Eco-Ethics of the Fjord City

A Comparative Analysis of Climate Activism and 'Green' Urbanism in Oslo

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ABSTRACT

This master's thesis compares bottom-up strategies of climate activism and top-down 'green' urban development strategies in Oslo, aiming to examine the city's environmental identity and reputation as a frontrunner for sustainability. It draws on theoretical work from both urban studies and eco-ethics, developing an interdisciplinary methodological framework to examine the terrain of environmental values. The research builds on the work of the Norwegian environmental movement, analyzing how ecological values and discursive strategies shape urban environmental ethics. It involves a comparative analysis of fifteen semi-structured interviews with climate activists and experts working within the areas of urban studies, city planning, and architecture. These interviews were conducted from 2022–2023, in addition to participant observation at demonstrations and protests led by climate activists in Oslo. In pursuing this interdisciplinary approach – bridging theory and practice – the thesis navigates between informed perspectives, analyzing how ecological values translate into the making of the built environment. It addresses how interpretations of urban sustainability are reshaping the ways in which city dwellers view collective identity and ethical responsibility in relation to the climate crisis and accelerating urbanization. This thesis contributes to the interdisciplinary body of literature that exists on this topic by addressing the intersection of climate change, activism, and urban identity, using Oslo as an exploratory case study. Research findings point to theoretical and practice-oriented tensions in Oslo's 'green city' discourse, stemming from contrasting ecological values and urban imaginaries. However, participatory approaches to planning and design provide opportunities to resolve this dissonance and foster productive collaboration between activists and practicing urbanists. In navigating between these perspectives, the thesis points towards the exploration of *eco-ethical urbanism* as an alternative development paradigm that reorients the concept of the 'urban' around principles of social, economic, and ecological justice. By establishing a bridge between these perspectives, new qualitative metrics can be established to address the climate crisis and promote alternative visions of sustainable urbanity.

Key Words: Activism, Architecture, Built Environment, Cities, Climate Change, Ecological Values, Environmental Ethics, Green Oslo, Identity, Justice, Landscapes, Urbanism, Urban Space

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1. INTRODUCTION:

'GREEN OSLO' IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

1.1 Oslo – Urban Space and Environmental Identity

Standing at the waterfront on Bygdøy peninsula, the urban landscape forms an arc around the Oslofjord. Modern architecture, old neighborhoods, and new developments along the fjord give shape to the compact capital. Surrounded by dense forests to the north, east, and west, the greenspace and bluespace are defining features of the surrounding landscape. In a world made increasingly by human design (Chan 2018), Oslo's natural environment is fundamental not only to its urban form, but also to city dwellers' sense of place, space, and identity. The restoration of the waterway, and the defense of the forest (or *marka*) line have established a precedent for environmental decision-making in urban planning. However, within the boundaries of the city, the foundations of just urban transitions and environmentally ethical futures remain fiercely debated.

While concern for *and* debate over environmental issues is widespread in Oslo (Røe 2016), the tension between its international reputation as a 'green' city and frequent demonstrations by climate activists reveal the contrasting visions of urban sustainability at a time of planetary crisis. Campaigning networks such as Greenpeace and grassroots movements including Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil (Stopp Oljeletinga) have mounted a strong opposition to fossil fuel dependence, extractivism, and socio-ecological injustice while putting forward demands for political action (Skauge & Haugestad 2020). Protests and demonstrations have challenged Norway's image as a frontrunner for sustainability, with strong representation of youth groups in the contemporary climate movement (ibid.). The tension between the city's reputation for 'green' urban practices (Røe 2016) and the presence of popular environmental movements engaged in direct action (Naturpress 2019) presents an opportunity for interdisciplinary research. By collaborating across generations, across social sectors, and across contested urban spaces, this thesis examines the tensions and dissonance that surround visions of just ecological futures.

This master's thesis investigates how climate activists, city planners, architects, and urbanists interpret the ethical challenges surrounding environmentally just planning processes in the built environment. The aim is to bring these issues out of the world of theory and abstraction and into the social and professional circles where new perspectives are taking shape. Oslo offers significant value as a case study on the ethical and ecological challenges of 'green' urban development (Røe 2016) – a city in which tensions emerge between political and economic stakeholders driving development policies on the one hand, and politically engaged citizens mobilizing public support around principles of social and environmental justice on the other.

Urbanization and accompanying global ecological crises have led an increasing number of researchers to address the social and ecological challenges related to the development of urban environmental ethics (Light 2001; Fox 2012; Chan 2018). The entanglement of cultural and place-based identities in the urban sphere raises conceptual and practical questions around the ethics of contemporary paradigms of urbanism at a time of planetary crisis. As the impacts of climate change point to the need for new cross-disciplinary research on *ethics in the built environment* (Fox 2000), this thesis examines how urban imaginaries are reshaping perspectives on the moral responsibility of cities and city dwellers at a time of accelerating change (Eriksen 2016).

As Norway's largest city, Oslo municipality has a population just over 700,000, while the greater urban area supports a population of over one million. The city's rapid development has been matched by increased public and political attention on sustainable urbanism, and the design of 'green' and 'resilient' cities (Andersen & Skrede 2017). In response to projected population growth, city planners have put forward municipal master plans centered on sustainable development (ibid.), reflecting the political and public agenda that has existed since the report *Our Common Future* was published in 1987. Oslo's urban development is, of course, coupled with global trends in urbanization. Over 50% of the global population currently lives in cities, and urban populations are projected to increase to 68% by the year 2050 (UN 2018). Increased population growth has generated a discussion around urban densification and centralization (Andersson et al., 2017), and policymakers and planners in Oslo have put forward positive visions of an ecologically balanced and sustainable city (Andersen & Skrede 2015).

The conditions of accelerating urbanization and global environmental crisis have established moral mandate to address the climate (and Nature) crisis within the urban sphere. How city dwellers and city developers conceptualize eco-ethical responsibility will impact the wellbeing of humans and nonhuman nature in the *built environment*.[1] This has led an increasing number of scholars to cross disciplinary boundaries and consider the social and ecological foundations of urbanism, including the use of eco-ethical principles to establish environmentally just urban planning processes, as well as the involvement of the public in through forms of citizen engagement. There has been increasing academic and public interest in "examining and explicating the ethical dimensions of climate change from both normative and positive (descriptive) perspectives" (Grasso & Markowitz 2015). Given the trends in urban population growth and accelerating planetary change, new interdisciplinary research is needed on the ethics of ecological urbanism in the twenty-first century. By reorienting concepts of the 'urban' around climate ethics and engaging directly with social movements seeking social and environmental justice, researchers can develop a more nuanced understanding of how engaged citizens envision 'green' urban environments.

Environmental historian Peder Anker (2020) argues that in the current political climate, "activists reminiscent of the scholar-activists… make up the small Green Party in Norway. In Oslo they are in a power-broker position and have managed to enforce an environmental regime that is not symbolic, leading up to the city being awarded the European Green Capital of 2019." Despite this international recognition, climate activists and organizers (that arguably operate at the 'periphery' of public discourse) have questioned the city's ostensible green identity. However, the diversity of thought that exists among the groups pursuing direct action (O'Brien et al., 2018; de Moor et al., 2021) underscores the internal divisions over the path towards ethical urban futures. Considering the different intellectual factions that reinforce or challenge Oslo's ecological identity, a detailed portrait of how coalition building and political mobilization takes place among activists can provide essential contrast to the organizing approach of urbanists and developers in Oslo.

[1] The term 'built environment' is generally defined by its "contrast to the 'un-built' environment, or the ecosphere" (Moffatt & Kohler 2008, p. 249). Its usage in common parlance can reflect a discursive or conceptual division between 'nature' and 'society' that separates manmade structures and activities from nonhuman nature. In the context of this research, it be defined as a socio-ecological system, building on the work of Sebastian Moffatt & Niklaus Kohler. This ecological perspective emphasizes the complex relations between human activities, infrastructures, and the ecosphere.

Within the domain of Norwegian green power politics, the foundations of just urban practices and their relationship to environmental identity remain undertheorized and ambiguous at times. In Oslo, the municipality has engaged in a decades-long regeneration project seeking to build a waterfront that meets the criteria of a *just city* (Andersen & Røe 2016, p. 305; Fainstein 2010). However, Developments such as Tjuvholmen and Barcode (chapter 4.2) highlight the tensions that emerge from this ambiguity surrounding 'green' urban outcomes. This ambiguity stems from the diversity of thought surrounding urban imaginaries and alternative futures.

Given the political and material support behind sustainable or 'green' urban development strategies in Oslo (Andersen & Røe 2016), contemporary discourses around the design of ecologically just cities offer an opportunity to examine where current visions diverge and converge. In examining these disparate understandings of urban sustainability, the contemporary climate movement and pioneering practices of urbanists are brought to the foreground.

The principles of environmental ethics taking shape among civically engaged groups in Oslo provide insight into the bridge between theory and action as city dwellers face the loss of nature in the climate crisis. However, these dynamics take shape in different contexts among activists and urbanists – two groups that present distinct normative assumptions and paradigmatic frameworks. The terms are used strategically to differentiate citizens engaging in innovative environmental practices and envisioning ecological futures for Oslo. By examining these perspectives, the thesis offers an entry point to navigate the tension produced by contrasting visions of transformative action in the urban sphere. The modes of engagement and tactics of resistance within the Oslo climate movement provide insight into how collective identity and urban eco-ethics become enmeshed through justice-oriented activism. Additionally, the discourse surrounding ecological urbanism among city planners, architects, and urban designers reveals how actors working within the development paradigm pursue alternate paths towards ethical relations in the built environment. These contrasting (and occasionally mutually reinforcing) visions of sustainable urbanity provide a pathway to investigate co-creative forms of ecological urbanism (Mostafavi & Doherty 2010) as an urban climate solution.

1.2 Thesis Structure and Research Ethics

The following research questions examine the formation of ethical perspectives and the pursuit of environmentally just practices among activists and urbanists, using Oslo as an exploratory case study.[2] These questions respond to the need for more interdisciplinary research on the state of 'green' development strategies in Oslo, the ethics of ecological urbanism, and the role of social movements in articulating just transitions for the built environment:

- What does a comparative analysis of qualitative interviews with climate activists and urbanists reveal about diverging views on Oslo's environmental identity?
    - How do climate activists and urbanists interpret the city's 'green' identity and reputation as a frontrunner for sustainable urban development?
    - How do climate activists and urbanists perceive urban beauty and the connection between the aesthetic and ethical aspects of built environments?

Given that the subjects of urban environmental ethics and ecological urbanism invite a broad range of questions, the thesis narrows the scope of inquiry by focusing on the particular practices of local activists and urban practitioners. This study does not offer a comprehensive description of the diverse scholarly perspectives that exist around environmental ethics in cities or produce universal conclusions about how activists and urbanists in Oslo are contending with the issues of moral responsibility in the climate crisis. Rather, it examines how climate organizers and urbanists operate in dynamic social spaces where ecological principles, civic values, and collective identities enter the *just city* dialogue (Fainstein 2010). These spaces highlight the intellectual and political schisms that surround 'green' strategies in the built environment and provide insight into the impact that environmental values have on individuals envisioning ecologically just urban futures. Addressing these divisions within the urban sphere requires an interdisciplinary framework that enable a more nuanced analysis of the terrain of environmental values.

[2] As an exploratory case study, it produces a thorough account of interpersonal perspectives with additional methods of data collection. The analysis of semi-structured, qualitative interviews will be combined with aesthetic analysis to examine the qualities 'green' urban environmental that evoke aesthetic responses. This mixed-methods approach allows for the exploration of new theoretical questions and provides the basis for further research.

The thesis begins by framing the state of the planetary crisis and addressing current strategies surrounding green urban development, highlighting Oslo's relationship to the challenge of ethical planning and designing in response to climate change. This introduction responds to the growing interest in urban environmental ethics (Chan 2018; Aceves-Avila 2020) and provides an overview of the thesis structure, overarching aims, and central objectives.

Chapter 2 emphasizes the relevance of eco-ethical frameworks to the challenges of 'green' urbanism at a time of global ecological crisis, bringing theoretical discussions out of the realm of abstraction and into contested urban spaces. It builds on the response to the "urban blind spot in environmental ethics" as described by Andrew Light (2001) and considers how participatory models and pioneering urban practices might provide a path towards just societal transitions.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and framework of analysis, pointing to the use of comparative practices as a tool for urban-environmental research. This section examines how networks of activists and urbanists provide insight into how the climate crisis has shaped the contested urban practices and power politics that exist within Oslo. In doing so, it links social movement research to the question of politicized environmental identity in the built environment.

Chapter 4 examines the tensions that surround Oslo's environmental identity and contested interpretations of urban sustainability. By examining the contestation of ecological identity in 'Green Oslo', it takes an interdisciplinary approach necessary to develop a more 'global' and environmentally sensible approach to comparative urban studies (Robinson 2016, 2022).

Chapter 5 puts forward a comparative analysis of twenty qualitative interviews with climate activists and urbanists, examining the nexus of ethics, aesthetics, and urban practices in Oslo. The chapter outlines key findings and examines the image politics of urban environmental practices.

Chapter 6 concludes by answering the central research questions and discussing pathways to address climate change in the urban sphere through the pursuit of participatory strategies of urban planning. It considers how activists and urbanists might engage in a more sustained dialogue and promote emancipatory frameworks of environmental ethics at a time of accelerating change.

The methodology for this thesis centers on an interdisciplinary, comparative approach to examine contrasting views on the research topic, combining comparative tactics and aesthetic analysis. The justification of the methodological approach draws from Nan Ellin's (2012, p. 248) research on co-creative planning processes, "inviting a wide range of professionals and stakeholders to participate, welcoming them when they do, and partnering to bring ideas to life." Developing detailed descriptions of how climate organizers and urban practitioners conceptualize the 'green city' is essential in charting the landscape of environmental thought in Oslo. Therefore, this thesis investigates these socio-ecological dynamics through semi-structed qualitative interviews with activists and urbanists. These interviews were combined with observations at local demonstrations and proposed 'green' development projects – spaces that can reinforce or challenge the city's green identity. Considering that the development of eco-ethics in Oslo's built environment raises issues of urban form (Næss 2014), this thesis combines comparative tactics (Robinson 2016) with aesthetic analysis and theory-driven observation to understand how current strategies relate to the phenomenology of green architecture and design.

Interviews were conducted from 2022-2023 as part of an ongoing dialogue with ten climate organizers and five urbanists from the disciplines of architecture, urban studies, and city planning. Interviews were conducted in person with occasional online communication when necessary. Developing this network of contacts was made possible by collaborative work with organizers and researchers promoting eco-ethical values in the urban sphere. Activists were contacted through organizing events and observation at demonstrations, all of whom were associated with Extinction Rebellion in Norway. Organizers affiliated with XR (and some connected to other local demonstrations such as the #InSilenceforClimate campaign) were contacted for semi-structured interviews. Additionally, five individuals falling under the umbrella term of 'urbanist' were interviewed to gain insight into green development strategies, including two researchers within the area of urban studies, two urban planners, and one master's student of landscape design. These interviews provided practice-oriented perspectives relevant to the research questions. The information provided by the respondents forms the basis of the comparative analysis, which is outlined in Chapter 3 and developed in Chapter 5.

The selection of research subjects raises the issue of establishing a representative and effective sample to aid in the analysis of qualitative data. One key consideration is the selection of interview subjects that can offer substantive insights, while ensuring that diverse intellectual perspectives are represented in the analysis. Maintaining the anonymity of activists interviewed was necessary, as some described engaging in civil disobedience and various tactics of resistance. Furthermore, providing a platform for anonymous dialogue frees individuals working within urban professions to express critiques of current development policies more openly. To maintain clear ethical standards, those who participated in semi-structured interviews have been directly informed about the research process, how their identities have been protected, and how the data has been used to further the aims and objectives of the research project.

Finally, this thesis project grounds itself in the tradition of naturalistic inquiry, a non-positivist approach to research that recognizes the subjective experiences of research subjects in a complex social world (Beuving & De Vries 2015). This approach requires a sustained effort to understand one's participation in society and adopt a reflexive outlook that may be described as "the capacity to think about one's own thinking" – an 'iterative' research process, rather than a linear one (ibid, p. 18). An interpretivist framework allows for the analysis of human behavior using a qualitative approach while interpreting the social realities that shape the actions and perspectives of research subjects (ibid.). The tradition of naturalistic inquiry and interpretivist mode of analysis provides the framework for developing a contextual understanding of urban phenomenon.

This methodological framework involves self-reflection and a critical examination of the researcher's role and relationship to the text. This approach is essential, as some urbanists whose research is relied upon in the coming chapters were also interviewed to support the co-production of knowledge. In pursuing this co-creative approach, the thesis aims to work within Ellin's (2012, p. 248) framework to achieve *good urbanism*, "beginning with an idea hatched by one or more people who quickly include others to refine and realize the vision so that decision-makers, urban design professionals, and communities are working together toward mutually-beneficial ends." Considering the severity of the climate crisis and its implications for both cities and city dwellers, working towards these mutually beneficial ends is essential to achieve just urban futures.

1.3 The Ethics of Ecological Urbanism: State of the Art

The theoretical foundation of the thesis draws extensively on contemporary work that has been done within the field of urban environmental ethics, as well as the empirical research conducted around social movements and practice-oriented approaches to ecological urbanism. The following section addresses the state of contemporary scholarship and current tensions surrounding the ethics of ecological urbanism, creating a bridge between urban theory and urban practice.

As a highly developed city that has pursued a politico-economic program centered on sustainable development (Røe 2016), Oslo is a fitting research site for cross-disciplinary research on the ethics of urban transitions and place-identity in the built environment. Writing for *Biophilic Cities*, Dr. Timothy Beatley (2012) argues that "Oslo has much to teach other cities. Most important is the lesson that it is possible ([and] indeed essential) to work on the basic elements of sustainable urban form… at the same time that investments are made in restoring and growing the wilder and more natural forms of infrastructure in a city." Beatley invites readers to consider how place-based environmental awareness have shaped the city's "ambitious planning vision and program for the future" (ibid.). This approach opens the door to an in-depth investigation of how urbanists and climate activists arrive at distinct interpretations of ecologically just urban transitions in city that arguably bears a high degree of moral responsibility over the climate crisis. It also brings to light the striking contrast between Oslo's international reputation for sustainable urban planning and the frequency of public demonstrations for environmental justice. This research therefore contributes to the body of contemporary research on urban ecological resistance to the climate catastrophe and the path towards socially and environmentally just processes of urban planning.

By recognizing the state of planetary crisis and the need for ecologically just urban transitions, this research project brings the Næssian tradition of environmental thought into the built environment. It builds on the tradition of eco-humanist scholarship that has been fostered at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) and recognizes the role that SUM scholars such as Arne Næss have played in promoting eco-philosophical pluralism and advocating for systemic change.

The aims of this research inquiry are aligned with the goals of the Arne Næss programme at SUM,[3] as it brings research on urban environmentalism and sustainable modernity together with theoretical questions related to eco-ethical responsibility at a time of accelerating planetary change.

This thesis takes a targeted approach by examining how exactly Green Oslo conceptualized by politically engaged citizens and professional urbanists envisioning a sustainable transition. It explores how climate activists and professionals working within the area of urban development interpret the ethical challenges associated with ecological transitions in the built environment. The analysis of *ecological urbanism* expands on the work of Mohsen Mostafavi and Gareth Doherty (2010), emphasizing alternative conceptions of urban form and planning. Mostafavi and Doherty envision an ecological approach to design thinking as a remedial device for contemporary cities, with forms of urbanism that are not in contradiction with their environment (ibid.). Working within this conceptual framework, it is important to recognize that its ethical foundations remain undertheorized, as it has largely been approached from a practice (or design) oriented standpoint. However, by establishing a dialogue between practicing urbanists and popular movements advocating for principles of climate justice, researchers may outline a path towards genuine social and ecological resilience in the built environment.

The use of 'practices' in this context includes the processes associated with architecture, design, and development, as well as the socio-political practices and tactics of resistance used by climate activists and organizers. Contemporary academic research also points to the existence of *pioneering urban practices* that "open the way to creative, subversive, empowerment-oriented forms of spatial transformation" (Pittaluga 2020). The analysis in Chapter 4 centers on the link between urban environmental practices and the city's environmental identity, navigating activist and urbanist perspectives. Increased academic attention on the contestation of power in 'green' urban spaces may ultimately aid in the development of normative recommendations for new research surrounding the social and civic dimensions of eco-ethics in the built environment.

[3] The Arne Næss Programme on Global Justice and the Environment "[brings] together young researchers, leading international thinkers, and practitioners from diverse fields" to address socio-environmental challenges (SUM 2023).

The use of the term ‘practice’ is also influenced by Sherry Ortner’s work (1999, 2006), defined as routinized behavior consisting of several interconnected elements, including forms of bodily activity, mental activity, background knowledge, know-how, states of emotion, and motivational knowledge. Ortner’s research (2006) has been essential in framing how social practices occur along a scale that ranges from routinized behavior and everyday habits to intended actions, such as organized political activity. This thesis focuses on the latter category by examining how the intended action of shaping in sustainable development practices or participating in climate activism shapes perspectives on the pursuit of ethical urban responses to climate change. It also considers how these eco-ethical perspectives are ‘enmeshed’ in everyday activity and routinized behavior. By recognizing that decision-making in the urban sphere is fundamentally inseparable from the web of life (Steiner 2022, p. 108), climate activists and urbanists can be viewed as agents whose choices impact the landscape of urban environmental practices.

With growing awareness of the climate crisis and the challenges it poses to cities, environmental activists have been on the frontlines of the ‘justice turn’ that has shaped contemporary political and environmental discourses (Biermann & Kalfagianni 2020). However, despite the increase in justice-oriented activism and public support for climate action, articulating the ethics of ecological urbanism remains a challenge for activists and urban practitioners alike. Urbanists, city planners, and architects on the other hand, have been on the frontlines of an ‘ecological turn’ in development practices (UNEP 2022). While this has resulted in a variety of proposals for ‘green’ approaches to architecture, design, and planning, the eco-ethical foundations of sustainable city building practices has received less attention at the theoretical level.

Existing research has also addressed the perception of environmental ethics among urban planners and policy makers in diverse cultural contexts (Gunn 1998; Pineda Pinto 2020), as well as the different interpretation of moral principles in planning processes (Wachs 2017). Conflicting visions of designing with nature – and with people – create an opportunity for new research to examine the environmental, ethical, and aesthetic qualities of ‘green’ urban environments.

1.4 Building a Livable Future in Urban Spaces

It remains to be seen how future generations will view their obligations to Nature or our treatment of the nonhuman world in the present. However, the spaces in which notions of eco-ethical responsibility are transformed into direct action provide us with a window into the challenges of urban sustainability at a time of accelerating change (Eriksen 2016). City planners, architects, and urban designers in Oslo have been active in the discourse surrounding livable and sustainable cities (Hofstad & Torfing 2017), while calling for increased engagement with the public (OAT 2022). Following the shift in scholarship towards issues of identity, urban geographies, and applied ethics (Fox 2012; Chan 2018), this thesis brings the discourse surrounding Oslo's green identity together with alternative perspective from climate activists and organizers.

