

D1.2

Mapping of the impact of inequalities on political participation and democratic quality

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Executive Summary

This document aims to provide a tentative conceptual map about the relationship among inequalities, participation/engagement and democratic quality, and a map of the impact of inequalities on political engagement and democratic quality across the Fairville network, as food for thought for the work of the other WPs, with a strong contribution from some Fairville labs.

The Introduction, besides this institutional framework, includes a description of the theoretical and methodological frameworks, including a description of the activity done. It is stressed that the relationship between inequality, engagement, and the quality of democracy has become an area of growing interest and debate. Understanding these dynamics requires an in-depth analysis of the interconnections and effects between inequality and engagement. This analysis has entailed both a literature review of their interactions and the collection of data from the field in the form of biographies of engagement collected in all the Fairville Labs.

Part One includes the description of the tentative conceptual map about the relationship between inequalities, engagement and democratic quality, based on a purposive literature analysis. Initial Definitions of Inequality, Participation/Engagement, and Quality of Democracy are provided. Then, based on the previous work done by Fairville WP1, four types of cases that we intended to identify were identified:

- Inequalities turn out to be a source and motivator for engagement
- Inequalities turn out to be a source of discouragement for engagement
- Engagement, by some of its characteristics, sometimes seems to fail to affect inequalities, or even reproduce them or create new ones
- Engagement, under certain conditions, seems to help effectively address inequalities, or at least lay the groundwork for addressing them.

Within this framework, it is hypothesised that the presence of co-production traits may increase the likelihood that citizen engagement in addressing inequalities may be more effective and make an important contribution on the side of the quality of democracy. This is considering that co-production is an approach and practice that is not without its obstacles and requires special preconditions.

Part Two includes a map of the impact of inequalities on engagement and democratic quality across the Fairville network, with particular reference to the context of some Fairville labs, namely those located in Berlin (DE), Brussels (BE), Dakar (SN), Giza (EG), London (GB), Marseille (FR), West Attica (EL). Taken together, the results obtained from the analysis carried out in the seven contexts of the Fairville labs considered made it possible to map specific phenomena of the relationship between inequalities, engagement and the quality of democracy.

The model of relations between inequalities and engagement illustrated in the conceptual map appears to demonstrate its validity across different contexts by highlighting aspects of these relationships that might not have emerged through other analytical approaches. This effectiveness appears to be consistent across all examined contexts

At the same time, the application of the model has allowed phenomena to emerge, both on a local and comparative level, that can enrich and complement it, e.g., from the point of view of the impacts of engagement, the knowledge production, the role of some “intermediary bodies” (NGOs, universities, etc.), the gender dimension.

In general, elements of co-production emerge strongly from the testimonies collected, and are often intertwined with other, more traditional modes of collective action.

INTRODUCTION

General framework

1. Institutional framework

D1.2 “Mapping of the impact of inequalities on political participation and democratic quality” is the second and last deliverable of Fairville WP1, led by K&I.

As stated in the Grant Agreement, Fairville aims to both document and propose pilot models of urban intervention that engage a plurality of actors in the collective improvement of deprived urban neighbourhoods via a deepening of resident and user participation in new and existing democratic processes. In this framework, Work Package 1 “Data collection for inequalities’ impact analysis on political participation and democratic quality”, is meant to provide an initial information base on the impact of multiple inequalities on political participation and democratic quality.

This Deliverable presents the results of the work done under the WP1 Tasks 1.2 (Data collection from literature, led by K&I), 1.3 (Data collection from territorial cases, led by UCL) and 1.4 (Overall analysis, led by K&I). The document aims to provide a tentative conceptual map about the relationship among inequalities, participation/engagement and democratic quality and a map of the impact of inequalities on political engagement and democratic quality across the Fairville network, as food for thought for the work of the other WPs, with a strong contribution from some Fairville labs.

This deliverable is divided into an Introduction and two Parts. The Introduction, besides this institutional framework, includes a description of the theoretical and methodological frameworks, including a description of the activity done. Part One includes the description of the tentative conceptual map about the relationship between inequalities, engagement and democratic quality, based on a purposive literature analysis. Part Two includes a map of the impact of inequalities on engagement and democratic quality across the Fairville network, with particular reference to the context of some Fairville labs, namely those located in Berlin (DE), Brussels (BE), Dakar (SN), Giza (EG), London (GB), Marseille (FR), West Attica (EL).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. *Inequality and participation in the post-modern societies: the democratic conundrum*

The relationship between inequalities, participation, and engagement, as well as their impact on the quality of democracy, can be better understood within the context of the profound transformations occurring in contemporary societies. These transformations are marked by changes in the relationship between social structures -such as social norms, behavioural models, roles, and values - and individual and community actors. Driven by factors like globalization, expanded access to education, and the widespread availability of computer-based technologies, traditional social structures are weakening, while the autonomy of individuals and groups is growing. This increased autonomy allows individuals to make their own choices, shape their own identities, and develop their own worldviews.

We can refer to this trend as a rise in “human subjectivity”, meaning that to different extents, and with different features contemporary societies reflect a large-scale increase in the importance, complexity and

density of the cognitive, intellectual and emotional dimensions of individuals. This transformation unfolds asymmetrically across regions, influenced by distinct cultural traditions, economic development levels, and governance models, from liberal democracies emphasizing individual agency to authoritarian systems managing collective modernization. It is a process which is also characterised by a high degree of uncertainty since social structures are becoming weaker, more flexible and more subject to change (Quaranta 1986, Giddens 1991, Beck 1992). We can say that new forms of human agency are emerging, producing a “surplus” of human energy, so that individuals are more and more “capable” of generating new ideas, innovating and overcoming everyday life constraints, while their field of action is broader and less limited by territorial boundaries (d’Andrea 2010). A dynamic towards innovation that can be expressed in a variety of new forms of participation and engagement (also thanks to the opportunities offered by new technologies), as well as through destabilising manifestations of dissension or revolt.

At the same time, there is an attempt by state institutions to cope with these highly energetic forms of collective and social action to regain control. This leads, on the one hand to experimenting with new modes of involvement and dialogue with the citizenry along a spectrum that ranges from mere tokenistic consultation to real and proper co-production (d’Andrea 2010, Pateman 2021). On the other hand, we witness several examples of an authoritarian backlash with new coercive forms of social control and attempts to channel the social energy that fuels protest towards supporting autocratising processes even in long-established democratic regimes (V-Dem report 2023, B. Herre in Our World in Data).

In this context, the issue of inequalities has become especially prominent. This is not only because, as we will discuss below in the next paragraph, various forms of inequality have begun to rise once again, whether between countries, regions, territories, or social groups (World Inequality Database, Our World in data), but also because the current climate of subjectivity influences how people respond. Individuals no longer react solely to conditions of deprivation in an absolute sense but also to the disparities between the living conditions of different groups, which are felt as unjustified and avoidable. At the same time, when these inequalities become too pronounced, they carry with them deeply debilitating effects, further exacerbating societal tensions and divisions.

For the purposes of the Fairville project, inequalities in spatial dynamics are particularly salient. They represent a complex phenomenon that manifests through various dimensions, such as socio-economic segregation in urban areas, economic disparities between cities and rural regions, and regional inequalities. All factors that have a profound impact on territorial development and the quality of life within communities. This too will be further discussed in the next paragraph.

In this context, a reflection on the complex relationships between inequality, political participation, and the quality of democracy is of particular relevance. This reflection will be developed by combining insights from the existing literature on the topic with the practical experience gathered at the Fairville Labs.

2.2. Initial Definitions of Inequality, Participation/Engagement, and Quality of Democracy

a. Inequality

The starting point of this discussion is the recognition that contemporary societies are witnessing a new rise in different forms of inequality. This reality is clearly reflected in data from the World Inequality Database, which demonstrates how inequality is becoming an increasingly prominent issue across the

globe. Historically, after a prolonged period during which economic disparities gradually – albeit unevenly – narrowed, and poverty levels diminished, most European countries began to experience rising economic inequality from the 1980s onward. This shift has had profound negative effects on social cohesion, equal opportunities, and democratic stability, as highlighted by the European University Institute (EUI) in its *Inequality, Welfare, and Social Justice* cluster.

Recent megatrends, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or global warming, have exacerbated existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. These global challenges have further deepened the disparities faced by marginalized groups, revealing the fragility of previously assumed progress in reducing inequality. Despite significant strides in fulfilling basic needs, research indicates that gaps in more advanced achievements – such as wealth accumulation, social mobility, and access to higher education – remain persistent, or in many cases, are widening. According to the report “Inequality Kills: The Unparalleled Action Needed to Combat Unprecedented Inequality in the Wake of COVID-19” by Nabil et al. (2022), these enduring gaps highlight the structural nature of inequality.

Moreover, the sources referenced in D1.1 suggest a progressive broadening of the understanding of inequality, no longer limited to an economic approach, mainly focused on indicators such as disparity in income, rent and wealth in different population percentiles, or Gini index. Rather, inequality is more and more understood as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that affects various areas of human well-being. According to the EU Multidimensional Inequality Monitoring Framework (MIMF), inequality must be analysed by considering a broad spectrum of factors, including economic, social, and environmental dynamics. These dynamics intersect in diverse ways, impacting different groups in distinct manners, a perspective that aligns with the intersectional approach. In other words, inequality cannot be fully understood without recognizing the multiple layers of disadvantage experienced by different segments of the population.

Thus, inequality encompasses a broad range of dimensions. On the one hand, there are more tangible, operational aspects, such as disparities in economic opportunities, housing, power, health, access to technology, environmental quality, and political participation. On the other hand, there are intangible, cognitive aspects tied to education, cultural dynamics, religious and gender factors, stress, and leadership opportunities. These less quantifiable dimensions are just as important in understanding the overall impact of inequality on individuals and communities (UNESCO 2005; EU MIMF 2022).

For the purpose of our work, we have considered diverse approaches to typify inequality, each with its own merits. These traits are not meant to be exhaustive but are intended to pragmatically organize field data alongside the conceptual map.

For starters, as we have seen, inequality is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that must be analysed by considering the various dimensions of human well-being (EU Multidimensional Inequality Monitoring Framework – MIMF).

There are several lists of inequality dimensions proposed by international organizations or research centres. The EU MIMF identifies 10 key life domains to provide a comprehensive system of inequality indicators at the national level: (1) knowledge and skills, (2) health, (3) material living conditions, which includes also indicators for housing inequalities, (4) natural and environmental conditions, (5) working life, (6) cultural life and leisure, (7) political participation and “voice,” (8) social and family life, (9) physical integrity and safety, and (10) overall life experience.

For Therborn (2012), inequalities represent avoidable and morally unjustified hierarchical differences. Three main categories of inequality can be distinguished. Vital inequality refers to differences in health conditions and life expectancy. Existential inequality limits the opportunities or freedom of action for certain groups or categories of people. Material inequality refers to the deep disparities in the resources available to individuals. According to this author, the presence of strong inequalities has detrimental effects on the social fabric of contemporary countries “Increasing social distance between the poorest and the richest diminishes social cohesion, which in turn means more collective problems and fewer resources for solving all our other collective problems”.

It is important to note that it is not the difference per se between individuals or groups that causes social inequality, but the deprivation that it engenders for certain categories (Duvoux 2021). Such deprivation can take different forms: denied access to decent housing, to healthy food or environment, to certain professional spheres, and so on. Social inequalities can thus be associated with the notion of social injustice, in the sense that they lead to a deprivation of fundamental rights for certain citizens.

Another relevant distinction amply presented in the literature is that between vertical and horizontal inequalities. Vertical inequalities refer to the disparities in income, wealth, and resources between individuals or different social groups within a society. These inequalities often stem from differences in economic status, which can result in unequal access to opportunities, services, and power, leading to a broader societal divide. Typically, vertical inequalities are framed in terms of a hierarchical structure, where wealth and resources are unevenly distributed, creating a gap between the affluent and the disadvantaged (Alberti et al. 2021).

On the other hand, horizontal inequalities relate to the unequal distribution of opportunities, resources, and constraints even within the same social group. These distinctions are defined (or constructed), according to variables such as gender, age, geographic location, religion, or ethnicity. These inequalities arise when certain categories of people face systemic barriers or exclusion based on characteristics that define their collective identity, regardless of their overall wealth or income. Unlike vertical inequalities, which focus on the economic divide between individuals or groups, horizontal inequalities highlight how social, cultural, or political factors lead to inequitable treatment. (Alberti et al. 2021, EU Group “Fighting Inequalities through development cooperation and stronger partnerships”)

Another important distinction is that between inequality of outcomes and inequality of opportunities. Inequality of outcomes refers to disparities in the distribution of income, wealth, and other material goods, where certain individuals or social groups end up with greater access to resources and advantages than others. In contrast, inequality of opportunities concerns the unequal distribution of life chances or opportunities across individuals or social groups, affecting their ability to achieve desired outcomes, regardless of effort or ability. This form of inequality is rooted in the structural barriers and constraints that prevent individuals from accessing the same opportunities for success, such as education, healthcare, or social mobility (Rawls 1971, Sen 1992, Roemer 2000).

Unequal opportunities also underpin what is referred to as transgenerational inequalities, where life chances – or lack thereof – are passed down from one generation to the next Stuhler (2024). This perpetuation of disadvantage across generations is a significant issue, as it reinforces the cycle of inequality within families and communities. These transgenerational inequalities are often the result of circumstances beyond an individual’s control, such as the socioeconomic status or educational background of their parents, which can limit their own opportunities and future prospects.

In the *Social Report 2020*, UN DESA highlights that, amid the global debate surrounding rising inequalities, “a consensus has emerged that all should enjoy equal access to opportunity – that one’s chances to succeed in life should not be determined by circumstances beyond an individual’s control”. However, the report also emphasizes that “the world is far from giving all people and groups the same opportunity”, illustrating the deep-rooted challenges that persist in addressing inequality of opportunities globally. This points to the ongoing need for policies and interventions that can effectively level the playing field and provide all individuals, regardless of their background, with fair opportunities to succeed.

As we mentioned above, a particularly important area of concern for the Fairville project is the spatial dimension of inequality, particularly phenomena such as spatial segregation by income within metropolitan areas, the growing economic divide between cities and rural areas, and regional disparities. Numerous scholars have highlighted that rising economic inequality is often accompanied by increasing levels of socioeconomic segregation in urban spaces worldwide (van Ham et al. 2021). Cities in low-income countries typically exhibit higher levels of segregation, but perhaps more strikingly, cities in high-income countries are seeing even faster growth in inequality and segregation. This has led to a convergence of global trends, as urban socio-economic segregation increasingly mirrors similar patterns in both developing and developed nations. These phenomena underscore a growing universalization of inequality and its spatial ramifications (van Ham et al. 2021).

The effects of spatial inequality are not limited to economic differences. They also manifest in terms of social mobility, access to opportunities, and even basic life quality. The geographic location of individuals and communities plays a crucial role in shaping their life chances, with those in segregated, economically disadvantaged areas facing barriers to upward mobility and social participation (Soja 2013).

Local dynamics are further complicated by the local impacts of environmental issues, such as climate change, and the increasing flow of migration both within and across national borders. These changes undermine traditional models of territorial governance and exacerbate local inequalities. The process of de-territorialization, as described by Paasi (1998) and Elden (2005), refers to the weakening of the connection between communities and the territories they inhabit. This process is particularly evident in rural areas, mountainous regions, small islands, outlying areas, and former industrial towns, where depopulation and the erosion of local economies have led to the potential disappearance of entire communities. In some cases, the loss of local control over territory has triggered the fragmentation of social ties, reducing communities’ resilience and their ability to address the challenges they face.

In short, the dynamics of inequality are deeply interwoven with spatial, social, and political processes. As contemporary societies become increasingly interconnected, inequality manifests in ever more complex forms, affecting various facets of life and impeding progress towards a more just and equitable world. Addressing these inequalities requires not only a recognition of their diverse forms but also a coordinated, multi-dimensional approach that considers the interplay of economic, social, and environmental factors.

In this context, also the debate about the mechanisms that generate inequalities has expanded. The aim of this report is not to trace the history of this debate; rather, we will limit ourselves to highlighting some positions that appear most relevant to the interests of Fairville. Piketty (2013) highlights how in contemporary societies, capitalism generates increasingly pronounced income inequalities, in contradiction with the principles of equality and solidarity promoted by democratic societies. According to Tilly (2005), inequalities primarily arise from the unequal control over certain key resources, which evolve over time. In contemporary societies, these resources tend to include financial capital, information

repositories, media, and scientific knowledge. For Therborn (2012), inequality is produced through four mechanisms: distancing, where some individuals advance while others fall behind; exclusion, through which barriers are erected that make it impossible – or at least more difficult – for certain groups to access a dignified life; hierarchical institutions, which structure societies and organizations like ladders, positioning some individuals at the top while relegating others to the lower rungs; exploitation, in which the wealth of the more privileged is derived from the labour, subordination, and deprivation of the poor and disadvantaged.

Inequality is a complex phenomenon having a multidimensional and systemic nature. It can be understood as hierarchically differentiated access to elements that have “value” in a given society as well as the opportunity to obtain such elements (whether material or symbolic goods such as wealth, health conditions, level of education, cultural background socially recognised as legitimate, etc.). In our case, we assume that urban allocation of resources (services, housing) and politics of risk management are also a source of inequality or can help redress inequalities. This means that inequalities are not just linked to belonging to a particular social group but also to cultural, gender, socio-ethnic or religious membership or backgrounds¹.

We can add that inequalities – whether economic, social, or political – can undermine democracy by concentrating power in the hands of a few (who have more education and resources) and limiting the ability of marginalised groups to participate effectively. This results in overwhelming elite influence on political processes and produces an underrepresentation of the working class or specific categories in political institutions (see Part 1, paragraph 3 of this report).

As stressed above, in Fairville we focus on rising inequalities, mostly located within metropolitan regions and in the relationship with “left behind” areas.

b. Participation/Engagement

There is a complex relationship between participation, inequality, and the quality of democracy, as participation (or, more broadly, the citizen’s ‘voice’) can also serve as one of the criteria for evaluating the other two phenomena. This will be explored in the final section of the chapter. In this section, we examine the elements that help define how we will approach the concept.

As it was noted for equality, also the notion of political participation, in its broader sense, refers to a complex system of meaningful actions. According to the Council of Europe, “Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship are about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities to contribute to building a better society.”²

There are several lists of participatory actions in the literature, according to Uhlener (2015) “[*participation*] Includes activities such as voting, communicating, lobbying, campaigning, donating, contacting officials, petitioning, protesting, and collaborating with others on various issues”.

¹ See Fairville Deliverable 2.1, Draft of a common glossary and common grid for analysis, with related sources.

² Goździk-Ormel, Ż. (2008). Have your say!: manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. Council of Europe.

Thus, political participation, in a broader sense, is defined as voluntary actions carried out by individuals, communities, organisations of different kinds to influence public policies (e.g., through the selection of policymakers), or to exercise direct power for change, at various levels, from international to national and local. Participation has several degrees from mere consultation to active involvement of citizens in decision making³ and is very often thought as top-down or undertaken with the assumption that public authorities should initiate it. In the last decades, further forms of political participation have emerged in both urban and rural contexts, to co-produce new knowledge and improvements, i.e. to contrast injustices and inequalities and foster social transformation (Ulahner 2015). These later forms are key for Fairville, as participatory processes that manifest as authentic forms of citizen engagement, where citizens co-produce public policies and co-determine their outcomes. It is these practices “from the bottom” that need to be captured and thought of as real engines of fair change.

The discussion about the forms of participation (or engagement) impinges on the third issue that we are going to discuss in the next section, namely the quality of democracy. Such a discussion has evolved to include distinctions between different democratic models and methods, with several possible overlaps, which we will not explore further here (Pateman 2012, Fung 2015, Floridia 2014, Dacombe 2016, Sintomer 2018, Luhtakallio & Thévenot 2018, Parvin 2020, Gherghina, Mokre & Mişcoiu 2021

c. Quality of democracy

The discussion around what should be understood by the quality of democracy and how to measure it is gaining increasing interest.

In the last few decades, the concept of democracy has evolved, and so too has the way we evaluate it. The definition of what constitutes a “good” or “high-quality” democracy is not fixed; instead, it depends on several dynamic and multifaceted criteria. At the core of the debate is how to conceptualize the very essence of democracy and the methods used to measure its quality. Historically, attention first focused on the process of democratic transitions, assessing how new democracies emerged and stabilized. However, as more nations embraced democratic governance, the discussion shifted toward understanding the internal workings and robustness of established democracies (Diamond & Morlino 2004).

In the 1990s, scholars and analysts began to focus on the process of consolidating democracy, exploring the challenges that new democratic systems face in maintaining stability, strengthening institutions, and ensuring the rule of law. Over time, as democracy became more widespread globally, the conversation broadened. Scholars, international organizations, and NGOs began to acknowledge that democracy was not simply about the existence of elections or the formal structures of political systems. Instead, there was a growing recognition that the quality of democracy also involves how well democratic principles are implemented, protected, and sustained (Diamond & Morlino 2004).

The development of tools to assess democracy’s quality, such as indices and rankings (like those provided by V-Dem or Democracy Index) has been critical in helping to measure democratic health and identify where improvements are needed. This process became even more important in the face of an emerging “backlash” against democracy – a situation where autocratic forces are rising in many parts of the world, undermining the democratic gains that had been made over the past century. According to the latest

³ See Fairville Deliverable 2.1, Draft of a common glossary and common grid for analysis, with related sources.

report from the V-Dem Institute, which monitors the state of democracy in over 200 countries, nearly 75% of the global population now resides in societies classified as autocracies, the highest percentage recorded since 1978. For the first time in over 20 years, the institute identified more autocratic regimes than democratic ones⁴. This backlash is not limited to newer democracies or fragile states but is affecting long-established democratic countries as well, which challenges assumptions about democracy's enduring strength (V-Dem 2025 Report).

The rise of autocratisation processes – which include the erosion of democratic norms, the weakening of judicial independence, restrictions on free speech, and attacks on electoral integrity – are now central to the global conversation.

This shift underscores the need for an in-depth understanding of democracy's quality in order to safeguard against backsliding and to ensure that democracies remain responsive, inclusive, and resilient. Thus, the purpose of this section is not to cover the entire academic or political debate about the quality of democracy but to examine some of the frameworks and definitions that could be useful to highlight their interplay with inequalities and participation.

According to Diamond and Morlino (2004), “the quality of democracy is a value-laden and hence controversial subject. Who is to define what constitutes a ‘good’ democracy, and to what extent is a universal conception of democratic quality possible?”.

According to the authors, measuring the level of democracy in a country is complex. There is no consensus on the characteristics that define it, and even when agreement is reached, assessing them is difficult. Experts may have differing opinions on individual characteristics and on how to translate them into applicable democracy indices.

There are various approaches to measuring the quality of democracy. Based on an operational definition of democracy and quality, Diamond and Morlino identify eight dimensions (partially overlapping) by which the quality of a democracy can be evaluated: “the rule of law, participation, competition, and accountability both vertical and horizontal. Though also quite relevant to the content, these dimensions mainly concern the rules and practices. The next two dimensions are substantive in nature: respect for civil and political freedoms, and the progressive implementation of greater political (and underlying it, social and economic) equality. Our last dimension, responsiveness, links the procedural dimensions to the substantive ones by measuring the extent to which public policies (including laws, institutions, and expenditures) correspond to citizen demands and preferences, as aggregated through the political process”.

These various dimensions constitute an interconnected system, such that increases or decreases in one can influence the others, often requiring trade-offs.

The V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) project approaches democracy as “rule by the people”, which can be understood and assessed through seven key principles⁵: electoral, liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian. Each of these principles represents a distinct perspective on democratic governance, reflecting the diverse values and priorities that different schools of thought

⁴ See the 9th annual Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?

⁵ See https://v-dem.net/documents/39/v-dem_methodology_v14.pdf

emphasize. While no single principle fully captures the entire meaning of democracy, together they provide a comprehensive framework for analysing and evaluating democratic systems today.

The *electoral principle* is the foundation of democratic governance, emphasizing free, fair, and competitive elections as the primary mechanism for citizens to choose their representatives. A political system qualifies as an electoral democracy if elections are genuine, inclusive, and regularly held, ensuring that governments derive their legitimacy from the will of the people.

The *liberal principle* extends beyond electoral democracy by emphasizing the protection of individual rights, the rule of law, and checks on government power. It ensures that democratic institutions are constrained by constitutional safeguards, an independent judiciary, and civil liberties such as freedom of speech, press, and assembly. In a liberal democracy, minority rights are protected against the potential tyranny of the majority.

The *majoritarian principle* focuses on the idea that democracy should reflect the will of the majority. It prioritizes a governance system where elected representatives implement the preferences of the majority of citizens, often through strong executive leadership. While this approach emphasizes efficiency in decision-making, it risks sidelining minority perspectives if institutional safeguards are weak.

The *consensual principle* offers an alternative to majoritarian democracy by prioritizing broad agreement and power-sharing rather than simple majority rule. It encourages coalition governments, proportional representation, and decentralization, ensuring that diverse voices – including minority groups – are incorporated into the decision-making process. Consensual democracy seeks to balance power across different political and social groups to maintain stability and inclusiveness.

The *participatory principle* emphasizes direct citizen involvement in political and governance processes beyond just voting. It supports civic engagement, grassroots activism, and decentralized decision-making, ensuring that citizens have continuous opportunities to influence policies and governance. Participatory democracy can be realized through mechanisms like referendums, citizen assemblies, and participatory budgeting.

The *deliberative principle* prioritizes rational discussion, public debate, and informed decision-making. It emphasizes that democracy is not merely about voting but about reasoned exchanges where citizens and policymakers engage in meaningful dialogue before making decisions. Deliberative democracy fosters a culture of discussion, compromise, and consensus-building based on well-reasoned arguments rather than mere political competition.

The *egalitarian principle* argues that democracy should ensure equal political participation and influence for all citizens, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, or other social differences. It highlights the importance of reducing political and economic inequalities so that all individuals have a fair opportunity to engage in democratic processes. Egalitarian democracy seeks to minimize disparities in political power and representation, ensuring that wealth or privilege does not disproportionately influence governance.

Using the V-Dem indices, the *Regimes of the World* program classifies countries into four distinct regime types, based on how well they align with the seven democratic principles.

In a *closed autocracy*, citizens do not have the right to elect the chief executive or the legislature through multi-party elections. Political power is concentrated, and governance occurs without public electoral participation.

An *electoral autocracy* allows citizens to vote for the chief executive and the legislature in multi-party elections. However, these elections lack true democratic integrity due to restrictions on fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and association, which are necessary for fair and meaningful electoral competition.

In an *electoral democracy*, citizens can freely and fairly elect both the chief executive and the legislature through competitive multi-party elections. The electoral process is meaningful, transparent, and conducted without significant interference.

A *liberal democracy* builds upon electoral democracy by ensuring robust protections for individual and minority rights, legal equality for all citizens, and strong checks on executive power through the legislature and judiciary.

This framework provides a systematic approach to analysing democracy and authoritarianism, helping to assess how different regimes align with or deviate from democratic ideals and practices based on the seven principles.

Another widely recognised framework is the **Democracy Index**, developed by *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, which evaluates the state of democracy in countries worldwide using five key categories.

- *Electoral Process and Pluralism* – This measures the extent to which elections are free, fair, and competitive, as well as whether multiple political parties can operate without undue restrictions.
- *Functioning of Government* – This assesses how effectively a government operates, whether it is free from excessive influence by unelected entities, and whether there is transparency and accountability in governance.
- *Political Participation* – This evaluates the level of citizen engagement in the political process, including voter turnout, political activism, and the ability of people to participate in civil society organizations and political movements.
- *Political Culture* – This examines public attitudes toward democracy, political institutions, and governance, assessing whether democratic values are deeply rooted in society or whether there is a preference for authoritarian alternatives.
- *Civil Liberties* – This category assesses the protection of individual freedoms, including freedom of speech, press, and assembly, as well as the extent to which citizens can exercise their rights without fear of oppression or government interference.

Based on a country's performance across these five categories – measured through various indicators – it is classified into one of four regime types, fairly consistent with the classification used in the *Regimes of the World* framework, thus providing another comprehensive framework for understanding the varying degrees of democracy and authoritarianism across the world.

- *Full Democracy* – Countries with high scores across all five categories, ensuring free elections, effective governance, high political participation, a strong democratic culture, and robust civil liberties.
- *Flawed Democracy* – Countries where elections are free and fair, but governance issues, limited political participation, or weaknesses in political culture and civil liberties prevent them from achieving full democratic status.
- *Hybrid Regime* – Nations that exhibit a mix of democratic and autocratic characteristics, often holding elections that are not entirely free or fair while also restricting political freedoms and civil liberties.
- *Authoritarian Regime* – States where political power is concentrated in the hands of a ruling elite, elections (if held) lack credibility, civil liberties are restricted, and government institutions function with little to no democratic oversight.

These perspectives generally hold true when considering the conventional definitions of representative democracy. However, it is equally important to highlight broader, **more critical interpretations of democracy**, which have been developed by a wide range of scholars and compellingly synthesized by Hayat in *Démocratie* (2020). Drawing on the works of Laugier and Ogien (2017), Hayat underscores an alternative vision of democracy, one that extends beyond institutional representation and incorporates Rosanvallon’s concept of *counter-democracy* (2008). This framework envisions democracy not merely as a system of governance but as a dynamic structure in which the people actively monitor and hold power to account, fostering a culture of civic vigilance and oversight.

Furthermore, this perspective aligns with a broader social principle of democracy, which champions pluralism and emphasises what can be termed “real democracy”: a model that seeks to empower marginalised voices, including the voiceless and non-citizens. In doing so, it moves beyond the conventional boundaries of deliberative democracy, advocating for more inclusive and participatory mechanisms that challenge the exclusivity of traditional political engagement.

It is worth stressing that this perspective, however, does not advocate abandoning representative democracy, which remains an essential framework within which even the most innovative forms of bottom-up engagement can flourish. Indeed, we currently witness how backsliding in fundamental liberties – such as freedom of expression or judicial independence – can significantly constrain the viability of community-led co-production initiatives⁶.

One final consideration crucial for contextualising Fairville’s endeavour concerns critiques from Global South scholars and thinkers who challenge Western frameworks for democratic quality assessment, arguing these metrics constitute a form of epistemological colonialism. These critiques have led to calls for more inclusive approaches to assessing democracy quality that incorporate diverse perspectives and recognise different paths to democratic governance, as stressed by de Sousa Santos (2007), Chatterjee (2011), and Mbembe (2020). In this view, democracy measurement tools risk decontextualising political systems from their historical, cultural, and economic realities, applying universalised standards that fail to account for the ongoing impacts of colonialism, resource extraction, and global economic inequality on democratic development in postcolonial societies.

⁶ These developments have been presented at the Advisory Board meeting (A. Deboulet).

De Sousa Santos (2007) argues that conventional liberal democracy has been reduced to a procedural form that privileges elite interests while failing to deliver substantive equality and social justice. The core of his argument is that there exists a rich diversity of democratic practices worldwide – particularly in the Global South – that remain invisible to or are delegitimized by dominant Western political theory.

De Sousa Santos introduces the concept of “high-intensity democracy” as an alternative to the “low-intensity democracy” of liberal models. This approach emphasizes participatory processes, diverse forms of democratic deliberation, and the incorporation of marginalized voices in decision-making.

Central to de Sousa Santos’s thesis is the idea of “epistemologies of the South” (2015), that is knowledge systems and governance approaches that have been suppressed by colonial and postcolonial power structures. He contends that truly democratising democracy requires recognizing these alternative epistemologies and creating spaces for “intercultural translation” between different democratic traditions.

To draw some conclusions, in the context of Fairville, two key aspects emerge from this discussion that are particularly relevant to its objectives: engagement and inequality as key dimensions of democratic quality and extending democratic evaluation to the local level. For what concerns the first aspect, as seen above, one of the critical factors in assessing democracy’s quality is the level of citizen participation and the degree to which democracy helps reduce social and political inequalities. In this regard, we henceforth employ the term ‘engagement,’ which, within the broader spectrum of participation, denotes an enhanced sense of agency – moving beyond mere involvement in externally determined processes to encompass active contribution to their governance.

Fairville seeks to explore how different participatory and deliberative mechanisms can be used to empower citizens, amplify marginalized voices, and promote social inclusion. This aspect will be further discussed in the following sections.

For what concerns the second aspect, we must consider that most democracy models and measurements, including well-known indices such as *The Economist’s Democracy Index* and the *Regimes of the World* framework, tend to assess democracy at the national level. However, democracy is not only shaped by national institutions, but it also depends on the quality of governance at the regional and local levels.

Through Fairville Labs, it will be also possible to observe how participatory and deliberative democracy principles can be effectively applied at the local level. The goal is to understand whether local democratic innovations, can improve governance, increase civic engagement, and address inequalities in political representation.

By shifting the focus from national assessments to local democratic experiments, Fairville aims to testing how democratic quality, or democratic robustness, can be strengthened in everyday governance. This approach acknowledges that democracy is not a one-size-fits-all system but rather a dynamic and adaptable process that must respond to the needs of diverse communities.

Ultimately, Fairville’s exploration of these issues contributes to a broader rethinking of democratic governance, encouraging greater inclusivity, civic empowerment, and responsiveness in decision-making.

d. Relationships: Inequality, Engagement, and the Quality of Democracy

The relationship between **inequality, engagement, and the quality of democracy** has become an area of growing interest and debate. Understanding these dynamics requires an in-depth analysis of the interconnections and effects between inequality and engagement. This analysis has entailed, as will be presented in the following chapters, both a literature review of their interactions and the collection of data from the field in the form of biographies of engagement collected in all the Fairville Labs. As will be better presented in the next Chapter, the literature review yielded information related to the following key relationships.

1. Inequalities discourage engagement – Economic, social, and political disparities often disempower individuals (Fung & Wright, 2001), reducing their sense of agency and discouraging civic engagement. This is particularly true for the most marginalised groups, who may feel excluded from decision-making processes.
2. Inequalities can also motivate engagement – In some cases, experiences of inequality of different kinds and often intersectional (Zajak & Hauss 2020) spur activism and political engagement, as marginalized groups mobilise to achieve greater representation and fairness (Temper et al. 2018), both in urban (Gaille & Terral 2021, Deboulet 2012, Deboulet 2022) and rural contexts.
3. Engagement does not always reduce inequalities – Even when individuals engage in political and civic activities, existing inequalities (both the local or sectorial, and above all the entrenched structural ones) may persist, including within participatory processes themselves, for the benefit of specific elites in various spheres (Young 2001; Gherghina & Lutai 2024) Besides, It is essential to assess who is actively participating and whether certain groups – such as women, youth, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities – face barriers that limit their influence.
4. Engagement can contribute to reducing inequalities – When participation leads to meaningful engagement and co-production between different stakeholders (Bresson 2004), it has the potential to empower people and create more inclusive decision-making processes (Lang 2018; Galuszka 2019).

At the same time, it is crucial to examine how the different ways in which the interplay between inequalities and engagement impacts the quality of democracy, having in mind the kind of challenges discussed in the previous section, including:

- The crisis of representative democracy. Declining trust in elected institutions and political disengagement among certain groups – e.g., the tendential decline in voters' turnout in many areas of the world, or the low esteem in which many citizens in top tiers democracies hold their democratic institutions, as documented, inter alia, by Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) in the Democracy Index 2024.
- Autocratisation processes. The erosion of democratic norms and institutions, leading to more authoritarian governance structures -e.g., constrains to the free press, interfering with the judiciary, backsliding in established civil rights, etc⁷.

⁷ See Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization - Democracy Trumped? 2025.

- The weakening of intermediary groups – a decline in the influence of civil society organizations, labour unions, and other groups that traditionally mediate between citizens and the state (Putnam 2000, Hacker & Pierson 2010, Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018).
- New forms of civic engagement in disadvantaged areas. Innovative grassroots movements and alternative forms of political engagement are emerging in response to systemic inequalities.

As discussed in the previous section, engagement and (in)equality are among the key criteria used to define democratic systems and assess their quality.

This is why cross-examining the findings from the desk research on the literature with the live experiences documented in the biographies of engagement collected in the Fairville Labs, it becomes possible to gain deeper insights into how these interactions manifest in real local contexts by identifying:

- Which challenges highlighted in the literature are also present in actual participatory experiments
- New, previously unreported issues that emerge in real-world democratic engagement
- Innovative forms of engagement that contribute to the co-production of solutions, fostering more inclusive and participatory governance.

In this way, Fairville Labs provide a unique perspective on how engagement and inequality concur to shape democracy at the local level, offering **actionable insights** for policymakers, researchers, and civic actors.

3. Methodological framework and description of the activities

In general terms, the methodological framework has foreseen two main approaches, i.e., the documentary analysis and the qualitative analysis.

The documentary analysis was based on the study of the scientific literature about the relations among inequalities, engagement and democratic quality to draft the Conceptual map (see Part One) and the study of documents and statistics related to the local context and experience of the involved Fairville Labs.

In both cases, specific grids for analysis have been elaborated and utilised by the research team. For the analysis aimed at building the conceptual map, the grid contained some items to identify relevant pieces within the examined texts, such as:

- The relevant area of the relationship between inequalities and engagement in which the piece can be placed
- Relevant contextual elements (actors, social groups, type of inequality, territories, times, etc.)
- How the specific type of relationship between inequalities and engagement (including obstacles or facilitating factors) manifests itself
- Degree, severity, and/or extent of the phenomenon
- Impacts on the democratic quality
- Tags
- Notes/remarks.

Based on the subject areas of the Fairville Labs, recent studies containing statistical data, analyses, and research on the topic were identified and analysed. This research and selection work supplemented the sources already provided by the Fairville Labs. Some of these materials are reported in D1.1. Ad hoc work on additional documents and materials also continued in the phase of constructing the maps of the individual territories to complete the contextual elements.

The qualitative analysis was carried out through a collection of biographies of engagement (citizens, activists, leaders of CSOs, local authorities, volunteers and members of associations, etc.) and a set of interviews with key informants (e.g., activists, researchers, local authorities, leaders of CSOs involved in some way in the Fairville Labs).

For the collection of both interviews for biographies of engagement and with key informants, a list of issues has been defined and co-produced with Fairville Labs. The list of issues for the biographies contained questions related to experiences and knowledge of different situations of inequalities, experiences and forms of engagement and co-production. The various Labs adapted such a list of issues to the different contexts and interlocutors. Also, the procedures to be followed for the collection of the biographies and the privacy protection of the interviewees have been defined. Each biography has been synthesised by the Fairville Lab in a short narrative and translated in English. All the biographies collected have been stored in the online platform on Zaclys.cloud.

The contents of the interviews with the key informants were used mainly to provide contextual elements and to support the results of the biographies (see part 2).

For the analysis of the biographies, the grid contained items such as:

- Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewee
- Description of phenomena of environmental inequalities
- Description of phenomena of economic and territorial inequalities
- Description of phenomena of social and cultural inequalities
- Description of phenomena of discrimination
- Description of inequalities produced by policies
- Description of cases in which inequalities prevent engagement
- Description of cases in which inequalities promote engagement
- Description of cases in which engagement produces limited impact on inequalities
- Description of cases in which engagement produces an impact on inequalities
- Description of cases of co-production.

As regards the activities carried out, first of all, the creation of the Conceptual map (see Part One) included the following steps.

1. Internal brainstorming on the possible contents and elements of the Map of the relationship between inequality, participation/engagement and democracy (the K&I Team started the design and the implementation of the literature review in the period April-September 2023).
2. The implementation of a review of the relevant scientific literature about the relationship between inequalities, engagement, and democratic quality. A first step has been the creation of an internal K&I online repository, from September 2023 to November 2024. In total around 200 documents have been considered and then further selected, based on a grid including the following items: number of the source; author; contents related to the area of the crisis of democracy; contents

related to the area of quality of participation; contents related to the area of quality of democracy; geographical references; other relevant issues.

3. Publication of a post on the Fairville Blog about the WP1 activities, including the implementation of the D1.2, to get useful information for the creation of the Map (February 2024).
4. The analysis of the literature stocked in the repository, focusing on a set of relevant issues and themes about the relationship between inequalities and engagement, and the reciprocal impacts between this relationship and democratic quality (see the theoretical framework, and Part One), to draft a first version of the conceptual map (from October 2024 until February 2025).
5. The discussion of the main results with the concerned partners on the occasion of the workshop held in Brussels on March 31 – April 2, 2025.
6. The final definition and formalisation of the conceptual map (April 2025).

For its part, the realisation of the Map of the impact of inequalities on political participation and democratic quality across the Fairville network (see part Two) included the following intertwined steps.

1. Preparatory methodological work (definition of the activities and the relative timing; definition of the consent and privacy protection procedures and forms) with ad hoc meetings between WP1 and T1.3 leaders (October 2023 – February 2024).
2. Presentation of the fieldwork activities of the T1.3 to the Fairville Labs during the Open Citizen Meeting in Brussels on 12-15 November 2023.
3. Definition of the themes and related questions for the interviews with key informants (February-March 2024).
4. Implementation of the interviews with the key informants (March-May 2024). The interviews were carried out by UCL and K&I teams (WP5 and WP1). The interviews were used for both D1.2 and D1.5 (uploaded in July 2024).
5. Starting the co-production process of the questions to be used in the narratives, taking into consideration the need to optimise the fieldwork activity of WP1, WP5, WP4, and WP3 (through meetings involving WP1 leader, T1.3 leader, Scientific project Coordinator, WP4 leader and meetings with WP leaders (July-October 2024).
6. Organisation of the training for the fieldwork, involving the representative of the Labs. An online training meeting for the teams of the Fairville Labs took place on 15 October 2024. This training has been organised by WP1 leader, Task T1.3 leader, the Project Coordinator and WP4 leader.
7. Implementation of the fieldwork activities by the Fairville Labs (October 2024 – June 2025), through interviews with 68 members and stakeholders of the Fairville labs, or their local interlocutors, in the form of a collection of biographies, and interviews with 25 local key informants in the cities of the Fairville Labs; few interviews (or the production of the narrative from each interview) have been carried out between March and June 2025.
8. Presentation of the progress of the activities at the Ethics and Advisory Board on “Knowledge circulation and ethics in co-production” hybrid meeting in Paris (February 7th, 2025).
9. The implementation of the fieldwork activities of the Fairville Labs have been monitored/discussed during the Fairville monthly Board meetings.
10. Collection and analysis of statistical data on inequalities in the context of the Fairville Labs (October 2024 – February 2025).
11. Collection and analysis of documents produced by the Fairville labs or their local interlocutors (October 2024 – February 2025).

12. Examination of other documents, deliverables or activities of Fairville, relevant to the present work (for example, those related to WP5 and WP3) (October 2024 – February 2025).
13. The final analysis of the emerging results (January-June 2025).
14. A draft of the map of the impact of inequalities on political participation and democratic quality across the Fairville network, through the production of some first documents related to a limited number of Labs.
15. The discussion of the first results with the concerned partners on the occasion of the workshop held in Brussels on March 31 – April 2, 2025.
16. The final definition and formalisation of the map (June 2025).

PART ONE

Conceptual Map

1. The complex relationship between inequalities and engagement

The review of the selected literature (see general introduction) focused on the complex, certainly nonlinear relationship between inequalities and citizen political engagement, with a specific focus on the dynamics of direct engagement and strategic collaboration among multiple actors to address inequalities, especially in urban contexts. Special attention was given to how these engagement dynamics occur, the actors involved, and the obstacles and facilitating factors they encounter, paying attention to the more or less comprehensive and formalized forms of co-production that are reported.

In addition to a concise and focused illustration of the literature reviewed, a conceptual map of the relationship between inequalities and citizen political engagement will be presented at the end of this part. These are purposive literature reviews and maps, in the sense that these do not claim to present this complex subject exhaustively but are intended to provide information and functional insights for the ongoing reflection within the framework of the Fairville project and its potential future developments.

Indeed, it is well known that the relationship between inequalities and democracy is not easy to detect (Soci 2019). Therefore, in briefly presenting and formalizing the main findings of this review, we will highlight, certainly in a conventional way, some aspects or dynamics relevant to the project.

We refer, in particular, to four types of cases that we intended to identify based on the previous work done by Fairville WP1:

- Inequalities turn out to be a source and motivator for engagement
- Inequalities turn out to be a source of discouragement, or “demobilisation”, for engagement
- Engagement, by some of its characteristics, sometimes seems to fail to affect inequalities, or even reproduce them or create new ones
- Engagement, under certain conditions, seems to help effectively address inequalities, or at least lay the groundwork for addressing them.

An examination of these different aspects may provide some insights into the relationship between inequalities and engagement (with a focus on the co-production traits that emerge in various ways) and how this relationship affects the quality of democracy, or vice versa.

2. Inequalities as a source and motivation for engagement

The first aspect examined is that of inequalities as the source and motivation of citizens' political engagement. In this view, engagement emerges as a "response" to specific crisis contexts characterized by inequalities of different kinds (Dufour et al. 2016), and often intersectional (Zajak & Haus, 2020). In the cases we focus on, it is a response to inequalities that tends toward "citizen-led" rather than technocentric, marketised, or state-led transformations (Scoones 2015), and that arise from an awareness of the limits of only "formal" democracy (Dacombe & Parvin 2021).

Several studies in this area are characterized by a focus on the spatial dimension as particularly relevant in the analysis of inequality and democracy (Dufaux et al. 2011, Shin 2019, Watson 2014), often with a focus on "spatial justice" (Dikeç 2009), and in the analysis of related forms of intervention (from space, on space, in space, making space) (Garber 2000). Of key relevance in this framework is the phenomenon of massive urbanisation, with its associated social, economic, and governance challenges (Deboulet 2012, 2022).

In the urban sphere, forms of social "recomposition" and engagement are manifested, for example, in the analysis of the local situation, and in the production of services, as in the case of grassroots organisations aimed at the struggle for housing and against the gentrification or ghettoisation of certain neighbourhoods (AAVV Vacarme 89 2020), as a search for alternative solutions to the creation and management of services (Gaille & Terral 2021), to the reception of migrants (Fondation Abbé Pierre 2020, Bouillon et al. 2017), and more.

The response to inequalities, especially at the local level, sometimes arises based on citizen research and interpretation of the situation, in the form of maps, monitoring, and production of information documents (see below). The forms of political engagement documented, in this framework, are of different types and intensities, ranging from modes of mere information-taking, consultation, or protest, or the creation of new forms of public spheres in urban spaces (Della Porta, Mattoni, 2014), to new and more sophisticated and complex forms of collaboration between different actors.

For what is of most interest here, different forms of political engagement in response to inequalities at the local level are often intertwined, and mostly characterised by being forms of interconnection and collaboration between social actors:

- Territorial alliances and alternative governance (List 2017)
- Self-organised citizen networks providing housing support (Fondation Abbé Pierre 2020)
- Development of alternative and participatory mapping/documentation (e.g., to report disparities in distribution of services, land or to detect and monitor environmental problems) (List 2017, Jordan et al. 2011)
- Creation of self-organised support networks
- Creation of platforms (e.g., for People Affected by Mortgages, mobilizing against evictions) (Romanos et al. 2023).

As can be seen, specific elements of co-production emerge from these types of analysed experiences (see also item 5), observable in experiences that involve, for example, knowledge co-production (including participatory mapping activities) (Temper et al. 2018), service provision networks (Kothari 2016),

alternative governance systems (Kothari 2016). For further developments, see B nit, Deboulet, Faldi, Fairville, Deliverable D2.1.

Such experiences involve, as appropriate, a range of actors that may include NGOs and civic organizations, academic institutions, professional experts, traditional community leaders, and local authorities. Some specific examples of collaboration or partnerships between different actors include:

- Environmental justice movements collaborating with academics (Temper et al. 2018)
- Community-expert partnerships in participatory mapping (Jordan et al. 2011)
- Civic organizations and volunteer groups providing support (Gaille & Terral 2021)
- Farmer associations working with NGOs and religious leaders (List 2017).

Engagement for multi-valent aspects of justice

“Because EJ (Environmental Justice) movements put forward that environmental problems are political issues that cannot be solved apart from social and economic justice and that these call for a transformative approach and the restructuring of dominant social relations and institutional arrangements, we argue that EJ movements need to be at the core of sustainability transformations. EJ brings attention to both the multi-valent aspects of justice, from distribution to cultural recognition to participation, capabilities, cognitive justice and beyond, as well as an intersectional approach to forms of difference across lines of class, race, gender, sexual preference, caste, ability, etc. Further, the EJ approach focuses on the interdependency of issues, seeing environmental devastation, ecological racism, poverty, crime, social despair, alienation from community and family as aspects of a larger rooted systemic crisis. Finally, radical politics and alternatives and knowledge on how to confront hegemonic power and injustices is often created through processes of struggle.”

(Temper et al. 2018)

These forms of engagement encounter different kinds of *obstacles*, depending on the case, whether material, political, or related to power and class or social status dynamics (see also points 3 and 4), including:

- Power asymmetries in decision-making in visible, hidden, and invisible forms (Temper et al. 2018)
- Limited access to resources (Zajak & Haunss 2020)
- Institutional resistance to citizen-led mapping initiatives (List 2017)
- Class and social divides within movements (Hetland Goodwin 2013)
- Middle-class dominance (Zajak & Haunss 2020).

Facilitating factors for these types of engagement, on the other hand, include organisational, technological, or elements related to the availability of expertise and activation of partnerships, as experienced in the Fairville project:

- Technology and social media enabling coordination (Civilsocietynetwork.com 2019)
- Cross-border inspiration and tactics sharing (Della Porta & Mattoni 2014)
- Support from academic/professional expertise / Academic-activist collaborations like ACKnow-EJ project (Temper et al. 2018)
- Pre-existing social movement networks (Dufour et al. 2016).

The *impacts* of these engagement dynamics on democratic quality are of different kinds. These include aspects such as empowerment, the creation of new spaces and approaches for political action or new ways of interpreting reality:

- Promoting new forms of participatory democracy (Dufour et al. 2016)
- Increased citizen engagement in decision-making (Temper et al. 2018)
- The reappropriation of urban centres by discriminated social groups (Francois et al. 2021)
- Development of alternative democratic practices (Temper et al. 2018)
- Creation of deliberative democratic spaces (Della Porta & Mattoni 2014)
- Repoliticisation of distributive conflicts (Romanos et al. 2023).

Related to these emerging new forms of engagement are also reported **new challenges**, which may manifest themselves, for instance, in institutional terms, like the tension between movement and representative democracy (Dufour et al. 2016), or the tension between movement demands and institutional response (Dikeç 2009). Other challenges are related to the kind of results obtained, e.g., the limited actual democratisation despite symbolic success (Romanos et al. 2023). Further challenges are related to the future of the action done, e.g., the sustainability of participatory practices, or the need for the creation of new institutional arrangements (Temper et al. 2018).

3. Inequalities as a reason for discouraging engagement

Within the complex relationship between inequality and engagement, there are also cases where inequalities (of various kinds) seem to discourage or hinder citizen engagement, at various levels, in the many forms and practices that have been defined and studied as “demobilisation” (Delfini et al. 2021). Traditionally, this phenomenon has been examined primarily by considering the context of the crisis of representative democracy (Cools 2012) and the degree of voting participation (according to categories such as age, ethnicity, social grade, gender, and disabilities) (Uberoi & Johnston 2022), but it has also been found, at least in part, for other forms of engagement more directly and at the local level.

According to some studies, a marked inverse correlation emerges between socioeconomic status, or the objective state of the residential environment, and citizen mobilization in the political arena (Lejeune 2016), as well as it is observed that citizens who are advantaged in terms of their wealth, education, income participate more frequently (Fung & Wright 2001).

From what some research shows, significant impediments to citizen engagement seem to emerge when citizens:

- Live in physically isolated and disadvantaged communities (Dacombe 2021)
- Have limited access to economic, time and educational resources (Civilsocietynetwork.com 2021)
- Experience language and cultural barriers, including those related to ethnic discrimination (Cools 2012, Finney et al. 2023)
- Do not receive adequate support from public institutions (Cools 2012).

Specific gender-related barriers have also been noted, in terms of limitations on access to public space, social rules, availability of resources, and legitimacy (OECD, 2018). In this regard, the dynamics of intersectionality strongly impact women’s active participation in the political process, at various levels.

In addition, there is an underrepresentation of the working class or specific categories (such as women and people with disabilities) in political institutions (Uberoi & Johnston 2022) and elite influence on political processes, which we will also return to in other sections.

Inequalities and democratic life

- ✓ Empirical work (...) suggests that the concentration of people suffering from varying forms of deprivation within different localities might bring nuance to accounts of its relationship to democratic participation which is absent in much of the existing work. Within the literature examining poverty within deprived areas, one of the primary insights derives from William Julius Wilson's (1990) identification of neighbourhood effects; the idea that the conditions of life in poor areas negatively affect the lives of residents, regardless of other factors.
- ✓ Jencks and Mayer (1990) explore the effects of structural conditions of poor neighbourhoods, highlighting the ways in which life in deprived neighbourhoods amplifies the effects of poverty suffered by individuals.
- ✓ Wilson (1990) suggests that deprived areas are not only ecologically and economically different from other areas in that they maintain unstable, weak social infrastructure but that they are ghettoised, their residents isolated from more stable and prosperous areas, with limited social connections outside of their locality.
- ✓ Deprived areas suffer in part because they lack infrastructure and resources that are commonplace in better-off areas.
- ✓ The segregation of individuals living in deprived neighbourhoods drives them to develop oppositional cultural stances towards mainstream society
- ✓ Qualitative data suggests that many residents see the structures of democracy as not serving their interests but instead as being distinctly remote and unresponsive to their needs. Consequently, many chose not to participate. [...] This reluctance to participate in democratic life was often related to the perception of the institutions of democracy as not working for the state, and this was explicitly expressed in terms of the area's reputation.

(Dacombe 2021)

Going into the peculiar dynamics by which inequalities discourage or hinder engagement, some relevant elements emerge.

For example, low educational attainment reduces access to relevant information and knowledge, and disfavours understanding of the dynamics of democratic processes (Bondesson 2021). In this regard, it has been noted that online platforms haven't fundamentally altered socio-economic stratification in participation (Schlozman et al. 2010).

Another phenomenon highlighted in this regard is that of power dynamics, mostly informal, within the engagement processes themselves. Sometimes such dynamics reproduce inequalities even in seemingly inclusive spaces and contexts (Bondesson 2021) or generate forms of superficial inclusion without real power. For example, within citizen organisations and movements various phenomena have been observed (Dufour et al. 2016) including internal conflicts, the tension between outsider activists and residents, and issues with sustaining engagement.

Other phenomena are related to the skills and capacities of citizens to effectively exercise their engagement, for example, a limited coalition-building capacity (European Commission, Rome civil monitor 2018).

The role of public authorities is also important in this framework, for example regarding administrative resistance to non-traditional organizing (Fung & Wright 2001), a hierarchy of participation levels (Fainstein 2009), wealth-based access to political power (Gherghina & Lutai 2024), not to mention the well-known still widespread phenomenon of corruption and its negative effects, including discouraging people's willingness to engage.

Because of this, there are forms of self-reinforcing cycles of inequality that produce, according to some, a deep-rooted sense of powerlessness, disappointment, and distrust in national and local political institutions (Uberoi & Johnston 2022). Other authors, in the wake of Foucault's and Galtung's classic research on aspects such as discursive practices and cultural violence, have highlighted the fact that often marginalized groups are socialized to accept their unequal position (Temper et al. 2018), and that presence or absence on the public stage is, to some extent, "constructed" from childhood (Cools 2012).

"Regarding "remedies" (in this case, from the traditionally "participatory" perspective) to encourage engagement against inequality, several factors have been identified (Cools 2012), such as:

- Recreate a sense of trust
- Encourage the use of public spaces for participation
- Ensure real power of influence with respect to the decisions to be made by the public authority
- At the beginning of the participatory mechanism specify roles and mechanisms of restitution
- Provide adequate information about the participatory mechanisms
- Allow people to express themselves about their individual experiences and specific needs as a starting point to be integrated into a broader framework
- Simplify technical language
- Provide educational support
- Create inclusive, non-hierarchical participation mechanisms.

But there are also approaches and tools, related to more advanced and complex forms of engagement with co-production traits, which will be mentioned in Section 5.

4. Cases where engagement fails to affect inequality

There is a range of situations where citizens' political engagement fails to affect inequalities, or even reproduces them, or creates new ones, for the benefit of specific political elites in different spheres (Young 2001).

In analysing cases where engagement fails to effectively combat inequalities, it has been observed that this is due to several factors.

First, a kind of pre-emptive, or de facto, marginalization of certain categories of citizens, because of some socio-economic, ethnic, or other characteristics (see also point 3). In this regard, true socio-economic

barriers have been identified: lack of skills and resources, to participate (Parvin 2021); extreme economic inequality (Vick 2015); material differences, and class backgrounds of participants (Fung & Wright 2001).

It has also been found that participatory tools often tend to involve the same types of people. For example, in France's Grand Débat national, participation (on 4 thematics including democracy and citizenship) was dominated by educated, retired, homeowners, and male citizens (Loisel & Rio 2024). This has also been noted, paradoxically, when using tools that were instead designed to enable broader citizen involvement. For example, crowdsourced urban participation platforms marginalize low-income and ethnically diverse communities (Pak et al. 2017). Empirical evidence suggests that the rise in digital technology has failed to compensate for wider participatory deficits among low Socio-Economic Status (SES) citizens. For instance, in the UK, participation in online surveys, petitions, and grassroots campaigning of various kinds seems concentrated among citizens of high socio-economic status (Hansard Society 2017; Uberoi & Johnson 2019).

In other cases, it is the methodological approach to engagement that is in question, such as in situations where we detect:

- A reference to an abstract “participatory” ideology (Bresson 2004)
- The adoption of pre-determined agendas and decisions before the consultation begins (AA.VV. Vacarme 2020)
- The adoption of standardized approaches lacking creativity and local adaptation (Visions 2009)
- Scant attention on how power and hegemonic discourses operate (Visions 2009, Young 2001)
- Adherence to a romanticized, unproblematic, homogeneous conception of the “community” (Visions 2009).

