

UrbanA Podcast – Episode 12 Transcript

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Episode Information

Topic: Drivers of Urban Injustice

Hosts: Ian M. Cook, Kate McGinn

Guests: Panagiota Kotsila, Isabelle Anguelovski, and Jonathan Luger from the Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability.

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Transcript

[Music]

Episode Introduction (0:00 – 0:56)

Kate: Hello, Ian, how are you on this wonderful day?

Ian: Stop being so happy.

Kate: Why shouldn't I be happy? We're making the Urban Arena podcast about trying to create sustainable and just cities.

Ian: And you think that is cause to be so sprightly?

Kate: Is it not?

Ian: I mean, didn't you ever stop to think about what's driving injustice and unsustainability?

Kate: Well, of course, but that doesn't mean I can't greet you in a cheerful manner. Have you been thinking too much about the drivers of injustice?

Ian: Actually, funny you should ask that, Kate, because I have are not only thinking about it, but talking about it too. Have a listen to this.

[Music]

Why Discuss Drivers of Injustice? (0:57 – 6:28)

Ian: Alrighty, So here we are to have a conversation about drivers of urban injustice. And with that in mind, I have three wonderful guests, so I'm wondering could you first, erm, please all introduce yourself. Let's start at the top of my screen, So Panagiota.

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Panagiota: Yes, I'm : Panagiota Kotsila, I'm a postdoctoral researcher at ICTA in the Autònoma- Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, and I'm working within the UrbanA Project and at the Barcelona lab for Urban, Environmental Justice and Sustainability.

Isabelle: Hi, good morning. I'm Isabelle Anguelovski, I'm a colleague of Panagiota at ICTA and Barcelona Lab. My background is in urban studies and planning with input from geography, sociology, and the core interest in urban environmental justice issues. Thank you.

Jonathan: Hi, I'm Jonathan. In the past year, I have written my master's thesis under the supervision Panagiota and Isabelle, and I have continued working with them as an intern for UrbanA.

Ian: Great so afterwards you can- after they've left, we can have a session where you complain about your supervisors [Laugh]. But before we do that, we'll discuss, we'll discuss what we're going to be discussing here today. I mean, most of the podcast series and the wider project that it's part of has been looking quite often at maybe not necessarily solutions, but ideas or approaches of how people come to try and tackle issues of urban justice and sustainability. People who are trying, you know, interesting projects or ideas or have different conceptualisation about how we need to think about the world and our cities.

And then today we're talking about something which maybe might seem a little bit, maybe negative or maybe even counterintuitive to some people because we're going to be talking about what causes injustice. So I'm wondering, can somebody start by letting us know, like, why do we need to focus on drivers of injustice when we're thinking about just in sustainable cities?

Panagiota: Yeah, I mean, I think that one- one thing is that, um, that I've been noticing and that I think happens to a lot of people is when we ask people to think about justice, it turns into a pretty elusive concept. You know, what is justice? It might be, um, it's also very situated understanding- they have a very situated understanding. People think, well, whatever is good for people, should- every people should have access to it, and that's justice. But then who do we imagine as people who enters in our, um, in our understanding of people in the city? And also what are these things that we assume people want or need? This is a very situated understanding or conceptualisation of justice, and many times it doesn't correspond- it doesn't necessarily capture what justice is for those people that might be facing difficulties in reaching their full potential or in living fulfilling lives.

So basically, I think one reason to go and look at the drivers of injustice is because it allows us to understand better what is it that- what do we need to fix or mend in order for everybody to, um, to be able to live fulfilling lives in cities and in order for sustainability, so-called sustainability interventions to be part of this mending, and also to not exacerbate or create new types of inequalities that lead to injustice.

Isabelle: I mean, going back also to our core- core interest as, as researchers in critical social science, I would also say that injustice or justice is very much linked to, to social inequality. And so what looking at drivers of injustice, helps us accomplish is really disentangle what markers, what processes of social inequalities prevent people from

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accessing new environmental amenities or sustainability-type interventions like food cooperatives or new mobility systems like Panagiota was mentioning.