The thesis brings the concept of ecological urbanism together with contemporary research on social movements and collective identity in the built environment, bringing readers attention to the power politics and social dynamics that shape the city's contested ecological identity. This intellectual effort is grounded by the understanding that "[c]ities should engage with local researchers to co-produce a range of scholarship and reflective conversations about resilient ethical city models and future implications for wider academic, policy and public discussion" (Barrett et al. 2016, p. 11). City planners can practice deliberative urban governance and promote transparency, honesty, and accountability (ibid.), providing a basis for cooperative action to address the climate crisis. By connecting frameworks of eco-ethical urbanism to the call for civic engagement in urban governance, researchers can aid in the development of conceptually rigorous approaches to socially and environmentally just urban transitions.

This 'civic shift' in planning discourses requires more careful analysis of the architecture of socially inclusive and ecologically just urban forms. Bridging discourse around ecological urbanism and principles of action put forward by environmental movements requires new avenues to move beyond ambivalence and rhetoric (Pløger 2004) in planning processes. In this sense, state of the art approaches to planning and design can be brought to street level – into the urban spaces where the social and environmental aspects of just urban transitions are brought to light.

One of the central challenges of this thesis is navigating the tension between localism (or place-based environmental awareness) and global perspectives on climate change. While a global or planetary perspective on environmental issues is needed to recognize the vast temporal and spatial scales that are inherent to the climate crisis, examining the ethics of urban environmental practices at a local level can provide researchers with greater clarity on the social, political, and material barriers to just urban transitions. Perspectives on climate change outside of cities in the Global North warrant greater attention in academia and among the public. However, countries whose profits derive from fossil fuels and extractivism arguably bear a greater degree of moral responsibility over the planetary ecological crisis. Therefore, there is a need for new research that sidesteps the North-South, human-nonhuman, and urban-rural divides, and approaches contemporary challenges with less dichotomous thinking.

This intellectual approach addresses the "urban blind spot" (Light 2001) and moves away from the traditional Nature/Society (and Nature/City) divide that has constrained western eco-ethical research. The reorientation of environmental ethics around the concept of 'the urban' may help readers recognize why the philosophy of human-nonhuman relations is relevant at a time of ecological breakdown. Rather than viewing the planetary crisis as a peripheral issue, this thesis places climate change and urban transitions at the center of ethical debate. Following this line of reasoning, the thesis aims to bridge the divide between aesthetic preferences and ethical principles in the discourse surrounding Oslo's environmental identity.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Biospheric Values and the Ecological Crisis

With growing awareness of the cascading impacts of climate change, both city planners and city dwellers now face the *perfect moral storm.* As a truly global phenomenon, climate change has led to the convergence of socio-ecological, intergenerational, and theoretical problems (Gardiner 2006). Scholars such as Saskia Sassen (2009, p. 2) have pointed to cities as a central stage in which humanity's environmental presence is felt: "It is through cities and vast urban agglomerations that mankind is increasingly present in the planet and through which it mediates its relationship to the various stocks and flows of environmental capital." Empirical research on the environmental impact of development activities has improved our understanding of the vulnerability of urban areas, while normative argumentation has addressed the moral responsibility of cities. Nevertheless, information about urban vulnerability and environmental responsibility has not yet generated the policies and practices needed to address the untenable state of socio-ecological relations. The planetary-scale environmental impacts of development activities are directly related to the domain of ethics (Jonas 1979), given the moral imperative of reducing harm. Humanity now faces major ethical dilemmas surrounding emissions and resource use in cities, the Rights of Nature, and the responsibility to future generations in the built environment.

The vast temporal and spatial scales of the climate crisis give rise to an ethical collective action problem – one which philosopher Stephen Gardiner (2011, p. 313) identifies as more severe than the traditional *tragedy of the commons*. Given that current theoretical work is arguably underdeveloped within the area of *intergenerational environmental ethics* (ibid., p. 3), examining the moral storm faced by cities from an eco-philosophical perspective remains challenging. This stems, in part, from the broader challenge of interdisciplinarity: the merging of different domains with distinct epistemologies, theoretical foundations, and intellectual traditions. Research that aims to contribute to our understanding of the urban response to climate change and address the consequences of development can navigate this disciplinary and epistemological divide with a conceptually rigorous approach. By producing new qualitative studies that address the ethical and

aesthetic foundations of green transitions, it may be possible to navigate the Nature/City dualism that often causes urban-environmental research to become mired in the realm of abstraction. New studies may cross disciplinary, epistemological, and conceptual boundaries to examine the challenges of implementing eco-ethical values in the built environment.

In the face of accelerating urban growth, environmental change, and calls to 'design with nature', the interaction between *built* and *unbuilt* environments remans a critical concern: "Urban life and its industrial imperatives have increasingly encroached on the world's so-called natural places, shrinking and often eliminating them" (Wapner & Matthew 2009, p. 208). With increased attention placed on urban responses to climate change by international bodies such as the IPCC and frameworks such as the *Sustainable Development Goals*, the climate crisis has proven to be particularly relevant to city dwellers. These international assemblages have pointed to the skewed vulnerabilities and responsibilities in relation to the climate crisis (IPCC 2022), which poses a significant threat to the cities globally. The imbalanced advantages and disadvantages require careful consideration of the role of moral values in the design of urban environments that aim to be socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable. Within this context of amplified vulnerability, the response to climate change taking place in cities challenges the traditionally anthropocentric field of urban studies to consider its social and eco-ethical foundations.

How has the ethical consideration of human-nonhuman relations shaped critical urban scholarship? While some contemporary researchers have put forward intellectual proposals to bring concepts such as *degrowth* into a substantive dialogue with city planning (Lehtinen 2018; Xue 2022), the field of urban environmental ethics finds itself in need of revitalization. Despite the discipline's growing interest in urban geographies (Chan 2018; Ege & Moser 2021), inadequate attention has been paid to the role that environmental values play in the making of the built environment. More than twenty years ago, Andrew Light (2001) called attention to the "urban blind spot in environmental ethics", arguing that scholars should shift their attention towards the geographic areas that are driving social and cultural change towards *ecological citizenship*. This shift was also grounded in an understanding of "the importance of democratic participation in environmental decision making" (Light 2006, p. 173), particularly in the geographical areas driving changes.

Light questions the narrative that "urban dwellers suffer from a moral corruption, disconnected as they are from what E.O. Wilson calls 'biophilia'" (ibid., p. 7). He identifies an 'urban gap' in the theories, practices, and organizations of contemporary environmentalists (ibid. p. 8), which has served as an obstacle to confronting the challenges of urban environmental ethics. Rather than viewing cities as "richly textured urban spaces" (ibid., p. 31), prominent environmental ethicists have held onto rigid perspectives that portray cities as sources of environmental disvalue, unsustainability, and increasing economic and political inequality. Light (2001, pp. 7-8) poses a pair of questions in response to this narrative:

> Is the city really the source of all environmental ills, covered only by a thin veneer of cultural accomplishment? Or is it in fact one of the most important front lines of environmental issues, a terrain of environmental values and which will be the true test of the ecological acumen and social pluralism of the environmental community?

Light points out that the 'urban blind spot' has led environmental ethicists to remain silent on critical issues related to the development of cities (ibid.). This silence has produced a significant gap in the literature, and given that urban populations are projected to increase significantly (UN 2018), contemporary scholarship on environmental ethics can approach the city as a subject of central concern. New comparative methodologies can address the social and environmental consequences of urbanization (Robinson 2016, 2022), such as the devastating loss of formerly nonurbanized ecosystems in the twenty-first century. However, theorists confronting questions on the normative status of urban environments should not fall back on a dualist perspective of idyllic nature on the one hand, and destructive cities on the other.

By rooting itself in a critique of the 'urban blind spot', this thesis advances a view of urban space that emphasizes its *complex terrain of environmental values*.

This approach requires a definition of environmental ethics that is suited to address the normative status of built environments (and their ethical relations to the nonhuman world). Adopting a narrower definition is helpful to avoid the tendency towards ambiguity in discussions of urban sustainability. Furthermore, a more pragmatic and grounded discussion of how ecological values shape the identity of a specific city may also prevent the stagnation that has become characteristic of debates within the discipline of environmental ethics.

This thesis narrows the scope of ethical inquiry by using Warwick Fox's definition of *ethics in the built environment* (2000). Fox (ibid., p. 1) argues that "the field of ethics to date has been profoundly human-centered in its range of concerns…", and that the discipline ought to be concerned with the examination of "any and all ethical questions that arise with respect to a moral agent's interactions with any and all aspects of the world around her or him."[4] However, its definition in *Ethics in the Built Environment* is delimited by a focus on the moral challenges that stem from the material processes of planning, design, and building. Fox's (2000) interdisciplinary work brought together philosophers concerned with the practice of architecture, planning, and building, as well as philosophically oriented architects, planners, and analysts of the built environment. This assemblage of theorists and professionals provided a platform to analyze the conceptual basis for ethical building practices, crossing intellectual and disciplinary boundaries.

This thesis is aligned with Fox's (2000, p. 4) aim of "[contributing] towards the accumulation of a critical mass of ideas and questions that will enable the discussion of *the ethics of the built environment* (or *the ethics of building*)…" It expands the domain of informed eco-ethical debate by bridging distinct perspectives coming from different 'fronts' participating in the debate over the ethics of the green city. Not only is this expansion necessary to address underexplored ecological values, but it also follows the trend in global urban studies research to engage in conceptual experimentation and 'think from elsewhere' (Robinson 2016).

Contemporary urban studies research is often characterized by "conceptual and methodological experimentation in pursuit of a more global approach to understanding cities" (Robinson 2016). While urban planning in Oslo has, to date, been debated and practiced in professionalized circles, and primarily through the policymaking process (Røe et al. 2016), theoretical research on 'green cities' can contribute to the accumulation of perspectives by analyzing the dynamic networks and assemblages of human and nonhuman life that constitute urban nature(s).

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[4] In the two decades since the publication of *Ethics in the Built Environment* (Fox 2000), a growing number of researchers have addressed the ethical dimensions of planetary ecological change on an intensely urbanized planet (Chan 2018; Ege & Moser 2020). While still in its nascent stage, this emerging field has produced qualitative research on the theoretical and design-oriented challenges surrounding the making of a *just city* in the face of urgent ecological challenges ranging from climate change and biodiversity loss to the Rights of Nature.

The term *urban nature(s)* will be used to indicate the plurality of relations between city dwellers and the urban environment, which are shaped by the particularities of place.[5] Its usage denotes a relational approach to analyzing urban environments as an assemblage of multiple social, ecological, and material-political entities that shape the fabric and identity of cities.

Childers et al. (2014, p. 325) argue that "understanding how cities, as complex adaptive social–biophysical systems, behave seems overly challenging, and moving beyond understanding to identifying and implementing real-world solutions for urban sustainability often seems downright daunting." To tackle this 'downright daunting task' with cultural sensitivity and conceptual rigor, this thesis examines how the production of knowledge around 'Green Oslo' is shaped by distinct material-political entities with the goal of shaping the city's public image.

The theoretical foundation of this thesis aims to promote a diversity of eco-ethical thought by linking distinct social and professional networks participating in current environmental debates. The theoretical justification for this comparative approach draws similarities to Ellin's (2012, p. 248) call for co-creative forms of urbanism that "[cultivate] relationships through a process that builds mutually supportive networks of people." Given the need for collaboration among urban practitioners and the civic sector (ibid.), analyzing the dynamic networks shaping the urban fabric (and identity of the city) enables researchers to examine how the interaction of social, ecological, and material political entities reveals the tensions inherent to the discussion of 'Green Oslo'.

[5] The term 'urban nature(s)' reflects the degree of conceptual experimentation that Robinson (2016) associates with a more global approach to urban studies. This willingness to experiment with neologisms is not only characteristic of research within the area of global urban studies, but also of environmental humanities scholarship more broadly. In its plural form, it reflects Arturo Escobar's (2020) outlook on the multiplicity of relations between human and nonhuman entities in shared spaces. While this concept is used to put forward a more nuanced theoretical analysis of the human-nonhuman connection in the built environment, it is also worth considering what the implications of this multiplicity of relations are for *pluriversal politics* (ibid.). This may be of particular interest to scholars examining the interconnection of urban-environmental relations in the Global North and Global South. Researchers such as Jason Hickel (2020) have pointed to inequitable dynamics between high-income cities of the Global North and the extraction of resources and capital from urban and rural areas of the Global South. While this thesis takes a more targeted approach in examining the tensions within Oslo over 'green city' development, future research may take geopolitical dynamics into account when examining the experience of urban nature(s) in more diverse contexts.

2.2 Just Cities and Contested Urban Spaces

Susan Fainstein, author of *The Just City* (2010), has been particularly influential in the debate over ethical forms of urban development. Building on theoretical contributions by Martha Nussbaum and Nancy Fraser, she provides an entry point into the discussion of moral values in the arena of urban planning. Fainstein presents (i) equity, (ii) democracy, and (iii) diversity as the most important considerations for planners when considering the principles that should guide just policies and practices in the built environment. The balance of these principles is a central concern, as the author views New York as a city that contains a great deal of diversity while also representing staggering levels of economic inequality. Fainstein (ibid., p. 24) argues that the continuous process of urban development raises the issue of ethically redistributing resources to support wellbeing, creating an inherent tension between democratic processes of transformation and just outcomes. Therefore, justice should be the "first evaluative criterion used in policy making" (ibid., p. 6). While Fainstein is critical of the view just urban outcomes can only be achieved through systemic transformation, she concludes that social reforms are possible through pragmatic projects that balance the principles listed above.[6]

Employing contemporary research on justice, Fainstein (2010) argues that meaningful reform is possible at the local level in the context of a capitalist political economy. However, interdisciplinary approaches that build on the work of Fainstein (ibid.) and Fox (2000) can bring alternative schools of political and ecological thought into the *just city* dialogue, enabling a discussion that extends beyond dominant politico-economic paradigms. Fainstein's work offers insights applicable to Oslo's green transition, as sustainable development paradigms fall under the umbrella of a capitalist political economy; however, climate activists interviewed for this thesis offered critiques of capitalism, consumer culture, industrial life, and referenced terms such as *degrowth* (see chapter 5). Therefore, expanding the *just city* dialogue is necessary to analyze alternative politico-economic orientations and their connection to the cityscape.

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[6] These arguments are grounded in Nussbaum's interpretation of the capabilities approach, which considers if policies or practices are in accordance with democratic norms, whether outcomes enhanced the capabilities of disadvantaged populations, and whether groups achieved relative recognition from one another (ibid., p. 55). However, the capabilities approach can also be applied to examine how urban policies or practices can enable or curtail the transformative potential of 'green urbanism' strategies.

The moral discomfort experienced by city dwellers over global environmental crises has been accompanied by the emergence of social movements centered on principles of justice and ecology. As argued in chapter 1, issues of justice (or injustice) concentrated in contested urban spaces are especially relevant to those who aim to take an active role in reshaping the urban fabric.

The post-1950s Great Acceleration has rapidly transformed the face of the world, and the planners/designers of cities now find themselves in the ethically complex position of retrofitting our cities to *become ecological* on a soon-to-be-ravaged planet. The notion of 'ecologies becoming urban, and cities becoming ecological' can be viewed as a process whereby "more-than-human participants and ecologies emerge in urban locations as distinct and situated material-political entities" (Gabrys 2012, p. 2925; Hinchliffe & Whatmore 2006, p. 126).[7]

Recognizing Oslo's landscape as one that has emerged from the interaction of both human and nonhuman participants and material-political entities, the design of an ecological ethical city becomes a question of agency. Developing an urban fabric that enables a just ecological transition therefore aligns with the motivation to expand the consideration of which material and ecological entities are granted rights and substantive moral consideration in the built environment. This reflects Alastair S. Gunn's (1998) argument that "[t]he obligation to make cities habitable is a matter of both environmental health and justice." The notion of habitability reinforces the idea that truly sustainable urban spaces function as coinhabited areas that support a diversity of human *and* nonhuman life. The redesign and reshaping of these urban habitats according to ethical principles is therefore a challenge to determine what planning concepts aid in the development of sustainability that goes beyond 'urban kitsch'.

[7] This suggestion by Hinchliffe and Whatmore (2006, p. 2925) is centered on the notion that "[nonhumans] do not simply *return* to the city, but rather *become urban* as part of the urban political ecologies in which they are situated and to which they contribute." Here the 'return to the city' is largely driven by the development of and encroachment upon formerly nonurbanized lands (ibid.). Despite the tension that exists between cross-species neighbors in the built environment (Hinchliffe et al, 2005), urban nature(s) can be seen as an assemblage of human and more-than-human relationships that shape the biopolitical management of life in cities. Though Hinchliffe and Whatmore (2006) do not use the term *assemblage*, they describe the 'conjugation' of urban nature similarly. This work points to the emergence of new urban ecological processes at the intersection of "plans for sustainable cities, development schemes, nonhuman migrations, biodiversity politics, and environmental rhetoric" (ibid. p. 2926).

In *Building and Dwelling* (2018, p. 17), Richard Sennett poses the question: can ethics shape the design of the city as urban citizens and spaces experience the turbulence and uncertainties of climate change? Sennet states that the "design of cities can enrich or diminish the everyday experience of those who dwell in them" (ibid.), and he recognizes the degree to which climate change poses a 'malign threat' to cities as we enter an era of floods, droughts, and general unpredictably (ibid., p. 272). In the face of this accelerating environmental change, described by Thomas Hylland Eriksen in *Overheating* (2016), Sennett's ethical framework posits that humanity faces the challenge of adjusting to a new ecological reality. Recognizing the inevitability of living alongside socio-environmental ruptures (and opposing the historical notion of dominating nature), Sennet (2018) puts forward an argument in favor of designing repairable and open cities that are better suited to these dynamic challenges.

Whereas Sennett's examination of openness and repairability is thorough, his ethical framework leaves out a substantive discussion of *non-anthropocentric environmental ethics*.[8] The extent to which ethical consideration in planning procedures should cross the species boundary remains an underexplored area of inquiry. Extending the dialogue around just urban transitions in this thesis therefore recognizes that both human and nonhuman city dwellers, in addition to the existing material-political entities that shape development processes, ought to function as participants in the procedures of urban planning. These planning processes have become largely professionalized in Oslo (Røe 2016, p. 268), arguably separated from local city dwellers who bear the brunt of new development strategies that reshape the urban fabric. Delimiting the discussion of planning and design to professional circles in Oslo has two principal consequences. First, it precludes a discussion of urban form and function *beyond the human,* or more specifically, a non-anthropocentric outlook on the ethics of the city. Second, it does not recognize the degree to which knowledge surrounding urban eco-ethics is generated and disseminated among city dwellers themselves. These limitations present an opportunity for further research that bridges anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives on *just spatial arrangements*.

[8] Although the term 'non-anthropocentric environmental ethics' can refer to a range of philosophical thought, including Aldo Leopold's (1949) *land ethics* and Paul Taylor's (2008) *biocentric egalitarianism*, here it relates broadly to values and principles of environmental protection that are not grounded in instrumental value or utility to humans.

The examination of multi-species ethics and entanglements in the *more-than-human* city remains a relatively new line of inquiry (Franklin 2017), especially with regard to regional governance and planning (Sheikh et al. 2022). However, there has been an intellectual effort to shift the focus of scholarship towards contemporary issues, urban geographies, and applied ethics. Jeffrey Chan (2018) describes this shift in scholarship, arguing that the planetary ecological crisis – popularly associated with the Anthropocene concept – has reinvigorated conversations around urban ethics. He offers a more relevant approach to philosophical questions that have somewhat stagnated within the academy. Chan's writing addresses the 'urban blind spot' by reasserting the 'primacy' of the city, moving away from the traditional *Nature/Society (and Nature/City)* divide that has constrained western eco-ethical writing:

> This urban turn in ethics is significant not only because of the primacy of the city today in defining the human condition for the majority of humanity (Amin, 2006), but also because that this same city could be re-envisioned through design to advance social justice (Mostafavi, 2017). Through this urban turn, ethics has been mobilized from a canonically non-spatial form of study to an action sphere that is profoundly intertwined with activism, design, and the city.

This reorientation of environmental ethics around the concept of 'the urban' may help readers recognize why the philosophy of human-nonhuman relations is relevant at a time of ecological breakdown and rapid urbanization. It invites researchers to examine the "different social, cultural, and political factors that may lead to the formation of urban ethics" (Chan 2018), thereby building on the study of the city as an *action sphere*, as argued by urban ethicists at LMU.[9] New research can build on the theoretical work done on urban ethics by reorienting current debates around concepts of ecological and civic justice. The interpretation of the city as an action sphere where design and activism become intertwined is particularly relevant for this thesis. If the city is to be re-envisioned through the lens of ecological urbanism to advance principles of justice (Mostafavi 2017), then the participants and material-political entities shaping the fabric of city cannot be limited solely to the professional enclaves of green architecture and urban design.

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[9] In 2015, a collaborative research group from the Ludwig-Maximilians University in München (LMU) initiated the multidisciplinary research project *Urban Ethics*. This thesis aligns itself with the project's aim to "understand different notions of 'lived' (or situationally specific) urban ethics, and to define the nature of urban conflicts and their corollary negotiation process" (Chan 2018, p. 11). By joining in this intellectual effort, it also centers on the negotiation of interests and conflicts in the pursuit of a 'green' or ecologically sustainable urban design.

One issue of interest in this thesis is the intersection of aesthetics and justice, particularly in the context of Oslo's 'green' identity (Røe 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to assess the value of urban beauty. In light of the loss of nature in the world's remaining wild spaces, and increasing attention on injustices of all kinds, why should the design of beautiful cities occupy the public's attention? Here, Elaine Scarry's work *On Beauty and Being Just* (2001) provides a much-needed counterpoint, framing responses to beauty as socially significant events. Readers may conclude that being overly attentive to aesthetics distracts from pressing ethical, political, and material concerns that rightly occupy the public's attention. However, Scarry's (2001) central argument rests on the notion that greater concern over aesthetics may, in fact, push humanity towards a greater concern for justice. Incidentally, Scarry (ibid., p. 18-19) describes this relationship in the context of mythology and urbanity, describing the greeting of Nausicaa, Odysseus, and Athena:

> As Nausicaa greets Odysseus on the beach… a short time later Athena greets him when he arrives at the city: 'As he was about to enter the welcome city, the bright-eyed goddess herself came up to greet him there.'
>
> Odysseus hears Nausicaa even before he sees her. Her voice is green: mingling with the voices of the other children, it sounds like water moving through lush meadow grass. This greenness of sound becomes the fully articulated subject matter of her speech when she later directs him through her father's groves, meadows, blossoming orchards, so he can reach their safe inland hall, where the only traces of the ocean are the lapis blue of the glazed frieze on the wall and the 'sea-blue wool' that Nausicaa's mother continually works.

Odysseus' greeting represents one of the first textual examples of an 'ode to beauty' framed in the welcoming one experiences upon entering a new city. Scarry (2001, p. 19) goes on to describe the idea of *beauty as a greeting* in classical, medieval, and Renaissance writings. Despite this ancient interest the merging of two abstract concepts, it has remained largely underexplored in urban scholarship. Scarry contends that by distributing attention outwardly and avoiding self-preoccupation, examining conceptions of beauty can help bring the concept of ethical fairness out of the world of abstraction: "At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering" (ibid., p. 77). The process of radical decentering, experienced by Odysseus upon greeting Nausicaa and entering 'the welcome city', provides potential parallels in the context of 'the green city'. How do aesthetic and ethical strategies to transform 'Green Oslo' (Røe 2016) relate to this process of radical decentering experienced by visitors?

