limitations. This integrated perspective allows for more nuanced decision-making, tailored to the specific needs and contexts of urban environments. By understanding these models, policymakers can make informed decisions about the most suitable governance strategies for their urban contexts. Effective governance of public spaces not only enhances urban liveability but also promotes social inclusion, economic development, and community well-being. As cities continue to grow and evolve, adopting flexible and innovative governance approaches will be essential to ensuring that public spaces remain robust, accessible, and sustainable for all urban residents.

The table below provides a comparative, yet simplified, analysis of the governance models across several critical categories to highlight their respective strengths and challenges.

To complement the table, an explanation of the criteria for the comparative analysis is provided:

1. **Stakeholder involvement**: Identifies the key stakeholders involved in each model (e.g., government, private sector, community groups).

2. **Responsiveness**: Measures how efficiently and effectively the governance model can respond to issues and changes in public space management.

3. **Sustainability**: Assesses the long-term viability of the governance model, including financial and organizational stability.

4. **Cost**: Evaluates the overall cost of implementing and maintaining the governance model, including potential cost savings or efficiencies.

5. **Innovation**: Examines the potential for incorporating innovative solutions and technologies within the governance model.

6. **Access and inclusivity**: Considers how the governance model ensures equitable access to public spaces and prevents social exclusion.

7. **Formalization**: Looks at the degree of formal recognition and support by government entities, which can impact the sustainability and legitimacy of the model.

8. **Risk and accountability**: Analyzes how risks are managed and how accountability is maintained within the governance model.

9. **Scalability**: Evaluates the potential for the governance model to be scaled up or replicated in different contexts.

10. **Flexibility**: Assesses the ability of the governance model to adapt to changing circumstances and needs.

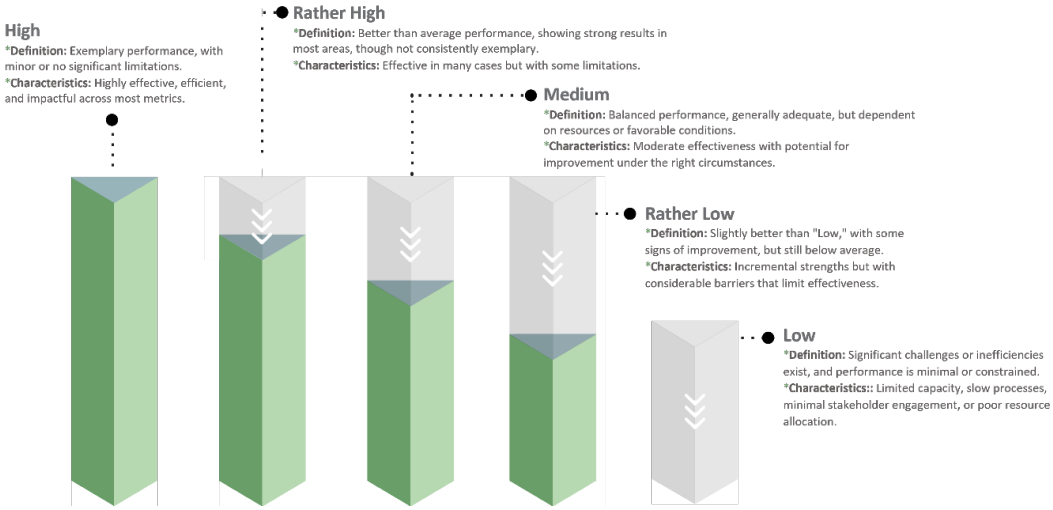

Figure 7. Performance scale for governance models.
Source: Author, 2024

Category	State-centred governance	Grassroots management	Public-Private-People Partnership (4Ps)
Stakeholder involvement	Medium (Mostly local governments)	Rather High (NGOs, community groups)	High (Government, private companies, the public)
Responsiveness	Rather low (sluggish, and bureaucratic)	High (Community-driven and rapid feedback)	Rather high (Collaborative but less dynamic)
Sustainability	Medium (resource-dependent)	Rather Low (limited formal support or funding)	High (enhanced by diverse and more sustained stakeholder support)

Cost	High (usually bureaucracy increases expenses)	Low (volunteerism reduces costs)	Medium to Rather High (cost-sharing mitigates expenses, but may face legal ambiguities)
Innovation	Rather Low (constrained by inflexible processes)	Medium (community-driven, fostering innovative solutions)	High (co-creation and collaborative problem-solving fosters diverse innovation)
Access and inclusivity	Medium (bureaucratic hurdles, potential for exclusion)	Rather High (community-led, and inclusive processes)	High (broad engagement encourages inclusivity)
Formalization	High (government recognized and regulated)	Rather Low (often informal, and not officially recognized)	High (structured agreements among stakeholders with legal backing)
Risk and accountability	Low (bureaucracy and lack of accountability often limits oversight)	Medium (community accountability but lacks formal oversight)	Rather High (shared accountability improves oversight)
Scalability	High (government recognised and regulated)	Medium (limited by community resources and organization)	Medium (need to rebuild the connections with private sector)
Flexibility	Low (inflexible, and slow to adapt)	High (responsive, and adaptable)	Rather High (adaptable to community needs and feedback)

Table 2. The three governance models – a comparison.
Source: Authors, 2024.

The following graph visualizes the advantages and shortcomings of each model and shows that the Public-Private-People-Partnership approach - a combination of the state, market and bottom-up approach - could prove most effective for public space management. However, in practice, these models often blend, with state-led initiatives incorporating grassroots participation or public-private partnerships drawing on state support for regulatory guidance. This broken-down comparison can help developing hybrid solutions that allow for more adaptable and tailored approaches to urban challenges, leveraging the strengths of each model to create resilient, inclusive, and sustainable public spaces.

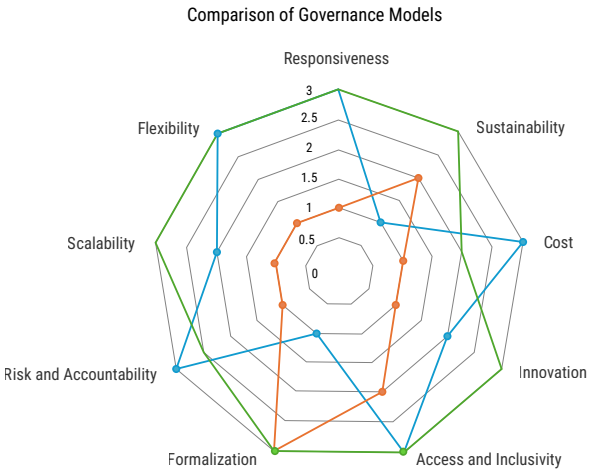

Figure 8. Comparison of governance models.
Source: Authors, 2024

Financing mechanisms

Financial resources are essential for the creation, maintenance, and improvement of public spaces. Without adequate funding, even the best-designed public spaces can fall into disrepair and become inaccessible.

