

Hybrid governance practices in planning and measurement of Sustainable Development Goals. A comparative study of Poland and Sweden

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out an ambitious vision for creating healthier, fairer, and more prosperous societies. Cities play a key role in this vision, as they are central to economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. However, making cities more sustainable is a complex task that requires innovative approaches to planning, implementation, and monitoring. Cities must balance competing demands such as improving residents' quality of life, protecting the environment, and ensuring efficient use of resources. Achieving these goals involves engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including local governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations and citizens.

This research focuses on how cities in Poland and Sweden plan and measure their progress toward sustainability goals in the context of “hybrid governance” frameworks. Hybrid governance refers to the collaboration of public, private, and civil society actors in decision-making processes. It enables diverse stakeholders to combine their strengths, but it also introduces challenges, such as conflicting priorities or ambiguities in defining and measuring sustainability. By studying six cities—three in Poland and three in Sweden—this project will explore how hybrid governance influences sustainability planning and measurement. Poland and Sweden have been chosen because of their distinct institutional and political contexts, which provide a rich basis for comparison.

In this project we formulate 3 questions:

1. How do hybrid governance practices influence the planning and measurement of SDGs in Polish and Swedish cities?
2. How do cities address ambiguities in sustainability planning and measurement of SDGs in cities, and how can these ambiguities be effectively managed?
3. How can decision-makers develop horizontal, participatory models for co-planning and co-measuring sustainability SDGs?

The project will use a qualitative, multiple-case study approach, relying primary and secondary data. We plan to study six cities—three in Poland and three in Sweden. We will use in-depth interviews and observations to gather primary data from city managers and stakeholders involved in sustainability initiatives. The secondary data will include various reports and official city documents.

This study is expected to advance both theoretical and practical understanding of urban governance. Firstly, this project seeks to advance the existing perspectives on how cities plan, measure and monitor advancement towards achievement of sustainable development goals and the role hybrid governance in this process. Secondly, the project is intended to provide novel insights on the possible ambiguities in planning and measuring SDGs and the ways in which these ambiguities could be managed more effectively.

By focusing on Poland and Sweden, the research aims to uncover how different governance structures and socio-political contexts influence hybrid governance practices. This will not only provide practical recommendations for improving sustainability planning and monitoring in these two countries but also generate insights that can be adapted to other urban settings. Ultimately, the project seeks to advance the understanding of how cities can plan, measure, and monitor sustainable development goals in a way that aligns with vision for creating healthier, fairer, and more prosperous societies while considering the needs of city stakeholders.