Also in this regard, often language and technical knowledge barriers exclude disadvantaged groups and specifically people affected by urban renewal projects as do forms of top-down “injunctions” to “participate” (Cools 2012, Bresson 2004, Deboulet & Lelévrier 2014). Forms of “cosmetic participation” have been observed, serving as marketing for territorial development (AA.VV. Vacarme 2020) or buzzwords attached to some political agendas (Brown 2003), as in the case of the stakeholders’ engagement (Hildyard et al. 2001) or in forms of “greenwashing,” where only apparent environmental sensitivity is exhibited by the promoters (Temper et al. 2018). In other cases (e.g., in the field of waste management interventions), misalignment between authorities has been noted, related to the public’s mistrust of science and different perceptions of risk (Botetzagias & Karamichas 2009).

It has also been noted that NGO/CBO-dominated processes can become obstacles to direct participation (Botes & Van Rensburg 2000), such as when the expectations of these organizations are projected into target communities (Mosse 2001) or when a neo-colonial or paternalistic approach is implemented (Bondesson 2021).

The “cosmetic participation”

Participation is a buzzword attached to many different political agendas. Its polyvalent nature makes it flexible and often unclear. Because of its versatility and positive sense of optimism and purposefulness, in developing countries, the term has become an integral part of mainstream governmental discourses. The fact that many of these authoritarian governments have been persuaded to claim that they care about people’s voices can be considered a starting point (Brown 2003). However, the actual policies on the ground have been much less promising than such claims

would suggest, and participation has been co-opted by the elites in power to maintain existing relations of rule (Cornwall & Brock 2005). It should not come as a surprise that powerful elites show little interest in changing a status quo from which they benefit. As a consequence, the language of freedom and emancipation offered by participatory approaches has ended up facilitating the incorporation of marginalized groups into official, uncontroversial value” (Cleaver 2001).

(Visions 2009)

In all of this, a real bias of political institutions toward certain categories of potential stakeholders often plays a role (Young 2001).

In some cases, it is the focus of engagement that prevents the problems of inequalities from being properly confronted, for example when participatory programs focusing on micro-level issues “obsessively” ignore broader macro-level inequalities (Visions 2009), or when the focus is on managerial approaches rather than empowerment (even in experiences like Ghana, see Mohan & Stokke 2000).

In other cases, then, the engagement system is linked to forms of co-optation, in some cases even linked to government initiatives, like certain forms of government-organized youth participation in Egypt (Sika 2016).

In addition, some contextual conditions reducing engagement effectiveness have been found, related to institutional rules, mistrust among actors, and more. These conditions are, among others:

- Lack of institutional reform to address structural inequalities (Baluta & Tufis 2021, Cassio 2024)
- Limited available time and lack of real interest from authorities (Visions 2009)
- Paradoxes related to the complexity of decisions to be made versus the deliberative capacity of citizens (Elstub 2018)
- Self-legitimizing participatory programs without real impact (Visions 2009)
- Distrust of political institutions deemed corrupt (Civilsocietynetwork.com 2019).

These phenomena tend to negatively impact democratic quality, since they:

- Reinforce existing inequalities when participation is limited to more privileged groups (Gherghina et al. 2021)
- Create a “vicious cycle” perpetuating socio-economic inequality in political participation (Elstub 2018)
- Cause a decrease in public trust (Loisel & Rio 2024)
- Increase risks for democracy when only those present in participatory devices have power (Loisel & Rio 2024)
- May be conducive to the use of citizen engagement tools as a control instrument by public powers (Loisel & Rio 2024).

5. When engagement helps to effectively address inequality

Several studies highlight instances and ways in which citizen engagement at the local level helps to effectively address inequalities of various kinds (or at least lays the groundwork for addressing them) and promote greater social justice, including forms of justice that have to do with the production of representations of reality and knowledge.

As will be seen, elements of effectiveness (actual or trending) are reported to the extent that elements of co-production are present in the context of the engagement enacted.

In fact, the conditions for this effectiveness to occur are diverse. Some are general in nature and relate to the quality of democracy itself, such as:

- Integration of both participatory and representative democracy approaches (Bresson 2004)
- The promotion of forms of co-production and cooperation (and not just information and consultation) as a mode of full involvement in decision-making processes (Bresson 2004)
- Structural transformation of economic and political relations (Elstub 2018)
- Promoting actions in urban contexts – where the inequalities are more visible – which seem the more suitable framework for engagement towards more “horizontality” (Deboulet 2022)
- The joint promotion of public engagement and greater equality (Fung 2015).

Other conditions are more context-specific and go in the same direction as co-production, as they manifest some of its traits, for example:

- Focus on empowerment rather than just participation (Visions 2009)
- “Building critical mass” and independent mobilization capacity (Galuszka 2019)
- Promotion of a “collective power” rather than individual participation (Galuszka 2019)
- Equal power distribution in deliberative spaces (Fung & Wright 2001)
- The possibility of discussing and deliberating away from the constraints of formal political life, and implementing forms of micro negotiations (Dacombe 2021)
- Creating strong civil society networks and organizations, in an out-scaling process (Temper et al. 2018)
- Helping in giving visibility to given communities and citizen groups (Temper et al. 2018)
- Long-term relationships between local government and local communities (Galuszka 2019)
- University support as a “knowledge bridge” (Cognetti & Castelnovo 2019)
- Community-based data collection and monitoring systems (Capanema-Alvares & Cognetti 2021).

A territorially sensitive approach

- ✓ Collective efforts may prove themselves ineffective in the long run because they are not able to change the structural conditions inflicted on some territories and populations. In both cases, grassroots solidarity networks have demonstrated a great capacity for improvisation and emergency management, mainly through direct action and rapid decision-making processes. These practices were based on solutions tailored to the specific needs and fragilities of inhabitants enhancing both local actors’ knowledge and the former mutual trust relationships that facilitated communication, a known path of mutual learning and sharing of resources and information among volunteers (Ripamonti 2018).
- ✓ At the same time, the face-to-face interaction between volunteers and beneficiaries has been the basis to understand the specific needs of every single person or family, experiencing very flexible, circumstantial and adaptive intervention tools and strategies to better fit most situations. Moreover, the integration of different support measures and tools developed very comprehensive and effective strategies to contrast poverty.
- ✓ A ‘territorially sensitive’ perspective to overcome structural inequalities that make the most fragile ‘invisible’ to local institutions (Grassi 2021), renovating the modalities through which social support has been provided.

(Capanema-Alvares & Cognetti 2021)

In this regard, forms of co-production (even when operating ‘outside existing norms and regulations’ (Galuszka 2019) seem particularly effective when they involve ‘grassroots and fragmented networks’ addressing daily problems (Cognetti & Castelnovo 2019) and create ‘multisectoral problem-solving’ networks (Fung 2015).

Regarding the contribution of citizen engagement to reducing inequalities, it has been observed, for instance, that effective engagement, in the sense already mentioned, seems enable, or create a favourable context, with respect to different aspects of social and economic life, of a material, cognitive, organizational nature, such as:

- The access to basic services and infrastructure in underserved areas (Deboulet 2016)
- The generation of new knowledge (Temper et al. 2018)
- The redistribution of resources, e.g., through participatory budgeting (Fung 2015)
- The creation of grassroots solidarity networks addressing urgent needs (Capanema-Alvares & Cognetti 2021)
- The empowerment of marginalized groups through collective action (Lang 2018).

Such modes of engagement tend to produce different kinds of impacts on democracy quality, related to power, social, and cognitive dimensions, such as:

- Enhancing legitimacy through direct citizen participation (Fung 2015)
- Creating “empowering forms of commonality and difference” (Vick 2015)
- Transforming “mechanisms of state power into permanently mobilized deliberative-democratic, grassroots forms” (Fung & Wright 2001)
- Requiring “material, educational, and social equality” (for meaningful participation) (Vick 2015).

6. Concluding remarks and concept map

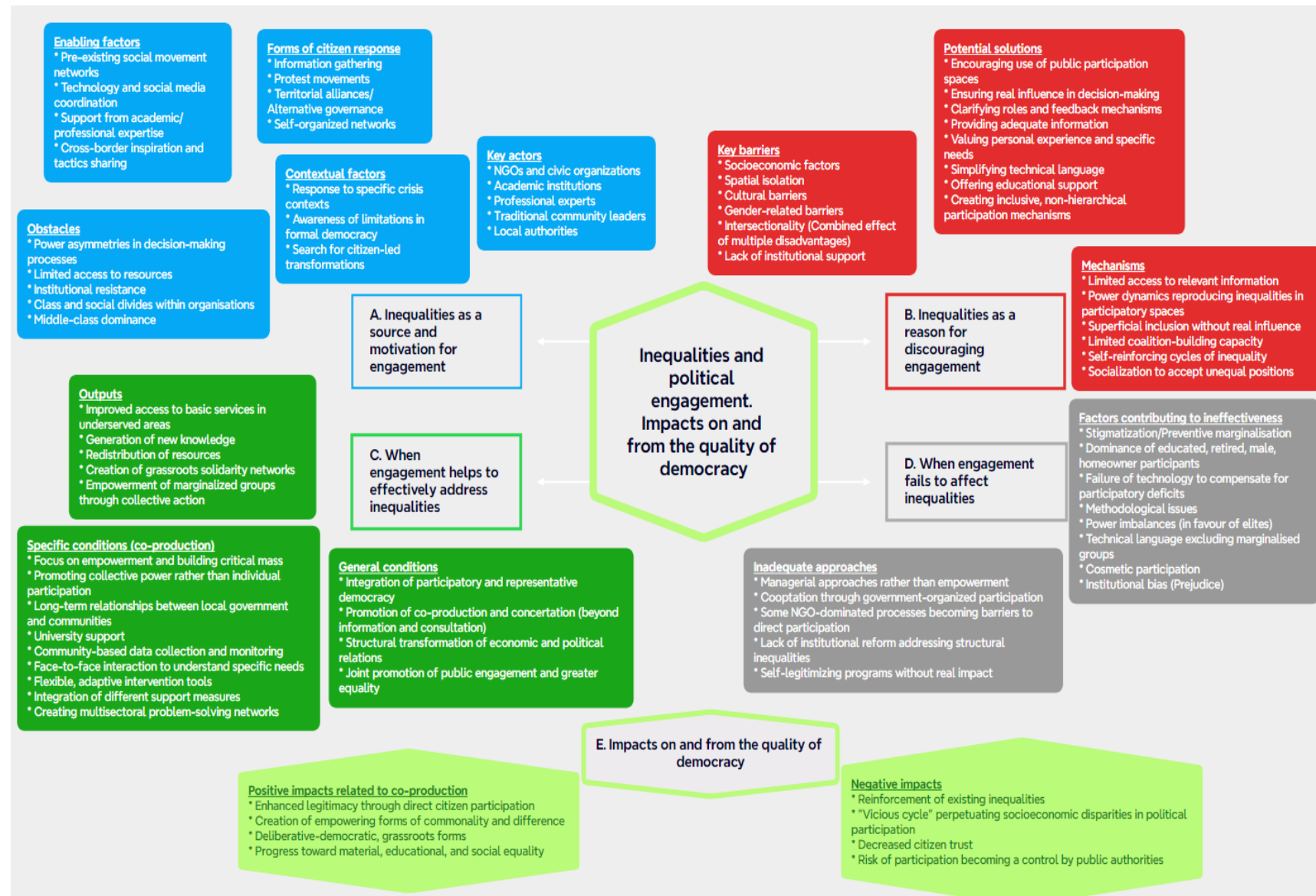
The literature review summarized here has made it possible to highlight useful themes and insights to examine, from the perspective of Fairville’s goals, some important aspects of the relationship between inequalities and citizen political engagement.

The literature review shows the extremely complex and varied relationship between inequalities and citizen engagement. It is a relationship that shows mutual connections and impacts of different signs. Within this complex framework, it can be hypothesized that the presence of co-production traits may increase the likelihood that citizen engagement in addressing inequalities may be more effective and make an important contribution on the side of the quality of democracy. This is considering that co-production is an approach and practice that is not without its obstacles and requires special preconditions, which we have attempted to highlight, at least in part.

The diagram in the next page offers a summary of the main results of the work presented in this part of the report, in the form of a concept map.

The four modes of relationship between inequalities and engagement that have been conventionally identified and used to examine and sort the documentary material considered may perhaps prove useful in analysing other types of materials as well. A further application will be to adopt this grid, as far as possible, also in examining the narratives presented in the next part of this report.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Map – Relationship between inequalities and citizen engagement



PART TWO

Map of the impacts between inequality, engagement and quality of democracy in the context of Fairville Labs

1. From literature to contexts

This second part of the document aims to validate and possibly enrich the conceptual map presented in the first part. This will happen by trying to “contextualise” the conceptual map, through the experiment of building a map of the impact of inequalities on engagement and democratic quality across the Fairville network. In doing so, we will also try to highlight the main modes of engagement, and especially of co-construction, that emerge within the contexts taken into consideration.

The mapping involved the realities of some Fairville labs, namely those located in Berlin (DE), Brussels (BE), Dakar (SN), Giza (EG), London (GB), Marseille (FR), and West Attica (EL). As already mentioned, in each of these realities some biographies of engagement were collected (citizens, activists, leaders of CSOs, local authorities, volunteers and members of associations, etc.), together with a set of interviews with key informants, as well as documents (including also relevant Fairville deliverables and documents produced by other WPs) and statistics useful for this work.

A map for each Fairville Lab has been created and contains:

- An introduction, with brief information on the type of people interviewed and on the demographic and economic reality of the area considered
- A section dedicated to the mapping of key inequality factors
- A section dedicated to the relations between inequalities, engagement, and forms of co-production
- A final section on how engagement faces inequalities, which summarizes, in the form of a matrix, how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified
- Below are the seven cards relating to the Fairville Labs involved in this work, followed by some summary considerations.

It should be emphasised that the information and phenomena described in the 7 maps represent a contribution in a more structured reflection on the contribution and limits of co-production in reducing inequalities, that is being conducted by the individual Fairville Labs and by other WPs of the project, such as WP3 (Fairville Labs/Co-production Pilots), WP4 (Co-assessing co-production benefits to reduce inequalities), and WP5 (Scaling co-production practices in, to and beyond the city). To facilitate work on this aspect, an ad hoc paragraph – e. Elements of co-production – was included in each map dedicated to the co-production elements, both described in the narratives and interviews with key informants and emerged from the analysis.

2. Map of impacts of inequalities on engagement – Berlin

2.1. Introduction

The map of inequality impacts on engagement in Berlin⁸ is based on the contents⁹ of 10 narratives¹⁰ of engagement and key informant interviews¹¹ on the Rathausblock (town hall block)¹² experience of co-production, lasting since 2011. The Rathausblock¹³ is an urban renewal area in Berlin-Kreuzberg, “where different urban actors have very different visions of what should be done with the mixed-use block in the context of rapid urban renewal. This is a little hidden island in a sea of gentrification urban activists/local civil society began advocating against privatisation and gentrification a decade ago”. “They push for a more common good and community-oriented uses and development of the five-hectare. This led to creating a cooperation ‘model project’, a cooperative effort between the city administration and non-profit civil society actors” which was established by creating bonds and alliances between the civil society and state actors. “This co-production developed physical and virtual infrastructures for the performative aspect of the site and the future housing project”¹⁴.

In more recent years, under the name of Rathausblock, the joint initiatives have taken numerous actions and hosted events to reimagine the site and its wider urban development. It is important to note that Rathausblock project is not only about building a part of the city but about creating it through a different kind of process – one that, while including civil society, also distinguishes itself from a conventional/institutional participatory process (#7) which, despite involving civil society, produces further inequalities among those who participate in the process. Rathausblock vision includes creating affordable housing, highly varied workspaces, social hubs, and cultural venues, while challenging the limitations of traditional “Realpolitik” and more mainstream planning approaches that often result in exclusion and spatial injustice rather than more democratic participation and inclusion. It should be noted that Rathausblock was one of the last undeveloped plots in the city centre, which is also one of the reasons why it was designated as a *Modellprojekt* for a non-conventional approach to urban development. Together with the Haus der Statistik, it is one of the two ongoing initiatives in Berlin that are currently experimenting with forms of urban co-production¹⁵.

The narratives provide detailed information on the initiated and still ongoing process of the Rathausblock, the results achieved, and the limits of this experience in terms of inequality. The Fairville Lab is taking

⁸ Berlin has a population of 3,8 million of residents. People from 170 nations living in Berlin; the 23% are foreign born population. The 56% of the population is younger than 45 years of age; the average age is 42,5. 27,000 new residents in 2023 and 34,000 new babies. (<https://www.businesslocationcenter.de/en/business-location/berlin-at-a-glance/demographic-data>)

⁹ The excerpts from the narratives are between quotation marks. Direct quotations of the interviewees are in italics between a single quotation mark.

¹⁰ The interviews for the narrative have been conducted by Anna Steigmann (University of Regensburg), Mari Paz Agúndez (Technical University of Berlin), Maria Tsakulova (University of Regensburg), Lorenza Manfredi (Technical University of Berlin), Emma Smalley (University of Regensburg).

¹¹ The persons interviewed as key informants are two members of the Fairville Berlin Lab: Enrico Schöenberg (*Projektwerkstatt* also involved in the *Zusammenstelle*) and Mari Paz Agundez (TU Berlin).

¹² For more information, see the following links: <https://rathausblock.org>; <https://rathausblock.org/projekte/modellprojektbroschuere-2019/>; <https://www.berlin.de/rathausblock-fk/>;

¹³ This description of the Rathausblock has been taken from “Fairville Labs’ Stories. Facing inequalities and democratic challenges through co-production in cities (April 2024).

¹⁴ Extract from the Fairville Lab blog presentation: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/design-a-beautiful-blog>

¹⁵ As mentioned by the publication “*Rathausblock. Ein Modellprojekt, selbstverwaltet und kommunal*”, the aim of Rathausblock is to develop “a model urban development from the bottom up. We came together to create a concrete utopia with a model project – a utopia of the good life in the city. At the same time, we wanted to counter the critics who claim that the urban political movement is always “against” – especially against new construction. In reality, we stand for many things – we just need to find a language and a form for it!” (source https://coopdisco.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Schroeter-und-Berger_Zusammenstelle_Broschu%C3%88re_A5_Doppelseiten_web_4.pdf).

place in this context¹⁶ with the aim of researching how the local spatial infrastructures, along with specific community-driven programs (workshops, tools sharing, and new communication strategies) have created a common good- and spatial justice-oriented planning practice.

The people involved in the narratives of engagement were 4 men and 6 women. 6 of the interviewees [narratives #1, #2, #4, #7, #8, #9 and #11] are inhabitants of the neighbourhood and/or members of associations. 3 [narratives #3, #6 and #10] are local authority representatives, who played a central role in the co-production process of Rathausblock. 3 narratives [#1, #4 and #8] were collected from citizens. 3 of the people involved in the narratives are (or were) members of some association [#2, #7 and #9]. The indicated associations and groups are: *ZusammenStelle*¹⁷ [narratives #2 and #9], *Stadt von Unten* (City from below)¹⁸ [narratives #2 and #7]; *Omas gegen Rechts* [narrative #1]; Feuer und Flamme [narrative #3], *Gretchen club* [narrative #11].

The Rathausblock is in the centre of Berlin-Kreuzberg¹⁹, in the Dragonerareal, at the intersection of Obentrautstraße and Mehringdamm. “It is a city area of 4.7 hectares; it is a listed building (*denkmalgeschützt*), long ignored, then coveted by investors and defended by the urban community, now owned by the state and during a transformation process”. Since 2016 Rathausblock area has been included in the urban development programme.

We summarise here briefly the history of the area²⁰. This is an area that was formerly used for grazing; between 1840 and 1855, the Landwehr Canal was built. In 1855, the area was home to a complex of barracks and stables of the 1st Guard Dragoon Regiment. The *Hobrecht* Plan of 1862 defined the current streets and blocks. Residential and commercial buildings were built in the area. In the 1920s, the barracks were used for civilian purposes, related to the automotive industry. During World War II, the Dragoon Barracks served as an inner-city armaments site. Between 1952 and 1958, a modern complex with a high-rise building was built on Yorckstraße for Kreuzberg Town Hall. In 1966, the Rheinlandhaus and the remaining buildings in the block east of Ruhlsdorfer Straße were demolished to create a direct road connection between Mehringdamm and Wilhelmstraße/Stresemannstraße, as well as to extend the U7 subway line.

In 2010, the Federal Agency for Real Estate (BImA), which owns the site, put the site up for sale. At this time, the Berlin real estate market had once again become attractive for investment. In response to the planned sale, the first citizen initiatives formed, submitting a symbolic purchase offer and presenting plans for the development of the area. In 2012, the investor ABR German Real Estate purchased the site, which had previously been put up for auction in a tender process. However, in 2013, the investor withdrew its offer because no agreement could be reached in a dialogue process with the district and stakeholders. Various civil society initiatives, the neighbourhood, and local businesses subsequently mobilized against the privatization of the site, and the Berlin Senate and the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg District Office also advocated for a socially acceptable use of the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the Institute for Federal Real Estate (BImA) put the site up for auction again. The next prospective buyers were the investors Piepgras and EPG GPI from Vienna. In 2015, however, the Finance Committee of the Federal Council voted against the sale of the site to a private investor to create social housing. In 2016, the Dragonerareal site and the surrounding areas were designated as a redevelopment area under the

¹⁶ For a presentation of the Berlin Fairville Lab, see here: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/design-a-beautiful-blog>

¹⁷ *ZusammenStelle* is a support structure designed to assist civil society initiatives in engaging with the urban planning process of Rathausblock. See also <https://rathausblock.org/projekte/zusammenstelle/>. See also paragraph 3.5.

¹⁸ *Stadt von Unten* (‘City from below’), composed of activists and academics, challenged privatisation of land and promoted alternative land use, emphasising the importance of public control and community involvement in urban development. It has been a key actor of the Rathausblock project until the initiative is terminated in the year 2022.

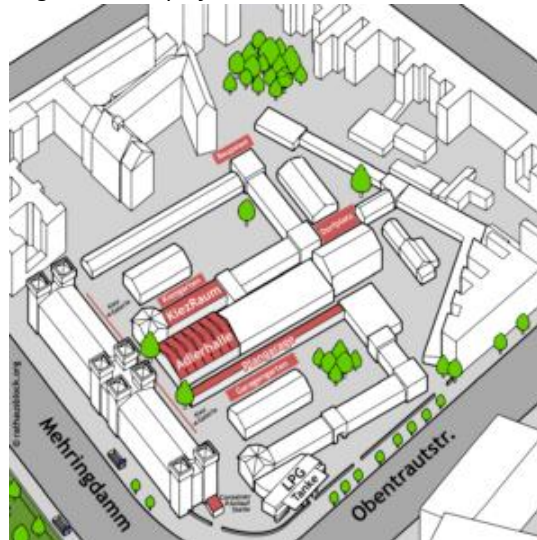
¹⁹ See <https://www.berlin.de/sen/stadtentwicklung/quartiersentwicklung/staedtebauforderung/lebendige-zentren-und-quartiere/gebiete/rathausblock-1287484.php>

²⁰ The history is summarised from this link; <https://www.berlin.de/rathausblock-fk/gebiet/geschichte-des-dragonerareals/>

name “Rathausblock.” With the formalisation of the property transfer on November 30, 2018, the site was transferred from the Institute for Federal Real Estate (BlmA) to the special fund for public service and non-operational essential existing properties of the State of Berlin (SODA), managed by *Berliner Immobilienmanagement GmbH* (BIM). The State of Berlin thus became the owner of the site²¹.

This is the map of Rathausblock (and also the logo of this long-lasting co-production experience).

Figure 2 – Map of Rathausblock



Karte vom Rathausblock © Rathausblock.org

2.2. Mapping key inequality factors

Almost none of the people involved in narratives and interviews provide information on inequality phenomena they know or experience in the territory, but describe phenomena of inequality within the co-production process, which will be presented in the next section. It might be supposed that the interviewees consider, in some way, this issue taken for granted, although it is certainly strongly felt.

In most cases, the interviewees have not been directly affected by rising rents or displacement, but rather by their **concerns** about how the **dynamics of the housing market** have significantly influenced the city’s urban development. This has given rise to a strong movement around the “**right to the city**” and **tenant activism**, with its most prominent base located precisely in the Kreuzberg neighbourhood. Also, the representatives of local authorities have concerns about the dynamics of the housing market. This is the case of the interviewee of narrative #3, the district representative, who has a personal background connected to these types of movements and the struggle for more equitable and socially oriented housing as having been himself an activist.

However, all persons interviewed, whether unaffiliated citizens, representatives of civil society movements, and city administration, opposed processes of privatisation of urban space and gentrification²². In this regard, it is important to consider the profound changes that affected Berlin after

²¹ For a history of cultural policies of the city of Berlin, see the article by Altmann, U. (2024) *Laissez-faire or sensitive policymaking: the legacy of creative clusters on Brownfield sites in Berlin*, published in *Urban Planning* volume 9, article 8236: <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/urbanplanning/article/viewFile/8236/4009> . On the history of commons in Berlin, see https://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Commons_History_of_Berlin

²² On the impact of gentrification and the displacement of tenants, see the article by Beran, F. and Nuissl, H. (2024). *Assessing displacement in a tight housing market: findings from Berlin*, published on *City. Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action*,

the reunification of the city, which made available many empty buildings in East Berlin and the different orientations of urban policies pursued by the city government.

Only one interviewee [narrative #1] provides information about economic and territorial inequalities. She expressed her concerns “about housing inequality in Kreuzberg, and the rising rents and the risk of displacement in the neighbourhood.” She emphasizes the need for affordable housing that accommodates people from diverse economic backgrounds and cultural origins. Without such inclusivity, she warns, the area risks becoming an exclusive enclave for wealthier residents, undermining the Rathausblock project’s goals. Also, the interviewee of narrative #11, who is among the early activists opposing the privatisation in 2011, reported “sparked collective mobilisation by the residents, who feared displacement due to rising rents and the future elite development” [narrative #11]. Also, other interviewees expressed their needs about affordable housing [narratives #1, #2, #3 and #9] for Rathausblock. Guaranteeing affordable housing is one of the aims of the Rathausblock co-production process.

2.3. *Relations between inequalities, engagement and forms of co-production*

The people involved in the narratives and interviews accurately describe the Rathausblock co-production process initiated from 2010 onwards and provide information on achievements, obstacles, facilitation tools, and prospects. As reported by narrative #7, such processes of co-production are often complex and fraught with challenges.

a. Negative effects of inequalities on engagement

Some of the narratives contain information on the reasons for the non-participation of particular groups of people or describe the reasons why some of those who had been involved at the beginning in Rathausblock process have, over time, dropped out.

The following issues are highlighted.

- Some initiatives remain confined to insular “**bubbles**,” making it difficult for broader participation of neighbourhood inhabitants [narrative #7].
- Events and **communications** often “**fail to reach the diverse populations** of Kreuzberg” [narrative #7]; from here, the importance of community outreach and public engagement [narrative #1].
- **Inequality in participation:** Much of the **participation comes from retirees or individuals with flexible schedules**, leaving younger people and those with full-time jobs or other commitments underrepresented. “This disparity raises questions about who has the time and resources to engage in these co-productive processes and how that influences the project’s outcomes” [narrative #1]. Narrative #9 also highlights “the role of the economy of time and the fact that many of those involved in the Rathausblock co-production process were older individuals with the time and financial stability to engage in lengthy meetings, often held during working hours. This imbalance excluded younger and working-class participants, creating a democratic deficit” [narrative #9].
- **Lack of financial support for sustaining voluntary participation over 10 years:** some participants, due to economic pressures, abandoned the process [narrative #4]. In this regard, it should be noted that some financial support was needed, for example, for the creation of structures like the

Volume 28, Issue 1-2 (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13604813.2023.2180829#d1e120>). The article contains the results of a survey carried out in 2015 among 2000 tenants who had recently experienced a displacement. A rent increase after refurbishment or the selling of the property proved to be the most common triggers of displacement.

Zusammenstelle, which offers paid positions [narrative #7]. But of course, this is not enough to cover all the needs. It should also be considered that not everybody wants or can accept a working position paid by the municipality. The interviewee of narrative #10 noted that “It became clear that it was difficult for the civil society groups to sustain long-term engagement due to the lack of financial and human resources, leading to a shift in power back toward institutional actors” [narrative #10]. A long-lasting participation without support, for the experience of interviewee of narrative #11 “is grounded in both existential necessity and political conviction”. She also reported cases involving some local businesses. She facilitated their relocations during construction phases and advocated on their behalf in negotiations. While some of the early actors eventually disengaged due to burnout or other changes, her involvement remained consistent [narrative #11].

- **Primary injustices due to the presence of elements of structural inequality embedded in the participatory planning process** [narratives #4 and #9] While the Rathausblock project aimed to secure public land for affordable housing and community use, the process itself did little to challenge deeper structural inequalities in decision-making power as it was not given many opportunities to do so: without redistributing actual decision-making authority and resources to civil society actors, such initiatives risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. The interviewee of narrative #6, commenting on the complexities of co-production, acknowledges that while the process has mitigated some inequalities, full parity between civil society and state actors remains unattainable.

Furthermore, some hindering factors on the reduction of engagement in the process have been mentioned. For example, the interviewee of narrative #6 acknowledges that early participation was high, but engagement has declined over time as discussions shifted from conceptual planning to concrete implementation. Some activist groups, such as *Stadt von Unten*, ultimately withdrew from the process due to frustrations with bureaucratic slowdowns and shifting priorities from advocacy to implementation [narrative #2]. Many early participants, including the interviewee of the narrative #4, initially joined out for a sense of justice and community commitment, but some of them, over time, abandoned the process [narrative #4]. Furthermore, some participants transitioned into institutional roles and abandoned the process [narratives #2, #4 and #7].

b. Effects of inequalities in promoting the engagement of people

People interviewed for the narratives indicated their role and their contribution in the Rathausblock co-production process as well as their concerns and visions. In general, it can be said that all the people interviewed for the narratives expressed their double concerns about the risks of privatising the spaces of Rathausblock, and the risk of implementing an urban planning exercise that was not really participatory, and the need to guarantee affordable housing, cultural preservation. They also highlighted the need to support the community and their willingness to work towards an innovative and effective model of co-designing urban planning. Each of them made available not only their time, but also their professional skills (and this also applies to representatives of movements and individual citizens). Specifically, the interviewee of narrative #1 used her skills as a photographer to document the co-production process, cataloguing the grassroots groups involved, including the creation of exhibitions; the interviewee of narrative #4, as an artist, proposed the creation of dedicated art spaces to define the uses of the spaces of Rathausblock. The interviewee of narrative #7 (who is an academic) was involved in drafting the agreement, working alongside government agencies such as BIM (Berlin Real Estate Management) and the municipal housing company WBM, and several professionals on urban planning topics.

The interviewee of the narrative #8, as an architect and researcher, participated in the process as a representative elected of civil society during the *Werkstattverfahren* (workshop procedure) held in 2019.

The interviewee of the narrative #9, as a researcher and activist, participated in *Zusammenstelle*, a support structure designed to assist civil society initiatives in engaging with the urban planning process, starting from 2019, to create a framework for supporting voluntary initiatives while maintaining their independence from administrative control.

The interviewee of the narrative #2 was actively involved since the early stages, in 2011, in the fight against privatisation; she is a member of the core group that initiated and shaped the project of Rathausblock; her role has been instrumental in fostering cooperation among stakeholders, negotiating governance structures, and ensuring that civil society remains a key player in urban development; she is also part of *Zusammenstelle*. Also, the interviewee of the narrative #7 is one of the earliest participants in the project from civil society. She describes how *Stadt von Unten* had to push the administration to recognize their demands. The interviewee of narrative #11 used her previous experience in international media development, acting as spokesperson for the civil society, for the area's diverse small businesses, including many Turkish-run workshops. She is also a member of the *Zukunftsrat* (Future Council) and multiple working groups (e.g., *Raum-und Flächenkuratorium*). She describes herself as a “translator” between the bureaucratic language of institutions and the everyday concerns of residents [narrative #11].

The representatives of the local authorities and the Senate [narratives #3, #6 and #10] played roles as facilitators of participation, negotiating among the different actors involved (civil society and local authorities), communicating the co-production process to the whole public, and co-defining the participatory governance of the project. The objective was and is to ensure that the urban co-production process of the Rathausblock project was inclusive, so that the voices of all were heard. The municipal counsellor [narrative #3] at the beginning of the project used his political influence to advocate for a participatory approach, ensuring that civil society's demands and community-driven development were central to the project's goals. The interviewee of narrative #10 is an important member of the Berlin Senate Department (*Senatsverwaltung*), responsible for coordinating the urban redevelopment of the Rathausblock quarter. She plays an important role in “coordinating funding between federal, state, and district levels, managing the *Gesamtprojektsteuerung* (overall project management) and overseeing infrastructure planning” [narrative #10]. For her, “the Rathausblock project was conceived as a ‘*Modellprojekt*’ (model project) as an example of co-productive urban development, initiated under a left-wing Senate (Die Linke) in 2016” [narrative #10]. This conception has been shared with civil society organisations.

For some of the interviewees, one of the **primary objectives** was to create 100% affordable housing [narratives #1 and #2]. The interviewee of narrative #6 provides further details. “The management of housing construction is a major objective here in the Rathausblock area – the aim is to build housing and ensure its planning and support through funding. The intention is that it becomes subsidized housing, creating living space for socially disadvantaged people. These are naturally objectives that can only be co-developed and approved as targets by the State of Berlin” [narrative #6]. The other **key objectives** mentioned by the interviewees included preserving existing businesses, fostering ecological sustainability, promoting innovative mobility and energy concepts [narrative #3]²³, and fostering cultural spaces to create inclusive, democratic, and equitable urban spaces [narratives #1 and #3] and promoting municipal participation (*Kommunal Teilhabe*) [narrative #7]. From a civil society perspective, the most pressing concern remains affordability: while cooperative governance is promising, without proper financial backing and state commitments to affordability, the model could fall short of its original vision [narrative #2].

For some of the interviewees, the **Rathausblock process represents a milestone and an experiment in urban co-production**, demonstrating both the possibilities and limitations of participatory governance in

²³ These goals were driven by civil society and supported by the State government at the time, a coalition of the SPD, Left Party, and Greens, which was open to experimental and participatory approaches. [narrative #3]

large-scale [narratives #2 and #3]. Some of the interviewees also provide information about the lessons learnt until now from the process. To ensure an inclusive process of co-production [narratives #3 and #6] it is necessary to strengthen civil society representation in decision-making bodies [narratives #2 and #8]; to expand financial resources for grassroots participation, to maintain pressure on policymakers to uphold cooperative agreements [narratives #2, #4 and #8], the redistribution of resources and decision-making power to civil society actors [narrative #6].

c. Engagement about inequalities producing limited impacts

The involvement of different actors, as we will see in paragraph 3.4, has produced positive results: privatizations have been blocked, urban space is now under public management, and a long and complex participatory process of urban planning has started, and it is still ongoing. Despite the results achieved, all interviewees described in detail the obstacles and challenges encountered or in progress.

- **Resource unbalance in participation** represents a fundamental barrier: Government bodies and housing associations have paid employees dedicated to the project, whereas civil society relies largely on volunteer efforts. Without funding for studies, administration, and sustained engagement, grassroots actors struggle to maintain influence over time. This disparity has made long-term participation challenging, leading to burnout and disengagement among many early activists [narratives #4 and #8].
- **Presence of conflict of interests and competing priorities:** The Rathausblock co-production involves a diverse set of stakeholders, each with distinct and conflicting interests [narratives #1 and #2]. The interviewee of narrative #2 identifies the seven core actors, “including Forum Rathausblock, a civil society assembly, *Vernetzungstreffen* Rathausblock, a network coordinating local groups, the Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing, the District Administration of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, BIM (Berlin Real Estate Management), WBM (state-owned housing company), and Economic Affairs Representatives” [narrative #2]. Rathaus *Modellprojekt* is a microcosm of larger societal dynamics, where negotiations over land use, housing, and public space reveal the tensions and possibilities of urban democracy [narrative #1]. The close collaboration between the institutional actors and community was unprecedented in Berlin; some institutional actors initially hesitated to engage in participatory processes, creating friction with civic society initiatives advocating for stronger community control over land and housing [narrative #6]; tensions among civil society organisations, particularly around the dominance of certain individuals [narrative #3]. Presence of divides within communities involved in the Rathausblock project and between civil society and the state, which is influenced by the dynamic and often contentious landscape of civil society in Berlin [key informants]. Among the conflicts of interest, the interviewee of narrative #10 mentioned the fact that “the civil society actors expected full participation in decision-making, but public legal frameworks and structures limited how far such equality could be allowed” [narrative #10].
- **Topics in conflicts:** competing priorities and expectations about density, building heights, and environmental considerations in delivering affordable housing, ecological sustainability, and social infrastructure while preserving the historical character of the area [key informants]; balancing civil society expectations with the administrative and financial realities of urban development [narrative #6]; conflicts over land allocation and governance models [narrative #6]; internal conflicts over paid roles split the group [narrative #7]; the involvement of future residents [narrative #7]; conflicts when personal interests took over [narrative #7]; conflicts about integration of more voices when groups prioritized individual housing interests over collective political goals [narrative #7]; tensions between different groups within the *Vernetzungstreffen Rathausblock*. While some actors were primarily focused on local cultural and historical aspects, *Stadt von Unten* took a more politically engaged stance, advocating for structural changes beyond

the immediate project [narrative #7]; balancing idealistic aspirations with practical governance [narrative #2].

- **Difficulties in guaranteeing the inclusiveness of the process.** As reported by the interviewee of narrative #10, “There were ongoing debates around who speaks for civil society and how to maintain an open and non-exclusive process” [narrative 10].
- The presence of **internal divisions within civil society** has sometimes complicated efforts to mitigate inequalities in participation, with competing interests and leadership struggles affecting the coordination of Rathausblock [narrative #6]. The interviewee of narrative #11 makes the example of the presence of “ideological divides with groups such as *Wem Gehört Kreuzberg*, whose anti-institutional stance was incompatible with the pragmatic and compromise-oriented approach she and others embraced” [narrative #11].
- **Excessive complexity of the stakeholders’ interaction in co-production.** The “complex structures of the stakeholders’ interactions and public hearings with too many working groups, consultants and contractors created an environment where **“everyone talked about everything,”** This structure slowed **the progress**: for example, “the debates over the location of the kindergarten stretched over a year, with sixteen different proposals reviewed in detail. Not only does it slow down the process but requires lots of financial and human resources” [narrative #10].
- **Delayed timing in the implementation of Rathausblock project:** “While initial plans targeted reaching planning goals by 2021, administrative complexities have pushed completion estimates to 2025” [narrative #2]. The interviewee of narrative #2 “highlights several factors contributing to these delays, including bureaucratic hurdles in land-use planning, rising construction costs impacting affordability goals, and ongoing negotiations on the proportion of affordable housing units” [narrative #2].
- **Delay in implementing key components of the project,** “such as the proposed urban factory, which was intended to provide affordable commercial spaces for local businesses. Despite being a central part of the urban development concept, the factory has yet to secure the necessary funding, pushing its realization further into the future, partly due to the complexity of coordinating multiple stakeholders and the financial constraints faced by municipal actors” [narrative #3].
- **Lack of compensation for long-term civic engagement** [narrative #4].
- **Deviations** from the initial plan during the phase of implementation: for example, the goal of preserving all existing businesses has proven difficult [narrative #3].
- **Bureaucratic slowdowns** [narrative #2]: also, due to **bureaucratic inertia in urban development planning** [narrative #4]. For the interviewee of narrative #11, it is important to distinguish “this systemic slowness from personal intentions, arguing that many institutional actors genuinely want the project to succeed, even if constrained by formal requirements and competing priorities” [narrative #11].
- **Hierarchical bureaucracy and technicalities** pose a barrier to implementing community-centred, participatory urban planning processes, necessitating continuous adaptation to the shifting political landscape [key informants]. Initially, activists, residents, and local businesses engaged in workshops, planning meetings, and forums. However, as the process became increasingly technical and administrative, fewer grassroots actors remained active [narrative #4]. “Bureaucracy can be used to discourage participation by making processes opaque and overly technical” [narrative #11].
- **Linguistic and technical barriers:** “linguistic and technical barriers that further alienate new or less-experienced participants. The specialised language used by both the administration and civil society actors made engagement difficult, leading to the phenomenon of ‘*Expertisierung*’, where civic actors began adopting bureaucratic jargon, inadvertently distancing themselves from the broader community” [narrative #9].
- **Limitations in civil society engagement in co-production and frustration:** “While civil society was initially empowered, institutional actors have increasingly dominated the process. The economic

realities of urban development, coupled with bureaucratic inertia, have made it difficult to maintain the ideal of equitable participation” [narrative #4]. The interviewee of narrative #11 pointed out that “successful co-production requires **recognising institutional constraints**, especially regarding legal and bureaucratic boundaries, and seeking realistic outcomes rather than idealised visions” [narrative #11].

- **The complex interplay of political and bureaucratic structures** represents a challenge for the Fairville. This also represents a challenge for civil society organisations that have to navigate in “Berlin’s fragmented governance structure, where responsibilities are divided between the Senate and the *Bezirksamt*, often slowing down decision-making” and producing frustration [key informants].
- **Changes in the government policies:** The original state government had committed to the goal of affordability, establishing the target of 100% affordable housing. The subsequent government has been less supportive, leading to uncertainties about the project’s targets, also due to funding constraints [narrative #3]. “The shift in (party) political power at various levels introduces uncertainties in policy direction, complicating collaborative efforts” [key informants].
- **Gaps in inclusion and accessibility** by CSO and citizens [narrative #1].
- **Organisational difficulties in scheduling meetings.** “It was hard to ensure broader participation and align schedules as the working hours of the institutional actors were over by the time civil society actors could join public hearings” [narrative #10].
- **Resistance to inclusiveness:** “Some community structures are also not willing to engage with new community actors and diversity” [key informants].
- **Decrease in transparency and openness during the process.** “Initially, the project emphasized transparency and open discussion, but over time, decision-making has become more centralized. Agreements between the Senate, BIM, and WBM now take place with less public oversight, leading to concerns that institutional priorities are overriding earlier commitments to inclusivity and participatory governance” [narratives #4 and #8]. The same concerns have been expressed by the interviewee of narrative #8 about the procedures followed in the design competition (*Werkstattverfahren* – see below).
- **Lack of participatory decision-making** during some phases of the Rathausblock process [narrative #2]; for example, during some phases of implementation [narrative #10].
- **Disconnection during the time between civil society and administrative bodies** [narrative #4].
- Need to have the **willingness of all stakeholders to commit** to the principles of cooperation and shared decision-making [narrative #3].
- **Need to build trust and foster strong relationships** among stakeholders. Personal connections developed with key actors by some of the interviewees have been crucial in navigating the project’s complexities [narrative #3]. Building trust and fostering relationships are also essential for the interviewee of narrative #11 because it contributes to increasing the legitimacy of the person in the dialogue with stakeholders. “Co-production only works when personal relationships are built on **honesty, visibility, and reliability**. She emphasizes that trust was earned by ‘being there’ walking around the area and speaking to people face-to-face, rather than via email or formal channels” [narrative #11].
- Difficulty for CSO/association in **balancing collaboration with institutions while maintaining independent activism**. Based on the experience of *Stadt von Unten* of struggle to maintain external pressure while participating in the formal cooperation process. When mobilization was strong, sustained public engagement proved difficult. This weakened the initiative’s ability to influence outcomes and reduced its negotiating power within the cooperation. The interviewee of the narrative #7 suggests that splitting efforts earlier, with one group inside the cooperation and another maintaining external pressure, might have been a better approach [narrative #7].

- The need for civil society organisations to **avoid a confrontational approach toward local authorities**. The interviewee of narrative #11 reported her efforts as spokesperson for civil society organisations to work “with institutions rather than against them”, and to “cultivate a dialogue with politicians and public bodies”. Her approach contributed “to the federal government’s eventual decision to transfer ownership of the site to the City of Berlin”. In this context, informal channels of communication are very important. In her experience, “demonstrations were occasionally coordinated ‘off the record’ with Senate actors to strategically apply public pressure” [narrative #11].
- **Resistance against the use of art**: “Art is often associated with gentrification and commercial interests”, while art is “a tool for representation and engagement rather than speculation” [narrative #4].
- **The presence of legal limitations in guaranteeing the equality of the process**. “While civil society often demanded more active inclusion, public procurement laws (e.g., *Vergaberecht*) and budget constraints limited this possibility. The Senate could not legally delegate procurement decisions to external partners.” [narrative #10].
- **Unbalance of power**, reported by almost all the people interviewed for the narratives [narratives #2, #3, #4, #6, #7, #8 and #9], identifying the following aspects:
 - While civil society was initially empowered, institutional actors have increasingly dominated the process. The economic realities of urban development have made it difficult to maintain the ideal of equitable participation [narrative #4].
 - “While this model facilitated collaboration, it also revealed **power imbalances**, with institutional actors retaining control over funding and long-term decision-making” [narrative #6].
 - Co-production is a complex process. “While the process has mitigated some inequalities, **full parity between civil society and state actors remains unattainable**. Institutional partners hold significant advantages in terms of resources, legal authority, and administrative endurance, which often leads to frustrations among the activists” [narrative #6].
 - The **Cooperation Agreement** (see paragraph #3.5) has allowed civil society actors to gain a seat at the table, fostering a unique collaborative decision-making environment. However, the true parity between civil society and institutional stakeholders remains elusive due to resource (financial and administrative) imbalances and decision-making hierarchies [narratives #2 and #4]. While the Cooperation agreement and *Zukunftsrat* aim to create parity among stakeholders, the reality is that institutional actors like the Senate and municipal housing companies still hold significant power [narrative #3]. As pointed out by the interviewee of narrative #7, the agreement is not legally binding. At any point, an administrative body could choose to disregard what had been discussed. None of the terms, including those that might have been agreed upon years ago, hold legal weight. This situation reflects a clear imbalance of power [narrative #7].
 - The final **decision-making was heavily influenced by powerful actors**, like public housing corporations (such as WBM), who prioritized economic efficiency over community-oriented outcomes. These dynamic underscores the challenges of achieving true co-production in urban development, where institutional actors often retain control over key decisions [narrative #8].
 - **Power imbalances**, fading public pressure, and the frustrations of working with institutions that could ignore agreements at any time. A crucial role is played by interpersonal communication and collaboration among civic society members and initiative participants [narrative #7].

The Rathausblock co-production process has tried to address the challenge of unbalance of power through the development of a sort of framework to support participation, consisting of the Cooperation

Agreement defined at the beginning, and the establishment of the *Zukunftsrat* (Future Council). The district administration created the *Zusammenstelle*, an office dedicated to facilitating communication between civil society and institutional actors. The Rathausblock process is described in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5. Despite the efforts, however, the challenge remained partially unresolved.

The interviewee of narrative #10 reflected on the **transferability** of the Rathausblock project: “The unique set of conditions, such as the site’s public ownership, central location, and political priority status, are not common elsewhere in Berlin” [narrative #10]. It is not possible to sustain from the point of view of the resources needed for such a long-lasting project of co-production. “Besides, the administration invested heavily in participatory tools, external coordination (e.g., STERN) and cross-departmental collaboration, which, again, is hard to provide for another big project like the Rathausblock.” [narrative #10]. She argues “that a lot was learned about trust-building, communication with the civil society actors, legal limitations and how to balance inclusion with project feasibility”. She considers “the Rathausblock project as a deeply ambitious, politically dependent and structurally complex redevelopment. While she acknowledges real successes in civic inclusion and institutional learning, she was honest about the limits of co-production under real-world legal, financial and administrative constraints that are hard to sustain in the long-term or replicate. The project is a ‘special case’ – important but not yet a scalable model for urban development elsewhere in Berlin” [narrative #10].

For the interviewee of narrative #11 “the Rathausblock model is replicable, but only under certain conditions, namely, the presence of embedded, politically committed civil society actors and public authorities willing to engage on an eye-level.” She highlights that learning has occurred on both sides: institutions have become more responsive, and civil society actors have developed a greater understanding of planning procedures and legal frameworks. Still, the model remains heavily dependent on individual relationships and informal coordination, which are difficult to scale. The Rathausblock process is a meaningful and ongoing experiment in co-production, grounded in mutual respect, pragmatic politics, and a long-term vision of inclusive urban development. While she remains aware of the limitations and contradictions involved, she considers the process a significant achievement in building bridges between government and society” [narrative #11].

As mentioned by the key informants, one important issue is the **difficulty of shifting from an oppositional to a constructive stance within community structures**. Community mobilisation is hampered by differences in tactics from oppositional to collaborative stance: mobilisation around a cooperative process, negotiation and dialogue with the state (versus opposition), and forms of institutionalisation [key informants]. The interviewee of narrative #10 pointed out that “the Rathausblock project is a work in progress and there’s a lot to be done, including improvement of its reputation among both civil society and institutional actors” [narrative #10].

d. Engagement contributions to reduce inequalities

The people interviewed for the narratives have contributed to the implementation of Rathausblock’s co-production project over the last ten years. Some achievements can be mentioned: to have prevented a process of privatisation of the area that would have led to new inequalities; to have, over time, defined and built an institutional framework of co-production between civil society, local authorities, and private sector for the urban planning of the area; the promotion of social housing.

- **The beginning: counteracted two privatisation attempts in 2012 and 2014.** The interviewee of narrative #2 describes the beginning Rathausblock project in 2011 when early civic activism arose for preventing a first tentative of privatization of the *Dragonerareal*. For the narrative #6, the first activism “started around 2010, with the first intentions to sell the site by BIMA, who were the owners at the time. There were already discussions taking place back then, including with our then-

city councillor” [narrative #6]. In May 2012, BiMA presented the first offer for the area. In July 2012, Investor ABR German Real Estate won the contract in the first highest bidder process (July 2012). Thanks to civic activism and in particular that of activist group *Stadt von Unten* (‘City from Below’) [narrative #7]. The first attempt at privatisation failed at the end of 2013, when the Investor – German Real Estate – withdrew following the dialogue process with the district and stakeholders [narrative #6]. The property was about to be sold for a second time in 2014, with the presentation of a new offer in July 2014 and the award of the tender in August 2014. The situation escalated. *Stadt von Unten* (‘City from Below’) and other groups and movements actively opposed it. The State of Berlin responded by pushing more strongly for an urban development study, which eventually led to the formal designation of the new area” [narrative #6].

- However, the turning point came in 2014, when *Stadt von Unten* actively asked to establish a model project for cooperative urban development, centred on principles of 100% participation, permanent affordability, and a non-commercialized approach to property ownership. Initially, the group directed their efforts against privatization [narrative #2]. A new phase started, in which civil society actors, local businesses, and residents had to define the site’s future [narrative #4]. In 2015, the district formally started its participation in the Rathausblock project when the area was designated for redevelopment under German building law, requiring urban development studies and participatory planning, and a structured, cooperative process [narrative #6].
- **The first approach: participatory urban planning and the engagement of local authorities.** Although co-production was not the initial driver of the district’s involvement, the collaboration with civil society was inevitable due to the presence of strong grassroots initiatives and the role they played against privatisation of the area. Early engagement included preventing speculative investments and securing urban development funding to support long-term community-oriented planning. The district administration played a key role in integrating these strategic objectives within formal planning procedures [narrative #6]. For the interviewee of narrative #6, “it was simply clear that co-production was the only way forward” [narrative #6]. The initial push of movements and CSOs was for cooperative urban development, demanding a more inclusive approach to urban planning. The interviewee of the narrative #3, in his capacity as district officer and a city councillor, starting from 2017, used his political influence to advocate for a participatory approach, ensuring that civil society’s demands and community-driven development were central to the project’s goals. As reported by the interviewee of narrative #7, while the group did not initially frame its approach as co-production, its aim from the outset was to establish an alternative planning process integrating self-management and municipal structures.
- **The start of the co-production project.** “By 2017-2018²⁴, after significant public pressure and negotiations, the site was officially transferred to the State of Berlin instead of private investors (November 2018). As described by the interviewee of narrative #10, one of the challenges was to guarantee the possibility to use special planning tools for Rathausblock. The area was first “designated a *Sanierungsgebiet* (redevelopment zone), granting the city special planning tools” [narrative #10]. This designation was opposed by BIM and private landowners. Finally, after the judgement of the Berlin Higher Administrative Court, “the city reclassified the area as a *Stadtumbaugebiet* (urban renewal zone) in 2023. Though offering fewer legal powers, this new status maintained access to public funding mechanisms” [narrative #10]. This shift to the State of

²⁴ In 2017 and 2018 two series of working groups have been organised. In particular, in 2017, the WGs worked on the question: What does a cooperative process at eye level look like? The following working groups were organised and implemented in 2017: Value Place for Participation (2017); Workshop for Housing and Social Affairs; Workshop for the History of the Place; Workshop for Commerce and Culture; Workshop for Neighborhood Space. Meetings for the requalification of the area took also place in 2017. In 2018 working groups (WGs) were formed to facilitate the joint work of citizens on issues related to Rathausblock: Housing and Social Affairs Working Group; Local History Working Group; Community & Culture Working Group; Space Working Group; Transport and Mobility Working Group; Ecology and Sustainability Working Group. In April 2018, first fund was available to neighborhood. Some public initiatives took place from April until the end of 2018.

Berlin marked the beginning of the co-production process, in which multiple stakeholders – including state actors, housing cooperatives, and civil society organizations – collaborated to define the site’s future” [narrative #2] and the design of a cooperation model [narrative #7]. “This transition required negotiations and explaining to the administration why conventional participation mechanisms were insufficient and advocating for an approach that recognized collective interests rather than individual stakeholders, and to distinguish between traditional participation and genuine cooperation.” [narrative #7]. The interviewee of narrative #8 expresses concerns about the fact that the original vision of 100% public housing and self-organized spaces has been eroded over time, with institutional actors gradually reducing the percentage of public housing and eliminating self-organized housing options.

- **The implementation phases and first results.** The participatory nature of the Rathausblock project makes it distinct from other urban regeneration efforts, leading to a more transparent but also lengthier decision-making process. The current phase is shifting towards execution and implementation. This transition has prompted a re-evaluation of meeting structures, with decision-making bodies now convening less frequently, emphasizing efficiency over extensive deliberation [narrative #3]. The interviewee of narrative #10 pointed out the difficulties in guaranteeing co-production mechanisms in this phase: “In recent years, the project moved from a planning phase to a more technical implementation phase, involving detailed tasks like energy infrastructure and heritage preservation. Therefore, particular technical questions do not involve co-decision making, contributing to a decline in participation and rising mistrust towards institutional actors. When such decisions are made, excluding public assessment and participation, it creates an impression of neglecting co-producing aspects of the process and moving it to “behind the scenes” [narrative #10]. The details of the implementation are subject to continuous negotiation. This is the case, for example, of the commitment to 500 affordable housing units and the establishment of a car-free residential zone [narrative #5]. As the project moves forward, physical changes are becoming visible. Demolition of outdated structures has begun to clear space for new developments, with the first housing projects awaiting land-use plan approvals. However, bureaucratic delays, particularly concerning the B-plan (*Bebauungsplan*), have slowed progress [narrative #5]. The mobilisation helped increase the share of social housing in municipal construction from 30% to 50% and contributed to shifting Berlin’s urban policy discussions [narrative #7].

e. Elements of co-production

Elements and practices of co-production²⁵ are described in the narratives. The co-production process has led to some institutional changes in the way urban planning is managed in Rathausblock. Important steps in this process are listed below.

- **Initial working group.** “Following the Rathausblock’s public acquisition state-led working group was established, but it lacked inclusivity, prompting civil society actors to establish their own framework” and to advocate for a more structured engagement model [narrative #2].
- **Establishment of the *Zusammenstelle*,** a dedicated office facilitating cooperation and defining the mechanism providing civil society actors with resources and organisational support [narratives #3, #7 and #9]. “While this move helped sustain engagement, it also created hierarchies within the movement, as those in paid positions had greater access to information and decision-making processes” [narrative #2]. *Stadt von Unten* eventually decided that individuals involved in *Zusammenstelle* could either work within this office or remain engaged in some way in the activism process. Some people exit the office [narrative #7]. However, early on, tensions arose about the structure’s function: whether it should remain purely technical (organizing meetings, archiving

²⁵ As stated in the introduction of Part 2, the contents of this paragraph are also a contribution to the ongoing broad reflection carried out by the Fairville Labs and other WPs on co-production.

decisions, maintaining accessibility) or take a more active role in shaping urban planning outcomes. Ultimately, *Zusammenstelle* acts as a facilitator rather than a decision-maker, often constrained by administrative expectations and funding limitations [narrative #9].

- **Establishment of governance structure**²⁶: “the *Zukunftsrat* (‘Future Council’) and the Forum, designed to facilitate equal participation and dialogue among stakeholders”. *Zukunftsrat* is a high-level decision-making body that brings together representatives from the Senate, the district, the grassroots initiatives, and major stakeholders like BIM and BBM [narratives #3, #5, #6]²⁷. The *Zukunftsrat*, moderated by Zebralog, plays a central role in setting the strategic direction for the project. The establishment of the *Zukunftsrat* was prepared by the *Gründungsrat*, which served as a negotiation platform to finalize the cooperation structure, and the *Vorbereitungsgruppe Zukunftsrat*, a preparatory working group that meets every two weeks to refine technical details before they reach the *Zukunftsrat*. This preparatory working group was managed by STERN, a consultant of the Senate, in collaboration with Zebralog. These meetings serve as a space where conflicts are identified early, and solutions are proposed before they escalate into larger decision-making forums [narrative #5]. Later, STERN holds a separate contract for communication, public relations, and engagement, formerly managed by Zebralog, aimed at ensuring that residents and local businesses remain informed about developments of the Rathausblock and have opportunities to engage with the process, also through public forums. *Zukunftsrat* is still in place. The interviewee of narrative #11 reported that the Council is now working on the issue of noise mitigation due to new residential developments nearby. For her, it is important that her *Gretchen club* is acting in a proactive role. The Forum is a **public platform** for residents and experts, especially for neighbours not already involved in the initiatives.
- **Formulation of a cooperation agreement – Coop6 (2019)**, which defined governance principles, the division of responsibilities between state actors, civic groups, and housing cooperatives, and land use requirements and planning principles [narratives #2 and #6]. As reported by the interviewee of narrative #10, the agreement involves “institutional actors (Senate, BIM, WBM) and civil society organisations” [narrative #10]. The entire process aimed “to be inclusive, with six original partners, including civil society alliances, involved in defining how decisions would be made. Moreover, civil actors helped shape the working structures, including cooperative forums, working groups, and joint planning bodies” [narrative #10].
- The ***Werkstattverfahren* (2020) procedures for the approval of works and initiatives to be implemented**. It is composed of three phases, where architectural teams presented their proposals to a jury composed of both professional experts and civil society representatives. The process was initially inclusive, with civil society members providing feedback on the proposals; then the process progressed, and power dynamics shifted, with institutional actors, particularly public housing corporations like WBM, dominating the final decision-making. This led to frustration among civil society members. For the interviewee of narrative #8, the final decision was made in a “backroom discussion” between the head of the Jury and WBM executives, undermining the transparency and fairness of the process [narrative #8]. For the interviewee of narrative #8, the culture of some members of the Jury was not “very horizontal” (for example, the CEOs of the housing companies). The board of the Jury is very powerful and exercises its power at the last meeting of the Jury [narrative #8].