Traditionally, public spaces are funded by local government budget, through central government transfers or local taxation (Arvanitidis, 2008: 8). However, local authorities often struggle in distributing resources adequately due to competing priorities in the budgets. As a result, the management of public spaces rarely has access to sufficient funding. Assessments from the World Bank indicate that governments' contribution typically may be relatively small, around indicatively 10% of total capital expenses, creating a significant funding gap, which needs to be addressed through additional financing mechanisms (Kaw, et al., 2020). Hence, this section highlights various financing mechanisms for public space management that national and local governments and other stakeholders can adopt.

By leveraging local government budgets, land-based financing instruments, crowdsourcing, philanthropy, and debt financing, cities can develop resilient financial plans that ensure the continuous improvement and effective management of public spaces. Understanding and implementing these mechanisms can lead to well-maintained, more sustainable public spaces that benefit all community members.

Local government budgets

Local governments should secure a budget for the operation and management of public spaces. Ideally, they would first estimate the management expenses and what it would take for the city to allocate funds to public spaces. However, this option is less realistic considering the strain city budgets are often in. Alternatively, local governments can earmark all revenues generated from public spaces (e.g. parking fees) or any funding explicitly channeled for public spaces to manage and improve public spaces and set mechanisms to ensure that they are not spent for other development priorities. For instance, congestion charge, a daily fee required to enter a downtown district, introduced by the cities of London and Stockholm to reduce traffic and carbon emissions, is reinvested in roads and public transport improvements (C40, 2019). Utilising roads infractions and violations fees is another way to re-invest on public space management and maintenance. Although local and national taxation provides a relatively stable source of funding annually, it might result in financial inability to think and plan long-term. Additionally, ring-fenced funding for public space development and maintenance is unusual if not supported by duly statutory status and therefore it would need legislation and governance integrations.

Action:

Allocate funds from city budgets or earmark specific revenues.

Stakeholders:

Local government, the public.

Mechanisms:

Annual budget planning, earmarking specific revenue streams, legislative support for ring-fenced funding.

Mechanism	Actors	Description	Tools/ Implementation	Revenue generation	Advantages	Challenges
Local government budgets	Local Government	Budget allocation from overall city budget	Annual budget planning, earmarking specific revenue streams, legislative support for ring-fenced funding	Annual budget allocations, earmarking revenues from specific sources (e.g., parking fees, congestion charges)	Stable funding source; control over funds	Strain on city budgets; competing priorities; weak legislation for ring-fenced funding

Land-based financing instruments

Public spaces significantly impact land values, which can be captured for implementing and managing public spaces. The land-based financing instruments entail collecting charges or fees from developers or property owners and reinvesting them to improve and maintain urban infrastructures, including public spaces.

Land Value Capturing mechanisms have been successfully used in many parts of the world to revitalize cities and enhance their public's quality of life. Below are some land-based financing instruments:

Land Value Tax or Property Tax. It is a recurring tax based on an estimated land value or building attributes. A city can use revenue from the sale of general obligation bonds, backed by property tax revenues, to fund public space projects and repay the bonds and interest with property tax revenue.

Action:

Implement recurring taxes based on land or property value.

Stakeholders:

Local Government, Property Owners.

Mechanisms:

Tax assessment procedures, property tax regulations.

Tax increment financing (TIF). This allows local governments to borrow or invest up-front in implementing and maintaining public spaces, based on the projected revenue that will be derived from the project. TIF commonly takes the form of bond financing, where local governments issue bonds backed by a percentage of revenue collected from the public space or an increase in property values surrounding the space over a certain period.

Local government bonds can be used to fund large and financially feasible public space projects that can potentially raise revenues and increase property value.

"Pay-as-you-go" is another form of TIF where the private developer can cover the investment costs of infrastructure.

Then, the government reimburses the developer as incremental taxes are generated. TIFs prove to be a viable source of public space management financing as the improvement costs are covered upfront during project planning and, hence, will not require additional funding. This financing mechanism may, however, not be viable in areas where economic activities and property markets are not yet vibrant (The World Bank, 2015).

Action:
Invest upfront in public spaces using projected future tax revenues.

Stakeholders:
Local government, developers.

Mechanisms:
Bond issuance, revenue projections, urban development plans.

Special assessments and betterment levies. These mechanisms are specific charges or levies added to the general property tax on residential or commercial properties to pay for new and improved local public spaces.

On this, developers may contribute money to improve public services and infrastructure, such as public spaces which directly benefit the residents or tenants of their properties (Hart, 2020).

Action:
Levy specific charges for local improvements.

Stakeholders:
Local government, property owners.

Mechanisms:
Assessment districts, levy administration, project-specific funding mechanisms.

Developer exactions or Development Impact Fees (DIF). These are one-time charges imposed by local governments on developers, for instance, in acquiring development permission. Based on the theory that growth pays for growth, these fees may be allocated to maintain infrastructure, including public spaces within the neighbourhood.

Action:
Impose one-time charges on developers for infrastructure funding.

Stakeholders:
Local government, developers.

Mechanisms:
Development approval processes, fee schedules, infrastructure planning.

Incentive zoning. Local governments may provide developers 'density bonuses' that allow them to develop or redevelop land at higher density or change land use stipulated in the zoning plans in exchange for incorporating public amenities to contribute to a special place endowment or public improvement fund.

As a result, the developers finance or improve infrastructure, including public spaces such as parks or streets.

Action:
Provide zoning bonuses for developers in exchange for public amenities.

Stakeholders:
Local government, developers.

Mechanisms:
Zoning regulations, density bonus programs, urban planning guidelines.

Land readjustment. This land value capture tool entails private developers surrendering their land to the government, which is then planned for or redesigned with infrastructure provisions and public spaces included.

The government subsequently returns the land to the private developers, now divided into relatively smaller parcels but with higher land values.

Action:
Pool, redesign, and redistribute land with infrastructure improvements.