So, for instance, deep histories of, of urban segregation and marginalisation are part of those drivers of injustice, structural and individual racism, the role of cities now as drivers of capital accumulation through land values and through property acquisitions, and- and the value captures from those properties; so all of those processes of social inequality creation in cities really are at the core of what prevent some groups those who don't have political power or social power or economic power from staying in neighbourhoods or from moving to neighbourhoods where many of those interventions of sustainability are taking place and they try to take- they tend to take place in areas where land is being revalued or where a neighbourhood is being rebranded, because that's where most profits can be made and where most, let's say changing that image of a neighbourhood can be really profitable also for- for planners. And so that's really what we're trying to get at here, you know what is from a core standpoint, the types of social inequalities people are confronted with?

Determining Drivers of Injustice (6:29 – 9:26)

Ian: Mm-Hmm. Mm-Hmm. Thanks.

And I know- I want to ask you a little bit about, because you came up with- in doing some research, you came up with 10 different drivers of injustice. And I want to ask, I want to ask a little bit about how you came up with these 10 drivers. What was the method behind the work you did? I know later on we're going to speak with Jonathan, who did his master's thesis about this topic, and he's been sort of delving deeper into some of the same things. But first, let me talk about the research behind these drivers of- of these 10 drivers of injustice. So how did you get there and what was the method?

Panagiota: Yeah. So we began as part of a process in the project of UrbanA of identifying EU funded projects that have focussed the research on the topic of sustainability and justice in cities. And from that wide- wider pool of about 350 projects that UrbanA identified, we had a subset of about 43 projects that are dealing with both the question of justice and sustainability.

And so we went and looked at everything that these projects have produced from website pages, policy reports, deliverables, academic articles every kind of- all the discourse, all the knowledge that has been produced and is still available online. And basically, we compiled this material and we, we analysed it using a text-based analysis. We coded it. So we, we had a list of possible drivers, which was confirmed and adjusted according to what we found.

Ian: And just for clarity, in case people might not get the word drive, by driver, what are you meaning that cause or something slightly different?

Panagiota: Well, I mean, yes, cause, but it doesn't have to be a linear or cause-effect relationship in a very direct way. And also, these 10 drivers of injustice, as we explain, also in the in the materials that we've produced around- around this- this analysis, the drivers of injustice are not are not exclusive of each other. Many times their feed into each other. So one driver might be material inequality, which is a core driver of injustice that

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might lead to another type of, of condition, such as, let's say, I don't know, exclusion from participatory processes, which in itself is another kind of driver of injustice. So these have to be understood and really seen working in conjunction, working together.

So yes, there is a kind of a cause-effect that if there is this type of condition or process, there will be, we expect to see and we have seen some sort of injustice happening, taking place, um, but it's not always, you know, in time or scale or space, very direct relationship. Sometimes it goes through multiple steps for the type of injustice to be expressed.

Discussing Two Drivers of Urban Injustice (9:27 – 28:37)

Ian: Now, as you mentioned this 10, and we're not going to go through them all because there's not time to go for them all. But I'm going to put a link on the website and in the show notes, but I want to talk about two of them in this podcast. Maybe pick them a little bit and get some examples as well, because so far we've been talking, I guess, a little bit on an abstract level. So let's also think about some sort of examples by what we mean. And the two that I'd like to talk about. The first one is material on the livelihood inequalities. And then I'd also like to talk about uneven and exclusionary urban intensification and regeneration. So let's start with the first one. So what- what were you getting out when you said that a driver of injustice was material and livelihood inequalities?

Panagiota: Right. So beginning, let's say, from what, um from basic inequalities that we see in cities as well as generally in societies, people have less access, have less resources or less access to resources that they need in order to fulfil, you know, live a healthy, fulfilling life. Particularly in the context of urban sustainability, for example, we see that a lot of the neighbourhoods that have better amenities, better quality and less pollution, more greening are the more affluent neighbourhoods. So they're neighbourhoods where people are of upper class, higher income, higher education level, predominantly white.