One reading of the passage above may point to the potential parallels between the emergence of green urbanism in Oslo and Scarry's (2001., p. 19) description of the 'safe inland hall'. As a coastal city, its turn towards environmental planning or sustainability paradigms is grounded in the recognition of environmental vulnerability. Here the 'traces of the ocean' cannot be so easily avoided due to sea level rise, leading urban planners and architectures to seek planning solutions. Oslo's ambitious waterfront development, for example, has not only occurred within this context of amplified vulnerability, but arguably aims to remedy the anxieties surrounding urban futures in the climate crisis. In this sense, its design strategy represents a form of yearning for inland safety and security. Merging the concern for justice requires more careful consideration of how these aesthetic-discursive strategies relate to the needs of citizens and the environment.

Scarry's passage details the articulation of the subject matter in Nausicaa's speech. However, in this context, the 'greenness' of urban space "becomes the fully articulated subject matter" (ibid.) addressed by planners and designers (ibid.). This emphasis on discourse and acts of speech is equally relevant to the making of a 'sustainable city' as it is to the greeting of a 'welcome city'. Therefore, the following section will explore the extent to which the experience of the built environment is shaped by discourse and rhetorical strategies. While Scarry's writing provides an opportunity to examine the value of beauty in elucidating ethical fairness, this is arguably underexplored when it comes to questions related to *urban beauty* at a time of global environmental crisis. This thesis similarly distributes attention to the intersection of aesthetics and justice in contested urban spaces. While framing the city as a primary stage of action in the twenty-first century, it will adopt Scarry's interest in making fairness a concrete concept in the context of growing awareness of climate change and ecological breakdown.

2.3 Discourse, Planning, and the Spirit of Place

In the 1980s, a 'new vocabulary' emerged in urban planning, following a rhetorical shift towards sustainability, broadly defined. Pløger (2001, p. 63) points towards the emergence of a planning discourse around 'sustainable cities', 'environmental cities', 'compact cities' and 'dense cities.' During this period, practitioners also shifted their attention from the purely physical towards social-environmental planning. Citing Albertsen's (1993, p. 181) description of this new planning paradigm, which argues that "it's possible to design the social by forming space," Pløger argues that this approach is crucial to contemporary European planning. The discourses surrounding the place-identity and politization of urban environments has also brought attention to *discursive planning*, which Pløger (2001, p. 65) defines as "a way to stage the significant and valid readings and meanings of place." This includes discourse as language, language as a conceptualization of the world, ontological and epistemological concepts, and the practice of power in the built environment (ibid.). Pløger's definition points towards the link between planning discourses, place-identity, and the instrumental use of political power to shape material conditions: "Discursive planning not only has the power to change the mode of planning and the way of politicizing urban communities" (ibid., p. 70). Within this framework, the aesthetic quality of place is seen as interwoven with the social and political fabric that shapes wellbeing and "people's feeling of belonging to place" (Berntsen 1994, p. 6). In order to analyze interwoven ethical and aesthetic challenges Oslo faces, it is necessary to frame the history of sustainable urbanism.

The umbrella term 'sustainable development' has been central to many sectors of urban policy-making since the release of the Brundtland Report by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. This was defined by the commission as *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future* (1987). Landscape architect Rob Roggema (2016) argues that Brundtland's attention to urban space had a significant impact on both the practices and theories of urbanism. In the decades since its publication, planners and designers have sought to establish forms of development that are not in contradiction with the values of environmental protection and social welfare.

Using Sharifi's (2016) broad definition of "the application of sustainability and resilient principles to the design, planning, and administration/operation of cities," Roggema (2016) addresses the implementation of effective definitions in the built environment post-Brundtland. Mainstream definitions of sustainable urbanism have focused on repairing harm done to natural systems, recycling and reusing recourses, and the disposal of 'clean waste' (ibid.). These limited definitions do not address the planning of urban systems to respond to *uncertain* developments, such as the impacts of climate change. Roggema (2016, p. 9) concludes that into order to 'become sustainable', cities can adopt new planning strategies, proposing a redefinition of *sustainable urbanism* centered on the concept of environmental change:

> Design a sustainable urban system, which creates physical and mental space to adjust the urban form at any moment in time, anticipates uncertain, unexpected and unprecedented change, and grows stronger and becomes more resilient when uncertainty impacts on it.

Given the *accelerating* environmental changes brought on by the climate crisis – exacerbated by virtually unchecked urban development – this thesis addresses Roggema's argument for understanding resiliency as a response to shifting conditions in cities. His definition implies that open and public spaces can be established "where adjustments over time are possible" (ibid.). This preference for *the open city* is aligned with Richard Sennett's conclusion in *Building and Dwelling* (2018), that openness and repairability go hand in hand with the design of just urban spaces. However, the imprecision of this definition leaves room for a more developed understanding of the social experience of place.

Examining the tensions in mainstream discussions of sustainable urbanism can therefore re-emphasize the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, transposing Scarry's discussion of beauty and justice onto the challenges faced by Oslo in the climate crisis. While a narrow focus on the response to uncertain conditions leaves too much room for interpretation, Roggema's (2016) definition of *green urbanism* provides a more precise entry point into the discussion:

> Green urbanism delivers a conceptual model for zero-emission and zero-waste urban design (Lehmann 2010). This urban metabolism (Wolman 1965; Newman 1999; Kennedy et al. 2007; Kennedy et al. 2010; Shafiea et al. 2013) describes the city in flows and aims to reduce the use of resources, to process them as efficiently as possible and to reduce the waste flows. Hence, when the city is able to close the cycles within its boundaries, a sustainable situation is achieved.

It follows that Oslo's shifting environmental identity in the twenty-first century also represents a change in the city's urban metabolism, or the dynamic flows of material and energy throughout the cityscape and its surrounding areas. However, the extent to which these changes represent a meaningful shift in the social experience of place remains underexplored.

Christian Nordberg-Schulz (1980, p. 5), a foundational figure in Norwegian architecture (and pioneer in the study of architectural phenomenology), argued that "the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell." His framing of *genius loci* (ibid.) emphasizes that the social experience (and intangible qualities) of material places are essential in determining the qualities of the built environment (or *geographical entities*) that shape individual identity (Vecco 2020, p. 227). The symbolic meaning of place and the role of representational spaces was addressed extensively by Norberg-Schulz in *Genius Loci* (1980), in which he argues that the role of the architect is not just to shape the material fabric of the built environment, but to consider the qualities necessary to allow people to dwell poetically within them. Building on his earlier readings of Heidegger during the 1960's, where he sought to merge semiotics and the phenomenological study of architecture, Norberg-Schulz (ibid., p. 5) suggests that lived experiences are necessary to differentiate *places* from *spaces*:

> A place is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the genius loci, or spirit of place, has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life. Architecture means to visualize the *genius loci* and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell.

The passage distinguishes Norberg-Schulz's (1980) outlook on the philosophical underpinnings of building and dwelling in urban space. It is not sufficient for the fields of planning and architecture to approach design challenges solely through the lens of practical material use. Rather, he argues for these professional enclaves to adopt a relational view of space (ibid.). Considering *how* city dwellers live in the built environment motivates a discussion around place-identity and the planning and design of the built environment in order to maintain its distinct character.

Norberg-Schulz (ibid.) highlights three pillars that make up the *spirit of place*: environment, culture, and belonging. Here *environment* refers not simply to the landscape, but rather to the atmosphere that is formed through human activity within built (and unbuilt) systems. The use of

culture refers to "cultural symbols condensed in architectural materials, forms, and styles" (Jiang & Lin 2022), while *belonging* is less easily defined – referring to Heideggerian forms of poetic dwelling. Understanding the representational meaning of place in this context implies that these meanings are not fixed. The physical structure of a place may change (Norberg-Schulz 1980, p. 18), as has occurred with the emergence of new planning strategies around urban sustainability – reshaping green space while establishing resiliency to environmental change. However, Norberg-Schulz also argues that the *genius loci* may remain consistent over time despite structural changes occurring in the built environment. This would point to a level of consistency in a location's place-identity, resistant to material changes – also known as the conservation of place-identity.

As current cultural debates tend to separate the ecological system from social and cultural systems, returning to the concept of *genius loci* can encourage researchers to examine how "the spirit of a place can be transformed in a local sustainable development process" (Vecco 2020, p. 227.). In the absence of a strong theoretical foundation of ethical thought and practice, contemporary planning discourses can produce undesirable urban development trajectories, disconnected from social experiences and ecological needs. Therefore, interdisciplinary research can examine the foundations of the 'green' or 'just' city as the "sum of all physical as well as symbolic values in nature and the human environment" (Jivén & Larkham 2003, p. 70). This thesis addresses the social, ecological, and symbolic values associated with Oslo's place-identity while building on an environmentally oriented theoretical foundation. It will consider the extent to which the 'ecological turn' in the city's urban discourse represents a substantive shift towards a greener place identity and also highlight the barriers to transformative action on climate change.

Examining the link between a discursive shift in urban planning practices (Pløger 2001) and the tension over Oslo's *spirit of place* at a time of growing environmental concern, it is worth attending to public perception of Norway's role on the international stage. Cultural historian Nina Witoszek (2011, p. 14) traces "the cultural, value-charged traditions behind the Norwegian regime of goodness," a metaphor directly linked to former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.[10]

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[10] *Disclosure of Personal Connection:* Professor Nina Witoszek served as the academic advisor for this thesis project at the University of Oslo's Centre for Development and the Environment. Her supervision and intellectual engagement with the questions addressed herein have had a substantive impact on the tenor of the work.

In international forums, Norway has become the epitome of good governance, enlightened altruism, and environmental concern (ibid., p. 7). Regarding this perception, Witoszek points to the Norwegian vision of 'positive development', with connections that range from social activism and philosophical orientations to governmental policy.[11] This largely positive self-image is reflected in Norwegian orientations towards issues of justice, human rights, and a cooperative, largely idealistic mindset (ibid., p. 8).

Despite the perception of social and environmental concern in Norway, Witoszek (2011, p. 25) argues that the broader conversation over this ethical vision of governance has not yet translated into urban environments: "Today we are looking at one of the most intensely modernized countries in the world. Nonetheless we encounter a culture which, as I argue, has in many ways banished the city from its moral universe." This 'banishing' is arguably not as prominent as it was in the twentieth century when the association between nature and local areas led to increasing anti-urban sentiment in Norwegian cultural discourse: "[so] strong was the equation between nature and nationality that in the 'politically correct' images of Norwegianness of the time, there was little room for an urban imaginary" (Grendstad et al. 2006, p. 107). While Ramsøy (1987, p. 101) posits that Norway is "a culture with a deep-seated anti-urban ideology," Desmond McNeill (2017) argues that over the course of a generation, urban development has come to be seen as a positive phenomenon in Norway. He concludes that a new generational of 'urbanists' have driven this attitudinal shift, leading policymakers and planners to present the city and its relationship to the environment in positive terms. However, a subtle tension between '*district* Norge*'* and '*urban* Norge*'* has remained in spite of these efforts reshape the discourse surrounding cities.

The planning and design of the built environment in 'Green Oslo' is therefore entangled with the manufacture of an international image of Oslo as a frontrunner for sustainable development. This image is crafted not only by political administrations and environmentally oriented parties, but also by developers, architectural firms, design studios – actors putting forward competing visions of urban space in Oslo. Within this framework, the city's fabric is essentially bid over in a

[11] These include Arne Naess' Deep Ecology, the Brundtland Commission's vision of sustainable development, and the country's outsized impact when it comes to humanitarian aid and development cooperation. Although normative divisions exist between Naess' ecophilosophy (as it was written) and sustainable development (as it is practiced), they are linked by a positive vision of collective action.

development process that seeks to reshape the city's place-identity through design competitions that draw international attention.[12] In the context of this competitive process, urbanists in Oslo have developed ambitious proposals ranging from the 'fjord city' redevelopment project (*Fjordbyen*) to optimistic targets for carbon reduction. This represents a foundational problem for architectural semiotics in the twenty-first century; namely, finding meaning in ecological design and planning in the face of climate change and global environmental crisis.

In order to address the contested meaning of 'sustainable urbanity' in 'Green Oslo', this thesis draws from *communicative planning theory*, also referred to as *collaborative planning*. The 'communicative turn' in planning theory began in the final decades of the twentieth century, with participatory models developed by Patsy Healey (1996, 1997) and Judith Innes (1995, 1999). Within this framework (Healey 1997, p. 5), key stakeholders are gathered for the planning process through collaborative models out of respect for the social context in which planning practices (and practitioners) operate. Communicative planners gather stakeholders from diverse background to assess social needs, values, priorities, and navigate tensions to arrive at negotiated plans (Innes 1995). In this interactive practice, planners facilitate the dialogue, offer their technical expertise, and gather knowledge to form key understandings.[13] This thesis adopts Healey's 'communicative turn' and attention to political power, while addressing the ethical challenges posed to ecological urbanism and sustainable development in Oslo.

[12] This competitive landscape brings the discussion back to Norberg-Schultz's arguments on the consistency of place-identity. Although sustainable planning and design proposals may alter the structure of the environment in Oslo, they may also be seen as the architectural embodiment of the Norwegian "regime of goodness," (Witoszek 2011, p. 14). Therefore, contemporary research can assess the extent to which the architectural visions of Green Oslo challenge or reinforce the city's cultural and environmental identity.

[13] The practice of communicative planning, as it was developed by Healey (1992, p. 145-146) was grounded in a Foucauldian analysis of power relations and deconstruction of the modernist assumptions that dominated the discipline. As Healey (ibid., p. 146) writes: "This 'challenge to systematised reason', and with it, to the planning enterprise, strikes at the heart of the enlightenment project of 'modernity.'" The communicative turn proposes that engaging with 'diverse discourse communities' (ibid. 158) has significant implications for environmental planning; it attempts to establish a planning paradigm that is compatible with our "contemporary understandings of a democratic attitude" (ibid. 144). Healey (ibid.) asks how the concept of planning can survive the philosophical challenges to materialism, modernism and rationalism.

2.4 The Moral Hazards of Zombie Urbanism

Norway's manufactured image as a frontrunner for sustainable development and green urban planning has been examined critically, and even disputed, both within the academy (Aspen 2015) and among environmental activists. These divisions underscore ongoing disputes over the role and responsibilities of cities, developers, and citizens at a time of environmental crisis. Additionally, contemporary research has addressed the consequences of undesirable development trajectories (Elmqvist et al., 2013) amplified in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Jonny Aspen has been a vocal critic of the city's current development strategies. His research at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design has addressed how current design proposals can be dominated by urban development clichés, separated from the social needs of city dwellers (Aspen 2013; 2015). Using the neologism 'zombie urbanism', Aspen (2013) argues that these development clichés fail to address the needs of urban residents, resulting in a homogenizing effect that gradually strips away place-identity. He views this phenomenon in urban development as increasingly prevalent, citing examples that range from New York's *High Line* to Oslo's *Fjord City* (Aspen 2016). Despite the intense marketing behind these redevelopment projects, Aspen (ibid.) argues that their planning and design is not driven by concern for city life, but rather caters to business interests, tourists, and a culturally interested middle class or 'creative class'.

Defining the concept of zombie urbanism, Aspen (2013) points to the top-down management of the planning and design of cities that results in an anemic built environment. Here the city dweller experiences what might be described as a form of 'staged urbanism' – an environment with "no room for irregularity and the unexpected…" (Aspen 2016). This "well-designed, neat, and tedious urbanism" (ibid.) is grounded in an aspirational and idealistic vision of public space. The zombie urbanism of the twenty-first century can be linked to the emergence of meticulously designed 'green' public spaces, parks, and arguably, an atmosphere of homogeneity that strips the city of its social complexity and 'lived qualities'. Aspen is particularly critical of this homogenizing effect, focusing on the political discourse that produces 'zombified' planning and design processes.

Given this thesis' emphasis on the social experience of the built environment, particularly among climate activists and organizers, the potential shortcomings of this trajectory become apparent.

With the concept of zombie urbanism, the social use (or even social complexity) of the built environment receives little attention, instead favoring sleek proposals that receive international attention for their impressive displays of engineering or design (i.e., Saudi Arabia's proposed development project, titled *The Line*). In this context, the needs of city dwellers, based on the social use of the built environment, are effectively supplanted by the aspirational vision of what the city should be. Within this paradigm, citizen engagement is arguably not valued in planning and design processes. As a result, the urban fabric is shaped not by the socio-ecological concerns of residents, but by professionalized decision-making processes and the competitive landscape of green power politics (see chapter 3.1). Recognizing these existing barriers to participatory planning may allow city administrators to "consider broader aspects of design, including the city administrative system, policies that aim to promote active participation, the organisation of the local government and the services that are intended to support participation" (Giannoumis & Joneja 2022, p. 113). Giannoumis and Joneja's (ibid.) conclusion therefore justifies reorienting planning processes to avoid top-down strategies of development that result in 'zombified' urban outcomes.

Aspen's arguments address the unintended consequences that are driven by an aspirational, though misguided outlook on the built environment. In this context, ignorance of the complexity and inherent 'messiness' of urbanity results in a misapplication of values that produces anemic environments. This concern over current development trends and their underlying values is also apparent in Thomas Elmqvist's (2013, p. 33) broader critique of sustainability:

> Although local governments often aim to optimize resource use in cities, increase efficiency, and minimize waste, cities can never become fully self-sufficient. Therefore, individual cities cannot be considered "sustainable" without acknowledging and accounting for their dependence on ecosystems, resources and populations from other regions around the world. Consequently, there is a need to revisit the concept of sustainability, as its narrow definition and application may not only be insufficient but can also result in unintended consequences, such as the "lock-in" of undesirable urban development trajectories.

Much as Aspen pointed to the homogenizing effect of international trends in the design of public spaces, the passage above points to the 'lock-in' of these undesirable trajectories. Elmqvist and his co-authors center their critique on the tensions that emerge from a misguided interpretation of self-sufficiency. The blind spots of self-sufficiency become clear in Oslo – a city with close physical and social ties to both the fjord and the forest, where relationships to *marka* are of particular cultural importance to city dwellers. Furthermore, Elmqvist's critique of the 'lock-in' effect mirrors Aspen's arguments on the difficulty of breaking out of existing planning paradigms and discourses. It is therefore essential to examine how predominating views on urban space are constructed by acts of speech within professional circles – an issue explored by Jon Pløger (2001). Given the divergent visions of Oslo's development trajectories among activists and urbanists, the role of urban imaginaries requires further analysis.

Resolving the ethical tensions that emerge from distinct visions of urbanism is a difficult task in a city that has been characterized as both a frontrunner for sustainability, and a victim of top-down, zombified planning strategies that fail to adequately address social needs or the climate crisis. Given this transition between *the social* and *the urban*, a comparative analysis that grounds itself in communicate planning theory is well suited. It provides an opening to examine the discursive approaches of those who are engaged in organized efforts to reshape the environmental fabric of the city. From the discussion of zombified planning processes to the protests for climate action at parliament, Oslo is shown to be a city where communicative approaches to planning provide theoretical and analytical value. This analysis builds on Robinson's (2022) approach of 'generating concepts of the urban through comparative practices'. While recognizing that conventional comparative methods have not always met the needs of *global urban studies* (ibid., p. 1522), innovative comparative tactics are better suited to understand the "social and political formations, multiple scales and extended social processes in which urban life is enmeshed" (ibid., p. 1523). Therefore, Robinson's reformatting of 'relational' comparison will be adopted to examine the pioneering urban practices (Pittaluga 2020) of distinct groups in Oslo. These practices have the capacity to challenge or reinforce the *spirit of place* in Oslo, highlighting the balance of utopian or dystopian perspectives and the pathway towards alternative futures.

2.5 Utopian and Dystopian Visions

Among the broader themes that exist at the heart of this thesis is the balance of utopian and dystopian visions of urban environmental change in the climate crisis. Ruth Eaton (2002, p. 239), addressing utopianism in urban planning and the design of the 'ideal city', emphasizes that "it is indeed a survey of numerus plans for *utopia* that harbored the seeds of *dystopia.*" She describes a reticence towards idealism and utopian thinking in urban planning towards the close of the twentieth century. In the postwar period, these perspectives gave way to more practical paradigms of development seeking to work within the existing urban fabric. Nevertheless, Eaton argues that "projecting ideal cities" should not be seen as an exercise to be avoided. She frames these imaginings of alternative urban futures as an expression of revolt against the status quo – "of a desire to transcend it and hence promote its improvement" (ibid). In fact, critical urban studies research in recent decades has moved away from the vision of a 'functional city' inherited from twentieth century planners (Fishman 1982). In the present-day, this trend can be identified in the transition towards sustainable alternatives towards the vision of 'modern urbanism' promulgated by figures such as Le Corbusier. At a time of planetary ecological crisis, the functionalist atmosphere of modernist urbanism has been the subject of new criticism and ongoing debate.[14]

The visual rhetoric used by climate activists and urban practitioners provide an opportunity to examine how visions of urban space harbor the seeds of ecological utopia or dystopia. Both strains of thought can be identified in the discourse surrounding Oslo's environmental identity. These visions of the city's future range from the optimistic to the pessimistic – from open air architecture and green public space to a focus on urban emissions and biodiversity loss. They are, in essence, aesthetic responses to the disruptive conditions of the present. The balance of utopian and dystopian 'urban imaginaries' is arguably to be expected, for as Summers (2022, p. 193) argues: "It is in cities that both growth and decay exist in the same spaces at the same time."

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[14] With the reference to the legacy of Le Corbusier, the critique of modernism, and the transition towards ecological urbanism, it is necessary acknowledge the work of New York based architect and urban designer Mitchell Joachim. Joachim's work adopts a 'socio-ecological' approach to architecture, urban planning, and design – a vision of urbanity that seeks to go beyond the boundaries of modernist urban planning and traditional notions of sustainability. This thesis is aligned with Joachim's aim of challenging design-thinking from a social *and* ecological perspective, while bridging the largely underexplored gap between communicative planning theory and ecological thought.

These aesthetic responses are not limited to the visions of green urbanism promulgated among architects, planners, and designers. By adopting Robinson's (2016, 2022) comparative tactics, the analysis can be expanded to include image events (DeLuca 2012) by climate activists; the merging of resistance, advocacy, and aesthetics. Although growing awareness of the climate crisis and global environmental issues has generated concern over ecologically dystopian futures, the city of Oslo has revealed itself to be a diverse terrain of moral values. Balanced by positive visions and ambitious planning proposals on the one hand, and dystopian concerns over the future on the other.

Global phenomenon such as urbanization, climate change, biodiversity loss, and even the COVID pandemic have revived discussions around the interconnectivity of built and unbuilt systems in the twenty-first century. Summers (2022, p. 192), writing in the third year of the pandemic, linked these disruptive processes to the domain of ethics: "In so many ways, the pandemic is shining a light on social fabrics and urban processes that were being eroded by gentrification, making room for platform mediated exchanges. The 'smart' and 'resilient' cities are not necessarily 'just.' In other words, the pandemic has effectively accelerated disruptive processes already in progress." These disruptions and their ethical consequences for city dwellers affirm the idea that the nonhuman world is no longer independent from human action (McKibben 1989). This impact is certainly supported by the evidence of planetary-scale environmental harm wrought by human action, and it stresses the ethical responsibility to rethink current approaches to urban development and the defense of nonhuman nature in cities. These conditions may reshape the discourse around what a 'green city' *can* and *should* be at a time of environmental and political instability.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Interdisciplinarity: Engaging Urban Nature(s)

The following chapter presents an interdisciplinary methodological framework to address the central research questions introduced in Chapter 1.2. This interdisciplinary approach builds on the theoretical foundations laid down throughout Chapter 2, using comparative methods as a framework of analysis to bridge theory and urban practice in answering the research questions.