Stakeholders:
Local government, developers.

Mechanisms:
Land pooling agreements, urban redesign plans, legal frameworks.

Sale of public land. In recent years, the sale of public land has become a widespread financing solution: capital gains obtained from the sale and redevelopment of public land, and secured through the planning system, are employed to fund new public spaces or facilities.

Action:
Sell public land to generate funds for public space projects.

Stakeholders:
Local government, private entities.

Mechanisms:
Land sale procedures, market valuations, investment planning.

Transfer taxes and stamp duties are charges assessed for recording a land title transfer from one private party to another. It can be either a fixed fee or a percentage of the property's value being transferred. It is important to note that some affected communities may not possess formal land titles, which could limit their ability to engage in such transfers.

Action:

Charge fees for recording land title transfers, while also developing mechanisms to support communities without formal land titles, such as facilitating title regularization or providing alternative forms of recognition.

Stakeholders:

Local government, property owners, and potentially land-users without formal titles.

Mechanisms:

Title transfer regulations, fee schedules, administrative procedures, and land title regularization programs.

Recurring lease payments from private actors can be received when they agree to local community priorities for access to new facilities or manage public space.

Action:

Lease public space to private entities for regular payments.

Stakeholders:

Local government, private entities.

Mechanisms:

Lease agreements, management contracts, revenue collection systems.

Table 3. A comparative of land-based financing instruments.

Source: Authors, 2024

Mechanism	Actors	Description	Tools/ Implementation	Revenue Generation	Advantages	Challenges
Land value tax or property tax	Local government, property owners	Recurring tax based on land or property value	Tax assessment procedures, property tax regulations	Regular property tax revenues	Predictable revenue; widely accepted	Requires accurate assessments; potential inequity as well as creating perverse incentives that can harm the most vulnerable communities.
Tax increment financing (TIF)	Local government, developers	Future revenue from increased property values	Bond issuance, revenue projections, urban development plans	Projected future tax revenues	Funds large projects; aligns with urban goals	Market dependency; complex administration
Special assessments and betterment levies	Local government, property owners	Specific charges for local improvements	Assessment districts, levy administration, project-specific funding mechanisms	Additional levies on property tax	Direct link to beneficiaries; project-specific	Resistance from property owners; defining benefit areas
Developer exactions or development impact fees (DIF)	Local government, developers	One-time charges for development approval	Development approval processes, fee schedules, infrastructure planning	Fees at development approval	Ensures infrastructure funding; upfront payment	Increased development costs; potential deterrent

Incentive zoning	Local government, developers	Density bonuses for public amenities	Zoning regulations, density bonus programs, urban planning guidelines	Increased property values, developer contributions	Encourages private investment; flexible	Requires careful planning; risk of overdevelopment
Land readjustment	Local government, developers	Land pooled, redesigned, and returned at higher value	Land pooling agreements, urban redesign plans, legal frameworks	Increased land value post-readjustment	Equitable value distribution; facilitates planning	Complex coordination; legal hurdles
Sale of public land	Local government, private entities	Sale of public land for funding	Land sale procedures, market valuations, investment planning	One-time payment from land sale	Immediate revenue; significant projects	Loss of public land; market conditions impact
Transfer taxes and stamp duties	Local government, property owners	Charges for land title transfers	Title transfer regulations, fee schedules, administrative procedures	Fixed fees or percentage of property value	Regular revenue; easy administration	Dependent on property market activity
Recurring lease payments	Local government, private entities	Lease payments for access/management	Lease agreements, management contracts, revenue collection systems	Regular lease payments	Steady revenue; private management	Aligning terms with public interest; potential conflicts

Crowdsourcing funds

Community or grassroots organizations may attempt to mobilize funds from residents, to manage and maintain public spaces within the neighbourhood. This could entail daily, weekly, or monthly contributions from individuals or households to fund activities such as street clean ups or landscaping, typically coordinated at the local level. Such management models help promote community ownership of public spaces and reduce the government's financial burden on public space management. This approach, however, poses significant challenges. Communities often lack the organizational capacity and resources to sustain such initiatives. Insufficient trust in public authorities and consequently lack of collaboration poses the risk of the community abandoning the space due to a lack of funding. In that case, there is no enforcement mechanism, considering it is a community-led initiative.

Action:
Mobilize community contributions for local public space management, while ensuring collaboration with public authorities.

Stakeholders:
Grassroots organizations, community members, ideally in collaboration with local governments.

Mechanisms:
Community coordination, contribution schemes, local management committees, and outreach to public authorities.

Philanthropy contributions

Private entities can contribute to funding public spaces. Donor funding may offer local governments access to grants from multiple sources for public space management. However, one downside of this type of funding is the question of ownership of the public space after improvements are made. Typically, local government should take ownership, but most donor agreements rarely make formal handing over to the local governments. To offset such risks, local governments should combine funding from different sources with their own funding.

Action:
Secure donations and grants for public spaces, while ensuring formal handing over to local governments and in combination with government funding.

Stakeholders:
Private entities, local government, philanthropists, donors.

Mechanisms:
Transparent funding agreements, combined funding sources.

Debt

Creditworthy local governments can borrow from capital markets to supplement their finances to invest in public infrastructure. However, most local governments, particularly in developing countries, are not as creditworthy to access capital markets. Local governments can optimize their Own Source Revenue and adopt more transparent financial management processes to enhance creditworthiness.

Action:

Borrow from capital markets to finance public infrastructure.

Stakeholders:

Local government, capital markets.

Mechanisms:

Loan agreements, bond issuance, credit rating management.

Table 4. A comparative of other financing instruments.

Source: Authors, 2024

Mechanism	Actors	Description	Tools/ Implementation	Revenue Generation	Advantages	Challenges
Crowdsourcing funds	Grassroots, community organizations	Community contributions for local public space management	Community coordination, contribution schemes, local management committees	Individual/ household contributions	Promotes community ownership; reduces government burden	Risk of insufficient funding; no enforcement
Philanthropy contributions	Private entities, donors, local government	Donations and grants for public spaces	Grant agreements, donor coordination, project management	Grants, donor funding	Access to additional funds; reduces public burden	Ownership issues; reliance on donor terms
Debt	Local government, capital markets	Borrow from capital markets to finance public infrastructure	Loan agreements, bond issuance, credit rating management	Loans, bonds	Funds large infrastructure projects: supplements budget	Requires creditworthiness; risk of debt

Conclusion and comparison of the different financing mechanisms

To summarize and compare the different financing mechanisms, the graphs below visualize the different financing instruments in the following categories:

- **Stability**: The consistency and predictability of the revenue generated.
- **Flexibility**: The ease with which the financing mechanism can be adapted to different situations.
- **Developer involvement**: The degree to which developers are involved in the financing mechanism.
- **Complexity and administrative burden**: The level of administrative effort and complexity required to implement and manage the financing mechanism.
- **Risk and market dependency**: The level of risk and dependency on market conditions associated with the financing mechanism.