So in contrast, people of colour, immigrants, people of lower income live in neighbourhoods that have been historically neglected, treated as, let's say, environmental dumps in the sense of having higher, more exposure to toxic materials to waste, to air pollution, et cetera, et cetera. So this is kind of a baseline inequality that we see. Now the driver of material livelihood inequalities can impact on further processes of sustainability. Right, so if we see, for example, schemes such as bike lanes, bike lane installation or expansion in cities, and we see where do they where they are placed, that might be one way in which material inequalities might express.

So people of lower income that live in neighbourhoods that are further out of the centre or that are not in the core kind of business or education districts find themselves excluded from this sustainability potential or amenity so they, they don't have access to bike lanes or they don't have access to these kind of municipal bike schemes. And so in the end, you see that, you know, sustainability interventions do not reach all people in the same way. And that is underlined by, by class, by income level, by material inequality.

Isabelle: I mean, bike lanes are particularly important, or let's say, everything that has to do with sustainable mobility planning, which is so much talked about now in the COVID context, like how can we minimise dense urban environments where people commute and pass through during the day? And you take the example of the city of Barcelona,

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where we have increased the number of bike lanes, expanded the side of, of sidewalks, giving even new lanes for pedestrians or for scooters. But at the end of the day, residents who are able to use those new bike lanes tend to be those that depend on only short commute distances and are able to go very easily and in sports attire or in, let's say, more loose close to their to their job.

But if you live in the periphery of the city where you have to live because income, your income doesn't allow you to live closer to your job, and oftentimes we're talking here about jobs in retail or in tourism, or even in- in support to, um, to health dependent people, then you cannot use those nice bike lanes. You are dependent on public transit. And so if you don't have dense, affordable and reliable transit systems, then you are very much at risk of just contracting the infection way more and then also arriving late at work and being fired with a much lower welfare system of, um, of support that actually would also be behind you in that context. So in that sense, you know, material inequality prevents you from using those nice mobility initiatives that- that cities now have in place unless you really live in the centre and everything around you is this 15-minute city that so many municipalities are going for now.

Ian: Hmm. Mm. Mm-Hmm. Panagiota I see you also want to jump back in.

Panagiota: Yeah, no, this is this is also making me think how you know, this driver of material inequalities is also beyond direct access to a resource or amenity, or, let's say, a good, but also defines how, how much you can access processes, right? So a lot of times if you belong to a, let's say, immigrant community, you, you're facing material inequalities, which then also put you in a position to not be able to participate in the certain processes, let's say, of decision making of, you know, community consultations, et cetera on the one side, so then creating a different type of, let's say, obstacle to your, to your benefit from sustainability interventions because you don't have the voice to- your voice's not being heard in- during the process of negotiation of implementation, etc.

But also, many times we see, as- I will mention, the example of The Liberties in Dublin, neighbourhood in Dublin that like a post-industrial neighbourhood with predominantly lower income people, but also heavily gentrified lately, where we see that different kinds of sustainability interventions like community gardens are in great risk because the neighbourhood has been, um, has been made attractive to higher income groups, you know, entrepreneurs, the international students with the ability to pay higher rents. And so because there is this push for, for housing in Dublin, Dublin has been historic- it has been lately, I think, one of the most expensive cities to rent a flat to be able to live in, so there's this push for building high rise apartments as a push for development for creating new housing, which means that things like community gardens that mean a lot of things to people of lower income in certain neighbourhoods, etc., like The Liberties are being sacrificed in the name of urban regeneration or development, which is what we're going to talk about next. So there's multiple aspects, you know, that's why I said that this is a core driver because it can really- you can really see it working in many different aspects of justice and sustainability in cities.

Ian: But can I ask, how, because with both of the examples I was thinking, with both bike lanes or bike sharing and also community gardens, and I can understand all the arguments you're making, I'm wondering, can we also maybe think a little bit about how, let's say, the acceptance or the prevalence rather of, you know, the usual thing that of

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caring about the environment or being interested in these things is very often expressed through middle class cultural practises as well? I mean, I mean, and of course, this changes from country to country. But like riding a bike in Budapest is very often more of a middle class thing rather than a working class thing, partly because of the reason that Isabel suggested, but also simply, it's just it's simply just the- also, even from, even from when people are teenagers or going into their 20s, it's still just, and they're not going to work if they're just going out to like, out to the pub or like going out on the week- or like going somewhere on the weekend, like to a park or whatever to meet their friends, it's still more of a middle class thing to be on a bike than than not. And I'm just wondering, like, how then do I guess class-based cultures, if you like, how do they feed in to accessing to sustainability initiatives, thinking about this question of material inequalities?