Per Gunnar Røe (2016, p. 17) argues that "[studying] Oslo may be of comparative value… within the context of the development of 'ideal types'" given its location at the edge of European urbanization. However, challenging perceived ideals and questioning the ethical and ecological principles behind current approaches to sustainable development remains essential. Contemporary research around the city's 'green' identity "can make an important contribution to the opportunities that exist today for bringing the urban structure into a still finer relation to its geographical and natural surroundings…" (ibid., p. 1). Rather than focusing on Oslo as an ideal type, this interdisciplinary methodology will bring attention to the constatations of environmental values and politicized urban practices that reveal the tension surrounding the city's ecological identity.

Given Oslo's comparative value to researchers (Røe 2016), a mixed-methods approach is effective in producing complex descriptions of the ethical outlooks of interview respondents (Weiss 1995, p. 9). This framework of analysis also draws from Charles Ragin's *The Comparative Method* (1987), which outlines the use of case-oriented comparative methods and the distinctness of comparative social science. Developing an in-depth understanding of local perspectives requires researchers to consider how citizens and city dwellers are influenced by the *particularities of place* and recognize that the history, culture, geography, politics, and languages that exist within the research setting are inseparable from social phenomenon. Sociologist Ørnulf Seippel (2001, p. 125) argues that research on the particularities of place – with its emphasis on the social construction of values, knowledge, and interests in diverse contexts – has not been well-integrated into contemporary research on environmentalism and political mobilization.

This thesis responds to Seippel's critique by acknowledging how contextual knowledge and the particularities of social, cultural, and urban life in Norway are integral to the values, knowledge, and interests that shape the identities of city dwellers and the cityscape. The comparative methodology highlights the complex terrain of environmental values in Oslo, connecting the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 to the interview responses.

The qualitative interviews conducted for this thesis included climate activists and organizers associated with Extinction Rebellion, as well as experts within the areas of urbanism, architecture, and city planning. Ten activists involved in climate organizing were contacted through their participation in actions with XR Norway or presence at local demonstrations; their names have been altered to maintain the anonymity of individuals engaged in forms of civil disobedience and to provide and equitable platform to analyze their responses. In the interest of representing a diversity of perspectives, this sample included an even number of male and female participants, with ages ranging from individuals in their early twenties to one participant in his sixties. Due to the limitations of a master's thesis and the difficulty of securing interviews with practitioners in the built environment, only two interviews with female urbanists were completed. However, perspectives gathered throughout the research process did address the gendered issues associated with urban greening and the pursuit of sustainable futures.

In addition to the analysis of semi-structured interviews, other methods included a semiotic analysis of current 'green urbanism' strategies, as well as participatory observation at environmental protests and demonstrations held throughout the city. As broader participation in the discourse surrounding 'Green Oslo' is a central objective of this thesis, observing image events intended to capture public attention (DeLuca 1999) was a valuable component of the research process. Images and photographs have also been included throughout the thesis, highlighting public demonstrations, visual rhetoric, and the symbolic role of specific development projects. These are intended to allow readers to ground the discussion of ethics and aesthetics in the built environment with practical examples. In pursuing this interdisciplinary approach, it seeks to build on Fox's (2000) participatory model of examining ethics in the built environment.[15]

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[15] See Chapter 2.1 for more detailed description of Fox's (2000) approach to *ethics in the built environment*.

Following the theoretical foundation outlined in Chapter 2, this turn toward interdisciplinary methods addresses ecological values directly in the discussion of urban futures. Including the voices of climate organizers in this comparative also represents an extension of the empirical research done on urban sustainability into the realm of social movement studies and civic engagement. Citizen involvement, as well as the professionalized urban design and planning processes, plays an integral role in shaping the fabric of the city. Practicing planners eager to move away from the "instrumental rationality that leaves values undiscussed or unspecified" have turned to more participatory models that incorporate community initiatives (Foley 1997, 1). Therefore, it is necessary to bridge the gap between the values associated with activism and *ecological citizenship*, as described by Andrew Dobson (2005). The methods described above follow this direction in contemporary research by addressing the ecological values which remain underexplored in academic discourse surrounding 'Green' Oslo in the climate crisis.

As outlined in Chapter 2, this qualitative research draws from the theoretical justification for communicative frameworks of urban planning, as well as the interdisciplinary methodological approaches to comparative practice put forward by Jennifer Robinson (2016, 2022). Following this line of reasoning, data gathered for this thesis will be subjected to a comparative analysis to develop a more nuanced understanding of Oslo's green image politics. This includes a comparison of the visual rhetoric of green urbanism and environmental activism, which constitute image events (DeLuca 2012) that challenge conceptions of urban ecological aesthetics and ethics.

Inspired by Deleuze, Jennifer Robinson's (2016) method of urban comparison separates tactics into 'genetic' or 'generative' approaches. The genetic approach "[traces] the interconnected genesis of repeated, related but distinctive, urban outcomes as the basis for comparison," as opposed to the 'generative' approach, "where variation across shared features provides a basis for generating conceptual insights supported by the multiple, sometimes interconnected, theoretical conversations which enable global urban studies" (Robinson 2016, p. 195). This thesis will focus on 'generative' approaches to urban comparison, which are well suited to address the overlapping or interconnected themes that ran through the qualitative interviews. Given the theoretical insights into biospheric values gathered through interviews with climate activists, and conceptual insights

surrounding green cities offered by urbanists, a generative approach enables the 'more global' vision of urban studies that is needed in the climate crisis.

In the case of *sustainable urbanism* as a development paradigm, the distinct (though related) expressions of the concept through architectural and design processes speaks to a genetic basis of comparison. However, when considering visions of the city's ecological future among both urbanists and activists, the wild variation of conceptual insights speaks to a 'generative' basis of comparison. This relationship between the genesis of urban sustainability (as a concept) and the generation of biospheric values among city dwellers in Oslo fits together with Robinson's (2016, p. 154) comparative urban tactics, as it tests the boundaries of how far these concepts can 'usefully be stretched'. With a focus on how activists and urbanists shape the image politics of sustainable development practices, this tactic emphasizes the variation that exists across a citywide commitment to sustainability and ecological sensitivity.

There are, of course, limits to the generative approach outlined above. For example, the genetic approach may offer a more nuanced understanding of how Norwegian environmental activists are influenced by the tactics of direct action developed in previous movements, or the philosophies of central figures such as Arne Næss. The genetic approach may also be better suited to trace the historical trajectory of sustainable development in Norway, and its relevance in the climate debate. Nevertheless, this thesis places a more targeted focus on the ways in which specific actors engage with the city's green image politics. This focus allows for a more detailed analysis of how activists and urbanists fit into these conflagrations of power, and how planning strategies can be made more interactive rather than directive, to bolster participatory models and encourage civic engagement. Comparative tactics require a more socially contextualized and ecologically sensitive analysis of political engagement, and as Robinson (ibid., p. 191-192) argues, "the desire to think for all cities everywhere is precisely to enter into this terrain."

3.2 The Role of Discourse in Shaping Urban Space

The research methodology for this thesis includes an examination of the ways in which activists and urbanists in Oslo take part in the discourse surrounding urban sustainability in Oslo. The following section examines how the place identity of the built environment is shaped by acts of speech and the "discursive production of different forms of representational spaces" (Pløger 2001, p. 63). Given that urban practitioners in Oslo have expressed an interest in civically inclusive development strategies (OAT 2022), it is necessary to consider how city dwellers participate in the discursive production (or contestation) of the city's ostensible green identity.

The methodological framework incorporates Robinson's use of comparative tactics (2016, 2022) to identify rhetorical strategies among both climate organizers and urbanists, including appeals to logic (*logos*), appeals to emotion (*pathos*), appeals to timeliness (*kairos*), but mostly importantly, appeals to ethics (*ethos*). This strategic approach will focus on the justifications for supporting or contesting Oslo's reputation as a frontrunner for urban sustainability, with particular attention to ethical argumentation. As the majority of climate organizers interviewed for this thesis are associated with Extinction Rebellion, this analysis will consider if overlapping rhetorical strategies can be identified within this subgroup. Additionally, it will consider what kinds of appeals urbanists make to either support or critique the municipality's approach to sustainable development. In both cases, the interview questions center on *how* individuals engage in environmental discourse, whether it be on the street through direct action or engagement with the urban planning processes. Furthermore, these questions address how these forms of engagement represent participation of the making of urban space, and supports a communicative planning model that views citizens-as-participants.

Considering the variation in ethical argumentation surrounding the making of a just and sustainable city in the climate crisis, comparative tactics are used to identify overlapping themes in the discourse of activists and urbanists. This approach will also be used to demonstrate the diversity of norms and values that exists in the discourse surrounding sustainable urbanity, and areas where activists and urbanists demonstrate overlapping aims, as well as conflicting ecological principles.

Robinson (2016, p. 191) argues that the attention to social inequality, environmental justice, collective efforts at democratic organization in cities, and the diversity of urban outcomes (within and across cities) is now well established in global urban studies research. The value that stems from the diversity of urban perspectives has been well articulated by researchers such as Charles Landry and Phil Wood (2008), examining the foundations of the *intercultural city* and the diversity advantage. Oslo's unique position as a socially and culturally diverse urban center with material support behind sustainability initiatives, located country that could otherwise be characterized as homogenous, presents an opportunity to examine the tensions surrounding current approaches to socially and environmentally just forms of urbanism.

Media outlets have pointed to the increase in activism among Norwegian youth (Young-Powell 2016), highlighting the role of students and young organizers. As this thesis is committed to a diversity of perspectives, and youth are often excluded from participating in discourses surrounding urbanism, this subgroup was given a voice in the comparative analysis. While increases in direct action have received significant media attention, there is a need for qualitative research to address how urban activism relates to the planning of a *just* or *green* city.

Similarly, while there has been significant media attention on the sophisticated approaches to environmental planning and design demonstrated by urbanists, these developments have received inadequate attention when it comes to their relationship to ecological values. Architects such as Halvor Ellefsen (2017) have taken holistic approaches to examining Oslo's green or sustainable urban development initiatives, particularly along the waterfront, but there remains an opportunity to examine how the execution of these developments ecological sustainability as a concept. Innovative approaches to green urbanism and architectural practice in Oslo have certainly been analyzed for their physical impacts on the built environment, as well as their relationship to the social and cultural fabric of the city (Ellefsen 2017; Bjerkeset & Aspen 2017). Still, this assessment of socio-environmental design has often overshadowed an examination of how urban forms and development paradigms impact the environmental identity of the city.

In order to gather informed perspectives on Oslo's sustainable urban development and 'regeneration' efforts, individuals were contacted due to their knowledge and professional

experience in the areas of sustainable architecture, planning, or green design. This involved contacting academics focused on issues of urban development in Oslo, such as researcher Per Gunnar Røe, as well as individuals with specific expertise in architecture and planning processes, including Jonny Aspen and Claudia Yamu. A shortcoming of this approach is that the qualitative data collected may be criticized as limited or impressionistic in scope. However, given the need for interdisciplinary research in this area, a conceptually rigorous and culturally sensitive analysis of Oslo's identity as a green city can highlight existing tensions.

With the noticeable increase in climate-oriented activism led by environmentally conscious citizens at Stortinget, where over seven-hundred political, religious or humanitarian demonstrations are held every year (Stortinget 2023), it is necessary to consider how environmental movements and civic organizations fit into the contested discourse of urban sustainability. Although protests and instances of direct action have gained attention in media outlets such as *NRK* (2023) and *The Guardian* (2016), the opportunity for environmental/political organizing in Oslo to reshape the urban fabric is underexplored. The emergence of robust youth-led environmental movements in Oslo has been addressed by researchers such as Åse Strandbu and Ketil Skogen (2000), focusing on political perspectives. While shifting away from Strandbu and Skogen's interest in the comparison of political orientations, this thesis recognizes the landscape of power politics shaping the discourse surrounding 'Green Oslo'.

This framing of the discourse around 'Green Oslo' also points to a need to renew the discussion of *pioneering urban practices* in transition spaces (Pittaluga 2020). Although technological developments cannot be neglected in the discourse surrounding green transitions, attention to pioneering practices can also include an analysis of the ways in which activists and organizers "open the way to creative, subversive, empowerment-oriented forms of spatial transformation" (ibid. p. 3). To address this gap in contemporary research, the thesis includes environmental organizers *and* urbanists as key participants in the discourse surrounding the transformative potential of urbanism. Communicative, participatory, or co-creative planning models can be strengthened by increased interaction between these groups, as well as with local policymakers.

3.3 A Semiotic Analysis of 'Green Oslo'

As described in the previous chapter, this methodological framework aims to explore how green urban developments and architectural projects serve as representational spaces with distinct meanings for activists and urbanists. Therefore, examining the meaning of environmental identity in Green Oslo can be strengthened by applying the lens of semiotic analysis.

A semiotic approach can enable an analysis of how activists and urbanists view the development of Green Oslo as a symbol or representation of the municipality's engagement with climate change as a set of environmental, ethical, or aesthetic values. This methodological approach is essential to address the second research question, as the environmental identity of a city and aesthetic preferences in the built environment are shaped by the representation meaning of urban space. The comparative methods used for this thesis aim to take both social and ecological dynamics and inequalities into account, while examining how activists and urbanists interpret the representational meaning of green architecture and sustainable urban design in Oslo. This follows not only the theoretical direction outlined throughout chapter two, but also the shift in contemporary research towards eco-ethical thought in an intensely urbanized world (Chan 2018).

It is important to acknowledge that semiotic analysis of urban environmental have received less attention in contemporary research. Andersen and Røe (2017, p. 308) argue that "Increasingly, urban investigations have focused on the role and meaning of architecture in urban restructuring and transformation, turning attention away from the study of architecture as signs and symbols in themselves, to the investigation of the social production and social construction of architecture." However, this thesis argues that a methodology which includes semiotics is particularly valuable when trying to understand Oslo's image as a sustainable city, and the symbolic role of architecture and design in the green transition. To understand the power politics of development practices, and the impacts of architectural practices on the lived experiences of city dwellers, researchers may examine the social and economic relations that form between architects, developers, and the financial elite or entrepreneurial classes. However, qualitative research should not turn away entirely from the study of signs and symbols entirely, particularly when it comes to the ways in which urbanists and architects interpret physical changes to the built environment.

Not only is there a symbolic element to the political discourse shaping Oslo's public image as a green or sustainable city (Røe 2012), but there is also an opening for semiotic analysis to address the actions of city dwellers pushing back against the cooptation of sustainability or environmentalism in the city. This includes the representational meaning of environmental protest and civil disobedience in public and private urban spaces throughout Oslo.

Researchers such as Sharif Goubran (2021, p. 626) have acknowledged the potential of semiotics to "provide the theoretical basis for examining and modeling the dynamic processes involved in sustainable architecture design." Although the history of applying semiotic analysis to the urban environment will not be covered in this thesis, "[there] have been many attempts to propose parallels between language and architecture – where both can be understood as systems of communications" (ibid., p. 625-626). This introduction of semiotics encourages the reader to consider how the experience of the built environment is shaped by social connotations and the relations between city dwellers and spatial elements.[16] Despite the long history of semiotic analysis being applied to architectural practice, Goubraun (2021, p. 626) argues that "the potential of semiotics to theorize and analyze the field of sustainable architecture – specifically relating to the production of meaning in design – is still largely unexplored."

While architectural semiotics is helpful in the study of *sign processes* (i.e., the actions and activities involving symbols and the production of meaning), researchers such as Mark Gottdiener and Alexandros Lagopoulos (1986) moved away from a narrow focus on language models, and suggested more attention be placed on social connotations. Additionally, a shift away from the interpretation of 'signs and symbols' in the built environment was matched by a transition in the scholarship towards *urban semiotics*, where the social dynamics received greater attention (ibid.). This transition in the scholarship also emerged from the critique *architectural semiotics*, which struggled to address the complexity of social relations.

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[16] There are various schools of semiotics with distinct approaches to the systematic study of signs and symbols. While the subdiscipline of *cultural semiotics* has dedicated itself to the study of *sign systems in a culture* as well as *cultures as sign systems* (Posner 2003), scholars such as Umberto Eco and Juri Lotman (1990) have addressed how signs are made heterogeneous through complex social, historical, and hierarchical processes. Although cultural semiotics is not typically used in the analysis of 'green urbanism' strategies, distinct branches such as Lotman's *Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School* "have a high potential for integrative landscape studies (Lindström et al. 2011, p. 26).

Gottdiener (1983, p. 101) regards *urban semiotics* as the 'less robust relative' of *architectural semiotics*, characterized by limited critical review and a 'proliferation of terminology' without systematization. This proliferation of terminology is arguably a feature of environmental humanities scholarship as well, which has generated heated discussion over debated concepts such as the 'Anthropocene' (Castree (2014). The issue of accessibility that emerges when researchers develop specialized terminology is a valid concern. However, this thesis takes a more optimistic view of the neologisms developed within urban studies more broadly (in addition to environmental humanities scholarship). At the very least, this creative experimentation can reflect new directions in contemporary research and a conceptual challenge to the status quo, arguably necessary as current development paradigms are contributing which is far better than inaction from researchers in the face of pressing issues related to social or environmental justice.

Robinson (2016, p. 4) acknowledges that innovative approaches can be encouraged within the field, as "*urban studies today demarcates a mode of experimentation*." Vedeld et al. (2021, p. 2) similarly argue that "Experimentation has become a mainstream strategy by many cities to test innovative policies or technologies on the ground," providing a justification for further exploratory studies aiming to improve civic engagement. Robinson notes that some of the most valuable insights from contemporary research have arrived through 'creative exploration' of urban experiences, which can inform "conceptualizations of the urban" (ibid.). Although the theoretical conversations that emerge from this experimental approach can involve "multiple, sometimes interconnected, sometimes disjunct, theoretical conversations" (ibid. p. 23), the insights gained from new perspectives can be value to urbanists exploring new biospheric values, as well as activists seeking more participation in the making of urban space.

The methodology of thesis is therefore aligned with Robinson's (2016) vision of *urban studies as experimentation* and Vedeld's (2021) notion of *testing innovation on the ground*. As there has yet been no holistic study of environmental identity in Oslo that connects green development strategies to civic engagement, the originality of this approach is a strength of the research. Given that a foundation in communicative planning opens the door to plural understandings of green identity, taking a holistic approach is necessary to bridge epistemological and ontological divides.

3.4 Examining Urban Environmental Identity

As this thesis centers on an analysis of the perception of 'Green Oslo's' among activists and urbanists, who operate with different premises and normative assumptions about the built environment, examining the concept of urban environmental identity requires an interdisciplinary methodology. This chapter will build on the understanding of environmental identity developed by Michael Schmitt and Caroline Mackay (2019), and consider how comparative urban research can develop a more holistic understanding of human-nonhuman interaction in the built environment.

Considering the landscape of image politics and development practices that enables a skewed portrait of what constitutes 'green' or sustainable public space, developing clear comparative tactics will aid in the analysis of the city's contested environmental identity. This analysis points towards the relationship between the place-identity of the city, and the environmental identity of city dwellers. However, the interview process demonstrated that city dwellers have highly contextualized relationships to the urban environment, leading to different interpretations of what constitutes urban nature. As a result, it becomes clear that a single definition of urban nature is not well unsuited to address the wide array of ecological relationships that exist in urban space. Current directions in the scholarship call for interdisciplinary methods to examine the complex relations between city dwellers and urban nature(s), existing across these multiple scales.[17]

It is key to acknowledge that environmental (or ecological) identity can arrive through distinct processes (Mackay & Schmitt 2019), which can be experienced individually or collectively. At the individual level, awareness of issues ranging from climate change and biodiversity loss to pollution may produce changes in one's philosophy. As Andrew Dobson (2005) argues, these changes can manifest in concepts such as environmental citizenship, which may act as a pathway towards sustainability. Collective action among motivated individuals can also manifest at the community or neighborhood level, resulting in a change to the local environmental identity. This expression of environmental identity at street level may be distinct from the city's relationship to sustainability more broadly. Furthermore, the environmental identity of the city is further subjected to the image

[17] The term *urban nature(s)* is defined in chapter 2.1 and used to indicate the more-than-human assemblage of social, ecological, and material-political entities that shape the fabric of the urban environment.

politics of development, which will be addressed in chapter 3.1. Uncovering these overlapping scales of environmental identity is a task that requires an interdisciplinary methodology, as it involves transitioning between interpretations of the 'ecological self' and the 'ecological city'.

In their article on the predictors of environmental activism and politicized environmental identification, Michael Schmitt and his colleagues examine the development of pro-environmental behavior - or PEB (Schmitt et al. 2019).

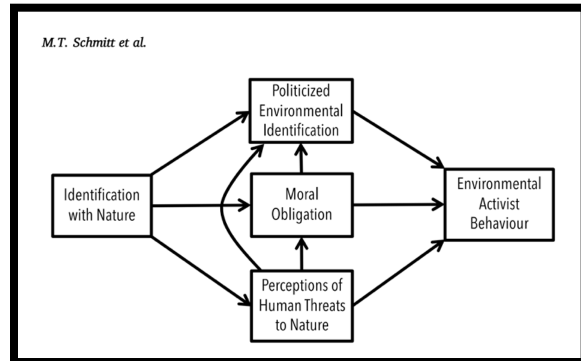

Figure 1 – Schmitt et al. 2019

This behavior includes participation in collective action, protest, boycotting, driving less, and other activities that are intended to produce social, economic, or political change benefitting the environment. According to their findings, there is "abundant evidence" to suggest that PEB is "promoted by a subjective sense of oneness with nature" (ibid.). However, the authors argue that in three studies, PEB was shaped more by politicized environmental identification than subjective identification (ibid., p. 28). Schmitt et al. define *politicized environmental identity* as: "...identification with a group that is engaged in a collective struggle to create pro-environmental social change" (ibid., p. 20). These findings were framed using a collective identity model that "allows for multiple processes by which identification with nature might predict activist PEB" (ibid.). The research points to the politization of environmental crisis (and perceived threats) as a key variable in the development of pro-environmental behavior.

Caroline Mackay also contributed to this line of inquiry in the article "Do people who feel connected to nature do more to protect it?" (Mackay & Schmitt 2019). Here, Mackay and Schmitt focus on 'subjective identification with nature' and argue that it activates psychological processes that lead to pro-environmental action, empathy, and a reconsideration of moral responsibility. They state that "Very few studies have examined potential processes that mediate the relationship between nature connection and pro-environmental action" (ibid., p. 8).

While the authors link ethics and moral responsibility to subjective identification with nature, further studies are needed to investigate their link to politicized environmental identity in urban space. Furthermore, these studies have not yet examined how these dynamics manifest among city dwellers specifically. Given the unique relationship between urban space and collective organizing against climate catastrophe, this remains an underexplored area of inquiry.

This comparative analysis navigates these scales of environmental identity, considering how individual relationships to urban nature(s) impact views surrounding Oslo's urban environment. While contemporary research has examined pro-environmental behaviors of urban residents (Meloni et al. 2019), and Schmitt et al. 2019 have examined specific environmental activist behaviors, this thesis addresses the relationship between environmental identity and pioneering urban practices that "open the way to creative, subversive, empowerment-oriented forms of spatial transformation" (Pittaluga 2020). Developing a deeper understanding of how city dwellers in Oslo relate to the manufacture of Oslo green image politics may open the door to new pathways for civic engagement through communicative planning. Therefore, this methodology supports expanding the definition of pioneering urban practices to include social organizing against climate change, environmental destruction, and *ecocide* more broadly.[18]

As "[cities] are hotspots of climate impacts, but also a crucial part of the solution" (IPCC 2022), qualitative research is needed to develop an understanding the social aspects of urban ecological identity. Given the shifting landscape of green power politics in Oslo, and the diverse tactics of resistance favored by environmental movements, a comparative framework of analysis is well suited to distinguish distinct interpretations of environmental ethics and ecological responsibility among key stakeholders. Building on a naturalistic approach to qualitative inquiry, the aims of this thesis respond to the need for interdisciplinary research on the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of the urban response to the climate crisis.