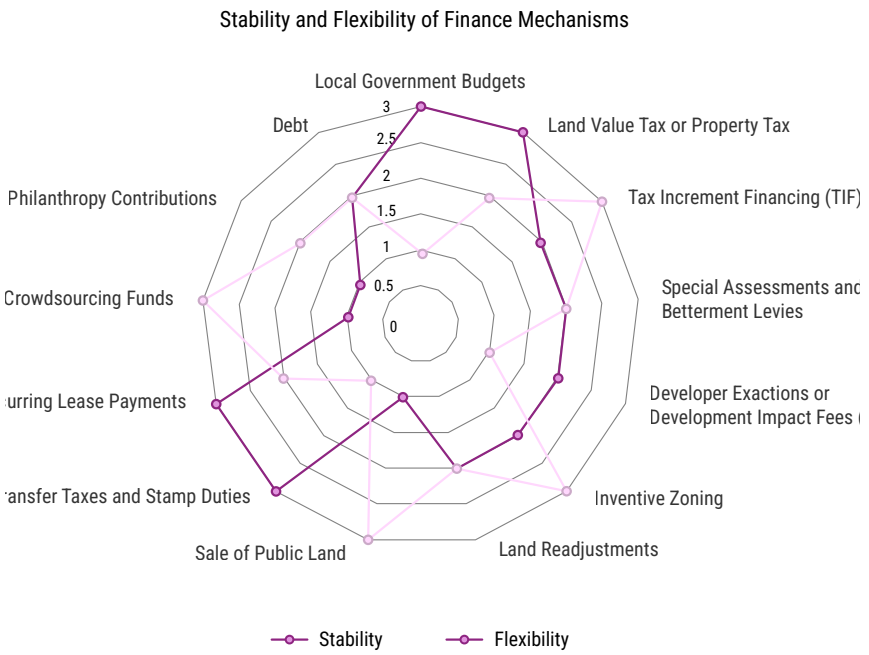

Figure 9. Stability and flexibility of finance mechanisms.
Source: Author, 2024

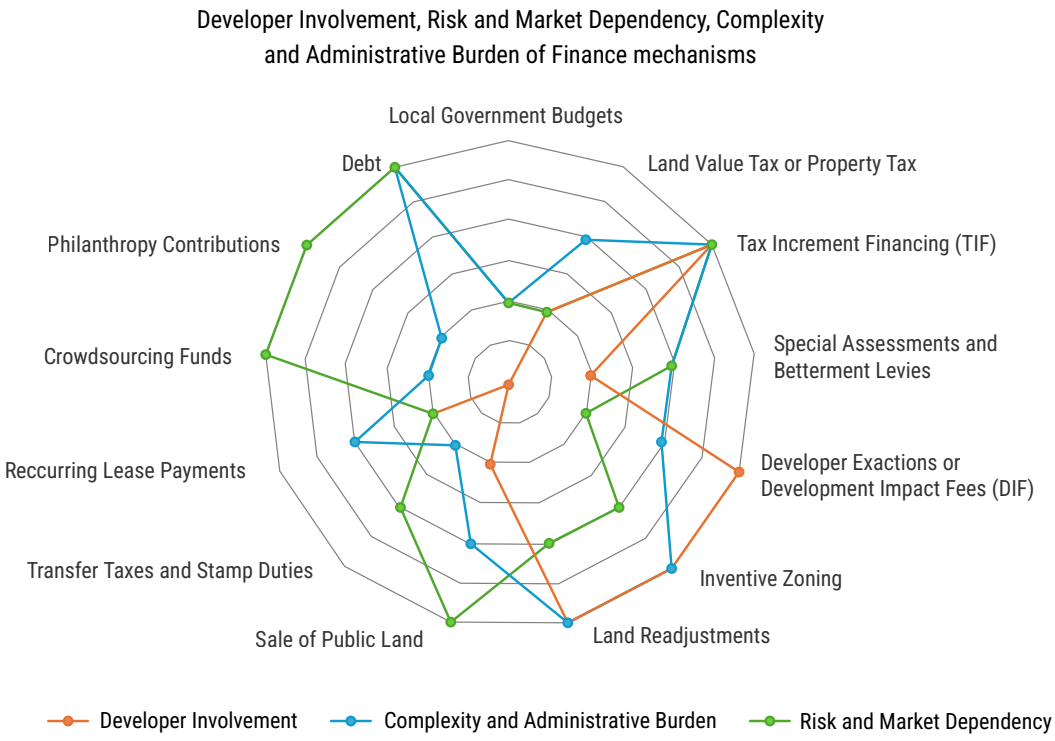

Figure 10. Finance mechanisms burdens.

Source: Author, 2024

4. Monitoring & Evaluation of Public Space Policies

Impact of public space policies

This publication focuses on outlining legislation, governance, and innovative financial mechanisms as a comprehensive framework to address public space challenges regarding both their sustainable development and effective management. Policymaking and design are challenging tasks that consistently require assessment of both the development and the implementation of the policy. Hence, this chapter focuses on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as critical components of a policy's success.

M&E provides a structured approach to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of policies. However, it is often either underdeveloped or inadequately resourced, leading to potential risks.

For instance, M&E is sometimes not designed into the policy from the outset, which undermines its ability to track progress or outcomes (McDavid et al., 2019). Even when included, M&E may suffer underfunding, making it difficult to carry out the necessary evaluations (Bamberger & Mabry, 2019).

Moreover, this chapter will provide methods to monitor and evaluate policies, as well as demonstrate assessment frameworks for the policy components: legislation, governance, and finance of public spaces. These frameworks will help ensure that policies are not only effectively implemented but also continuously improved based on real-world feedback and data.

What is monitoring and evaluation?

