

3 DIMENSIONS TO ADVANCE SOCIAL EQUITY IN SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

How industrial legacy cities are designing municipal programs with an equity focus

How can we unpack the concept of social equity in city planning? How can interventions be designed with an equity lens? Breaking down the concept of equity into three simple dimensions helps to communicate about social equity with different stakeholders, mainstream equity thinking and ensure municipal programs are designed to increase equity across the city.



ACCESS

Local governments seek to ensure more equal access to public services and infrastructures for all local residents – independent of factors like age, neighborhood, income, social group or language.



PARTICIPATION

The more programs are designed with rather than for residents, including all voices across the city and involving those affected early-on, the more they meet local needs and generate long-term impacts.



OPPORTUNITY

To offer fair perspectives for all, local governments are targeting 1) improved access to quality education for all, 2) provision of career perspectives and 3) increased diversity in employment.

SOCIAL EQUITY: A HISTORIC PRIORITY OF INDUSTRIAL LEGACY CITIES

The [Urban Transitions Alliance](#) is a global network of industrial legacy cities who have committed to realizing sustainable and inclusive urban transitions. With deindustrialization, severe job loss in industrial sectors and ongoing disinvestment that primarily impacted former worker's neighborhoods have led to social inequality as a major transition challenge in many cities that had relied on industrial growth for their overall development and prosperity. Underprivileged and minority groups often faced systematic exclusion due to discriminatory policies and practices. The equity aspect of urban transitions thus constitutes a joint priority for industrial legacy cities in the Alliance. To ensure all residents can thrive and find the support they need, Alliance cities have started to consider equity implications across all their projects and strategies.

Usually, municipal programs either target equity as a process (*procedural equity*) aiming to include unheard voices in designing the process of addressing inequalities, or equity as an outcome (*distributional equity*) aiming to ensure equal access to resources, services and opportunities. In our understanding of human needs and urban societies, individuals are closely embedded in social structures and rely on these links to thrive. The more people feel part of a community, the more they will be engaging - strong community ties boost our sense of belonging and identity, encourage active participation in community matters and thus support civil society and social entrepreneurship. Community links are closely connected to urban design as the availability and condition of physical spaces define the context of social interactions.



THREE DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL EQUITY



When analyzing equity-focused programs in Urban Transitions Alliance cities, three different dimensions or pathways to address inequalities emerged: **ACCESS**, **PARTICIPATION** and **OPPORTUNITY**. These are by no means mutually exclusive – very often, programs succeed best when all three aspects are considered early on. Working on the social equity dimensions will strengthen local communities because it 1) ensures physical infrastructures and services benefit all, 2) gives a voice to everyone and sends the message that everyone matters and 3) provides opportunities for all to contribute to the community in meaningful ways. Municipal interventions to strengthen community links also correspond with all three equity dimensions: provision of community spaces and accessible contact points (access), collaboration with community projects and neighborhood institutions (participation) and realization of workshops and cultural activities (opportunity).



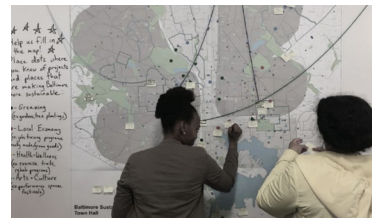
ACCESS

This dimension is closely related to the concept of distributional equity. Depending on factors like age, neighborhood, income, social groups and language among others, not all residents have the same access to public services and infrastructures. To ensure that no individual or group in the city is excluded or left behind, local governments can strengthen inclusive access by considering affordability, different target groups and their needs, intelligence on barriers to access and contact points for support.

TOOLS

- Spatial mapping of access and demographics per neighborhood (e.g. food access, tree canopy cover, income, rent, age);
- Identifying champions that can convey the needs and expectations of their community.

IN PRACTICE



Mapping of energy burden or access to green space, tree canopy and other factors per urban neighborhood in [Baltimore and Cincinnati](#); Food Environment Maps in [Baltimore](#)



Municipal energy centers in [Katowice](#) and [Dortmund](#) to provide access to energy support programs



Recycle-a-bike project in [Buffalo](#) for access to active and sustainable mobility from an early age

Buffalo Water Worx

Community-focused green infrastructure project in [Buffalo](#) strengthening **access** to green space, **participation** and co-creation through design developed and implemented by youth and a career **opportunity** component.