Isabelle: I agree with what you say on the one hand, because it is- it is the practises of the tech workers, the creative class, the young people who tend to be privileged or who tend to be taken into consideration when planning those new infrastructure or even when preserving community gardens. But on the other hand, it's not because the other types of groups are not doing it, it's because they are not recognised for what their practises have been.

So there's a really interesting concept in the US, which is about bike lanes being white lanes through black neighbourhoods, and basically, that's I think what we're seeing as a pushback, which is, well, you didn't care about us in New Orleans or in Portland in particular or in Cleveland 10, 15 years ago, when we bike, people were biking through unsafe streets. But now that X or Y neighbourhood is being, um, is being gentrified, is being revitalised, for instance, Albina in in Portland, well, now you care about it and you are going to create those safe bike infrastructure for white people. And I think that's really the push back.

Or if you take the example of the Lafayette Greenway in New Orleans, which is a beautiful kind of green corridor of resilience infrastructure against flooding, has playgrounds, has gardens and has bike lanes again, it is within a broader planning project, which is about climate adaptation to flooding in New Orleans and increasing property values in those areas. And so these- these whole greenway is assorted with high-end condos being built around them, and all of the bike lanes are passing through black neighbourhoods like Tremé. So of course, residents are just like, you're not doing it for us, you are doing it for others. But we were there before and we used those bike lanes. We used biking before, but in much more precarious conditions.

Ian: Mm-Hmm. Mm-Hmm. Go on Panagiota, I see you also went to come.

Panagiota: Yeah, no, I was thinking also that beyond that, sometimes I think, you know, we're kind of reproducing this coloniality of what *can* be sustainability, right? Like, why is riding a bicycle the dominant expression of sustainability in cities? Why can't we see at- the waste pickers that are predominantly people of colour and many times, immigrants that go and actually, you know, perform and practise, you know, the mantra of environmentalism, reuse, recycle, etc. but they're not being recognised, their work is not being protected, they don't have any kind of Social Security, et cetera, et cetera. So maybe we need to also broaden our perspective on what is sustainability practise in cities.

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Ian: Yeah. Yeah, I have a good example of that, why I was thinking about the street where I live, when I first moved it used to have benches and put out some flowers, but there was also a couple of homeless shelters close by and is quite a wide street and a big street, so often local homeless people would sleep on on those benches, so local shop owners complained to the local city council and said get rid of the benches because I don't want homeless people sleep in front of my shop. They got rid of benches, got rid of the basically the area for inhabiting the public space.

And I've lived there since 2008, so obviously it's been quite a while and things have started to change, and there are still homeless shelters there, but slowly, you know, the usual story of gentrification is taking place. And the last, um, the last local government that was in power, they beautified all of the local parks in many ways, and in some ways, interesting ways. But at the same time, they criminalised – but on a wider level, it wasn't the local government – but criminalised activity- criminalised homelessness to a large degree, including dumpster diving, as you say in an American way, like going through rubbish bins. And what the homeless population do in Budapest is they go around the dustbins, they're not looking for food, they're actually looking for things they can sell in a recycling plant. So like glass and metal and so on and this, and this was criminalised.

But as you point out, this is actually really, you know, the most, the most dedicated hardcore environmental practise; to go through other people's shit they've thrown out and actually find value and worth in there and make sure it doesn't end up in a rubbish dump. But this was never, this would never be framed as an environmental activity. It always be framed as basically, you know, either, either coming from poverty or being criminal as well. So, yeah, exactly this reframing of what we think of as a, as a- as a just or sustainable- sorry, exactly reframing what we think about being environmental practises is very much based on these class issues as, as well.

But let's, let's move on to the second driver before we get too bogged down with my musings, which is uneven and exclusionary Urban intensification and ge- regeneration. So I mean, somebody might be, first of all, saying, wait, wait a minute, urban regeneration? That- that's a driver of inequality? What's going on there?