²⁶ There is also the *Vernetzungstreffen* (coordination meeting) a self-organized network of most civil society initiatives and actors involved in the model project. (source Fairville Berlin Lab flyer, May 2025).

²⁷ In particular, participate in the *Zukunftsrat*: BaF-Km, *District Office of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg*; SenSBW, *Berlin Senate* department for urban planning, construction, and housing; SenWeB, *Berlin Senate* Department for Economy, Energy, and Public Enterprises; SenFin, *Berlin Senate* Department for Finance; BIM, *Berlin Real Estate Management Company*, a state-owned entity managing Berlin’s public properties; WBM, *Housing Construction Company Berlin-Mitte*, a municipal company that manages and develops both residential and commercial properties; representatives of local retails, the Forum (platform); civil society initiatives and actors involved in the model project. (Source: Fairville Berlin Lab flyer – May 2025).

- In this context, through ethnographic observation, the Fairville Lab of Berlin aims to understand how just co-productive Rathausblock processes can be developed and what kinds of social spaces they create. The Fairville Lab is working to bridge divides within communities involved in the Rathausblock project and between civil society and the state and to actively promote inclusivity. It is interesting to understand the power dynamics among the multi-scalar actors involved in the coproduction process, the challenges faced by the local initiatives, and whether the spaces produced through the process foster social interaction among the neighbours. It is important to note that the Rathausblock stakeholders are now shifting from being reactive (anti-privatization) to being more proactive, aiming to establish a model project of effective community-led urban planning at scale. The Fairville Lab is also facing the challenges tied to the complex interplay of political and bureaucratic structures. This involves dealing with technical rules, with the different approaches of CSOs, and the changes in the political landscape. In this regard, we report some quotations from the interviewees:
- “One point is that the District and the Senate level are not always fine with each other because they have different kinds of colours of political parties. It is not easy to cooperate with every political party. Some parties have cooperation in their DNA, but some don’t.” [key informants]
 - “There is also some planning culture coming from the bureaucracy that is like a filter. It is very hierarchical, very vertical [...] [key informants].
 - This is something that needs to be changed in the administration. It is difficult to know how to change it even for them because it is hard to go out of the rules of this bureaucracy, even if they want to. There is some kind of isolation by rules and by the vertical organization. We need people inside the administration who have the motivation to work together with civil society and make other processes” [key informants].
 - “Sometimes, there is a clash in the civil society. There is a part of the civil society saying that the reform-making process is a corrupted process. We need to find a third way, a way to collaborate with the state. To not just be against but to make a clear change. Some changes need to be made on both sides. [...] Both sides must go beyond their disagreement” [key informants].

Finally, the Fairville Lab’s mobilisation efforts are focused on addressing systemic barriers to participation through activities such as translation services, to ensure inclusivity and effective communication with people affected by housing inequalities and other urban processes. An important field for consideration relates to the financial resourcing of participation.

2.4. *How engagement faces inequalities – Berlin Matrix*

The matrix summarises how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified. The ordinate displays various types of bottom-up actions and initiatives. The x-axis presents the primary inequality problems and phenomena considered. The cells indicate potential intersections between the problem and the type of engagement. For comparative purposes, the matrix structure remains consistent across all Fairville Labs analyses.

Table 1 – Matrix Engagement/Inequalities in Berlin

MATRIX OF INEQUALITIES/ ENGAGEMENT	Environmental problems	Economic and territorial inequalities	Social inequalities	Discrimination and segregation	Bad governance & lack of policies
Requests, protests and conflicts		X	X	X	
Social movements		X	X	X	
Parallel planning		X	X	X	
Mapping exercise					
Self-managed initiatives					
Produces or implements goods and services					
Action to foster rights (rights to city, right to...)		X	X	X	
Knowledge co- production (fostering local knowledge)		X	X	X	
Actions of risk management (face or prevention)					
Creation of association					
Creation of support network (territorial coalition)		X	X	X	
Collaboration with local authorities		X	X	X	
Collaboration with universities, research centres					
Promoting and implementing new regulatory framework		X	X	X	
Agenda settings of strategies and actions to solve local problems		X	X	X	

3. Map of impacts of inequalities on engagement – Brussels

3.1. Introduction

The map of inequality impacts on engagement in Brussels is based on the contents²⁸ of 9 narratives of engagement and key informant interviews²⁹. The narratives provide detailed information on the different forms of experienced inequalities tied to the recurrent floods of the area of Rue Gray and on their impacts on engagement and actions each of the interviewees has taken to try to improve/solve the situation.

“The Rue **Gray** is situated on the bedding of the old Maelbeek river, in a consequent low point of the valley. Although invisible to the eye after centuries of urbanization, the presence of this river is still felt. The Fairville lab Brussels³⁰ works around the unequal distribution of environmental hazards and flood risk in this street, to improve the overall liveability for the current inhabitants, and their right to a decent housing situation”³¹. It “aims to promote the empowerment of the local community for setting up a participatory flood risk management process in the urban area around Rue Gray in the Maelbeek valley. This empowerment is aimed at proposing innovative solutions, also based on the knowledge and expertise of the communities and citizens concerned. The FVlab is based on the idea that urban policies should not be developed ‘for’ the people but rather ‘with’ them, to value their local expertise and to fully respond to their needs”³².

The Maelbeek is a tributary of the Senne River, with torrential characteristics, i.e., sudden and violent floods³³, that flows through several municipalities in Brussels, including Etterbeek, Ixelles, Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, Schaerbeek.

We use the historical sketch and text included in the Fairville Brussels Lab presentation³⁴. “Historically in Brussels, a socio-economic divide is visible in the city’s valleys: working classes and the poorest groups

²⁸ As stated, this map uses extracts of the narratives. The interviewee narrative is reported in the third person. The name is not reported for privacy protection. The excerpts from the narratives are between quotation marks. Direct quotations of the interviewees are in italics between a single quotation mark.

²⁹ The key informants interviewed were Dominique Nalpas (Etat généraux de l’eau à Bruxelles - EGEB), and Catalina Dobre (Université Libre de Bruxelles - ULB).

³⁰ The Brussels Fairville Lab is coordinated by the CSO EGEB, the ULB laboratory LoUIE and the Ixelles municipality. It also involves further networks, such as the platform “Délir les fils de l’eau”. EGEB - The General States of Water in Brussels (<https://www.egeb-sgwb.be/> established in October 2012) is a citizen association whose objective is to make water an urban common good. In other words, the idea is to create the conditions for a co-management of this element and in particular of rainwater and runoff. On the basis in particular of the concept of New Urban Rivers (NRU). EGEB uses surveys. In addition, for several years, EGEB have been developing the concept and application of the Solidary Watershed which links the inhabitants of the bottom of the valleys with those of the top. The EGEs work in a cross-sectoral and transdisciplinary fashion. NRU is composed of a set of hydrological devices integrated in the urban landscape of low technological intensity (rainwater tanks, ponds, rain and storm gardens, infiltration wells, roundabouts or floodable tree stands). Connected, these devices manage stormwater through infiltration, slowing down, harvesting or evapotranspiration. NRUs make it possible, in case of rainfall, to manage stormwater “where it falls”, and to avoid run-off and consequent flooding. LIEU Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Urban Studies, ULB (Université Libre de Bruxelles) - LIEU brings together geographers, historians, architects and town planners, sociologists and arts and literature specialists who are passionate about urban questions. In particular, LIEU seeks to highlight the tensions at work in the production of urban spaces, by focusing on sociability, struggles and minority experiences (present and past) in cities. It is also a meeting place for urban knowledge, including one produced outside the academic world (by associations, administrations or private companies).

³¹ Extract from <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/a-visit-to-brussels-september-18-19-2023>

³² Extract from Deliverable D1.1 page #46

³³ Source: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maelbeek>. English translation of the Italian version of Wikipedia: The Maelbeek basin is characterised by steep slopes, which cause violent flooding. After the creation of several neighbourhoods, the brook, which became torrential during thunderstorms, caused flooding and compromised public health, and was therefore channelled into an aqueduct.

³⁴ Extract from <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/the-brussels-fairville-lab-presentation>

used to live in the lower parts, while richer classes lived in the higher areas. Along the Maelbeek river were several industries (breweries, tanneries, etc.) and housing for workers and low-income people.

At the end of the 19th century, major sewage works were carried out to improve the sanitary conditions and to attract wealthier classes. Houses were connected to water distribution, and the Maelbeek river was vaulted in 1873 and transformed into a combined underground infrastructure collecting stormwater and wastewater. Since the 1970s, with the increased urbanisation of the valley, during storm events, the infrastructure has frequently overflowed into the streets and basements of Rue Gray.

In 2003, to limit the risk of flooding, a 33,000 m³ underground stormwater basin was proposed underneath the nearby Place Flagey to act as a buffer for the infrastructure. Citizen-based organisations contested this titanic project, its cost, the possibility that it could not be sufficient to resolve flooding and searched for alternatives by managing stormwater on the ground and less underground. Stormwater can be managed, not only where the floods occur, but over the whole valley through infiltration, storage, and reuse. This contestation was a pivotal movement for raising awareness of alternative ways to manage stormwater and the need for citizen participation in urban projects. It was the first time that water publicly became a political and ecological issue in Brussels. The stormwater basin was nevertheless built in the name of a necessary solidarity with the inhabitants of Rue Gray. However, in the past 20 years, flooding has continued on this street. Two main problems have been identified in Rue Gray: sewer overflow in the middle of the street (brown water) and seepage from the rising groundwater level (clean water)."

Figure 3 – The Maelbeek River Basin



Source: [EGEB website](#)

12 people have been involved in the interviews for the 9 narratives³⁵. In fact, the narrative #7, albeit primarily focused on the experiences of one person, who served as the principal interviewee, saw the participation of three more people, whose interventions complement the narrative when relevant. The principal interviewees were 4 male [narratives #1, #5, #7 and #8] and 5 females [narratives #2, #3, #4, #6 and #9]. 2 of the 9 interviewees are between 30 and 40 years old [narratives #2 and #4]; 3 between 40 and 50 years old [narratives #1, #3, #5]; 1 between 50 and 60 years old [narrative #6] and 2 over 60 [narratives #7 and #9]. 5 of them are active members of the Association Déliers Fils de l'Eau [#1, #2, #3, #4, and #9]; 4 had two initial contacts with this association but are not active members [#5, #6, #7, and #8]. Several of them have played and play an important role in the Association. From the interviews, it seems that most of the interviewees were and are the owners of the flooded houses; one of the interviewees lives in social housing. Five of the respondents live right on Rue Gray, the other four in cross streets or neighbouring areas. 5 of the respondents came to live in the area in recent years: 1 in 2017, 2 in 2019, and 2 in 2020. The others have lived in the district for a long time, some since the 1960s, one since 2008, one for 10 years, and one for 20 years. Women seem much more engaged than men (see paragraph 3.3).

Only one narrative contains a reference to Fairville. Interviewee of narrative #8 considers Fairville an important initiative, even if he is not actively involved.

3.2. Mapping key inequality factors

Narrative interviewees and key informants provide an accurate description of the environmental problems and inequalities experienced related to the flooding of houses in Rue Gray and neighbouring streets over the past 20 years, by both rainwater and sewage, which spills out of the drained river.

a. Problems and environmental inequalities

The narratives describe in detail the damage caused by the floods, their initial reactions and actions to remedy the damage caused and prevent future damage, their first dealings with local authorities, insurance companies, builders, VIVAQUA³⁶, etc.

First of all, it emerges that only two of the people interviewed [narratives #3 and #5] were aware that the house they were living in or buying was at risk of flooding. The respondents of narratives #1, #4, and #9 did not know this. Neither did the respondent from narrative #9, who lives in a social housing flat after moving to another flat. They discovered the problem during their first flood. The interviewees of narratives #1 and #2 report how the previous owners tried to conceal the problems (in the first case "Additional layers of coating had been applied to conceal the problems" trying to hide the damage of previous floods) and in the second case by declaring that the problem had been solved. Respondent of narrative #3 pointed out that "The neighbourhood is identified on urban maps as vulnerable to flooding" [narrative 3]. Three narratives reported information on recurrent floods even before the year 2000.

The interviewee of narrative #7 grew up in the neighbourhood. "He/She and his/her family moved to the area in the early 1960s when he/she was four years old. Their residence was not far from Rue Gray, and [the interviewee] recalls witnessing the street flooded, rainwater running down the streets, cars floating ... It's the Maelbeek, people used to say, referring to the already culverted Maelbeek River. Even at that

³⁵ The interviewers for the narratives were: Luisa Moretto (ULB, professor); Loukia Batsi, (EGEB, researcher); Giuseppe Faldi, (ULB, researcher & lecturer).

³⁶ VIVAQUA is a 100% water public company. Founded in 1891, VIVAQUA is one of the largest water companies in Belgium. Their activities encompass the production and distribution of drinking water and include also the management of sewer networks and flood control.

time, flooding was not a new issue, despite the neighbourhood being less densely urbanized than it is today”.

All narratives describe the damage caused by floods and water infiltration; some describe ‘their first’ flood or a particularly intense and damaging one they experienced. It should be noted that flood damage varies considerably depending on the location of different property units: “His building has six apartments, and the situation varies depending on each unit’s location. Those at the front of the building seem to be less affected, while those on the ground floor suffer from high ambient humidity” [narrative #1]. A similar consideration is reported by the respondent of narrative #6; the extent of damage depends on where the house is in relation to the underlying water infrastructure. “Through his/her conversations with Vivaqua and observations in the neighbourhood, [the interviewee] has learned that his/her house’s location plays a significant role in the flooding problem in his/her basement. The sewage system in the area appears to have a layered structure, and his/her house is positioned in a way that makes it more vulnerable to backflow issues. Additionally, [the interviewee] noted that while the neighbours did not initially report similar issues, over time, others in the street – including a neighbour directly across from him/her – began experiencing flooding as well [narrative #6]”.

These are the damages that are reported:

- **Humidity** in flats and walls (dampness rises from the floor for more than a metre, tiles come off, etc.) [narrative 1, #9]; humidity levels fluctuate with the seasons: they are particularly high after rainfall but can also worsen in summer due to evaporation effects [narrative #1].
- The presence of the **water table beneath his house**. Located about one to two meters below the structure, it causes significant capillary rise, affecting the building’s stability [narrative #1].
- **Sewage backup into the basement** [narratives #6].
- **Water seeped into the basement and common areas** [narrative #2].
- **Room flooded** [narrative #8].
- **Malfunctioning electrical installations** [narrative #1]
- **Water stagnates** in the basement and attracts rats, making the space almost unusable [narrative #1]
- When the incoming water leaves behind lasting damage to doors, walls, and structural components of the building [narrative #2#]
- Flooding episode, which **filled the cellar and the small yard with sewage water** [narrative #9].

The narratives also contain descriptions of a series of specific episodes. It should be noted that the interviewees report their historical memory of flood events, which affected people who mostly lived at the bottom of the valley or in social housing.

- “Over the past five years, the incidence of flooding has increased once again due to heavier rainfall” [narrative #7].
- The **2019** “event was caused by sewage backup, which flooded the building’s cellar through exhaust pipes” [narrative 3].
- “After moving into the apartment in October **2020**, [the interviewee] quickly discovered that severe flooding issues plagued the building. The problem first became apparent during the winter, when water seeped into the basement and common areas” [narrative #2]. Also, the interviewee of narrative #6 experienced a minor flood in 2020.
- In **2021**, an intense rainfall event resulted in significant flooding in the building’s basement. The flooding was not just water infiltration but also sewage backup into the building’s basement [narrative #4].
- Two interviewees reported information on the floods that occurred in **2023**. That July 9th “flood led to sewage water once again entering the cellar, while another issue surfaced when rainwater

entered [the interviewee]’s apartment from the terrace. Due to the lack of absorption and blocked drainage, the wooden flooring was completely damaged. Subsequently, heavy rains throughout the summer caused further flooding in the cellar [narrative #3]. “The summer of 2023 brought two major flooding incidents, each resulting in approximately 30 cm of sewage water infiltrating the basement” [narrative #6].

- After two years without major incidents, the summer of **2024** saw an escalation in the frequency and severity of flooding. The basement flooded multiple times within two months, causing extensive damage [narrative #4]. All interviewees of narrative #7 reported experiencing flooding during the heavy rainfall of July 2024, which resulted in sewage backup and the inundation of building cellars. Additionally, persistent humidity remains a concern [narrative #7].

The respondent in narrative #9 reported on the problems with the dampness in the area that the first social housing flat he lived in had: “The apartment is poorly insulated and humid. Two walls have extensive mould, water enters through the windows each time it rains, and strong sewage smells make living there unpleasant”.

It should be emphasised that managing the effects of recurring floods entails additional costs, which not all inhabitants can bear, and thus contributes to pre-existing inequalities. Similarly, those with less money have more difficulty in implementing preventive structural interventions, which often entail substantial costs. Two respondents, based on their experiences, have commented oppositely on **the installation of stormwater basins in Square Flagey**: “Stormwater basins in Flagey have not been fully effective” [narrative #6]; “the stormwater basin significantly improved the situation” [narrative #7].

The interviewee of narrative #5 describes his **experience before 2017** on flood: Since then, [the interviewee] has played an active role in managing infrastructure concerns, particularly the recurring flooding in the building’s underground parking and cellars. Despite not being personally affected – having neither a cellar nor a car – [the interviewee] took on the responsibility of monitoring water accumulation, alerting neighbours, and attempting to direct water into the city drainage system. The floods, primarily triggered by heavy rain, created stress among residents, as their exact cause remained uncertain [narrative #5]. Furthermore, he helped tenants deal with the assurance, developers, and owners of the flats. “Many of the affected cellars belonged to tenants rather than property owners, thus creating **uncertainty about who was responsible for repairs**. Tenants often turned to [the interviewee] for help, as they struggled to get responses from landlords or the property management company (syndicate). Over the years, the building went through multiple syndicate changes, each proving to be inefficient in handling complaints or taking decisive action. While the building had insurance, many tenants were unaware of the claims process. Landlords were often unresponsive, and tenants were left with unresolved damages, including mold and structural deterioration in their storage spaces. [The interviewee] repeatedly acted as intermediary between tenants, landlords, and the trustees, highlighting the inefficiency of the system in addressing property maintenance concerns” [narrative #5].

Interviewees also accurately describe the actions, at the individual level, they initially took to address the effects of the floods and to prevent them, if possible. **Cleaning and removing water** [narratives #2 and 6].

- **Implement a technical solution to protect houses:** Some of the interviewees tried to implement various technical solutions to prevent future floods. “Initially, [the interviewee] converted part of the basement into a room for their son; however, it soon became apparent that the room frequently flooded whenever the street’s drainage system became blocked. To mitigate the problem, [the interviewee] built 1-meter-high walls around the room to block the water. Despite these efforts, water continued to seep through. Consequently, [the interviewee] no longer utilizes the basement” [narrative #8]. To mitigate the problem, several residents have invested in **powerful ventilation systems** [narrative #1]. Furthermore, some co-owners removed the **concrete flooring**

and installed water pumps and protective grids to keep rodents out. However, these efforts were undone by a contractor who, while performing other work, destroyed the previous improvements, causing the problems to return [narrative #1].

- **Requesting the intervention of assurance.** Several interviewees activated the assurance.
 - In 2019, “[the interviewee] and the neighbours managed the situation by using insurance coverage for cleaning and implementing makeshift solutions, such as blocking the exhaust pipes. In 2019, insurance companies covered cleaning costs and the implementation of some very first solutions and clean-ups, but after multiple incidents, coverage became uncertain. The cost of professional cleaning services reached approximately 1,500 euros per intervention [narrative #3].
 - As an initial step, [the interviewee] also reached out to the insurance provider, hoping for assistance, but it brought with it increased premiums rather than a viable path forward [narratives #2].
 - The initial incident involved sewage backup into the basement, but at the time, [the interviewee] did not pursue any formal complaints or insurance claims. In 2023, [the interviewee] contacted his/her insurance company and received reimbursement for damages [narrative #6].
 - In the case of the interviewee of narrative #8, “the insurance company no longer covers [the interviewee]’s property in case of flooding, as it is located in a flood-prone zone”.
 - In 2021, “many apartments in the building had not yet been sold, and the insurance remained under the developer’s responsibility. This created confusion regarding liability, and residents struggled to find a clear course of action”. “Over time, [the interviewee] learned to navigate insurance processes better, leading to faster responses for cleaning services. After the flooding events in 2024, insurance covered the cost of professional cleaning services, but delays in response meant that contaminated water remained stagnant for extended periods” [narrative #4].
 - [The interviewee] worked alongside other owners to push the building’s management and architect to investigate the situation before the guarantee of the building expired [narrative #5].
- **Knowing the causes of the flood.** Knowing the causes of floods is necessary to understand who to ask for damages and who is called to intervene. Above all, it helps to understand whether it is an individual or structural problem.
 - The “repeated incidents led [the interviewee] and the neighbours to conclude that a systemic issue with the drainage and sewage systems was contributing to the problem” [narrative #3].
 - But understanding the causes of the floods is not so easy and simple, as pointed out by the interviewee of narrative #5: The building was still under a ten-year construction guarantee, which provided a potential legal avenue for addressing the issue. However, diagnosing the root problem proved difficult since professionals were rarely available during flooding events [narrative #5].
- **Solidarity and mutual support by neighbours.** “In response to flooding incidents, neighbours have demonstrated strong mutual support. [The interviewee] actively assists his/her neighbours in implementing some simple measures to limit the problem, such as modifying cellars to be more water-resistant by replacing wooden staircases with metal alternatives, helping with the drainage of cellars, and participating in clean-up efforts [narrative #7].
- **Requesting (and in some cases obtaining) the first intervention (ineffective) by the Municipality and Vivaqua.** Some experiences.

- Interviewees of **narrative #8** obtained support from the Municipality for cleaning the first-time basement; after that, the support ended, and the person cleaned it on his own. Since they are older, “have resorted to hiring someone to assist with the cleaning”. Both the Municipality of Ixelles and Vivaqua, neither of which wanted to take responsibility for what was happening by passing the burden from one institution to the other.
- The interviewee of **narrative #9**, through the Municipality, activated Vivaqua, “who came to unblock the street drains, eventually making the water recede. [The interviewee] used to contact the responsible persons or visit the municipality in person to complain about the situation. “On many occasions, technicians visited the apartment, took photos of the problems, but no action was taken to address them. The technicians were also unable to provide any information, and the problem was not resolved”. “[The interviewee] has since stopped reaching out. *‘I don’t call them anymore because they don’t listen’*. Additionally, there’s a concern that insisting too much about the problems could result in being asked to move, either to other municipal housing in different neighbourhoods or to search for other housing options independently. This has happened to other residents whose apartments were in poor condition. [The interviewee] does not want to leave the apartment. Having mobility issues, it is easier for [the interviewee] to live on the ground floor” [narrative #9].
- The interviewee in **narrative #1** reports that no structural actions were proposed or implemented by the municipality.
- The interviewee in **narrative #6** contacted Vivaqua to verify their responsibility for the floods. Vivaqua responded that they would intervene free of charge only if their responsibility was proven. Otherwise, the costs for the intervention would be borne by the interviewee, who therefore gave up.
- Only in one case, reported by the interviewee of narrative #3 seems that the intervention of authorities produces somehow improvement in the situation. “After continuous follow-ups, authorities intervened in mid-August 2023. The confirmation that blockages had been cleared coincided with a noticeable reduction in flooding, suggesting that the intervention had indeed made a difference. However, the entire process exposed a reactive rather than proactive approach by local authorities, highlighting the need for more immediate and systematic responses to infrastructure failures” [narrative #3].
- **Consultation of experts and contractors:** Some of the interviewees contacted experts and contractors to assess the situation and provide recommendations and solutions. To address the problem of the humidity of the houses due to infiltrations, to the interviewees of narratives #1 and #2, it was proposed to build a waterproofing structure around the house or to build drainage channels. Both these solutions were not financially sustainable: This kind of intervention would represent a major financial investment, roughly a third of the purchase price of the house [narrative #1].
- **Ineffectiveness of the proposed solutions.** “None of these solutions (waterproofing and drainage channels) came with a guarantee of effectiveness, and the financial burden of such interventions made implementation difficult” [narrative #2]. Also, the “possibility of installing an anti-backflow valve”, has been told it would be ineffective, leaving his/her feeling frustrated and without viable options [narrative #6].

What emerges is that some of those interviewed received reimbursement or help during the first floods, help which then stopped during the subsequent events. In some cases, the episodes were more than one per year. It is also important to note that the frequency, intensity of floods vary based on the location of the apartment and its structure.

Neither the municipality nor Vivaqua provided information about the causes of these floods and what to do to prevent them from happening again. **People felt lonely and frustrated.** The interviewee from

narrative #1 complained about **the lack of political will on the part of local authorities to solve the problem**. This is the comment of the interviewee of narrative #6: “[The interviewee] admitted to not taking proactive steps to seek professional assessments or contact local authorities for intervention. [The interviewee] hesitated to reach out, believing that an individual complaint would not be taken seriously and that municipal authorities would dismiss his/her concerns. [The interviewee] also reflected on how institutions like **Vivaqua appear unmotivated to provide effective solutions**. When [the interviewee] reached out to them, he/she received no concrete advice on mitigating the issue. Their **suggestion to be prepared for more frequent floods due to climate change left his/her feeling helpless rather than supported**.” Therefore, “[the interviewee] questions whether the government has the resources or willingness to implement truly impactful changes” [narrative #6].

The interviewee of narrative #1 denounces a lack of political will and fears that, due to the lack of effective measures against water infiltration, buildings in the neighbourhood will eventually **be left to deteriorate until developers purchase the land and rebuild new structures better adapted to the ground conditions**. He has already observed that some houses renovated by the city have been abandoned just a few years later, **reinforcing his scepticism about any real political commitment to solving the problem** [narrative #1].

b. Economic and territorial inequalities

Narratives #1, #2, and #3 contain information on the economic impacts of the environmental problems and inequalities described in the previous paragraph. Environmental problems amplify pre-existing economic inequalities and show inequalities in the capacities of people to handle the floods:

- There are social **inequalities in handling such crises**. Wealthier residents can afford to hire lawyers and experts, whereas others, like him, must manage the situation alone. He mentions the case of a woman in his neighbourhood whose roof leaks due to the poor condition of a municipal building, but she has received no assistance [narrative #1]. Other property owners in different circumstances might not have the financial means to do the same, raising concerns about **inequality in flood resilience** [narrative #3]
- The **recurring flooding also had economic burden and consequences** [narratives #2 and #3].
- The **deterioration of the building** lowered property values, making it difficult for owners to justify investments in maintenance and repairs [narrative #2].

c. Social and cultural inequalities

Only the women interviewees [narratives #2, #4, and #9] refer to the social and health problems caused by the floods and to social inequalities. First, two interviewees underline the **health risks** associated with floods:

- “Given the repeated exposure to sewage water, [the interviewee] emphasized the health risks of the flooding. As a specialist in the health field, [the interviewee] was particularly aware of the potential dangers and took protective measures. For example, [the interviewee] **felt ill after the first clean-up effort**. This strengthened [the interviewee]’s resolve to push for greater **awareness of public health concerns related to flooding**” [narrative #4].
- The inhabitant [interviewed] has been living in municipal housing for over six years. The first apartment had **many problems with insalubrity and humidity**, but [the interviewee] eventually managed to move to another one that was in relatively better condition. Two diagnostics made this possible: one by a doctor confirming that [the interviewee] is asthmatic, and one by the association Habitat & Rénovation, declaring that the apartment was harmful to [the interviewee]’s

health. As a result, [the interviewee] moved to another available municipal apartment on Rue Gray, which was, however, much smaller [narrative #9].

A second area of concern is the **psychosocial stress** that living in a situation of constant flood risk entails: The psychological toll of constant uncertainty and deteriorating living conditions added another layer of distress, making [the interviewee] question whether he/she should continue fighting or consider relocating [narrative #2].

A third area of concern is **security issues** in social housing blocks. “A significant number of apartments have been evacuated by the owner due to unliveable conditions. This situation appears to have attracted squatters who break in and occupy these empty apartments. Others enter not to sleep, but to steal, or sell drugs, etc. This situation has caused considerable stress for both interviewees. Although the owner has been informed, no measures have been taken to address these security problems – only the police intervene [narrative #9].

d. Inequalities as outcomes of policies

This category considers the inequality phenomena inherent in the strategic choices of certain policies, those produced by the implementation of certain policies (intended and unintended effects), and those finally resulting from the non-action of policies and interventions.

One of the problems most highlighted by the narratives concerns the relationship of the citizens living in the Rue Gray area with the local and technical authorities that deal with water, for the prevention of floods and the compensation for damages (lack of responses, passing of the buck between different public bodies, etc.).

Many of the problems reported could be considered in this category:

- Partial ineffectiveness of the stormwater retention basis in Place Flagey, implemented in 2003, and its management, which has not fully prevented the occurrence of periodic flooding (unintended effects).
- Lack of willingness to listen to the complaints of the citizens of Rue Gray, to understand the causes of the recurrence of floods, and to identify and implement effective solutions (non-implementation of necessary measures). This bias against action could be caused by the lack of economic resources, the absence of a specific policy in this regard, etc.
- Finally, it could be assumed that the public administration handled citizens’ complaints based on defined procedures, establishing that it can handle only certain types of reports and that in unforeseen cases, it refers to other services, does not respond, takes time, etc.

3.3. Relations between inequalities, engagement and forms of co-production

Narratives describe lived experiences of recurring environmental problems and inequalities. The narratives and key informant interviews also contain information on how these experiences influenced and determined the willingness to get involved in changing the situation. In dealing with the forms of involvement and co-production experienced and experienced, certain challenges must be considered:

- Floods are connected to the flash rain that overflows the sewage infrastructures. The geographical characteristics of the neighbourhood (bottom of the valley) worsen the problem, making the houses in the Rue Gray more vulnerable in comparison to others. The floods are not always visible. Sometimes the street is flooded, sometimes it is only private space (people’s cellars and ground floor spaces). Also, the river cannot be seen externally. One of the challenges is to make these

harmful impacts visible. As pointed out by key informants, floods “often go unnoticed as they occur underground or in private spaces.”

- *‘The problem seems to be individual, that is why the people have difficulty knowing what happens on all the street and difficulties in gathering.’* [key informants quotation] Each of the interviewees initially tried to solve ‘his flood’ and to find the best possible and feasible solution for his specific case, asking for help from local and technical authorities dealing with water management in Brussels, insurance companies, etc. The individual solution has generally proved ineffective in the short and medium term, as one has to deal with recurring flooding.
- According to some interviewees, local authorities tended not to respond or passed the responsibility on to others, or provided partial and, in any case, non-resolving answers, and people felt alone.
- Flooding in Rue Gray is a complex problem, which requires the involvement of all stakeholders in first identifying and then implementing solutions that consider the different individual situations.

The stakes are different: the rights of the inhabitants of the Rue Gray area and trust in the institutions. The narratives and interviews describe the choices, concerns, and wishes made by the interviewees in this process. Some issues are presented in the following points.

a. Negative effects of inequalities on engagement

For some of those interviewed, their experiences did not lead to mobilisation or very limited participation due to a sense of powerlessness and frustration. For some, there appear to be no viable solutions given the complexity of the problem and the lack of will and resources on the part of the public authority. It is particularly the respondents of narrative #7 who express a more pessimistic point of view.

- **Possible technical solutions at the structural level are not feasible.** “[The interviewee] perceives the problem as requiring substantial time and financial investment, as illustrated by the storm water basin project. [The interviewee] recalls that it took several years for the project to be approved, and those advocating for it faced considerable opposition. The initiative was disruptive to businesses and residents, leading to a decade-long construction period. Given the current economic recession, [the interviewee] thinks that it is unlikely that the municipality will allocate millions or even billions of euros to large-scale flood prevention initiatives. While potential solutions may exist, [the interviewee] knows that they are costly, technically complex, and accompanied by various disadvantages. Moreover, with the municipality having already invested in the stormwater basin, further reinvestment appears improbable according to [the interviewee]. In addition, [the interviewee] sees the situation – where water infiltrates from below and falls from above – as being driven by uncontrollable natural forces. For him/her, flooding remains a natural issue with no straightforward resolution” [narrative #7]. The interviewee of narrative #8 is also sceptical about the possibility of finding feasible solutions.
- **Sense of loneliness, frustration, and helplessness.** “However, collective solutions seem unattainable to him/her and the other residents, leading to a sense of helplessness among them. Despite this strong sense of solidarity among the residents, they have never collectively approached public authorities to demand action on flooding issues. Many feel resigned, believing that no viable solution exists. In other instances, community mobilization proved successful when it involved urging the municipality to oppose, for instance, private investment projects. However, in the case of flooding, residents are contending with two natural phenomena – the Maelbeek and intense storms. As a result, there is a widespread assumption that public authorities are unable or unwilling to take further action. Furthermore, municipal governance often seems to them to be characterized by inaction, with officials opting to delay interventions and defer responsibility to their successors [narrative #7].

- **Refusal to cooperate in the work of diagnosing the problem.** To understand the multifaceted nature of flooding, which often goes unnoticed, citizens were asked to collaborate through the situation through FloodCitiSense. But some of them refused, not wanting to take responsibility for the causes of the floods and preferring instead to play the role of victims and damaged people: *‘Can one be a victim and participate in the search for a solution? Can the victims of a situation requiring intervention by public services participate in understanding a phenomenon?’* [key informants].

Some interviewees observe that not all inhabitants participate and are involved in common initiatives and itineraries to promote possible solutions. In this respect, a distinction must be made between landlords and tenants, who may also have limited capacity to act from an economic point of view. Some owners do not live in the area of Rue Gray, and others belong to collective entities.

- **The low interest of some inhabitants in getting involved and participating.** “However, not all owners were actively involved, as some did not live on the premises and were therefore less invested in finding a solution [narrative #2]. For [the interviewee], this experience highlighted the difficulties of managing property maintenance remotely and the disparities in access to municipal services depending on personal engagement and persistence [narrative #3]. However, [the interviewee] also acknowledged the limitations of grassroots mobilization, particularly when many residents remain passive or uninvolved. [The interviewee] has observed that property owners, especially those living abroad, are often reluctant to take responsibility, leaving a small group of engaged residents to bear the burden of action. Tenants, meanwhile, may lack long-term stakes in the property and therefore be less likely to engage in advocacy [narrative #5].

b. Effects of inequalities in promoting the engagement of people

Environmental inequality and floods led most of the interviewees to mobilize. Several narratives describe the interviewees’ pathways and their choices regarding engagement. The narratives present different levels of engagement, from an informal self-help group [narrative #7] to the adherence of a more structured organisation [narratives #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6]. Some of the interviewees joined at the beginning a collective initiative, but during the time he/she became sceptical [narrative #8].

- **Narrative #1:** “Faced with the severity of the problem, [the interviewee] decided to join a local citizens’ collective to advocate for better water management and infrastructure improvements in the neighbourhood. He learned about the group “Déliers les Fils de l’Eau” through flyers in his neighbourhood and attended several meetings. His involvement led him to participate in a formal municipal appeal to alert the local government about the flooding and water infiltration risks in the area and to ask for its collaboration in understanding the problem” [narrative #1].
- **Narrative #2:** “Determined to address the issue, [the interviewee] sought out potential solutions. He/she engaged in discussions with the other property owners in the building, hoping to coordinate a collective response. As the search for a resolution continued, [the interviewee] realized that his/her building was not the only one affected. Conversations with neighbours revealed that flooding was a widespread issue in the district, affecting numerous properties. This led [the interviewee] to join “Déliers les Fils de l’Eau”, a local collective dedicated to addressing the persistent flooding problems in the area. Through this group, [the interviewee] found a **platform to amplify his/her concerns, share experiences, and collectively** advocate for solutions at the municipal level” [narrative #2].
- **Narrative #3:** Initially, he promoted the establishment of a condominium group on WA to facilitate communications on the management of situations and to put pressure on local authorities. “Even before the 2023 floods, [the interviewee] had joined the citizen initiative “Déliers Les Fils de l’Eau” focused on addressing flood issues. [The interviewee] was motivated by a belief in collective action

and climate resilience, recognizing that Brussels, like many other cities, faces growing challenges due to climate change. [The interviewee]’s involvement increased significantly after the floods when [the interviewee] helped collect testimonies and data from affected residents to push for public action” [narrative #3].

- **Narrative #4:** After several inconclusive attempts by [the interviewee] with insurance companies and local authorities, “the worsening conditions prompted [the interviewee] to seek more organized solutions beyond emergency responses. Recognizing that isolated complaints were ineffective, [the interviewee] joined forces with other affected residents to establish a more coordinated approach and get in connection with the group “Déliers Les Fils de l’Eau”. Promoted within Déliers Les Fils de l’Eau, the establishment of a Working Group on Health Impacts.
- **Narrative #5:** The interviewee], based on his experience, felt the need to act collectively. “Through these interactions (participating in a broad network), [the interviewee] became aware of other similar flooding cases in nearby buildings and streets, reinforcing the idea that the issue was systemic rather than isolated. Having worked in environmental advocacy groups, looking into sustainable urban solutions such as improved drainage systems and the expansion of green infrastructure, [the interviewee] had already participated in discussions about long-term strategies for flood mitigation, though [the interviewee] remained aware of the challenges in pushing policymakers to act. Through his/her interest and involvement in group initiatives, [the interviewee] developed a deeper appreciation for the power of collective action. [The interviewee] recognized that while individual complaints often go unheard, organized community efforts had a greater chance of prompting change.
- **Narrative #6:** She experienced a sense of loneliness. “The interviewee] only recently became aware of a community-led initiative addressing flooding issues. He/she learned about this through his/her sister, who attended a local meeting and encouraged him/her to get involved. Initially hesitant, [the interviewee] attended a second session where neighbourhood residents and urban planning students discussed potential improvements to water infiltration infrastructure. Discovering that other streets in the area had been dealing with flooding for years further reinforced his/her belief that the **issue is not just an individual problem but also a broader urban challenge**. [The interviewee] now sees the potential value in joining collective action efforts, as a larger, organized group may have greater leverage in pressuring authorities for solutions” [narrative #6].
- **Narrative #7:** As mentioned above, the respondent of narrative #7 did not join citizens’ initiatives and groups to talk to local authorities, because he does not think it is useful. Instead, he actively cooperated with the Group of Neighbours, which provided mutual support and help to individual families. They have tried to implement individual and condominium solutions to limit the damage (“such as modifying cellars to be more water-resistant by replacing wooden staircases with metal alternatives, helping with the drainage of cellars, and participating in clean-up efforts” narrative #7). It can be noted, as an additional observation, that sometime after the interview, the respondent joined the citizens’ initiative.
- **Narrative #8]** “In the early stages, [the interviewee] was also in frequent contact with neighbours regarding the flooding issue. They gathered their signatures to approach Vivaqua but later became less involved in collective action. [The interviewee] has participated in two meetings organized by DFE/Fairville, and although they consider the initiative a positive one, they have not been highly active in it. They signed up to support a petition to the municipality and completed a data collection form following the summer 2024 floods. But they remain sceptical about the potential for effective solutions, believing that any such solutions would require extensive and costly work” [narrative #8].
- **Narrative #9:** “[The interviewee] is the only resident of the municipal housing actively participating in the DFE actions. However, [the interviewee] expressed that these meetings have so far failed to lead to concrete action. Nonetheless, [the interviewee] is willing to continue participating and to

try reaching out to more affected residents. The interviewee is also part of an action group within DFE that specifically addresses the problems faced by residents of municipal housing”.

c. Engagement about inequalities producing limited impacts

The narratives also contain detailed information on the obstacles that prevented and still prevent the identification of first and then the implementation of long-term sustainable solutions, despite the involvement and participation of many of the interviewees. Obstacles relate to four areas: relations with local authorities and water operators; the institutional complexity of responsibilities for urban water management; conflicts and differences of opinion among citizens about what to do; and structural obstacles to citizen participation.

- Obstacles to collaboration between citizens and associations and local authorities, and water operators
 - **Lack of response from local authorities and insurance companies:** “Despite their collective efforts [of the condominiums/owners of the flats in the building], they faced delays in getting responses from both insurance companies and municipal authorities” [narrative #3].
 - **Existence of an assumption that local authorities do not listen to requests and demands of individual citizens:** “[The interviewee] admitted to not taking proactive steps to seek professional assessments or contact local authorities for intervention. [The interviewee] hesitated to reach out, believing that an individual complaint would not be taken seriously and that municipal authorities would dismiss his/her concerns” [narrative #6].
 - **Discharge of responsibility by local authorities.** “While authorities acknowledged the problem, they often deferred responsibility, citing regional jurisdiction and budgetary constraints” [narrative #2].
 - **Lack of transparency** “regarding ongoing public works further compounded his/her frustration, as affected residents were left in the dark about potential solutions” [narrative #2]. For the interviewee of narrative #1, “there is the **need for an honest and pragmatic approach**. If no viable solution exists, he/she would prefer authorities to be transparent rather than waste time in endless discussions” [narrative #1].
 - **Lack of information sharing:** “[The interviewee] learned that various construction projects were being carried out on nearby streets by water utility companies, yet residents received little to no information about how these works related to the flooding problem” [narrative #2].
 - **Remittance of responsibility:** Some examples are presented in the box.

- ✓ Initially, [the interviewee] reported the flooding through **FixMyStreet**, an institutional platform for addressing infrastructure issues. However, rather than taking direct action, the response [the interviewee] received was simply a referral to another agency, Property Bruxelles. After contacting them, [the interviewee] was informed that interventions had already taken place, but subsequent floods indicated that the issue remained unresolved. In frustration, [the interviewee] began directly calling municipal offices, repeatedly pressing them to send a team to clear blocked sewage pipes” [narrative #3].
- ✓ “[The interviewee] attempted to contact various entities, including the municipal authorities and water service operators, but was met with frustration as each agency deferred responsibility to another” (i.e., often deflecting responsibility to regional authorities). For [the interviewee], this bureaucratic loop made it clear that systemic problems were at play and that individual complaints would not suffice to address the issue” [narrative #4].
- ✓ “One of the key obstacles was determining who held ultimate responsibility for addressing the flooding issue – was it the builders, the city, or the building’s management? Due to the complex nature of the problem, no single entity was willing to assume full accountability, leading to delays in action” [narrative #5].

- **Meetings with citizens and groups used for electoral purposes and not to deal with flooding issues:** a few examples below.

- ✓ “[The interviewee] attended meetings with municipal officials, including a pre-election consultation with some political representatives. While [the interviewee] appreciated the opportunity to voice concerns, he/she felt that many of the responses were politically motivated and designed to appease voters ahead of the elections” [narrative #3].
- ✓ “After a municipal petition from some inhabitants on the issue of flooding in Rue Gray, municipal representatives were willing to discuss the issue, but their commitments, potentially influenced by the upcoming elections, lacked clear action plans” [narrative #4].

- **Inertia on the part of local authorities:** Some examples are presented in the box below.

- ✓ [The interviewee] perceived as one of the major obstacles being bureaucratic inertia. “Local authorities acknowledged the problem but primarily indicated the need for thorough studies in the long term rather than immediate interventions” [narrative #4].
- ✓ Throughout his/her experience in looking for solutions to the flooding issue in his/her building, [the interviewee] observed a clear pattern of bureaucratic inertia, where different departments failed to coordinate efforts or provide concrete solutions. Although some municipal representatives acknowledged the problem, tangible actions remained scarce [narrative #5].
- ✓ This dilution of responsibility leads to bureaucratic inertia and a lack of accountability, making it challenging to address systemic issues effectively. [key informants] Quotes: ‘Fragmentation and constant evolution of the institutions of water management (municipality, Region, Water Operators).’ “The Belgian State is federal. The different regions have a lot of autonomy with their own parliaments and their own tools. For many environmental, economic questions, they have their own responsibility.’ [key informants].

- **Fatigue of citizens in the relationships with local authorities:** The interviewee of narrative #1 is acting as spokesman, and “he admits feeling a growing **fatigue**. Attending all the meetings and managing interactions with authorities has become overwhelming. He strongly believes that a citizens’ collective should not rely on just one person and advocates for rotating responsibilities to prevent burnout among volunteers” [narrative #1].
- **Sense of frustration.** A key frustration for [the interviewee] “was the **slow and ineffective response from municipal authorities** and **water management agencies**. Despite repeated attempts to report the problem, [the interviewee] encountered **bureaucratic inefficiencies** and unclear divisions of responsibility between different agencies” [narrative #3].
- **Lack of co-production culture in public authorities.** ‘Non-existence of the culture of co-production, tradition of very much top-down provision of services by the federal ‘State’ [key informants].

- **Fragmentation and complexity of institutional interlocutors, with different levels of responsibility.** The complexity of the institutional framework of urban water management of Brussels represents an obstacle for the Brussels Fairville Lab, which makes it difficult to identify the interlocutors to involve in the co-production of solutions to the problems caused by recurrent floods.

- “The principal barriers facing “Etat généraux de l’eau à Bruxelles” stem from the fragmented institutional landscape of urban water management, which complicates the implementation of coherent and unified solutions” [key informants].
- “The jurisdiction over water management in Brussels is divided among multiple entities, including the municipality, the region, and various water operators, each with their own

policies and priorities. Responsibility between institutions, moreover, is evolving rapidly further blurring accountability” [key informants].

- Presence of divergences between individuals and group members regarding priorities, strategies, and interventions to be implemented. This is a relevant obstacle, also because citizens and groups of citizens have developed, based on their experiences and knowledge, specific convictions about what should be done. Arriving at a common vision is a necessary challenge. This is a challenge also for the Fairville Brussels Lab.
 - “[The interviewee] observed a divergence in priorities within the group. Some members prioritized long-term urban planning solutions, such as a comprehensive flood diagnostic study. [The interviewee], while supportive of such efforts, was more focused on immediate action to prevent further flooding in the short term” [narrative #3].
 - “For [the interviewee], the split between commercial and residential interests³⁷ presented a challenge in mobilizing all stakeholders under a unified goal”. [...] “[The interviewee] observed a disparity in engagement levels among residents. While some property owners were highly involved, others – particularly renters or absentee landlords – showed little interest” [narrative #4].
- **Presence of structural obstacles limiting citizen participation.** The fourth area concerns the presence of structural obstacles (locations, time, resources, etc.) that limit citizen participation and produce disparities in engagement.
 - “Many professional spaces within buildings were affected by flooding but displayed a different level of urgency in addressing the issue” [narrative #4].
 - According to the interviewee in narrative #1, there is a swinging participation of citizens in the meetings of Déliers Fils de l’eau and limited availability on the part of the inhabitants. “Those who engage actively tend to be people with more free time and financial resources” [narrative #1].

d. Engagement contributions to reduce inequalities

We have considered among the cases in which engagement contributes to reducing inequality those actions described in the narratives relating to the necessary transition from an individual vision of the strategies and actions to be carried out to a collective and community-based one and for setting a of co-production experience among residents, citizens, the municipality, Vivaqua, etc. and the concrete steps that have been taken in this regard.

- “Flooding occurs approximately three times per year in their neighbourhood, and this frequency can be relatively manageable if **handled together** and through small preventive measures” [narrative #7].
- The owners of the building “formed a **WhatsApp group to coordinate responses to flooding** and other building issues. This collaboration proved essential when dealing with insurance claims, cleaning operations, and maintenance work. Within this group, [the interviewee] took on a leadership role, handling insurance contacts, coordinating clean-up efforts, and engaging with municipal services” [narrative #3].
- “[The interviewee] **became part of a broader network of engaged citizens**, participating in a local mailing list that regularly discussed infrastructure and community matters. The community started organizing informal neighbourhood gatherings, such as street-side discussions and communal

³⁷ It can be noted that owners seem more disposed to act, renters depend to their owners. Involvement and mobilisation also depend on each person’s agency and capacity (possibility) to act.

drinks, where concerns like flooding were raised. These events provided a platform for exchanging information and strategies” [narrative #5].

- “[The interviewee] took on the role of spokesperson during the appeal to local authorities. His experience as a union representative in the education sector had already given him the skills to communicate with elected officials and present demands. [...] For him, these efforts demonstrated the **importance of working in partnership with public decision-makers rather than viewing them as adversaries**. Dialogue and cooperation can lead to sustainable solutions” [narrative #1].
- “[The interviewee] perceives that **sustained engagement is necessary to drive change**. Within “Déliers Les Fils de l’Eau”, the group began exploring additional community-driven initiatives, such as (i) monthly resident assemblies to discuss updates, share concerns, and strategize future actions, (ii) engagement with experts such as a hydrologist and urban planners to learn about flood mitigation options and (iii) organisation of public meetings for increasing awareness. Through these efforts, [the interviewee] observed a shift in public perception. Residents who had previously remained passive started showing interest, recognizing that collective action had the potential to influence policy decisions” [narrative #4].

Furthermore, some of the interviewees underlined the usefulness and necessity of a collaboration between citizens, institutions, and technicians to manage the complex issues of water management.

- “[The interviewee] highlights his/her transition from viewing flooding as a personal burden to recognizing it as a systemic issue requiring collective action. Although [the interviewee] initially felt isolated in dealing with repeated flooding, he/she is now more aware of the importance of coordinated efforts. [The interviewee] remains cautious but willing to participate in community initiatives – particularly joining local advocacy efforts to ensure that the flooding issue remains a priority for municipal and regional authorities and encouraging a collective approach by connecting with neighbours to strengthen community demands for infrastructure improvements – perceiving that collective pressure could be an effective way to drive meaningful change” [narrative #6].
- “Despite [the interviewee] remaining realistic about the limitations of grassroots actions in tackling such complex issues, he sees citizen engagement as an opportunity to improve the situation in the long run. **Collective initiatives have the potential to transform the neighbourhood**, but they must be supported by public policies and appropriate resources. [...] “Despite the challenges, [the interviewee] still believes that **collaboration between citizens, experts, and public authorities could improve the situation**” [narrative #1]
- [The interviewee] acknowledges the importance of citizen groups like “Déliers les Fils de l’Eau,” which have provided both moral and technical support to affected residents [narrative #1].
- [The interviewee] sees the **need for continued engagement with municipal authorities to ensure that flood prevention remains a priority** [narrative #3].

In this process, from an individual vision and approach to a collective one, an important role has been played by EGEB also through the Fairville project. The *‘Fairville lab is based on the idea that urban policies should not be developed “for” the people but rather “with” them, to value their local expertise and to fully respond to their needs’*. [key informants]. The main activities carried out from 2021 until now are summarized below.

- Launch in 2021 of **some meetings with residents** on the problems of Rue Gray, continued also in 2022.
- Start a **photographic documentation work** of the problems of Rue Gray with the photographer Flavio Montrone – La Serre Cultural Center.
- **Use of the RAQ** (Relais d’Action de Quartier) built by the Federation of Social Services of the Region for addressing social problems during the Covid-19 pandemic to collect information on the events of Rue Gray, through observation.

- **Involvement of a group of professional actors around the EGEB**, Brusseau and La Serre, bringing together workers from the Centre de Service Social de Bruxelles Sud-Est, the Fédération des Services Sociaux, and Habitat et Rénovation.
- Organization of the **first Brussels Water Day** with testimonies of the events of Rue Gray
- **Involvement of HYDRIA**³⁸ (former SBGE) to understand the causes and identify possible solutions, and organization of a discussion meeting with citizens.
- **Using the FloodCitiSense app** to monitor the situation during the rainy season.
- Preparation of a **survey with a questionnaire addressed to residents to collect information**.
- Support to make use of the *“interpellation communale,”* a legal tool that allows citizens to present their concerns directly to elected officials, in this case on the questions of flooding. [key informants] quotes: *‘The inhabitants organized together to write the letter with the help of Délier les Fils de l’eau. The letter of the ‘interpellation’ was signed by over 40 persons, including 23 from rue Gray’. [...] “This interpellation took place a few weeks ago in the ‘conseil communal’.”*
- Implementation of several projects aimed at fostering community engagement and co-production.
- Starting a **collaboration with academic institutions**, such as the ULB – Free University of Brussels, the Nanterre University³⁹, and projects like Fairville, as elements of a broader strategy to integrate scientific research and community insights into the development of sustainable urban water management practices. [key informants] *‘We have had a hydrologist working with us for a long time for Hydria, a regional operator saying that we needed the cooperation between the experts, the inhabitants, and the municipalities to draw the map of the flooding’.*

e. Elements of co-production

Elements⁴⁰ of co-production⁴¹ are being experienced by the interviewees and are described in the narratives. The following elements can be mentioned:

- **Ability to produce and share knowledge** about one’s territory or community

³⁸ A meeting with representatives of HYDRIA and citizens took place on 2022 for trying to understand possible causes of the floods. During such meeting the representative of HYDRIA said that “People should not live at the bottom of a flooded valley”. “Indeed, a persistent question arises: isn’t part of the rise in groundwater during heavy rains due to the absence of an outlet in this valley floor? The stream that used to run through the valley now flows into a sewer, preventing rainwater from draining away and making it impossible for it to function as an outlet. Some people suggest that the bridge pillars and the large embankments would act as a brake on groundwater flows... What would be the impact of integrated rainwater management through water infiltration on the whole catchment area? Wouldn’t this contribute to flooding the inhabitants of the valley bottom, in Gray Street? To remedy this, others think that a good idea would be to recreate the old stream in the very heart of Gray Street in order to drain the excess water downstream. Some people like to dream of a street where the vegetation would regain its rights, which would lead to significant changes in traffic.” For more information, see: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/report-from-the-belgian-fairville-lab-the-problem-in-gray-street-flooding-and-social-isolation>

³⁹ A group of geography master students from the University of Nanterre (led by Marie Anne Germaine, member of the CNRS LAVUE) carried out in “October 2024 a survey in the neighborhood, interviewing 180 residents on the topic of flood risk and rainwater management. The results of the survey, together with a participatory cartography (Map-it), developed during the same period in collaboration with a group of local inhabitants”, have been presented during the Brussels Workshop 2025 (March 31-April 2). The presentation represented an occasion for discussing among residents, Fairville members, on the possibility to apply “nature-based solutions in the upper parts of the neighborhood – designed to infiltrate rainwater – intends to benefit residents in the lower areas by reducing flood risk, an approach that draws on the concept of the watershed solidarity. However, it also raises local concerns, as it triggers existing socio-spatial inequalities between the upper (and wealthier) and lower (and more vulnerable) parts of the neighborhood” [extract from the report of the Brussels Workshop 2025].

⁴⁰ These elements were identified based on the reflection initiated within Fairville’s WP2 on co-production. These elements are also in line with the definition of “community-driven co-production” described in the Fairville D2.1 “Draft of a common glossary and common grid of analysis”, August 2024 which contains an analysis of specific terms and themes. “Coproduction” - by Giuseppe Faldi, Agnès Deboulet & Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, with Mathilde Jourdam-Boutin: see in particular page #15-16).

⁴¹ As stated in the introduction of Part 2, the contents of this paragraph are also a contribution to the ongoing broad reflection carried out by the Fairville Labs and other WPs on co-production.

- **Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies and proposals**
- **Ability to negotiate** and to stay in relations with local authorities
- **Ability to build and 'be' in a network**

**Ability to produce and share knowledge about
one's own territory or community**

The first element concerns the ability to produce and disseminate knowledge about recurring floods and environmental problems in the Rue Gray area. These abilities were indicated by the people interviewed on several occasions. These are the experiences of producing and sharing knowledge of some of the interviewees.

- **Participation in promoting and creating an online platform for collecting information.** The interviewee of **narrative #2** collaborated in opening an online platform to collect and share information, knowledge, experiences, etc. As described by the **narrative #3**, "one of the group's initiatives was a platform for collecting flood-related data, which aimed to document the extent of the problem and provide evidence-based arguments for stronger municipal intervention".
- **Collaboration in collecting evidence and documents on flooding incidents.** The interviewee of **narrative #2**, "along with other members of "Déliers les Fils de l'Eau", he/she helped document evidence of flooding incidents, compiling photographs and testimonies in the hope these materials could help officials to conduct a thorough technical assessment of the underlying issues" [narrative #2]. The interviewee of **narrative #3** played a key role in gathering evidence, documenting flood impacts, and sharing reports with local authorities.
- **Sharing knowledge with other citizens, local authorities.** As reported by the interviewee of **narrative #3**, "additionally, the group worked on raising awareness within the community through organising meetings and workshops, distributing information about flood preparedness and best practices for protecting properties. [The interviewee] is willing to contribute to this effort by drafting information materials and helping to disseminate them" [narrative #3]. Interviewee of **narrative #2** attended meetings where residents exchanged stories and strategized on how best to approach authorities. He/She participated in awareness campaigns, distributing informational flyers and encouraging others to join the movement [narrative #2].
- **Implementation of a survey through a questionnaire for the inhabitants.** The interviewee of **narrative #4** realizing the importance of gathering structured evidence on the problem, [the interviewee] contributed within the group in launching a community-wide questionnaire aimed at documenting flood events, understanding the extent of damage, and identifying common patterns across different buildings in the neighbourhood. Also, the interviewee of **narrative #5** takes "contact with some inhabitants that were distributing a questionnaire to document flood occurrences, damages, and potential causes in the area. The interviewee of **narrative #4** answered the questionnaire. This effort was aimed at collecting data to inform and pressure local authorities for better infrastructure solutions. Flyers were distributed in mailboxes, and communication channels like WhatsApp and email lists" [narrative #4]. The interviewee of **narrative #6** "considered conducting a neighbourhood survey to identify all affected residents but ultimately hesitated, fearing that openly discussing flooding issues would devalue his/her property. Despite this concern, [the interviewee] acknowledges that flooding is already evident to potential buyers and remains an ongoing challenge" [narrative#6].
- **Establishing the working group on health.** The concerns on risk on health conditions of inhabitants of Rue Gray, motivated the interviewee and other members of the "Déliers Les Fils de l'Eau", to create a working group on health. This working group "aims to include medical professionals, social workers, and other stakeholders. Their goal will be to assess the health impacts on residents and advocate for stronger public health interventions" [narrative #4].

Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies, and proposals

Most of the interviewees stated in the narratives their vision of how to tackle the problems of Rue Gray, formulated proposals, and called for intensive networking between citizens, groups, technicians, and local administrators to find and implement effective solutions to the problems of Rue Gray.

Specific proposals and more “articulated plans” are reported below:

- **“Specific financial aid programs should be introduced to help residents in flood-prone areas afford the necessary renovations”** [narrative #1].
- **Use of the hydrological and urban planning knowledge** that might help mitigate the issues through gradual solutions, such as increasing green spaces and installing permeable pavements [narrative #1].
- The Need to **secure budget allocations for infrastructure improvements** is crucial, particularly given the possibility of regional budget cuts affecting environmental initiatives [narrative #3].
- The **three-step plan** presented by the interviewee of narrative #2 “First, [the interviewee] called for the implementation of a **clear and actionable flood mitigation plan**, complete with specific milestones and allocated resources. Second, [the interviewee] pushed for greater transparency and communication from public officials, demanding regular updates on infrastructure projects and their potential impact on the flooding crisis. Third, [the interviewee] advocated for independent technical assessments to determine the root cause of the issue and identify scientifically backed interventions [narrative #2#].
- Together with other neighbours, they have explored possible solutions. [...] Ultimately, [the interviewee] realized that the only viable solution appears to be **improving water drainage systems** [narrative #7].
- [The interviewee] strongly believed that **resolving the flooding issue required a structured plan involving multiple stakeholders**, including municipal and regional authorities, property owners, and water management agencies [narrative #2].

Many interviewees reported the frustration they experienced in their relationships with local authorities and were aware that “immediate solutions may be difficult to achieve”. Nevertheless, many interviewees also reveal a convergence on the need to use an approach involving and activating a multi-stakeholder network of citizens, groups, local authorities, etc.

- There is the need of a **strong and persistent advocacy activities** by citizens and group toward local authorities, official and politicians [narratives #2, #3, #4, #5, and #6], to ensure “that residents’ concerns are addressed” [narrative #5] and **“to keep the issue on the political agenda”** [narrative #3]. “Politicians are more likely to act if they perceive a significant number of affected and engaged voters demanding solutions” [narrative #6]. Stronger community participation will create a more **unified and effective voice in demanding systemic solutions** [narrative #3].
- Interviewee of narrative #1 questions “how to include more vulnerable residents in the movement, **ensuring that the fight against water damage does not become an issue only for a privileged few**. This reality underscores the need for **institutional support** to strengthen and amplify citizen initiatives.” [narrative #1]. Interviewee of narrative #3 stressed the need to encourage more residents, particularly renters, to engage in advocacy efforts” [narrative #3].
- [The interviewee]’s story highlights the **complex interplay between individual struggles and broader systemic challenges**. His/her experience demonstrates both **the power and limitations of collective action in addressing urban infrastructure problems**. [...]. [The interviewee] concluded with a call to action for both residents and policymakers, emphasizing the urgent **need for effective**

governance and community-driven solutions to urban infrastructure challenges [narrative #2]. “As cities face increasing climate-related challenges, **proactive and community-led responses will be critical in shaping sustainable and resilient urban environments**” [narrative #5].

- “[The interviewee] remains cautious about long-term governmental commitment. [The interviewee] believes that **continuous pressure on local authorities is necessary to ensure concrete action**. [The interviewee] expects public authorities to provide: (i) recognition of the flooding issue as a structural problem requiring proactive intervention, (ii) clear accountability regarding which institutional body is responsible for addressing the problems, (iii) implementation of tangible short-term mitigation strategies alongside long-term planning and (iv) clearer communication and transparency in municipal decision-making” [narrative #4].

Ability to negotiate and to stay in relations with local authorities

Most of the interviewees for the narratives had relationships with public offices. Some of them have also had prolonged experience of dealing with public administration, through participation in multi-stakeholder meetings, submitting petitions, etc.

- The interviewee of narrative #1 helped draft the official document submitted to the city hall and defended the residents’ interests during the meeting [narrative #1].
- “One of the major actions undertaken by the collective was a formal petition of the municipal authorities, where residents presented their grievances and demanded concrete action” [narrative #2].
- Submission of requests to various public offices, participation in various meetings with local authority representatives, etc. [narrative #3].

Ability to build and ‘be’ in a network

Both EGEB and Fairville Brussels Lab have promoted and implemented networking and network-building activities to support citizens’ demands. It can be mentioned in this regard:

- The **co-created network for the Brusseau project**, involving, among others, besides EGEB, also the Université Libre de Bruxelles.
- The **multistakeholder platform “Délir les fils de l’eau”**, initiated by EGEB, including residents, and professionals, for addressing the pervasive and complex nature of urban water management challenges as a collective. The platform is facilitating ‘the sharing of knowledge and resources, enabling a more coordinated response to crises. Moreover, by advocating for and implementing co-production practices, the collective seeks to reshape the traditional paradigms of urban governance’ [key informants].

In this context, as reported by key informants, networking and alliance-building are strategic elements of the Fairville Lab, indispensable for managing and finding shared solutions to environmental risks in the rue Gray area through co-production.

- *‘This Fairville lab aims to reinforce this process by federating and empowering a community of citizens who feel marginalised to propose co-creative solutions through participatory processes.’*
- *‘By doing so, the Fairville lab aims to restore trust between inhabitants and political powers and to allow a better shared understanding of the reasons behind the flooding and the actions to be taken for reducing the flooding.’*

- *‘At present, several citizen-based organisations collaborate to bring forward the unheard voices of the citizens living in Rue Gray. Nevertheless, new means are needed to reduce the gap between citizens, local authorities and water operators.’*

3.4. *How engagement faces inequalities – Brussels Matrix*

The matrix summarises how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified. The ordinate displays various types of bottom-up actions and initiatives. The x-axis presents the primary inequality problems and phenomena considered. The cells indicate potential intersections between the problem and the type of engagement. For comparative purposes, the matrix structure remains consistent across all Fairville Labs analyses.

Table 2 – Matrix Engagement/Inequalities in Brussels

MATRIX OF INEQUALITIES/ ENGAGEMENT	Environmental problems	Economic and territorial inequalities	Social inequalities	Discrimination and segregation	Bad governance & lack of policies
Requests, protests and conflicts	X	X	X	X	X
Social movements					
Parallel planning					
Mapping exercise	X				
Self-managed initiatives					
Produces or implements goods and services					
Action to foster rights (rights to city, right to...)	X				
Knowledge co- production (fostering local knowledge)	X	X	X		
Actions of risk management (face or prevention)	X		X		X
Creation of association					
Creation of support network (territorial coalition)	X	X	X		
Collaboration with local authorities (long-term and/or punctual one)	X				
Collaboration with universities, research centres	X				
Promoting and implementing new regulatory framework					
Agenda settings of strategies and actions to solve local problems	X				

4. Map of impacts of inequalities on engagement – Dakar

4.1. Introduction

The map of Dakar, and specifically of the localities of Wakhinane Nimzatt, Djeddah Thiaroye Kaw and Hamo 6 in Guédiawaye is based on the experiences and knowledge⁴² contained in 10 narratives of engagement⁴³ and an interview with four key informants⁴⁴ from the Fairville Lab of Dakar (members of **UrbaSEN**⁴⁵, an NGO of Senegal, and of the **FSH – Fédération Sénégalaise des Habitants**⁴⁶, an umbrella structure that brings together grassroots community organizations sharing a savings system⁴⁷). The narratives of engagement describe the experiences of 10 people, 5 women and 5 men, of different age groups who have direct knowledge and **experience** of the many **inequalities** affecting the area, as well as of **the situation of recurrent floods**, and are engaged to restore, mitigate, or prevent them. The men are mainly city councillors or local delegates, one is responsible for a cooperative, while all the women interviewed are leaders of groups active in the area. In both cases (municipal councillors or group representatives), they perform leadership functions vis-à-vis the local community.

It should be noted that the **Fairville Lab of Dakar** is grounded on the activities carried out by UrbaSEN, in collaboration with the FSH, which has been intervening for years in some areas of Dakar by proposing participatory urban planning, including participatory environmental risk management and mapping⁴⁸. It should be noted that the narratives are referring to these activities. Co-production is based on several technical cooperations with the dwellers' federation and local authorities, often lacking technical expertise and financial means. University (Ucad and students in the new planning department from

⁴² The excerpts from the narratives are between quotation marks. Direct quotations of the interviewees are in italics between a single quotation mark.

⁴³ The interviews for collecting the biographies of engagement have been conducted by Aïssatou Badji, stagiaire, Amadou Ba, stagiaire, Hadia Diaby, stagiaire, and also drafted the interview reports and their synthesis. Ismaila Seye, responsable du pôle cartographie et collecte de données, Magatte Diouf, chargée des programmes, Rokhaya Fall, chargé de la collecte de données and Aïssata Talla, présidente de la FSH assured the coordination and the quality control.

⁴⁴ The key informants interviewed were: Papa Ameth Keita (UrbaSEN), Magatte Diouf (UrbaSEN), an internal stagiaire (UrbaSEN), Mamadou Fall (Commune de Wakhinane Nimzatt).

⁴⁵ urbaSEN is an ONG born out of a participatory urban planning project launched in 2009 in the suburbs of Dakar. urbaSEN supports groups of residents in Senegal's precarious neighborhoods, helping them to take part in the process of managing their housing, their neighborhoods and their living environment. Its interventions are structured around urban restructuring, land regularization, flood control, post-disaster housing reconstruction in disadvantaged areas, and the organization and empowerment of citizen groups for greater participation in the management of public affairs. In partnership with WeRobotics and the current DPGI (Direction de l'Aménagement des Zones d'Inondation), UrbaSEN has set up the first light drone aerial mapping skills center in the sub-region. urbaSEN organises workshops on participatory urban planning aimed at defining urban diagnostic. The maps constructed from drone footage are used as a basis for making participatory maps of areas not surveyed but prone to flooding. Hence the importance of using citizens' knowledge and information to supplement the maps. Participatory maps allow proposals for flood solutions to be presented to local authorities. In 2014 urbaSEN was among the promoters of the establishment of FHS. (For more information see: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/dakar-fairville-lab-presentation> and https://urbasen.org/user/pages/05.archives/dossier-de-presentation-en/urbaSEN_EN.pdf)

⁴⁶ Fédération Sénégalaise des Habitants FSH has more than 15 000 members organised in 646 saving groups. 90% are women explained that they started by rebuilding houses and then to support microprojects at neighbourhood scale. Nowadays, the federation is working with the minister thanks to the data on urban infrastructures they collected. Public institutions and ministers today rely on the FSH to do the mobilization and preparation of the intervention.

⁴⁷ The Fonds Rotatif is a solidarity-based, sustainable and self-managed financing mechanism funded since 2014 by various donors (FEDEVACO, FGC, AFD...) and by FSH members themselves. Through a database called urbadatabase, members of FSH groups benefit from funding to rebuild their housing, strengthen income-generating activities and co-finance street-level community microprojects in several intervention communes. The fund built 800 houses; the development of 30 public spaces (playgrounds, recreation areas, multi-purpose sports areas), the construction of 77 semi-collective cesspools, the rehabilitation of 02 toilet blocks in suburban schools and construction of a toilet block for a market, the supply of 3,805 regulation waste garbage cans, the construction of 47 residential toilets

⁴⁸ A brief description of the approach used by urbaSEN can be found [here](#).

Amadou Mahtar Mbow university are now also a partner (in Fairville) to monitor and try to capture and analyse the overall processes. As stated by the key informants, UrbaSEN and FHS's intervention strategy is centred on **empowering groups of slum dwellers** in target regions of Senegal and in by incorporating the voices and expertise of residents, particularly from informal settlements, into the urban planning process: "The objective is to propose a participatory and inclusive planning method involving the different actors of the territory in the process of creation and management of the city."

"Major State projects do not take into account territorial realities as well as the organizational dynamics of informal, unplanned, and irregularly occupied areas." [key-informants]. Based on this statement, UrbaSEN proposes a participatory mapping exercise of the areas of intervention. The Fairville Lab involves FHS, local authorities, technical services, government agencies, researchers, and academics in a support group, but for now not directly involved in data collection (there are also *Internships from universities*).

The map shows the area, mainly in the **departments of Guédiawaye** (communes of Golf Sud, Ndiarème Limamoulaye, Wakhinane Nimzatt, Médina Goumass) and Pikine (Djdda Thiaroye Kao, Pikine Est, Thiaroye Gare, Diamegueune SICAP Mbao, Tivaouane Diaksao), whose problems and activities are described here. In particular, the Fairville Lab operates in the communes of **Wakhinane and Ndiarème Limamoulaye**. The following table contains basic information.

Figure 4 – Maps of the Department of Guédiawaye and Pikine



Source: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrondissement_of_Guédiawaye)

Table 3 – Basic information communes of Wakhinane and Ndiarème Limamoulaye

	Tot. population	Density per Km ²	Population change
Department of Guédiawaye⁴⁹	372,708 (2023)	27,927/km² (2023)	Since 1975: +207.5% (from 2000 till 2015: +52.7%; 1.3% Annual Population Change [2013 → 2023] ⁵⁰)
Municipality of Wakhinane Nimzatt⁵¹	105,461 (2023)	24,265/km ² (2023)	1.7% Annual Population Change [2013 → 2023]
Municipality of Ndiarème Limamoulaye⁵²	36,024 (2023)	27,642/km ² (2023)	0.25% Annual Population Change [2013 → 2023]
Municipality of Djeddah Thiaroye Kaw⁵³	100,128 (2023)	53,104/km ²	0.33% Annual Population Change [2013 → 2023]

The municipalities are characterised by **uncontrolled urban sprawl**. The prolonged drought that affected Senegal between 1970 and 2000 caused a strong process of urbanisation and population increase in peri-urban areas, characterised by **informal settlements and the absence of adequate water and rainfall management infrastructure**. The participatory Atlas of environmental resources set up by ECOPAS project⁵⁴, in describing the evolutionary trends for the three dates considered (1986, 1999 and 2018) highlights two constants: the **continued development of dense built-up areas** and an **increase in flood-prone areas**, which declined between 1986 and 1999 and then tripled between 1999 and 2018. Three floods⁵⁵ occurred in **2005, 2009** (22,000 people in Guédiawaye were affected by the flood), and **2012**⁵⁶, resulting in deaths and destruction (of houses, roads, bridges, businesses, crops, etc.). Between 2008 and 2012, the government allocated the first funds to reduce the impacts of the floods, but with little success. In 2014, with most urban areas of the country affected by flooding, the government of Senegal adopted strong measures, starting with a **ten-year program for flood management**. In 2012, the **master plan for rainwater drainage in the Dakar peri-urban region (PDD)** was designed, including plans of structural works to be carried out to control flooding in the Dakar peripheral zone, particularly in Pikine and Guédiawaye. Floods also have consequences in terms of health, due to the circulation and presence of dirty surface water and pollution of drinking water aquifers. One of the causes of pollution problems is the **lack of proper and modern sanitation systems** in all the households, especially in **informal settlements**. With the support of the World Bank, the Nordic Development Fund (NDF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), between 2012 and 2019 starting the implementation of the PDD by the **Rainwater Management and Climate Change Adaptation Project (PROGEP)**. PROGEP starts building

⁴⁹ Source: https://www.city-facts.com/gu%C3%A9diawaye-dakar/population#google_vignette and https://www.citypopulation.de/en/senegal/admin/dakar/SN0102_gu%C3%A9diawaye/

⁵⁰ Data of the Census of November 19, 2013: 329.658 inhabitants; Data of the Census of 8 August 2023: 372.708 inhabitants (source https://www.citypopulation.de/en/senegal/admin/dakar/SN0102_gu%C3%A9diawaye/)

⁵¹ https://citypopulation.de/en/senegal/mun/admin/dakar/SN01020254_wakhinane_nimzatt/

⁵² https://www.citypopulation.de/en/senegal/mun/admin/dakar/SN01020253_ndiar%C3%A8me_limamoulaye/

⁵³ https://www.citypopulation.de/en/senegal/mun/admin/dakar/SN01030355_djidah_thiaroye_kaw/

⁵⁴ For more information, see (2018) "Atlas Des Enjeux Et Défis De La Gouvernance Inclusive Des Ressources Environnementales À Dakar Cas Des Communes Littorales De Sam Nottare, Ndiarème Limamoulaye, Wakhinane Nimzatt Et Yeumbeul Nord", available here: https://cisvto.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ATLAS_Ecopas_LIBRO_LR_compressed.pdf and the 2020 Final Report: <https://assesta.it/new-site/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ECOPAS-e-book-FINALE-compresso.pdf>

⁵⁵ For a brief story of the management of flood, see The World Bank (2014). *Recovery and Reconstruction since 2009. Recovery Framework Case Study SENEGAL: URBAN FLOODS*. August 2014 - <https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/rfcs-2014-senegal.pdf>

⁵⁶ In 2012, the emergency relief plan (ORSEC) was activated after the heavy rains of August 26. Due to heavy flooding, 26 deaths, 264,000 people and 7,737 damaged houses were reported. In addition, floods displaced over 5,000 families (over half from the Regions of Dakar and Matam) and contaminated 7,700 drinking water sources.

important infrastructures of water drainage and sanitation, which **partially alleviate the situation**⁵⁷, but it is not yet concluded⁵⁸ (in some cases, infrastructures must be completed).

4.2. Mapping key inequality factors

The 10 narratives provide useful information to describe the problems and inequalities in the area and the solutions initiated. As stated by the interviewees for narratives #1 and #2, **inequalities are both individual and collective**.

The first type of inequality concerns the **management of recurrent flooding**. The totality of people interviewed for the narratives had direct experience and knowledge of the problems, especially about flooding. Various areas of Dakar are subject to periodic flooding during the rainy season; some residential neighbourhoods have channel systems that protect homes and infrastructure from water. Several narratives report that often informal settlements have no such systems. Narrative #2 **emphasized the unequal presence of sanitation infrastructure among neighbourhoods**: some have all the services for a better living, and some do not. As mentioned by narratives #1 and #4, some areas in the two municipalities are too low (presence of depression areas), and during the rainy season or when it rains heavily, the roads flood. Narrative #8 gave the example of the road between the Sentenac Cooperative headquarters and Hamo 6. Not only are the roads flooded with water, but also the houses. Narrative #6 lamented that during the winter, some roads and houses become inaccessible. Her house was regularly affected by standing water as a result of flooding. It is especially, but not only, the homes of the most vulnerable people that are most affected.

As analysed by narrative #8, the risk of flooding is also tied to the spatial and social dynamics of the territory (**migration** and urbanisation). In the case of the municipality of Wakhinane Nimzatt, the first settlements date back to 1972, since when it has gradually continued to receive population flows with a very **limited sewerage system**, accentuating the risk of flooding.

Floods are also due to **poor management of sanitation infrastructure**, such as water catchment basins and canals. Rain and floods (especially in winter) bring sand, plastic, and trash (debris) that block canals and sumps (narratives #1 and #5). For the person of narrative #5, the problems of sumps management are: bad practices of site workers on spills in sumps and the tendency to overload sumps built, for example, to collect wastewater and waste from 10 households with spills from 30 households. Narrative #4 emphasizes the need for regular cleaning and maintenance of sumps to remove plant and vegetable waste and plastics. This is complicated and sometimes expensive maintenance to do.

From the social point of view, as stated by narrative #5, some of the **residents often exposed to flooding do not have the means to cope**. More **low-income citizens and vulnerable families are unable to afford**

⁵⁷ Caroline Sachaer and others, in their article (2018) *"Flood management in urban Senegal: an actor-oriented perspective on national and transnational adaptation interventions"*, identified three key intertwined issues which have influenced the limited achievements of flood management in urban areas. These include, but are not restricted to, the political and personal appropriation of flood management-related processes, the reinforcement of the dichotomy between central government and municipalities, and a fragmented institutional framework with overlapping institutions. The article is available here: https://backend.orbit.dtu.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/145115817/Flood_management_in_urban_Senegal.pdf. Hilary Hungerford et al. in their interesting article (2019) *"Coping with Floods in Pikine, Senegal: An Exploration of Household Impacts and Prevention Efforts"* investigated, by interviewing 40 families, the economic and health impacts (malaria, diarrhoea) some households in Pikine produced by the floods and the preventive measures put in place by the government (including some infrastructure, such as rainwater retention basins). The article is available here: <https://www.mdpi.com/2413-8851/3/2/54>

⁵⁸ For an overview of the rainwater drainage system of Dakar region, see Oumar Cissé. (2022), *"Challenges of urbanisation in Dakar. Land-use, sanitation, public transportation and public housing"*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (page #36-#37): <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/senegal/19120.pdf>. On PROGEF, see: <https://www.ndf.int/media/project-files/adm-capitalisation-note-t1-en-web-191217.pdf>

the expenses of cleaning and managing sumps and canals. The cooperative described by narrative #4 often has difficulty maintaining sumps and canals due to the lack of resources of citizens living in the area, who, in principle, are requesting to contribute to the expenses. Narrative #8 made an example, citizens should have the ability to pay for a hydro-cleaning truck, a sum that varies between 25,000 and 30,000 FCFA. But often, citizens do not have economic resources. Otherwise, residents resort to “bail-pelle”, which consists of digging to evacuate the water. Various narratives (#1, #4, #5, and #8) emphasized the fact that social and economic inequality negatively affects flood management capacity to find the resource for regular sanitation management and for disposing of waste and mud after cleaning is a major obstacle for residents, given their limited financial resources [narrative #1]. Narrative #8 pointed out that financial inequalities are very acute, exacerbating the gap between well-educated residents and those whose level of education is somewhat lower, given the cost of training.

Narratives #2, #3, #6, #8, and #10 spoke of the “**nefarious effects**” of these recurrent floods on the daily lives of families. Among the “nefarious effects” produced by floods, they mentioned:

- Exacerbating the difficulties of access to public places by people with reduced mobility [narrative #2, and key informants].
- Altering neighbourhood relations and sometimes being the source of conflict [narratives #3 and #10].
- Worsening of the family’s overall quality of life [narrative #3].
- Negative effects on children’s health [narratives #3 and #10].
- Negative effects on the elderly’s health [narrative #10].
- Negative impact on the economic activities of adults [narrative #3].
- Increase in the insecurity of people [narrative #3].
- Negative impact on school activities, i.e., prevents the school’s courses holidays from being held [narrative #3].
- Problematic and difficult access to the school of Djeddah Thiaroye Kaw (the school director at the beginning of the year pays for sand trucks to be spread on the road to facilitate children’s access) [narrative #3].
- Housing problems and increased promiscuity [narrative #9].
- Overflow of aseptic pits produces an unsanitary environment [narrative #9].

Apart from the floods, there are **forms of social inequality** in the territory, and accurately described by some of the narratives:

- There is an **insufficiency or absence of basic infrastructure** in some parts of the territory and especially in disadvantaged areas, often densely populated, such as schools, health facilities, roads, and sanitation systems [narratives #9 and #10].
- Vulnerable areas have an **inequitable access to resources** compared to better-endowed urban centres, reflecting a lack of democracy and inclusiveness in the management of public resources [narrative #9].
- **Difficult access to education in vulnerable areas:** overcrowded classrooms and long distances to schools [narrative #9].
- **Difficult access to public places by disabled people** [narrative #2 and key informants]
- **Remoteness from medical facilities and unsanitary conditions** due to poor sanitation [narrative #9].
- **Market infrastructure** of Wakhinane Nimzatt presents several problems, both in general outdated and dilapidated) and especially toilet blocks, not adequate and unsuitable and without light; poor management of the infrastructure [narrative #7].

Inequalities among territories in the presence or absence of infrastructure and services such as schools, health centres, sanitation systems, roads, etc., **might also be considered the results** (even if not planned) **of public policies or public choices**. As highlighted by key informants, the State fails to understand and manage in an equitable way the social and territorial dynamics related to informal settlements and the recognition of land ownership and use rights. “The programs do not take these neighbourhoods (informal, unplanned, etc.) into account. The land occupation status, which is irregular, poses a problem in terms of overall planning and consideration of our needs.” [key informants]. It should be noted that recurrent flooding affects informal settlements to a greater extent. For the key informants, one of the problems behind this is the **lack of reliable information on the areas of informal settlements**. To address this problem, one of the **Fairville Lab’s activities is the co-construction of spatial maps**⁵⁹, to integrate the state’s technical knowledge with citizens’ popular information and experience.

In this context, as pointed out by narrative #9, a very relevant point is the **criteria followed by public authorities on how to distribute available funds for investment** and infrastructure among territories. Narrative #8 systematically links inequalities, infrastructure, to the relationships with the State, arguing that the taxes that the inhabitants of her commune pay do not translate into returns from the State, which must be “accountable”. Structural shortcomings are compounded by democratic challenges, such as the lack of equitable participation in the distribution of resources [narrative #9].

Furthermore, regarding the specific problem of floods, some of the interviewees highlighted the **difficulties for local authorities in finding and implementing effective and permanent solutions**, also due to a **lack of knowledge** of the specific situation on the ground [narrative #1]. Some facilities are **ineffective** [narratives #1 and #9] **due to technical faults** or **overuse** [narrative #6]. As reported by narrative #9, problems are regularly brought to the attention of local authorities and central government; some requests have been met, but obstacles remain, notably due to a **lack of political will and budgetary constraints**. The delegate of the Commune of Wakhinane Nimzatt [narrative #1] reported that after visits by local authorities to flooded or flood-prone areas, no lasting solution had emerged. Furthermore, maintenance of the infrastructure put in place, such as the catch basins, remains a challenge.

Relationships with public authorities are a crucial point. During the Fairville meeting in Brussels in 2023, a representative of the FSH reported that in particularly critical situations, the citizens take action without waiting for State intervention. “We who face flooding can identify the risks, and endogenous solutions”. However, the contribution of local authorities is needed: hence the need, resulting both from the narratives and the interviews, for adopting and implementing a **co-production approach to flood solutions, involving citizens, local authorities, UrbaSEN, FHS, and all the concerned actors**. A significant example of the co-production approach is embodied in an agreement between the municipality, citizens, FHS, and UrbaSEN regarding covering the cost of carrying out preventive and flood reconstruction works. The agreement stipulates that 50 percent of the costs will be paid by the municipality, 25 percent by UrbaSEN, and 25 percent by citizens (see below, point 3.5).

4.3. *Relations between inequalities, engagement and forms of co-production*

The narratives and the interview with the key informants also provide information for mapping the specific impacts that the different forms of inequality have had or are having both on the interviewees themselves and on the people of the territory.

⁵⁹ Historically, maps have been a tool often used by Senegalese citizens and farmers for the recognition of ownership and their rights to land and the resolution of conflicts since colonial times, with respect to construction companies. See on this: List, N. C. (2017). “*Land Grabs in Urban Frontiers: Producing Inequality in Senegal’s Dakar Region*”. University of California, Berkeley.

a. Negative effects of inequalities on engagement

As described in the second part of this map, especially in winter, there are areas prone to flooding that make daily life difficult for everyone, especially vulnerable people and families, making their homes impassable [narrative #6]. Women are particularly affected, given their role within the family and their duties regarding the cleaning of the house and the care and health of the children. Furthermore, as said above, low-income families do not have the economic resources to contribute/construct/maintain the works necessary to prevent and prevent floods from hitting their homes. Despite this, from the narratives and interviews, it might be argued that there is a part of the local population and **community that is not mobilised and active to change the situation. There are citizens not involved.** Lack of interest and time are mentioned as reasons for non-involvement, according to what is stated in narrative #10: *'We warn everyone', if people don't come, it's because they're not interested or have something else to do'. The reasons for the lack of interest in involvement will need to be further investigated. One of the reasons could also be the perception by people that they cannot change their situation.* Furthermore, especially those who work are not interested in presenting their demands and claims to the local authority; however, once informed, the latter try to meet their expectations as best they can [narrative #10]. Narrative #10 underlines the fact that when an initiative is put in place to improve the living environment of the community, the whole neighbourhood is invited to take part, because it's in everyone's interest. There is an effort to involve all the members of the community and to encourage them to do more.

b. Effects of inequalities in promoting the engagement of people

Almost all the people interviewed reported that the situations of inequality they experienced, including recurring floods, were behind their **decision to mobilise themselves or to act in some way to change the situation.**

As for the representatives of the local authorities, in their 4 narratives [#1, #2, #7, and #8], they all expressed the **importance of collaboration with citizenship, with UrbaSEN** for the positive impacts it produces, since the solutions to identified inequalities attempted by local authorities have often been ineffective. In these 4 narratives [#1, #2, #7, and #8] willingness of local authorities to dialogue and listen to citizens and groups is emphasized. For narrative #2, inequalities cannot prevent the administration's involvement with respect to citizens' grievances and complaints. In the narrative #1, the interviewee expresses his will to act to solve/mitigate the situation: "Any action that tends to move my commune forward, I get involved in". In fact, he, as a local leader, does not hesitate to personally finance certain initiatives, such as waste removal by cart.

As for group and cooperative leaders, the search for feasible solutions against the floods that were having a major negative impact on their lives and those of their families is among the **motivations for their engagement** [narratives #5, #6, and #10]. In terms of commitment, the respondent of narrative #10 stresses that the inequalities they face are not an obstacle for them. She adds that everyone is invited to take part in public action. An interviewee [narrative #3] found out about the federation FHS through a neighbour and subsequently joined to receive funding for renovations from FHS. FHS made microfinancing available to citizens and groups from a revolving fund that allows them to finance both collective and individual works. After two years, she set up a group composed of women and young people from her neighbourhood. She then discovered the benefits of implementing sanitation works. In case of narrative #4, in response to the flood, the cooperative implemented several initiatives to improve stormwater management and increase community resilience. In the case of narrative #10, the person joined the FSH after seeing the many works that had been produced; a neighbour informed her of the rules of operation of the FSH and how to join. Seeing then the FSH's commitment against flooding, she

decided to join. In narrative #9, the respondent motivated her engagement in her willingness to promote the development of her municipality and the prevention of floods in unplanned areas.

In narrative #4 it is reported that a particular **form of mobilisation** consists of individuals or local groups addressing local authorities and associations to obtain information and lobby on territorial problems that directly affect them, also through petitions, or contacting elected representatives. This type of mobilisation, according to the interviewee, which is specific to the 'cités' and intellectuals, is different from mobilisation in working-class neighbourhoods, which he associates more with clientelist forms of mobilisation. He pointed out that there is a **'habit' of citizens mobilising to improve their neighbourhood**. In the narrative #10, it is mentioned the fact that now, the **young people of the district are fighting for their rights with the local authorities**. Despite the obstacles, they recognise that their commitment is essential if they are to overcome the limitations of public services and improve their living environment. As pointed out by narrative #9, communities are not limited to denouncing the injustices, but they start to act. **Advocacy** helps to bring the needs of communities to the attention of the relevant authorities.

The narratives describe the many forms taken by engagement: promoting opportunities for dialogue between citizens and local authorities; forming groups; proposing viable solutions [narrative #9]; conducting hands-on activities and participating in the construction of maintenance or flood prevention works or in risk management initiatives; making financial contributions for recovery and flood prevention expenses; awareness raising actions; intervening autonomously for completing public interventions [narrative #9]. **Collective action is characterised by its inclusive nature**, involving all social strata, including foreigners, people with disabilities, and marginalised groups. Diversity is seen as a strength in the management and implementation of local projects [narrative 9]. This aspect may contribute to giving more importance to financial and self-help participation, which is the main lever to bring local authorities to co-finance (in Wakhiname, for instance).

It should be underlined that the great **role played by women**. About 90 percent of FHS groups are composed of women; women are often leaders of these groups. Recurring floods have a greater impact on women, who have to take care of the home, child management, schooling, etc. Participation in the Federation's activities enables female participants to have access to micro-credits useful for financing work and small economic activities necessary for women's economic autonomy from men.

c. Engagement about inequalities producing limited impacts

Both from the narratives, and especially from the key informant interviews emerges that sometimes citizen mobilization alone, without the cooperation of local authorities, does not produce positive results, as well as the solutions provided by local authorities to the problems of recurrent floods, without the knowledge of citizens, failed to solve the problems. The limited impacts produced by citizen engagement are related to the presence of some obstacles in the relationship between citizens and groups on the one hand and local authorities on the other. These obstacles are listed below.

- **Delays in the disbursement of funds by the municipality** [narrative #10].
- **Local groups often have difficulty meeting their financial commitments**, which slows down the implementation of projects [narrative #6].
- **Misunderstandings** in relations between local authority and citizens, also due to the intervention of different sectors of public administration [narrative #2], which requires citizens to be able to address their requests to the right interlocutors.
- **Presence of different and not always converging interests between citizens and local authorities:** the State has several interests that are not necessarily those of marginalised groups, especially women [key informants]. For example, the State promotes action in areas where there is regular

urban planning, to the detriment of action in informal neighbourhoods, which is more at the request of residents. The work of mapping and collecting data on the territory carried out by the inhabitants is intended to counteract this orientation, providing information that the state often lacks because these are informal neighbourhoods.

The key informants mentioned specific obstacles to the co-production of the mapping exercise and the engagement of citizens.

- **An excess of technicality** and problems with *télescope* (*telescoping*).
- **difficulty in integrating official mapping with bottom-up mapping** because official mapping (derived from the colonialism period) does not record the informal urbanisation of those land uses that do not have a land title deed (local development plan). The problem is that the State may recognise land uses or titles, but without including them on official maps.
- Widespread presence of '**urbanisme de rattrapage**' (**keeping pace urbanism**): restructuring policy with data collection, relocation/removal to install equipment. The FHS carries out its data collection to contrast the '**urbanisme de rattrapage**' by the State.
- Presence of a **technicist approach that does not consider local and popular knowledge relevant** and useful.
- **Absence of local technical services.**
- Except for Fairville, and in most the cases, lack of researchers/ students able to document the co-production and mapping exercises.

d. Engagement contributing to reduce inequalities

Narratives also provide information on how the involvement of individuals and groups, together with local authorities, is having a positive impact on inequality. Several narratives indicated an **improvement in the situation as a result of citizen mobilisation with the support of UrbaSEN and FSH**. Narrative #7 indicates that the situation began to improve following the intervention of the NGO-UrbaSEN, which helped to refurbish the local toilet block. Also, progress has been made in flood risk management [narrative #1]. In particular, the narratives report:

- **The construction of cesspools and stoplogs, and the refurbishment of several houses**, including their own [narrative #6]; construction of **perimeter walls** in the most exposed areas and **sumps** have been installed to facilitate the evacuation of surface water [narrative #4]; **implementation of semi-collective liquid sanitation facilities** in a participatory manner, involving residents at every stage, from design to maintenance [narrative #6].
- **Organisation of collective actions involving citizens at all stages**, from awareness-raising to mobilisation and implementation [narrative #9]; these actions often involve women and children [narratives #1 and #4].
- **Establishment of committees** (composed frequently by citizens) for the maintenance of sanitation infrastructures and organisation of their periodic cleaning (narratives #6 and #8), as well as the cleaning of roads, reforestation, and catch basin management.
- **Organisation of periodic meetings** of all the sales of the market for discussing the problems of the market and identifying possible solutions, with the involvement of the market delegate [narrative #7].
- The partnership between the municipality and UrbaSEN has helped residents to market soap, rehabilitate household toilets, and obtain funds to maintain their homes [narrative #8].

e. Elements of co-production

Virtually all narratives describe the practice of elements⁶⁰ of co-production⁶¹:

- **Ability to produce and share knowledge** about one's territory or community
- **Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies, and proposals** to be achieved by co-production
- **Ability to promote the involvement of other citizens**, by applying an empowerment approach of citizens and the recognition of their needs
- **Ability to build and 'be' in a network**
- **Ability to negotiate and to stay in relations with local authorities** aimed at defining partnerships.

These are elements practiced in the context of FSH activities and collaboration with UrbaSEN even before the Fairville Lab was launched. The Fairville Lab was grounded in this context. The **Dakar Fairville Lab**⁶² **tackles the inequalities arising from flood risk and the challenges of democracy through co-production activities**. Its main objectives are **to document the work done locally and give communities a central place in the definition of public policies**. In particular: support to vulnerable residents in **drawing up a flood risk management plan**; build the capacity of community players; support advocacy campaign⁶³.

The key informant interviews provide precise information about the core elements of the approach used.

- **Mapping risks and proposing solutions:** State projects often do not consider local and informal areas lacking basic social infrastructure/equipment. UrbaSEN on sanitation provides the basic information so that residents can map the risks, working with them on post-disaster construction and proposing solutions for managing these risks, rather than waiting for the State to do so [key informant interview].
- **Centrality of the role of residents.** FSH stresses the **importance of the involvement of those who live with the problems**, since they have a better grasp of the realities than the technicians. For UrbaSEN it is important to put **residents at the centre of decision-making, so that they are no longer passive waiters, but active players**. The aim is to let residents express their experience, in their language, in their way. [key informant interview]. *'We're the ones who live here, we're the ones who suffer, so we're in a position to find the solutions. Citizens and residents start to do things, and then they get the State and the local communities to do things with them, from their perspective'* [key informant interviews].
- **Increase in the residents' abilities/capabilities:** they now have the means to negotiate with the authorities to influence and be heard by the authorities on infrastructure planning, and on the other side, also, the State is starting to change and to take into consideration the proposals and advice of the residents.
- The fight against inequality is seen as a **long-term effort**. It depends on **passing on knowledge and practices to future generations** [narrative #9].

⁶⁰ As stated in the introduction of Part 2, the contents of this paragraph are also a contribution to the ongoing broad reflection carried out by the Fairville Labs and other WPs on co-production.

⁶¹ These elements were identified based on the reflection initiated within Fairville's WP2 on co-production. These elements are also in line with the definition of "community-driven co-production" described in the Fairville D2.1 "Draft of a common glossary and common grid of analysis", August 2024, which contains an analysis of specific terms and themes. "Coproduction" - by Giuseppe Faldi, Agnès Deboulet & Claire Bénéit-Gbaffou, with Mathilde Jourdam-Boutin: see in particular pages #15-16).

⁶² The aims of the Fairville Lab have been extracted from the document "Fairville Stories".

⁶³ These are advocacy campaigns for legislative/policy changes that reflect current urban needs and dynamics. For example, the Lab advocates for the inclusion of informal settlements in official urban planning through the development of detailed urban planning documents that consider the specific characteristics and needs of these areas: land titling, vulnerability to floods, and economic exclusion and inequalities.

- The co-production of local initiatives makes it possible not only to meet the needs of residents but also to actively involve them as stakeholders and beneficiaries. Residents' financial contributions remain symbolic and are facilitated by loans repayable over twenty months. It is important to share and scale this approach also in other areas [narrative #6].

A central element of co-production pursued by UrbaSEN and FSH, and indicated in all interviews is the **relationship with local authorities**.

- Relations with the **local municipality play an important role in financing projects and interventions**. The municipality finances 45-50% of the expenses and sometimes (rarely) intervenes to cover the share of the most vulnerable households [narrative #5]. As said earlier, 50% of the costs of interventions within the framework of the UrbaSEN agreement are paid by the town hall, 25% by UrbaSEN, 25% by the population [narrative #1, #2, and #4].
- However, **relations with the municipality are also fluid** and allow residents to **address requests and complaints** without difficulty. An **important mediation and facilitation role among residents and the municipalities is played by UrbaSEN**. This was the case with the requests concerning the modernisation of the market, which were first agreed with UrbaSEN and then with the delegate [narrative #7].
- The **municipality organises training for citizens** to strengthen their capacities [narrative #8].
- Several meetings have been held with members of the town council, community players, and notables from the commune to organise activities that promote social inclusion. Collective actions are discussed beforehand and involve all stakeholders [narrative #2].

Finally, narrative #3 reports an interesting experience on the relation with local authorities: a project was presented at the town hall to the local authorities and religious authorities (imams) before being implemented. The respondent also pointed out that before, they did not have the means to undertake initiatives. The young people in the neighbourhood, particularly the ASC, formed groups to help the houses most affected and dug to redirect the water before backfilling. A neighbourhood council has also been set up to discuss problems, find solutions, and make decisions together; young people have even volunteered to pay the municipality's counterpart. The municipality has been slow to pay the compensation it owes to the federation. Without this payment, the population will not be able to benefit from additional works in other alleyways in the district [narrative #3].

About the **Fairville project**, narrative #7 hopes that the project will improve people's living conditions and hopes for a sharing of knowledge and good practices useful in this regard. Only two interviewees [#3 and #10] said that they don't know Fairville.

Finally, narrative #1 underlines the need for a budget dedicated to infrastructure maintenance to ensure the sustainability of the efforts made by citizens and local authorities to manage and prevent floods.

4.4. *How engagement faces inequalities – Dakar Matrix*

The matrix summarises how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified. The ordinate displays various types of bottom-up actions and initiatives. The x-axis presents the primary inequality problems and phenomena considered. The cells indicate potential intersections between the problem and the type of engagement. For comparative purposes, the matrix structure remains consistent across all Fairville Labs analyses.

Table 4 – Matrix Engagement/Inequalities in Dakar

MATRIX OF INEQUALITIES/ ENGAGEMENT	Environmental problems	Economic and territorial inequalities	Social inequalities	Discrimination and segregation	Bad governance & lack of policies
Requests, protests and conflicts					
Social movements	X				
Parallel planning	X				
Mapping exercise	X	X	X		
Self-managed initiatives	X				
Produces or implements goods and services					
Action to foster rights (rights to city, right to...)					
Knowledge co- production (fostering local knowledge)	X	X	X		X
Actions of risk management (face or prevention)	X				
Creation of association	X	X	X		
Creation of support network (territorial coalition)	X				
Collaboration with local authorities (long-term and/or punctual one)	X	X	X		
Collaboration with universities, research centres	X				
Promoting and implementing new regulatory framework					
Agenda settings of strategies and actions to solve local problems					

5. Map of impacts of inequalities on engagement – Giza

5.1. Introduction

The map of inequality impacts on engagement in Giza is based on the contents⁶⁴ of **10 narratives** of engagement⁶⁵ and key informant interviews⁶⁶. The narratives provide detailed information on the different forms of experienced inequalities in Mansheyat Dahshur (*Governorate of Giza – Greater Cairo Area*) and on their impacts on engagement and actions each of the interviewees has taken to try to improve his/her quality of life and those of his/her community. As described by all narratives, one of the main problems concerns the mismanagement and disposal of waste.

“Mansheyat Dahshur⁶⁷ is a peri-urban municipality of the Giza Governorate, in the Greater Cairo Area. It is home to the three world-famous pyramids of Snefru and around 55,000 people. The primary occupations found in Mansheyat Dahshur are agriculture and carpeting, with 1/3 of all commercial dates consumed in Egypt produced in Dahshur’s sub-district.

Despite its unique historical and touristic value, it suffers from both a seriously deteriorating solid waste management system and poor waste disposal practices, like most low-income areas around and within the Egyptian capital.

Mansheyat Dahshur has a seriously deteriorating solid waste management system in place, which is not sufficient to deal with the large volume of waste produced by its population. Due to that, poor waste disposal practices such as open burning, dumping, and littering into the irrigation canals are carried out on a regular basis. Some parts of the irrigation canals located in Mansheyat Dahshur are critically polluted, with a mix of wastewater and plastic waste clogging the canal⁶⁸.”

The next figure presents a map of the area.

As pointed out by the key informants, the entire “village”⁶⁹ is not connected to a central sewage system. Although sewage pipes have already been installed in more than 50% of the locality, they are not connected, not functional, and currently out of service. The absence/shortage of a waste management

⁶⁴ The excerpts from the narratives are between quotation marks. Direct quotations of the interviewees are in italics between a single quotation mark.

⁶⁵ The interviews were conducted by Alaa Sabet (Giza Lab field coordinator) and Paloma Anger (Giza lab coordinator & Researcher); audio -recording transcription: Laila Amin (Copy editor) & Kawkab Tawfik (Giza Lab Anthropologist and Communication expert); translation Arabic - English: Kawkab Tawfik (Giza Lab Anthropologist and Communication expert); Biographies drafting: Kawkab Tawfik (Giza Lab Anthropologist and Communication expert).

⁶⁶ The key informants interviewed were Paloma Anger, Kawkab Tawfik, Ahmed Zaazaa of North South Consultants Exchange – Giza. “NSCE is one of the leading Arab and African consulting firms in the field of sustainable development in Africa and the Middle East”. North South Consultants Exchange (NSCE) is a registered consultancy firm in Egypt since 1988. The firm was awarded the ISO certificate “ISO 9001:2008” in recognition of the professional quality of international consultancy services.” For more information, see: <https://nsce-inter.com/>

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⁶⁷ Extract from the Fairville Giza Lab presentation: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/giza-fairville-lab>

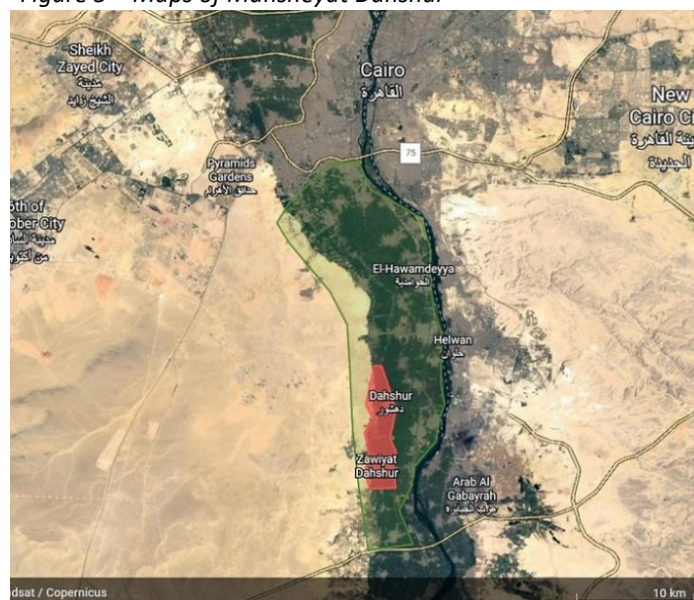
⁶⁸ A detailed picture of the situation of waste and water canals has been provided by Corentin Mouchard, by a mapping survey held in Mansheyat Dahshur, and described in the Fairville blog post, titled: “Mapping water canals in Mansheyat Dahshur”, June 11, 2025 - <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/mapping-water-canals-in-mansheyat-dahshur> .

⁶⁹ Here and henceforth, the term “Village”, used by the interviewees, must be understood to mean a large peri -urban area. Informal settlements equivalent to a middle size city in some European countries. A qualitative analysis based on interviews with stakeholders, and inhabitants of informal areas of Giza and Cairo is contained in the document GTZ. Participatory Development Programme in Urban Areas. (2009). “Cairo’s informal areas. Between urban challenges and hidden potentials. Facts, voices, Visions.

service results in residents not knowing where to throw their waste, which, in many cases, is thrown into irrigation canals.

A large part of the territory is occupied by farms and agricultural holdings, while a part of the population works in tourism or related sectors, such as transport. Therefore, from an employment point of view, most people are farmers (predominantly men).

Figure 5 – Maps of Mansheyat Dahshur



Source: [Fairville Giza Lab presentation](#)

In this complex context, the Fairville project, which began operating in 2022, is based on the previous experiences in waste management held in the area. The Fairville Giza Lab is managed and implemented by North South Consultants Exchange (NSCE). “ In 2020, NSCE and its partner [Greenish](#) conducted a study⁷⁰ of the solid waste situation as part of the EU-funded project [Visit Badrashin](#). The Fairville Giza Lab is built on the trust established with the local community, local CSO and the regional and local authorities, and is benefiting from NSCE extensive network of experts and the experience in participatory design of [10 Tooba](#) – Applied Research on the Built Environment⁷¹ – to experiment with co-production in the Egyptian context⁷²”.

“The ambition⁷³ of the Giza Fairville Lab is to bring together the inhabitants, the authorities and researchers to realize a co-mapping and co-assessment of the solid waste situation and to co-develop a realistic action plan based on innovative local solutions, supported by the best expertise”. The process is addressing “the municipal and agricultural waste challenge in all its dimensions: waste minimization, waste sorting, waste transportation, waste recycling, resource recovery, waste collection, and/or waste

⁷⁰ Information on the study, its methodology and results are reported in Kamal, M. (2020). Understanding the Municipal Solid Waste State of Mansheyat Dahshur. Technical Report. Available here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368543470_Understanding_the_Municipal_Solid_Waste_State_of_Mansheyat_Dahshur/citations

⁷¹ Tooba 10 published the “Knowing Local Communities: Participatory Needs Assessment Manual”, in the framework of the GTZ initiative, available at this link <https://www.10tooba.org/en/?p=259>

⁷² Extracted from the presentation of the Fairville Giza Lab: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/giza-fairville-lab>

⁷³ This description has been extracted from the presentation of the Fairville Giza Lab: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/giza-fairville-lab>

disposal. It will involve all concerned stakeholders: dwellers, CSOs, informal collectors, private sector, local and regional authorities.”

During the first period the Fairville Giza Lab carried out a participatory mapping exercise of the territory aimed at ‘mapping this year using a spatial approach; map household waste management behaviours; map public and private waste management system and process in Badrashin district; And start to document impact on inequalities created and or strengthened by waste management issues for Dahshur communities⁷⁴’.

The aspirations of the Fairville Giza Lab are that this experience can be replicated in more locations in Egypt.

The persons interviewed for the narrative are eight men [narratives #1, #3, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, and #10] and 2 women [#2, and #4]. Five interviewees have an age from 24-31 years old; four interviewees are between 45 and 55 years old; one interviewee is over 60 years old. Six respondents have a university education. Three respondents were involved in Local Youth Parliament activities. One of the interviewees is a farmer; two are involved in field work activities of Fairville Lab; one is a teacher, one is a journalist/publisher, one is working in a waste management project, one is engaged in a local development project, and one is involved in both local authority work and his NGO. Five of the interviewees live in Manshiyat Dahshur [narratives #3, #4, #5, #6, and #7], two live in Dahshur [narratives #1, #2, and #9], and one lives in Saqqara [narrative #8]. One is a local-level civil servant [narrative #7]. It should be noted that most of the respondents are people with a secondary education, who have had and have access to different types of opportunities (training, contacts, etc.).

5.2. Mapping key inequality factors

Interviewees and key informants provide an accurate description of problems and inequalities. One of the most pressing problems concerns the mismanagement of waste, as described by interviewees, which has a major impact on the quality of life of all the inhabitants of Mansheyat Dahshur.

a. Problems and environmental inequalities

All people interviewed indicated environmental problems⁷⁵ as the most relevant for Dahshour and Mansheyat Dahshur (but also in other nearby villages, such as Saqqara [narrative #7], also taking into consideration their impacts. Three major problems are mentioned:

- Poor waste management
- Problems with access to drinking water and water in general.
- Floods.

Some of the statements made by the interviewees regarding waste management and sanitation are listed below.

- Despite high population densities, “the **sewage system is incomplete** in Saqqara, Dahshur, and many of the surrounding villages. Only around 50% of the work has been done in some areas, but

⁷⁴ Extract from the Fairville Giza Lab Operation Plan 2023-2024.

⁷⁵ On this issue, it is interesting to consider the indicators of Deprivation in the built environment (BEDI) for the Governorate of Giza: overall built environment deprivation indicator:29,0%; affordability: 44,9%, crowding: 7,9%; durable housing: 1,2%; secure tenure: 83,7&: safe water: 20,2% and sanitation 16,4,6% These are the data of the same indicators for Egypt: overall built environment deprivation indicator:34,1%; affordability: 54,3%, crowding: 7,7%; durable housing: 3,2%; secure tenure: 70,2% safe water: 16,6% and sanitation 52,6% (source <https://10tooba.org/bedi/en/>)

progress has stalled due to financial issues – contractors haven’t been paid, so work can’t continue. Waste management is another major issue” [narrative #7].

- “There’s also **no proper sanitation⁷⁶ system** [narratives #2 and #9], which means we rely on trenches that often overflow, creating health hazards and costly repairs” [narrative #2].
- “Every building relies on **cesspools, which are emptied into the canals**, further polluting the water supply and harming agriculture” [narrative #1].
- At Manshiyat Dahshur, the problems of water and sanitation are aggravated by the division of the village into **higher and lower areas**, which leads to serious issues with groundwater and sanitation. The layout of the village, with buildings spread across different elevations, only exacerbates these problems” [narrative #6].
- The village suffers from a **lack of waste management** [narratives #6 and #8], and with people often dumping rubbish on the streets [narratives #6].
- “The **canals are clogged with waste**, and no one is maintaining them. There used to be engineers with excavators cleaning them regularly, keeping the flow open. But it’s been six or seven months since anyone has come. It’s like we’ve been forgotten – like no one lives here anymore” [narrative #3].
- One of the biggest issues is **pollution [narratives #4 and #8]**. “The air is **unclean, and waste is everywhere**. There’s no awareness, no regulations, no systems to enforce cleanliness, and it affects both our health and the beauty of the village.” [narrative #4]
- “We’ve even compared ourselves to nearby villages like Shabramant, which have basic containment fences – even that is better than what we have” [narrative #4].

This waste mismanagement and sanitation system produces negative impacts on the health and well-being of people. As mentioned by the interviewee of narrative #8, the problem of unmanaged waste and pollution is spread and impacts a population of more than 60,000 people. “Any solution must be shared, not individual. It has to work for everyone” [narrative #8].

- “**Poor waste management leads to disease**. Flies contaminate food, and unclean water causes health issues – eye infections, internal diseases, and even kidney failure.” [narrative #7]
- “This cycle of problems impacts both health and livelihoods, **creating a sense of despair** in the community” [narrative #1].
- “**People complain** constantly” [narrative #4].
- “It causes **diseases, affects the quality of life**, and creates visible and invisible harm” [narrative #4].
- “People living near waste sites and collection places suffer the most from **bad smells, disease, and mosquito** infestations” [narratives #4 and #8].
- “**Children are the most vulnerable**. Many suffer from respiratory problems due to uncollected garbage being burned or dumped into irrigation canals. Shockingly, one of the largest waste collection points is located next to the village school” [narrative #1].
- “As for who suffers most from the current situation, it’s all of us. But the **waste collectors** are particularly vulnerable. They have no protective gear, no gloves, no masks. They’re directly exposed every day” [narrative #4].
- “And **garbage** isn’t just a water problem; it’s a **health crisis**. People dump everything into the Nile like it’s a trash bin, not a lifeline. Plastic waste has exploded over the past decade. When I was

⁷⁶ The interviewee of narrative #9 reported that in Dahshur “the sanitation issue is finally being addressed. Work began in 2008, stopped during the revolution, and restarted recently. Under the *Hayya Karima* initiative (Decent life presidential initiative), we’re entering the second phase. The governor recently cancelled the contract with the old company and brought in a new one. A trial run of the station is expected soon. The whole village is ready for household connections to begin.” [narrative #9].

young, we used paper bags. **Now it's all plastic, and it's choking our waterways, polluting our environment, and making people sick.** But no one talks about awareness. **No one takes responsibility**" [narrative #3].

The second environmental problem indicated by some of the interviewees concerns access to water and clean drinking water, which represents a pressing issue for narratives #1 and #2:

- **Problems in accessing clean water** [narrative #1].
- "Dahshur's **drinkable water supply is unreliable** – it's pumped from Badrasheen and only runs for about four hours a day in the summer" [narrative #9].
- The **water scarcity**, its **poor quality**, and high salinity made farming increasingly difficult [narrative #1].
- "The local supply [of water in Dahshur] is unsafe, and as a result, people are forced to buy water. This puts a significant financial strain on families" [narrative #2].
- "Even the **drinking water**, though filtered, **isn't truly safe**. Every home now uses extra filters because once we had someone test our water, and what came out was truly alarming" [narrative #4].

For the third problem (flood), the respondent in narrative #10 reported recurring floods of "groundwater that flooded the streets, damaged houses, and for years even blocked the only school at the entrance to the village" [narrative #10]. For eleven years, that school was closed because of the floods.

b. Economic and territorial inequalities

The interviewees also described the **economic and territorial⁷⁷ inequality⁷⁸ phenomena** they experience and perceive by making comparisons of Dahshour and Mansheyat Dahshur with the situation in other localities.

The interviewee of narrative #1 provides a clear picture of the situation of multiple inequalities affecting the territory: "The challenges faced by rural communities in Egypt, including my own, are significant. **Inadequate services and visible inequalities**, especially in comparison to larger cities, are common across the villages in the country. The local population has grown rapidly, yet administrative structures and resources have not kept pace. This imbalance has strained local systems, leaving villages unable to meet the growing demands of their communities. These challenges affect everything from **education to healthcare to infrastructure**, etc." [narrative #1]. Also, the interviewee of narrative #8 pointed out that the "waste affects everything – our health, the environment, and tourism. I've seen illnesses caused by it" [narrative #8]. Problems in waste management damage the image of the village.

The interviewees also described specific inequality issues: namely economic inequality; lack of basic services of health and education services.

⁷⁷ The map of Governorates of Greater Cairo, formal and informal settlements, published in 2009 in GTZ, "CAIRO'S INFORMAL AREAS BETWEEN URBAN CHALLENGES AND HIDDEN POTENTIALS - FACTS. VOICES. VISIONS. About Cairo and its Informal Areas" page #28 shows a widespread presence of informal settlements in the Governorate of Giza.

⁷⁸ Some sources are providing statistical data on inequality and poverty in Egypt. A synthetic overview is contained in the document "Socio-Spatial inequalities in Egypt – Literature Review" made by A. Zaazaa. "In Egypt, inequality is reproduced through the perpetuation and intersection of different types of inequalities, including income, wealth, education, gender, employment, and health. Replicated across generations, these types of inequality inhibit social mobility, which adversely affects society and the economy." [...] "In 2019, according to WID, 1% of the highest-income Egyptians received 19% of the total national income, while the 50% of the lowest-income Egyptians received only 17.2%. Also, the top-income 10% of Egyptians received 48.7% of the total national income, which means that only one million Egyptians received a higher percentage of the national income than that received by 50 million Egyptians".

For **economic and territorial inequality**, it is possible to mention the following.