UN-Habitat places significant emphasis on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to ensure accountability, improve program effectiveness, and contribute to global knowledge on sustainable urbanization. Thus, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are integral components of any effective policy framework. Monitoring is the ongoing process of collecting and analysing data to track the implementation of a policy, ensuring it is being executed as planned (UN-Habitat, 2021). Evaluation, on the other hand, is the systematic assessment of a policy's outcomes and impacts, determining its effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement (World Bank, 2023).

Monitoring involves regular collection and analysis of information to track progress and adjust as necessary.

Evaluation focuses on understanding the broader impacts and outcomes of the policy, assessing whether the policy goals and objectives have been achieved.

Together, **M&E** provide a feedback loop that informs policymakers, and decision-makers about what is working, what is not, and what needs to be changed. They ensure accountability and transparency and improve decision-making.

Monitoring and evaluation of public spaces

Effective M&E are pivotal in ensuring that public space policies achieve their intended outcomes. The objectives of M&E are multifaceted, addressing various aspects of policy implementation and impact. By systematically tracking and iteratively assessing the policy process, M&E upholds the integrity of the policy process, enhancing its effectiveness, and ensuring that it remains aligned with its goals.

However, **M&E is often not integrated as part of the policy from the outset** and can be under-resourced when included. This can undermine the policy's long-term effectiveness. Furthermore, M&E carries certain risks—it can be politically manipulated to present selective results or, in some cases, completely forgotten and recommendations not considered, leading to missed opportunities for improvement (McDavid et al., 2019).

Without adequate follow-up, M&E becomes a formality rather than a tool for meaningful change, which threatens the inclusiveness and sustainability of public spaces. The primary objectives of M&E in public space policies include ensuring compliance with policy directives, evaluating the impact of the policy, supporting data-driven decision-making, enhancing accountability among stakeholders, and promoting transparency throughout the policy implementation process. These objectives are critical in fostering sustainable development, effective management, and inclusive governance of public spaces.

Therefore, **adequate resources** and **political independence** are crucial to ensure that M&E frameworks are properly implemented and not subjected to manipulation or neglect (Bamberger & Mabry, 2019; Rist & Stame, 2006).

Objectives:

- **Ensure policy compliance:** Verify that the policy is being implemented as intended (UN-Habitat, 2021).
- **Assess impact:** Measure the effectiveness of the policy in achieving its goals (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2023).
- **Improve accountable decision-making:** Provide data-driven insights for informed policy adjustments and improvements (GovPilot, 2023).
- **Enhance accountability:** Ensure that stakeholders are held accountable for their roles in policy implementation (UN Women, 2023).
- **Promote transparency:** Facilitate open communication about the progress and impact of the policy (OECD, 2023).

Theory of change as a methodology for M&E

A theory of change (ToC) is a strategic method used to explain how specific interventions are expected to lead to desired development outcomes, based on a thorough causal analysis of available evidence.

For effective public space policy, a ToC should be grounded in comprehensive analysis, stakeholder consultation, and lessons learned from diverse contexts. Importantly, **a well-developed ToC must also be based on scientific findings**. This ensures that proposed interventions are not just speculative but informed by research and proven methodologies.

Unfortunately, in practice, public officials sometimes rely on assumptions or intuition, presenting it as a ToC when there lacks ample scientific evidence about what works and what does not. Strengthening the science-policy interface is crucial to ensure that ToCs are robust and evidence-based. A sound ToC helps identify effective solutions to address the root causes of issues hindering progress.

It guides decision-making by considering the advantages, effectiveness, feasibility, and uncertainties inherent in any change process.

Additionally, a ToC highlights underlying assumptions and risks, which must be understood and revisited throughout the implementation process to ensure that the approach leads to the desired change.

Why use theory of change?

1. Addressing complex development challenges

Development challenges are multifaceted and often deeply embedded in societal structures. A theory of change (ToC) helps systematically address these underlying and root causes by considering interdependence among the various factors.

For example, simply opening a legal aid clinic may not lead to increased access to justice for women unless cultural sensitivities, legal reforms, and childcare constraints are also addressed. ToC enables policymakers to prioritize interventions that can maximize impact by addressing these interconnected factors.

2. Enhancing learning and adaptation

ToC provides a robust framework for learning within and between programming cycles. By explicitly articulating the causes of develo-pment challenges and testing assumptions against evidence, ToC ensures a logical pathway for achieving desired outcomes. It facilitates course corrections when approaches are not working as planned or when risks materialize.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation help refine assumptions and adapt strategies to deliver planned results, making ToC a dynamic tool that evolves with changing circumstances, especially in response to crises and shocks.

3. Strengthening partnerships and consensus

ToC is a valuable tool for developing and managing partnerships. It fosters consensus among stakeholders, including programme planners, beneficiaries, donors, and staff, by establishing a shared understanding of the intervention logic. Early involvement of stakeholders in the planning process enhances buy-in, motivation and demonstrates how their contributions lead to long-term impact. This collaborative approach strengthens partnerships and coordination, ensuring that all parties work towards common goals and complementary outcomes. However, a well-executed ToC can also highlight ineffective strategies, which may be difficult for stakeholders with vested interests. Known as the “unwelcome message,” this transparency is crucial for refining approaches and directing resources to impactful solutions. Managing these messages ensures the ToC’s integrity and fosters honest dialogue among stakeholders.

4. Enhancing communication and strategic clarity

A common ToC provides a unified framework for effective communication. It clearly articulates the vision and strategy for how change can happen, making it easier to communicate the purpose and approach of interventions to beneficiaries, stakeholders, donors, governments, and partners.

By summarizing the work in a concise and understandable manner, ToC emphasizes real change over mere activities and outputs, ensuring that discussions focus on meaningful outcomes and impacts.

In short, using a theory of change enhances the effectiveness of public space policies by addressing complex challenges, fostering learning and adaptation, strengthening partnerships, and improving communication.

It is a strategic tool that guides decision-making, prioritizes interventions, and ensures sustained and impactful development outcomes.

Theory of change for public space policies

This section will demonstrate the application of the theory of change (ToC) to this policy document, focusing on the legislation, governance, and financial mechanisms of public spaces. Before delving into its application, the section outlines the key principles and steps for developing an effective ToC, as adopted from the UN Development Group (UNDG) framework.[12] This approach ensures a structured and evidence-based methodology to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of the policy, aiming for sustainable and impactful outcomes.

How to develop a ToC

The approach to developing a theory of change (ToC) for public space policies aims to bring improved clarity and quality to the process of programme design and implementation using a simple, flexible methodology.