Isabelle: Yeah, I think it's always a big puzzling and pausing- so what are we talking about? We're talking about, generally speaking, municipality led reinvestment programmes in neighbourhoods that have had a lot of vacant land, decaying industries, poor housing stock, low access to the centre of the city and to, to just connections, poor food choices; so it's a kind of a whole package of measures driven by an urban municipal plan and often associated via public private partnerships, or only speaking private investment via the transformation of these old decaying stock into high end housing. And of course, also the addition of, in general, higher end housing within vacant land.

And we talk about it very much within the context of sustainability because over the last 15 years, a lot of these urban regeneration has been associated with environmental amenities. So we're talking here about new parks and public spaces or these bike lanes. We are talking about new transit, transit lines, what is named as transit-oriented development – TOD, we're talking about maybe new markets or new food co-ops going-coming in and even the wider clean-up of a derelict waterfronts, for instance. So it's really a big package of, of measures.

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But the problem is, in order to make these area profitable, there is very much an appropriation of the land value that was unused before. So what some geographers like Neal Smith, have called the rent gap. And in order to fill that rent gap and to transform it into value, you need to capture value and transform an area that was not profitable from a property tax standpoint or rent or even sale prices of homes into area of higher value. So that's why you rebrand the neighbourhood as both green and liveable for a higher class. And you have all of these real estate developments around those amenities that are meant to be for higher income residents, residents with higher purchasing power. And unless you have very stringent affordable housing policies and a long existing housing stock that's being maintained, kept up over time, then you have processes of gentrification and displacement that unfortunately very quickly accompany these urban revitalisation.

Ian: Yes, so I mean, I guess, I guess the question you're asked a lot then if you're thinking about these things is so then – and maybe this is not completely fair because you're looking at drivers of injustice rather than coming up with, I'd say policy suggestions or solutions – is so what should we- what do we do? Should we not regenerate an area? What do you- how do you respond to that?

Isabelle: I mean, you have different cities that take very different approaches, and you also have a deeper social state or a welfare system that exists in some countries or some cities that will protect against those evictions and displacement. In a very rampant capitalist context like the US, you're very, very- you have very few margins of action unless you actually really have these very radical housing organisations making a big push for changing policies at the municipal level, but in general it's very difficult because in the U.S., municipalities depend on property taxes for so much of their budget, like schools, firefighters, nurses, et cetera, public nurses. So of course, at the end, they feel very trapped, especially so in the context of very neoliberal policymaking at the federal level where cities have been stripped of their funding.

So anyway, you have these very radical housing groups that are pushing for rent control, for instance, that exist now at the state level in, in Washington, which is the state where Seattle is based. You have tenant protection acts, like you have them in Boston with anti-eviction clause or just eviction clause, well, that's still being discussed in Congress. You have policies like in Washington DC that is called The Right to Purchase Act where African Americans are being, in general or tend to be the renters in the rental market of D.C. and when condos are being flipped into for-sale properties, they are the ones who have the first right to purchase. So that kind of gives them a sense of security. And then you have many other cities that tend to be in Europe where, when developers have to redevelop an area or bid for, let's say, building two hundred units, they have to comply with very stringent building norms.

So for instance, In Nantes for every 100 units of new housing being built, 56 of those units, so more than the majority have to be either social or public housing. That's really huge. If you compare it with the U.S., where the inclusionary zoning clauses tend to be 10 to 12 percent only of every block of housing being dedicated to, to affordable, it's- it's a very big difference. Or in Vienna, you have a lot of the decommodified housing that's being protected. So I think those are more promising approaches.

Sustainability and Justice in EU Projects (28:38 – 39:56)

Ian: Mm hmm. Brilliant. Thank you. I want to now maybe shift back, sort of circle the conversation round to what we started talking about, which was where you came from when it came to coming up with these drivers of injustice, and of course. As you said, there- a lot of this was informed by work you've done outside the context of actually looking at EU funded projects. But, and maybe this is also a good time then to bring Jonathan in, because I know Jonathan spent quite a lot of time really deep diving into the project documentation and other, and other outputs from EU funded projects.

