

Book Review

Green New Deal in Urbanen Räumen Lebenswerte und umweltgerechte Stadtentwicklung: Kritische Positionen zum

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The book, titled *Liveable Values and Green City Development: A Critical Stance on the New Green Policy for Urban Space* (originally in German), is a collection of articles derived from the first interdisciplinary conference held in 2019 by the Institute for Liveable and Environmentally Just Urban Development (In-LUST). Established in 2015, In-LUST advocates the concept of “let the city become its own solution” (Toscano, 2025, S.14), and this volume serves as a critical examination of the “New Green Deal” (Toscano, 2025, S. 14, 20) for urban spaces. Targeted primarily at academic researchers, policymakers, and urban planning professionals, the book prioritises quality of life and social consensus, exploring how to handle publicly funded projects and implement comprehensive community concepts.

This academic focus is particularly timely given the current global context. As the United Nations document “Prospects 2018” highlights, cities account for 75% of global carbon dioxide emissions, consuming vast resources and causing severe environmental degradation. Consequently, urban sustainability has become a central pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). However, the current mainstream discourse, largely shaped by the Green New Deal since the 2010s, faces significant challenges. While advocating for structural economic transformation to address the climate crisis, related practices have often yielded idealised anti-urban approaches and damaged ecosystems. I identify a core contradiction in current planning: the tension between an approach that embeds green technology into market optimisation and one that questions the market to emphasise environmental justice and social equality.

It is within this context that the book aims to re-evaluate urban sustainability through practical experience. The purpose of the volume is to approach sustainability as a form of pedagogy or dialogue rather than a fixed definition, thereby introducing new practices that differ from the reliance on technological optimisation. For instance, it rigorously argues for shifting the concept of sustainability from a noun to an adjective to analyse

properties, and it elucidates the mechanisms of “ecological neo-colonialism” (Toscano, 2025, S. 23), offering novel insights that challenge technocratic solutions. Overall, the book advances a concept of sustainability that regards ecological justice and spatial justice as a unified whole. Despite being a German-language publication, these rigorously argued viewpoints hold significant value for New Zealand readers, as they provide a critical political-ecological perspective that helps local planners reflect on the limitations of mainstream industry discourse and seek more inclusive planning concepts.

This book is divided into three parts, each containing several technical articles on the given theme. The first part, “Interdisziplinarität,” problematises interdisciplinarity as an approach to analysing socio-spatial reality. The second part, “Partizipation,” advocates for participation as an invested, democratic, and sustainable form of citizenship. The third part, “Intersubjektivitäten und Gemeinschaften,” addresses issues of identity, various “sustainable cultures” (Toscano, 2025, S.23), and a culture of shared living. Accordingly, to facilitate a rigorous critical analysis, the articles are examined in this review under three thematic categories: Theoretical Reflections and Paradigm Critique, Practical Insights and Case Analyses, and Issues of Spatial Justice and Cultural Difference.

Theoretical Reflections and Paradigm Critique

In “Klimaungerechtigkeit: Nur wer die Armut bekämpft, kann die Erderhitzung stoppen,” Klaus Dörre elucidates a new form of ecological neo-colonialism, in which the increasingly impoverished world population is excluded from liveable living conditions due to extractivism and the uncontrolled growth of capital through privileged territories. In “Stadt, Mensch, Energie,” Carina Bhatti, Hannah Hintzen, and Stephanie Weis argue that cities, buildings, and energy are not merely elements or objectifiable processes involved in reality, but rather serve as perspectives for observing the world to enhance the picture of sustainable and just cities. Therefore, they propose an analysis of sustainability in which the noun form of the concept is replaced by the adjective form, which discusses the properties of things. In “Utopien der sozial-ökologischen Stadt,” Alexander Neupert-Doppler criticises the questioning of the concept of ‘utopia’ by theoretical and mass media discourse, and points out that they ignore the functional significance of utopia as a civilisational goal.

Practical Insights and Case Analyses

In “Nachhaltige Stadtverdichtung - von neuen Planungsgrundsätzen zur Umsetzung im Detail,” the MIMO team introduced their project, and, based on their practical experience, proposed a sustainable design for degrowth. In “Die Stadt gemeinsam gestalten: Integrierende Stadtentwicklung für eine lebenswerte Stadt,” Heike Herrmann proposes that the challenges faced by urban and spatial development in responding to the complexity of the interdependent relationships formed by various local and global impacts on the society in which they are embedded require a consultation process and the integration of cross-departmental and interdisciplinary perspectives, incorporating everyday knowledge and guiding a new type of governance and political relations. In “Das Quartier partizipativ gestalten: Innovative, experimentelle und kollaborative Stadtentwicklung für nachhaltige Mobilität und lebenswerte Räume,” Jan-Hendrik Kamlage, Ute Goerke, and Jana Wegener propose the significance of an open participation process as part of the mobility transition in addressing the challenges of adapting transportation and urban space in German cities. In “Akteursbeteiligung in Transformationsprozessen,” Alena Jahns, Marianna Rossi, and Jan Hildebrand demonstrate how the energy transition affects actors at all levels, with cities and towns playing a special role in this regard. In “New York - Inclusive urban development and innovation: Anne van Rießen im Dialog mit Oscar J. Romero Jr, CIO der NYC Civic Engagement Commission in New York,” Anne van Rießen and Oscar J. Romero discuss the experience of the “Inclusive Urban Development and Innovation” project in New York. The basic argument is that the smart

city agenda should reflect the needs of communities, rather than the hype surrounding specific technologies or market interests, and they emphasise the principle of environmental justice. In “Urban Planning and Sustainable Development: Towards the Ecological Transition of Cities. The Case Study of the City of Palma, Island of Mallorca,” Pedro Górgolas uses the City of Palma on the Island of Mallorca as an example to study the problems of Southern European cities and the predatory impact of tourism.