An overarching ToC should be developed to help explain the outcome areas prioritized by the policy framework, including aspects of legislation, governance, and innovative financial mechanisms.

Theories of change can be elaborated for each outcome area as a basis for identifying and explaining the policy outputs included in the implementation work plans.

This methodology recommends three key principles and four sequenced steps for developing a theory of change.

Key principles for developing a theory of change

Consultative development : A ToC should be developed through a consultative process that reflects the understanding and meaningful engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, community groups, and private sector partners.

Evidence-based and science-policy nexus : A ToC should be grounded in robust scientific evidence, ensuring that interventions are informed by proven methods.

12 https://unsdg.un.org/resources/undaf-guidance-theory-change

This requires a strong science-policy interface, where scientific research directly informs policy decisions. The ToC should be continuously tested and revised to remain relevant and effective.

Continuous learning: A ToC should support continuous learning and improvement from programme design to closure, incorporating feedback and lessons learned throughout the implementation process.

Key steps for developing a theory of change

1. Focus on high level change:

Objective: Determine the high-level changes the policy aims to contribute to within the context of sustainable development and effective management of public spaces.

Approach: Use evidence from comprehensive assessments, such as:

- The Common Country Analysis (UN, 2023),
- Planning Law Assessment Framework (UN-Habitat, 2018),
- A Quick Thematic Guide for Mainstreaming Safe, Inclusive, and Accessible Public Spaces into National Urban Policies (UN-Habitat, 2020),
- Governance Assessment Framework for Metropolitan Territorial and Regional Management (UN-Habitat, 2020),
- Public Space Site-Specific Assessment (UN-Habitat, 2020),
- Global Public Space Toolkit (UN-Habitat, 2016),
- City-Wide Public Space Assessment toolkit (UN-Habitat, 2020),
- as well as align with strategic frameworks like the UN Vision 2030.

2. Identify needs for desired development change:

Objective: Identify the specific needs required for the desired development change to occur, informed by problem tree analyses and other evidence.

Approach: Analyze underlying causes of issues identified in the Common Country Analysis, consult stakeholders, and ensure proposed solutions address the core problems and promote equity, feasibility, and comparative advantage.

Validation: Validate these needs with empirical evidence and stakeholder consultation to ensure relevance and feasibility.

3. Make assumptions and risks explicit:

Objective: Clearly define the key assumptions that underpin the theory of how change will occur and identify significant risks that could influence the process.

Approach: Assumptions about causality, implementation, and external factors must be scientifically informed and evidence based. Science is crucial in answering, "What do we need to do to achieve X or Y?"—and actively involving empirical data specialists ensures that these assumptions are grounded in the latest research. Regularly review and revise assumptions as new data and stakeholder feedback are received.

Risk management: Identify potential risks and develop strategies to manage and mitigate them, ensuring the theory remains robust under different scenarios.

4. Identify partners and key actors:

Objective: Identify the partners and actors most relevant for achieving each result, considering the related risks and assumptions.

Approach: Determine roles and responsibilities within the policy framework, including collaboration with government agencies, private sector entities, academic institutions, and community organizations.

Integration: Ensure alignment with overall policy goals and principles, promoting coordinated efforts and leveraging resources effectively.

By adhering to these principles and steps, the theory of change for public space policies will provide a clear and logical framework for achieving the desired outcomes.

This structured approach facilitates the identification of necessary resources, activities, and partnerships, and ensures that the policy is grounded in evidence and stakeholder consensus.

The following section will apply this methodology to the specific components of the policy document, detailing the pathways to achieving sustainable, inclusive, and well-governed public spaces.

Application of ToC in public space policies

This figure below, demonstrates the application of ToC in developing public space policies, programs, and initiatives, highlighting legislation, governance, and finance as essential components for sustainable development and efficient management of public spaces.

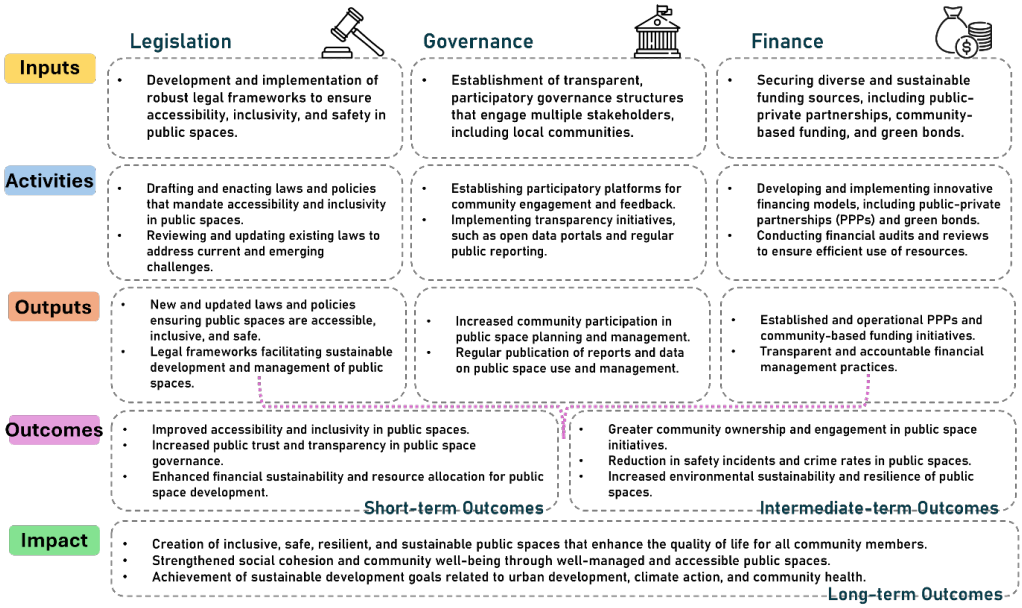

Figure 11. Theory of change for public space within legislation, governance, and finance

Source: Authors, 2024

5. Recommendations

This publication has examined the role of legislation, governance, and financial frameworks in promoting safe, accessible, sustainable and robust public spaces. Public spaces are vital for urban life as they provide areas for social encounters, recreation, and community engagement. This chapter discusses the challenges and presents recommendations that are particularly crucial for policy, law, and decision-makers.