So I'm wondering like, you know, so the EU spends a lot of money each year, you know sort of putting out calls for tenders for people to come up with projects that solve certain societal issues, and those are decided upon at a very high level and they trickle down. And people spend large parts of their lives putting together grants and consortiums to try and tackle these. So when it comes to questions of justice and sustainability, I'm just wondering like, So Jonathan, how are they usually, you know, expressed in EU documents- EU project documents I mean, the projects that are trying to tackle these issues?

Johnathan: Well, I think it's one of the interesting fin- most interesting findings is that in in the whole dataset of all the European projects that I was lookin- was looking at and delving into, justice is most often equated with participatory practises. And it is talked about in a way that justice is equal to participation, or it is signified by ideas of participation and inclusion, which is very good because participation, of course, is closely connected to, okay, can we include as many different stakeholders? Can we include indeed, like we said in the beginning, vulnerable communities in neighbourhoods? And what can- we include people in decision making, but also in the design of of sustainability interventions.

But then, on the other hand, it creates their quite a narrow mindset of what justice is, which is participation, and other types of justice. Can we talk about distributive justice? Can we talk about intersectionality or about epistemic types of justice? I mean, these are topics that that are very important to think about. But when you only think about participation and only think about inclusion, then a lot of new possibilities or possibilities as to how to engage differently with these topics, they become obscured and marginalised.

Ian: Mm hmm. That's that's, that's great. Thank you. I mean, it's super interesting, I think. And anyone please feel free to join in, or also, Jonathan, it's super interesting sort of the life of concepts. I think once concepts reach a certain level of bureaucratisation they- they take on a life of their own, or maybe even not even a life of their own, a death of their own because they're basically killed of critical potential they're killed of meaning, and they basically very, very quickly- you can see, you know, an idea from which, you know, people have really thought about something, doing research, doing serious scholarship, doing serious work in communities, push hard for an idea, within a few years, its boom, it's used everywhere, used all over the European Union and elsewhere, and it's used in documents and it's lost- it's, it's almost lost its meaning because- because it's just replaced the- it's just replace whatever, whatever the trendy word is that came before. Yeah, go on Panagiota.

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Panagiota: Yes, I mean, I just wanted to add here that it's interesting also to see how well, first of all, to see how the different outputs of projects engage differently with the concept of justice. Always, we talk about projects that have looked at justice *and* sustainability. And I think that's also important to see, you know, to what extent are people that are interested in sustainability, to what extent do they engage with social justice? Because there's also a great variety of projects that are only looking at social justice, but not environmentalism or sustainability, right?

So in this context, the different outputs that we saw that Jonathan looked into, um, we saw that when resistors are more free to kind of frame their own questions and apply their own thinking in more academic types of outputs, that also take longer to produce and need more, kind of require more time, more focus, more energy, there you see more critical thinking on justice in relation to sustainability. But when it comes to things like deliverables or policy recommendations, all in the framework of these like, mostly big consortium projects that involve a lot of different researchers from a lot of different disciplines, we see that kind of dilution of what could justice mean or how much do we delve into the drivers of injustice in cities?

And I think this is also part of what we, as academics and researchers are required to do, the timeframes that we're required to work in, you know, the fact that we depend on EU funding for our survival in universities many times. So all this we need to take into account also not to, kind of, point the fingers to researchers or to people who are in these projects that, oh, you know, you're not, you're not critical enough. People are critical, but maybe it's very hard to- to express radical opinions or to have the time to really think deeply with concepts when you're working in the framework of competitive and short-term European projects.

Ian: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. I think there's something really about the logic of project-projects, and I keep wanting to say isation, the logic of project-isation today that that we all we all feel, which is somehow really, really limiting what we can do. But that's, that's it; we have to have a- we have to have a project and you have to look at something and you have to solve it or you have to come to a conclusion, then you have to write in a report so that you get funding next time.

There's no space there for saying, you know what? Actually, what we found out was actually not particularly great. And you know, our methods didn't really work very well and the project didn't work very well. But anyway, thanks for the money. Can I have some more? That's just like, not, it's not gonna, [Laughs] it's just not going to work. So, so I guess I was also wondering a little bit about the yeah, I guess the, the, the, the methods. I guess if you look at project documentation like how much, how much can you really trust what's there, right? In terms of like an expression of what actually went on inside a project?