- Presence of “**economic difficulties**” in Manshiyat Dahshur because “the village relies heavily on external labour, which means there aren’t enough local initiatives or projects to provide steady employment for the youth” [narrative #6].
- **Emigration of young people**: the lack of economic opportunities and labour forced young people “to leave the village in search of work in other governorates or Cairo” [narrative #6].
- **Lack of economic support for sustainable agriculture**. “Using sustainable practices felt like an ethical choice, but without state support, the costs were prohibitive. Competing with other farmers who used chemical fertilisers wasn’t viable” [narrative #1]. This situation obliged the interviewee of narrative 1 six years ago to sell his land. There is an “urgent need for systemic changes” to address the “difficulties of my generation [30-year-olds] in having a decent income out of agriculture and making use of innovative and sustainable systems” [narrative #1].
- **Applying excessively low prices to local agricultural products**. “We grow a lot of crops here – beans, potatoes, zucchini, peppers – typical peasant farming. Some of the produce is exported to Europe by small local distributors, but we don’t get fair prices. They pay less than the market rate, and we have no choice but to accept it” [narrative #3].
- **Presence of unpaved roads [narratives #4 and #7]**. “The roads are unpaved, making travel dangerous. Accidents on roads like the Marriutiyya are all too common, and this discourages girls from going out for work or other activities” [narrative #2]. “The road to school is not only ugly but also dangerous. I’m constantly worried about my children’s health and safety, whether from potential diseases or accidents due to the poor conditions [narrative #4].

Lack of health facilities is indicated by the interviewees [narratives #3, #4, #8, and #10].

- “Our local hospital was refurbished, but **there’s still no real medical staff or operation** [narratives #4 and #10]. [...] We have a hospital that was built for millions, but it’s empty – no doctors, no equipment. If I fall ill, I have to pay hundreds to see a private doctor outside the village” [narrative #4].
- There is a public Health Unit that “operates from around 9 or 10 in the morning until 2 in the afternoon. Expanding it to 24-hour service is essential [narrative #7]. “The unit offers general checkups, dental care, and family planning – but no emergency services or surgeries” [narrative #9].
- “There’s **no emergency hospital here** [narratives #4 and #9], and the health centre that exists is just for show – it’s not functional. These issues make life especially difficult for families and children” [narrative #4].
- “We only have one public health unit that provides basic care, but it is severely under-equipped and underfunded. The healthcare situation is especially tough for those who can’t afford private clinics, and the **scarcity of medicine and medical procedures makes it even harder**. For many, getting the necessary treatment is a financial strain” [narrative #5].
- **High cost of using private doctors**.
 - The “**health unit** in the village is **barely functional**. If someone gets sick, they don’t go there because it doesn’t provide proper treatment. Instead, **people visit private doctors, which is very expensive**, costing anywhere from EGP 200 to EGP 500⁷⁹ for consultation and treatment” [narrative #2].

⁷⁹ 1 EGP is equivalent to 0,018 EUR. According to the World Data website, the average salary of an Egyptian is €3,510 per year, or approximately €293 per month. The minimum wage for permanent workers in the public and private sector set by the government is EGP 7000 per month, starting in March 2025. The month average for a farmer is EGP 161,972 (<https://www.erieri.com/salary/job/farmer-general/egypt>).

- “The local health unit, though functional, is not properly equipped to meet the needs of the community. **Many people cannot afford private healthcare**, so they end up relying on the health unit. It’s not ideal, but it’s the only option for many. For minor illnesses, I typically go to the local health doctors, but if the issue is more serious, **I go to a doctor outside the village**, sometimes in Badrasheen or even farther away. The cost of medical treatment can be high, with consultations starting around 70 EGP and the cost for treatment often reaching 400-500 EGP or even more” [narrative #6].

Finally, the lack of adequate schools and educational and recreational facilities is also indicated by the interviewees.

- **Lack of schools.** Children have to walk long distances (up to 30 minutes) [narrative #10].
- **Lack of secondary school**⁸⁰. “There’s no secondary school here. Kids have to travel to Badrasheen or Saqqara to study beyond middle school – just like I did when I was a boy” [narrative #3]. “There are also some NGOs in the area, but their impact is minimal, and they aren’t doing enough to support the poor or orphans as they should” [narrative #6]. “While we do have three primary schools and one secondary school for boys and one for girls, there is no high school, and students have to go to Mit Rahina or Badrashin for further education” [narrative #7].
- **Presence of overcrowded classrooms** [narratives #5, #6, #7, #8 and #10]. “In the classroom, the conditions are crowded, with sometimes up to 70 students per class, and desks are shared by three or four students. The schools also lack proper infrastructure, making it hard to provide the quality of education that students deserve”.
- **Lack of teachers for the schools.** Teachers at school are not sufficient. This lack of teachers is particularly experienced in the field of mathematics [narrative #5]. There’s a nationwide shortage of teachers that also affects Manshiyat Dahshur. “We need infrastructure expansion and better staffing because education directly affects environmental awareness. An informed generation can change how we deal with waste” [narrative #8]. The interviewee from narrative #10 explains that to overcome the shortage of teachers, “the government decided to reduce the capacity to 40 students per classroom: a good idea, but without hiring new teachers. Thus, schools now work double shifts. Some teachers are paid per session: 50 Egyptian pounds per lesson. It is a private contract, and thanks to this number of teachers has gone up, but it is not enough” [narrative #10].
- **Problems in cleaning schools.** “The cleanliness in the schools, for example, is much worse than in other places like Nasr City or Badrasheen, where there is more awareness and better infrastructure. Here, even though we try to educate the children on cleanliness, many don’t follow through, and the lack of sufficient staff to manage waste exacerbates the problem” [narrative #6].
- **Lack of recreational and sports facilities for young people.** “The youth centre is tiny, there is no space to play sports, even though there are many young people full of energy and drive. The young people tried to ask the local authorities to build a football pitch, but there was no response” [narrative #10].

c. Discrimination

The interviewee in narrative #2 describes the discrimination and inequality she experienced as a woman. These inequalities are in addition to what has already been described in the previous paragraphs. For the

⁸⁰ In Dahshur there are four schools – two primary, one preparatory, and one secondary. [narrative #9].

interviewee of narrative #2, the first major problem concerns the absence of labour⁸¹ for women⁸². “**Job opportunities for women** are practically non-existent, except for a few low-paying positions in private clinics” [narrative #2]. The absence of job opportunities means that **they don’t have the chance for economic empowerment**, leaving them largely dependent. In rural areas like ours, most work involves agriculture, which is primarily reserved for men. Aside from a few low-paying clinic jobs, there’s little else available for women” [narrative#2].

As the key informants pointed out during their interview, the gender issue is also very relevant in the areas of household waste management, childcare, and health⁸³. *‘Gender issue, traditional society, women have the main role in the domestic waste management and are also more exposed to the lack of an efficient system and health issues related to the piles of garbage in streets affecting kids’* [key informants]. On the other hand, however, from a cultural point of view, *‘when women are collecting garbage [outside their houses], it is seen as humiliating. People will ask, “Where is your man? What are you doing?” Women have to justify what they do. I am just speaking generally. I think also when we are looking at the official census, the majority of women are being recorded as “housewives”. This is problematic, housewife is not a job, they should be “unemployed”* [key informants].

It should also be considered that traditionally, women must take care of the house, children, etc. They are expected to perform basic **domestic roles**, and their activities are mainly carried out within the **private space of the household** walls. Culture and social norms codify how relations between men and women must be implemented. For example, there are places where women are traditionally not allowed to go, such as coffee shops, where men meet after work. The exchange of private messages between men and women not from the same family is similarly problematic, because, for example, for a man *sending a message or communicating with a woman privately is not something respectful* [key informants]. It is important to note that “in front of a male rural community, the leadership of women is not always well welcomed and accepted” [key informants].

d. Inequalities as outcomes of policies

This category considers the inequality phenomena inherent in the strategic choices of certain policies, those produced by the implementation of certain policies (intended and unintended effects), and those resulting from the non-action of policies and interventions. Some of the interviewees report issues related on the problematic relationships with public authorities and on the implementation of public policy.

⁸¹ The official unemployment rate of Egypt in 2023 was 7,7%. The rate for male unemployment is 4,7%; for women it 17,8%. 82,1% of the labour force are males; females are 17,9%. 14,4% of the unemployed have a university degree or above. Participation rates for industry by age: 15-19 years old: 11,9%; 20-24 years old 35,2%, 25-29 years old 56,4%; 30-39 years old 57,6%; 40-49 years old 59,5%; 50-59 years old 55,9%; 60-64 years old 22,9%; over 65 years old: 10,5%. Source CAPMASS. About Giza, the labour force (above 15 years) in 2007 was 29,8%; the employees in informal sector were 30%; the unemployment rate of people with university education was 17,8%. (Source <https://opendataforafrica.org/atlas/Egypt/Giza/Labour-Force-above-15-years-old>)

⁸² “The 2020 Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) positions Egypt at 134 out of 153 countries worldwide (World Economic Forum (2020). Global Gender Gap Index 2020. Insight Report - www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf). Moreover, the World Bank reported concerning statistics of approximately 40.7% of youth being classified as not in education, employment, or training⁸². This phenomenon disproportionately affects women, particularly in rural areas, further underscoring the extent of the gender gap”. [...] “A notable disparity between boys and girls exists in terms of primary and secondary school attendance in Egypt, resulting in a systemic bias against women from an early stage⁸². Even when women manage to obtain an education, their opportunities in the job market after graduation remain limited. Egypt is ranked 140 out of 153 worldwide in terms of equal economic participation and opportunity⁸². Apart from the evident educational and employment inequalities, prevailing social norms and attitudes contribute to the perpetuation of these gender disparities, faced by Egyptian women.” Extract from “Socio-Spatial Inequalities in Egypt – Literature Review”, by Zaazaa, A.

⁸³ We note that gender aspects in waste collection and management were reported only by the qualified informants and not by the interviewees for the narratives.

The interviewee of narrative #3 described the **negative impacts of the intervention of canalisation of water** made by **public authorities** to ensure **water resources for agriculture**. The intervention did not improve the situation: “Years ago, we had a reliable irrigation system: every eight days, we’d get water. It was organised, and even though you had to wait your turn, it worked. But things started changing about three years ago. The authorities decided to line the canals to improve the system, and they promised better water flow after that. But what we got was the opposite. Now we get only two days of water, and even that is unreliable. Sometimes it doesn’t come at all, or it comes for just a couple of hours and then cuts off without warning. The worst part is that we’re the last village in the line. The water flows down from al Hayat, and every village before us takes its share. By the time it reaches Manshiyat Dahshur – if it reaches us at all – there’s barely anything left” [narrative #3]. **Complaints to the local authority** about the irrigation system **go unanswered**. Farmers are told they now have “wells and pipes”. In reality, these are structures that cannot carry water because they are full of waste. The presence of a pipe doesn’t help. The interviewee in narrative #3 is forced to first clean the canals of waste to have water, even though this is not his responsibility, and then irrigate his land: “responsibility belongs to the engineers, the authorities. They’re supposed to do their part” [narrative #3].

Also, the interviewee of narrative #8 reported the problems encountered in the relationships with local authorities in answering citizen requests: “When we encounter problems – like with schools or waste – we contact local authorities. But responses vary. Sometimes they come quickly. Other times, we wait a week before they bring a loader or clean the roads. It’s inconsistent, and we often have to push for action ourselves” [narrative #8].

Another problem reported by the interviewee for narrative #3 concerns the poor functioning of the Government Office for Agriculture, both in terms of the **lack of support for farmers and the lack of regulation on the distribution of fertilizers**. “I’m supposed to receive a small quota [of fertilizer] every three months – two half-sacks per feddan⁸⁴. But I rent land, and since I don’t have an agricultural card, I’m forced to buy it on the black market. What costs 250 EGP from the association ends up costing me 1,200 EGP. The landowners keep the cards and sell their fertilizer on the side. There’s no regulation, no oversight” [narrative #3].

The interviewee of narrative #9 reported some problems with the local authority. He takes action if he sees government practices and initiatives that might produce negative effects and impact on the inhabitants, so that change is triggered. In particular, he described that “there was a horrible open drain in the middle of a residential block, right in front of a school. Four children died there. We launched a media campaign against the Giza Governorate. Every day, we posted about what we called “**the drain of death**.” Eventually, the Governor came himself. After we showed him the situation, he issued a decision to cover 450 meters of that canal. That was our first major environmental achievement. Not only did we cover the drain – we planted trees over it. It went from a pollution hotspot to a green space the community now takes pride in” [narrative #9].

5.3. *Relations between inequalities, engagement and forms of co-production*

The interviewees of the narratives and the key informants describe how the inequalities have impacted them and the initiatives in terms of mobilization that each of them has started to change the situation of themselves and the inhabitants of the community.

⁸⁴ “Feddan” (1 feddan = 0.420 hectares, 1.037 acres source: FAO.) is a unit of area used in Egypt, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Oman. In Classical Arabic, the word means ‘a yoke of oxen’, implying the area of ground that could be tilled by oxen in a certain time. (source: Wikipedia).

a. Negative effects of inequalities on engagement

This section describes some cases in which the inequalities described in the previous section prevent the involvement of the people and inhabitants of the community in changing their situation.

As discussed in part 2, inequality experienced relates to the health and quality of life impacts of inadequate and deficient water and sanitation, and waste disposal systems in many locations. This situation stems from structural deficiencies and the behaviour of individuals. Although the effects are negative for everyone and particularly for women, given their role in household waste management, a large proportion of inhabitants do not involve themselves in alternative waste management practices.

As far as the involvement of women is concerned⁸⁵, as pointed out by the key stakeholders, one of the biggest obstacles is the **great difficulty in breaking stereotypes and prejudices** about their role in the family and society, specifically in the upper-Egypt territory. *‘Women are not allowed to gather in public space’⁸⁶. The gathering of women must be done in close female environments and in places where women are used to going’* [key informants]. To address this problem, as will be seen in paragraph “e. Coproduction elements”, the Fairville Giza Lab is trying to involve women in household waste collection within the family. Also, the interviewee of narrative #9 pointed out the **difficulty in engaging women** in projects and initiatives. His NGO (see later) is carrying out initiatives aimed at empowering women and involve them in economic activities.

A second obstacle met by initiatives trying to set up a door-to-door waste collection in Manshiyat Dahshur and other municipalities is the **lack of economic resources** of households and families to invest in this.

Interviewee of narrative #9 also reported cases in which the **involvement of people** in development projects or initiatives is **difficult** due to a lack of interest or lack of trust: “We’ve assessed community needs, gathered data, and are building partnerships. But community involvement remains a challenge. In some areas, people are harder to reach – like in Manshiat Dashour. But we believe that once one village succeeds, others will follow” [narrative #9].

As pointed out by the respondent of narrative #6, there is a **lack of education and widespread awareness of the effects of one’s behaviour**. For the interviewee of narrative #8, “**awareness is key**. We need to educate people in schools, mosques, and through community networks”. Raising awareness is not an easy task, since “Not everyone sees it as their problem. Teachers, engineers, doctors – they care. Farmers, maybe less so. Women are mixed in their responses. Children can be taught” [narrative #8]. Also, the interviewee of narrative #9, pointed out that there is a **lack of environmental education in school**; what is needed is a more concrete approach to environmental problems.

b. Effects of inequalities in promoting the engagement of people

In this paragraph, the experiences of the interviewees are described, based on the narratives, regarding the motivations for their involvement and mobilization, and the role that the inequalities experienced or known had. The path and forms of involvement pursued by each of the interviewees are briefly reported below.

- **Narrative #1.** “I previously worked on the project Visit Badrashin. During this experience, I built a strong and meaningful connection with the local community. This experience not only deepened my understanding of their needs and aspirations but also laid the foundation for trust and

⁸⁵ A small example of such difficulty in engaging women is the fact that on 10 interviewees for the narrative, the women are only two.

⁸⁶ See <https://journals.openedition.org/esma/693>

collaboration that continues to inspire my work today. Now, I serve as a field coordinator for the Fairville Lab in Manshiyat Dahshour, acting as the bridge between the Lab and our community while managing logistics. [...] My work stems from a lifelong passion for **engaging with people and fostering community development**. After earning my degree [...], I dedicated myself to the social development field. Beyond my professional role, I am deeply involved in **supporting education in my village**".

- **Narrative #2.** "I've been a **volunteer in an association** here for the past five years. **When I started volunteering, my family hesitated**, especially my father. Only my mother supported me at first. But as time went on and they saw the positive impact of my work on the community, they started to approve." [...] With the association, we "worked to raise awareness after a child tragically fell into an open sewerage branch and died. We succeeded in getting the area closed off. We've also organized medical convoys, cleaned the streets, and painted the youth centre walls. Over time, I've participated in projects focused on **economic empowerment for women**, such as organizing handicraft workshops and exhibitions where women can sell their products. Eventually, I even got my father involved in one of our projects. He attended a session where the trainer discussed the importance of supporting women in their work. That session convinced him".
- **Narrative #3.** "I was born and raised here. Our roots run deep in this village". [...] I own and rent some land, around 30 kirats⁸⁷ in total, and I work it with whatever means I have" [narrative #3]. The respondent in narrative #3 **took individual action to try to improve his situation as a farmer**, asking local authorities for economic support for fertiliser and a better water access system. His complaints went unanswered. "As a farmer, I just want things to be more stable". He was **involved in the collection of money to donate land for the sewage station for a village** (see below).
- **Narrative #4.** "In our village, community work is a shared concern. We all know each other and face the same struggles". [...] "Especially as a woman in a rural community, I find it easier to connect with others and talk through solutions". [...] "I originally wanted to study law. **My family didn't want me to travel for university**, so I studied social service at an institute in Cairo" [...]. "Currently, I work in **Fairville project**". [...] "My role involves coordinating interviews with women in the village, whether they're at home, in shops, or in pharmacies". [...] "Even before that, I was active in the youth centre". Beyond this, I also volunteer with the Tourism Development Association". I'm a facilitator with the "**Supporting Women Entrepreneurs in Egypt**". "I've worked on improving the local health unit and pushed for better services, like clean water and access to medical care". "I also teach basic English to children at home. We were part of a youth program at the local centre, playing football and basketball, when one of our mentors introduced us to the Youth Parliament. It was **our first real exposure to civic engagement**. We ran for elections in our village and then at the governorate level, winning positions like secretary and president. Through this, we met officials, attended seminars, and developed personally and politically. That **early exposure shaped my desire to stay involved in community work**". [...] "**Seeing the problems up close doesn't discourage me – it motivates me**". [...] "**My family was sceptical at first**. Being a rural village, there were **concerns about boys and girls mixing in our activities**. But our mentor visited families, explained the purpose of our work, and gradually won their trust. "**I always seek advice**, especially from those closest to me – **my husband supports me unconditionally**".
- **Narrative #5.** "We face **numerous challenges** here in Manshiyat Dahshur, including issues with waste management, poor road conditions, and limited access to quality education and healthcare. These issues affect everyone, but I've always **believed in the power of local action to make a difference**" [...] "I dedicate much of my time to **supporting my community**, focusing on social activities and environmental work. My life has been shaped by both the challenges and the

⁸⁷ The kirat is a unit of area used in Egypt, Sudan, Syria, and the Oman. In Classical Arabic. The kirat is a subunit of the feddan. A feddan is divided into 24 kirat, with one kirat equals 175 square metres. (Source: DBpedia.org).

opportunities of this village”. [...] “I come from a family that deeply values education, community service, and environmental preservation”. [...] “Over the years, I’ve gathered experience in teaching and journalism, and I’m currently working in book publishing at a publishing house”.

- **Narrative #6.** “I was born in Dahshur”. [...] “My grandparents arrived in the 70s, or maybe even before, and they originally came from Menoufia (lower Egypt). I grew up here, and over time, this area started to develop, although much of it is still quite underdeveloped. I am 40 years old, and I work as a teacher here in Manshiyat Dahshur. I try my best to fulfil my role in society, helping the younger generation as best I can. Though teaching wasn’t originally my first choice”. [...] “However, once I began teaching, I realized that this was truly what I was meant to do, and now I am committed to it [...] trying to pass on the knowledge I’ve gained to others”.
- **Narrative #7.** He was born in Saqqara; he has long experience working in public administration for land development. Currently he is working “as a supervisor on a project focused on solid waste and general waste management”. He has been involved in the protection of Saqqara’s archaeological heritage. “I was the Head of the Local Unit in my village, which meant I was responsible for managing not only the neighbourhoods but also the entire village. A major part of my role was to build strong community ties and to mediate family disputes”. [...] “I led a literacy eradication project in the villages of Saqqara and Abu Sir”. [...] “After I graduated top of my class from the Faculty of Commerce, I never imagined I’d end up in local administration. I was doing research and had broader ambitions. That’s why I travelled. I worked in Austria, came back to Egypt, went back again, then to Greece. Those experiences changed me. I saw how other people lived and how systems functioned abroad. In 1987, for example, I saw how waste was separated at the source in Japan – every building had bins for different types of waste. I wanted to bring that idea back, but we lacked the financial resources and the necessary equipment”.
- **Narrative #8.** “I’m from Manshiyat Dahshur. I was born here, and so were my parents and grandparents, although my family is originally from Saudi Arabia”. [...] “Today, I coordinate a project aimed at improving the area. Dahshur is a beautiful place with a rich archaeological and touristic identity. But we face real challenges – mainly environmental pollution and unmanaged waste. These problems tarnish the area’s beauty and potential. We’ve been working [...] on studies and solutions to address these issues, hoping to eventually restore Dahshur’s full charm – its rural character alongside its archaeological treasures, without the burden of pollution.” [...] “I’ve tried to be part of the solution. Back in 2010, I founded a small company to collect household waste”. [...] “Now, we’re tackling the waste issue to complete the transformation”.
- **Narrative #9.** He started as a volunteer. “My personal awareness began when I got involved in community work. At first, our main goal was simply to clear the streets of waste and make our surroundings greener. We wanted trees, not trash. But over time, I started seeing the bigger picture: global warming, fossil fuel emissions, biodiversity – things we hadn’t considered before.” [narrative #9] “I serve as the Field Follow-Up Manager at the Local Unit in Dahshur. It’s an evening job, which allows me to be active in the community during the day. I wear many hats in civil society”, in the field of tourism, of climate change, etc. “I also founded an online group, a local platform that now has over 27,000 members. We manage it through a dedicated media team.” [narrative #9] He acted as a bridge between local authorities, international organisations and the community. He was and is an employee of local authority, and he was among the founder of a local NGO.
- **Narrative #10.** “I work in the private sector, in a restaurant chain operating between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. But my head and my heart are here, in Mansheyet Dahshour. I joined the Youth Parliament in 2011, when I was at university. I went to India for three months, where I participated in two environmental projects. Since then, I have never stopped believing that we can change. That is why I wanted to get involved, because I want to see my children grow up in a better place. I dream of a future where children no longer have to walk kilometres to go to school, where no one

has to breathe toxic smoke from rubbish, where there are fields to play in, well-equipped hospitals, and respect for our dignity”.

Based on the experiences described by the interviewees in the narratives, it is possible to make a few considerations.

- Most of the interviewees value **community ties and promote the activation of individuals** to solve problems of the community. On this aspect could be mentioned what reported by the interviewee of narrative #7: “If there are community problems, like rubbish collection or bigger issues like roads, do we come together to find solutions? Yes, first we gather together. There’s a group in the village interested in its problems, and they meet every week. We see the problem with tuk-tuks and cars, and we want to fix it. For example, we bring in tuk-tuk (gasoline rickshaws) and minibuses drivers and ask them to commit. Before going to the authorities, we want to solve it ourselves⁸⁸”.
- The experiences of the **women interviewees** in narratives #2 and #4 highlight the efforts they made to get involved in volunteering and participatory⁸⁹ activities, **going beyond the stereotypes** that wanted them to be housewives. From this point of view, it can be underlined that the approval by the family (parents) of their choice was the result of a negotiation, also through the involvement of third parties. The support that the respondent of narrative #4 continues to receive from her husbands is also important.
- The respondents of narratives #2 and #4 are **young** (less than 25 years old). The **involvement and mobilisation of young people**⁹⁰ to solve community problems is a noteworthy factor in a context characterised by high levels of youth unemployment. The effects of inequality on young people are very serious: improving the quality of life in the community could lead to new job opportunities without having to move elsewhere.
- In some narratives, an important role in confirming the **willingness to do something to change** the situation in one’s own community came from **participating in experiences, projects and travels** to other parts of the world. Participation in these experiences consolidated the belief that it is possible to contribute to a better future.

⁸⁸ The interviewee mentioned also the use of regularly meetings involved one elder representative for each family for solving problems and conflicts (it is called *majlis ‘urfi*, customary Council). Usually, at least 20 families participated out of 100 families of the community.

⁸⁹ On the cultural obstacles met by women in their participation in political activities, see IEMed. (2017). “Women’s Political participation in Egypt: Perspectives from Giza” A summary of the publication is available here: <https://www.iemed.org/publication/womens-political-participation-in-egypt-perspectives-from-giza/>. The publication contains the main outcomes of fieldwork activities, through focus groups and interviews. Elements of the context identified by this document are: “• The father, or any other male family member, is the main breadwinner for the family; • A large number of families are unable to balance the large gap between expenses and earnings as most of them work in marginalised jobs within the informal sector - very often for long hours; • Some women work in jobs such as domestic work, commerce or factories to help fill the income gap. However, their work is still seen as insignificant; • Illiteracy among young girls and women in these areas is very high. Most of them drop out of school at a very early age; • Early marriage is a significant problem in these areas; • The deteriorating of the education drives away pupils and students (girls and boys) from school at different levels. Even though women and young girls are present in big numbers at the base in these societies, they are rarely in the public sphere. Furthermore, when they get involved, they take on traditional roles, such as voting in the elections, and are influenced by the head of the family, habits and traditions in usage, which confines women to household activities (housework and children’s education).” See also, OECD “Women’s Political participation in Egypt. Barriers, opportunities and gender sensitivity of select political institutions.”, July 2018

⁹⁰ On the participation of young people in Egypt’s civic, social and political life, see Sika, N. (2016). Youth civic and political engagement in Egypt. Power2Youth. Working Paper no. 18 September 2016. Based on an analysis of the recent history of Egypt and on fieldwork conducted among young people between March and December 2015, the study investigates the extent to which young people are included or excluded in the social, economic, cultural, and political spheres in Egypt. From the fieldwork emerges that migration, employment and education were the major concerns for young people.

c. Engagement about inequalities producing limited impacts

In this paragraph we report two elements. The first concerns the engagement experiences described by the interviewees for narratives that had a limited impact (because they involved few people, because of the limited duration, because of the results achieved, etc.). Some of them concerns also waste management. The second element concerns the barriers to engagement indicated by the interviewees and key informants.

In this regard, some elements can be mentioned.

- **Spot support initiatives.** “I helped write complaints about our collapsing health unit. The building was leaking, and the smell alone was making people sicker. I also supported efforts to install the village’s first ATM, and I’ve helped with events for orphans and NGO collaborations – all as a volunteer” [narrative #4].
- **Private health care at affordable prices.** “We do have some local clinics, like Al Khalafawi and Al Mustafa, which offer services at a more affordable price than private hospitals. These clinics are trying to cater to the needs of the people, especially since the health unit is limited. There is also a local initiative by some doctors from the village, offering their services to the community, which is a great help” [narrative #6].
- **Cleaning the village.** “Years ago, when I was 17, I joined a youth initiative. Every week, about 50 of us would gather to clean the village. We raised money among ourselves – maybe 30 pounds each – to buy brooms and bags. But despite our efforts, the waste kept coming back. There was no institutional support, no encouragement from the local council, and no consistent waste collection. Eventually, we lost motivation and stopped [narrative #4].
- **Raising interest in talking about waste management.** “I’ve seen the power of community cooperation in addressing some of these issues. In terms of waste management, for example, while people are reluctant to pay for garbage collection, we’ve begun to see some positive changes, as residents are increasingly open to discussing solutions” [narrative #5].
- **First test to change waste management.** “There are some local efforts being made to manage the garbage, such as people collecting waste and transporting it to designated areas, but the system is not as effective as it should be. The workers are few, and they are often overwhelmed with many tasks, such as keeping classrooms clean and attending to other duties” [narrative #6].
- **Producing values from waste.** “I founded a small company to collect household waste. At first, people were enthusiastic. But interest dropped over time. Some households subscribed, others didn’t, and tension grew. We tried to sort waste and create value through recycling. But the plastics people used – especially from cleaning products – had no market value, so recycling wasn’t viable. We even explored starting landfills, but land prices here are too high. Desert land was an option, but access and ownership proved difficult. We faced many setbacks” [narrative #8].
- **Land for a sewage station.** Interviewees of narratives #3, #8 and #9 reported the effort started 10 years ago to find land for the sewage station. The government had required land to build a sewage station, and the community came together in response. Over the course of a year, residents raised one million Egyptian pounds, going house by house to collect contributions. They explained the issue in mosques, clubs, and every possible gathering place, rallying support through a collective effort where everyone contributed. Once the funds were gathered and the necessary documents were submitted to the governorate, there was hope for swift progress. However, despite their efforts, nothing moved forward. The land had been donated to the government, and the sewage system was to be funded by a Kuwaiti grant, meaning the State would not bear any costs. Yet even after ten years, the project remained incomplete. Though work had recently resumed, the sewage station was still not operational [narratives #3, #8 and #9].
- **Awareness-raising activities on separate waste collection.** Even in absence of fund, the interviewee of narrative #7, had meetings “with residents and explained how to sort waste at home

– plastic in one bag, food waste in another. I held countless meetings as head of the unit, engaging people from every village. I did what I could with what little we had – just a few garbage trucks and one loader. People would come out at specific times to place their bags on the main road, and we’d collect them quickly. It wasn’t perfect, but it helped reduce the load” [narrative #7].

- **Youth initiative for waste collection.** Since waste collection takes place every two or three weeks, the interviewee of narrative #10 had organised with some friends a local waste management company. He also created a Facebook group in which to discuss this issue. The collection took place sometimes only after weighing up a complaint. The young people cleaned the streets, planted trees, repainted dirty walls. “We built U-shaped collection points, hoping that people would throw their rubbish there. But the government never sent anyone to supervise, to fine offenders’ The lack of support and identification of collection sites by the local authorities led to the closure of the experiment” [narrative #10].

The interviewees and especially the key informants indicated some **obstacles to the engagement** and to co-production.

One of the obstacles concerns the **non-receptive behaviour on the part of the local authorities** and the public sector in general experienced by some of the interviewees. The experience of some interviewees as members of the Youth Parliament is also along the same lines: “As for the challenges faced by the Youth Parliament, one of the main obstacles is the slow response from organizations and institutions we work with. Sometimes, it takes months for us to receive responses or approvals for projects that are critical to our community” [narrative #5]; “Despite our efforts, the local council was largely unresponsive. They praised our spirit but offered little support” [narrative #4]. On the other hand, according to the respondent of narrative #10, participation in the Youth Parliament enabled him to learn how to “dialogue with institutions, how to present problems, how to propose solutions.” The interviewee with a group of friends continues to meet weekly to decide what to do but according to him, “the government does not listen, or rather, it listens but does not act.” What is needed is for the state to do its part; to give confidence and accompany in the first steps of implementing the solutions proposed by young adults.

The interviewee of narrative #9 pointed out that there are problems, especially **when local authorities block progress**. “For instance, we needed approval for a waste project, but the local unit refused. They were dumping garbage into canals instead of the proper site in Beni Youssef. So, we filed a complaint. Eventually, we were granted approval – now we’re the only local association in Badrasheen with official permission to manage waste” [narrative #9]. He also mentioned the fact that since 2010 in Dahshur there is not the Local Council.

Finally, on relations with public authorities, the experience reported by the interviewee of narrative #7, who is also a civil servant, currently involved in an innovative project on waste management, is interesting. His office acts as an intermediary between the citizens’ requests and the local authorities, avoiding involving the local councillors. The requests (for example, to do a clean-up campaign with big trucks in Manshiyat Dahshur) are transmitted directly to the mayor, so that he can decide and intervene, without an overload of requests to the offices, which are unable to handle them and thus remain unfulfilled. His aim is to “make things easier for the mayor. Don’t go to the local council asking for things directly – they’ll just turn you down or overwhelm you with demands. We can help the mayor, and he can help the village” [narrative #7].

Finally, the key informants in their interview commented about the **limited engagement by the State and local authorities**, about the possibility to support bottom-up initiatives on waste management [key informants].

In their interview the **key informants** mentioned the barriers that the Fairville Lab is facing:

- There are “**several cultural, social, and logistical barriers** [that] impede the [Fairville] project’s progress”.
- There are in place social “**gender norms [that] restrict women’s public participation**, which is crucial since they are primarily responsible for household waste management and are disproportionately affected by inadequate waste services”.
- There are “**financial barriers** – poverty and lack of resources – [that] also limit the project, as the local community and the state show reluctance to allocate funds to the problem”.
- The “existing inequalities and the **centralised nature of Cairo’s political landscape** exacerbate the rural-urban divide, posing challenges in scaling effective waste management solutions across similarly affected areas”.

d. Engagement contributions to reduce inequalities

In a few cases, interviewees also described engagement and participation initiatives that had a positive impact in terms of reducing inequality. Before going into presenting the different descriptions, it seems from the narratives that in Manshiyat Dahshur and Dahshur there is a certain attitude among inhabitants of taking action to solve specific community problems (narratives #4 and #5). Despite this, however, as we have seen in part 2, problems are still on the table.

Some positive experiences of engagement are described by the interviewees of narratives #4, #5 and #10 involved in the Youth Parliament⁹¹ and by narratives #7 and #8. The **Youth Parliament**⁹² is a program supported and overseen by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which provides funding and organizational support. “The connections made through this program have also opened opportunities for us to engage with government officials and agencies to help push forward local initiatives” [narrative #5]. Young members of Youth Parliament write reports and document issues. The interviewees for narrative #4 and #5 describe what they do and some positive experiences.

- “Beyond these daily challenges, I’m also involved in the local Youth Parliament, where I’ve been working since 2015. I began as a volunteer, giving lectures to students about the **importance of academic excellence and positive behavioural change**. Over time, I have seen the Parliament become an **effective platform for raising awareness about issues such as education and waste management**. One of our biggest successes has been **building trust with the local community**. People now look to the Parliament to help solve problems, and we’ve worked on everything from **improving the local health unit to addressing corruption in schools**” [narrative #5].
- “In addition to my work in the Youth Parliament, I also advocate for environmental reform. The issue of **plastic waste** is a huge concern, and I’ve been involved in initiatives aimed at reducing this problem. I believe the solution lies not only in government action but also in community-driven efforts. We are working on creating small businesses to collect plastic waste and help reduce the overall problem, all while providing job opportunities for the youth in the village” [narrative #5].
- “We **support primary schools**, providing volunteer teachers and material support. However, the local educational services need significant improvement, and we regularly follow up with schools and parent councils to ensure that progress is being made” [narrative #5].

Positive experiences are reported also by other interviewees and by the Fairville Giza Lab.

⁹¹ On the experience of Youth Parliament and on the way to promote and implement an effective participation and engagement of youth in decision making, see “Have your say!”. (2015). Manual of the revised European Charter on the Participation of young people in local and regional life”. Council of Europe Publishing.

⁹² Each member of Youth Parliament had **ID card**. To be part of the parliament, you had to be between 14 and 20 years old and be able to read and write. Members **need parental permission**, especially since they often travelled for seminars and training across governorates”.

- **Bottom-up initiatives.** The interviewee from narrative #10 described the positive results he and other inhabitants managed to achieve through mobilisation from below: reopening of a school closed for 11 years due to flooding, and the installation of two ATMs. He has been active, together with other inhabitants, in building new schools: they are looking for land to acquire.
- **Tourism initiative.** Interviewee of narrative #8 reported his experience in promoting and launching some years ago a tourism programme. “That succeeded and even earned us recognition – Dahshur was named one of the best rural villages out of 28 in a global competition. We’ve also succeeded in promoting traditional crafts through our association” [narrative #8].
- **Waste management project in tourist villages.** The interviewee of narrative #7 is engaged in a waste management project in Manshiyat Dahshur, that will be enlarged to all the villages in the “Badrashin district – especially those with touristic importance, like Saqqara, Abu Sir, and Dahshur. The strength of the project lies in its participatory approach: engaging residents, understanding their problems, and proposing realistic solutions” [...] In this context, people can “people can document what they see, offer suggestions, and take part in their own development. That’s the essence of progress: collective effort, shared responsibility, and genuine commitment to change” [narrative #7].
- **Set up a food supply office.** “Our village [Dahshur] lacked a food supply office. We collected data, submitted a report, pushed, and eventually secured approval. The building was abandoned, so the community came together to renovate it. Now it’s operational” [narrative #9].
- **Eradicating illegal dumps.** “In Dahshur, I once had eight illegal waste dumps – now there are only three. How? Not by force. We simply talked to people. We replaced trash with trees. We stayed there, even at night, to protect those spaces. When people see us caring, they follow suit” [narrative #9]
- **Grassroots waste management project.** In Dahshour, the interviewee from narrative #2, along with other young people and community members, initiated a grassroots waste management project. They began by collecting garbage from households free of charge and later introduced a modest subscription fee of EGP 30–35. Currently, around 50% of the village participates in the initiative. The project emerged from within the community, driven by a shared recognition of the urgent need to address the escalating waste problem. The group collaborated with local authorities to designate waste collection areas. However, inconsistent waste removal led to unintended consequences, such as garbage being burned or dumped into nearby canals. Despite numerous challenges, the organisers remain committed to community engagement as a key strategy for finding sustainable solutions. They actively involve village elders and other influential figures in discussions and hold separate sessions specifically for women. Additionally, they conduct awareness campaigns to educate residents on proper waste management and the health risks associated with neglecting such issues.
- **Two bottom-up initiatives on waste management**⁹³. Among the bottom-up positive initiatives on waste management, the “Nahia Garbage Project”, promoted by Nahda Foundation, a community organisation in Nahia and started in 2012, aimed at collecting and recycling solid waste at the level of the entire locality of Nahia. The initiative involved local inhabitants, local authorities, and others. The waste has been transformed into resources. Another positive experience in waste collection

⁹³ On “Nahia Garbage Project”, more information is available here:

https://www.tadamun.co/?post_type=initiative&p=571&lang=en&lang=en . The article also contains a description of challenges and obstacles and some comments on the transferability of a similar initiative in other territories.

The experience of Manshiyat Naser is described in the blog entitled “The visit to Giza Fairville Lab in Cairo & Inter-lab exchange, November 2024”, when a delegation from Fairville visited the Giza Fairville Lab in November 2024 for a mutual exchange (<https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/the-visit-to-giza-fairville-lab-in-cairo-inter-lab-exchange-november-2024>).

and management is that carried out in Cairo proper, a huge area called **Manshiyat Naser**⁹⁴. “The settlement that has transformed from a 1970s slum into a remarkable hub of recycling practice, where 60% of Cairo’s solid waste is collected and processed”. The resources collected by recycling waste are used for community development.

The interviewee of narrative #9 describes his experience in **setting up a local NGO** to promote and implement sustainable development initiatives, which provided an official structure to legitimise their operations. The NGO were organising tree-planting campaigns, beautification efforts, distributing gas cylinders to households, and addressing food shortages [narrative #9]. The process of establishing the NGO encountered several obstacles, including a lack of guidance and structured training courses, and, above all, a lack of funding and support from the public sector. The NGO had only one significant funding source from the Egyptian government; the other funding came from international inputs. They utilised training opportunities on important topics, such as communication, negotiation, and lobbying, which they discovered through participation in meetings and networking. The NGO is focused “on economic and social empowerment, child protection, environmental conservation (including climate change, biodiversity, and land degradation), and empowering girls and youth”- [...] “We promote handicrafts, especially those using sustainable, local materials. We also run a waste collection program and promote rural tourism” [narrative #9].

e. Elements of co-production

Elements⁹⁵ of co-production⁹⁶ are being experienced by the interviewees and are described in the narratives. The following elements can be mentioned:

- **Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies and proposals**
- **Ability to negotiate** and to stay in relations with local authorities
- **Ability to build and ‘be’ in a network**
- **Capacity to act** – the experience of co-production of the Fairville Giza Lab

Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies and proposals

The people interviewed for the narratives described their desires, expectations, and provided indications of what should be done to solve problems in the area, as well as a **vision of the future**. From the statements in the narratives, it emerges that a central point is **the need for support and collaboration with the government and public authority**.

- “I believe that solving the **garbage problem requires collaboration with the government**. While we can achieve some progress on our own, having the governorate’s support would make a significant difference. They have the mechanisms to implement large-scale changes. To gain their support, we present our projects as solutions to existing problems and demonstrate that we are committed to supporting their efforts. This form of social accountability can encourage the

⁹⁴ On this experience see the volume “Middle Eastern cities in a time of climate crisis”, edited by Deboulet, A. and Mansour, A, 2022, and in particular the article of Badir, A. and Florin, B. “Useful! For a recognition of waste pickers in the circular economy”, pages 141-148, and EL Hady, N. “Addressing waste as a basis for regenerative transformations!”.

⁹⁵ These elements were identified based on the reflection initiated within Fairville’s WP2 on co-production. These elements are also in line with the definition of “community-driven co-production” described in the Fairville D2.1 “Draft of a common glossary and common grid of analysis”, August 2024, which contains an analysis of specific terms and themes. “Coproduction” - by Giuseppe Faldi, Agnès Deboulet & Claire Bénéit-Gbaffou, with Mathilde Jourdam-Boutin: see in particular pages 15-16).

⁹⁶ As stated in the introduction of Part 2, the contents of this paragraph are also a contribution to the ongoing broad reflection carried out by the Fairville Labs and other WPs on co-production.

government to act. Looking ahead, I hope to continue working on these projects [including Fairville] and taking part in decision-making. It's rewarding to see the positive impact on my village, and I believe that with the right support and collaboration, we can achieve much more" [narrative #2].

- "Despite the challenges we face, I remain motivated. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the issues in Manshiyat Dahshur, but I believe that **persistence is key**. We're making **progress, even if it's slow**, and I take pride in the small victories we achieve along the way. [...] In the end, I believe that the solution to many of our problems lies in **collaboration, both within the village and with external organisations. It's about creating opportunities, raising awareness, and empowering people to take action**. I may face obstacles, but I am committed to making a difference for my family, my community, and future generations" [narrative #5].
- "Looking ahead, I don't expect overnight change. This is a complex issue. Everything – shops, pharmacies, farmers – contributes to the system of waste and how we handle it. **But I hope that by next year, we'll see real progress**. Even if it's not perfect, I want to feel that we've made a real difference. That's why I'm committed to **this project** [Fairville]. I believe in it – not just because I'm working on it, but because **it's for our future**" [narrative #4].
- "At work, **I focused on empowering women and students through training programs, particularly in entrepreneurship**. I firmly believe that equipping people with the tools they need to improve their lives aligns perfectly with the goals of our Fairville project. While we may not be able to solve systemic issues like waste management instantaneously, **we can help the community take meaningful steps toward sustainable solutions by working together**" [narrative #1].
- "I believe **the key is awareness**. The more people become aware of the importance of **good behaviour, like waste management and hygiene**, the more progress we can make. We need to **educate not only the children but also the adults**. The young people here, especially those involved with local youth organisations, are critical in spreading this message [...]. **It's a matter of widespread community involvement and a steady commitment to making change**. If we can start with the **youth and focus on changing behaviours**, we may see some improvement. However, this is a project that will take time, and we will need to be patient, organised, and persistent to achieve real results" [narrative #6].
- "From managing villages and addressing everyday issues to **promoting awareness and cooperation among residents**, I've always believed in collective effort. The problems in our area – waste, sewage, roads, healthcare, and education – are real, but through collaboration, customary councils, and participatory projects, we've shown that solutions are possible. Our work continues, and I remain committed to supporting my village and district however I can" [narrative #7].
- "What we're doing now is a first step. Solving this won't happen overnight. It's a journey. We need **long-term solutions** – recycling plants, structured waste collection, and eco-friendly products. One project won't fix it all, but this is the beginning of a bigger effort. I see eco-industries as part of the answer. For example, replacing plastic with biodegradable alternatives could create both environmental and economic benefits." [...] In the past, we've tried to raise awareness through tree planting initiatives. That's symbolic – it's not the full solution, but it engages people. It reminds us that we can beautify rather than pollute. But real change **needs government involvement and private sector support**, not just community efforts." For the interviewee of narrative #8 it is important to raise awareness of all citizens, to promote mutual learning with other communities that is already doing positive initiatives and to offer "a better alternative and building infrastructures and industries that support it. Beyond waste, education is the next critical issue. Good schools lead to good communities. That's where the real **transformation** begins – in **minds and attitudes**" [narrative #8].

- For the respondent of narrative #10, it is necessary for the **State to listen and support citizens' initiatives** to change the situation for the better.
- The interviewee of narrative #9 pointed out the importance of connecting much more and better local communities and tourism (for example, food tourism): "There's still a disconnect between the local community and tourists. Sometimes, villagers see a tourist bus and feel indifferent or even hostile. But when they begin to benefit – directly or indirectly – from those changes, they will welcome visitors, engage with them, and treat them with respect. That's the kind of sustainable development we're aiming for" [narrative #9].
- The interviewee of narrative #9 pointed out the fact that even if his NGO lacked funds, it is carrying out several initiatives in Dahshur, including those of empowering women and waste collection. "Imagine what we could do with proper support. We dream of environmental innovation – solutions that empower, unite, and create lasting change. And we believe it's possible" [narrative #9].

As mentioned above, for some of the interviewees, the **Fairville project represents a concrete opportunity to contribute to changing the situation**. This is the point of view of the interviewee of narrative #5: "In the future, I hope that initiatives like the Fairville project will help further our efforts to improve waste management in the village. The project's focus on community involvement and its practical approach to addressing the waste issue is exactly what we need. It's a reminder that change is possible, even in places where services are minimal and challenges are high. Through projects like this, we can build a better, more sustainable future for our community" [narrative #5]. For the interviewee of narrative #9, "the project creates **space for connection and collaboration**. Right now, everyone is working in isolation. If Fairville succeeds, we'll all be able to sit at the same table: local authorities, civil society, the private sector, and individual citizens. Together, we could develop a plan to eliminate waste in Dahshur" [narrative #9]. However, the majority of views generally expressed by decision-makers are moral, blaming the uncivilised peasants rather than addressing the structural inequalities.

It is also interesting to consider the point of view of the interviewee in narrative #3, which we can imagine is a perspective shared by other farmers: he dreams of receiving support from the government regarding water and fertilisers, which will enable him to continue cultivating the land.

Ability to negotiate and to stay in relations with local authorities

The lack of **support and cooperation from local authorities** is, as we have seen above, one of the critical obstacles to overcome. In this context, **having a history and the ability to dialogue with the public authority**, as described by some of the interviewees, is an important asset. The skills, capacities, and social capital gained by interviewees #4, #5, and #10 through their participation in the work of the Youth Parliament are an example of this.

- "As described in narrative #5, the use of letters and then written petitions in some cases were successful: "Despite these efforts, many issues remain unresolved, particularly those related to the **local government's lack of support**. When our voices aren't heard at the local level, we escalate problems by **writing official letters to higher authorities**, often gaining support through **signatures and public petitions**. This process has been vital in securing new infrastructure, such as a new building for our health unit, and addressing corruption in local schools" [narrative #5].
- As mentioned by the interviewee of narrative #4, the Fairville project can contribute to facilitating the relationships with and the support by local authorities: "If anyone can help, it's the **local council**. They **have the authority to act but often don't**. That's why I'm proud to be part of a serious, well-studied project with architects like Dr. Ahmed Zaazaa involved. It's not about doing something symbolic and moving on. We've seen **temporary solutions before – they fade quickly**.

But this project has depth and potential. I'm here because I want lasting change, **and I want that change for my village**" [narrative #4].

- The key informants in their interview underline the **need for economic support from local authorities**. "One of the issues is the **budget**. We cannot expect the local community to find a system without economic tools to build specific spots for collection and health tools, such as gloves and other equipment. This is something that is really challenging and for which we need the support of authorities and donors. People are very interested in collaborating but practically there are some **limits**, and we cannot expect them to afford the cost of this starting process. We need the support of the authorities. An **informal collection system already exists but is not covering everything because it is a system that is built on a pro-private profit** so they will not collect any kind of waste, only specific waste. The authorities will eventually play an important role by providing tools and equipment that these people need to self-manage. They need to manage their own space and waste collection in their own space" [key informants].

Ability to build and 'be' in a network

The interviewee of narrative #9 emphasised the importance of networking, concerning his NGO's experience. "Our association doesn't work alone – we have what we call a **"community support committee"**. This includes local officials, directors from various departments, youth influencers, and women leaders. We **train and empower these groups to make decisions and take action**" [narrative #9]. To fix the problems of Dahshur "we need to work together: NGOs, local administration, women and youth groups, the Ministry of Environment, and others" [narrative #9].

Capacity to act – the experience of co-production of the Fairville Giza Lab

The key informants, as well as some of those interviewed for the narratives (narratives #1 and #2) describe some of the actions that the Fairville Giza Lab has carried out and is pursuing to counteract the current challenges and propose innovative solutions. These are the current efforts to address the barriers mentioned before by the key informants.

- Efforts to **mitigate social, cultural, and financial "barriers"** include **adopting gender-sensitive approaches** to engage women within culturally acceptable settings and leveraging local NGOs and community organisations already embedded within the social fabric of the village" [key informants].
- "By **documenting and learning from existing grassroots waste management initiatives**, the project aims to develop a scalable model that respects local contexts and constraints" [key informants]. In this context, it is particularly important to consider the experiences of waste collection and management described by the interviewees and mentioned in this map.
- "These efforts are particularly focused on **creating a participatory framework** where both men and women can contribute effectively, though in different capacities and spaces" [key informants]. This framework is also based on the approach of transforming waste from a problem into a resource, through the activation of entrepreneurial initiatives.
- And finally, there is an orientation to **involve other NGOs and stakeholders**⁹⁷ in the project.

The interviewee of narrative #1 describes some of the activities carried out by the Fairville Giza Lab.

- "Now that Fairville has completed the **data collection** [including the mapping exercise], we have a **clear and precise understanding of our village's layout** and the challenges we face. Without data, people were uncertain of where to begin or how to tackle their issues. Now, with precise

⁹⁷ Interviewee of narrative #9 informed that there are 5 active local associations in Dahshur on different issues.

information in hand, this marks a significant milestone, providing us with a solid foundation to **create a clear and actionable plan for progress**" [narrative #1].

- "Through the Fairville Lab, we initiated a **partnership with experts from Hayy al-Zabalin**⁹⁸, a community in Cairo renowned for turning waste into profit. Their work inspired us to show our villagers that **waste, far from being a burden, can be a resource**. I'm confident that once people see the financial benefits with their own eyes, they will embrace this change. Together, we can transform not only our village but also the way we view and handle the challenges we face every day" [narrative #1].
- "A remarkable shift is happening within the community: after so many **focus group discussions and different kinds of meetings** we organised, those who participated in our activities are **beginning to speak up more openly** about their challenges and actively seek solutions. This newfound **confidence** stems from their growing awareness that they have the right to voice their concerns. Perhaps most importantly, they now know exactly where to turn for support" [narrative #1].
- In Dahshour "one of our major projects was actually waste management. We started by **collecting garbage from people without charging them**, then gradually introduced a **subscription fee of EGP 30–35**. About 50% of the **village participates**. This project was born from the heart of the community, as we saw the urgent need to address the growing waste problem. We **worked with local authorities to designate collection areas**, but **inconsistencies in waste removal created new issues**, such as burning garbage or dumping it into canals. We've faced many challenges, but we believe in engaging the community to find solutions. For example, we **involve the elders and influential figures in discussions and hold separate sessions for women**. We also run **awareness campaigns to educate people** on issues like garbage management and how neglecting these problems can lead to health issues" [narrative #2].

It should be emphasised that Fairville Giza Lab intends to launch the collection and management of waste both within households and outside, hence the importance of involving women. As was mentioned earlier, women are pretty interested in being involved.

- "**Women play a main role in the economy of the house and in the waste management within the private space** because they are the ones who collect and sort the waste. There is an **informal system** to sort waste material. We are in rural environments, some of them collect the waste that can be used as forage for the animals, some as combustible for the oven. They are aware of the **value of waste** but there is no service provided by the local authority for waste collection. In the most marginalised, the rural space of the village, there is no spot for the waste collection, so people don't know how to throw their garbage. They would be very **happy to be engaged in a system of waste collection**. The problem is that **many of them are not able to pay for an extra private service**. There is also a private service that is a private garbage collector that passes through door to door and collects the garbage, but this **needs a financial contribution that people can't afford**, or they don't consider that they want to afford it because they don't see that it is worth it. However, many women that I spoke with would be very happy to contribute to a system of waste management. There is the **domestic waste collection and the outside waste management**. We need to deal with the two. "Of course, we cannot ask women to be involved in the outdoors. They cannot work as a garbage collector." We should use these 2 systems: the indoor and the outdoor. Women play a main role; we should work with them" [key informants].

The Fairville Giza Lab is employing a gender-sensitive approach to promote the presence of women. This approach was explained by the key informants in their interviews.

⁹⁸ This is the nick name of the neighbourhood of Manshiyat Naser.

- “So far, with women, we had **workshops**, and we conducted **interviews**. I was the leading woman, and I was approaching them. “Of course, we were not doing this in a public space. We were doing this through or in an association in a **place where women are used to go** for their work in their association, their handcraft...”. We conducted the interviews in the houses of women, and it was just me in a very safe and **close female environment**. It is **hard to engage women in activities that are gender mixed because their family or their husband don’t allow them to come** so most probably, we need to keep activities separated between men and women for most of the time. We need to consider their own needs and their own limits. We cannot just ignore that and try to apply activities for both men and women on an equal approach” [key informants].

5.4. *How engagement faces inequalities – Giza Matrix*

The matrix summarises how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified. The ordinate displays various types of bottom-up actions and initiatives. The x-axis presents the primary inequality problems and phenomena considered. The cells indicate potential intersections between the problem and the type of engagement. For comparative purposes, the matrix structure remains consistent across all Fairville Labs analyses.

Table 5 – Matrix Engagement/Inequalities in Giza

MATRIX OF INEQUALITIES/ ENGAGEMENT	Environmental problems	Economic and territorial inequalities	Social inequalities	Discrimination and segregation	Bad governance & lack of policies
Requests, protests and conflicts	X	X			X
Social movements					
Parallel planning					
Mapping exercise	X	X			
Self-managed initiatives	x	x			
Produces or implements goods and services	X	X			
Action to foster rights (rights to city, right to...)					
Knowledge co-production (fostering local knowledge)	X	X			
Actions of risk management (face or prevention)	X				
Creation of association	X	X			
Creation of support network (territorial coalition)	X	X			
Collaboration with local authorities (long-term and/or punctual one)	X				
Collaboration with universities, research centres	X				
Promoting and implementing new regulatory framework					
Agenda settings of strategies and actions to solve local problems					

6. Map of impacts of inequalities on engagement – London

6.1. Introduction

The map of inequality impacts on engagement in London is based on the contents⁹⁹ of 10 narratives of engagement^{100 101} and a collective discussion between 3 key informants¹⁰². The narratives provide detailed information on the different forms of experienced, perceived, and known urban inequalities related to the areas of social care and infrastructure, housing and regeneration and street markets, as well as on the forms of engagement and actions each of the interviewees has taken to impact the situation. The narratives describe some initiatives that have positively counteracted specific inequalities, contributing to improving the situation. They also contain reflections on the concepts of co-production and the commons/commoning, as well as experiences in these areas and the obstacles encountered. From the narratives, emerges an aspiration and mobilisation, albeit in different forms, towards a city that, even at the neighbourhood level, can be caring for diverse communities and the social, economic and environmental infrastructures upon which they depend.

This idea of a city, comprised of networked local neighbourhoods of care, is in line with what the Fairville London Lab, an off-shoot of the London-wide Just Space network¹⁰³ supported by the Bartlett Development Planning Unit¹⁰⁴, has been seeking to advance since 2023. As described by the Fairville

⁹⁹ The excerpts from the narratives are between quotation marks. Direct quotations of the interviewees are in italics between a single quotation mark.

¹⁰⁰ The persons interviewed for the narratives are: #1 Damian Patchell, Manager of Markets Street Trading High Street and Town Centres, London Borough of Tower Hamlets; #2 Ashraf Ali, Director for Public Realm, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, London; #3 Tom Young, Kentish Town/Queens Crescent Planning Activist, Just Space Member (Local Economy Focus), Architect, London Borough of Camden; #4 Tim Oshodi, Nubia Way Self-Builder, Community-led Regeneration Consultant and Health Equity Activist, London Borough of Lewisham; #5 Sarah Goldzweig, PhD Researcher, Just Space supporter, Research and Policy Officer, Latin Elephant, London Borough of Southwark; #6 Portia Msimang, Just Space member and Project Co-ordinator at Renters' Rights London, Charteris Neighbourhood Tenant Co-operative Member, London Borough of Islington; #7 Christine Goodall, Network Coordinator of the HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network; #8 Equal Care Co-op Care Receiver; #9 Stephanie McKinley, Programmes Manager for London, London Plus Social Prescribing Network; #10 Equal Care Coop Volunteer. Please note: Not all interviewees are 'Lab members'. Some are members of Just Space, others work in voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSOs), and others are local authority officers. They were chosen because they offer relevant insights into the lab's struggle for coproduction.

¹⁰¹ The interviewers were Tim Wickson and Alessio Kolioulis (DPU/UCL), and Richard Lee and Agnieszka Rolkiewicz (JS/Co-Produce It).

¹⁰² In London, members of the Lab (coordinated by Co-Produce It CIC, a spin off from Just Space, with support from the Bartlett Development Planning Unit at University College London) have opted to forgo interviews with key informants in favour of a reflective discussion on "scalability issues". For the issues related to the social care strand of the Lab, have been interviewed: Emma Back, Luke Tanner, and Adam McNichol, all of Equal Care Coop – London. For information on the Fairville London Lab, see <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/the-london-fairville-lab-presentation>.