Buffalo's Willert Park neighborhood had suffered from long lasting disinvestment and high poverty rates. The city's "green streets" revitalization project involved local residents, block clubs, neighborhood council members and churches in the planning, implementation and maintenance of rain gardens for two community centers. The gardens were realized in the "Water Worx" summer school: Kindergarten and school children were educated to execute the design and layout themselves while being introduced to sustainability related career opportunities. "Water Worx" shows a true holistic approach: The environmental benefits go hand in hand with increased community ownership and career inspiration.

HOLISTIC EXAMPLE



PARTICIPATION

Linked to procedural equity, this dimension refers to the governance aspect of equitable design, emphasizing both the involvement of residents in the process and the engagement of underrepresented voices to ensure no one is left behind. The more programs are designed with rather than for residents, involving those affected early-on, the more they meet local needs and generate long-term impacts. This can be ensured through active outreach and citizen-led engagements that invite co-creation, also increasing public acceptance and ownership.

TOOLS

- Outcome-open / blank page engagements
- Participatory budgeting
- Sharing + transferring responsibilities (e.g. commons, trusts)

IN PRACTICE



Every story counts campaign and neighborhood ambassador program in [Baltimore](#) to inform sustainability planning with an [equity lens](#)



Essen: More than 200 citizen projects funded in EU Green Capital year of 2017, ongoing since



District festivals in [Essen](#), [Altendorf](#) + [Katowice](#), [Nikiszowiec](#) for inclusion, community building and sustainable revitalization of underserved neighborhoods



OPPORTUNITY

Unfortunately, current education and employment systems still perpetuate social inequalities, pre-defining questions of access and freedom of choice. To offer fair perspectives for all, local governments are targeting 1) equal access to quality education early-on, 2) provision of career perspectives through training and support programs and 3) increased diversity in employment in public institutions. In strengthening and diversifying the local labor market, key questions relate to connecting available talent and skills to employer's needs as well as to the quality and sustainability of jobs created.

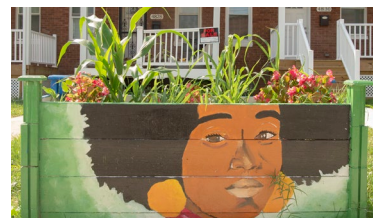
TOOLS

- Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP)
- Partnerships with universities and training institutions to ensure the workforce is skilled for sustainability projects and jobs

IN PRACTICE



Sustainable workforce transition collaboration in Pittsburgh with local [Energy Innovation Center](#) providing training and entry support for residents struggling on the job market (e.g. single mothers)



Arts apprenticeship and career opportunity program Art @ Work in [Baltimore](#) for youths creating beautification projects throughout their neighborhoods



New Ways to the water program in [Essen](#) with training component for long-term unemployed

CASE STUDY: CITY OF TURKU

CIRCULAR INTERVENTIONS MAPPING BASED ON THE THREE EQUITY DIMENSIONS

As Finland's oldest city and a key trade point in Europe, Turku ambitions to pave the way towards an economic model that shifts from extractive industrial practices to production models that reduce waste and primary resource demand. These collaborative efforts have already given birth to internationally recognized good practices and created a momentum around the circular economy in the city. As a result, the [Circular Turku](#) project was launched, which aims at identifying opportunities for circular economy action across five priority sectors and at engaging local residents and businesses in the transition.

As any sustainability framework, the circular economy has social implications. What are the impacts of circular economy projects on access to specific resources and their affordability? How do such projects influence the local labor markets and what are the related training and education needs? How can circular economy initiatives foster community links?

To answer these questions and ensure that Circular Turku will benefit all, the city has been working with ICLEI's Urban Transitions Alliance to map social equity interventions across the five priority sectors of Circular Turku: food, construction, transport, energy and water.

For each of these priority sectors, approaches to strengthen "access", "participation" and "opportunity" outcomes were mapped, based on best practices from other industrial legacy cities. The mapping also identified relevant local actors to engage and existing programs to build on. Identifying these opportunities early on in the roadmap process allows stakeholders to be aware of the dimensions and local actors to consider when prioritizing circular economy interventions. Such a mapping is also a relevant manner to start a conversation with city departments outside of the environmental sustainability space.



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Launched in 2017, the Urban Transitions Alliance is a city network and knowledge-exchange hub of innovative urban transition policies and projects. It supports industrial legacy cities from across the globe to identify common challenges, share knowledge and develop equitable solutions to successfully guide their individual sustainable transitions.

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