I know working in a, in a quite different field, sometimes in terms of opening up access to education, we have to present one story to the university management or the funders about what we do so that we can extract resources from them basically. We see it as a resource extraction process and then to actually use it for actually something which is genuinely more meaningful. So it might not be quite as negative as it seems in the documents, right? There might be people doing super interesting work under the guise of project- project documentation.

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Isabelle: No, I think these are all really important points. And I think Jonathan's thesis – and he can talk more about it, I'll make a very short point – also made a really interesting finding related to individual projects, or projects where you're not responding to a call and those that are part of consortium. So maybe I'll let Jonathan talk about it.

The only other, just very brief complementary point I wanted to add is related to how easy it is to tackle issues of participation. It seems that actually, you include a few minorities, you include a few women there, you have a focus group, or you have a workshop and you have fulfilled your inclusionary goals. And that's way easier, at least on paper, to share as an event to organise than to start saying: “capitalism is a problem, exploitation of racial minorities is the problem, and that's why they cannot access food co-ops” within, you know, big consortiums where people all have different backgrounds, some can be radical and some can be almost, you know, right-wing because they come from other schools of thoughts. Or, you know, we have economists, we have people from business schools in projects. I mean, there's no way they want to talk about capitalism being, capital accumulation, being the source of a problem. So participation is kind of where you don't find too many conflicts within consortiums, and on top of it, you also do not conflict yourself too much with the EU.

Jonathan: like you said, as well Isabelle about the, the- it was very interesting to see that it is indeed the consortium projects that struggle to engage in a systematic way with these ideas of justice as opposed to the individual grants. And like Panagiota as well said, I think it has a lot to do with the logic of how these projects operate, which is on this call-based structure, and the pressure is just extremely high, not only to actually work in the project, but also to get the grants in the first place.

Under FP7, the previous funding scheme of the European Union, there was only 16- 16% of the projects got accepted, and under Horizon 2020, it was a bit higher. So there is this drive to deliver results. And then, going back to your other point Isabelle, then participation is something that seems easier, it is a very tangible way to engage with justice and a very practical way, to engage with just, oh, we just invite these stakeholders, we just invite these residents, we just invite these people. That is a natural thing to do when you are under so much pressure. So it's again, what Panagiota said, it's not about pointing fingers, but it's just this this whole structure of getting funding that creates this dynamic in which also the more critical engagements with these topics, they just get buried under so much bureaucratisation, if you will.

Ian: Okay. All right. Well, I'd like to thank everyone for this discussion. I think it's like been super interesting like as usual with these things like more questions than answers, but I think it's actually also really good, especially as all of us now who are involved, either as academics or as practitioners or as activists or whatever, we've increasingly pulled into these, this world of, of, of projects. And so, and like negotiating projects, has become really a skill of life.

So I thi- and I think it's, it's one where we have to- we can't just be completely uncritical and naive about it, and- because for all the reasons we spoke about, but at the same time, is also we can't just reject it all because, because unfortunately we need- we can find good and we do need- and like exactly with the, with the, with the- with these 10 drivers that you came up with from the project documentation, you can find that actually being involved and looking through projects, you can actually find interesting stuff there as well.

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Okay, well, that leaves me with nothing more to do apart from to say thank you for everyone, for all of your contributions today. So bye!

Panagiota: Thanks for having us.

Isabelle: Bye bye!

[Music]

Post-Interview Discussion (39:56 – 45:59)

Ian: Alrighty, So, yeah, so Kate, you had a listen there to myself having a chat with Jonathan, Isabelle, and Panagiota, what did you think was some of the interesting things that came out of that discussion?

Kate: Yeah. Well, first off, I love that we discussed looking at drivers of injustice because I think Isabel mentioned this. But you know, it helps us kind of disentangle what processes of social inequality hold people back in accessing certain things, like she was mentioning food cooperatives or affordable housing, things like that. So definitely a worthwhile discussion to have.