Issues of Spatial Justice and Cultural Difference.

In “Plattformurbanismus: Technokapitalistische Produktionen privater und öffentlicher Räume,” Sybille Bauriedl and Anke Strüver critically analyse platform urbanism by examining digital services in the mobility (car-sharing) and care sectors in European cities, revealing how the platform economy reproduces and reinforces gender, class, and racial inequalities in urban spaces within the framework of technological capitalism. In “Lob der Differenz zwischen Städten: Eigenlogische Ansichten,” Martina Löw advocates that urban development should focus on shaping the unique personalities and behaviours of cities. This implies that future urban planning should not be simply about technological upgrades, but should also pay attention to and respect the cultural differences between cities. In “Neue Räume für Kollektive,” María Cecilia Chiappini points out, based on considerations of freedom and spontaneous citizenship in space, that urban planning must accept wastelands and integrate temporality into spatiality from a spatial analysis perspective, in order to achieve the adaptive transformation of urban structures.

The reviewer believes that the biggest advantage of this book is its re-politicisation and re-socialisation of ecological sustainability issues, rejection of technocratic solutions, and placing social justice, democratic participation, and spatial criticism at the centre of the discussion. However, unlike the demands of the Green New Deal, it does not advocate for constructing a new grand narrative, but rather provides an "operational" political ecology perspective from certain specific planning systems, community participation processes, and daily micro practices. This book indeed inherits the concepts of "urban rights" and "just urban development," but it seeks a balance between "bottom-up participation" and "top-down public project funding," enriching readers' institutional imagination on how to achieve spatial justice. However, the advantages of this book go beyond that. It has a deep theoretical basis, such as the introduction section not only making factual appeals about climate change, but also discussing the definition and description of sustainability from the perspectives of language and cognition, which makes the relevant discussions not limited to specific technologies or policies. But at the same time, it also has a strong practical orientation. As mentioned earlier, it invites relevant practitioners to provide insights, thereby providing rich case studies and design experience.

Of course, this book also has some shortcomings. Firstly, its cases mainly focus on Germany, and the non-German cases discussed only come from places such as New York and Spain. Therefore, when it comes to the Global South, although there are some discussions, the lack of authors or empirical research from these regions makes the relevant arguments appear abstract and indirect (cf. Robinson, 2016; Watson, 2016). While the book primarily targets an academic and professional audience, this geographic limitation reduces its direct practical applicability to the Global South. The criticism of solutions to technological bureaucracy is precisely based on the premise that the cities where these cases are located already have relatively complete infrastructure. For the Global South, environmental crises in cities often stem from a lack of basic infrastructure and technological investment - a context where the book's critical stance on technology might need re-evaluation to suit different structural challenges (Herrmann, 2025). Secondly, the exploration of practical concepts sometimes carries a certain degree of speculation. For example, in articles about participatory planning, the description of the conceptual implementation process and methods lacks discussion on overcoming existing power structures (e.g. global capital, real estate lobbying groups, entrenched administrative inertia) to bring about change.

The third shortcoming lies in the interdisciplinary nature of this book, which extensively uses professional terminology from sociology, philosophy, and political science. While such terminology is appropriate for its target audience of researchers and professionals, it inevitably creates a barrier for non-academic readers, such as grassroots community workers and local politicians. Interestingly, they are indispensable actors in urban transformation (Arnstein, 1969), which raises the question of whether this book attempts to “re-politicise” ecological sustainability issues but excludes those grassroots actors who need to be empowered the most from the dialogue due to the knowledge barriers caused by its own expression.

However, these shortcomings are not to be overestimated. More importantly, even though this is a book written mainly in German, its universal critique of theory holds value for non-German-speaking countries, including New Zealand. Specifically, it offers several rigorously argued viewpoints that provide novel insights for local planners. First, the concept of ecological neo-colonialism, as meticulously argued by Klaus Dörre, offers a robust theoretical lens to examine environmental justice. For New Zealand, where planning issues are deeply intertwined with Indigenous rights and the Treaty of Waitangi (cf. Livesey, 2019; Ministry for the Environment, 2020), this concept serves as a critical warning: it urges planners to ensure that “green” development does not inadvertently perpetuate structural inequalities or exclude marginalised communities. Second, the methodological proposal to shift “sustainability” from a noun to an adjective challenges the static, box-ticking compliance often found in mainstream industry discourse. This linguistic turn is highly relevant to New Zealand’s current urban density debates, as it prioritises the qualitative properties of “liveability” and social inclusion over mere quantitative environmental metrics (Scerri & James, 2010).

For planners focused on sustainability, they not only need to deal with complex natural and legal environments, but also need to reflect on the limitations of mainstream industry discourse (Hollands, 2008). As a critical collection of essays, this book provides planners with ideas and practices that differ from mainstream technical discourse. It not only reveals the social justice obscured by the discourse of the 'Green New Deal,' but also proposes a possible alternative planning direction that emphasises social equity and community participation. Therefore, for practitioners who wish to understand the concept of sustainable transformation and seek more inclusive and transformative planning concepts, this book is still worth reading.

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AI Declaration

AI assistance (DeepSeek) was limited to proofreading for language accuracy; all ideas, arguments, and final content are the author's own.