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[18] The term *ecocide* is a subject of ongoing debate, particularly when it comes to decolonizing its definition (Eichler 2020); however, it "denotes various measures of devastation and destruction which have in common that they aim at damaging or destroying the ecology of geographic areas to the detriment of human life, animal life, and plant life (Gauger et al. 2012, p. 3-4). This definition is an appropriate reference point for this thesis, in part because of its breadth, as climate organizers expressed that direct action in the city was most often motivated by a common desire to address planetary-scale crises such as climate change, the 6th Extinction, and mass deforestation.

4. THE ECO-URBAN THEATER

4.1 The Image Politics of Development' in 'Green Oslo'

The following chapter lays out the core themes that emerged throughout the research and interview process, beginning with the analysis of the image politics surrounding Oslo's reputation as a *green city.* These themes do not reflect the full range of perspectives gathered through interviews and observations; rather, they represent recurring themes that were of particular importance to the central research questions.

Among the most prominent themes was the image politics of 'green' urban development in Oslo, as well as the politization of sustainability more broadly. As mentioned in Chapter 1.1, the municipality of Oslo has actively promoted its image as a *green city* and engaged with the visual rhetoric of sustainable urban development. This 'urban image' is part of a broader international conversation – one in which the city is presented as a frontrunner for sustainability (Ross 2019; Anker 2020). The municipality's deliberate decision to promote this image generated significant discussion with both climate activists and urbanists throughout the interview process, though no clear diverging views were found. While the ten climate organizers interviewed agreed that the city's turn *towards* sustainability was far better than a turn *away* from environmental thought (and concern for the climate crisis), seven informants referenced their concerns that Oslo's green image has been used as a political tool to avoid taking significant action on climate. Magnus[19] argued that at a time when the climate crisis poses a clear danger to present and future generations, the political leadership in Oslo has used the rhetoric of a sustainable city while turning away from activists' demands for more substantive actions. Additionally, all organizers interviewed agreed that Equinor's presence in the city and influence within the domain of Norwegian politics represents a clash with the city's supposed concern for climate and the environment. These arguments represent a more critical appraisal of green image politics, and require a close examination of the municipality's engagement with its urban image.

[19] The names of climate organizers have been changed to protect the anonymity of respondents, as discussed at the beginning of Chapter 3.1, allowing for more open and unfiltered conversation to take place.

Oslo's attention to sustainability has been documented in both national and international media outlets (NRK 2023; New York Times 2017), and there was a notable increase in positive press releases when the city was recognized as the 'European Green Capital' in 2019 (Oslo Kommune). The municipality's public statement in response to this recognition read: "The jury especially noted Oslo's holistic approach covering a broad range of topics such as biodiversity, public transport, social integration, and citizen health gathered under the overarching theme 'City for everyone, putting people first'" (Oslo Kommune 2019). However, here one might ask what exactly a *city for everyone* means in terms of the makeup of the urban environment? Furthermore, when the Norwegian government only scaled back its fossil fuel expansion plans after significant pressure from activist groups, NGOs, and demonstrations at Stortinget (Taylor 2023), its pledge to *put people first* rings hollow to members of networks such as Extinction Rebellion or Just Stop Oil. At a minimum, it highlights the tension between corporate interests, political interests, and the interests of an environmentally conscious and concerned citizenry.

Oslo's green public image is connected to the desire to act as a role model for other cities – a goal stated explicitly when the city was awarded the European Green Capital award (Oslo Kommune 2019). The municipality stated as part of its main goals a desire to "[strengthen] Oslo's international profile as a green city and "communicate the full story of Oslo's green urban city life internationally with the aim to attract the best talents, investments, companies, startups, visitors, and tourists" (ibid.). This statement brings Jonny Aspen's (2013) arguments surrounding the triumph of zombie urbanism to the foreground, particularly when the notion of *green urban city life* is immediately connected to the role of financial investments and the presence of tourists and visitors. The statements made by Oslo Kommune (2019) point to the unchallenged idea that the green city is an inherently competitive arena – one in which startups, tech companies, and financial investors with clashing interests compete over limited urban space.

While this critical interpretation is a matter of debate, the municipality's main planning goals are worthy of discussion further discussion. According to Aspen (2013), it is this very notion of urban sustainability that produces anemic urban environments, development schemes, and adult playgrounds that encourage the city to conform to international standards and reproduce the same urban forms that have successfully increased tourism in other cities (i.e., New York's Highline).

He further argues that this vision of urban sustainability results in *public space being turned over to private interests*. When public space is eroded, the 'green city' has the potential of transforming into a patchwork of financial institutions, luxury housing, and spaces catering primarily to tourists and the 'creative class'. Aspen (ibid.) argues that this transformation is already well underway in 'Green Oslo', a point that will be taken up in the following chapter.

On the other hand, the municipality's statement of goals also referenced the role of civic engagement in reaching its environmental targets. It declared that the municipality seeks to "spread knowledge and engage the citizens, organizations, academia, and the business community to reach the target of becoming a zero-emission city in 2030" (Oslo Kommune 2019). Although the role of investors (i.e., the 'business community') is referenced again in this statement, this desire to connect civic engagement and academia to the making of green urban space is also representative of the goals of this thesis. It goes on to state that the aim of mobilizing the population is tackled at the city level through the support of "neighbourhoods, organisations, and associations that are building a greener city from the ground up" (ibid.). This notion of *building from the ground up* is also representative of the reasons for this thesis to engage more closely with environmental organizers, who have been particularly vocal around environmental issues in Oslo, but are not directly taking part in deliberative planning processes.

The statements by Oslo Kommune (2019) are intended to leave readers (and more importantly media outlets that cover the reception of the award) with the image of Oslo as a city where urban sustainability is tackled from the neighborhood level all the way up to municipal decision-making. However, considering the local resistance against Equinor, and concerns that planetary-scale crises like climate change could render local improvements in green urban governance meaningless, it is necessary to consider how accurate this image truly is, and if bolder visions of urban change are necessary to face the scale of the ecological breakdown taking place around the world.

Entities such as Oslo Kommune, political parties such as the *Miljøpartiet De Grønne* (MDG), and political representatives such as county governors (*statsforvalteren*) and county mayors (*fylkesordfører*) play an integral role in the political processes that shape the fabric of the built environment. The limitations inherent to a master's thesis made it difficult to obtain responses

from representatives in these areas, presenting an opportunity for future research to gather perspectives from local officials the political sphere. Nevertheless, analyzing perspectives from urban practitioners and climate activists was essential in answering the research questions and addressing the tension that surrounds the image production of the ‘green city’.

There is little doubt that the municipality’s central sustainability goals place significant weight on the importance of financial actors, investors, and entrepreneurial freedom in shaping urban space – arguably to be expected within the context of neoliberal urban governance (Skrede 2013). Nevertheless, the explicit promotion of civic engagement and desire to build a greener city from the ground up represents an environmental ‘turn’ that few other cities have adopted. The majority of interviews with urbanists reflected a hopeful vision of how the city’s commitment to its green image might stimulate meaningful participation from the public on issues such as climate change. However, urbanists such as Jonny Aspen have questioned how public participation can be made more substantive given the shortfalls of current development strategies.

Aspen’s (2015; 2017) arguments related to zombie urbanism and the outsized impacts of the financial elite (and creative classes) on Oslo’s fjord redevelopment plans require a closer analysis of the material changes to the waterfront and discursive strategies surrounding sustainability in the Fjord City. It is therefore necessary to identify the central actors taking part in and shaping the international dialogue that bolsters the image politics of ‘Green Oslo’.

The following section will further discuss the municipality’s stated commitment to civic engagement while taking a closer look at the planning and development of two areas of the Fjord City redevelopment project: Barcode and Tjuvholmen. While this represents a limited survey of the social and ecological tensions that have emerged in the Fjord City, it serves as an informative portrait of how the city’s green image politics may come into conflict with central principles of social, economic, and ecological sustainability.

4.2 Civic Engagement and the Making of Urban Space

The second core theme that emerged through the research process is the role of civic engagement in urban space and the potential for unsustainable outcomes in the built environment when social and ecological concerns are displaced in favor of economic or financial concerns.

City dwellers not only use urban spaces on a regular basis, but also have direct knowledge about the impacts of urban policies and development practices at street level. This body of knowledge and understanding of urban space – including its form and function – provides the justification for planning approaches that view *citizens as participants*. How then can urbanists think about the consequences for city dwellers (and urban environments) when the city is not designed for its human *and* nonhuman inhabitants? This presents not only a profound ethical and political problem – as urban planning is needed to develop socially, economically, and environmentally just responses to the climate crisis – but also a risk to the inhabitants of the city.

When city dwellers are excluded from the planning process, political gaps may form, and those who bear the brunt of development decisions are not given a voice in shaping urban responses to environmental conditions. The risk here is that decisions made at the municipal level may be ineffective in addressing global challenges like climate change, and that the exclusion of the civic voice may exacerbate existing social, economic, and ecological injustices. At a time when European cities have experienced significant push-back from city dwellers around issues of inequality (Schoene & Allaway 2019), there is certainly a risk that failing to take civic engagement seriously at the planning level could further existing social, economic, or political divides, producing contradictions with Fainstein's (2010) definition of the just city.

The connection between civic engagement and the making of public space will be explored first before transitioning to a discussion of the Barcode and Tjuvholmen developments as effective counterexamples related to unsustainable planning and design in 'Green Oslo'. Considering the academic interest in participatory planning models (Åström 2020), the city's commitment to civic engagement (Oslo Kommune 2019), and the need to prevent unsustainable or unjust outcomes, there is an opening to examine how these ideals are being upheld.

The protection of the citizenry against unsustainable urban outcomes has been addressed by Ellen de Vibe, the former Chief Town Planner at the Agency for Planning and Building Services in Oslo. Speaking at the eighth edition of the Oslo Architecture Trienalle in 2022, de Vibe emphasized the core concepts of safety and security while challenging the idyllic notion of public space:

> Public spaces are one of the last arenas we as individuals are free to access independent of age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. They are arenas for exchange of ideas, knowledge, goods, and social life. They are arenas to see other human being and to be seen by others. They facilitate leisure and pleasure… We wish them to be harmonious and conflict free areas where everybody wants to stay. But often they are also arenas for struggle and conflict.

According to de Vibe, *safety* should be understood as the ‘condition of being protected’ – emphasizing public wellbeing and the concept of ‘harmlessness’ in the local environment. She defined *security* as the ‘state of being free from dangers or threats’, guaranteed through actions of the state. These concepts have varying effects on different social groups, and de Vibe (along with other speakers) pointed to the different experiences of public space among women and girls as a key example.[20] Therefore, it is essential for socially sensitive planning models to address these disparate effects on urban populations. This is particularly relevant in the age of climate change, as current research has documented the link between climate change and social inequality (Islam & Winkel 2017; Singer 2018). De Vibe’s focus on the planning and design of socially equitable urban environments pointed to climate change as one of the principal threats to the safety and security of city dwellers. Within her conceptual framework (and in the context of the research topic), urban safety can be seen as the condition of being protected from the harmful impacts of climate change, while urban security can be understood as the state of being free from the dangers or threats of environmental change, guaranteed by state actions to adapt and mitigate. De Vibe argued that favoring one definition over the other is not purely semantic, but has a substantive policy effect, as the concept of security favors state intervention to address dangers and threats.

[20] In her thematic report *Gender, Cities and Climate Change* (2011), Gotelind Alber states: “While the gender and environment nexus in general has been an issue for many years, the climate change and gender nexus has only started to receive attention during the last decade.” Although the OAT 2022 emphasized the importance of socially sensitive and equitable approaches to urban design that protect women and girls, the interlinkages between gender, cities, and climate change were not discussed at length. This represents an important example of how *vulnerability* – a concept closely related to Ellen de Vibe’s framing of safety and security – “depends on exposure to the negative effects of climate variability” (Alber 2011, p. 7). Given that the OAT 2022 emphasized civic participation in planning, this represents an opportunity for increased engagement to address the gendered aspects of vulnerability in urban space.

De Vibe's description of public spaces as "arenas of struggle for struggle and conflict" will be particularly relevant in the following pages, exploring the tensions that emerged in Barcode and Tjuvholmen – two developments that challenge the idyllic notion of public space or green space.

Following Ellen de Vibe, State Secretary Bjørg Sandkjær, a leader of Oslo's Centre Party, discussed political engagement with the concept of "good spaces for us to live our lives". She argued that this is perhaps more important than *how* we develop cities, and was among the most vocal in addressing issues related to climate change and the environment. Sandkjær emphasized that nobody is free from the effects of the climate crisis, and stated that the increase in urban populations (discussed in chapter 1.1) requires planners and practitioners to consider how urban spaces can be made both safe and sustainable, particularly for vulnerable groups:

> We see more and more migrate to big cities as climate change and the climate crisis is unfolding, threatening livelihoods. The climate crisis affects everybody, yet hardest hit, as always, are the poorest and more vulnerable groups among us. With urbanization on the rise, it's important for us to think about and discuss how to make sure that our cities, urban areas, and public spaces around the world are safe as well as sustainable for everyone.

Turning to solutions, she argued that efforts should be increased at the local and national level when it comes to climate finance, climate services, nature-based solutions, cutting emissions, supporting adaptation, and resilience building. Like de Vibe, Sandkjær discussed protections for women and girls in public spaces, highlighting the social aspects of vulnerability in cities. She argued that addressing these vulnerabilities requires meaningful participation, and while she did not explicitly reference participatory planning models, civic engagement remained a central theme.

The theme of civic engagement was also explored by Kelly Donovan from the from Global Infrastructure Basel Foundation (GIB), who presented a theory of change used in the Safe & Sound Cities Programme that "includes relational well-being as a necessary dimension to place-making" (OAT 2022). She emphasized co-creative urban planning processes that take social dynamics and wellbeing into account to advance sustainable and resilient infrastructure: "This approach posits that wellbeing is relational – that people understand themselves in relation to other people… Furthermore, this relational approach moves beyond individual psychology; it moves beyond individual behavior and looks at underlying processes that enable or hinder wellbeing."

Donovan argued that a relational approach is necessary to ensure that long-term outcomes match the aims of urban policies and urban practices. She detailed how the experience and outcomes of wellbeing in the built environment have three interlinked dimensions. The *material* – having enough to meet one's basic needs; the *relational* – being connected to others on terms that are fair and enabling; and the *subjective* – how one feels about one's life and future. Turning then to the drivers of wellbeing in the built environment, she noted that there are 'personal drivers' stemming from individual inputs brought into a system, 'societal drivers' such as the organization of the economy or social differences in inequalities, and finally, 'environmental drivers' such as the built environment, public spaces, and urban ecology. Donovan stated that positive shifts in the interaction of these drivers produce "overall positive movement towards the conditions that enable wellbeing." Within this framework, a successful planning and design paradigm enables continuous interaction between relational outcomes and relationship drivers. This continuous interaction necessitates input directly from city dwellers, particularly around their experiences of wellbeing in the built environment as they are the experts of their own realities. Participatory models of socio-cultural place analysis were also addressed at the OAT by Ingar Brattbakk, a researcher of social geography based at OsloMet, paying closer attention to social and economic inequalities in cities.

A key takeaway from the event, other than its emphasis on civic engagement and the role of public space, was that strategies to achieve urban sustainability need to be physical, structural, and societal. Following this multi-dimensional approach, co-creative processes (Ellin 2012) are needed to establish positive cultures of interaction between city dwellers, planners, and practitioners, and urban ecologies. It was also noteworthy that eco-feminist thought could be identified in several lectures and presentations, although the term was not explicitly referenced. The theme of engaging with the public to defend public space requires more careful consideration of the vulnerabilities that specific urban populations face in the climate crisis.

How has this interest expressed by notable planners such as de Vibe and political leadership in Oslo translated into strategies of 'good urbanism' (Ellin 2012) that take social *and* ecological sustainability into account? A closer examination of the Barcode and Tjuvholmen developments can underscore the obstacles to meaningful participation and genuine sustainability.

Investigating the design of Barcode, a part of the fjord redevelopment transformed from a former docking site and industrial land into a neighborhood of multi-purpose, high-rise buildings, Bengt Anderson and Per Gunnar Røe (2017) underscored the tensions surrounding the social politics of urban architecture. The authors (ibid. p. 305) note that Barcode's design cannot be examined in a political vacuum, and should be analyzed as an extension of the broader plans for waterfront redevelopment promoted by the municipality of Oslo:

> The goal has been to create a waterfront for everybody to use (The Municipality of Oslo, 2008b), thereby meeting the criteria of the 'just city' as defined by Fainstein (2010, 2005), namely democracy, equity, diversity, growth and sustainability. The challenge according to Fainstein (2005) is to create synergies and handle contradictions between these goals.

Building on Fainstein's (2010) definition of the *just city* (highlighted in Chapter 2.1), Andersen and Røe (2017, p. 304) address this concern directly in the context of the Barcode development, arguing that the "project will not contribute to the making of a just city." Despite the municipality's aim of promoting entrepreneurial urban regeneration along the waterfront that is socially and culturally varied, the authors draw more critical conclusions. They point to the development as a prime example of "socially insensitive and decontextualized design" (ibid., p. 314) that benefits the financial elite and privileged classes rather than the traditionally working-class population of the inland city (East Oslo). Particularly in the areas of equity, social sustainability, and the improvement of living conditions, Andersen and Røe (ibid.) argue that these principles, arguably essential to any 'regeneration' plans that seek to market themselves as socially or environmentally sustainable, are absent from planning and design of Barcode. They agree with researcher Jonny Aspen (2013, p. 198), who argues that there are "'few traces of how the city's existing social and cultural diversity' informed the planning and design of the new waterfront."

These development plans reflect what Aspen (2013) refers to as *zombie urbanism* (described in Chapter 2.4), where the final design of large-scale architectural projects seeks to emulate 'adult playgrounds' that cater to tourists and the creative class while allocating more space to the financial elite through processes of gentrification. Rather than reshape urban space to match the social, economic, and ecological needs of city dwellers, this approach to planning and design furthers socio-spatial segregation while further contributing to the gentrification of 'Green Oslo'.

The development politics and architectural practices enabling decontextualized and unsustainable development also highlights how the experience of the built environment shapes the perception of green urban architecture and development, particularly among environmentally conscious citizens.

In their observational study of Tjuvholmen waterfront development, Sverre Bjerkeset and Jonny Aspen (2017) highlighted many of the same concerns surrounding the image politics of the Fjord City. Tjuvholmen was one of the first completed developments under the umbrella of the Fjord City project. Like Barcode, the new mixed-use district is located in a post-industrial site and therefore has a strong element of urban regeneration. The initial development proposals framed the new district as an economic boon that would establish "lavish, high quality public spaces" (ibid., p. 116). The development would be privately owned, and participants in the design competition were informed they should make the area available to the public, although "all public spaces should be fully financed and managed by private capital" (ibid., p. 121). The design of this new cultural attraction was left largely up to developers participating in the competition. The authors argue that this private-public dynamic generated planning and design processes that produced results with limited accessibility to city dwellers: "Symptomatically, the area has no public sector and a feeble civil sector presence" (ibid.). While Tjuvholmen was shaped by a highly coordinated aesthetic strategy, informed by the master architect Niels Torp's preference for classical urban form and design, Bjerkeset and Aspen's (ibid.) critical analysis highlights the issues of accessibility that stem from private interests dominating the planning of public space.

To frame issues at Tjuvholmen stemming from the configuration of urban power relations, it is helpful to briefly return to a point made by Richard Sennett (2018) and referenced in Chapter 2.2. Sennett (ibid., p. 287) highlights the fact that cities are constantly in need of repair. Planners and policymakers face the challenge of promoting resilience through repair-oriented systems, raising questions about the form and function of urban environments. Following this line of argumentation, Sennett posits that *open cities* are more repairable than *closed cities*: "[it] is looser in operation, its power relations are more interactive than directive, it is thus capable of adapting and retooling when things go wrong…" (ibid.). Considering the domination of private interests in the making of Tjuvholmen's inaccessible public space, the power relations driving its development may be viewed as directive, rather than interactive.

As planners and developers need to establish resilient and repairable cities to respond to the climate crisis, it is essential to consider *open* versus *closed* cities in relation to configurations of power and public space. Bjerkeset and Aspen (2018, p. 129) conclude that the Tjuvholmen development can be analyzed as a closed configuration, where issues of management and ownership enter the stage:

> The empirical material clearly demonstrates that the Tjuvholmen neighbourhood in Oslo can be considered a tight public space. Key characteristics are a closed planning and development process; physical and visual strictness and orderliness; widespread prohibitions and restrictions on use; extensive surveillance and control; lack of diversity in terms of uses and users; and, a certain tightness in people's physical and verbal conduct.

Tjuvholmen was promoted as an extension of the municipality's commitment to sustainable development and environmentally sensible planning. This included investment in environmental design, including the strategic construction of artificial reefs to improve biodiversity in the fjord (Ellefsen 2017, p. 209). It should be noted that the Oslofjord has experienced a long-term decline in biodiversity, and concerns surrounding pollution and contamination date back to the early nineteen-thirties "when the importance of the pollution for the biology of the inner fjord had become well documented" (Ruud 1968, p. 460). This ecological degradation, exacerbated by accelerating urban development in the climate crisis, represents a challenge to planners and designers attempting to redefine the image politics of what a sustainable waterfront can become. The visual strictness discussed by the authors will be addressed in the following chapter, particularly when it comes to eco-aesthetic preferences in the Fjord City.

Architect Halvor Ellefsen (2017, p. 209), points out that this underwater development required sophisticated construction methods which produced tangible results: "[Forty centimeters] of sand and different devices aimed to encourage marine life forms cover the muddy seabed. This attempt to clean the waters and create a new marine ecology has so far proved successful." The shift towards environmental planning and design at Tjuvholmen does highlight the emergent interest in the Fjord City surrounding the use of architecture and infrastructure as tools to improve socio-ecological relations between city dwellers and their shared urban environments. However, taking a broader view of social *and* ecological sustainability in the built environment, Bjerkeset and Aspen's (2017) analysis reflects a schism between the Tjuvholmen development and Sennett's view of the *open city* or Fainstein's view of the *just city*.

The authors point out that it is legitimate for planners and developers to strive for noticeable improvement in the quality of the built environment (Bjerkeset & Aspen 2017, p. 128); however, Tjuvholmen demonstrates issues of prioritization, where the aesthetic strategy to attract entrepreneurial investors and the creative class leads to the neglect of “more general social concerns” (ibid.). It is therefore vital to consider how central development actors leverage political power to shape processes of planning and design in favor of private interests and closed configurations. Researchers can respond to the municipality’s commitment to addressing climate change *and* improving the urban environment by developing comparative methods that examine how more open and civically inclusive strategies of communicative planning can be established. Moving away from Sennet’s ‘closed systems’ and the visual strictness pervading the image politics of Green Oslo therefore necessitates more careful consideration of biospheric values and their relationship to urban space. At a broader level, it justifies a comparative methodology that examines how visions of so-called ‘sustainable’ green space, or the ‘green city’ more broadly, are limited in scope by urban development and design processes that cater mostly to the financial elite.