¹⁰³ Just Space is a London-based network of more than 300 community groups seeking to influence planning in the city. Of these, more than 60 participated directly in the production of a community-led post-COVID 19 *Recovery Plan* for London. Both the DPU and Just Space have been involved in several co-production projects enabling local communities or user groups to reflect upon the role of planning in their everyday lives and co-design alternative strategies within a framework of socio-spatial environmental justice. Within such initiatives, particular attention is paid to supporting the participation of those marginalised groups and individuals typically unrecognised or unheard in dominant planning approaches. The "Just Space 2024 Manifesto. A different kind of London – for people and communities" is available here: <https://justspace.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/just-space-2024-manifesto-final.pdf>. To learn more about Just Space, please visit their website: <https://justspace.org.uk> and follow them on social media: <https://www.facebook.com/JustSpaceLondon>.

¹⁰⁴ See <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/the-london-fairville-lab-presentation>: The Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London (UCL) conducts world-leading research and postgraduate teaching, much of which is designed to build the capacity of national governments, local authorities, NGOs, and community activists seeking to promote more socially just and sustainable forms of development. To learn more about DPU, please visit their website: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/bartlett-development-planning-unit> and follow them on social media: <https://www.instagram.com/dpu/ucl/>

stories, the “Fairville London Lab¹⁰⁵ aims to discover effective mechanisms of co-production that can address inequality issues, and that will be effective in a global city where decades of financializations and wholesale gentrification have caused widespread public distrust in democratic institutions¹⁰⁶”. The Fairville London Lab is closely linked to the activities carried out by Just Space. In fact, the Fairville London Lab sets out to develop and demonstrate the deliverability of propositions and policies of the *Just Space Community Led Recovery Plan*¹⁰⁷, with a particular emphasis on three strands of this work: protecting street markets and promoting community food hubs, building a care movement and promoting neighbourhood care hubs, and supporting the co-production of housing and the wider built environment¹⁰⁸. Each of these strands has its own aims and objectives, with specific activities decided based on needs and opportunities presented by different lab members.

As we will see in the next pages, the contents of the narratives resonate with the “Main imperatives” of the ‘*Just Space Community-Led Recovery Plan*’ of 2021, such as “a caring city”; “visibility & influence for all”; “A City of Local Neighbourhoods”, and “Priority for Climate and Nature”. This community-led Plan, co-produced through a participatory, community-led process, contained recovery and development proposals for London in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which both revealed and exacerbated the city’s longstanding and ever-deepening crisis of inequality. The Plan is based on the 2016 ‘*Just Space community-led Plan*’¹⁰⁹, which “spelled out the planning vision and policies for **a fairer, greener London and the city’s longer-term health**. With planning in London causing the widespread demolition of homes and eradication of whole communities and their assets in pursuit of unfounded development targets in the name of ‘regeneration’, we aimed the Community-Led Plan at the next Mayor, demanding a new approach”.

The current strategic focus of the Fairville London Lab is supporting the Just Space network in their efforts to influence the London Plan Review process (an update of the strategic spatial plan governing development in London). In particular, the London Lab is committed to advancing evidence-backed policy propositions to activate the promise of a caring city for all Londoners.

The “*2024 Just Space Manifesto*”¹¹⁰ provides a synthetic picture of the situation of London¹¹¹: “London has been growing rapidly over the past 30 years. With cranes on the skyline and construction trucks on the roads, high-density, high-cost apartments have been built across 47 Opportunity Areas, and 600 more towers are in the pipeline. But people on the ground know that something is wrong. We have not built the genuinely affordable homes needed by a population that has been encouraged to grow by over 40% since 1990. With the population now at 9.7 million, only one large new park has been created. There is an acute shortage of affordable housing, including the loss of 300,000 Council homes through Right to Buy and the Council estate demolition programme. 60,000 families are in temporary accommodation, including 74,000 children, with 300,000 households on the boroughs’ waiting lists”.

¹⁰⁵ The Fairville London Lab draws on inputs from a range of Just Space members and associates including Spitalfield Housing Association, Save Brick Lane Campaign, the Development Planning Unit and Future of London.

¹⁰⁶ Extract from “Fairville Stories” and from <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/a-visit-to-the-fairville-london-lab-co-producing-campaigning-commoning>

¹⁰⁷ As stated in the Operational Plan of the Fairville London Lab, the Lab aims to demonstrate the feasibility of the policies #2, #3, #8, #9, and #39.

¹⁰⁸ Extract from: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/a-visit-to-the-fairville-london-lab-co-producing-campaigning-commoning>

¹⁰⁹ Extract from the introduction of the “*Just Space community-led Plan*”, 2016. Despite its best efforts, the London administration in its urban planning did not consider what Just Space proposed as the outcome of a collective work on alternative urban planning.

¹¹⁰ “*Just Space 2024 Manifesto. A different kind of London – for people and communities*”, page #cv2

¹¹¹ For an analysis of poverty and social exclusion in London, see Jiayi Jin “Spatial translation of social inequalities. Poverty and Inequality in a deeply divided London Borough”.

In the narratives, reference is made to existing situations in specific London neighbourhoods¹¹²: **London Borough of Tower Hamlets [narratives #1, #2]; London Borough of Camden [narrative #3]; London Borough of Lewisham [narrative #4]; London Borough of Southwark [narrative #5]; London Borough of Islington [narrative #1]; London Borough of Hackney [narrative #8 and #10]**. As mentioned by Clerici (2023), “there are not boroughs entirely wealthy or deprived but rather a mix. [...] Households with different socio-economic conditions coexist in the same Council facing dissimilar living and working situations”¹¹³. However, it is worth noting that this historical social mix is being eroded as gentrification processes continue to unfold and intensify. The following map (Figure 6) of deprivation of London illustrates this phenomenon.

Finally, the respondents of the narratives¹¹⁴ are five males [narratives #1, #2, #3, #4, and #8] and five females [narratives #5, #6, #7, #9 and #10]. Narratives #1, #2 and #5 concern neighbourhood street markets; #7, #8, #9 and #10 narratives concern the implementation of caring initiatives and support for vulnerable persons; #3, #4, #5 and #6 concern housing, regeneration and urban planning issues¹¹⁵. Half of the interviewees have a university education in areas such as urban planning, law, social care and health [narratives #3, #5, #6, #7, and #9]; two have cooperative experience [narratives #4, and #6]; two self-identify as activists [narratives #3, and #4] and four are regular Just Space participants [narratives #3, #4, #5 and #6]. Several grassroots associations and organisations were mentioned by those interviewed, including (but not limited to) the Just Space Network, Latin Elephant, Renters’ Rights London, HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network, London Plus Social Prescribing Network, Equal Care Coop, Fusions Jameen Self-build Cooperative, Charteris Housing Coop, London Renters Union, Hackney Digs, Up the Elephant Campaign, 35% Campaign, Save Nour (Brixton Market), Friends of Queens Market, Save Shepherd’s Bush Market, Wards Corner Coalition, Save Brick Lane , PLUSH SE16, Catford Against Social Cleansing and Save Ridley Road Market.

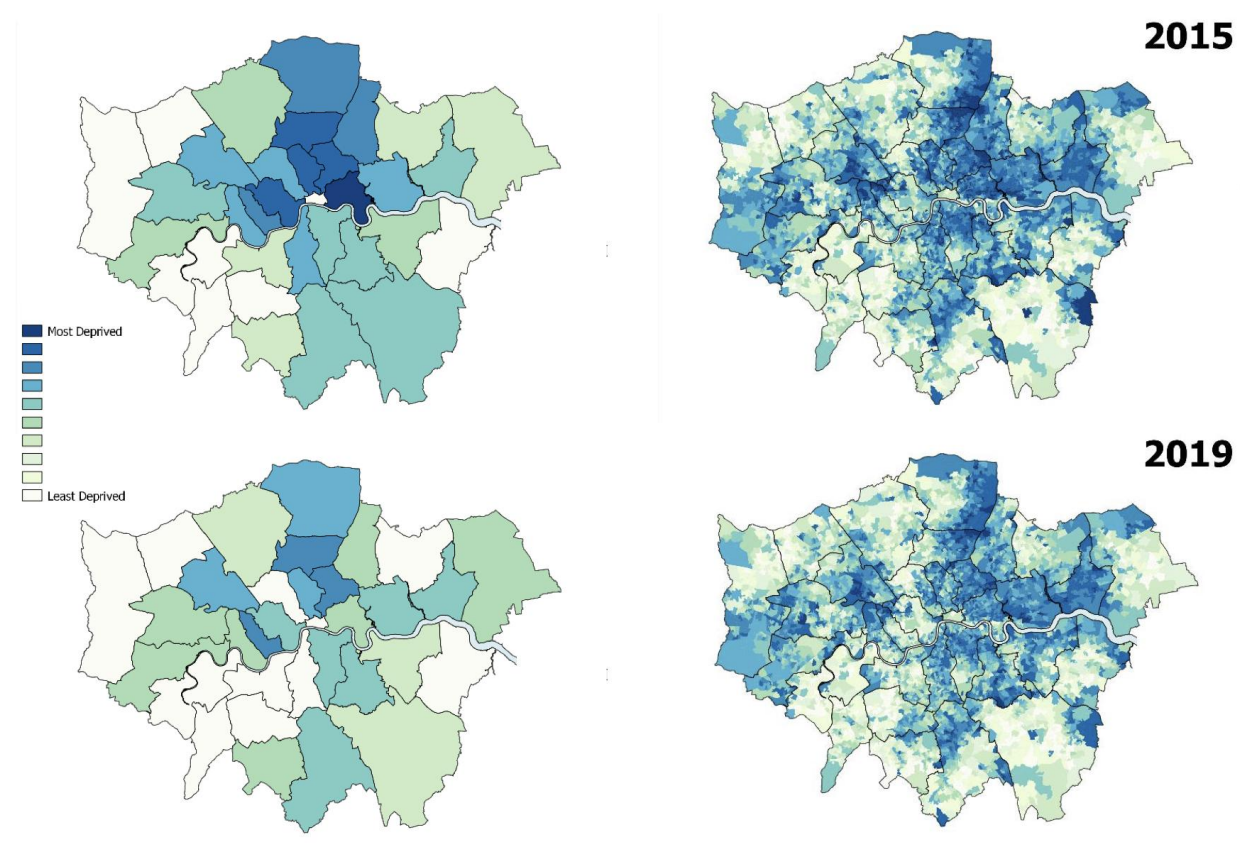
¹¹² Great London is geared by 32 Councils.

¹¹³ Clerici, E. (2023). Social exclusion and inequality in European cities. Abyssal exclusion, advanced marginality, and the goodness of the European indicator AROPE. Doctoral thesis of Eleonora Clerici, La Sapienza, University of Rome. Pages 190-216. Clerici underlines that “according to several studies, poverty is spreading. It relates and embeds with the other three phenomena: the struggle for housing, the processes of gentrification, and the trend in dismantling social housing”. [...] Regarding the first issue, having good quality and affordable housing in London is becoming more complex and impossible due to the changes in the housing market and its relationship with the finance [...]. It enormously affects and drives the rise of inequality and segmentation in the city [...]. Concerning the processes of gentrification, London experienced tremendous changes. For instance, areas – such as Hackney, Stratford, Canary Wharf, and Lambeth – that have always been described as deprived are becoming increasingly interesting for developers and wealthy households, pushing further out the residents. [...] Lastly, related to the issues of dismantling council estates, since the 1980s and 1990s, there have been projects and programmes for renovation and regeneration [...]. This scheme aims to provide new, better housing in socio-economic mixed estates. To achieve this goal, a ten-year programme should dismantle social housing, displace its residents, and relocate them to new buildings. As much as this programme wants to improve their living conditions, it breaks down the communities and their networks [...] Furthermore, in London, the spatial division is not only related to income but also ethnicity and housing [...]. According to the EU-SILC Data, 22% of the London population in 2018 was at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

¹¹⁴ This map uses extracts of the narratives. In italics are reported quotations of the interviewees.

¹¹⁵ For a gender perspective, we can note that in line with gender division of labour, the two interviewees involved in street markets are men; only one woman is among the interviewees involved in housing; apart from the care receiver, the interviewees involved in social care are women.

Figure 6 – Map showing Distribution of the IMD2015 and IMD2019 in London by local authority



Source: [The English indices of deprivation 2019](#)

Note: The scale of colours goes from white to blue with darker shades indicating higher incidences of deprivation. Whilst pockets of deprivation exist across the city, a feature of London's post-war urban development trajectory, the map displays a distinct sweep of deprivation reaching down the Lea Valley from Enfield, traversing the boroughs of Harringay and Hackney before crossing east along the Thames into Newham and out into Barking.

6.2. Mapping key inequality factors

The persons interviewed provided information on economic and territorial inequalities, social and cultural inequalities, phenomena of discrimination and racism, and phenomena of inequality because of public policies. The description of inequalities identified by the interviewees is presented considering the three strands of the Fairville London Lab: markets, care, housing and regeneration.

a. Economic and territorial inequalities

Many of those interviewed report **economic and territorial problems and inequalities**. One of the major concerns expressed by the respondents of the narratives is that of **gentrification linked to regeneration**, with the consequent risks of expulsion faced by vulnerable families and long-term inhabitants of formerly working-class neighbourhoods [narratives #2, #3, #4, #5, and #6].

Urban regeneration was also implicated in the growing precarity of London's traditional street markets. The interviewee in narrative #2 recalls that several street markets were put in a difficult position by the urban changes made in preparation for the London 2012 Olympics as well as those entrained by Crossrail. Some vendors were forced to leave and never returned. According to interviewee #2, a senior officer working for Tower Hamlet Council, the regeneration is aimed at making the market more beautiful, more attractive, better reachable by public transport, whilst avoiding the **risk of an increase in trader costs, a displacement of sellers and buyers, or a reduction in diversity**. It is about *'protecting and not driving away diversity, it is also about diversifying the commodities. As has been said in land and strategy, it is not just about having all the fish sellers and fruit and vegetable traders, but also other communities, and how we can include them. That is the backdrop of it. When we do this investment, our politicians need to be looking at that and ensuring they are not driving away the local traders. There should be safeguards around that. The wider gentrification that could come in as part of the natural development within the area is something to consider. Because when you have planning developments, different influxes of migrants or new people change the landscape, and that shifts the demand for what people want'* [narrative #2].

Narrative #5 brings the **experience of traders displaced from their businesses in and around the Elephant and Castle** shopping centre in Southwark following its demolition in September 2021, and the ongoing redevelopment into a *New Town Centre*. As seen in that narrative, there is a longstanding concentration of Latin American businesses in the Elephant and Castle area, so much so that there was once a community campaign mounted to designate the area as London's *Latin Quarter*. It was an early attempt to "intervene in the regeneration process" by securing *'formal recognition of the neighbourhood's importance to Latin Americans in London... an almost heritage designation'* [narrative #5]. The shopping centre itself, as opposed to the largely Latin arches surrounding it, was incredibly diverse, and Latin Elephant sees itself as working with all traders from migrant and racialised backgrounds in the neighbourhood [narrative #5]. These ethnic and migrant traders in Elephant and Castle have suffered acutely from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and *'the rising costs of living and small business operation'* [narrative #5]. However, research conducted by Latin Elephant has clearly demonstrated that *'there was a base level of instability established by the regeneration displacements that made traders much more susceptible to all the other crises'* [narrative #5]. Interviewee for narrative #5 also notes that the traders displaced to temporary units in Castle Square are *'prohibited from forming tenants' associations'* without express permission from their landlord [narrative #5] a move that limits their collective ability to address experienced inequalities.

Returning to Tower Hamlets, interviewees for narratives #1 and #2 capture the perspectives of two Council employees engaged in the development and management of street markets. Both narratives acknowledge problems and inequalities related to **street markets and food hubs themselves**. First, the social function performed by street and district markets, alongside overtures calling for this to be emphasised in Council decision making, should be emphasised. For interviewee #1, **street markets represent an important part of the history and identity of neighbourhoods**. They also represent a form of support for micro entrepreneurship and can contribute to the sustainability of the most vulnerable individuals and households: *'You need affordable stuff. Markets like Whitechapel are where people go for everyday things – fruit, vegetables, basics – at prices way lower than supermarkets. That's important'* [narrative #2]. This point about the broader significance of street markets and migrant and ethnic businesses is echoed by the interviewee of narrative #5. As pointed out by the interviewee of narrative #5, *'these businesses are not just retail spaces, they are really important cultural and social spaces for people, providing and supporting informal care networks'* [narrative #5]. The street markets are not just business spaces, they are important cultural and social spaces for people, providing and supporting informal care networks that are not being recognised. For all three respondents, recognising and

responding to these socially valuable functions of markets is presented as a key area of concern: '[we] have to make sure whatever we do, traders can still afford to be there' [narrative #2].

According to interviewees for the narratives #1 and #2, there are street markets that work well and others that do not or may have a period of crisis. For example, in the past, Hackney Council markets were not organised and did not function well [narratives #1]. There is also an indication that markets serve different constituencies and therefore need to be managed accordingly: *'You've got places like Columbia Road Market, where people come from all over London, not just locally. Then you've got Whitechapel, which is more for the residents. Each market is different. So, you've got to understand who the traders are, who the customers are, and what they're looking for'* [narrative #2]. The **decline and crisis of street markets is a problem** not only for the vendors but also for the residents of the neighbourhood. For interviewee for narrative #2: *'Traders are struggling. You don't have the same footfall; you don't have the same type of buyers. That's why we need to look at ways of revitalising it, bring in different traders, maybe change up what's on offer'* [narrative #2]. Another two decisive elements concern the costs for traders and the products that are sold and their cost: *'costs are going up, it's getting harder [for traders].[...] [but] You need affordable stuff... markets like Whitechapel are where people go for everyday things – fruit, veg, basics – at prices way lower than supermarkets'* [narrative #2].

Interviewees of narratives #4 and #6 reported the inequality related to **the lack of affordable housing**. In some of the instances brought up by interviewees, groups of people without a house decided or were involved in movements or cooperatives to build their own houses. For example, the interviewee of narrative #4 describes the existence of **poverty and social exclusion phenomena** in the Downham area of Lewisham, a neighbourhood in which he and others of Fusions Jameen Cooperative came together to auto construct a number of social rent homes on a street known as of the area of Nubia Way: *'Downham where we built our homes in Nubia Way was a poor white working-class area [originally] built to house slum cleared residents. The local authority recognises it has been institutionally blind to the needs of the communities of the south of the borough, as it was more focused on poverty in the north'* [narrative #4]. The area was a poor white working-class area that had been completely neglected. It should be emphasised that this is an area also characterised by environmental problems. The local authority didn't recognise it, didn't see it. It's right on the very end [of the borough]'. According to the interviewee of narrative #4, *'Ninety per cent of adults in our ward had no formal qualifications, the police didn't even bother to come... the community were left to sort things out for themselves. People felt very excluded. The established community regularly expressed frustration that their needs weren't being met. They perceived that newer, 'Black people and other immigrants' got their needs met ahead of them. It was a tough, openly racist area'* [narrative #4]. Examples of experiences of racism from the local community and from the state is provided in the section below (section C below).

The interviewee in narrative #6, referring to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, mentioned that unequal access to resources, including land, is a key driver of inequality. *'Land is a big thing. The factor of production is land, not housing. There can be no real sharing of wealth and power until there is some redistribution of the land'* [narrative #6]. There is a separation of the issue of the land with respect to housing. She said: *'Nobody in the UK describes private renters as landless'*. This issue came to the fore recently when *'leaseholders suddenly realised that they don't own anything at all. All they've got is a long rental agreement, one that they can sell. It's feudal, really. Then, of course, at the sharp end of this, we have people in the private rented sector, or people experiencing homelessness. Today, a lot of the people who would most benefit from expanding co-operative housing is working really, long hours for very low wages. And the thing about co-ops is you do have to give additional labour. You don't need so much cash, but you do need time to give. You need labour to give'* [narrative #6]. Here, the unequal availability of time emerges as another vector of inequality.

b. Social and cultural inequalities

In the area of social inequality, the interviewee of narrative #8, points out, based on his experience (he had to move to social facility for elderly people after a heart attack), the lack of support and disrespectful **manner in which the needs and autonomy of the residents are considered** in some facilities for the elderly. *‘I’m 70 now. I wouldn’t say I’m young, but I’ve still got some life in me. I live in a really nice building – beautiful, really, with security and everything – but there’s not much going on here socially. The lounge is hardly used. The only group that actually comes here regularly is Compassionate Neighbours’* [narrative #8]. The same interviewee reported brief visits, little or no notice when visits are cancelled, and instances where cleaning is not carried out or meals are left uncooked due to time constraints. Much depends on the availability of the operators and volunteers: some are good and helpful, others less so. He describes a lack of adequate care and highlights that, in the absence of alternatives, quality of life deteriorates. This changed when a new cooperative offering alternative community-led care services, offered him an alternative. As illustrated in narrative #8, there is a clear need to respect those receiving care and support (their needs and their aspirations for autonomy and independence) even when care is provided through public or low-cost private systems.

The interviewee of narrative #10 [a social care student and carer of the new cooperative assisting interviewee #8] reports how the traditional system of social care is based on two or three visits in a week of 45 minutes each. The time available is too short to talk to establish a connection. The traditional system produces isolation and uncertainty for the people receiving care. The provider is unable to inform the carer when they will return to the receiver. To prevent these risks, Equal Care Coop¹¹⁶ uses a co-produced planning of care between the carer and the receiver of social care. “With Equal Care, the focus is on how many hours someone is allocated weekly, and what needs to get done within that time. That’s how I plan my week with them. For some it’s around 10 or 12 hours a week – I usually do three hours per visit. It’s similar with another care receiver, though maybe slightly fewer hours” [narrative#10].

As reported by both #8 and #10, the traditional care system places significant stress and pressure on carers, who are often required to visit six or seven individuals each day, each with their own challenges and, at times, urgent situations for example, needing to call an ambulance before moving on to the next person. As one carer put it: “Personal care is intimate and not always easy. I don’t have to deal with that kind of pressure, and I’m really lucky for that” [narrative #10]. In contrast, as reported by the interviewee for narrative #8, Equal Care Co-op’s model helps care receivers feel less isolated and truly cared for.

c. Stigmatisation

A third area of inequality indicated by several of those interviewed concerns the presence of stereotypes and racist phenomena.

- **Racialised groups are often the most affected by displacing regeneration projects** [narrative #5].
- There are difficulties for the Council of the market of Camden **to recognise the economic efforts being made by people of colour to secure their workplace** in the markets, which is often undervalued/overlooked [narrative #3]. The narrative describes the history of the presence of different ethnic groups in the market: *‘In the 50s and 60s, it was full of Irish and Greek Cypriot people who began to move out in the 70s. By the 80s they had mostly left. Migrants from global conflict zones e.g., the Middle East, North & East Africa etc have replaced them and taken over local retail and so saved Queen’s Crescent as a working-class street. It’s a good example of a low-cost setting persisting amidst an otherwise extortionate and exclusive property market... [yet] the*

¹¹⁶ At the beginning of the Fairville Project, the London Lab collaborated with Equal Care Coop to evaluate lessons from a London-based pilot in co-produced, cooperative care delivery.

Council doesn't recognise the economic efforts being made by the people of colour on Queen's Crescent. I'm not calling this racism, but it is thoughtless' [narrative #3].

- **Presence of stereotypes and mixed attitudes towards street markets:** residents consider markets important elements of their history and identity, others consider them *'noisy, messy, or not for them even though real estate agents use the markets for advertising properties. The markets get blamed for a lot – rubbish on the streets, anti-social behaviour – even when it's not the traders' fault'* [narrative #1].
- **'Gentrification is racist in its impact and a driver of racist anti-social behaviour. The market reinforces the social exclusion faced by poor and Black people. No one can argue with that. There is stark evidence that gentrification processes deepen health inequalities'** [narrative #4].
- *'Many council officers have a colonial officer mentality... they don't know the area well, and they definitely don't want the community to have control. Lewisham officers are based in Catford only three miles from Downham. They might as well be on the moon. They think they know what's best for us and take many decisions without our participation'* [narrative #4].
- **Widespread presence of stereotypes towards persons with disabilities.** The interviewee of narrative #7 describes her experience of discrimination "In my late twenties and early thirties, when I had very young children, people assumed that blind people were always older. It was incredibly difficult to find support or even social interaction because I did not fit that stereotype. That theme – assumptions – has persisted throughout my life. As I got older, the assumptions changed slightly but never disappeared. For instance, when I was living outside London and walking around town, people assumed that I was never in a hurry because I was disabled. The idea that I might have a family, be working, studying, or have important commitments never occurred to them. I was often left at the back of queues, as if I had nowhere to be and nothing better to do. Another recurring assumption was that blind people only ever went to the post office. Strangers would stop me in the street and ask if I needed to go there, as if that was the only place a blind person might go. There were also assumptions around benefits – that a blind person must be collecting some form of government assistance and had no other reason to be out and about" [narrative #7].
- **Intersectionality.** "Assumptions and stereotypes exist not only about disability but also about ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other parts of one's identity. They can cause real harm, limit opportunities and affecting how people interact with society" [narrative #7].
- **Discrimination in the organisation of social prescription.** Based on her experience, the interviewee from narrative #9 describes discrimination with respect to the organisation of social prescribing led by general practitioners (GPs). In some cases, the service is brought in-house of the neighbourhood and isn't allowed to go out or connect with community services. So, it is difficult to identify and contact them: "One member approached me recently because he couldn't get a response from the local service. Turns out, the borough now has four separate services run by GP surgeries. I had to research every GP surgery and identify them myself. It's not acceptable" [narrative #9].
- **Presence of discrimination and difficulties to access to health and care services** for Roma, Gypsy and Traveller groups and communities and by sex workers, both of which have many problems that are very little talked about. "Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities face some of the worst health outcomes, and we hear very little about them". [...] "There's a massive blind spot in health equity work" [narrative #9].

d. Inequalities as outcomes of policies

Interviewees for the narratives also indicated both instances where inequality is embedded in public policies and interventions and when inequality occurred in consequences (at times, unforeseen or

unintended) of public policy implementation. Urban regeneration interventions leading to gentrification can be considered in this context. Some of the interviewees for the narratives referred to specific cases.

- In urban planning, some officials and public authorities **do not fully consider the impacts and outcomes of interventions** that are carried out with the funds they have available. They only think about spending the allocated funds, without considering the outcomes. They do not consider that they should be concerned (or they are not motivated to deal with) reducing inequalities. The interviewee of narrative #3 said that “The level of slapdash [in planning] is overwhelming” [narrative #3].
- The interviewee of narrative #3 describes the case of a Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN), implemented in Queens Crescent by Camden Council in 2021. An Equality impact assessment of road closures was done, and the outcome reported was that it would not affect ethnic groups. However, for the interviewee, experience has shown that this was not true. For them, the implementation of this LTN impacted negatively on black and minority ethnic businesses, since *“the vast majority of retail workers on the street were people of colour”, something which should have been picked up in the EqIA [Equality Impact Assessment]: ‘you would have to be completely indifferent – perhaps, filled with bureaucratic boredom – not to notice’* [narrative #3]. Three years after the closure of the street, no economic benefits have arisen. “People have lost their jobs”, and the LTN has not helped in promoting a change in the shopping habits of people. The interviewee of narrative #3, underlined the fact that “the equalities impact assessment couldn’t even see [methodologically] that there was a distinct group of people who were directly in the firing line of this change, who might suffer harm” [narrative #3].
- The interviewee for narrative #3 also pointed out the **discretionary power of the authorities not to implement public policies or interventions already decided**, which would be useful for the territory. He provided the example of the implementation of the policy to protect neighbourhood workspace in Camden. *‘The curiosity here in Camden is that planning policy to protect neighbourhood workspace has been quite good, but it is never properly implemented’* [narrative #3]. It is an issue of **power dynamics and bureaucracy** [narrative #3].
- In narrative #4, it is reported that a similar experience occurred in the Downham area of Lewisham Borough. There, even after a local community had developed an ‘asset-based strategy for the neighbourhood, attracted political support from the elected Mayor, Lewisham Council’s Leader, and obtained the interest from Heritage Lottery, the Council officers blocked the investment by withholding crucial information required to bid for funding: *“because they weren’t in control’*. The interviewee commented: *‘Many Council officers have a colonial officer mentality... they don’t know the area, and they definitely don’t want the community to have control’*. They did not want to recognise what the community was asking for. 6 years later, the same officers propose to install an artificial football pitch on the site, an intervention the community opposes on environmental grounds.
- Another interviewee reported an experience from Southeast London. £50,000 of funding was available for five by-and-for organisations to tackle health inequalities. The idea was to integrate care with the social care budget and address inequality. But this did not materialise. The staff involved in the ICS boards did not know about these funds. There is a predominance of NHS staff on these boards. The culture of the NHS needs to change [narrative #9].

6.3. Relations between inequalities, engagement and forms of co-production

The narratives and the interview with the key informant provide information for mapping the specific impacts that the different forms of inequality have had or are having on engagement and co-production, both the interviewees themselves and on the people of the territory.

a. Negative effects of inequalities on engagement

Some of the interviewees described the difficulties they encountered in involving other people for the improvement of the overall situation and their own. A first area concerns the difficulties in involving vendors and users of street markets. As we have seen in paragraph 6.2, street market vendors are among the groups most at risk of displacement in the event of regeneration projects or changes in the road system. Despite this, their involvement is challenging to initiate and sustain. We also include here some opinions expressed by the interviewees against co-production that hinder its implementation.

- **Some traders are reported not to be responding to the consultation, expressing a sense of uselessness of engagement on the part of many traders, called to participate in the consultation** on market improvement, for collecting their inputs or testing new stalls. Some traders said, 'What's the point? You're not going to listen anyway.' Others said, 'We've done this before, nothing changed'. *'That's the barrier...we [Tower Hamlets Council] have got to rethink how we engage'* [narrative #2].
- **Perceived presence of conflicts among traders and apathy by local officials:** *'We don't have, unfortunately, a group of people working together, in terms of the traders, they're quite adversarial against each other. And they have their politics. The impression I've got is that everyone's just thinking about themselves. [...] I'm just about surviving [...] Why should I care when no one else is? [...] But I think the apathy really is, we've heard all this before and nothing, nothing's happened'* [narrative #1].
- **Distrust in the co-production process from the point of view of the community:** The interviewee of narrative #5 expressed her concerns about 'what actual decisions does the community have the ability to influence? What can they have input on and what's already decided? [...] *The 'co' in co-production makes it seem like it's a conversation, but in practice it is not a conversation. It's more like a checklist where you choose what you want from the options you are given, and even then, you might not get it, because the decision might already have been made'* [narrative #5].
- **Isolated, project-based co-production:** "Ultimately, isolating co-production to individual projects isn't an effective way to do it" [narrative #5]. For co-production to be effective, it must be an ongoing process, allowing sustained dialogue to develop between the community and public authorities. *'It has to be how everything is happening constantly. There should be opportunities for these processes to be initiated by the community and for the council to respond: 'We hear you. How can we do this? Let's do this together' [...] 'To have it as only happening every so often and never happening in the same way means there is no way for people to maintain their engagement in the conversation or even to jump out and then jump back in'* [narrative #5].

b. Effects of inequalities in promoting the engagement of people

The inequalities experienced or observed by the interviewees prompted them to take action to change their own situation, that of other people in the community, or to improve their territory. In several cases, their experiences of/or engagement with issues of inequality led them into particular professional or activist trajectories. We briefly summarise their engagement paths below.

- **Narrative #1:** He first became active in street markets as a volunteer seeking to improve street markets in Hackney, later this experience led him to join Tower Hamlets Council as Manager of Markets Street Trading High Street and Town Centres. *‘I joined Tower Hamlets because I wanted to do something bigger. I knew Tower Hamlets had the most market days in London, 48 days a week across several sites, and I liked the way everything was done in-house’*. He is motivated to improve the markets they run through the active involvement of vendors: “We manage compliance, enforcement, licensing, and development all together, which means I can focus on making improvements rather than just ticking boxes”.
- **Narrative #2:** Works for Tower Hamlets Council as the Director of Public Realm, has an interest in street markets rooted in his childhood experience of growing up in and around Roman Road Market.
- **Narrative #3:** he is a Just Space member, trained as an architect. At a London scale, he seeks to defend and extend space for London’s diverse local economies. A theme of Tom’s involvement in local planning issues is the destructiveness of fashionable policy prescriptions and favoured business or development models. Related to this, he is currently interested in challenging the careless imposition of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) on areas such as Queens Crescent (Kentish Town) by revealing their potential negative effects on local economic networks.
- **Narrative #4:** he grew up in Croydon, South London; he has always had a strong sense of community (*ubuntu*), which he traces back to his involvement in anti-apartheid campaigning in Southern Africa. His brother experienced homelessness firsthand and this motivated his interest in housing and community-led development. In the 1990s, as a member of Fusions Jameem Cooperative, he overcame institutional barriers and racist attacks to deliver 13 self-built, eco-friendly, social rent homes. Today, he is involved in numerous initiatives addressing entrenched and racialised social, spatial, and environmental inequalities in the Downham area of Lewisham, including the establishment of Downham Dividend Society and the promotion of Healthy Living Centres.
- **Narrative #5:** She is a migrant from the United States. Before arriving in London, she was involved in organising groups in Los Angeles (LA), and through that participated in the People’s Budget LA coalition led by Black Lives Matter (BLM) LA. Just Space Supporter, Research and Project Officer for Latin Elephant, London Borough of Southwark¹¹⁷. Alongside this work, she is conducting PhD research into retail gentrification across London and helps coordinate a pan-London campaign against retail gentrification.
- **Narrative #6:** Was born into a political family, which in her house meant the struggle for land reform, labour rights and nationalisation, democracy, human rights and a non-racial South Africa. Later, as a young woman with a newborn baby in London, she experienced housing precarity firsthand. Homeless but not roofless, she joined a housing cooperative (Charteris Neighbourhood Tenant Co-operative) as an unhoused contributing member, participating actively for five years before eventually being housed there. “I got involved in a *Welfare Rights for Women* course organised by *Islington Women’s Advice Group* – a brilliant training model open to anybody where women from across the legal profession came together to offer training and, advice sessions”. Alongside her work with Charteris, she has experience working with “Islington Women’s Advice Group¹¹⁸”, and Renters Rights¹¹⁹ London.

¹¹⁷ Latin Elephant is a registered charity that promotes alternative and innovative ways of engaging and incorporating migrant and ethnic groups in processes of urban change in London, in particular among Latin Americans. For more information, see its webpage: <https://latinelephant.org/>

¹¹⁸ A community training model open to anybody in which women from across the legal profession came together to offer training and, advice sessions. Most of the women involved specialised in violence against women and girls (VAWG) or family law. Housing support was also available.

¹¹⁹ Renters’ Rights London is funded by the Nationwide Foundation with the aim of ensuring that the voice of renters on low incomes is heard by those with power over their circumstances. Be that landlords, local or national government.

- **Narrative #7:** She is currently severely visually impaired. She lost her sight over time due to a genetic disease. She married early, had two children, and did not finish high school. She has experienced and unfortunately continues to experience stereotypes and wrong assumptions about people with disabilities in her life. The turning point came in 1995 when, wanting to improve her situation, she turned to the Job Centre where the disability adviser suggested she take a training course on computer use. After the computer course, she followed a training path that led her to obtain a master's degree in social policy at LSE. She valorised the skills acquired to counter stereotypes and inequalities, to support people with disabilities. After work experiences and commitment to various organisations, she is currently the Network Coordinator of the HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network.
- **Narrative #8,** a 70-year-old man, a post-infarct patient housed in a social care facility for the elderly. "I owed £3,500 in rent [of my apartment] because they didn't bill me on time. Suddenly, I was facing eviction, right after a stroke. I got help from the London Renters Union. They supported me in obtaining to pay it off in instalments". He has not been happy with the support system provided by the housing with extra care provider in which he lives because it did not respect his autonomy and independence. "The old care company just assigns hours and sends whoever". That is why he chose to pass to Equal Care Coop. The transition was difficult due to the opposition of the previous care provider. With Equal Care Coop, he participated in some social activities and chose the person who would take care of him. "Independence means not being someone's slave – it's about having control over your life". The social care activities made by the carers are reported in an online platform, accessible also to care workers as well as family members/friends and others involved, like health professionals. This allows for building a care team that includes family, community, and volunteers and where the team owner/person receiving care is in charge of their care.
- **Narrative #9:** "I've always been interested in amplifying the voices that don't get heard". She has always been involved in mental health and participation, but not as a doctor. She devised a peer-to-peer training course between patients and NHS staff on long-term mental health conditions, so that they can use the experiences of patients and family caregivers. The training is still carried out. She led a team of people with lived experience about mental illness, travelling across the country, working to challenge the stigma of mental illness. She is actively engaged in the Campaign Time to Change, against the stigma of mental illness. She created the London Social Prescribing Network, a city-wide group designed to enhance and scale the implementation of social prescribing (a healthcare approach where health professionals refer individuals to non-clinical services to support their health and wellbeing) across Greater London.
- **Narrative #10:** She is studying psychology and elderly care. She responded to a call for volunteers for Warm Welcome, a network of safe, heated community spaces set up in response to rising living costs. It offers food, activities, and companionship, fostering connection and support through the winter and beyond. Following that, she then started working as carer for two people as part of Equal Care Coop community-led model. Her role involved helping elderly who are often disabled with household tasks – things they might not be able to manage on their own.

Regarding the relationship between inequality and engagement, two considerations can be drawn from the narratives. The first consideration is how targeted support or an appropriate training initiative, at the right time, can be transformative and open new perspectives, as narratives #6 and #7 suggest. The second is the fact that even people living a condition of inequality or in extreme vulnerability use (or might use) their agency to survive in such a situation, or to act for change, improving their condition for themselves

and for the people living the same problem, as suggested by narrative #7¹²⁰. In other cases, witnessing or experiencing inequality can also serve as a catalyst, motivating individuals to organise collectively and engage in more explicitly political initiatives aimed at structural change #4 #5 #6.

c. Engagement about inequalities producing limited impacts

The narratives also contain information, based on the experiences of the interviewees, on the obstacles to engagement and co-production encountered, as well as on cases in which the engagement of groups or individuals produced limited impacts on reducing inequality.

- **Problems in collaboration between associations and public authorities.** An example of such problems is the complex and sometimes difficult collaboration of associations with the NHS. NHS has little understanding of what voluntary organisations are. The NHS holds lengthy meetings in which they talk about their work, showing little awareness of the fact that time to participate is not paid to voluntary organisations and is taken away from other important activities [narrative #9].
- **Active exclusion and the non-recognition of citizens' demands during consultation processes.** In the case of the Elephant and Castle regeneration in Southwark, complaints from migrant and ethnic traders about their treatment by the new management company overseeing their temporary relocation units in Castle Square were effectively dismissed because they were raised *in the 'wrong way'* [narrative #5]. In other words, these concerns were not addressed because they were voiced in ways not recognised by formal planning procedures highlighting how such processes often serve to marginalise and silence dissent rather than engage with it. Organisations such as Latin Elephant and Just Space work to support these communities in navigating planning systems and ensuring their voices are meaningfully heard [narrative #5].
- **Lack of reciprocity** *'There is an obligation on the side of the community to be coming to the table in the way that the council or the developer want them to. But there is no obligation from the other direction. The burden always falls on the community to make themselves more amenable, or to acquiesce a little more'* [narrative #5].
- **Imbalance of power.** An example of imbalance of power can be found in Neighbourhood Planning, a provision of the 2011 Localism Act. In theory, Neighbourhood Planning allows the citizens of a neighbourhood to develop a spatial development strategy for their neighbourhood, but in practice any resultant document that might eventually be produced is non-binding and has a very low status in urban planning. *'With the 2011 Localism Act, one gets a special planning document with a low status in the pecking order of planning documents. It's actually at the bottom'* [narrative #3].
- **Lack of time and expertise among citizens.** Attempting to engage with planning, at all scales from the neighbourhood to the city, takes time and expertise. There is a burden on active citizens to collect and analyse data, prepare and submit arguments, all of which takes time and expertise. Time that many people don't have. *'It's only because I'm effectively retired that I've time for this. There's plenty of people who don't. It's my privilege'* [narrative #3].
- **Problems in describing the quantitative impact.** An example of this problem is encountered in projects funded by the NHS. The NHS requires a description of the impacts produced in quantitative terms for economic contributions. Even for modest funding, a large amount of data is required from small non-profit organisations, which is difficult for these organisations to obtain [narrative #9].

¹²⁰ On the agency of vulnerable people, see Aglietti, C., Delaney, C., Ensari, P., Ghidoni, E., Harroche, A., Still, A., Tucker, M. (Eds). (2023). *"(Better) Stories for the Pandemic"*, Orebro University; Lister, R. 2004. *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Lister, Ruth (2015). To count for nothing: poverty beyond the statistics, *Journal of the British Academy*, 3: 139–165.

- **‘Lost in translation’ and language barriers.** Use of technical language, e.g., by the NHS, represents a barrier to participation by citizens and associations. “We’re not even talking about the same thing when we say ‘health.’ For the NHS, it’s a disease. For us, it’s housing, food, poverty, community” [narrative #9]. In the case of Elephant and Castle in Southwark **language exclusion** is manifests in the use of **technical jargon**, as highlighted by the interviewee of narrative #5, where the interviewee notes the importance of non-technical and, in the case of Elephant and Castle, **translated materials to enable meaningful participation**.
- **Financial sustainability of the partnership.** Interviewee for narrative #9 points out the importance to have funds for co-production, able to support a full-time participation and not part-time, as happened in the case of VCSE Alliance, in which only two ICS out of five have received full time funds from NHS (the rest received funds only for two days of work per week).
- **Risk to be engaged in “false co-production”.** An example of this risk is described by the interviewee of narrative #9 who expresses concern for the attitude of the NHS in co-production: while collaboration sounds great on paper, in practice, the NHS is still very “do to” and not “do with.” They use co-production toolkits, but nothing changes”. They hire staff that should be used to carry out co-production, but in reality “spend most of the funding on themselves” [narrative #9].
- **Problems in monitoring projects.** Short time to deliver impossible goals [narrative #9].
- **Lack of transparency in funding lines.** An example of a lack of transparency concerns the NHS. The interviewee of narrative #9 expresses her concerns about the fact that not all the funds of £200 million that the NHS allocated for health equity across the UK last year reach each ICS effectively. She expresses concern that such funds have been absorbed into core NHS costs – staffing, waiting list. It is difficult to find true information, and the documents presented in the board meeting are opaque [narrative #9].
- **Lack of funding for street market improvement.** For those concerned with protecting and improving street markets, one of the most important problems is the lack of funding available to address important issues such as safe storage for the merchandise, and improved infrastructure for traders and their customers. By law, it is established that money collected by traders can only be used for licensing, enforcement, and waste collection; as such, street market associations and/or managers are reliant on the Greater London Authority’s Good Growth programme for any works outside of this scope [narrative #1].
- **Problems in inclusion and the digital divide.** For Tower Hamlets Council, there is a need to find a new way to promote inclusion. While for young people it is possible to use digital tools to include them, since they have access and digital skills, there are other groups of traders that have not yet access and skills. There is therefore a need to find new ways to carry out consultation and to promote wider inclusion [narrative #2].
- **Lack of education of people about their rights.** There is a need to promote and carry out educational activities and raise awareness among citizens and inhabitants about their rights to participate in planning [narrative #6].
- **Problems for better follow-through.** An example of this kind of problem concerns the collaboration between Health Equity Group and the Community Development Network. One persistent issue across all the co-production initiatives was “the lack of proper documentation and follow-through. Sometimes it happens that much of the valuable insight generated during the event has not been properly recorded or acted upon. Participants bring energy, ideas, and expertise, but instead of sustaining engagement, things often revert to formal structures” [narrative #7].
- **Slowness in the co-production and frustration:** The interviewee for narrative #7 describes the experience of participating with the Health Equity Group (HEG). Involvement started during the time of the pandemic, to respond to immediate needs when community participation was low (tokenism). Subsequently, community involvement was promoted. Community participation was

included in the terms of reference of the Health Equity Group (HEG). Despite the agreement on the importance of involvement, in practice, the participation process was slow due to bureaucratic problems; the deliberations under discussion were about how to do it rather than taking direct action (“to do”). There was a tendency for decision makers to treat community input as new ideas that needed a thorough development process before they could be implemented. The same mechanism was also implemented in the London Digital Task Force, through hearing from small community groups rather than implementing the principle of inclusive participation. In other areas, proposals for inclusive community and citizen involvement are initially treated with enthusiasm and then turned into working groups that use months to figure out how to proceed rather than integrating direct community participation into decision making [narrative #7].

- **Risks of distrust of citizens towards local authorities.** The Latin Elephant charity has received some funding from Southwark Council to support their trader engagement work, and the Council that are being used for implementing engagement with traders, research, community engagement, tours, and programming. While “some individual councillors or individual officers have at various points made an effort to solve problems with us about [the] challenges facing traders. Overall... there remains a feeling amongst many of our community members that there has been a dismissal of community concerns at the Elephant and this breeds distrust”. *‘It demoralises people to be told: ‘you’ve raised your concerns in the wrong way’ especially when avenues for engaging are already confusing or limited’* [narrative #5].
- **Lack of strategic vision by local authorities.** An example is reported by the interviewee of narrative #4, who highlights how local authorities, by failing to engage with communities when setting strategic development visions, miss opportunities to address health inequalities or promote health equity in a meaningful way. *‘We need to come from an asset-based approach. Downham’s two key assets are huge amounts of green space and the communities with their networks. We’ve got 800 acres of underinvested green space, with over five thousand families suffering as a result of institutional blindness. The Council lacks a vision of how to maximise the health equity impact of these assets’*. Addressing these challenges, the interviewee argues, will require a partnership-based approach: *‘We need an effective partnership with communal ownership to maximise its potential. We have examples of Coin Street, Milton Keynes Parks Trust to show it can be done. These are the success stories. WECH [Walterton and Elgin Community Homes] and Westway demonstrate that an asset-based approach including communal land ownership is crucial’* [narrative #4].
- **Difficulties in engaging local authorities.** An example of such difficulties has been experienced by Equal Care Coop, which has tried to engage with local government authorities like the London Borough of Hackney to navigate and possibly change procurement processes to better accommodate cooperative models. Here, despite partnering with Hackney Council to pilot a new model of cooperative provision (funded by the Mayor’s London Office for Technology and Innovation), Equal Care Coop was unable to effectively influence long-term procurement policy [key informants]. This theme is also addressed by the interviewees for narratives #3 and #5.
- **Lack of implementation of taken decisions and adequate follow-up.** When decisions taken are not implemented, citizens and groups experience frustration. There is a need for meeting participants to be included in the follow-up process, to receive information and feedback on what has emerged through adequate documentation. There is a need for the proposals that have emerged not to be dispersed and for the participants to be able to be in contact with each other on an ongoing basis [narrative #7].

The narratives reported also experiences in which engagement reveals some limited cause for optimism.

- **Towards a practice of inclusion in the management of street markets in Tower Hamlets.** Interviewees for narratives #1 and #2, constructed from conversations with two senior officers involved in managing street markets in Tower Hamlet’s revealed an awareness of the need for

more inclusive engagement around issues impacting street markets. “The people we want to engage with are the hardest to connect with because they feel disenfranchised, or they’re just too busy, or they’ve been ignored before” [narrative #1]. Engagement tools used: face-to-face with traders, involvement of caretakers, flyer distribution block by block, and in the schools of the neighbourhood, etc. “We brought them to see the stalls in person, got their feedback, and made changes. It wasn’t perfect, but it was collaborative” [narrative #1].

- **Stories of positive use of land that are inspiring to community management at Walterton and Elgin Community Homes).** The interviewee of narrative #4 provides inspiring examples coming from the positive stories of the Walterton and Elgin Community Homes (WECH), North Kensington Community Trust. The interviewee for narrative #4 reports that they are currently engaged in a battle over the use of a green area in Downham, calling for it to be utilised strategically to promote health equity.
- **Healthy Living Centres in Downham.** The interviewee of narrative #4 reported some success in collaborating with local healthcare providers and networks to secure resources to develop Health Living Centres in Downham, for the well-being of the community (sense of ownership of the land). The area has been redesigned by the community, also by bringing Healthy Living Centres into it. *‘We’re lucky to have a GP who is committed to the area and shares our aspirations. She’s been innovative enough to fund our Healthy Living Centre work and support our work integrating health equity into the Local Plan. The Primary Care Network and Integrated Care Board have a budget which can support it as well because they are all into social prescription’* [narrative #4].
- **Some benefits despite the bigger picture.** The work of Latin Elephant to support migrant and ethnic traders to engage with the regeneration has extracted some key benefits (even if the big picture is sub-optimal) *‘We do get some funding from the Council and that has been useful to keeping some aspects of our work going — mostly community engagement work and some public-facing programming. Also, some individual councillors or individual officers have at various points made an effort to problem solve with us about challenges facing traders. Overall, though, there remains a feeling amongst many of our community members that there has been a dismissal of community concerns at the Elephant and this breeds distrust’* [narrative #5].
- **An experience of resistance.** The Charteris Neighbourhood Tenant Co-operative¹²¹ is experiencing a critical phase, due to the increase in land prices and increased interference from their freeholder/landlord, Islington Council, in the process of allocating the flats managed by the Co-operative. The Co-operative is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the properties it manages, including the collection of rent due by tenants. The members of the Co-operative (who are the tenants of the flats) decide during periodical meetings how to use the collected money. The Co-operative has a contract with Islington Council that sends new tenants to the Co-operative. Since its establishment, the Co-operative has played an essential role in preventing the council from demolishing the properties and redeveloping the area, in promoting a sense of community among the residents, and in maintaining the properties. The new tenants, however, are not interested in being part of the Cooperative. “If the number of active residents decreases too much, it becomes difficult for the Cooperative itself to maintain management of the situation: It’s just a case of how long we can make the case to stay” [narrative #6].

¹²¹ For information on Charteris Neighbourhood Tenant Co-operative see here: <https://www.cntc.co.uk/>

d. Engagement contributions to reduce inequalities

The narratives also describe experiences¹²² in which citizens and community involvement helped to reduce inequality.

- **Breaking the language injustice barriers of non-English speaking vendors.** Latin Elephant¹²³ does a lot of translation work for non-English-speaking people about planning and regeneration to make sure impacted traders know their rights and understand how the planning process works. They provide workshops in English and Spanish, and they work closely with Southwark Law Centre. Latin Elephant is engaged in breaking down the initial language injustice barrier. During the latest Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process, which threatens those small and medium sized business located under the railway arches adjacent to the Elephant Park development, Latin Elephant got traders together to write objections on the basis that critical planning material wasn't being provided in accessible formats, and, as a result, the next CPO proposals and documentation were translated directly into Spanish, posted online, and made available by Southwark Council. Over the years, Latin Elephant has helped ethnic and migrant traders access resources, including legal advice. *'It is nearly impossible to access pro bono commercial legal advice, placing traders at a distinct disadvantage when they are in landlord-tenant disputes, or service charge disputes. Without legal support, how can they sit at the table and negotiate, contest treatment or access relevant recourse?'* [narrative #5].
- **The complex process of setting up an association of renters.** Renters Rights London was established as a project of Camden Federation of Private Tenants – the longest-standing Private Tenants Organisation in England, with an initial objective to establish a London-wide renters organisation. This project received three years of funding. At the end of three years, a new London-wide group of London tenants had not yet been formed. Using a community development approach the interviewee of narrative #6 contacted one of the city's local active groups, Hackney Digs, and supported them to register as a cooperative and establish the independent London Renters Union (LRU) Renter Rights London continues to operate as an advocacy organisation for London's renters with funding from the Nationwide Foundation. their mission is to ensure "that the voice of renters with low incomes is heard by those with power over their circumstances", be they landlords or public administrators [narrative #6].
- **A positive alternative to demolition.** Charteris Neighbourhood Tenant Co-operative was born in a neighbourhood of squats. *'It was a good, squatted community, it had a community kitchen, and they were organised, so when the threat of demolition came... in the mid-seventies there were protests', demolition was resisted. Then, due to a change of national government, funding suddenly became available for local authorities like Camden, like Islington, help squatter communities to form housing cooperatives: "It was an early example of refurbish don't demolish'* [narrative #6].
- **A space of learning and co-learning.** Just Space is a space of learning and co-learning among people with different experiences and expertise [narrative #6].

¹²² On success stories in which engagement contributes to reduce inequalities, see also this publication of Just Space: <https://www.thebartlettreview.com/features/mapping-lockdown's-impact-on-community-planning-groups>; see also on positive experiences against demolitions, another Just Space publication "Community-Led regeneration. A Toolkit for residents and planners", (2021). available here: <https://uclpress.co.uk/book/community-led-regeneration/>.

¹²³ Latin Elephant is a charity. For more information on the charity, see footnote #18.

e. Elements of co-production

Elements¹²⁴ and practices of co-production¹²⁵ are contained in the narratives and are described below, grouped in the following categories:

- Ability to produce and share knowledge about one's territory or community
- Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies and proposals to be achieved by co-production, for the three strands of the London Lab – street market, urban planning, housing and the built environment, and social care
- Ability to define what co-production is
- Ability to build and 'be' in a network

Ability to produce and share knowledge about one's own territory or community

The first important element of co-production highlighted by the narratives concerns the capacity of citizens and groups to **produce and share information and knowledge** about their territories and communities. In this context, it is important to recognise popular knowledge and its role as "expert by experience".

- **Citizens and local people as experts of local knowledge and the use of "asset-based approach"**. *'The most important thing for people's health is not what their situation is, but whether they feel they're able to have an influence over their situation'* [narrative #4], by using and recognising the value of their knowledge. For this reason, in the experience of the interviewee of narrative #4, residents engaged in projects and co-production processes should be paid to *'confirm that their knowledge has value and changes their self-perception. From a person who needs something to a person who is able to make a valuable contribution'* [narrative #4]. In this context, the interviewee of narrative #4 suggests using an "asset-based approach". Adopting an *asset-based approach* means *'using what you've got to get what you want'* it is *'central to community wealth building and community wealth building is self-building. It is maximising people's agency in the regeneration process. That is what co-production could be'* [narrative #4].
- **Experts by experience**. Some people use the term "experts by experience" to describe those with lived experience of a particular issue, for example, about volunteer people from specific groups or associations. Others dislike the phrase because it might imply the duty for the person to solve all problems of inequality [narrative #7]. "While the term is not perfect, it serves to differentiate between those with direct experience of an issue and those without" [narrative #7]. As recommended by the interviewee for narrative #7, it is important to consider the concept of **intersectionality**. For example, the experiences of disability will vary due to factors like gender, background, identity, and personal circumstances: "our lives are shaped by multiple overlapping factors, not just one identity or characteristic" [narrative #7].
- **Framework for collecting and sharing impact knowledge**. One of the problems for communities and groups receiving funds from public bodies like the NHS is to provide the required information (quantitative data) on the impacts produced by the funded projects. To solve this problem, the interviewee of narrative #9 defined a "framework with Southeast London ICS and a group of creative arts organisations. It's a logic model, a proportionality tool, a toolkit designed to help small

¹²⁴ These elements were identified based on the reflection initiated within Fairville's WP2 on co-production. These elements are also in line with the definition of "community-driven co-production" described in the Fairville D2.1 "Draft of a common glossary and common grid of analysis", August 2024 which contains an analysis of specific terms and themes. "Coproduction" - by Giuseppe Faldi, Agnès Deboulet & Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, with Mathilde Jourdam-Boutin: see in particular page #15-16).

¹²⁵ As stated in the introduction of Part 2, the contents of this paragraph are also a contribution to the ongoing broad reflection carried out by the Fairville Labs and other WPs on co-production.

grassroots organisations better describe their impact in language funders understand”. This framework is being tested in Southeast, to scale it to the London level [narrative #9].

- **Cooperation among carer leads to better health outcomes.** “What I think works really well with Equal Care is the team model – self-managed teams with shared communication. With [one care receiver], for instance, we had a small team of two carers. We used a shared platform to log what happened at each visit and flag anything important for the next person. It made it so much easier, like knowing in advance if someone was hospitalised, or if medical supplies were arriving, rather than turning up and being surprised” [narrative #10].

Ability to have a vision and identify challenges, objectives, strategies and proposals to be achieved by co-production

A second element of co-production described in the narratives is the capacities of citizens and groups to have a strategic vision and to define the goals to be pursued, the challenges to be addressed. The interviewees of the narratives provided their visions, aims, and challenges concerning the three strands of the Fairville London Lab: street market, urban planning, housing and the built environment, and social care. The elements below emerge from the first strand.

- **To preserve and strengthen markets.** The importance of markets and migrant ethnic businesses is emphasised in narrative #5: *‘Everybody living and working in these threatened areas know these businesses are not just retail spaces, they are really important cultural and social spaces for people, providing and supporting informal care networks’* [narrative #5]. This community-led view also seemed to have some resonance with the two Local Authority Officers interviewed for narrative #1 and #2: “We want to make sure that we still have markets, we consolidate, we ideally make sure that these markets become the best ways of, as a stepping stone for entrepreneurship”. In Tower Hamlet’s, Fairville London Lab members are working to encourage the Council to follow through on their rhetorical commitment to inclusion: “If we lose the traders, we lose the markets. And if we lose the markets, we lose a lot of history. I’m open to trying new approaches” [narrative #1].
- **Anticipate the future of the markets.** The interviewee for narrative #2 posed the questions about “where the market stands, **how the market looks in 10, 15, or 20 years**, if it can continue to exist alongside the influx of new people, and how it is possible to protect the market. The interviewee of narrative #2 expressed concern about how to protect the market and its sellers over time, in the context of ongoing **regeneration** and gentrification processes. There is a risk that current vendors might be driven out, even if it seems that “there is political appetite to safeguard the market, not push it out”. For the Fairville London Lab, it is important that in urban planning, consideration is given to the value and presence of street markets and their wider function within traditionally working-class areas of the city. The priority is therefore how to protect them in the context of strong development pressures [narrative #2].
- **The ambivalence of the discourse around street markets: markets are important to the local economy.** Markets are treated unequally – there is a valorisation of ‘tourist’ markets vis à vis the neglect/managed decline of local markets. London needs to recognise the contribution of SMEs, local/everyday traders. For the Fairville London Lab, this translates into campaigns and action to protect markets not just when they can be seen as historically significant but rather because they are essential to the operation of a more equal city, places of everyday exchange, affordable goods, public open space, etc. *‘For too long, London neighbourhoods have been de-developed. The game changer would be an attitude shift that recognises the local economy’* [narrative #3].

Concerning the second strand, the elements that are emerging are listed below.