Legislation: Challenges and recommendations

Legal complexity and ambiguity: One of the major challenges in urban legislation is the complexity and ambiguity of legal provisions. When laws are difficult to understand and interpret, compliance becomes challenging for both officials and the public. This often leads to inconsistencies in enforcement and arbitrary interpretation, which, while sometimes understandable, can create space for abuse by officials. Such ambiguity undermines the intent of the legislation and can result in unintended consequences that hinder the achievement of policy goals.

Recommendation

Simplifying and clarifying public space legal provisions is essential to ensure they are easily understandable and interpretable. This includes engaging legal experts to review and streamline complex legislation, reducing opportunities for arbitrary interpretation, and ensuring transparency. Additionally, providing training for officials and the public on new legal frameworks can significantly enhance both compliance and consistency in enforcement, reducing the risk of misuse or abuse of the law. Reviewing inconsistencies and overlap between national and local legislation is also advised.

Outdated legal frameworks: Many cities still operate under outdated legal frameworks that no longer address contemporary urban realities. These laws, often restrictive, fail to accommodate modern challenges such as climate change, public space provision, rapid urbanization, and technological advancements. While updating these frameworks is necessary, it requires considerable political will, resources, administrative capacity, and time. Additionally, it is important to recognize that laws are often one step behind evolving realities—this lag is inevitable but manageable with proactive approaches.

Recommendation

Regularly updating legal frameworks to reflect current urban challenges is essential, despite the natural lag between legislation

and urban development. Establishing periodic reviews of urban laws for public space and involving diverse stakeholders in the legislative process will help ensure that laws remain relevant and adaptable. However, successful updates also require building significant administrative capacity to manage the complexity of legal revisions and to implement them effectively.

Limited legislative expertise: Municipal authorities often lack access to specialist legislative expertise needed to draft, implement, and enforce effective laws. This limitation can result in poorly designed public space legislation that fails to achieve its intended outcomes.

Recommendation

Building research-informed capacity and expertise within subnational and local authorities to draft, implement, and enforce effective laws is necessary. Providing training programs and creating partnerships with academic institutions and legal experts can help enhance legislative capabilities.

Ineffective enforcement: Human and fiscal resources are part of effective law-making which requires that regulatory impact assessments are done before starting a legal reform process to ensure that required capacities are in place prior to enacting the laws.

Recommendation

Strengthening enforcement mechanisms as part of law-making processes to ensure robust and fair implementation of laws is critical. Allocating sufficient resources for enforcement, adequately training personnel, and establishing transparent accountability systems are key steps to reducing corruption and enhancing the effectiveness of urban legislation.

Political interference: Political interference in the legislative process can lead to urban laws and policies that prioritize short-term political gains over long-term urban development goals. This can result in inconsistent and ineffective legislation that undermines sustainable urban planning and the development of public spaces.

Recommendation

To mitigate political interference, it is essential to establish legal safeguards that ensure the legislative process remains transparent and objective. Introducing legal provisions that mandate public participation and independent oversight during the drafting and implementation of urban laws can help prioritize long-term urban development goals. Additionally, enacting legislation that sets clear criteria for decision-making processes can reduce the influence of short-term political agendas.

Lack of standardization in land allocation: In many cities, there is no standardized legal requirement for the allocation of land for public spaces. This often results in inconsistent provision of streets, sidewalks, parks, and green areas, as urban planners and private developers have wide discretion in the creation of these spaces.

Recommendation

Implementing legal mandates that require property developers to allocate a certain percentage of land for public spaces during the urban development process is essential. This can be achieved by conditioning subdivision or building rights on the provision of dedicated public land. Incentives such as tax breaks or increased floor area ratios can encourage exceeding these requirements. Integrating public space needs into urban planning, legislating temporary uses for idle spaces, and engaging the community in the planning process will ensure public spaces are equitably distributed and meet residents' needs.

Over-reliance on expropriation for acquisition of land: Many cities still rely heavily on expropriation to acquire land for public spaces, which is often controversial and can provoke public backlash. This method is not only time-consuming and resource-intensive but also ineffective and risky, as it disproportionately benefits a few at the expense of the majority population. Expropriation can create tension between governments and communities, undermining trust and delaying public space development.

Recommendation

Moving away from expropriation as the primary tool for land acquisition is crucial. Instead, governments should prioritize more collaborative methods, such as land swaps, land readjustment, and offering incentives for private landowners to voluntarily dedicate land for public use. These approaches are less contentious and promote cooperation between stakeholders. Where expropriation is unavoidable, the process should be streamlined to ensure fair compensation, transparency, and public engagement, but it should be used sparingly and only as a last resort.

Inadequate legal provisions for public space planning standards: Existing planning standards often lack clear and adequate provisions for public space requirements.

In some regions, such as parts of Africa, there are no binding legal standards, resulting in substandard public spaces that fail to meet the community's needs.

Recommendation

Establishing robust and clear planning standards is necessary. Legislation should define minimum space requirements for public areas and incorporate comprehensive design guidelines. This includes requirements for accessibility, safety, environmental sustainability, and aesthetic value to ensure public spaces are accessible, safe, functional, attractive, and inclusive.

Governance: Challenges and recommendations

Coordination and transparency: Effective governance of public space requires coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, private companies, and community groups. However, weak coordination, fragmented institutional frameworks, and a lack of transparency often hinder these efforts. These issues lead to policy fragmentation, duplication of roles, sectoral overlaps, and inefficiencies, ultimately undermining public service delivery and eroding trust among stakeholders.

Recommendation

Enhancing coordination and transparency within the governance of public spaces is crucial. This can be achieved by creating formalized platforms for stakeholder engagement, establishing clear roles and responsibilities, and promoting regular communication and collaboration. Additionally, conducting institutional audits to identify overlaps and gaps, streamlining processes, and fostering inter-agency collaboration can lead to more efficient service delivery. Promoting open data initiatives and involving stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation processes will further ensure more predictable and coherent urban development plans.

Sustainability and longevity: Ensuring the long-term sustainability of public spaces requires ongoing management and maintenance. Governance frameworks that rely heavily on volunteer or community-based efforts may struggle to maintain momentum and resources over time.

Recommendation

Developing effective governance frameworks that ensure the long-term sustainability of public spaces is necessary. Integrating public space management into broader urban planning frameworks, securing stable funding sources, and establishing maintenance and monitoring systems are essential for maintaining momentum and resources over time.

Inadequate decentralization: Decentralization is crucial for responsive and efficient urban governance. However, many countries exhibit inadequate decentralization, resulting in centralized decision-making processes that do not reflect local needs and priorities.