When closed planning takes precedent and the built environment is managed through strict systems of private surveillance and control, tensions emerge surrounding the image politics of urban sustainability, particularly when broader social and ecological concerns are disregarded.

Considering the impacts of ambiguous definitions of sustainability at Barcode and Tjuvholmen, it is valuable to consider how these spaces operate within the symbolic realm. However, it is important to note that analyzing the symbolic role of green urbanism (discussed in chapter 2.3) can produce a range of interpretations when it comes to the fabric of the built environment. While professionalized planning discussions among urbanists take place within the context of sustainable governance, the actions of climate activists point to direct action as an alternative pathway to shape the fabric of the city. This comparative focus is critical in answering the first research question surrounding the strengths and weaknesses of current paradigms, particularly when it comes to civic participation in the making of the Fjord City. Given that urban resistance against climate catastrophe among activists is a central theme of this thesis, it is helpful to examine how specific developments in Oslo may operate as symbols of contested sustainability.

4.3 Symbols of Contested Sustainability in the City

The following section provides an overview of three development projects in Oslo that illustrate the tensions that emerge from distinct understanding of social and ecological sustainability. It will begin by addressing the two developments discussed in the previous chapter as symbols of contested sustainability in the urban core before examining a case at the periphery of the city that brings activists resistance into the discussion.

There are limits to an analysis that is overly attentive to the task of interpretation, given the difficulty in decoding complex socio-ecological dynamics in urban environments. Goubraun (2021, p. 626) states that "[this] notion of the built environment as an indefinite code waiting to be "decoded" by the urban navigator has become progressively common." However, drawing from Roland Barthes' (1985, p. 9) research on semiology and urbanism, Goubraun (ibid.) concludes that "decoding the built environment requires a person who is a geographer, urbanist, architect, historian, and psychoanalyst." This diversity of expertise is obviously impractical, and even in interdisciplinary research, the need to span a vast array of perspectives represents a significant obstacle to the research process. Here, the value of Robin's (2016) comparative tactics to understand 'the urban' becomes clear. Rather than having a single expert decode the meaning of architectural practices or urban transformations, a relational view of urban space allows for the analysis of plural (or even contested) understandings of urban sustainability. This creates an opportunity to draw from comparative tactics to disentangle the meaning of green architecture through a relational, rather than top-down approach.

This approach enables a comparison of how current approaches to planning, design, and development are shaping the city's environmental identity within the context of the 'green transition'. To critically present the strengths and weakness of current paradigms of development, it is helpful to analyze the degree to which developments, particularly related to the Fjord City, are either symbolic in nature, or genuinely seek to improve relations between city dwellers and the environment while shaping the urban fabric.

Disentangling the meaning of urban sustainability in the climate crisis requires qualitative researchers to delve into this precise terrain – wading through the complexity of individual versus collective outlooks on what kinds of spaces can reasonably be identified as 'green' or 'sustainable'. To approach this task holistically, expanding the scope of urban semiotics to include the pioneering practices of activists and organizers is a valuable step.[21] As Rice (2011, p. 36) argues: "Without holistic, open and flexible approaches to sustainability that respond to the very real pressures the world is facing, then the important role that architecture could play will lie unrealized." Following this line of reasoning, the analysis of interviews will address how current approaches to the development of 'Green Oslo' relate to definitions of collective concepts, and by extension, respond to the social and environmental needs of city dwellers at a time of accelerating change.

To borrow a phrase from Joar Skrede (2013, p. 1): *this analysis is not motivated by semiotic curious only.* However, interdisciplinary approaches to urban semiotics remain largely underexplored when it comes the discourse surrounding green cities. As discussed in chapter 2.3, John Pløger (2001, p. 64) addressed the production of a place-identity in his article "Millennium Urbanism – Discussive Planning," arguing that although planners "often do not see their planning work as a discursive practice," their work involves staging the societal meaning of urban space.

Drawing from Zygmunt Bauman's (1993, p. 145) work on postmodern ethics, Pløger (ibid.) argues that space is an abstraction, and becomes meaningful through the interaction of distinct process, including "those of cognitive, aesthetic and moral spacing." Therefore, representational spaces produce coded meanings for city dwellers and are related to the "social imaginary produced by discourses *of* space" (Pløger 2001, p. 65). Although the theoretical framework of the thesis in grounded in urban environmental ethics (Gunn 1998; Light 2001; Chan 2018) rather than postmodern ethics, this framing is particularly helpful in navigating urban imaginaries in Oslo and the discussive production of green space.

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[21] Louis Rice, whose research focuses on the relationship between the design of the built environment, sustainability and health, has addressed how the effort of 'urban decoding' is made more complex by the engagement of epistemology and power politics. The meaning of sustainable architecture cannot be disentangled from epistemology, the landscape of political power, scientific research, or collective attitudes towards the nonhuman world, "as they are all tied together into a collective concept" (Rice 2011, p. 32). Rice (ibid.) is critical of current sustainable development paradigms, arguing that a focus on limited aspects of environmental sustainability has pushed away wider ecological, equitable, social, and economic concerns (ibid., p. 36). This thesis supports a critical outlook on the limits of current sustainability paradigms, and the 'black-boxing' of sustainability that curtails bolder visions of biophilic cities.

Although the task of interpretation and 'urban decoding' has limitations, understanding the coded meaning of 'Green Oslo' requires some degree of translation work and analysis of how planners, architects, and developers go about staging the societal meaning of urban space.

This intentional staging of the societal meaning of greenspace can be identified clearly at the Barcode development discussed in the previous chapter. Andersen and Røe (2017, p. 307) argue that "The Barcode buildings are the most explicit physical, as well as political and symbolic, expression of the recent waterfront restructuring in Oslo." In an interview between the authors and an architect working for the Norwegian firm Alab, relatively unknown when the architectural competition was announced in 2003, the symbolic role of the development was discussed:

> Replying to a question about whether Barcode was either 'anchored locally or more internationally oriented', the Alab architect suggested that Barcode was 'a symbol of big-city growth.' For the architects it was important to see Barcode as part of non-local processes and tendencies. It could 'be recognized in other places in the world' and was a symbol of global urbanization processes.

The statement from the Alab architect emphasizes that Barcode – renamed the Opera Quarter – held a particular symbolic importance, and that development's representational meaning was closely linked to the paradigms of economic and urban growth. According to Andersen and Røe (2017, p. 312), when members of Alab met with their counterparts at the architectural firm Dark (owned by the same company group) and consultants from the Dutch architectural firm MVRDV, "the first thing they did was to gather information on urban growth and demographics." According to one Norwegian participant interviewed by the authors, he did not know why this information was necessary, while a representative from Alab stated that this was to find out "what the city needed" (ibid.). If major waterfront development projects that aim to adopt the label of sustainable urbanism are to be understood as symbols of 'big city growth', it reveals that the city's pledge to build a greener city from the ground up is closely linked to the paradigm of economic growth in the minds of developers. The planning dialogue that took place around Barcode therefore serves as a reminder that ideological commitments to economic growth may curtail the transformative potential of 'green urbanism' strategies in Oslo and the ability to pursue pioneering urban practices.

The Tjuvholmen development highlights similar thematic issues, and its approach to 'green' design is an effective example of the tensions that emerge from ambitious definitions of sustainability.

The previous chapter detailed how Tjuvholmen was strategically marketed as an example of what sustainability in the Fjord City might look like (Bjerkeset & Aspen 2017). The ambiguous, arguably defanged definition of sustainability in this context is precisely that which leads to developments where private interests take precedent, with the resulting architecture serving as temples to the city's financial elite. Rather than building a symbol of genuine social and ecological wellbeing, Tjuvholmen may serve as a more effective symbol of the social and economic divisions that exist in the built environment. Furthermore, when 'green design' is limited to the construction of underwater artificial reefs estimated to cost ten million NOK (Ellefsen 2017, p. 209), it raises the question: *what is being sustained above ground and for whom?*

As Bjerkeset and Aspen (2017, p. 129) point out, "it is people's use that ultimately determines the character of public spaces." This social use also shapes the spirit of place in the built environment. To paraphrase Christian Norberg-Schulz's (1980) argument in *Genius Loci*: places are spaces where life occurs. In order to work towards a *more-than-human* understanding of what makes a just and sustainable city, this requires more substantive action to strive for socially just outcomes in the built environment, in addition to recognizing the needs of its underwater inhabitants. Writing on the issues of sustainable urban development in the Fjord City, Joar Skrede (2013) states that:

> "Oslo City's own information magazine Fjordbyen stresses the same point; everyday life will be even greener, it assures the public: "New parks and green public areas will make for a luxuriant Fjord City. Hobby anglers and bathing nymphs can look forward to enjoying a clean fjord" (The Municipality of Oslo, 2009, p. 26).

While the stated commitment to the *greening* of public life is a promising sign that planners are not hostile towards the integration of ecological thought, the Tjuvholmen development places greater emphasis on landscape aesthetics, luxuriant spaces for leisure, and increased tourism than it does on social or environmental justice. As a result, it's symbolic role can be interpreted as an example of contested sustainability, rather than committed action to plan, design, or build ethically for current and future generations of human and nonhuman city dwellers.

Contested visions of sustainability and urban futures can also be identified directly in ongoing debates over the city's municipal plans, direct action in front of *Stortinget*, as well as demonstrations carried out by city dwellers around the periphery of the city.

From Bygdøy peninsula, the offices of the Norwegian state-owned multinational energy company Equinor can be seen across the water, drawing attention away from the surrounding greenspace and bluespace. The angular superstructure is made up of 5 lamellas, each 3 stories high, 140 meters long, and 23 meters wide. Seen from the waterfront, the building serves as a reminder of the presence of the petroleum industry in a city that promotes its reputation as a forerunner for sustainable development (Næss 2014, p. 1525). ArchDaily (2013) described this "iconic structure" in positive, value-laden terms, stating that it seeks to reflect Equinor's "role as an innovative and internationally pioneering petroleum company [and gives] a new identity and pulse to the local environment." This statement underscores the broader discussion surrounding how actors responsible for climate change are given an outsized voice in shaping place identity.

Figure 2 – Equinor Headquarters at Fornebu

They further described the architecture as a representation of typically Scandinavian "democratic values and social equality" (ibid.) – a skewed portrait of the local environment that stands in stark contrast to the actions of local activists engaging in direct action to oppose the fossil fuel industry's presence in Oslo.

This description of Equinor's role will generate unease among critical readers questioning how urban discourses produce description so thoroughly divorced from the reality of the climate crisis. A narrow focus on the design of the built environment (and the minimalization of urban footprints) results in a complete erasure of the social and political tensions that exist. The discussion of the identity and pulse of the local environment is emblematic of a kind of reckless ambiguity that can be identified in broader public discourses surrounding sustainable or green cities. Here, the lack of a socially, politically, or ecologically sensitive discussion of place-identity supports the interest of fossil capital and points to the use of *green image politics* to redefine sustainability and enable the continued profiteering of companies like Equinor on an ecologically ravaged planet.

Demonstrations at Fornebu led by Extinction Rebellion, student organizers, and joined by other politically active environmental organizations such as Nature and Youth (*Natur og Ungdom*) (Naturpress 2019; NRK 2021) sought to challenge Equinor's actions and operations by physically blockading the building's entrance, a symbolic act of resistance against the presence of the fossil fuel industry at the periphery of the city. These instances of civil disobedience also challenge the representational meaning of the space (described by ArchDaily), as Equinor's headquarters plays a symbolic role to protesters as a driver of climate catastrophe at the periphery of the Fjord City.[22]

While architectural publications may describe the infrastructure of the fossil fuel industry as a driver of place-identity, it may be more accurate to state that resistance against said infrastructure by activists represents contested understandings of place identity in Oslo.

Figure 3: Extinction Rebellion protest at Equinor's headquarters in Fornebu (2021). Photograph taken by Signe Fuglesteg Luksengard; published online in E24 Næringsliv.

Figure 4: Extinction Rebellion protesters lying on the ground in front of Equinor's headquarters. Photograph courtesy of XR; published in Naturpress, May 2019.

Although figures two and three represent only one organized campaign of non-violent civil disobedience against the largest oil and gas operator on the Norwegian Continental Shelf (NCS), they also highlight an ongoing pattern of urban-environmental resistance to climate catastrophe.

[22] The discussion of symbolic action in the built environment and the representational meaning of space is inspired by the framing of *Genius Loci*, as described by Kristian Nordberg-Schulz (1980). The theoretical justification for this semiotic analysis can be found in Chapter 2.3, while the methodological approach is further outlined in Chapter 3.3.

Strategic efforts at greenwashing can be identified in Equinor's statements on development projects such as the Rosebank oil and gas field, located 130 kilometers west of the Shetland Islands. While sites such as Rosebank are characterized by Equinor as a key part in achieving a "managed energy transition" (Equinor 2023), the continued expansion of fossil fuels can be regarded as a fundamental contradiction with any genuine commitment to secure the wellbeing of present and future generations. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine what kind of renewable energy transition might be achieved when Rosebank is expected to produce three hundred million barrels of oil in its lifetime (ibid.). The resistance against Equinor's role in the local environment and direct action by activists in the city, organized by groups including Extinction Rebellion (Naturpress 2019; NRK 2021), is an effective example of contested meanings of sustainability at the periphery of the city. It also serves as a public-facing example of environmentally and ethically motivated city dwellers engaging in direct action on the waterfront to oppose Norway's fossil dependence.

More diverse examples of direct action along the waterfront can also be identified to illustrate contested visions of sustainability in the Oslofjord. While the the 'Fjord City' regeneration project has sought to transform areas formerly regarded as Oslo's industrial 'backyard' into a central location in the Norwegian capital (Hofseth 2008, p. 101), the future of the fjord's ecology is a subject of central concern among environmental groups.

Beginning in 2022, activists associated with XR Norway began a series of actions targeted at the cruise industry's presence in the Oslofjord. In September 2022, the cruise ship AIDAnova was set to dock at Akershusstranda when it was confronted near the Bygdøy peninsula by two sailboats operated by members of XR Norway (Naturpress 2022). The activists distributed over a thousand leaflets to passengers warning about the dangers of greenwashing.[23] The parent company, Carnival Cruises, has attempted to market its green image, as the AIDAnova was the first cruise ship to run exclusively on liquified natural gas (ibid.). Carnival aimed to convince the public that 'green cruises' produce lower emissions while XR activists pointed to the devastation of the Oslofjord's ecology, flying the banner "Cruises Kill."

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[23] Details of the direct action campaign in September 2022 were gathered from interviews with participating members, subsequent reporting by local journalists, and information provided on XR Norway's social media pages.

Located near the Akershus Fortress, Akershusstranda is an area of significant interest to the city's fjord regeneration efforts. Considering the centrality of its location and the documented link between cruise ships and biodiversity loss (Hall et al. 2010), this organized 'image event' (DeLuca 2012) was targeted to generate public discussion over acceptable environmental practices. The protest saw limited success, and though the action received media attention (Naturpress 2011), the presence of the cruise industry in the waterfront remains a contentious issue.

Activists associated with XR resisted the description of the AIDAnova as a symbol of the industry's shift towards principles of sustainability. At a conceptual level, they challenged the representational role of industry in urban bluespace, viewing the desire to 'green' the industrial status-quo along the waterfront as a contradiction with genuine ecological wellbeing. As an image event, the XR campaign against 'green cruises' demonstrated that the debate on urban greening can be constricted when centered on decreasing the environmentally impacts of environmentally harmful industries (Hall et al. 2010), rather than envisioning an ethical urban metabolism along the waterfront. It underscored the tension that emerges when the normative assumptions associated with industrialized urban life are brought into dialogue with more ambitious proposals to defend the rights of urban nature(s). Despite the ongoing dialogue within XR over the effectiveness of disruptive action – a topic addressed by several interview respondents – the tactic of directly blockading environmentally destructive industries *on the water* has been embraced by other environmental groups in Norway such as Greenpeace (NRK 2022). This disruption to the normal flow of people, goods, and services in the Oslofjord also represents a tension between the political desire to increase economic activity in the Fjord City and the municipality's aim of developing a sustainable waterfront for 'all to use' (Oslo Kommune 2019).

To better understand the contrasting understandings of the symbolic role of green urbanism and architecture in Oslo, it is helpful to examine the alliances, movements, and networks of activists that offer alternative visions of sustainability in cities and the built environment more broadly.

4.4 Alliances, Movements, and Urban Landscapes

This chapter concludes with an overview of the fourth theme that emerged through the research process: the use of urban spaces to move beyond contested urban sustainability and promote a solidarity among environmentally conscious city dwellers. By examining the creative use of these spaces among climate activists and organizers, alternative pathways are presented for researchers to explore the social foundations of genuinely sustainable and livable futures.

As noted in chapter 4.1, Oslo's municipal government has stated that it aims to "[activate] citizens' continued efforts in the green transition and engage the entire population (Oslo Kommune 2019). This broad commitment to civic engagement can therefore include working with NGOs, activist movements, and organizing networks already in place and committed to serious action on climate and environmental issues. Particularly in Oslo, groups such as Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion, and Just Stop Oil have been among the most active in organizing around principles of justice and ecology to work towards a sustainable transition. These groups use different tactics of resistance and represent different 'fronts' of the social response to environmental catastrophe. While they operate with different organizational structures and have distinct (though often mutually reinforcing) goals, their vocal participation in the discourse around sustainability in Norway reveals that a minority of citizens are already activated and politically engaged on these issues. This thesis has stressed that current efforts to mobilize this engagement can include Oslo's youth-led environmental movement and organizing networks already addressing these issues.

Despite the substantive organizational and normative differences between XR and Greenpeace, these groups have established organizing mechanisms for civic engagement ranging from social media pages to member lists. Therefore, tapping into the organizing structures already in place to mobilize Oslo's population on climate change could be part of a multi-dimensional approach to bridge current knowledge gaps. The knowledge gap between urbanists seeking participatory models of planning and activists working to mobilize communities is of particular interest here. Through serious and sustained dialogue, it may be possible to clarify ambiguous definitions of sustainability that produce urban outcomes in contradiction with a fundamental aspect of sustainability: the genuine flourishing of human and nonhuman life (Næss 1986). Otherwise,

'green' urban development in Oslo runs the risk of producing shallow notions of what it means to live sustainably, and to promote social and ecological wellbeing in the built environment.

To briefly summarize, Næss' critique of *shallow ecology* refers to utilitarian or pragmatic justifications for the protection of nonhuman life, and the lack of recognition that nonhuman life has inherent value outside of its utility to humans (Naess 1994). This shallowness can arguably be identified in developments such as Barcode and Tjuvholmen, where aesthetic principles and the desire for economic growth and investment were given greater weight than innovative solutions to aid in human and nonhuman flourishing. Clarification of concepts such as sustainable urban development, and *deeper* engagement with scholarship that understands climate justice as a fundamental concern for city dwellers is therefore indispensable in the 'Green Oslo' discourse.

This clarification will be essential in moving from symbols of contested sustainability and shallow ecological thinking to symbols of urban solidarity in the climate crisis. Despite the severity of the climate (and nature) crisis, and its potential consequences for city dwellers, this pursuit of social and ecological solidarity in urban space can already be identified in protests joined by various civic and environmental groups based in Oslo.

Figure 5; Climate protest at parliament (Stortinget) on October 1st, 2021. The demonstration was joined by members of XR, Greenpeace, Nature and Youth (Natur og Ungdom), and environmentally concerned citizens unaffiliated with any particular group. Photograph by Andrew Turner Poeppel.

Figure 6; A larger demonstration at parliament on October 28th, 2022. In addition to the groups depicted in Figure 4, the protest against drilling on the arctic shelf was joined by members of the Red Party and representatives of the youth-led environmental / development organization Spire. Photograph by Andrew Turner Poeppel.

Figures four and five depict two demonstrations in front of parliament (*Stortinget*) organized by members of Extinction Rebellion, Greenpeace, Nature and Youth (*Natur og Ungdom*), and joined by members of the red party and the environmental/development organization *Spire*. These demonstrations not only demonstrated a degree of solidarity among environmentally concerned city dwellers, but also their ability to work beyond different in tactics and goals to promote solidarity against climate catastrophe. As seen in both figures, the demonstrations functions as image events (DeLuca 2012) intended to generate media attention through joint action in the center of the city. Individualized protests signs, artistic practices, costumes, and other creative practices figured prominently at these demonstrations. Attending these events was not only a key part of the research process to develop a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between these groups, but also highlighted what researcher Claudia Hedwig Yamu has described as the ability of open and public spaces to promote creative encounters in the built environment.

Yamu et al. (2020, p. 2) argue that "creativity emerges and develops in dynamic interaction between the individual and their spatial environment." The study of *spatial affordances for creativity* is an emerging field (ibid.) but it encourages researchers to consider how the arrangement of the built environment aid or hinder the ability of individuals to engage in knowledge sharing and the exchange of ideas. These arguments will be carefully examined in chapter 5.3, focusing on co-creative encounters in the 'green city'. It should be noted that the creative use of public and/or spaces by environmental activists represents an underexplored area of research. However, observations at climate demonstrations between 2022 and 2023 revealed the prominence of *artivism* in Oslo's environmental movement.[24] The use of artistic practices and installations in public spaces not only figured into the aesthetic arguments made by climate activists, but also demonstrated that creative capacity is viewed as a strength of the movement as a whole.

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[24] This portmanteau has been in use for over a decade, coinciding with the rise of protests movements critical of capitalism (Danko 2018, p. 236). While the term is often broadly used to refer to the interaction of artistic practice and direct action, sociologist Dagmar Danko (ibid., 248) argues that artists seeking to legitimize their presence "in the same spaces as artists" have engaged in creative resistance "by alluding to the spirit of the avant-garde and sharing the belief in the potential of creative opposition." As climate activists arguably view their own role as the 'front guard' against climate catastrophe, their use of creative forms of opposition may be examined as an extension of the spirit of the avant-garde into the realm of ecological thought. Future cross-disciplinary research can examine how the use of *artivism* among climate activists speaks to the fact that domains of civic and artistic activity are not immune to global ecological challenges. This call for further eco-aesthetic research on the intersection of art and resistance can therefore build on Henri de Saint-Simon's assertion that artists remain on the edge of social progress (Greenberg 1939).

The degree to which developments along the Fjord City foster creative encounters is a matter of debate, depending on one's views surrounding the accessibility of areas such as Barcode and Tjuvholmen. However, the analysis of these developments in chapter 4.3, focusing on issues of social and economic inequality, leads to a critical appraisal of the degree to which they are able to promote "a fluid interface between diverse organizations and disciplines" (Soares et al. 2020, p. 25). On the other hand, the creative use of open and public spaces such at *Stortings plass* to promote civic engagement on climate supports the conclusion that "[the] array and location of urban functions and physical features create a possibility for spatially guided creativity" (ibid). By considering how public spaces facilitate a fluid interface with different groups, it creates an opening for researchers to examine the creative interaction of climate activists in urban greenspace.

Interviews conducted with organizers for Extinction Rebellion in Oslo revealed that while events may be attended by different environmental groups, and interaction between XR networks throughout the country is common, there is comparatively little interaction between groups such as XR, Greenpeace, and environmental/development organizations such as *Spire*. This point will be taken up in the following chapter through a comparative analysis of responses from those interviewed. Furthermore, while organized environmental resistance in Oslo has been somewhat successful in increasing pressure on parliament to halt drilling actions (The Guardian 2023), these networks of social activism have not engaged to the same degree with the power politics that are shaping urban space in Oslo. This represents an area of engagement with underexploited opportunities for creative collaboration, particularly as the city aims to shape its international profile and green public image. This engagement is also relevant to the urban response to the climate crisis at a city level, as environmentally conscious citizens, and particularly organizers, represent a range of opinions often excluded from existing policy dialogues.