I think one of the things that I was particularly interested in when you were discussing it was kind of this idea that when you think about sustainability, you just think still of like middle class white activities. So whether that's like going on biking trips or farming your vegetables in your local community garden, like it's still such a middle-class white thing. And I was thinking about this and kind of like why that's necessarily the case and kind of was pondering whether it's because sustainability is still kind of positioned around this idea of choice. If you have the choice to recycle that choice to buy a hybrid car, the choice to go on a bike trip, then you'll do it and then that's considered sustainability. But if it's a necessity, if you're dumpster diving because, you know, that is a sustainable thing to do, but also you're doing it out of necessity, then you're just doing it to cut costs. And so, kind of that dichotomy was super interesting to me.

Ian: Yeah, I think that's a really, I think that's a really brilliant point. And, and it speaks to, I guess, it speaks to the class blindness of a lot of the discourse around sustainability. But also, I guess the whole, um, I guess maybe even like a wider thing, the elevation of choice and the morality around choice and the performance of the choices that we make as to being like one of the sort of key almost identifiers of what sort of character we are in the current world today.

I mean, like, we have so much choice with everything that we never used to have in the past, you know, like, I mean, not only what we consume, but what school we send our kids to or, you know, what type of Christmas tree we buy if it's, you know, an eco-friendly one or these sorts of things. So I mean, I don't know, like everything is everyth- and the choices everywhere, and there's so much morality around that. And I think it's infused when it comes to these things around sustainability with these very, with this class discourse as well, you know, like and performing, I think performing your good sustainability character is also a marker of being of a certain class very often as well. So I mean, it's a

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really good point the difference between need and choice when it comes to, yeah, when it comes to the idea of what's sustainable.

Kate: Absolutely. And I think like again, it's a social marker and it's a- it's a again you're performing to everyone else saying, I am sustainable, I am, you know, upper middle class, I can take the extra 30 minutes to recycle my, my, my plastic and things like that.

Ian: Yeah. And you know, I was actually thinking about that in relation to something else. It's like when, but when you look at the biggest polluters in the world, you know, something like the top – and now I'm just going to do that silly thing whilst I'm being recorded on a podcast of like saying statistic, which I can't remember the actual source for or the actual number.

Kate: This is why we have show notes.

Ian: [Laughs]. Okay, you know what? I'm just going to say, you know, something like a very, very small percentage of people create like the sort of the real planet-damaging pollution that affects everybody else. So like, so actually, you know, even like, you know, middle class people, you know, spending the extra time to cycle to the organic, you know, cooperative to buy their food actually make such a tiny, small dent in the actual overall, you know, saving of our planet. Actually, you know, maybe, and this is maybe the problem with this sort of class blindness of, you know, environmentalism and sustainability movements that they'll actually be better spent building, you know, some sort of class war to wipe out the upper echelons of society who are causing the biggest, you know, the biggest amount, who, who are the biggest pollutants, you know, the top one or two percent of people in the world, richest people in the world are the biggest pollutants. So, it's actually, it is very much a class issue as much as it is a anything else.

Kate: Although I will say I think like again, unfortunately, like the middle class, upper middle class, those are the people in power or in traditionally powerful seats. And so like what they do is what other people also look at. So I think like the flipside of that is these types of people who are in powerful positions they like have a responsibility to signal sustainability. Now, of course, you know, if they are polluting insane amounts but then are cycling to work, obviously that's not positively signalling. But like, I think there is like a responsibility that they have because they're in these positions of power.

Ian: Hmm. Maybe we should speak to a powerful person on a future podcast,

Kate: Maybe next time around, next month.

Ian: You know- do you know any powerful people, Kate?

Kate: You're a quite powerful person. You're the host of a podcast!

Ian: We- we're co-host of a podcast, Kate.

Ian: Alrighty. Okay, so Kate, if people want to get in touch with us, how do they get- how do they find out where our contact details are?

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Kate: They look at the show notes. Yes, um, our emails and our Instagram handles are all below, so please get in touch with us, we want to hear from you. Want to hear your thoughts and your disagreements and your agreements?

Ian: Yes. Yes, we do. Alrighty. That's it for us for another month. Thank you so much for listening, and goodbye.

Kate: Bye.

[Both laugh]

[Music]

Disclaimer (46:00 – 46:19)

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