- **Role of participatory planning.** Interviewee of narrative #3 posed the issue of the role of urban planning, and in particular, whether it is still a tool for improving the lives of people and places. It is the task of public offices to make urban planning accessible to citizens. Public authorities have the power and the tools today to change neighbourhoods and cities. To make urban planning accessible and useful for the well-being of neighbourhoods. In this framework, for the interviewee of narrative #3, partnerships and networking are needed. There is a national debate in which Just Space is also involved about the role of urban planning in the use of land and who decides on this, also taking into consideration the complexities of the reality of the city [narrative #3].
- **Power sharing in the management of the urban commons.** An important issue for the interviewee of narrative #5 concerns how decisions are made about the use of the land previously or currently functioning as an urban common. For example, prior to regeneration, the shopping centre at Elephant and Castle was *‘privately owned but worked effectively as a public space’* [narrative #5]. Its demolition can therefore be read as an act of enclosure. This issue is also tied to questions of **power sharing in the management of public or common assets and the need for appropriate language and effective words to allow citizens and groups to describe and talk about the commons they want.** *‘What work can be done to make ideas accessible, and thus powerful tools for communities?’* [narrative #5].
- **The role of the cooperative movement.** The interviewee of narrative #6 posed the question of whether the cooperative movements in London might be a possible actor contributing to changing the city of London and promoting something different for the future. For the interviewee of narrative #6, an alternative model of federated cooperatives might be useful. *“People are the critical ingredient. You need a critical mass of people who can identify what it is that they want and work together to secure it. That’s where we have our power”* [narrative #6]. *‘For those of us in Greater London who don’t aspire to a suburban semi but want something different for the future, because we don’t like this present. I think we should be developing alternative cooperative models. [...] ‘If we want this, then we need cooperative infrastructure. Not just for the dissemination of information but to support cooperative development and cooperative operations’* [narrative #6].
- **Need of infrastructure for community engagement.** What is needed first are physical spaces and infrastructures where people can meet to discuss, reflect, and decide what to do: *‘We need physical space for people to meet, plan and agree operations. More and more community spaces have been lost, and people are living in smaller and smaller units where it is hard to organise’* [narrative #6]. Many people live in small houses or disadvantaged situations and cannot participate online (e.g., those who live in cramped houses of multiple occupation). This is why we need physical spaces where people can meet [narrative #6].

Finally, here below are presented the elements emerging from the third strand.

- **Sustainability of the social care model** (from the London Lab’s Equal Care Coop pilot that came to end in 2024). The interviewee for narrative #10, a care worker, reflects on current models of care and the sustainability of the Equal Care Coop model. *“You’d need more carers, better schedules, and higher pay to compensate for fewer hours. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be sustainable. For it to be equitable, it would need proper resourcing, otherwise only people who can afford private care would benefit.”* According to the interviewee, what works well is the working model of Equal Care Coop: self-managed teams and shared communication. There is a platform for sharing information. The care model is co-constructed by the patient, with the carer, family, etc. *“We’re making things happen together. It supports both the care receiver and the care worker”*. There is, according to

the interviewee, room for improvement, e.g., in teamwork, by organising monthly face-to-face meetings between takers or building a common chat [narrative #10].¹²⁶

- **Complex procurement processes and a restrictive regulatory framework in the care sector.** The key informants of Equal Care Coop informed that they are “facing significant operational and financial challenges such as complex procurement processes, stigma in the care sector, and restrictive regulatory environments that hinder scaling efforts. There is a regulatory and legislative environment that challenges cooperative models, particularly in care services. The organisation recognises the **need for engaging directly with governmental bodies, using strategic funding opportunities, and fostering stronger community relations** as key strategies to overcome these barriers” [key informants].

Ability to define what co-production is

The third element is the capacity of most of the interviewees to **define first and try to implement the co-production and commons**. As stated earlier, it should be emphasised that implementing forms of co-production to reduce inequalities by contributing to improving the quality of democracy represents a strategic line of the Fairville London Lab and the organisations involved in it, first of all, Just Space. For this reason, it is necessary that, based on the different experiences implemented and lived, to arrive at a **shared definition of co-production and a common vocabulary**. One has to consider that most of the interviewees are people in different roles within government, civil society groups and organisation with different knowledge and levels of commitment to co-production. Remember that in this field, several terms are used to refer to co-production, sometimes to mean different practices. As pointed out by the interviewee #7, there is a **misalignment in the meaning of co-production** between the public sector and the community. The term is used in various contexts, in decision-making relations between communities and institutions, between communities/associations and funding bodies for commissioning services. This “misalignment” in the meaning of co-production represents an obstacle in implementing effective and real co-production processes¹²⁷. The respondent in narrative #7 also reports the case of the terms ‘commons’ and ‘asset-based approach’, which we have already discussed¹²⁸, and which are mentioned in narratives #5 and #4. It is worth reporting how the interviewee for narrative #4 further articulates this approach. In the asset-based approach local residents are engaged “as paid researchers. [...] It’s about transforming individuals through the process of collectively meeting their needs. People have been disempowered and the way to re-empower them is one, by asking what do they want/need? and two, by exploring their role in achieving it. ‘Self-building’ provides people with experience of achieving a vision, leading to ‘If I can do this, I can do anything’ [narrative #4]. Furthermore, in the experiences of the interviewee of narrative #7, the concept of the commons has only really emerged in their work with the Net Equality project. This involved building network maps and sharing assets as common resources, including software tools developed for the project. These concepts have also been explored in the project of HEAR Network titled “Exploring Collaboration” [narrative #7].

These are the definitions of co-production provided.

- **Co-production as togetherness.** For interviewee of narrative #2, a senior Council Officer for Tower Hamlets, concerning the experience of street market, co-production means “togetherness” between the traders and the residents, [and] the users who are going to be there”. It is

¹²⁶ To note. The pilot mentioned has finished and there are currently no plans to continue in Clapton let alone extend in London. That said, some learnings from the pilot, namely the importance of revealing the link between neighbourhood services and the experience of care giving / care receiving continue to feed into Just Space thinking on issues such as ‘care hubs’ and the need to centre ‘care’ as a cross-cutting/transversal issue in London Planning.

¹²⁷ For a list of obstacles in co-production and engagement identified by the interviewees see point c.

¹²⁸ See the point on the ability of citizens and inhabitants to produce and share information and knowledge.

“relationship-based”, builds “long-term trust” and involves “working side by side”. In this context, it is important to embed innovation, a new way of thinking, and doing things [narrative #2].

- **Co-production as liberation approach:** The interviewee of narrative #4 expressed the will “**to be in the room with the decision makers**”. There is a top-down approach and then there is also another ‘*way in which you can do it, which is a liberation approach*’, which is “holistic, participatory. It’s not about saying, ‘please listen to us’, it’s more ‘look we know what we need, and we may need technical guidance to achieve it’ but you professionals should be on tap not on top. [...] We know how we’re going to get there, and we’ve got our advisors” [narrative #4]. It is the assed-based approach. It is an **issue of equal power**. ‘*Us as communities have to use our power. Just Space provided the technical knowledge to help us get what we need through the complex Local Plan process. We were able to show Council officers, in their technical terms that their approach was worsening race and health inequalities. We’re showing them we’ve got some power and we’re saying we want to be at the decision-making table. Council officers fear it, but the politicians are open to it, this creates room to push an equality agenda*’ [narrative #4].
- **Co-production as collective control.** For the interviewee of narrative #6, co-production “is the flavour of the month. Language is open to interpretation, but we know what we want, which is: ‘**control, not individually, but collectively, over the means of production**. We want to involve as many people as possible, and we want no more ennui, and that comes from common ownership’. narrative #6].
- **Co-production, as opposing hierarchical models of governance:** For the key informants, “true co-production is about dismantling the hierarchical models of governance and embracing a more democratic, participatory approach. It’s challenging because it requires those in power to not only listen but also act on the advice and insights from the communities they serve” [key informants].
- **Commoning as control over wealth and power.** For the interviewee of narrative #6, it is also important to consider “commons”. “We are talking about land and the larger ambition for community control over the wealth and power which comes from land” [narrative #6].
- **Co-production funding stream.** The interviewee of narrative #7 reported that there is an increasing use of co-production in funding exercises of associations and civil society organisations. **Co-producing funding streams** (largely used by London-based funders such as the City Bridge Foundation) “involves working with potential grantees to develop funding programmes, rather than funders independently deciding what they want to support or conducting tokenistic research on needs”.[...] “The statutory sector tends to equate co-production with consultation, focus groups, or similar engagement mechanisms, but this does not constitute genuine co-production” [narrative #7].
- **Co-production as sharing power in decision-making.** Co-production is the sharing of power, regardless of the field of application narrative #7].

Ability to build and ‘be’ in a network

The fourth element of co-production, as described in some of the narratives, is the capacity of groups and associations to initiate negotiations and engage in networks with other groups and stakeholders. In particular, the narratives contain descriptions of specific experiences of networks.

- **The experience of the Up Elephant Campaign.** Latin Elephant actively collaborates with other associations in the Elephant and Castle neighbourhood as part of a coalition campaign called ‘Up the Elephant’. The Campaign opposes gentrification in different forms, in different ways and with different instruments [narrative #5].
- **The experience of the HEAR Network.** The creation of the HEAR network was facilitated more than 20 years ago by the establishment of a new disability infrastructure organisation, named “Inclusion

London”, and the implementation of the government-funded programme called “Change Up”, aimed at strengthening the voluntary sector. The core of the network was the “Equality and Human Rights group” (part of Inclusion London). HEAR has now become a charity, based on the same ethos: “bringing together people from different equality and human rights specialisms to work collaboratively”. Some members of the Network met difficulties in connecting at national or supra-regional levels. These are groups that work at the neighbourhood level, and even smaller. The Network promotes horizontal and vertical connections of its members and participates in national and international projects. One of the strengths of the Network “has been its ability to sustain engagement over time. It has successfully brought together community groups, statutory sector representatives, and academics on an equal footing, breaking down the usual divides between these groups.” [narrative #7].

- **The experience of Community Development Network.** There are networks in which a separation remains between the community and institutions. On the contrary, a positive example of an integrated one, is that of Community Development Network, which was born following a series of master classes led by the University of East London and which attracted different organizational realities (communities, local authorities, large and small organizations) and individuals whose focus is on learning, using “what has been achieved” “to inform the next steps”. This approach made the Community Development Network very innovative [narrative #7].
- **The network of networks “The London Plus”¹²⁹.** The London Plus is acting as “connectors, translators, advocates. We take what’s happening in the voluntary sector and try to influence what’s happening at a policy level”. They work with Transformation Partners in Health and Care, a bridge organisation aimed at facilitating the partnership with the NHS in the various domains of health and social care. The interviewee of narrative #9 describes the difficulty of working with them because often, they don’t have information on the NHS. For about two years, the interviewee of narrative #9 has been working on building a new framework to solve the problems of collaboration between organisations and the NHS. This new tool will be tested in some areas of London and then extended. The NHS needs to move from a piloting approach to an implementation of actions, with effective and equal involvement of communities [narrative #9].
- **Views on the value of Just Space as a community network and its coalition building networking approach.** “When I arrived in London, I got involved with Just Space, and in October 2021, I started working for Latin Elephant. This was during COVID, and a year after traders had been displaced from the Elephant and Castle shopping centre. Originally, a lot of my work at Latin Elephant was about visiting displaced traders and trying to collaboratively problem solve the challenges they are facing. Now, much of my work is focused on coalition building across London’s threatened retail spaces and markets” [interviewee #5]. According to interviewee #3, “Just Space is sustaining conversation about planning’s wider role, which is immensely important in the bleak situation that we’re now in. [...] To talk with people of different political convictions. Just Space feels safe for that. Safe that you’re not going to get a stupid response, you’re going to get a decent conversation”. Finally, on the value of community planning networks like Just Space, interviewee for narrative #6 states: “Just Space is a really interesting model, a space to meet interesting, knowledgeable people, who look at things in the round, who avoid this separation in thinking between housing and land. It is a place of learning. I’m not a planner but through Just Space I get to meet people with expertise in an area which is not mine and to learn from them. Some of the biggest experts in Just Space aren’t planners either, they are just seriously knowledgeable people who have accrued knowledge through practice, because they needed to” [narrative #6].

¹²⁹ Among the members can be mentioned: volunteer centres, CVSs, the VCSE Alliance Peer Network (led by the interviewee of narrative #9)), the London Boroughs Faith Forum, etc.

6.4. How engagement faces inequalities – London Matrix

The matrix summarises how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified. The ordinate displays various types of bottom-up actions and initiatives. The x-axis presents the primary inequality problems and phenomena considered. The cells indicate potential intersections between the problem and the type of engagement. For comparative purposes, the matrix structure remains consistent across all Fairville Labs analyses. In the matrix have been included also environmental problems since they are addressed by Just Space.

Table 6 – Matrix Engagement/Inequalities in London

MATRIX OF INEQUALITIES/ ENGAGEMENT	Environmental problems	Economic and territorial inequalities	Social inequalities	Discrimination and segregation	Bad governance & lack of policies
Requests, protests and conflicts		X	x	x	X
Social movements		X	x	x	X
Parallel planning	x	X			
Mapping exercise	x				
Self-managed initiatives	x	X	X	x	
Produces or implements goods and services	x	X	X		
Action to foster rights (rights to city, right to...)		X	X	X	
Knowledge co-production (fostering local knowledge)	x	X	X	X	
Actions of risk management (face or prevention)					
Creation of association	x	X	X	X	
Creation of support network (territorial coalition)		X	X	X	
Collaboration with local authorities (long-term and/or punctual one)		X	X	X	
Collaboration with universities, research centres		X	X	X	
Promoting and implementing new regulatory framework					
Agenda settings of strategies and actions to solve local problems	x	X	X	x	x

7. Map of impacts of inequalities on engagement – Marseille

7.1. Introduction

The map¹³⁰ of the impacts of inequalities on engagement in Marseille is based on the contents of **9 narratives**¹³¹ of engagement and key informant interviews¹³². The narratives provide detailed information on the different forms of experienced inequalities in Marseille and on their impacts on engagement and actions each of the interviewees has taken to try to improve their quality of life and those of their community.

Before analysing what emerged from the interviews, it seems necessary to contextualise it, providing some information on Marseille and the activities of the Fairville project there. In Marseille, two Fairville Labs operate in synergy, one in Arrondissement No. 3 “**La Belle de Mai (BdM)**” and one in arrondissement 4-5¹³³ “**Marseille 4-5 Studio**”. Many phenomena are common to both; nevertheless, this map concerns the 3rd Arrondissement.

The Fairville Lab Marseille “BdM” is carried out by “Alternatives pour des projets urbains ici et à l’international” (APPUII)¹³⁴, CNRS LAVUE, Centre-Ville Pour Tous (CVPT)¹³⁵. Since one year, Collective of Organised Inhabitants in the 3rd arrondissement (CHO3) has joined forces¹³⁶; and Institut Méditerranéen de la Ville et des Territoires. Is it also in connection with the SPLA¹³⁷-In and many other partners.

¹³⁰ This map uses extracts of the narratives. The excerpts from the narratives are between quotation marks. Direct quotations of the interviewees are in italics between a single quotation mark. Translations in English of the quotations in French are provided in the footnotes.

¹³¹ The interviews for collecting the biographies of engagement and drafting the preliminary synthesis have been conducted by Agnès Deboulet (CNRS). 2 interviews were undertaken with Philippe Urvoy (CNRS) and one of the interviews by Violette Arnoulet (Université Gustave Eiffel) and Ben Kerste (APPUII), Fiona Forte has been doing the transcriptions.

¹³² The key informants interviewed were Alima El Bajnoui (CVPT); Hélène Froment (CVPT).

¹³³ Marseille 4-5 Studio is carried out by academic institutions – Aix Marseille University (AMU), Ecole Nationale Supérieure du Paysage (ENSP), and MESOPOLHIS (research institution AMU-CNRS-IEP) in dialogue with the Municipality of Marseille, 4-5 arrondissement (district municipality) to observe, analyse, potentially support through constructively critical research, municipal intervention in the area pertaining to social and environmental change. Marseille 4-5 Studio also works in dialogue with interested residents groups and collectives, such as “Jardins Collectifs Longchamp”, “Marseille en Transition”.

¹³⁴ Alternatives pour des projets urbains ici et à l’international (APPUII), is an association under the law of 1901, working to support local requests and on a national scale to contribute to a co-operative action on the city, concerned with listening and equality. - <https://appuii.wordpress.com/>

¹³⁵ Centre Ville Pour Tous (CVPT) accumulates 20 years of experience in questions of urbanism, architecture, and sociology. CVPT Disposes on a huge network of partners in the public institutions and the civil society, the role of CVPT is fundamental to the project in terms of resources, work force, and understanding. In the Fairville context, CVPT is engaged with APPUII and the CNRS/Paris 8 in a co-production process that aims to develop local housing plans, focusing on mobilizing support for affordable housing. CVPT documents the input and experiences of residents affected by the 2018 building collapse to inform a state-adopted charter or *Charte Du Relogement* and organises mutual aid support groups around food. [key informants] - <https://centrevillepourtous.fr/>

¹³⁶ Collective of Organized Inhabitants in the 3rd district (CHO3): Based on an approach of community organizing in the 3rd arrondissement, CHO3 successfully mobilized over the last 5 years a great number of inhabitants. CHO3 organized several campaigns, touching diverse topics concerned by the *right to the city*: housing, mobility, public space and gardening, solidarity bonds, alternative economy, etc. - <https://www.instagram.com/cho3marseille/?api=Cassino%E3%80%90PG.CYOU%E3%80%91.jslr&hl=zh-cn>

¹³⁷ The Société Publique Locale d’Aménagement d’Intérêt National Aix Marseille Provence (SPLA-IN AMP) was set up by its three shareholders, the French State, the Aix-Marseille-Provence Metropolitan Authority and the City of Marseille, to help tackle run-down housing in the Aix-Marseille-Provence Metropolitan Area. Its current priority is the city centre of Marseille. It operates within the framework of the Projet Partenarial d’Aménagement (PPA). On an operational level, it implements actions relating to the treatment of run-down private housing. See <https://comu-marseille.fr/>

As reported by the Operation Plan of the Fairville Marseille Lab¹³⁸ BdM, “Marseille is a city marked by particularly strong inequalities. All the indicators are nationally at their lowest. In the last fifty years, mechanisms of clientelism (clientelisme) flourished and fostered a slow process of depoliticization, and a situation of mistrust and fragmentation. Especially, but not only, marginalized social groups and areas in the city are concerned disregarded by the public authorities for decades.

The collapse of several inner-city apartment-buildings, the 5th of November 2018, and its consequences of a huge series of evacuations especially in the inner-city arrondissements (Noailles, “La Plaine”, Belsunce, etc.), became the symbol of decades of political mismanagement.”

Some demographic data about the 3rd Arrondissement.

Table 7 – Demographic characteristics in 2020 of Priority neighbourhoods – Marseille – Quartier Prioritaire 2024: Centre Ville 3^{ème} arrondissement - QN01332M

3^{ème} Arrondissement¹³⁹	
Population (2020)	52.538
Surface	2,6 km ² ¹⁴⁰
Poverty rate	53,5%
Percentage of population 16-25 years old out of school and unemployed	23,8%
Percentage of single-parent families	32,6
Percentage of foreign nationals aged 25-59	53,2%
Immigrants as a proportion of the population	33,4%
Percentage of the population using public transport most often to get to work	42,7%
Percentage of primary residences between 30 and 60 m² in size	53,5%
Percentage of tenants	77,2%

As the table above shows, the 3rd Arrondissement is “marked by very poor living and housing conditions, and the presence of “slum landlords”, became a hot spot of citizen mobilization, searching to create new solidarities and confront collectively issues of social inequality and injustice¹⁴¹.” In particular, “the arrondissement of BdM¹⁴², has been neglected by public authorities for decades, whether in terms of public facilities, transport, housing rehabilitation policy”.

The BdM neighbourhood is “situated near the Saint-Charles railway station and was for a long time a working-class neighbourhood densely populated by immigrants (mainly Italians) employed at the nearby tobacco factory. The disused factory, which had become an abandoned industrial area, was renovated and transformed into a cultural and heritage centre in the 1990s. Today, it houses the Marseille municipal archives, a multimedia centre and *La Friche*, an important cultural centre. La BdM remains a multi-ethnic neighbourhood to this day. It was originally populated by Italians, who were later joined by Poles,

¹³⁸ This presentation of Marseille has been extracted from the Operation Plan of Marseille 2023-2024.

¹³⁹ Source: Le SIG Ville - <https://sig.ville.gouv.fr/territoire/QN01332M>. The 3rd Arrondissement is among the priority neighbourhoods. On this category of neighbourhoods, see the Atlas, available here https://sig.ville.gouv.fr/Atlas/GeoPrio2024/fichiers/atlas_qpv_2024.pdf. The Province of Provence-Alpes-Cote d’Azur (PACA) has 135 priority neighborhoods, involving 539.121 inhabitants. The data of PACA is available here: https://sig.ville.gouv.fr/Atlas/QP_r%C3%A9gions/fichiers/ANCT_AtlasQPV_PACA.pdf

¹⁴⁰ Source INSEE

¹⁴¹ Extract from the Operational Plan of Marseille 2024-2024.

¹⁴² This is an extract from Fairville Stories – April 2024.

Spaniards and Armenian refugees. Today, it is home to numerous immigrants from North Africa and the Comoros. Despite redevelopment works, the neighbourhood is still one of the poorest in the city. A survey conducted in 2016¹⁴³ counted more than a thousand very run-down houses in the area, some of them at risk of collapse”.¹⁴⁴

Since 2019, the “*Projet Partenarial d’Aménagement*”¹⁴⁵ (PPA) aims to combat unworthy housing and improve the attractiveness of local living conditions. Two of the PPA’s four “demonstration sites” are located in the 3rd arrondissement, including one in the heart of the BdM neighbourhood (Belle de Mai site).” PPA will run for 15 years. There is also the Euromediterranean programme. “*The operation Euromediterranee*, situated in the former industrial harbour arrondissement in the western part of the city, focuses on urban renewal as an expansion of the traditional city centre (middle-class attractiveness, new industries, tourism and urban-event policy, etc.). This operation includes two stages, Euromed 1 (1995-2015) and Euromed 2 (2016-2030). This project is clearly inspired by neoliberal logic, promoting attractiveness and influence (making Marseille “a Euro-Mediterranean capital” (...) to put itself on the economic level of Barcelona and Genoa¹⁴⁶”), from a metropolitan integration perspective”.¹⁴⁷

Furthermore, “the working-class arrondissements built in the 1960s and 1970s and concentrating nowadays a bunch of social, urban and political “issues”, are covered by the national operation called ANRU¹⁴⁸ (National Agency for Urban Renewal)¹⁴⁹.” Since 2020, the City of Marseille, alongside the State and the Metropolis, has made the fight against substandard housing one of its priorities, mobilising all the levers at its disposal. The official webpage of the City of Marseille on the Eradicating Substandard Housing interventions reported the following: 2,300 inspections were carried out in 2023 in response to reports, at an average of 200 per month. Between 2020 and 2024, clearance orders were issued for more than 600 buildings, following the implementation of safety measures. Between 2022 and 2024, more than 100 insalubrious orders were issued, compared with 6 between 2016 and 2018. Between 2020 and 2024, 12.5 million euros were invested in compulsory work. Since 2021, 200 compulsory work procedures have been launched and 130 sites completed”¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴³ On the situation of housing in BdM, see the Master thesis of Ilona Meye (2024) “Quartier de gare et urbanisme transitoire: étude de cas de Marseille Saint-Charles” (HAL), which contains a paragraph devoted to BdM (pages 53-63). The thesis mentioned the main results of the survey carried out in 2016. “A 2016 study, entitled the ‘Bosc study’ (the name of the architect who led the study), examines the reality of this poor housing, block by block. The study reveals a number of facts about the housing problem: 65% of homes are potentially run-down, i.e. between 3,160 and 3,399 homes. Of this figure, between 1,185 and 1,264 dwellings are identified as potentially in a very poor state of repair, with a risk of peril. See also Elisabeth Dorier (2024). “Marseille, crise de l’habitat indigne, une veille géographique (2018-2024) (1) arrêtés de périls et évacuations d’habitants” <https://urbanicites.hypotheses.org/2872>. See also <https://www.marseille.fr/logement-urbanisme/logement/logements-insalubres-et-arr%C3%AAt%C3%A9s-de-p%C3%A9rils-et-évacuations-d'habitants>

¹⁴⁴ Source: Wikipedia: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belle_de_Mai

¹⁴⁵ Le PPA is a global project of requalification of the big centre-city of Marseille. It aims to: “Lutter contre l’habitat indigne; Améliorer l’attractivité et la qualité résidentielle ; Permettre aux habitants de se maintenir dans leur quartier; Restaurer le patrimoine bâti; Redynamiser la fonction économique”. <https://ampmetropole.fr/missions/amenagement-du-territoire-et-urbanisme/projets-urbains/le-projet-partenarial-damenagement-ppa/>

¹⁴⁶ Official website of Euro Méditerranée: <https://www.euromediterranee.fr/actualites/aux-origines-deuromediterranee>

¹⁴⁷ Extract from the presentation of the Marseille Fairville Lab on the project website.

¹⁴⁸ ANRU has been established as a public institution of an industrial and commercial nature (EPIC) by law in 2003 for cities and urban regeneration. “The National Urban Regeneration Plan aims to “restructure the priority urban neighbourhoods, with a view to improve social diversity and sustainable development”. See: <https://www.anru.fr/la-docutheque/whats-purpose-national-agency-urban-regeneration>

¹⁴⁹ Extract from the presentation of the Marseille Fairville Lab on the project website.

¹⁵⁰ See <https://www.marseille.fr/logement-urbanisme/logement/logements-insalubres-et-arr%C3%AAt%C3%A9s-de-p%C3%A9rils-et-évacuations-d'habitants>

In this context of change, “Residents and locally mobilised groups fear¹⁵¹ that these projects will reinforce inequalities and injustices in the 3rd arrondissement instead of improving living conditions of the most vulnerable residents¹⁵²”.

In the friction zones created by these multiple urban interventions, operates the Fairville Marseille “Belle de Mai” Lab, with the general objective to “empower residents to effectively interface with public authorities and influence urban planning processes” [key informants]. In particular, the Fairville lab aims “to observe to what extent these operations reduce or reinforce inequalities and socio-spatial fractures, and the effects of the ambition declared by the public authorities to co-construct the city with its inhabitants. On the other hand, in the sense of action-research, we aim to cooperate with different local associative actors. The central aim consists in promoting a perspective of co-production, cooperation and mutual learning, according to the principle of *éducation Populaire*¹⁵³”.

In 2024, the Fairville Lab¹⁵⁴ organised a series of **Atelier Populaire d’Urbanisme (APU)**¹⁵⁵, various commented walks and initiatives. This cycle of workshops, meetings, commented walks has several objectives: collectively decrypt the ongoing urban projects, develop urban diagnostic based on the experience of the inhabitants, and co-construct alternative proposals and urban interventions”.

The Fairville Lab carried out a **survey among households in the neighbourhood on housing issues** between October 2024 and January 2025, involving 53 households, the results of which were presented at **Belle fête de Mai**, the annual neighbourhood party on the public squares Cadenat / Caffo, organised by the Fairville Lab together with CHO3. All the results are contained in a leaflet¹⁵⁶ that illustrates the urban redevelopment interventions planned and ongoing that are affecting the neighbourhood and provides the references of associations involved in protecting citizens' rights. The objectives are to raise awareness among the inhabitants and planners as well as decision-makers, to promote careful observation of what is happening in the neighbourhood, and to promote a broad network of collective actors to push the various administrative levels towards a **co-definition and co-production of the interventions and works to be carried out with the associations and citizens' groups** that does not exclude anyone, first and foremost those who already live in the flats.

¹⁵¹ On the issue of evictions from the point of view of citizens, see the collective book *Lutter pour la cite*” (Fight for the Neighbourhood)” on the experience of one suburb of Ile de France region, coordinated by the associations APPUII, Renaissance des Groux and the Tenaces collective and published in 2022.

¹⁵² Extract from Fairville Lab stories, April 2024

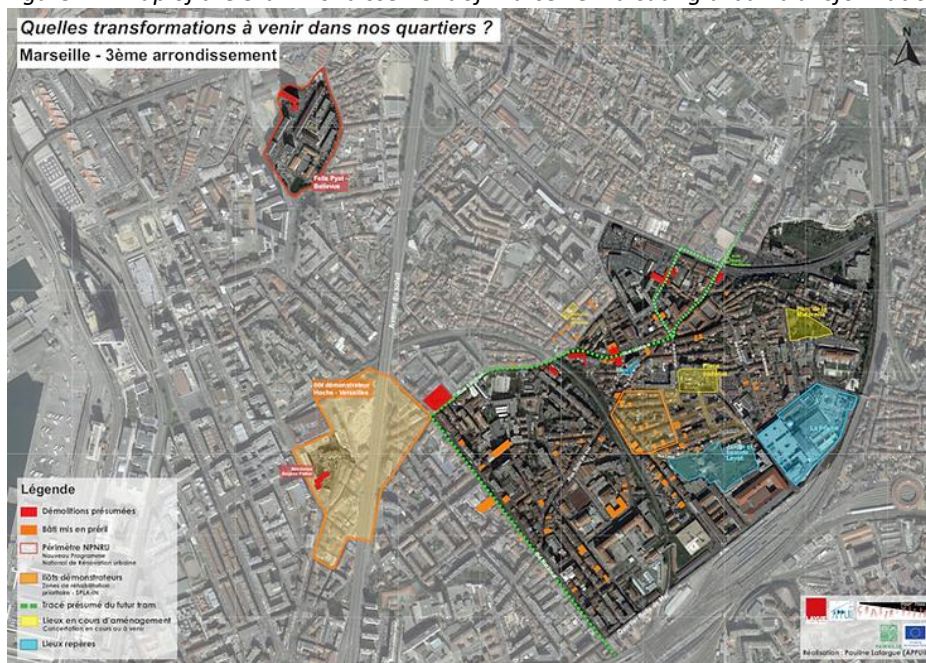
¹⁵³ Extract from the Operational Plan 2023-2024.

¹⁵⁴ Extract from Fairville Stories, April 2024.

¹⁵⁵ APU is a kind a workshop, aimed at sharing urban technical knowledge, enabling residents to engage in dialogue with public authorities, and employing diverse “languages” to increase accessibility of technical consultations and broaden community dialogue. [key informants]., It draws from the example of APU In Roubaix and Lille namely, that are long-standing open places of encounter and collective planning, see advocacy planning. Deboulet, Mamou, 2018

¹⁵⁶ “La Belle de Mai is transforming, an urban upgrading for everyone!, May 2025” (“La Belle de Mai se transforme, une revalorisation urbaine pour tous, mai 2025”).

Figure 7 – Map of the 3rd Arrondissement of Marseille indicating urban transformations



Source: Graphic realisation: Pauline Lafargue (APPUII), from [the Fairville project](#)

Nine people were interviewed¹⁵⁷ to collect their narratives of engagement. Of these, two are male and seven are female. Many of the interviewees have a history of migration behind them, five from outside Europe [narratives #1, #2, #4, #5, #7]. None of them is native of Marseille and two of them have moved from the northern part of France [narratives #3 and #6]. Three of the interviewees [narratives #2, #5 and #6] have been living in Marseille, in La Belle de Mai, for a long time (more than 10 years); four interviewees arrived in Marseille more recently [narratives #1, #3, #4 and #7]. Most of the interviewees (six) are involved in one way or another in CHO3 activities; two of them in CVPT activities and takes part to the COMU, two are neither residing nor engaged in the neighborhood but have or had citizen's and electie engagement. Three of the interviewees have a long history as activists on the protection of rights of citizens, against discrimination [narratives #2, #5, and #6]; and one interviewee has a long experience in working with communities in France and outside Europe [narrative #4]. As we will describe in point 3.5, some of them are also active in the Fairville Lab. At least six of the interviewees have children.

As pointed out during the Brussels mid-term workshop (2025), the interviewees described different levels of engagement within the FV Labs and within the community at large. Within these residents, half of them are in very precarious conditions and half of them are more comfortable, more educated and activists. So huge diversity. As we will see, the interviewees perceive inequalities in different ways.

7.2. Mapping key inequality factors

The interviewees for the narratives, as well as the key informants, provide an accurate description of the problems and inequalities they have experienced or are aware of. These descriptions are grounded on the very different experiences of inequality lived at the individual level by each interviewee. There are diverse ways of perception of inequality: those from migrant (and recent) backgrounds, those who live in the neighbourhood but have citizenship rights, etc. The interviewee of narrative #7, provided an

¹⁵⁷ One interview lasted 45 minutes, all the others ranged from 1 to 2 hours. The retranscription was realised by Fiona Forte.

interesting and useful definition of inequality: ‘*Les inégalités c’est que tu n’as pas beaucoup de choix*¹⁵⁸’ [narrative #7].

One of the main problems mentioned by practically all interviewees is that of **housing**, a subject of ongoing discussions and debates, including informal ones. As noted by the interviewee for narrative #7, “mostly problems in BdM are associated with over occupied tiny (and costly) dwellings, and health-related issues are due to the lack of papers and sometimes lack of social security. The first problem is housing” [narrative #7].

As the interviewee notes for narrative #3, from the discussion meetings animated by an operator with the inhabitants, they mention situations of great injustice and inequality, also linked to issues such as transportation, medical violence, and discrimination in accessing rights, among others.

Also, the interviewee of narrative #5 mentioned first “**the most disabling inequalities in rights**, and the problems arising from the **intersection of poverty and unequal treatment of the neighbourhood and its residents**” [narrative #5]. Also, for the interviewee in narrative #8 in general terms, **inequality is the effect of not respecting the individual rights** of each person: Rather than insisting on the structural weaknesses, she likes to insist on the need to get along with the most vulnerable, those in social and economic distress. But she refuses the expression “*quartiers populaires*” that she resents as stigmatising, the problem does not come from the “*quartiers populaires*” but from the social situation of individuals and the fact that the rights (social and legal) are not respected [narrative #8].

According to another interviewee, part of the **population of Marseille** is fluctuating or unstable. Those who stabilise are “second or third generation poor of immigrant origin, so more North Africans in Noailles, more Comorians in the third arrondissement”. The housing in these central arrondissements serves as “de facto” social housing, as there is very little public social housing available. Part of the population of the arrondissement is stable; then there is a part of the population that transits to Marseilles for matters of study linked to the choice of the school for children. Then there is a part of the fluctuating population, which arrives, stays for a short time, and leaves, using the city centre as a transit point (some PPA officials are among them), and which is challenging to manage, support, and involve in the participation exercise. The interviewee spoke also of the presence of slumlords (*marchands de sommeil*, little Sleepsellers) [narrative #9].

a. Economic and territorial inequalities

The interviewees describe different forms of economic and territorial inequalities, relating to housing and the right to housing; to transport; to deficiencies in services, starting with schools, and health care, gardens and community centres.

Housing and right to a decent home.

‘The right to housing’, access to a decent home, is among the issues most mentioned by the respondents. As is clear from the interviews, housing problems are linked to processes of discrimination and social exclusion against citizens and immigrants, especially those without the necessary documents. Narrative #1 reports that after the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown, housing filled up and the cost of rent increased. BdM neighbourhood has strongly deteriorated, even if it is not classified as a poor neighbourhood. As pointed out by narrative #1, “I used to dream of living in the BdM, but that’s changed since 2018. It used to be cleaner, but now it’s just like the slums”.

Below are the specific aspects reported by the interviewees and the key informants.

¹⁵⁸ Translation: ‘*Inequality means that you don’t have many choices*’.

- **Difficulty in finding a house.** One interviewee reports that when she arrived in Marseille, she lived in a hotel for two years. “I didn't know anyone. (then) We found someone who rents out like a garage or a cellar, between the ground floor and the basement. We don't have any rights. It cost 450 euros.” She was helped by a community activist. Finding a house is challenging, even for those with regular documents, because it requires a significant amount of time and considerable financial resources [narrative #1].
- **Inequality in rents.** “Inequalities in rent mean we have to find more money; we sometimes sleep on the floor in the studio” [narrative #1]. The interviewee also tells that in one of the former residence, “the water overflow spoiled some of the documents” [narrative #1].
- **Inequality in accessing to decent house** [narratives #1, #2, #5, #6 and #7]. Some examples, taken from two of the narratives collected:
 - The most vulnerable residents (for example, undocumented people or migrants), who are unable to find accommodation and are forced to rent very expensive flats that are in a precarious state
 - The greatest inequality and injustice are suffered by undocumented migrants, who are abused on all sides and have to be housed in ‘undignified condition’ in substandard accommodations in dilapidated buildings at very high prices .
- **Lack of building maintenance.** Buildings are poorly maintained [narratives #6 and #7].
- **Presence of insects in homes.** One of the interviewee reported that one of the issues is “how to get rid of insects. Such as bed bugs, cockroaches” .
- **Problems in living in bad housing** mentioned by narratives #2, #6, #7. One of the interviewee reported her experience of living in a small and damp house. *‘À chaque fois je dois faire le ménage et nettoyer l'humidité, faire les travaux chaque 3 mois, 4 mois, parce que la peinture il faut la refaire à chaque fois et... Quoi encore? Et le logement il est trop petit et mes enfants ils n'ont pas les affaires à leur place directement. À chaque fois je fais le même truc : ranger, mettre les choses en place pour que mes enfants puissent trouver leurs affaires directement, facilement.*¹⁵⁹
- **First-hand negative impacts in living in bad housing.** As described by the interviewee in narrative #7, problems related to housing, access to a decent home are at the centre of concerns and interpersonal dialogues (e.g., in the crunches between the mothers while the children play). But above all, living in an indecent house has first-hand negative impacts on those who live there. First of all, creates **health-related impacts**, including **mental** [health]: *‘Si on est bien logé, on est bien dans notre moral, santé, tout, tout*¹⁶⁰ [narrative #7]. Furthermore, housing issues **absorb much or most of the energy and time** of the people living there, either for research or as reported by the respondent in narrative #7 to make an indecent house liveable. Also, the interviewee of narrative #1, reported that *‘Un bel appartement, sécurisé, rassure. Si j'ai un T3, je peux me reposer dès que les enfants jouent. C'est la pagaille et je n'en peux plus. Je me cogne parfois dans les jeux de mon fils, la vaisselle*¹⁶¹ [narrative #1].

The statistical data presented in the introduction have already highlighted the widespread presence of unworthy housing (e.g., because they are too small or dilapidated) in the neighbourhood. The problems reported by the interviewees are also confirmed by the survey carried out by the Fairville Lab in Marseille

¹⁵⁹ Translation: ‘Every time, I have to clean and get rid of humidity, do some works every 3 or 4 months because you have to paint every time...what else? And the dwelling is too small, and my kids don't have their things in the right place. Each time, I do the same thing: sorting out, put things in place for my children to find their belongings directly, easily.’

¹⁶⁰ Translation: ‘If you are well housed, you are well mentally, your health condition is good, everything, everything.’

¹⁶¹ Translation: ‘Such a flat, securized, is reassuring. If I got a three-room flat, I could rest while the kids are playing...it's a mess and I can't stand it anymore. Sometimes, I bang into my son's stuff, the dishes...’.

in 2024-2025¹⁶², which involved 53 households and indicated that 1 in 5 live in houses that are too small (even 1 in 10 with less than 9 square meters per person); half of the dwellings have problems with humidity; many dwellings and buildings are poorly maintained; 1 in 4 tenants have problematic relations with the owner of their flat. In short: small, damp, unhealthy houses are unworthy houses.

Some of the interviewees (a majority of whom, as stated before, have a migration history) and all others express solidarity with migrants, underline, based on their experiences, that in this difficult context, people with a migrant background or who are undocumented are further penalised and discriminated (reality that concerns four of our interviewees on the impact of inequalities).

The awareness of such a situation of discrimination and hardship is well expressed by one of the interviewee in narrative #7: *'Je suis toujours en train de lutter et défendre mes droits et occuper de mes affaires, mes trucs, c'est un peu compliqué'*¹⁶³.

Presence of inequalities in public facilities (transport, education, health, etc.)

Respondents for the narratives also described the presence of other territorial and economic inequalities, tied to public transport, education, health, etc.

- **Inequality in public transport:**
 - Public transport service is lacking [narrative #1].
 - Buses in the neighbourhood are overcrowded, and the service does not meet needs, whereas in the more upmarket areas of Marseille the buses are empty [narrative #2].
 - Lack of transport from the neighbourhood to the centre and out of stock of tram and metro for an intra-urban neighbourhood [narrative #5].
- **Inequality in access to health and care.**
 - The interviewee of narrative #2 pointed out that access to health and care is also a key issue in the neighbourhood.
 - Problem of access to health and care for people without documents and sometimes without social security [narrative #7].
- **Lack of quality school buildings.** There are some problems with the quality of schools in the neighbourhoods [narrative #5]. Nevertheless, the interviewee of narrative #7 reported that recently a new school has been opened in the neighbourhood.
- **Lack of gardens and public space,** where people, families, children, and teens can stay, play and relax [narrative #7].

This lack of public places for gathering and recreation (both outdoors and indoors) becomes even more serious because more than 50 per cent of the neighbourhood's flats have less than 60 square metres (see also the data of the already mentioned Fairville Marseille BdM survey: 1 in 10 respondents lived with less than 9 square metres per person). This need for space often leads people to stand with their chair or couch in the street, on the pavement. This situation penalises children: overcrowded housing affords insufficient space for homework, and the inability to host children's friends. In this context, one of the complaints expressed by some of those interviewed in the past related to the absence of a neighbourhood library, which was later realised thanks to the bottom-up efforts of associations and citizens (see part 3).

¹⁶² As stated above, an overview of the results of the survey is contained in the booklet "La Belle de Mai se transforme. Réhabiliter le quartier pour toutes et toutes", May 2025.

¹⁶³ Translation: 'I'm always fighting and defending my rights and looking after my stuff, my things, it's a bit complicated.'

The interviewee of narrative #6, who is the owner of her flat, also lamented the presence of much **higher property taxes**, while the level of services and facilities is completely inadequate [narrative #6].

b. Social inequalities

The interviewees also describe the presence of various phenomena of social inequality. We remember that a part of the residents in the neighbourhood are people with a migrant background, some of them without permits or documents, with difficulty finding work, accessing services, support, etc. The inequalities experienced in general by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood are greatly increased for undocumented city-dwellers.

- **Lack of economic support** for residents with low income: they “didn't have any help” [narrative #1].
- **Presence of forms of labour exploitation**, whereby workers are asked to work long hours, with very low wages. This is practiced especially against undocumented migrants, according to one of the interviewee: She works for a cleaning company and doesn't earn much, so she has to scrape by. Before, and for almost seven years, she worked all day, but it was too hard. Especially for someone in an irregular situation, “the bosses take full advantage of it.” Sometimes, her workdays stretched from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. Even though she earned more, she no longer had time to take care of her children. She no longer had a life outside of work, she says.
- **Difficulty in reconciling work and family** needs, such as childcare. Long working hours make it difficult to reconcile work demands with family care needs (according to one of the interviewee).
- **Lack of support for asylum seekers**: lack of information on procedures and the existence of support associations. This absence has led to a sense of loneliness and helplessness. This is the experience reported by the interviewee of narrative #1: “I was an asylum seeker and didn't know that there were associations that could help me. I was afraid to talk to the mothers at school” [narrative #1]. She didn't know anyone, and there was no one to support her. “I was afraid, I'm in a closed ball, at my daughter's school, at work. But I went to the parents' café, and I just listened” [narrative #1].
- **Inequality in access to quality food** [narratives #2, #5 and #7]. Some of the interviewees expressed their concern about unequal access to healthy and quality food by vulnerable people and the excessive costs of healthy food. The respondent from narrative #5 also expressed the need for initiatives on access to quality healthy food to enable vulnerable families to choose what they take. Usually, *cantine solidaires* (organisations who distribute of free meals for vulnerable people and families, including on some occasion not accompanied minors) or the CSOs distribute to vulnerable family's food packages whose contents have been decided by the organisers and not by the beneficiaries. All the above-mentioned concerns prompted them to get involved in food distribution, canteen organisation, etc.
- **Growing problems of drug use**. The interviewee of narrative #5 cites the growing drug problem, with two deaths in the arrondissement the week before of the interview.
- **Lack of support staff for children and young people with disabilities at school** in the 3rd arrondissement compared to other arrondissements (*Elève en Situation de Handicap*): ‘*les quartiers sud ont tout et nous, on a rien*’¹⁶⁴ [narrative #7].
- **Undue requests to do volunteer work for receiving support**. The interviewee of narrative #7 reports her experience. She feels ashamed that many instances of support ask her to do voluntary work that is in fact involuntary ‘*Comme maintenant, je te dis, pour renouveler, je suis toujours en pression de faire des cours à gauche à droite, justifier que je suis en France et dans une bonne citoyenneté, demander aux associations... Des associations de bénévolat comme si je suis... Je fais*

¹⁶⁴ Translation: ‘the southern districts have everything, and we have nothing’.

*la charité. C'est un peu injuste*¹⁶⁵ [narrative #7]. This is a paternalistic approach that bothers those who suffer from it.

- **Lack of support for the 450 households evacuated from their homes on day-to-day problems.** One interviewee reports on the daily difficulties of the 450 households evacuated from their homes because they are uninhabitable or demolished. "As for the 450, the problem is deeper. It is a day-to-day problem: *'C'est-à-dire je trouve à manger pour midi mais le soir, je suis à l'hôtel. Comment je vais faire pour faire... Pour trouver à manger pour mes enfants le soir?*'¹⁶⁶.

c. Discrimination

The people interviewed for the narratives indicate the presence of different forms of discrimination, concerning people with a **migration** background, **undocumented people**, people with different somatic characteristics, women, people with disabilities, etc. As mentioned also before, some of these forms of discrimination occur in housing issues.

- Presence of forms and incidents of **racism and discrimination affect migrants and foreigners** and in particular **undocumented migrants** [narratives #2 and #7]. From an inter-sectional point of view, **women are most affected by discrimination** [narrative #2].
- **Discrimination in access to housing based on the countries of origins of migrants:** For the interviewee of narrative #7, part of the African or North-African migrants in the neighbourhood who come from Spain or Italy, have a "residence card" but are not allowed to get a formal rent. They are also facing racism. Then there are Arab people and migrants from Romania or Comores *'il y a une préférence de race (...) Et tu ne peux pas être logée à un autre arrondissement que 15e, 3^e ou 4^e*¹⁶⁷. For these people, the only choice is to come in this arrondissement [narrative #7#].
- **Impact of discrimination on way of living of people:** Lastly, the interviewee of narrative #6 knows that many of the people she meets experience discrimination. *'Mais dans beaucoup d'endroits (même le jardin Levat) (...) Je veux dire qu'il y a beaucoup de choses gratuites auxquelles on peut aller, mais il faut juste s'autoriser à le faire. [...]. Je veux dire que c'est aussi un privilège d'être à l'aise partout'*¹⁶⁸ [narrative #6]. In this regard, it could be observed that there are situations of discrimination and vulnerability that deeply impact people's lives, so much so that they lack the will and agency to react, to find housing, to access free services, and that make them feel comfortable even in very precarious situations. What the interviewee calls a privilege could be considered on the one hand a problem and on the other hand an element of resilience.
- **Horizontal inequality and women's segregation.** The interviewee in narrative #1 reports her experience of horizontal discrimination in Algeria, where her husband prevented her from working because he wanted her to take care of the home and family, respecting tradition. The interviewee was a senior computer technician. The respondent at home takes care of everything. The interviewee now works, but in an industry and with a qualification that does not take into account her training as an IT technician [narrative #1].
- **Ethnic discrimination and mistreatment:** The respondent in narrative #8 denounces discrimination and mistreatment on the basis of ethnicity of people when they are alone, as opposed to when they are in a group: *'Tout au début, les arabes, les comoriens, quand ils étaient*

¹⁶⁵ Translation: 'Like now, I tell you, to renew [my documents], I'm always under pressure to do courses left and right, justify that I'm in France and in good citizenship, ask associations... Voluntary associations as if I were... I'm doing charity work. It's a bit unfair'.

¹⁶⁶ Translation: 'In other words, I find something to eat for lunch but in the evening I'm in a hotel. How am I going to manage... To find food for my children in the evening?'

¹⁶⁷ Translation: 'there's a race preference (...) And you can't be housed in any other arrondissement than 15th, 3rd or 4th'.

¹⁶⁸ Translation: But in lots of places (even the Levat garden) (...) I mean, there are lots of free things you can go to, but you just have to allow yourself to do it. [...]. I mean, it's also a privilege to be comfortable everywhere".

*tout seuls, on les maltraitait, quand on était avec eux, ce n'était pas la même chose. C'est ça la justice sociale aussi, tu vois? C'est qu'à un moment donné, ta présence redonne de la force à la personne et de la considération pour la personne que tu accompagnes, tu vois ?*¹⁶⁹ [narrative #8].

d. Inequalities as outcomes of policies

This paragraph includes those policies mentioned by the interviewees that can produce inequalities, either per se or as unintended effects. In this case, we report the opinions of the interviewees and the key informants regarding ongoing urban development interventions and practices.

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a high **level of concern among groups and inhabitants about the potential impacts of urban interventions on them, particularly in terms of increasing inequalities and restricting access to housing.**

We have already mentioned in the introduction the three different urban development projects underway in Marseille, which also considerably affect the BdM arrondissement.

It should also be borne in mind that CVPT, together with the *Assemblée des Delogés*¹⁷⁰, has been assisting families evacuated after their homes collapsed since 2018.

Another element is the **long time required to implement urban interventions.** Sometimes the implementation times of urban interventions to secure/reconstruct buildings are **long**, as reported in the Fairville blog post from December 2024, which describes a lively walk in the BdM neighbourhood: “A portion of Schiaffini street is now the subject of a rehabilitation project. We stopped at number 13. This building has been “made safe” in July 2022 (which means that it was evacuated and walled up by the municipal authorities, due to its state of disrepair and risk of collapse. They call it: “ordinary danger”). It has been totally walled up after the evacuation of the tenants. Until today, nothing more has been done. In the city of Marseilles, thousands of residents have been evicted and hundreds of dilapidated buildings walled up, following the collapse of several buildings in poor condition in the city centre in 2018, causing the death of eight people”.

These long times are particularly problematic, as the interviewee in narrative #8 reports, for those who are temporarily housed in hotels.

As we mentioned above, the survey carried out by the Fairville Lab in Marseille shows that only 2 out of 10 families are informed about the interventions underway. In line with the results of the survey, only the interviewees for narratives #4, #5, #8, and #9 referred to any of the ongoing interventions.

- For the interviewee of narrative #9, over time, sectoral interventions financed to the tune of tens of millions of euros have been initiated in Marseille but have not produced a significant impact. The approval and signature of the **Projet Partenarial d'Aménagement - PPA**¹⁷¹ marked a turning point: new ways of working together of associations and citizens with the authorities must be found. For the interviewee, there is an interest in experimenting with this new way of working and the idea of democracy that supports it. **Participation in the PPA passes through the role and**

¹⁶⁹ Translation: ‘At the very beginning, Arabs and Comorians were mistreated when they were on their own, but when we were with them, it wasn't the same thing. That's social justice too, you see? At some point, your presence restores the person's strength and consideration for the person you're supporting, you know?’

¹⁷⁰ This is the Committee of Displaced Persons that was formed following the November 2018 collapses.

¹⁷¹ *Projet Partenarial d'Aménagement*. This project is the fruit of a joint effort by the State, the Aix-Marseille Provence Metropolitan Authority, the City of Marseille and various local players to mobilise all the tools for urban regeneration and renewal to improve the quality of life in 2 sectors of the city centre.

conception of democracy that the participants of the CoMU¹⁷² have. It is not only a matter of territorial governance.

- The interviewee in **narrative #4**, with respect to the **ANRU's urban development interventions** and in particular to its role in rehousing the structured/new buildings, pointed out the need for associations and **citizens' groups to play a central role in the governance of rehousing and to refuse to obey of the logic of the inter-play among different institutional levels**, which are often invisible and difficult to understand and manage. There is the need to *'Se positionner dans la gouvernance- Normalement c'est l'ANRU qui est censée faire le relogement des immeubles que eux vont devoir racheter/gérer. Refus de se plier à ce qu'on appelle 'Le millefeuille administratif'¹⁷³ [...]. 'Enfin, je vous dis, on va rien lâcher... Et c'est une des luttes invisibles parce que les gens ne le voient pas. Mais c'est une question qui est posée constamment'¹⁷⁴* [narrative #4].
- Furthermore, the interviewee for **narrative #4** underlined the need to **translate** into different languages the **"Charte du relogement"**¹⁷⁵ of Marseille, an official document on the engagement of public authorities and other actors involved (including property owners) on the relocation of families and persons evacuated due to collapse or uninhabitable homes to guarantee the right to housing defined by a participatory way, including also citizen groups, such as the **"Collectif du 05 novembre"** (formed by displaced people after the collapse of their building in November 2018 and after evolved in the *Assemblée des Délogés*). The interviewee of narrative #8 reported that "If they were successful negotiating¹⁷⁶ the charter, they didn't succeed in including the needs of people not evacuated and living in a 'paying squat' in reality private slums" [narrative #8].

With respect to the right to housing and interventions on urban redevelopment, the dialogue between individual inhabitants and local authorities represents a very important element. The interviewee of narrative #8 reports the **problems occurring during the evacuation among residents and local authorities**. The interviewee for narrative #4 described two operating harmful practices implemented by public authorities and the effects that these can have in more general terms, of **delegitimisation of public action** and therefore of **reduction of trust**.

- **Ways of carrying out evacuations from flats and problems in compliance with the "Charte de Relogement"**. Narrative #8 reports the maximum stress and problems experienced by people who have to be evacuated from their flats. Most of these people have 15 minutes in all to leave their homes and take essential things before all is lost. Many people also do not know how to read and understand the administrative papers they are given and shown. They do not know what to do and do not receive any help or support from the municipality - [...] [narrative #8]. Many of the evacuees are accommodated in hotels. According to the respondent of narrative #8, the local authorities do

¹⁷² The *Collège des Maîtrises d'Usages (CoMU)* is an innovative, collaborative body created as part of the Project Partenarial d'Aménagement (PPA) for Marseille city centre. The CoMU plays a crucial role in the governance of this project. It is designed as a co-construction space where members, representing a wide range of local stakeholders, work together to ensure ongoing consultation and influence decisions. These members are divided into three groups, each made up of ten people from local associations, neighbourhood interest committees and committed citizens, representing the different voices of the community. See <https://comu-marseille.fr/>

¹⁷³ Le millefeuille administrative, mille feuille is a pastry (thousand leafs): this term symbolises the superimposition of different levels of government (communes, intercommunalités, départements, régions) and the dilution of competences, making public action opaque for citizens.

¹⁷⁴ Translation: 'Positioning themselves in the governance - Normally, it's the ANRU that's supposed to relocate the buildings that they're going to have to buy back/manage. Refusal to submit to what is known as the "administrative millefeuille". [...] 'I'm telling you, we're not going to give up... And it's one of the invisible struggles because people don't see it. But it's a question that's asked constantly.'

¹⁷⁵ This document has been defined by a participatory process: This is the document with the original signature of the involved organisations: <https://www.marseille.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/logement/charterebergement2021.pdf> . See also https://renovationurbainroubaix.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2023-03-16-CHARTRE_METROPOLITAINE_DE_RELOGEMENT.pdf

¹⁷⁶ On the negotiating of the Chart, see point 3.4.

not comply with what was agreed in the *'Charte de Relogement*. *'Le 115, c'est des hôtels plutôt borgnes sauf certains cas, puisque dans des cas, ils relogaient les gens avec le 115 hein. [...] Il y a aussi bien le relogement en hôtel, il y a le Dalo, les trucs comme ça. L'État ne joue pas son rôle. C'est-à-dire que si on va faire le comité de suivi de la charte, on va remettre en cause les pratiques municipales, certes, mais on mettra aussi en cause les pratiques de l'État'*¹⁷⁷ [narrative #8]. The interviewee of narrative #8 has written several requests and petitions to the authorities on these aspects.

- **Officials often fail to respond to citizen inquiries or show disrespect for people's individual circumstances**, frequently dismissing those who approach public offices with problems by saying *"on reviendra vers vous"*¹⁷⁸ *et de ne pas le faire, pour des raisons non-dicibles comme des doubles agendas ou des projets cosmétiques*". The interviewee calls people back regularly, even to tell them there's nothing new yet. It's about respecting the time and personal identity of everyone you talk to. *'Je suis en train de lui dire: je prends en compte ce que vous me dites. Et en fait, je suis en train de leur dire "vous existez quelque part. Vous existez". Donc ça a l'air très basique'*¹⁷⁹ [narrative #4].
- **Delegitimization of public action** as a result of the above mentioned bad practices, which undermine democracy. Public officials often become inaccessible to those seeking answers. For the interviewee in narrative #4, this creates **illegitimacy both externally and internally**; the technician or administrator experiences **delegitimation** and withdraws from public engagement. **Citizens are left without recourse**. "This suffering is a sign of a **lack of democracy** that affects not only the poorest, but even within institutions" [narrative #4].

7.3. Relations between inequalities, engagement and forms of co-production

The interviewees and the key informants describe how inequalities have impacted them and the mobilisation initiatives aiming at changing their condition and that of the community. that each of them has tried to implement,

a. Negative effects of inequalities on engagement

This section contains the opinions and narratives of the interviewees regarding those cases in which the inequalities described in paragraph 2 of this map prevented people from taking action.

The reactions and emotions initially experienced by some of the people with a migration background or asylum seekers, as described by the interviewee for narrative #1, can be traced back to this typology:

- Sense of **loneliness**, also linked to the fact of not knowing anyone
- Fear of **asking for help**; fear for their children; fear to speak with other people
- Fear of **crime and the climate of degradation** in the neighbourhood
- **Not knowing** that there is someone who can help you.

¹⁷⁷ Translation: 'The 115 (is the telephone number of the official service for temporary housing, especially homeless) is a rather blinkered type of hotel, except in some cases, because they used to rehouse people using the 115. [...] There's also rehousing in hotels, the Dalo, things like that. The state is not playing its role. In other words, if we set up the charter monitoring committee, we will certainly be questioning municipal practices, but we will also be questioning the State's practices'.