Developing new qualitative research on the range of urban environmental values and concepts surrounding the green city supports the use of comparative tactics (Robinson 2016) to examine underrepresented opinions and urban practices in 'Green Oslo'. This comparative analysis will be outlined in the following chapter, bringing activist and urbanist perspectives into a serious dialogue on the making of a green city at a time of planetary crisis.

5. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: DISENTANGLING URBAN NATURE(S)

5.1 Navigating the Terrain of Ecological Values

The following chapter will begin with an analysis of the diverse environmental values that were uncovered during the interview process, building on Robinson's (2016; 2022) use of comparative tactics and general vision of urban studies as experimentation. By opening with the discussion of values, it will highlight the genesis of distinct approaches to environmental thought that produce a variety of views surrounding 'Green Oslo's' relationship to the climate crisis.

Among the most prominent themes that emerged through ten interviews with climate organizers was the shift in personal and ecological values that were shaped by growing awareness of climate change. For most, this shift was not only characterized by concern for the impacts of environmental crises for human populations, but also a transition from anthropocentric concerns towards a broader concern for both human and nonhuman wellbeing. Magnus, one of the most active organizers in Extinction Rebellion Norway (and a founder of the branch *XR Youth*), discussed his journey towards environmental activism, stating that it was driven by social and environmental concern that extended beyond the 'bubble' of high standards of living in Norway:

> It's a long journey… I grew up in a very multi-racial area of Norway. I was the only ethnic Norwegian in my class, so I kind of grew up in the middle of the world. Societal concerns were at the forefront, so during highlight I decided to look at societal issues. I went to China and that's really where I woke up. I saw what climate change looks like. I felt it – embodied it – and I couldn't close that out anymore…

The use of the word embodiment stood out in Magnus' statement as it draws similarities to the concept of *embodied knowledge*, derived from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). According to Merleau-Ponty, "the original source of embodied knowledge" is 'knowledge bred of familiarity' or *savoir de familiarité* (Tanaka 2011, p. 149). Magnus' firsthand experience witnessing the impacts of climate change outside of Norway was the path towards knowledge bred of familiarity, which sparked his interest in "societal issues." His description of early life "in the

middle of the world" and its relationship to societal concern is also of particular interest given its appeal to emotion (or *pathos*), as well as Norway's historical homogeneity (Eriksen 2013).

Despite Norway's reputation for homogeneity and material abundance, Magnus stated that the development of embodied knowledge related to climate change led him to the conclusion that all members of society should take responsibility and an active role in the defense of the environment. He argued that this defense is particularly relevant in cities given current trends in urbanization, and connected it to the notion of city dwellers' 'distance to nature':

> Everyone has to do their part – companies and states and cities. But at COP27 and these meetings, they're not implementing any change. It's about overarching goals and intention agreements that are set… The implementation and details are very much done at the local and city level… Human populations are increasingly urbanized, so what does that do for distance to nature?

The idea that "everyone has to do their part" was also reiterated in an interview with Solveig, a recent addition to XR's network of organizers in Oslo. Her main role within XR centers on community outreach, and getting new members involved in actions taking place throughout the city. She emphasized that the anxiety over current environmental conditions is shared by many within distinct social groups and linked participatory action to the need for environmental values among a diverse range of citizens:

> A lot of people are worried. A lot of people are doing what they can. Even in industries, we need carpenters who care, we need skiers who care… As much as possible we would like to talk with people and get them to engage their own groups.

Solveig's statement was noteworthy for connecting climate concern to skiing – a pastime that is arguably a feature of Norwegian cultural identity (and one that is threatened by shifting environmental conditions) – but also for its optimistic portrayal of how environmentally conscious citizens can communicate "with their own groups." However, throughout the interview process, it became clear that achieving this kind of substantive engagement among a variety of social groups also presents a challenge when it comes to communicating non-anthropocentric environmental ethics to unfamiliar audiences. Magnus described this challenge as somewhat acute when it comes to communicating concepts such as the *Rights of Nature* (Borràs 2016) to policymakers who embrace anthropocentric frameworks of environmental thought:

> I've been working with Marianne Borgen, the mayor of Oslo, to try to suggest giving [legal] rights to the Aker Selva River. That's telling a new story – going from an anthropocentric worldview more to an ecocentric one, and the premises here are just different. When I spoke to her and others, they don't understand the difference…
> So that need for a new story, and need to rethink structurally – that's not something that's acknowledged in the sustainability discourse, and that's how you end up with superficial green stamps put on [development projects].

Magnus' statement is particularly helpful in outlining how individuals operating with different normative assumptions face challenges when trying to initiate discussions of ecocentric principles with policymakers. Given that many policymakers operate within the framework of neoliberal urban governance (Skrede 2016), concepts such as the Rights of Nature are most often unfamiliar to them. As Joar Skrede (2016, p. 413) argues, "cities have become strategic targets for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiments." Within these experiments, implementing the Rights of Nature may be seen as being in contradiction with utilitarian or instrumentalist justifications for environmental protection in the city. The Rights of Nature represents a new paradigm within the field of environmental law, "[recognizing] that nature has certain rights as a legal subject and holder of rights" (Borràs 2016, p. 116). As Magnus describes in the previous statement, this notion of the inherent value of the nonhuman world to thrive outside of human intervention – in line with Næss' *deep ecology* – is rarely found in the prevailing discourse around urban sustainability. Magnus also raised the following question: should activists focus their energy on working through these differences in values with policymakers who have alternative ideas about sustainability, or should their efforts be focused on organizing against actions that are actively destroying the planet, such as the expansion of fossil fuel development at a time of environmental crisis. Despite the difficulty in communicating ecocentric values, he expressed that conversations centered on ideas that are typically pushed to the periphery of sustainability debates are also necessary to achieve system-level change:

> When I speak about deep transformations, which the UN says we need, that also means changes in values, worldview, and paradigms that generate the reality we know today. So, that's about cultural changes – cultural shifts.

Magnus' statement on deep transformations underscores that the discussion of ecological values (and the cultures necessary to sustain them) cannot be separated from current political commitments to address climate change. This cultural shift was also linked to the idea of community, and the social infrastructure necessary to work outside of current paradigms that are

'generating the reality we know today'. Considering the uncertainty surrounding what an *ecological culture* would look like in the climate crisis, this subject is worthy of further research.

The importance of culture and community was also repeated in an interview with Jens, an XR organizer who was motivated to join after experiencing extreme levels of eco-grief and climate anxiety. He stated that awareness of the cascading impacts of climate change motivated him to help community outreach efforts for XR as an antidote to existential dread over the future of human and nonhuman life. Jens stated that he also decided to become active in the movement as a tool to overcome the feeling of helplessness in the climate crisis – a sentiment that was repeated in many of the interviews with XR activists. He explained that he is not involved in disruptive nonviolent direct actions such as roadblocks, but instead focuses on community organizing (referring the Norwegian word *fellesskap)*. His participation focused mainly on spreading information about upcoming actions, getting new members involved, and ensuring that there is a strong element of inclusivity in the local branch. However, in describing current recruiting efforts, Jens explained some of the hinderances that stem from public perception of the response to climate change:

> It should also be said that Norwegian are much less involved [in direct action] than other nationalities. Norwegians… well… they have everything they want. They are not as threatened by the climate crisis. It's a wealthy country, and we are wealthy because of oil, which is causing the climate crisis…

Jens argued that this tension around socio-economic wellbeing and public perception of climate action presents an obstacle to his own community organizing efforts. He stated that some Norwegians are not convinced by appeals to timeless (or *Kairos*) when it comes to climate action, feeling as though they must choose between material abundance and meaningful action to reverse the interrelated global environmental crises. As a result, many are hesitant to join movements that frame increased economic growth or development as drivers of environmental collapse. An interview with Isak, a young XR activist and university student contacted through an organizing meeting, confirmed this sentiment: "I used to think that the status quo wasn't such a bad thing – growing up it doesn't take up much space in your head. Then I started to learn about [the state of the climate and biodiversity crisis], and I wasn't comfortable doing nothing." Isak went on to describe how he was originally convinced by Norway's public image as an international 'role model' when it comes social welfare and environmental policy. It wasn't until he became aware of

the severity of the climate crises that he recognized direct action has a vital role to play in pushing for stronger commitments to promote "social and environmental wellbeing."

These statements illustrate the tension of values that surround the pursuit of *livable futures* and the belief that paradigmatic shifts are required to live genuinely sustainable lives in Norway. Given the growing interest in promoting alterative (or post-growth) metrics of societal wellbeing (Hickel 2020; Büchs & Koch 2019), it is necessary to consider how human and nonhuman flourishing will be reduced if the current trajectory of the climate and nature crisis is not reversed. On this topic, the current body of literature is unambiguous. Despite the long-term implications of the climate shift, its immediate effects on vulnerable populations – particularly those in the Global South – has been well-documented (IPCC 2023). In light of the skewed vulnerabilities of climate change and the call for a fair and meaningful response (Hailwood 2017), livable futures can be grounded in a vision of global justice.

In an interview with Einar, an XR activist in his sixties, this existential concern over livable futures was a central theme. Although Einar described himself as an activist more so than an organizer, he was contacted through an organizing meeting at the coworking space *Greenhouse Oslo*, which serves as a central meeting point for XR members. While he is not one of the principal organizers for XR Norway, his active participation in these meetings warranted further discussion and participation in a semi-structured interview. He went on to explain that his concern over the future his grandchildren would face was the principal motivator in joining XR. He described how this engagement in a broader movement and ability to build connections with other concerned citizens was key in preventing ecological despair from becoming debilitating:

> I have climate sorrow, but not climate depression. That's an important distinction. The most important thing is to do something. The activity aspect is very important.

The statement above serves as a clear example of appeals to emotion (or *pathos*) in ethical argumentation. Einar emphasized that subjective feelings of anxiety can be alleviated by combatting the feeling of helplessness, and the notion that one has no control over present circumstances. He stressed the importance of developing a sense of togetherness and "coherence" in the broader climate movement, as many young activists he has protested with suffer from similar feelings of eco-grief, anxiety, and despair. Einar's insight into the thought processes of young

activists stemmed from a background as a psychologist, and he was eager to discuss how this educational background shaped his understanding of psychological responses to climate change.

It was also striking that despite Einar's use of the word 'coherence' when discussing the climate movement in Norway, he stated that he was also displeased with specific actions by other groups taking part in direct action in Oslo. The main target of his criticism were activists associated with Just Stop Oil (*Stopp Oljeletinga!*), which became more active in Oslo throughout 2022:

> What will Just Stop Oil do now? We will not be searching for new oil until 2026, so I think it's a narrow perspective... It was said that we [at XR] were not active enough and did not have enough actions. I don't think that's true… We have every possibility to start actions.

Einar's principal criticism was that despite Extinction Rebellion's broader goals, defined by their core set of ten principles and values, some members left to join their counterparts engaging in more disruptive forms of action. This list includes the following points: a shared vision for change, a focus on 'momentum-driven organizing', the need for a regenerative culture, a willingness to 'challenge ourselves and our toxic system', valuing reflection and learning, promoting inclusivity, breaking down hierarchies of power, avoiding blaming and shaming, using non-violent strategy and tactics, and finally, an autonomous and decentralized structure.[25]

The relationship between XR and *Stopp Oljeletinga* was described in greater detail by Magnus, focusing on the distinct aims and opportunities for collaboration between the two groups. However, Einar's criticisms highlighted the contrasting values that generate tension between the two groups, particularly around public perception of direct action and disruptive tactics:

> It doesn't stop with attention in media. You must go a step further. What will that media attention to with people. Will people be sympathetic?

Einar emphasized that when getting communities involved in climate action, organizers should consider the most effective methods to communicate the values of the movement through other tactics of resistance. While he did not offer a blanket criticism of disruptive action, he argued that greater attention should be placed on public communication, and the pursuit of actions that

[25] This list of principles and values was taken from the website for Extinction Rebellion Norway, though they are shared by all national, regional, and local networks associated with the movement. This list is intended to provide a shared vision and set of overarching goals to guide the actions of autonomous and decentralized networks.

mobilize populations, rather than alienate potential allies. Einar's critique underscores some of the contrasting values that exist in XR and *Stopp Oljeletinga*, which were also described by Magnus.

Whereas XR is concentrated more on building a mass movement to achieve a just green transition, Just Stop Oil has centered its organizing efforts on disruptive actions and image events that are intended to generate maximum attention from media outlets.

Despite his critique of Just Stop Oil's disruptive tactics, Einar expressed optimism that a growing number of young people and even professionals have become more aware of the severity of the environmental crisis, particularly in cities. He went on to describe the idea of nature as something "external for city dwellers" – existing at the periphery of urban space. In order to promote the cultural shift (and shift in values) that is necessary to pursue environmental protection for its own sake, this shift away from nature as being external to the city is a key question. Einar argued that it was promising to see a cultural shift on climate, particularly among city planners focused on sustainability issues. He went on to state that "city planning has taken [these issues] more into consideration in the last years," and referenced an example of planners redesigning water pipes to accommodate the excessive rainfall driven by climate change. According to Einar, greater attention on ecological initiatives such as these may help render nature as something that is not external, but internal in the minds of city dwellers. Still, this shift in ecological values can only be achieved by clarifying concepts such as urban sustainability, and it requires action on the part of planners, designers and policymakers to work outside of current development strategies.

These interviews emphasized that a diverse terrain of social and civic values exist among climate organizers in Oslo, while the discussions of environmental values focused primarily on ecocentric thinking. Magnus offered perhaps the most articulate argument in favor of a transition towards non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, while individuals such as Jens and Einar stressed the social, civic, and economic beliefs that may stand in the way of mass mobilization (i.e., complacency and hesitance stemming from the comforts of Norwegian affluence). However, subsequent interviews with urbanists revealed a far more diverse terrain of environmental values when it comes to the pursuit of sustainable and livable urban futures.

5.2 Perceptions of Urban Nature(s): Tension and Dissonance

The following section will offer a more targeted analysis of the tensions that emerge from distinct visions of environmental and urban futures. This analysis draws from a comparison of key responses from urbanists and activists on contested ideas surrounding urban sustainability.

As described in the previous section, a diverse set of social and civic values exist among activists in relation to climate change and the principles of direct action. Although the respondents discussed in the previous chapter emphasized solidarity within the climate movement, they also highlighted how distinct values can lead to different interpretations of civic engagement and effective tactics of resistance. Additionally, they pointed towards the tensions that can divide the various 'fronts' of Oslo's climate movement, grounded in contrasting visions of activist resistance. These interviews also served as an entry point into the discussion of competing and mutually reinforcing ecological perspectives on the role of the city (and city planner) in the climate crisis.

The interview with the XR activist Einar generated a particularly relevant assertion: that city planning has taken climate and environmental issues into consideration to a greater degree in the last years. This assertion was confirmed in two subsequent interviews representing 'urbanist' perspectives from both faculty and students.

Speaking with architect and urban planner Claudia Hedwig Yamu, a professor in the faculty of technology, art, and design at OsloMet, she affirmed Einar's assessment of the growing concern for environmental issues in the discipline of urban planning. Yamu argued that concern for climate change and environmental issues is arguably greater among students of urban planning when compared to students of architecture. This increased concern for issues related to ecology and justice in the discipline may emerge because 'the planner' needs to be especially sensitive to issues of social, economic, and environmental inequality. In making this point, she described the role of urban planners as *agents of change*: "the planner is also a meditator in the city and a moderator for the city. The planner has to be an agent of change and have a lot of awareness, listen a lot, and be engaged with the community… You have to be in the field, and you have to have the highest ethical

standards." Considering the possibility that climate change could exacerbate existing inequalities in the city, Yamu's call for planners to have the "highest ethical standards" is especially salient.

The prominence of environmental thought and values among students of architecture and urban design was also discussed with Ruth, a master's student in landscape architecture at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO). In response to the claim that these issues are receiving greater attention within the institution, she offered the following assessment:

> I would say how seriously faculty and students at AHO are engaging with environmental issues and climate change varies greatly, because right now, AHO as a whole institution isn't as engaged as it should be or could be. That's why I believe, for the moment, it's individuals who have the biggest impact. Some students and faculty do not take it seriously enough, while others are serious engaged and very knowledgeable about these matters. Last year, some students started KAHOS, the climate association for AHO's students. They are examples of what I believe is going to influence AHO as an institution to go in the right direction. However, we still have awards and projects at AHO that some say promote the use of unsustainable materials and practices. For example, there's the 'Excellence in the Use of Concrete' award. I'd also say there's a lack of understanding and knowledge from the architect's perspective on *landscape architecture*.

Ruth's conclusions about AHO's engagement with climate issues confirms much of what was said by Claudia Yamu about the varying degrees of interest and commitment to sustainability. While some students are engaged in environmental organizing, as shown by the establishment of the student-led climate association KAHOS, it is perhaps unsurprising that other students and faculty see these concerns as tangential to their own career development or professional lives. Associations such as KAHOS arguably open the doors to new avenues of *pioneering urban practices*, as environmentally engaged students may be "capable of preparing the urban space to accommodate more evolved situations, [and] new embryos of urbanity" (Pittaluga 2020, p. 8). However, the existence of the 'Excellence in the Use of Concrete' award highlights that AHO's commitments to sustainability have not prevented the institution for recognizing the creative or novel use of materials that are generally regarded as unsustainable. Reflecting on how climate change can shape normative assumptions and design thinking in the institution, Ruth stated:

> I believe that if we took [climate change] seriously enough, sustainability would be the foundation of everything we design, create, and build. It should not be an *option* to create sustainable projects and products.

This statement underscores the need for a fundamental shift in design thinking, moving away from optional commitments to sustainability towards a requirement that development projects and products be grounded in firm principles of environmental protection. It also exposes the tension that emerges when environmental thought is seen as a secondary consideration or relegated to the periphery of design thinking. Rebecca went on to describe her entrance into the discipline, stating that her own interest in climate change preceded her decision to study landscape architecture:

> The whole reason I started studying landscape architecture was because of climate change. I knew what climate change was long before I knew what landscape architecture was. So, for me, landscape architecture has always been in the context and perspective of climate change. That's why I see the role of landscape architecture as something that should be based on sustainability. However, as time goes on and my knowledge of climate change becomes greater, the role of landscape architecture in the context of climate change only becomes greater for me.

The interview with Ruth offered an optimistic portrait of the potential for landscape architecture to play a transformative role in addressing climate change. She argued in favor of a more holistic understanding of the built environment (and its treatment), and argued this can be embraced by all sub-disciplines of architecture. Within this conceptual framework of ecologically sensitive design, Ruth argued that the built environment should, above all, sustain human and nonhuman life, placing greater attention on social and ecological wellbeing. Following this line of thought, the goal is for all design thinking to be grounded in knowledge of climate change and unavoidable commitments towards environmental stewardship. However, despite this optimistic view of the potentials of the discipline, she also described how vague principles of 'green design' can come into conflict with projects that market themselves as green or sustainable:

> I've become more aware of how landscape architecture sometimes needs to have a different role than how it is sometimes portrayed. Our role is *not* to create extravagant designs but to preserve, protect, and rehabilitate nature.

The statement above is perhaps most valuable in emphasizing Ruth's view that the role of the landscape architect is designing for a sustainable future, aligned with firm commitments to non-anthropocentric principles. Namely, the principles of preserving, protecting, and rehabilitating nature, rather than producing extravagant designs that attract tourists and what Jonny Aspen (2013) refers to as the 'creative class'. While Rebecca offered a nuanced description of the degree to

which AHO has lived up to its institutional commitment to sustainability, she stated that she hoped awareness of environmental issues would continue to drive positive action in Norway as a whole:

> I would say it is similar to the situation we have at AHO. We are certainly moving in the right direction, but we are still allowing unsustainable projects to be designed and build when sustainability should be at the foundation of everything we do.

This statement highlights the importance of 'cultures of sustainability' at an institutional level. Despite growing interest in the nonhuman world and the threats it faces in the twenty-first century, as well as gradual movement towards the codification of environmental protection among practitioners in the built environment, there are still key examples of tension and dissonance surrounding environmental values at AHO. Ruth was particularly concerned about the tendency towards greenwashing among urbanists – a risk that has arguably increased due to the popularization of sustainability as a concept. Discussing the resolution of these tensions, Ruth argued that public perception of concepts such as sustainability and greenwashing is malleable. Given that landscape architects can render abstract concepts into physical spaces of interaction with urban nature(s), communicative efforts are needed to define positive cultures of sustainability.

The issue of public perception and the pitfalls of greenwashing strategies in 'Green Oslo' were also addressed by the XR organizer Jens. Returning to Equinor's role in the city (and presence at Fornebu), he stated that one of the difficulties climate activists face in Norway is the widely held belief that Equinor plays an essential role in energy production (and security), a perception that is aided by its effective public communications efforts:

> Equinor does a lot of bad things, but they are very good at greenwashing. They are good at giving people reasons to think that they need Equinor. So, when we do actions against them, we have less public support…

Here it is necessary to consider what exactly is meant by greenwashing. The Equinor case might be the most recognizable example, as their expansion of fossil fuel operations is in contradiction with ambitious targets to reduce emissions. Furthermore, projects like Rosebank are certainly in contradiction with any commitment to protect fragile environments or ocean biodiversity. However, when getting into less obvious examples of greenwashing, the use of the concept can highlight other tensions in the discourse around urban sustainability. This issue was addressed directly by the XR activist Solveig, who held an alternative view of the concept:

> I want to look at people talking about the same [concepts] but with different meanings of the words. I'm using words like greenwashing, but what does that mean when we look into things? I think it's too easy to just say – Oslo is not green enough. I don't think that's a very helpful statement. But to say Oslo needs cheaper public transport – now we're talking.
>
> I'm not very fond of the word greenwashing. It's like a label to take away the specifics. Very often when I'm in a disagreement with people I stop and think: are we actually talking about the same thing? I also have the impression that Oslo is doing a lot of things [related to sustainability], but I'm in Extinction Rebellion because I don't believe these slow political processes will be enough.

Solveig's critique of greenwashing as an ambiguous concept underscores the dissonance that emerges from contested meanings of unsustainability, and how some within the Norwegian youth-led climate movement (Haugestad et al. 2021) can struggle to communicate across conceptual barriers. This was a surprising turn in the conversation, and Solveig offered a nuanced understanding of the rhetorical strategies that make resolution of greenwashing accusations difficult. Given that individuals in these instances are often operating with different premises related to sustainability, it is necessary to move beyond shallow definitions of greenwashing to identify the specific actors and actions responsible for the current state of planetary conditions. Furthermore, her critique of greenwashing was linked to an appeal to timeliness (or *kairos*) – while resolving accusations of unsustainability is difficult, the untenable state of human-nonhuman relations requires immediate action, rather than continuous tinkering with the status quo.

The conceptual tension around greenwashing also came up in an interview with Ingrid, a designer and organizer of the #InSilenceForClimate (*#iStillhetForKlima*) campaign in Oslo. Gathering at Stortingsplass outside of parliament, the campaign included weekly silent sit-ins to draw attention to the loss of nonhuman nature and provide a platform to build solidarity. Ingrid's background as a designer quickly became relevant when addressing the tensions present in the manufactured image of Oslo as a frontrunner for sustainability. Discussing what constitutes green action in the climate crisis and what can be relegated to the realm of greenwashing, she stated:

> I think a lot of what appears to be green [in Norway] is just old-fashioned… It's not that we're progressive; we're stuck in the past, and that relates to the environment. We should be ahead, but when you hear the actual discussions [about climate] it's not very progressive at all. The things that the politicians are discussing is leaning towards neoliberal discussions for problems. They want the market to fix it, they want to speed up, and they just need more money put into whatever for it to be solved.