Recommendation

Enhancing decentralization to enable responsive and efficient urban governance is crucial. Delegating decision-making authority to local governments, providing adequate resources, and building local capacity to address specific community needs can lead to more effective and tailored urban solutions.

Inclusive public participation: Effective management of public space requires inclusive public participation. However, meaningful involvement remains challenging, particularly in communities with low social capital as well as limited time commitment or a history of distrust between the community and authorities. Inclusive and action-focused participation is often hampered by the low representation of underprivileged groups, including women, children, youth, persons with disability, and ethnic minorities, First Nations, migrants, and disadvantaged individuals.

Recommendation

Increasing meaningful and action-focused community participation in public space management is crucial for their sustainability and success. Developing inclusive engagement and action focused strategies, building trust and social cohesion through accountability and transparency, and empowering communities with decision-making authority and resources can lead to more robust, vibrant and resilient public spaces. Implementing targeted outreach and engagement initiatives to involve underprivileged groups can ensure their voices are heard and their needs addressed.

Weak digital governance: While digital tools have the potential to enhance governance by improving transparency and accountability, many countries face challenges related to digital divides and inadequate safeguards for data protection.

Recommendation

Leveraging digital tools to enhance governance while safeguarding data protection is important. Investing in digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy through capacity development, and establishing robust data protection policies can improve transparency, accountability, and the overall effectiveness of urban governance.

Finance: Challenges and recommendations

Limited funding: Securing sufficient funding for the development and maintenance of public spaces is a common challenge. Many local governments operate with constrained budgets and may prioritize other areas over public space investment.

Recommendation

Recommendation: Diversifying funding sources, including people-public-private partnerships, grants, and community fundraising initiatives, can help ensure the availability of necessary financial resources.

Unstable revenue sources: Many financing mechanisms, such as land-based financing and people-public-private partnerships, can be subject to market fluctuations and economic downturns. This instability can impact the availability of funds for public space projects.

Recommendation

Developing stable and resilient revenue sources for public space projects is crucial. Implementing land-based financing mechanisms, establishing dedicated funds, and exploring innovative financing options such as green bonds and social impact bonds can help mitigate the impact of market fluctuations and economic downturns.

Administrative burden: Implementing and managing various financing mechanisms can impose a significant administrative burden on local governments. This includes the complexity of managing multiple funding sources, complying with financial regulations, and ensuring transparency and accountability.

Recommendation

Streamlining administrative processes to manage financing mechanisms efficiently is essential. Implementing digital financial management systems, providing training for administrative staff, and establishing clear guidelines for financial management and reporting can reduce the administrative burden on local governments.

Equity and accessibility: Ensuring that public spaces are equitably distributed and accessible to all segments of the population is a financial challenge. Investments in public spaces must consider the needs of underprivileged and underserved communities to minimize exacerbating social inequalities.

Recommendation

Prioritizing equitable distribution and accessibility of diverse types of public spaces is important for addressing social inequalities. Conducting needs assessments to identify underserved areas, allocating resources to underprivileged communities, and implementing inclusive design principles can ensure that investments in public spaces benefit all segments of the population. The active involvement of underprivileged communities in the design and development of public spaces will further address this challenge and help reduce the risk of the public space perpetuating existing inequalities.

Insufficient financial and human resources: Local governments often lack the financial and human resources necessary to implement and sustain effective urban governance and planning. This lack of resources hampers their ability to carry out periodic capacity needs assessments and implement necessary reforms.

Recommendation

Strengthening the financial and human resources of local governments is necessary for effective urban governance and planning. Providing capacity-building programs, securing adequate funding, and promoting partnerships with private and non-governmental organizations can enhance resource availability and the ability of local governments to engage in meaningful planning and service provision.

6. Annex

Methodology

A **systematic** and **comprehensive desk review** was conducted to ensure a robust understanding of public space policies, focusing on legislation, governance, and innovative financial mechanisms. This methodology was designed to provide clarity and quality in the process of policy design and implementation, following the guidelines of the UN Development Group framework (UNDG).

Approach and data sources

The review incorporated a diverse range of sources to cover the critical aspects of public space management: **legislation, governance**, and **finance**. These sources include publications from UN agencies, academic journals, and reports from international organizations.

- **UN-Habitat Publications:** Toolkits and knowledge products from UN-Habitat, such as *"Global Public Space Toolkit (2015)"*, *"*Planning Law Assessment Framework *(2018)" and "Streets as Public Spaces and Drivers of Urban Prosperity (2013)"*.
- **UN Women Reports:** Publications related to safe and inclusive public spaces, such as *'Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces (2017)", and "A Safe City for Women and Girls: A Toolkit for Action (2019)"*.
- **World Bank Documents:** Reports focusing on the economic and social aspects of public spaces, such as *"Competitive Cities for Jobs and Growth (2015)"* report.
- **Academic Journals:** Peer-reviewed articles accessed through databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and PubMed,
- **Publications:** from practitioners and organizations, such as "Gehl, J. (2010). Cities for People", and *"Project for Public Spaces. (2023). How to Turn a Place Around"*.

Figure 12. International Literature on Public Space.
Source: Authors, 2024

Additionally, this review applied a specific selection criterion:

Scope: Publications from international organizations and peer-reviewed journals, documents explicitly discussing public space design and management principles, and literature published in the last 15 years.

Delimitations: Non-English publications, documents focusing solely on rural or non-urban spaces, and articles lacking empirical data or theoretical insights relevant to public space design.

In total, 35 documents were analyzed, comprising 15 reports, 12 articles, and 8 academic papers.

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Public spaces are vital for the dynamic social, environmental and health need functions as part of public life of diverse user groups, as they provide areas for social encounter, civic and political engagement, recreation (including work, play and study), shelter needs and other forms of community engagement. This publication has examined the crucial role that legislation, governance, and financial frameworks play as critical aspects of public space management and development. It has provided a detailed analysis of how the above frameworks influence the creation, management and sustainability of public spaces.

This is particularly relevant and useful for many decision-makers and stakeholders since globally, current legislative, governance and financial approaches often fall short of effectively managing public spaces, leading to neglect, deterioration, and ultimately privatization of public space. Thus, by showcasing innovative models to strengthen legal frameworks, improve fiscal resources and enhance governance frameworks, this publication makes a significant contribution to the achievement of SDG 11, especially target 11.7 which aims (by 2030) to deliver universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

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