¹⁷⁸ Translation: 'we'll get back to you' and not to do so, for non-dictable (dicible) reasons such as double diaries or cosmetic projects'.

¹⁷⁹ Translation: 'I'm telling them: I'm taking on board what you're telling me. And in fact, I'm telling them "you exist somewhere. You exist". So it sounds very basic'.

These emotions and reactions are so intense that they can prevent people from taking action, particularly in the early stages and without external support. Furthermore, as also emphasised in paragraph 2 of the map, there can be such intense situations of discrimination and disempowerment (e.g., towards undocumented people) that prevent people from seeing and recognising the **opportunities** that exist to improve their situation.

Finally, the sense of **helplessness** experienced by some people who turn to the public authorities and get no answer, described by narrative #4, or the sense of **bewilderment** of those who have to leave their homes immediately upon the presentation of an official document they are unable to read and understand [narrative #8] can be considered in this category.

b. Effects of inequalities in promoting the engagement of people

The interviewees also described how their experiences of inequality motivated them to take action. Below, we summarise the main lines of the trajectories of engagement reported by interviewees that led them to mobilise to improve their situation and that of the community in which they live.

- As mentioned in the introduction, most of the interviewees have a **migration background** (Some arrived recently, others came to Marseille long ago). Someone coming from outside Europe, or from another part of France. Many of them experienced, firsthand, the difficulties of finding a home to live in, as well as the phenomena of **discrimination and inequality** described in Section 2. In these cases, external intervention by a citizens' association or the school attended by their children enabled the interviewees to find support and backing. In many instances, it was the interviewees' own families who experienced discrimination and injustice. As reported below, the discrimination suffered concerned ethnic aspects, country of origin, migration background and above all, whether the interviewee is an irregular or undocumented migrant.
- As reported previously, the majority of interviewees are **women**, some of whom have **children**. They are in charge of domestic affairs, the **care of the family and the house**. A few of them express their **difficulties in reconciling work and family** duties.
- **Motivation to make things better for them and for the community** is behind many of the respondents' choices. In a few cases, this choice also stems from a personal desire to help. To some, their previous professional experiences in the field of social work (also outside Europe) led them to work for the empowerment of citizens and people they encountered in their professional activities.
- A feeling of justice, the **right to a decent home**, as well as the rights of migrant people, were and still are at the core of the commitment of many of the interviewees, who experienced **different forms of engagement**.
- Most of the interviewees are engaged in **voluntary work with local associations and groups** to improve their lives and those of the community. Some of them have collaborated on initiatives such as distributing food parcels, providing free books, setting up a neighbourhood library, offering access to healthy food, providing medical assistance to undocumented people, and running campaigns about squatting.
- Some of the interviewees had the **opportunity to participate in negotiating tables with the local authorities** or other similar initiatives. They also experienced the fatigue of participating in these discussion tables and became aware of the resources and skills required of citizens participating in this type of experience.

Based on the experiences narrated, some additional considerations can be made.

- The importance of the **family history**, and the experience of discrimination and inequality perceived as such by the respondent's family.
- The **relationship with one's own children's school** can provide opportunities to get out of isolation and get in touch with people and associations that can provide support.
- The importance of the **infrastructures of care** (formal or informal), provided by associations and citizens' groups that can collect, support and strengthen people's sense of solidarity and agency and possibly push them towards more political and demonstrative actions.
- Clearly, a **gender issue** exists. According to some interviewees, women are the ones who suffer the most from the precarious conditions experienced by their families and possible children and therefore feel the greatest need to get involved in collective actions to improve the neighbourhood in which they live.

c. Engagement about inequalities producing limited impacts

Based on the contents of the narratives and of the key informants, this paragraph contains two types of information. The first is the obstacles that may limit involvement and co-production. The second are some practices of involvement that are limited or have produced a limited impact.

These are the obstacles to engagement and co-production mentioned by the interviewees.

- The interviewee #2 noted that **no visible effects of City Council's interventions** can be seen, but there was "a bit of listening". Generally speaking, the interviewee is fairly critical of the **participation devices** used in urban policies, which it seems do not **adequately account for the residents' needs**.
- **Difficulty in understanding technical and bureaucratic language by citizens** [narrative #2]. This difficulty also manifests itself during the meeting with local authorities when the technical language of urban planning is used. *'We try to work with people, my neighbours, to facilitate their participation. The vocabulary of urbanism is challenging for many'* [key informants]. A key barrier is formed by the complex jargon in urban planning that makes it harder for residents to understand processes that affect them and participate in changing them [key informants].
- **Difficulty for local authorities to connect with the reality lived by residents**. In the experience of interviewee of narrative #2 in residents' meetings with local authorities carried out in the framework of projects, it seems that they have not awareness of residents' problems and are not so interested in getting to know them; they use language that is not easily understood by citizens [narrative #2].
- **Failure to actively listen to and address citizen concerns**: Despite the consultation mechanisms and the subsidies that accompany them, there is the feeling that **not enough is being done to ask residents what they want for their neighbourhood**. In the opinion of one interviewee, projects should start by working with the people who live in the neighbourhood daily and possess a direct knowledge of its conditions and problems (*maîtrise d'usage*) [narrative #2].
- **Participation and co-production require energy, skills and abilities**. The interviewee of narrative #2 explains that getting involved in Fairville or other projects requires much energy from the residents, who do not have the same "skills/abilities" as professionals/activists, or academics [narrative #2]; for the interviewee of Narrative #4, intervening on inequality to achieve social improvement requires that each person upgrades their skills and capacities [narrative #4], including legal ones [narrative #8]. For one interviewee, participation in the *Assemblée des délogés* was a demanding and partly professional task, and it still requires a significant amount of time.
- **Inequality within the association**. The interviewee in narrative #2 reported, based on her experience, that inequalities are also sometimes reproduced in the associative sector. For her, the

first step is to resolve the injustice internally, and that's a question of dialogue: meetings are a time to talk about what's working and what's not, and to resolve problems collectively.

- **Gap between the representation and the reality of participation.** One of the interviewee gave the example of the "*Quartier Libre project*". "You open up a consultation with the inhabitants, you have meetings, you read the minutes of the meetings, and you have the idea that you have done something with and for the inhabitants, using the right language, but then when you attend the meetings you see that the reality is different; that there are only a privileged group of people who participate". For the interviewee of narrative #4, the participation makes promises that won't be kept. It's easier to take initiatives based on relationships.
- **Digital divide and inequality** within participation. For example, in the case of the *Quartier Libre project*, an open consultation was conducted via a blog on the internet, in an area with digital poverty.
- For the respondent of narrative #3, **many project documents (reports, plans, etc.) contain an exclusionary and elitist representation of reality.** The methods used to represent the context of intervention in projects are considered elitist. The media used to present the projects are also seen as exclusionary. It is defined as a '*déni de démocratie*¹⁸⁰'. Plans are made at the desk (or even interim reports on the activities carried out) without going to the people concerned: '*aucun moment on nous propose d'aller demander aux gens ce qu'ils en pensent en fait*¹⁸¹'. Furthermore, for the interviewee of narrative #3, there are some risks in the design: providing a stereotypical and racist representation due to the use of images taken from the internet; not considering the most marginal, poorest, and most precarious sections of the population.
- **Tendency in social animation to replace citizens, rather than giving them a voice.** For an interviewee, '*mobiliser ne signifie pas 'faire à la place de' mais arriver à ce que les revendications soient (aussi) portées par 'les premiers concernés*¹⁸²'. To prevent this tendency, it is suggested here to use the "community organising" narrative [narrative #3].
- **Difficulty in creating balances of power** between the diverse actors involved in a field such as housing, which is very technical and where the inhabitants find themselves in a condition of insecurity and illegality and where the resolution process is known to be time-consuming, particularly when dealing with complex technical issues that can be challenging to understand [narrative #3].
- **Bad practice of organising "fake" meetings.** The interviewee of narrative #3 reported the bad practice in which someone's anger is exploited to cancel the specific requests of individuals regarding the housing (subject to systematic checks regarding its conditions) by the owners. The idea is to forge a collective struggle and to undo the individualisation of treatment by the landlord to **create a balance of power on housing**".
- **Lack of associations in Marseille and in the 3rd arrondissement where people can socialise and deal with housing-related issues.** For an interviewee, there is a need to socialise the discussions about urban problems, inequalities in the neighbourhoods, etc., but there are few associations working on housing. A place for such a kind of reflection could be the right to housing branch of CHO3 [narrative #7].
- **Concerns about the fear of "communitarianism".** There are concerns about the fear of "*communautarisme*" that prevents people from coming together based on shared cultural or ethnic backgrounds. "*Fear of communautarism in France makes it hard to gather around cultural or origin identity, which is then challenging for co-production initiatives*" [key informants].

¹⁸⁰ Translation: 'denial of democracy'.

¹⁸¹ Translation: 'At no point are we asked to go and ask people what they think about it in fact'.

¹⁸² Translation: "Mobilising does not mean 'doing in the place of' but ensuring that the demands are (also) made by "those primarily concerned".

- **Excessive duration of urban projects.** The lengthy duration of urban projects often obfuscates their immediate benefits, making it difficult to maintain community interest [key informants].
- The **high pressures from urban regeneration projects** make direct involvement in urban planning processes very challenging [key informants]
- **Difficulty of participation in some co-production instance.** If we take the example of the COMU, there are problems with local authorities' capacities to maintain the process over time and regulate speech. Also mentioned are the attempts among some other CSO participants to "pre-empt legitimate speech.
- **It is difficult to involve the participation of that part of Marseille's population, which is fluctuating** and uses the city as a place of transit. It is necessary to adapt the instruments of participation and involvement to the characteristics of the different groups that live and work in Marseille [narrative #9].
- **Difficulty collaborating with the academy:** *"It is not so easy for people to work together with researchers. We organise workshops where the public comes with researchers"* [key informants].

e. Engagement contributions to reduce inequalities

The interviewees for the narrative also describe cases in which the engagement contributes reducing inequalities.

- **Community-Led Infrastructure Initiatives.** Two examples.
 - **Neighbourhood library.** The neighbourhood library was established thanks to the action of Brouettes and other associations, of citizens (some of whom are among those interviewed for the narratives), and some professionals who contributed to simplify the process. The library also has a media library [narratives #5, #6].
 - **School building work at the Bernard Cadenat school.** The interviewee from narrative #7 described the collective mobilisation that led to the Bernard Cadenat school being listed as a priority and to the much-needed maintenance work being started and implemented. The current municipality is trying to continue in this direction: *'On a obtenu aussi l'inauguration d'une autre école après une longue bataille. Elle n'était pas parmi les écoles qui sont prioritaires pour l'année 2024. Là, on a appris avec le CHO3... Parce que j'ai ramené et mobilisé les parents d'élèves.[...] Mais aussi on a été directement vers le maire. Nous, les parents d'élèves on leur a montré des vraies photos [...] on a pris les photos des classes et de l'école et on a ramené et montré directement au maire. Et bah le maire, il s'est battu. Il a dit "c'est pas... C'est catastrophique, on ne m'a pas ramené le vrai état des lieux". Alors il a appelé directement le spécialiste de la mairie de... Centrale. Et là il a emmené l'école Bernard Cadenat parmi les prioritaires.*¹⁸³ [narrative #7].
- **Make visible the inequalities produced by institutions.** The interviewee of narrative #3 reports good practice in the animation and conduct of meetings with residents on housing that enable participants (all women) to decipher the mechanisms of inequality, and in particular, the institutional ones that prevent equality by not applying existing legislation or regulations.
- **Initiatives for access to quality food.** The interviewees for narratives #2 and #5 are involved in various activities aimed at accessing safe food. Solidarity *cantines* are already active. A system of

¹⁸³ Translation: 'We also managed to get another school inaugurated after a long battle. It wasn't one of the priority schools for 2024. That's where we learned from the CHO3... Because I brought back and mobilised the parents. [...]. But we also went directly to the mayor. We, the parents, showed them real photos [...] we took photos of the classrooms and the school and brought them back and showed them directly to the mayor. And well, the mayor he reacted strongly. He said "It's not... It's disastrous, I haven't been shown the real state of affairs". So he called the specialist of the municipality...Centrale. And that's when he brought the Bernard Cadenat school on board as a priority'.

food boxes is also being set up, allowing people to choose the food to be included in their box. These initiatives involved different and various associations (including Longo Mai, the Levat garden, etc.).

- **Campaign on the reduction of transport tariffs**, implemented by CHO3, that obtained such reduction [narratives #3 and #7].
- **Advocating for displaced families**. One example following the evictions after the building collapse is the *Assemblée des délogés*, which acts as a mediator to obtain basic rights for evacuated families who have no possibility of understanding the rules or being heard. “The formation of the *Assemblée* was also to help and react in such terrible conditions since the people that came to see us were essentially the most precarious (...). The 450 families that have been ‘followed’ had no concrete help from the municipal services. But the most stable socially came only once and then managed by themselves”. The *Assemblée des délogés* is an emanation of the ‘*Collectif du 05 novembre*’ that formed just after the housing collapse in November 2018. Another aspect is clearly palliative to government and municipalities deficits: ‘*all aspects of people’s daily life were taken into account ... to try avoiding the shortcomings of administration*. She also mentions that the follow-up of the Charter means that the inhabitants must be able (also with the assistance of lawyers and experts) to contest unjust decisions. They managed to provide a ‘cheque-service’ of 10 euros per day for people rehoused in hostels (who couldn’t and still can’t organise a proper life)” [narrative #8].

f. Elements of co-production

Elements¹⁸⁴ of co-production¹⁸⁵ are being experienced by the interviewees and are described in the narratives. The following elements can be mentioned:

- **Ability to produce and share knowledge** about one’s territory or community
- **Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies and proposals.**
- **Ability to negotiate** and to stay in relations with local authorities
- **Capacity to act** – the experience of co-production of the Fairville Marseille Lab.

**Ability to produce and share knowledge about
one’s own territory or community**

The interviews reveal a widespread ability to produce and share knowledge and information about the neighbourhood and the phenomena of inequality that characterise it. Some of the narratives also indicate important and necessary elements to strengthen and promote this ability to produce and share knowledge.

- **Need to ensure active listening to inhabitants**, including through the adoption of ‘spokespeople’ and ‘tête-à-tête’ sessions designed to encourage the most marginalised people to speak out [narrative #3]. This involves positioning the operator or volunteer next to the person to enhance the relationship and avoid asymmetrical and depersonalising interactions [narrative #4]. It is essential to maintain a relationship with the person who brought a problem to the forefront throughout the search for a solution, through dialogue and conversation that acknowledges the

¹⁸⁴ These elements were identified based on the reflection initiated within Fairville’s WP2 on co-production. These elements are also in line with the definition of “community-driven co-production” described in the Fairville D2.1 “Draft of a common glossary and common grid of analysis”, August 2024, which contains an analysis of specific terms and themes. “Coproduction” - by Giuseppe Faldi, Agnès Deboulet & Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, with Mathilde Jourdam-Boutin: see in particular page #15-16).

¹⁸⁵ As stated in the introduction of Part 2, the contents of this paragraph are also a contribution to the ongoing broad reflection carried out by the Fairville Labs and other WPs on co-production.

legitimacy of the other person and their demands. The relational dimension is crucial for the respondent of narrative #4, and in this context, it is also important to consider nonverbal communication.

- **need to legitimise the knowledge of the inhabitants.** *“It's so important to hear the knowledge of the inhabitants; this is a critical question of legitimacy. We need to make the vocabulary more explicit, understandable, and relevant. It's crucial to work on this. People are very efficient when they discuss their own experiences in everyday situations and contexts”* [key informants].
- **Importance of the collective dimension.** For narrative #7, the collective dimension is crucial for the demands to be heard and the rights of individuals to be protected, as evidenced by the campaigns and actions carried out by CHO3. A group is more likely to be heard than an individual.
- **Skills, experience, capacities, and time** are essential elements for participants in the exercise of co-production of knowledge and its sharing. In the experience of one interviewee on the *Assemblée des Délogés*, the following features are of paramount importance: the **technical** (including legal) **skills** of the participants, the availability of time, a **capacity for self-reflection** including political self-reflection on what is being done, the **previous experience of militancy** of some of the participants, the presence of some ‘precarious intellectuals’ for their ability to analyse and ‘synthesise’ the anger of people. On the issue of skills and capacities, the interviewee for narrative #2, underlined the need to take time for a **“self- reflection about one’s own capacities: to take the time to reflect** before committing herself fully to a project, so to be aware about what she can and cannot do for the community”.
- **Use of the ‘Atelier d’urbanisme’ to overcome the barriers of the technical language of urbanism and to promote co-production of knowledge with residents.** The *Atelier populaire d’urbanisme* (popular urban workshop) foresees small groups of residents taking time to explain terms and to gather input. The key informants are using it with the following objectives: *‘through these public workshops, we aim to transform the way dialogue is created between inhabitants and public authorities, fostering a bottom-up approach for real co-production and challenging the usual top-down methods’* [key informants].

Ability to have visions and to define challenges, objectives, strategies, and proposals

The interviewees for the narratives showed that they have the ability and skill to produce a vision about the future, to define goals and challenges. The visions proposed concern the following perspectives

- The importance of recognising the informal economy of the neighbourhood [narrative #4].
- The desire to increase the **competent participation of inhabitants**, to allow them to understand better and explain what they are doing and what they want [narrative #6].
- The need to have a **listening policy** by the local authorities and the desire that **inhabitants** will have **more weight within the elaboration of urban development policies**. *‘Je le dis très naïvement en fait mais c'est ça le vrai espoir, c'est que les habitants soient réellement entendus. C'est que leur voix compte réellement, qu'ils fassent vraiment levier, que les élus **changent leurs habitudes de politique descendante** et qu'ils soient plus dans l'écoute, la remontée euh... Voilà, qu'ils soient dans une réelle démocratie en fait¹⁸⁶* [narrative #5].
- **The desire to stay in the neighbourhood:** *“With or in spite of the project, she wants to stay in the neighbourhood, which represents an ‘esprit de solidarité’. ‘Rester à côté de notre point de repère,*

¹⁸⁶ Translation: ‘I'm being very naive in saying this, but that's the real hope, that local residents will really be heard. It's that their voice really counts, that they really act as a lever, that the elected representatives change their top-down policy habits and that they listen more, that they give feedback, and so on. That's it, that they are in fact part of a real democracy’.

*la 'Friche'... Le marché, les commerces à côté... Le centre-ville juste à pied... Les voisinages, etc.*¹⁸⁷” [narrative #7].

- The need to **protect democracy** in France to guarantee the freedom of expression of citizens and inhabitants [narrative #7].

Ability to negotiate and to stay in relations with local authorities

Some of those interviewed for the narratives have had or are still having experience of ongoing relations and negotiations with local authorities: an interviewee participated for a period of time in the work of the City Councils; another for his professional experience in community animation is in contact with local authorities; a third one had several meetings with local authorities about transport, the public garden, the urban transformation of Place Cadenat; a fourth one transitioned from the *Collectif 05 November* to the *Assemblée des Délogés* to monitor implementation of the *Charte de Relogement*, and a last one participates in CoMU activities. As mentioned earlier, one of the interviewees is now local councillor.

The skills and the social capital gained in these experiences represent a resource for the future. Three aspects were reported.

- **Need to consider power relations in the context of negotiation with local authorities.** For an interviewee to maximise participation in a negotiation with local authorities, it is important, before starting the engagement, to analyse the existing power relations: “Participating in a negotiating arena is useful, provided there is a balance of power.” He cites the example of CoMU or the campaigns run by the CHO3 to obtain legal rights (such as opening a bank account) or a discount on public transport [narrative #3].
- Concerning participation in the CoMU, it has underlined the need **to overcome distrust in collaboration with the local authorities**: “We should have met in smaller groups, we should have thematised the sub-groups ‘*put a bit of method back in to get out of the mistrust*” [narrative #9].
- Narrative #8, based on the experience of co-production, highlights the need to avoid a confrontational approach with local authorities, but to negotiate the maximum possible benefits for citizens. “Co-production is really seen as a non-agonistic position, it is really showing the need for negotiation. She thinks that this attitude is not always present in Marseille’s negotiations with the municipality. ‘*Le but que tu poursuis, il est plus important que t'affronter avec les personnes avec qui tu discutes si tu veux. Tu vois, pour moi, c'est ça la co-construction si tu veux.*’¹⁸⁸”.

Capacity to act - the experience of co-production of the Fairville Marseille BdM Lab

Finally, we report in this paragraph information and opinions of the interviewees regarding the Fairville Lab in Marseille and their possible involvement in the co-production exercise.

- For the interviewee of narrative #8, **co-production is a path to sustain pragmatic justice goals**.
- The interviewee for narrative #6 recalls the **criteria behind the choice to establish the Fairville Lab of Marseille in La Belle de Mai** rather than elsewhere. The decision was made to intervene in a

¹⁸⁷ Translation: ‘spirit of solidarity’. Staying close to our landmark, la “Friche”... The market, the shops next door... The city centre just a short walk away.... the Neighbourhoods, etc.

¹⁸⁸ Translation: ‘Your goal is more important than confronting the people you're talking to, if you like. You see, for me, that's what co-construction is all about

neighbourhood where residents could work and be directly involved, and where there were few intermediary associations.

- Interviewees for narratives #2 and #3 describe the **importance of networking**, to involve other groups and associations, and by **using personal relationships** to make the project known. This is particularly relevant for **increasing the diversity** of the network [narrative #3]. For the respondent of narrative #4, it is important that one has the ability to identify and recognise resources of the system present in the neighbourhood.

Below are the reported ideas and suggestions regarding the Fairville Lab Marseille BdM, as contained in the narratives and key informant interviews. Many of the interviewees for the narratives are familiar with Fairville Lab activities or have participated in some.

- The Fairville Lab is still in the construction phase, but the main objective is to "support (*accompagner*) residents". There is a **need to define objectives** "not just on paper" to obtain concrete results, because experience in the neighbourhood shows a lot of "project beginnings" but more rarely the "endings". The important thing is to **find a common vocabulary, to speak the same language** [narrative #2].
- Fairville enables **moving to a higher level of action** by connecting door-to-door organizing work on housing issues with broader urban development projects, creating links between housing problems and surrounding urban planning initiatives. *'On peut passer à un niveau un peu plus élevé. Donc du coup, faire ce travail de porte-à-porte sur la question d'organisation, sur le mal-logement, et avoir [...] un projet comme Fairville autour permet de faire ce lien en fait, sur la question du mal-logement et la question aussi du projet urbain qu'il y a autour'*¹⁸⁹ [narrative #3].
- **Fairville is widening the network of stakeholders** and CVPT action from the neighbourhood level to the higher and central levels that have responsibility for housing interventions [narrative #5].
- The importance of the Fairville Lab's **focus on PPA** is emphasised, which will initially intervene in some areas of the centre of Marseille and then expand to the rest. Reference is also made to the plan to renovate 118 schools in the city, including 17 this year and a few in the neighbourhood [narrative #5].
- The Fairville Lab will be very beneficial because, unlike campaigns, it **allows raising awareness of housing and substandard housing problems** among public authorities. It builds on existing networks and positive changes, such as the establishment of a Human Rights Ombudsman and links with critical media outlets like Mars News [narrative #6].
- The advantage seen in Fairville is that there is **no conflict of interest** with local funders. However, many associations are cautious because they fear losing funding (e.g., with the metropolitan city). The important thing is that the voices of the inhabitants can be heard through an association that tells the truth. **Fairville is a space where the neighbourhood's inhabitants can speak freely about their problems – it is not outsiders who come to discuss the neighbourhood** and its inhabitants [narrative #7].

From the interviewees emerged also two significant issues that are being debated:

- **Need of more internal coordination.** The interviewee of narrative #6 reported problems in coordination, that produce different point of views about the activities to be carried out by the Fairville Lab Marseille BdM. *'Une partie de l'équipe de CVPT n'était pas très favorable à la recherche-action, pour des questions de pouvoir interne dans l'association et d'incompréhensions. Mais les choses se sont clarifiées à mesure que la coordination a augmenté. Par ailleurs ont*

¹⁸⁹ Translation: 'You can take it to a slightly higher level. So doing this door-to-door work on the question of organisation, on poor housing, and having [...] a project like Fairville around enables us to make this link in fact, on the question of poor housing and also the question of the urban project that there is around'.

rencontré une difficulté à se coordonner en raison du nombre de campagnes lancées, notamment par CVPT¹⁹⁰ [narrative #6].

- **Issue of remuneration of residents.** The interviewee of narrative #2 notes that while residents are volunteers, the other members of Fairville are involved in the project as part of their paid work. So, the commitment is not the same, which is perceived as a form of inequality. She doesn't want to "do the work of others".

7.4. *How engagement faces inequalities – Marseille Matrix*

The matrix summarises how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified. The ordinate displays multiple types of bottom-up actions and initiatives. The x-axis presents the primary inequality problems and phenomena considered. The cells indicate potential intersections between the problem and the kind of engagement. For comparative purposes, the matrix structure remains consistent across all Fairville Labs analyses.

¹⁹⁰ Translation: 'Some of the CVPT team were not very keen on action research, because of internal power issues within the association and misunderstandings. But things became clearer as coordination increased. The number of campaigns launched, particularly by CVPT, also made coordination difficult'.

Table 8 – Matrix Engagement/Inequalities in Marseille

MATRIX OF INEQUALITIES/ ENGAGEMENT	Environmental problems	Economic and territorial inequalities	Social inequalities	Discrimination and segregation	Bad governance & lack of policies
Requests, protests and conflicts		X		X	X
Social movements					
Parallel planning					
Mapping exercise		X	X	X	
Self-managed initiatives		X	X		
Produces or implements goods and services		X			
Action to foster rights (rights to city, right to...)		X	X	X	
Knowledge co-production (fostering local knowledge)		X			
Actions of risk management (face or prevention)					
Creation of association					
Creation of support network (territorial coalition)		x	x		
Collaboration with local authorities (long-term and/or punctual one)		X	x		
Collaboration with universities, research centres		X	X		
Promoting and implementing new regulatory framework		X			
Agenda settings of strategies and actions to solve local problems					

8. Map of impacts of inequalities on engagement – West Attica

8.1. Introduction

The map of West Attica is based on the experiences and knowledge¹⁹¹ contained in 10 engagement narratives¹⁹² and an interview¹⁹³ with a key informant from the Fairville Lab of West Attica.

The narratives of engagement describe the experiences of 10 people, 5 women and 5 men, of different age groups (1, 25-20 years old, 2, 30-40 years old; 4 40-55 years old; 3, over 55 years old) who live or work in West Attica and have had or is continuing to have direct knowledge of the situation. Most of them hold intellectual jobs: 2 researchers, 3 teachers, an engineer, 2 cultural workers, an environmental inspector, and a waste management engineer. All of them are involved and mobilised in some ways to change the situation.

The information collected provides specific information on the existing situation in West Attica and in four important cities of the region: Elefsina, Aspropyrgos, Fyli, and Mandra (see table below).

Table 9 – Basic information for the four cities of West Attica

	<i>Tot. population</i> ¹⁹⁴	<i>Density per Km2</i>	<i>% of population over 65</i>
West Attica	3,814,065	1,001	17%
Elefsina	30,147	873,3	17%
Aspropyrgos	31,380	278,8	14%
Fyli	48,157	481,8	15%
Mandra	17,819	41,74	23%

West Attica is a disadvantaged area, characterised by low population density, important presence of Roma communities, limited access to social services, high levels of pollution due to the presence of industrial settlements, the largest landfill of Ano Liosia in Greece (in the municipality of Fyli), and a deteriorated environment, prone to fires and floods. The extensive Waste Management Facility in Fyli of 3,000 hectares includes a medical waste incinerator, a biogas plant, a recycling facility and – most notably – the landfills receiving 5,5 thousand tons of waste daily. As mentioned by some of the interviewees [narratives #6, #7, #8, and #9], the Region is also characterised by relatively low levels of democratic participation and social cohesion, with widespread phenomena of corruption [narrative #5], vote bargaining, and low public trust in the state. As pointed out by narrative #3, the problem of West Attica is systemic.

¹⁹¹ The excerpts from the narratives are between quotation marks. Direct quotations of the interviewees are in italics between a single quotation mark.

¹⁹² The interviews for the narratives have been collected by Artemis Koumparelou (Commonspace), Anastasia Christaki (Commonspace); Eirini Stathopoulou (internship at Commonspace).

¹⁹³ The key informant interviewed was Artemis Koumparelou (Commonspace). An excerpt of the interview with West Attica key informant is included in the annex of D5.1: Barriers and emerging pathways to scaling co-production: a perspective from the Fairville Labs. July 2024

¹⁹⁴ Census 2021 - https://www.citypopulation.de/en/greece/mun/admin/ATT_attik%C3%AD/

The Fairville Lab, coordinated and carried out by Commonsplace¹⁹⁵, chose to experiment with co-production to help mobilize citizens and groups to describe specific characteristics of phenomena of social and environmental inequalities affecting the Region and make proposals for solutions.

8.2. Mapping key inequality factors

Based on the inputs gathered mainly through narratives and an interview, but also documentation, the following main areas of inequalities and problems were identified: environmental degradation, economic and territorial inequalities, social inequalities, discrimination and stigma, and negative impacts produced by policies and poor governance.

The two most pressing problems in the Region are pollution and environmental degradation. The area is also at risk of fire and floods. These problems are strictly linked with (territorial, economic, and social) inequalities. West Attica is one of the most polluted areas of Greece and Europe in terms of air, soil, and water due to the presence of the **Fyli landfill** and the **refineries and cement factories** in Elefsina, Aspropyrgos, and Thriassio Plain. The inadequate management of hazardous waste produces light and noise pollution [narrative #4], strong smells, and the presence of “rats and mud” [narrative #3] with devastating effects on people’s health¹⁹⁶ (high rates of cancer among residents, lower life expectancy of vulnerable groups).

‘It’s shocking how the bells keep ringing for funerals in Ano Liosia. I wonder if there are as many births in the area as there are funerals’ [narrative #8].

‘Everybody gets affected. When you inhale poison, won’t you get affected?’ [narrative #9].

‘Although the residents of Aspropyrgos often belong to vulnerable groups, the workers, including myself and possibly over 20,000 others, experience the same daily exposure to pollutants. From summer fires and poor infrastructure to heavy vehicle emissions and the uncontrolled burning of waste, these factors have consequences for everyone’ [narrative #2]. As reported in narrative #2, traces of heavy metal have been found in her blood due to the contamination with polluted air and water.

Furthermore, the presence of industries **damages green areas and limits the possibility for people to enjoy them**: in Elefsina, the coastline is not accessible due to the presence of industrial activities; in Aspropyrgos a natural lake has been drained for the refineries; green areas are being destroyed. Nevertheless, two of the respondents reported that in recent years, the situation in Elefsina has had some small positive changes (for example, concerning access to the coastal area [narrative #10]).

¹⁹⁵ Commonsplace provides high quality services in the fields of Spatial Strategies, Architecture, Social Research, Urban and Environmental Design and Participatory Planning by creating/ implementing innovative tools and processes. It seeks to be a link between citizens, social institutions and public authorities, a hub for the exchange of knowledge, ideas and practices among citizens, experts and decision-makers. See also: <https://www.commonspace.gr/en>

¹⁹⁶ There are very few studies on the effects on health of the environmental pollution in the Region, between them we can highlight: Vladeni, Z., Douna, E., Koupidis, S., Savourdos, P., Makrynos, G., Vitale, E., & Dounias, G. (2025). Cardiovascular Risk Assessment Among Workers in the West Attica Landfill. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 21(37), 174. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2025.v21n37p174>; Makri, P., Kalivas, D., Bathrellos, G., & Skilodimou, H. (2006, September). Spatio-temporal analysis of groundwater pollution from BTEX in Thriassio Field, Attica, Greece. In 10th IAEG Congress “Engineering Geology of Tomorrow cities”. Nottingham, United Kingdom (pp. 6-10).; Kalivas, D. Stahopoulou, E., Hermides, D., Kontakiotis, G., Zarkogiannis, S., D., Skilodimou, H., Bathrellos, G., Antonarakou, A., Scoullou, M. (2020) The environmental impact of a complex hydrogeological system on hydrocarbon-pollutants’ natural attenuation; the case of the coastal aquifers in Eleusis, West Attica, Greece. In *Journal of Marine & Science Environment*, 8(12) - <https://doi.org/10.3390/jmse8121018>

According to the narratives, landfills and environmental pollution are at the root of the main forms of economic and territorial inequalities¹⁹⁷ experienced and perceived by the interviewees in their daily lives:

- High unemployment rate [narrative #1].
- High presence of informal work and diffusion of precarious work conditions [narrative #1].
- High diffusion of temporary contracts, producing dependence of the workers (vulnerable groups are often manipulated through temporary works) [narrative #7].
- Decline of livestock farming [narrative #6].
- Presence of infrastructure gaps and lack of basic services [narratives #2 and #3].
- Housing and territorial (and ethnic) segregation (for example, more in Aspropyrgos than in Elefsina)
- Inequality, housing and territorial segregation affecting Roma communities.

Concerning the last inequality factor, the Roma often live in segregated, specific (often informal) settlements. For example, in Aspropyrgos and Elefsina¹⁹⁸, they live in houses without access to basic services such as water, electricity, and sewers [narratives #1, and #3]. They are discriminated at work and have much higher unemployment rates than the rest of the population (e.g., in Sofo they have 50% while the rest of the population has 20%); a high percentage of them work in informal jobs; they are often discriminated in terms of access to public services, like school for their children.

One of the interviewees underlines that in Elefsina there are minor cases of ethnic segregation and many more cultural centres and archaeological attractiveness (in 2023, it was the Capital of Culture) [narrative #4]. The situation in Elefsina seems better with respect to other cities of the Region:

'I'm 27 years old and have lived here my whole life. Still, I wouldn't want to move to Athens. I don't think it would make a difference – the pollution and the atmosphere would be just as bad. Here, it's a quiet town, you have your friends, and everyone knows each other. There are good collaborations' [narrative #4].

Interviewees also describe some **social and cultural inequalities**.

- **Poor protection of health and rights of workers** in the waste management sector, which is characterised by a significant presence of vulnerable people or migrants from Russia or Albania: *'For example, in Aspropyrgos, the Roma population, in terms of health indicators, is one of the most disadvantaged groups. They have a much lower life expectancy. Even if these people leave Aspropyrgos, they continue to carry these inequalities and exclusions with them, which intensify as time passes'* [narrative #1].
- **Disparities and inadequateness of healthcare infrastructures.**
- **Educational and cultural barriers**¹⁹⁹, with limited access to schools, to cultural recreational activities; lack of facilities for arts and culture, of public spaces for entertainment, especially for

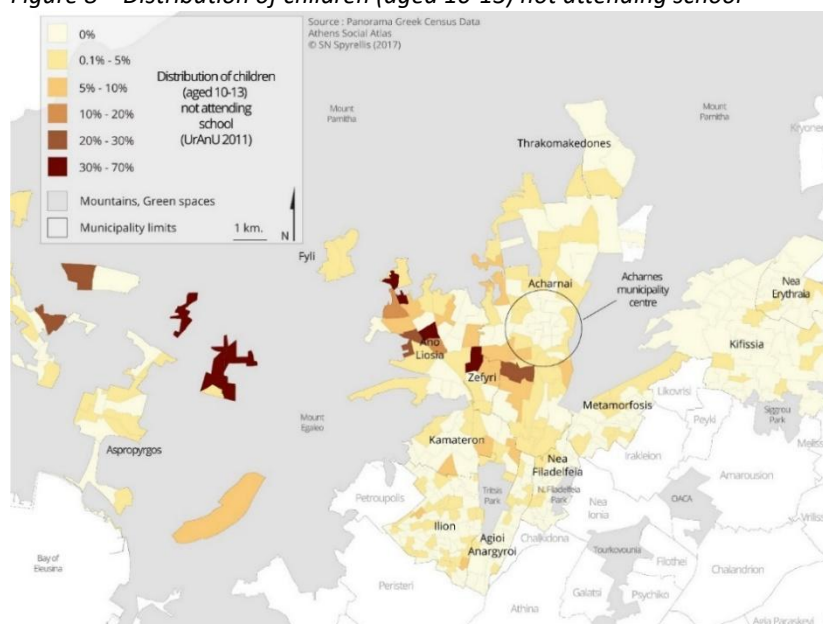
¹⁹⁷ We can define the situation in terms of spatial (in)justice (Soja E., (2009), "The city and spatial justice", *Justice Spatiale Spatial Justice*, 1.), in order to underline the specific deprivation produced by the economic and political organisation of space in our society, putting in evidence the political choice to locate a lot of industries, refineries and landfill concentrate in the same region. For the concept of spatial injustice, see the "D2.1 Draft of a common glossary and common grid of analysis", page #43.

¹⁹⁸ There are different settlements of Roma people: varying in type and living conditions in Aspropyrgos; and in Elefsina (in the Papakosta area). Some lack basic utilities such as water and electricity, while others are more integrated into the urban environment. There are also conflicts among specific ethnic communities and Roma people, for example, with Pontians and Arvanites. In some case, the Roma settlements are prone to be evicted. See the article published on the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice, titled: Roma living next to a landfill under constant threat of eviction in Aspropyrgos, Greece, available here: <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/roma-settlement-near-a-landfill-constantly-under-threat-of-eviction-and-evicted-to-make-way-for-the-2004-olympics-redevelopment-in-aspropyrgos-greece>

¹⁹⁹ As pointed out by Fricker (Fricker, M. (2013). Epistemic justice as a condition of political freedom?. *Synthese*, 190, 1317-1332), we can speak in terms of distributive epistemic injustice: "the unfair distribution of epistemic goods such as education or information – which is an important kind of social injustice in its own right, and may often be closely intertwined with the discriminatory kind".

youth. On the access to school of Roma children, see the following Figure²⁰⁰, about the percentage of children 10-13 years not going to school. Ano Liosia is among the cities with a much higher percentage.

Figure 8 – Distribution of children (aged 10-13) not attending school



Source: [Athens social Atlas](#)

- **High levels of crime** recorded, particularly in Aspropyrgos and Elefsina: theft, drug and arms trafficking, and smuggling [narrative #6 and #8].

Most respondents pointed out the presence of **reputational stereotypes and stigmatisation processes** related to Roma communities and the West Attica Region, and in particular in the Ano Liosia area, which hosts the landfills. *‘A child from the northern or wealthier suburbs is treated differently than a child from Western Attica’* [narrative #7].

For one of the interviewees, those who live or work in their daily lives in West Attica are always left behind and ultimately continue to experience the problems in the worst way. Reputational stereotypes can be considered obstacles to the activation and mobilisation of people and groups to change their living conditions. One respondent pointed out that the lack of capacity of local communities to cope with the problems and challenges facing them is due to the history of their settlement [narrative #6]. The landfills have spread a shadow over the lives of the people living nearby: the stigma of the landfill has become inextricably tied to the community’s identity [narrative #9]. The landfill, a “deep wound” of the area for decades and a symbol of its decline [narrative #9]. There is a depressing effect of living near the landfill; it is a symbol of resignation and despair. One of the interviewees believes that Ano Liosia is more than a place: it is a call to action; it embodies the potential for change despite the odds.

²⁰⁰ The entire article is available here: <https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/segregation-education-and-the-city/> : Vergou, P. (2017). Residential segregation, education and the city: educational strategies of middle-class groups in West Attica. Athens social atlas. <https://doi.org/10.17902/20971.74>. The author also mentioned the fact that parents avoid enrolling their children in school with Roma students or in new schools located near Roma settlements. On the issue of child wellbeing in Attica Region see also the article drafted by Eirini Leriou, published in Child Indicator Research in 2022 and titled: *“Understanding and measuring child well-being in the region of Attica, Greece: Round four”*. The article presents the results of application of a tool for measuring child well-being used in 25 schools and childcare centres of Attica during the year 2020-2021 (including West Attica also).

- “When I first visited the landfill, I cried. It seemed inconceivable that I brought a child into this area. I felt an immediate threat and fury. I thought, why me? Why do we accept this? Why have we given up?” [narrative #5].
- “The landfill is the number one issue because it damages the earth, and when the earth suffers, everything else is secondary” [narrative #5].
- “Just as there is individual depression, there is also collective depression in social movements” [narrative #6].
- “These are areas that were settled primarily after 1922 by refugee populations in a fragmented manner. They lack a unified understanding of their historical development, making it difficult to connect their history with the present and to address the problems” [narrative #6].
- There is a progression, but it feels fake when it’s hiding the landfill. For me, Ano Liosia is the landfill – the whole of Fyli municipality is the landfill” [narrative #9].
- The greatest **processes of social stigma and racism** (including violence and attacks) affect **Roma communities**. Processes of stigmatisation of Roma people concern, for example, as mentioned above, the access to school for children; labour, including hiring practices by employers. The Roma people are considered to have an invisible value: “the Roma are the last link in a production chain that starts with the industries and ends with scrap activity” [narrative #1]. Most of the Roma people work in scrap. There is an exploitation process of people with fewer educational opportunities by keeping the landfill in operation. The situation has improved in recent years, but the problems continue.
- Also, local municipalities are against Roma people: “One Roma person that I met commented that when his son died, the municipality refused to allow him to be buried in the municipal cemetery. No Roma can be buried there. So, they find other cemeteries” [narrative #1].

Inequality is also the outcome of failure/lack of implementation of public policies and/or poor land management and governance, or funding choices of authorities. Lack of funding, failure in implementing and enforcing of policies, measures and standards for the integration of Roma communities [narratives #1 and #5]; absence of a monitoring and tracking system of the waste chain, especially for the hazardous waste [narrative #2]; insufficient and inadequate legislation to combat pollution (e.g., fine dust) [narrative #2] producing the diffusion of illegal/improper waste management practices by companies (especially small and micro enterprises) to avoid controls [narrative #2]; use of environmental hazards for political leverage and diffusion of “professional complainants” of environmental laws for financial gain [narrative #3], corruption [narrative #5].

Seven of the respondents were very critical of the local government (especially to Fyli and Aspropyrgos municipalities), which they consider responsible for the present degraded situation of the Region, due to the spread of corruption [narrative #5], vote bargaining, lack of transparency in sharing report and data on health situation and pollution, mismanagement of the land [narrative #2] and its risks. The key informant highlighted the complex administrative interactions across local, regional, and national levels that contribute to the current situation. The criticisms expressed by some of the narratives, concern both municipalities, but sometimes also the regional and the national levels, for example regarding the lack of access to epidemiological studies, which are obscured from the public.

- “For many years, administrations have kept the landfill because it provides them with money for elections. Through the funds generated, they bind and manipulate people who otherwise might not easily find employment. These workers are employed at the landfill on five-month contracts with the municipality. They never secure permanent positions, and they end up depending on the municipality to constantly renew their contracts” [narrative #7].
- “On the other hand, the industries themselves have a greenwashing policy and try to tame the public through small grants to municipalities” [narrative #6].

- Each municipal administration, to get elected, buys votes. So, some voters give their votes and, in return, buy lawlessness” [narrative #8].
- “We are supposed to live in a well-ordered state. At the landfill, the constitution is being violated. The area and the mountain of Aigaleo are under the control of the Forestry service (Ministry of Environment and Energy). If you try to build something on a plot of land there, you are immediately reported. Yet, at the landfill, we have buildings with no permission” [narrative #8].
- “Studies were made, and we never saw them,” [...] “Attempts have been made to obtain these studies, but the municipality consistently denies their existence or offers flimsy excuses, like claiming they’ve been lost or misplaced” [narrative #9].
- Lack of prevention of fire in Ano Liosia: “When the local authorities say they’re fully prepared and the next day I hear there wasn’t even water in the tanks... It might not have saved the whole mountain – the fire is truly uncontrollable – but we could have saved something” [narrative #5].

Finally, one of the interviewees complained about the incorrect behaviour of the police forces in the fight against widespread crime: late interventions, no preventive action, and poor communication with the public [narrative #8].

8.3. Relations between inequalities, engagement and forms of co-production

The narratives and the interview with the key informant also provide information for mapping the specific impacts that the different forms of inequality have had or are having on both the interviewees themselves and the people of the territory.

a. Negative effects of inequalities on engagement

For the interviewees, the inequalities have negative effects on the will of people to engage themselves.

- General **tendency of resignation** [narrative #6], little interest or unwillingness to engage themselves [narrative #4], **lack of sense of ownership of the land** [narrative #6], taking for granted that the situation cannot be changed (lack of power to resist) [narrative #7], involving particularly the most vulnerable groups.
‘There is a sense that everything here is neglected, and no one is paying attention to us, which creates a sense of resignation among the people’ [narrative #5].
“There is a relationship of dependency between the industry, the municipality, and the residents” [narrative #6]
‘It’s like living with a partner who doesn’t suit you, but you see what’s happening in the world outside and say, never mind, I’ll stay for those small things that they offer me’ [narrative #6].
‘People from Ano Liosia are not getting mobilized. It’s not that they aren’t sensitive about the issues; they just don’t want to act’ [narrative #9].
- Lack of interest in getting involved by youth [narratives #6, and #9].
- Lack of mobilisation for a better health care system [narrative #8].
- Lack of labour rights advocacy in general in the West Attica Region, and, in particular, of Aspropyrgos with minimal union activities and organized groups compared to the Elefsina area [narrative #2]
- **Lack of awareness and knowledge** by the people of the problems affected their neighbourhoods [narrative 9]; presence of different views of the situation (for example, for both public administration and some citizens): the Fyli landfill is more an asset (from a labour standpoint or

the funds it brings to the municipality, even if those funds are not then used for the well-being of citizens) than a problem.

'They placed it here because they knew they were targeting people who lacked the power to resist. Whether due to a lack of education to understand the environmental, health and social harm caused by the landfill, or because they were willing to accept the job security and financial compensation it provided' [narrative #7].

- Mistrust towards the local government and, in general, towards the implementation of democratic practice [key informant].

'They have already been disappointed by how things are going with limits and opportunities. Furthermore, there is mistrust of local authorities toward political will. I would say that there is a lack of political will' [key informant].

b. Effects of inequalities in promoting the engagement of people

As was the case of 8 of the interviewees, the situation of inequalities they experienced or learned (by their studies or their work experiences) prompted them to mobilise and act and to produce an interpretation of the situation, make comparisons, and suggest proposals:

- 2 are involved in social movements (Greek Branch of Nature Friends International, Ecological and Cultural Association of Chaidari, citizens' assembly for hydrocarbon extraction and West Front movement)
- 2 have been involved in the creation of cultural and recreational spaces for dance, gymnastics, and countering stereotypes towards the Roma people
- 1 has founded an association for the safety of workers in the waste management sector
- 1 created an association that carries out cultural projects
- 7 of them are involved in raising awareness and education activities
- 1 of them mobilised against the employment preconisation policy of the municipality
- 1 is active in promoting new and best practices in waste management.

These are the associations created by some of the respondents:

- *Cultterra* cultural association in Elefsina, which launched an open call for inviting young people to engage in cultural and artistic activities, organised Pride events, and implements projects and community building initiatives
- *Proastio in Ano Liosia*, organising cultural, artistic activities and theatre
- *Gymnastic for Everyone*, a group providing dance and sports courses
- *NGO of Aspropyrgos* raising awareness activities on the health risks to waste workers, the promotion of new and alternative waste management practices, and the recognition of informal workers.

Beyond the experiences of the interviewees, the situation of inequality over time has led to the activation of social and environmental movements (for example, the historical environmental movement Western Front) and citizens' groups, many of which are still active in the region [narrative #9]. Also, the key informant in her interview stressed that some people, groups, and activists²⁰¹ in Fyli who have been active for a long time are willing to participate in the Fairville Lab.

²⁰¹ There are two local movements particularly engaged on environmental issue: West front movement and Ecoeleusis.

c. Engagement about inequalities producing limited impacts

Several of the interviewees noted that sometimes engagement and mobilisation fail to produce important positive changes (but only very slight ones) for different reasons:

- Fragmentation of groups and movements and their limited ability to work together [narratives #1, #5, and #6].
- Lack of young people participating in these social movements (most of the participants are over 60 years old) and lack of vision for the future [narrative #6].
- Lack of visibility of the protests and voices of associations and citizen groups against the landfills and the environmental pollution due to the policies of municipality local media [narrative #8].
- Presence of small initiatives promoted by citizen movements, but not able to influence the bigger political landscape [narrative #6].

The people interviewed mentioned other movements and organisations active in the area, of which they could not indicate whether and how they produced positive impacts, albeit limited:

- Labour unions involving workers of the industries, but with a relatively low environmental interest; a portion of them are supporting the expansion of the landfill [narrative #6].
- Citizens groups (including informal and spontaneous ones) and associations against landfill expansion, industrial pollution, and environmental degradation [narrative #1].
- Roma rights movements per se with some solidarity networks from Athens, but almost no support by non-Roma local population [narrative #1].
- The Communist Party of Greece, KKE, is active on environmental issues [narrative #4].

In the past, there was a great protest by residents to control the operations of the refineries in Aspropyrgos and Elefsina, but now there is no resistance, as these facilities are now considered essential to the area, providing job opportunities [narrative #6].

d. Engagement contributing to reduce inequality

Respondents also reported cases in which mobilization had produced impacts of reducing inequality:

- Roma movements (including also informal ones) obtained to increase the access to school for their children [narrative #1]
- In the settlement of Sofo, activists, together with the Roma residents, are claiming access to water supply. Other ongoing struggles are to increase access to basic services to Roma people of the settlements in Aspropyrgos [narrative #1]
- the skate park created in 2023 in Elefsina by in Cultterra, by a negotiation with the Municipality (now abandoned during the nighttime for lack of illumination) [narrative #4]
- In Elefsina, the social movement achieved the closure of the cement factory's production operation near the site where the Aeschylia Festival is held and the right to pass through the TITAN cement factory to access a public space [narrative #6].

The impact in the long term by the organisations founded by some of the respondents at the level of culture, arts and sports and problems perception and vision should also be considered here.

e. Elements of co-production

The interviews also provide information on the extent to which elements²⁰² of co-production²⁰³ are practiced.

- Ability and orientation to produce and share knowledge and to identify challenges and possible solutions.
- Implementation of raising awareness about the situation of West Attica and the need to change.
- Playing even if informally in some case, as a facilitator role concerning the community (for example, the Proastio center, which provides a cultural and creative space for imagining that a different future for Ano Liosia is possible): *‘Oh, Ano Liosia with the Roma and the landfill, we’re afraid, but when they come here [the Proastio centre], they see there is nothing different from other areas’* [narrative #5].

Forms of contacts, cooperation, negotiation, and coproduction with local authorities and/or university or research centres have not been mentioned by the 10 interviewees. The only example of coproduction, as seen in the initiation of negotiations with local authorities, is what Cultterra did for the realisation of the skate park in 2023. Only one interview mentions the Fairville project [narrative #9]. Practically all respondents made proposals and requests to local, regional and national government: more transparency and accountability [narrative #9]; access to studies (epidemiological and environmental ones) by the large public [narratives #3, and #9]: *“The people have a right to know what is happening in their own community”* [narrative #9]; more environmental research [narrative #3]; the request to municipalities and Region to listen the reasons of the protesters [narrative #7]; raising awareness campaign [narrative #9]; enhancing working conditions of workers [narrative #2]; change waste management and industrial practices [narratives #2, 10]; demand for a better health care services [narrative #8]; more inspections [narrative #6]; operational restrictions for Hellenic Petroleum in Aspropyrgos and Elefsina [narrative #6]; identification of a new location for the landfill (avoiding expanding it); relocation policies for industries [narrative #10]; creating common spaces and cultural hubs for people [narratives #4, and #7].

In this context, it should also consider the co-production process that the Fairville Lab has started since the end of 2022 to co-produce an Atlas of inequalities of West Attica. With this aim, the Fairville Lab initiated a process of engagement of groups, associations, and individuals interested in getting involved in this exercise. The Atlas is being developed through the organisation of 3 cycles of workshops in the three localities around 3 different major issues: 1. landfill in Fyli; 2. informal settlements, illegal/informal waste, oil refineries and air pollution in Aspropyrgos; 3. the sea front (industries) in Elefsina. The Fairville Lab is seeking to engage in dialogue various fragmented initiatives (movements and groups) of the area, give broader visibility to the local issues and promote co-production with the research community. In pursuing these objectives, the Fairville lab is also engaged in overcoming the demobilisation of people; the lack of involvement of youth and Roma communities (marginally involved also in environmental movements), starting with the schools and managing the interplay of different levels of responsibility (local, regional and national).

In conclusion, *‘we also find it important to find ways to manage and to provide information in the atlas that could be used for further research or for further policy suggestions’* [key informant].

²⁰² As stated in the introduction of Part 2, the contents of this paragraph are also a contribution to the ongoing broad reflection carried out by the Fairville Labs and other WPs on co-production.

²⁰³ These elements were identified based on the reflection initiated within Fairville’s WP2 on co-production. These elements are also in line with the definition of “community-driven co-production” described in the Fairville D2.1 “Draft of a common glossary and common grid of analysis”, August 2024, which contains an analysis of specific terms and themes. “Coproduction” - by Giuseppe Faldi, Agnès Deboulet & Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, with Mathilde Jourdam-Boutin: see in particular pages 15-16).

8.4. How engagement faces inequalities – West Attica Matrix

The matrix summarises how various forms of engagement face the different inequalities and problems identified. The ordinate displays various types of bottom-up actions and initiatives. The x-axis presents the primary inequality problems and phenomena considered. The cells indicate potential intersections between the problem and the type of engagement. For comparative purposes, the matrix structure remains consistent across all Fairville Labs analyses.

Table 10 – Matrix Engagement/Inequalities in West Attica

MATRIX OF INEQUALITIES/ ENGAGEMENT	Environmental problems and pollution	Economic and territorial inequalities	Social inequalities	Discrimination and segregation	Bad governance & lack of policies
Requests, protests and conflicts	X	X	X	X	X
Social movements	X				X
Parallel planning					
Mapping exercise					
Self-managed initiatives		X	X		
Produces or implements goods and services					
Action to foster rights (rights to city, right to...)	X		X	X	
Knowledge co-production (fostering local knowledge)	X	X	X	X	X
Actions of risk management (face or prevention)					
Creation of association	X		X	X	
Creation of support network (territorial coalition)					
Collaboration with local authorities (long-term and/or punctual one)					
Collaboration with universities, research centres					
Promoting and implementing new regulatory framework					
Agenda settings of strategies and actions to solve local problems					

9. Concluding remarks

Taken together, the results obtained from the analysis carried out in the seven contexts of the Fairville labs considered made it possible to map specific phenomena of the relationship between inequalities, engagement and the quality of democracy.

The model of the relationship between inequalities and engagement, as illustrated in the conceptual map, appears to demonstrate its validity when applied across different contexts. It effectively highlights aspects of these relationships that might have remained hidden if approached through other means. This validity has emerged consistently in all the contexts examined.

At the same time, the application of the model has allowed phenomena to emerge, both on a local and comparative level, that can enrich and complement it. By way of example, we can make a few observations.

- In all seven contexts examined, some (though not many) experiences emerge in which engagement has produced a positive impact in terms of reducing inequality on concrete aspects of urban living.
- What emerges is an attitude of citizens, through various forms of aggregation, to produce real knowledge of which they want to remain in some way holders and not being just providers of “raw” information: countermaps, countreplanning, environmental reports, etc. (as was observed at least for the Labs in London, Giza, Dakar, West Attica, Berlin, Marseille).
- Environmental inequalities tend to be perceived by all social strata, leading to the mobilisation, even (and especially) of relatively strong individuals with time and resources. However, it is the most vulnerable who suffer the greatest consequences (e.g., West Attica, Giza, Brussels).
- In cases of severe inequalities leading to engagement, there tends to be some intermediary body (NGOs, universities, international or governmental programmes) that offers support, capacity building, or even the opportunity to travel, confront other realities and get stimuli and suggestions to work in one’s local context.
- In cases where inequalities seem to discourage engagement, lack of time, lack of economic resources and also distrust of change and frustration tend to prevail as crucial factors. On the other hand, it seems that certain types of inequalities, such as those related to discrimination, may have greater impacts on the decision and willingness to engage.
- Although the gender dimension of the reported experiences needs to be further investigated, there certainly emerges a strong female subjectivity at various levels of engagement (from vision to information gathering to the promotion of collective action), even though some crucial aspects, such as interlocution with the authorities, are often still the prerogative of men.

Specific attention should be paid to the forms of co-production that emerged from the analysis of the biographies and other sources consulted (see also below the subject of engagement). Particularly relevant are the forms of co-production of knowledge, which are based on a clear recognition of the knowledge citizens possess. Moreover, in all the contexts taken into consideration, the obstacles to co-production are mentioned, and what was reported by the interviewees confirms what was found in the literature on this topic, especially on the complex relationship with local authorities, which is crucial. As emerges from the Berlin experience, among the factors to be considered is the country’s legal framework.

As regards the different modes of engagement with which the different forms of inequalities appear to be addressed, based on the examination of the forms presented for the seven contexts considered, some brief considerations can be made.

It must be said, in general, that all forms of inequalities and all forms of engagement that were present in the survey grid were mentioned in the biographies, albeit to varying degrees.

The most recurrent modes of engagement are:

- The activities of request, protest and conflict
- Knowledge co-production (by far the most cited by the biographical sources)
- The creation of support networks
- Actions to foster rights
- Collaboration with local authorities.

The most recurrent intersections between modes of engagement and inequalities are highlighted here.

- To tackle economic and territorial inequalities (which are the most cited), the knowledge co-production; the request, protest and conflict; the creation of support network; the collaboration with local authorities; the self-managed initiatives are the most relevant.
- Also for addressing social inequalities, the knowledge co-production, the creation of support networks, the collaboration with local authorities, and the actions to foster rights prevail.
- To cope with environmental problems and pollution, the range of most common solutions is broader and includes: knowledge co-production; the actions of risk management; the creation of support network; the creation of association; the collaboration with local authorities; the collaboration with universities and research centres; the request, protest and conflict.

Other forms of inequalities and modes of intervention recur, but less frequently.

In general, elements of co-production emerge strongly from the testimonies collected and are often intertwined with other, more traditional modes of collective action.

Of course, we have examined phenomena which, in general, have a recurring and cross-contextual nature, but which manifest themselves locally in highly differentiated ways. Precisely for this reason, the experiment of analysis carried out allowed us to examine specific cases, but with tools that allow for a certain degree of comparison, and as such can be used further, both within the Fairville project and in other situations.

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