When asked if there are still opportunities for pro-environmental action while working with "old-fashioned ideas," Ingrid's conclusions were not optimistic. Grounding her arguments in appeals to logic (or *logos*), she stated that the models of neoliberal urban governance are not well-suited to pursuing the task of deep system transformation. Considering that policymakers and representatives are incentivized to maintain the status quo, Ingrid viewed structural changes as a logical course of action. This conclusion was further supported by appeals to ethics (or *ethos*), arguing that the material abundance of Norwegian society is accompanied by an imperative to act in a just manner on the international state. Ingrid pushed back against the idea that progress can be made without systemic change, and disagreed with the notion that livable futures can be pursued without leaning into discomfort:

> A lot of it is a façade. Because we Norwegians in general do better financially. So it's easy to have your oat milk latte or whatever… It's easier to buy the more expensive, ecological brand, but it doesn't mean people are going beyond that… A lot of people are very comfortable with the way things are, and they'll do whatever is easy and within reach, but not necessary go one step further to do things that are uncomfortable… I think we need to move through the discomfort, that's the journey I've had.

This passage reveals a key tension that exists in activists' appeals to emotion (or *pathos*), and one that was left somewhat vague throughout the interview: what exactly does it mean to "do things that are uncomfortable" in the urban sphere? Although the notion of leaning into the discomfort of environmental knowledge bears some similarity to Donna Haraway's (2016) concept of 'staying with the trouble', Ingrid's responses revolved around individual action (i.e., not engaging in typical levels of consumer behavior) while at the same time calling for systemic transformation. This raises the question of what leaning into discomfort would mean from a system level, outside of changes in consumer behavior or habits. The unresolved tension points to Solveig's arguments around the vagueness of greenwashing accusations, and Magnus' statement that one needs to get into the specifics of a given policy or practice in the built environment. As was previously argued, this presents an obstacle for activists who are understandably more focused on direct action than the theoretical foundations of pursuing sustainable forms of urbanism.

These interviews emphasized the barriers to transforming current urbanization processes, with critiques of development strategies that mirrored arguments made by critical scholars of urbanism.

The concern over the unintended consequences of development trends is shared by Jonny Aspen, whose research as examined the tendency of urban regeneration strategies to cater to the needs of financially affluent citizens while pushing the economically disadvantaged (or non-citizens) to the periphery – a process representative of the tensions that exist in 'Green Oslo'.

In an interview with Aspen, he described how tensions around the presence of *nature in the city* emerge through the developer-driven insistence visual strictness. Referencing the Bjørvika development, he stated that the parameters developers worked within produced an urban floor dominated by commercial spaces and private interests: "the city floor was sold to an American developer for roughly 3.3 billion kroner. That just shows how public space and urban living has become 'big business.'" The developer Aspen referenced is Madison International, a real estate investment firm that worked with the independent investment bank Arctic Securities to arrange "six transactions that give Madison almost full control over the commercial public spaces on the city floor in Bjørvika" (Saltnes 2019).[26] Aspen stated that when the urban floor is purchased and programmed in this manner, it can have a homogenizing effect on the built environment, pointing out that these development trends are underexplored in relation to their environmental consequences. He noted that the insistence on "strict management" also enters the public discourse, which has motivated his recent research interest in "trying to develop a language about urban quality and urban living that is more nuanced." Aspen stated that his hope is that more nuanced terminology surrounding 'urban qualities and life' is not just a feature of contemporary research, but embraced by policymakers and planners active in making and remaking of urban space.

Addressing the Fjord City redevelopment plans, Aspen pointed out that roughly two-fifths of the project has been completed, with new development occurring in Filipstad and the area to the east of Bjørvika. He stated the 'green shift' has become more pronounced in the architectural competitions driving the development of these neighborhoods when compared to other areas of the Fjord City: "The renderings look much greener, so architects and planners are quick to take up new trends, but again this returns to the question: how serious are these commitments?" On the question of civic engagement, he pointed out that public participation often occurs after major decisions and guidelines of development are already in place. He added that "most of the areas of

[26] Translated from Norwegian and provided to Dag-Jørgen Saltnes in an article for *Estate Nyheter* (2019).

Fjordbyen are owned by the harbor front and the railway, and both of those public institutions have made their own real estate agencies, so they are public but act just like any private developer." Aspen noted that this peculiar private-public dynamic can generate tension, particularly when development processes favor private and commercial interests.

The interview with Aspen emphasized that there is a tendency to see urban quality through a restricted lens, and that a more nuanced language is needed to interpret the "qualities of ambiguity" that define the built environment. He noted that interdisciplinarity is the backbone of this approach, drawing concepts and terminology from sociological research and literary fiction. He pointed out that his own interest in urbanism developed after reading Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), which draws from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* to interpret modernism as a cultural discourse. When discussing J.G. Ballard's iconic novel *The Drowned World* (1962), Aspen made the observation that "the city has been a backdrop for both utopias and dystopias" – a statement that draws the immediate comparison to Ruth Eaton's (2002, p. 239) arguments on ideal cities harboring both utopian and dystopian thinking. These references centered on the idea that moving across disciplinary boundaries is needed to escape the restrictive tendences and tensions of green urbanism today, and that leaning into interdisciplinarity can produce creative results that fall outside of current development strategies.

Resolution of these tensions may be vital in producing a more nuanced discourse around the qualities of urban nature(s) and the possibility of alternative or post-growth urban futures.

5.3 The Potential of Urban Downscaling

While the previous section highlighted the conceptual and practical tensions in the discourse around 'Green Oslo', it is helpful to turn to solution-oriented observations. If activists and urbanists aim to achieve genuinely livable futures and work through conceptual divisions or philosophical disagreements, at the very least, it is necessary to give eco-centric thinking and concepts such as *degrowth* or *urban downscaling* the consideration they are due.

The degrowth agenda has become more prominent among various environmental movements in the Global North (Demaria et. al 2013, p. 195); however, this consideration is arguably not as common in the areas of urban planning, architecture, and design. Researchers such as Jin Xue (2022) at NMBU have been active in addressing existing gaps between degrowth and urban studies, but there remains a need for interdisciplinary studies to address urban downscaling and its relationship to ecocentric thought. Additionally, there is significant room for policymakers engaged on climate issues to consider alternatives to the current trajectory of urban development and participate in ongoing dialogues with those who operate outside of the growth paradigm.

The arguments put forward by degrowth advocates (i.e., Jason Hickel 2020) will not be addressed in full, but the absence of a serious dialogue between urban planners, developers, and critics of the growth paradigm (Xue 2022) presents an obstacle to post-growth approaches to planning and the pursuit of spatial solutions. A narrow insistence on urban growth as the primary measure of wellbeing in the city – regardless of what is being produced (and at what cost to the environment) – may lead to fundamentally unsustainable outcomes in the built environment. The inability of architects and developers to conceptualize a sustainable city that relies on alternative metrics of social and ecological wellbeing arguably points to a failure of imagination. Although Ruth Eaton's (2002) research on *ideal cities* detailed two thousand years of utopian ideas related to city building, this willingness to consider alternative spatial arrangements has not translated into a willingness among policymakers or developers in cities such as Oslo to prioritize new metrics of social and ecological wellbeing over increased investment and growth in the built environment.

Facing the moral storm of the climate crisis, this willingness to engage with new thinking (outside of the growth paradigm) can be addressed in urban scholarship *and* among urban practitioners eager to address the substantial problems posed by global ecological breakdown.

As described in previous chapters, the municipality of Oslo has stated that its goal has been to create a waterfront for public use that meets Fainstein's (2010) criteria for a *just city*, including democracy, equity, diversity, growth and sustainability (Bjerkeset & Aspen 2017, p. 129). Fainstein (2010) pointed out that handling contradictions between these goals can be a significant challenge. Additionally, degrowth advocates such as Jason Hickel (2020) may argue that an insistence on the growth paradigm and continuous accumulation of capital in highly developed countries (and cities) of the Global North may fundamentally contradict the need to embrace principles of global justice. Therefore, given the increased interest in degrowth scholarship and post-capitalist thought (ibid.), researchers revisiting the *just city* concept may examine spatial arrangements and developments that fall outside of the growth paradigm.

Xue (2022, p. 418) has pointed to the missing dialogue between degrowth and city planning and examined the "potentiality of urban planning in solidifying the degrowth theory," emphasizing one major ethical challenge. Given the commitment to participatory modes of planning, and the fact that "planners working in the public sector are, as civil servants, obliged to promote democratically adopted political objectives" (ibid., 417), how could planners that advocate for degrowth policies prevent the implementation of those policies – guided by their personal values – from being an example of top-down, technocratic planning? Despite this obstacle to *urban downscaling*, Xue (ibid.) notes that planners may be well positioned to "inform politicians and the public at large about how alternative spatial solutions are likely to affect the possibilities of reaching the environmental and social justice goals in question". While the field of environmental humanities tends to be critical of solutions that focus mainly on technological innovation and technocratic solutions to climate change (Higgins et al. 2020), a concern shared by activists and Claudia Yamu, innovative research on urban degrowth has shown that technologies may play a pivotal role in encouraging citizen engagement around underexplored concepts such as *urban downscaling*. The creative use of digital technologies can offer an opportunity to gather key insights and encourage participation in areas of research that would otherwise remain underexplored.

Digital tools can play a role in examining the potential of urban degrowth while overcoming the challenges that Xue (2022) describes when it comes to the imposition of political thought on those who are unfamiliar or even hostile with the notion of post-growth approaches to planning and design in cities. For example, Silvia Mete (2022) examined the potential of scenario-based gaming sessions to implement degrowth housing solutions in the Oslo region. By creating pre-designed scenarios in which city dwellers have a right to housing guaranteed by per capita limitations on private ownership that "[keep] consumption under control" (ibid., p. 534), participants were able to explore desirable and livable future scenarios that "cannot be achieved by following the current trajectory" or working "within the existing conditional frameworks" (ibid., p. 519).

These gaming scenarios also highlighted the landscape of power politics and potential issues faced in implementing degrowth strategies at the city-scale: "The participants pointed out that the local authorities often feel powerless in the face of private and market interests. It would be even more so trying to promote a degrowth scenario" (Mete 2022). This creative use of gaming to explore the "potentials and barriers" (Mete 2022) of degrowth serves as an example of a pioneering urban practice in digital space. This use of digital tools to investigate new avenues of post-growth thought in the built environment "[opens] the way to creative, subversive, empowerment-oriented forms of spatial transformation" (Pittaluga 2020). Interviews with XR activists throughout Oslo demonstrated that there is a willingness among young environmentalists in particularly to engage with these pioneering practices, particularly when it comes to the exploration of post-growth scenarios. As these respondents were open the potential of post-growth thought in the climate crisis, it highlights an opening for urbanists relying on digital tools to work with activists and collaborative methods, thereby overcoming the barriers to downscaling described by Xue (2022).

For the sake of comparison, it is necessary to examine how climate activists and urbanists interpret current visions of economic sustainability and the potential of urban downscaling as a response to the global ecological crisis. Climate organizers interviewed for this thesis offered a variety of views on the potential for urbanism and to address the climate crisis within existing conditional frameworks. Speaking with Magnus, an organizer introduced in the previous chapter, he offered a mixed assessment of Oslo's green urban planning and design solutions:

> On the one hand, I will be happy to give [city planners] huge applause for bringing these issues in and trying to build something new that [aligns] with future goals… But sustainability is increasingly a word that is mainstream and normalized but also deservingly criticized because it comes into a development paradigm which really puts economic growth before everything. So, it's basically economic growth at all costs with *some* ecological considerations. Myself and many in XR regard it as easily falling into greenwashing… Many of these initiatives require increased resources and consumption, so there's no real consideration about the nature crisis and the climate crisis as interrelated.

Magnus' statement draws similarities to the assessment made by Ruth regarding the current trajectory of urban sustainability commitments. While his answer was grounded in a general recognition that planners are moving in the right direction, he argued that current proposals rarely go so far as to put aside considerations of economic growth in favor of alternative metrics such as emissions reductions or the species richness. This tension over the principal goals of 'green urbanism' can be identified in the planning discussions that took place for the Barcode development (Andersen & Røe 2017, p. 307), seeing as promoting 'big city growth' was the first principle discussed in the planning and design process.

Magnus put forward the argument that the primacy of economic and financial considerations represents a serious obstacle to achieving deep system transformation:

> If the goal is economic growth with ecological considerations, it's not about ecological integrity at its core. And then you as an activists have to strategically maneuver – yes, it's good that you're doing something, [but] you have to see what the projects are actually doing… You shouldn't criticize by default, so if you want to be critical you have to go into it and look at the parameters and metrics that are used. That requires a lot of energy, and we are very few so you don't have climate activists who really look into that and come with expert-level considerations on this or this project. Our voice is just silenced because we don't have that capacity.

This statement points to perceived limitations of current "metrics and parameters" of development, particularly when the desire to increase economic growth in urban spaces takes precedence over measurements of ecological sustainability such as *species richness*. When the richness of urban space is reduced to measurements of economic sustainability, as was arguably the case in the planning discussion of Barcode, alternative metrics of social and ecological wellbeing may be disregarded in professional dialogues. It is particularly relevant that the concept of degrowth featured prominently the interview with Magnus, and explicitly referenced in two subsequent interviews (analyzed in the coming pages).

Isak, an XR activist introduced in the previous chapter also expressed critiques of the growth mindset and its implications for cities. Addressing the Barcode development and its relationship to sustainability, he made a succinct point: "Honestly, it never would have occurred to me to think of Barcode as an example of sustainability. I'm not even sure what that would mean…" This sense of ambiguity encourages one to return to the point made it the previous chapter – that current, ambiguous definitions of urban sustainability and livability, when left up to developers, operate more within the realm of image politics than the realm of social or environmental justice. The consequences of this trajectory are quite clear, as the weaponization of green image politics can result in cliché developments and meticulously staged 'sustainable projects' that fall within the category of zombie urbanism (Aspen 2013). Considering the pathway towards alternative trajectories, it is helpful to consider how *urban downscaling* is perceived among planners.

An interview with urban planner Martin Løken was particularly informative in this regard, as he was the only informant to bridge the gap between urban planners and environmental activists. Løken serves as the deputy mayor of Ås and the head of the main committee for technology and planning. He is also a member of Extinction Rebellion and has participated in organizing events held throughout the surrounding area. Although the municipality of Ås is located outside of the boundaries of the capital, Løken has lived as a resident of Oslo and was eager to speak about the challenges to implementing degrowth principles in the urban sphere. He described how his transition into the profession of urban planning and awareness of the climate crisis encouraged him to consider the arguments made by degrowth advocates. This was linked to the development of environmental values, which he believes are disregarded in existing municipal plans:

> I saw that there were plans coming through the municipal board… and when I tried to read some of these regulation plans, I didn't understand. I asked some of the older representatives: does this mean we are building on values of nature, and there were no answers. They were voting with no debate… There was a growth imperative that was silent.

The statement above highlights the implicit assumption among planners that the growth imperative should drive development in the surrounding area. He noted that after studying urban planning for five years at NMBU, he was eager to engage with other practitioners in the built environment and challenge the growth imperative. According to Løken, the response from senior planners typically included the argument that it was either too late or too early to shift economic thinking or embrace

alternative environmental values in current approaches to urban development. He also argued that part of the challenge in shifting development paradigms stems from the high barrier to entry when it comes to urban planning. Løken listed educational requirements, discipline-specific language (or *déformation professionnelle*), and the difficulty of building the political support necessary to effect significant change as key examples of these barriers, even at the local level: "I've been deputy mayor now for four years and the head of the planning board, but almost never with the majority on my side." He noted that widely held views surrounding the benefits of urban growth are a significant obstacle to the implementation of urban downscaling, as a lack of support from other planners can result in the stagnation of degrowth principles at the municipal level.

Løken argued that small-scale projects at the local level, ranging from community gardens to artistic installations, are essential in providing a pathway towards alternative futures. Here, he noted that more serious consideration of ecological justice is needed to produce a paradigmatic shift in planning that extends beyond the local level. Without this element of *recognitional justice* for nonhuman nature, he concluded that practices such as clear cutting the forests surrounding Oslo will likely continue. His statements also demonstrated that transitioning from small-scale, bottom-up strategies of community downscaling or "degrowth lifestyles" to implementation at the policy-level remains experimental. Despite these challenges, Løken stated that surrounding himself with fellow environmentalists and developing a personal and intentional connection to nonhuman nature was essential in convincing him that there are pathways to deep system transformation.

Considering the significant barriers described by Løken when it comes to implementing degrowth principles at the municipal level, readers may conclude that the implementation of concepts such as urban downscaling in major metropolitan areas remains a distant or futile prospect. However, these issues are pertinent to current strategies of urban transformation, as political leadership within the Green Party (MDG) has vocally supported densification of the built environment. MDG representative and Vice Mayor for Urban Development Arild Hermstad (Oslo Kommune 2023) linked densification policies to the growth occurring in the cityscape:

> Oslo is experiencing record growth in population and jobs. At the same time, policy goals for reduced climate gas emissions and more social inclusion are ambitious. Urban development in Oslo is concentrated within the existing built environment, which requires densification and transformation in prioritized areas.

The limited urban footprint of the city, contained between the fjord and the forest (or *marka*) line, leaves policymakers in the position of debating the social and spatial consequences of densification. While some city residents have expressed concern over *building upwards* in a city that is already quite tiered, “[the] present and the previous local governments in Oslo have both implemented densification strategies in their municipal master plans” (Skrede & Andersen 2022, p. 254). The implementation of these policies has significant social and economic impact, as previous plans sought to densify the less affluent parts of eastern Oslo, while the current government has shifted its attention to densification of affluent areas to the west. While these debates have focused on spatial capacity and urban quality, they typically sidestep appeals to ethics (or *ethos*) in the conversation over downscaling. This gap in argumentation presents another opportunity to bring alternative paradigms to the negotiating table. Given the degrowth agenda’s orientation towards justice, resolving the issues of densification and downscaling may be achieved by addressing eco-ethical arguments on the form, function, and scale of metropolitan areas.

The discussion of urban downscaling in Oslo is particularly relevant considering the ongoing debate over the city council’s decision to permit high-rise buildings (up to 125 meters) in the middle of the city center. While representatives of MDG such as Eivind Trædal have supported arguments in favor of verticality as an efficient use of space, critics such as antiquarian Janne Wilberg have argued that high-rise developments serve the interests of property developers and function as an ‘environmental nuisance’ in the city (Solheim 2023). Given that MDG’s arguments surrounding densification and verticality have generated heated discussion over the city’s skyline, the risks of socially stratified forms of tiered urbanism remains a key issue in ‘Green Oslo’.

Further research on degrowth policy frameworks within cities is certainly necessary to understand the implications of downscaling for urban politics as well as the wellbeing of human and nonhuman city dwellers. However, considering the growing interest in developing new participatory development processes in Oslo (Kjærås 2023), it may be possible for collaborative platforms to allow for more serious dialogue on underexplored concepts and ecological values.

5.4 Co-Creating Cities through Citizen Engagement

The following section will focus on avenues for creative collaboration and alternative pathways to green development that could reshape the urban identity of 'Green Oslo'. The comparative analysis is grounded in a vision of future urban spaces as co-created by a range of stakeholders and city dwellers to achieve what might be characterized as the *more-than-human* city. This approach presents an opportunity to think about how city building can be envisioned as a collective endeavor to support the wellbeing of urban residents, both human and nonhuman. This optimistic view of pathways towards ecological urbanism is not centered on principles of sustainable development as currently imagined, but as co-creative processes that are intentionally planned, designed, and managed to achieve just outcomes. This broader view of what can be achieved on the 'justice-front' points towards the making of a truly biophilic city, with wilder urban forms (Beatley 2011) that can only be pursued effectively with changes in mindset, policy, and urban practice.

In an interview with Per Gunnar Røe, professor of sociology and social geography at the University of Oslo, he discussed the social, economic, and environmental challenges that act as a barrier to the making of a just or sustainable city. He stated that he was inspired by New York based sociologist Eric Klinenberg's understanding of social infrastructure in his work *Palaces for the People* (2018). Klinenberg (ibid.) takes a broader view of social infrastructure, including an array of public spaces, both indoor and outdoor, that enable a flow of exchanges and interactions in the built environment. Building on this broader view of social infrastructure and its importance to city dwellers, Røe's research has examined justice-oriented issues ranging from the ownership and maintenance of urban space to regulation and surveillance in cities, though his research on 'Green Oslo' (2016) has been most influential for this thesis.

Røe, along with his co-author Mark Luccarelli, (2016, p. 4), have argued that the broad implications of green urbanism require researchers to "[explore] the relation between urban design / urbanism and nature." The question of city dwellers' connection to nature was a central theme of the interview, and one that he has addressed in his research (ibid). Røe stated that he works mainly with "nature as greenspaces that are part of the city – part of the considerations made by city planners, developers, architects, and geographers." This framing of nature as "part of the city," is

not merely a semantic point, but a normative assumption that urban research can move away from the conceptualization of nature as a pristine object existing at the periphery of the city. However, given the hesitance among urbanists to consider wilder urban forms (Beatley 2012), it is necessary to take a closer look at what closer human-environment interaction can look like in terms of urban practices. Røe described the practical, social, and infrastructural barriers to bringing the built environment into a more harmonious relationship with its natural surroundings:

> When it comes to the connection with nature, from a practical perspective, social infrastructure is important. Especially in Oslo, it's relevant that you can take the metro into the woods or to other places to experience nature. The green spaces of the city may also be sites for experiencing nature and [promoting environmental consciousness]. Even if parks are not 'nature' understood as something wild – it's manicured, organized, and programmed. Still, you can use these green spaces as plots where things grow wild and have a degree of biodiversity. Of course, these can be spaces that people learn from.

The statement above emphasizes the issue of accessibility to natural spaces, and the broader urban structures that shape *how* city dwellers experience the unbuilt environment. His description of current approaches that view 'nature in the city' as something to be manicured, organized, and programmed resembled the critiques of the *pristine nature myth* by researchers such as William Denevan (2011) and Paul Robbins (2011). According to Røe, moving away from this management-oriented mindset is necessary to view urban nature as "spaces that people learn from."

However, Røe pointed out that this view of 'nature in the city' is not shared by all urban practitioners interested in urban greening: "Until recently, much of the focus when it comes to developing a *green* or *sustainable* city has been focused on Oslo within its municipal borders. That's a very limited way of looking at the city." He pointed out that one cannot solve the problems of accessibility in the *green city* with this limited mindset, and that it is vital to consider urban surroundings, as well as the dynamic flows of people, goods, and services in and out of the city: "One concept that is quite useful to understand the relationship between the city and nature is urban metabolism. The city has a much more complex relationship to nature and its surrounding through infrastructure, transportation, and the flows in and out of the city." This dynamic interaction warrants a more nuanced discussion of how city dwellers (who cannot experience *wilderness* as it is traditionally thought of) are able to experience *nature within the city*.

Røe argued that the accessibility of natural spaces is closely linked to issues of social and economic inequality in many cities, where a growing number of working class people are pushed to the periphery. This raises questions about the suburbanization of poverty – which Røe described as an pressing concern in Oslo, as demonstrated by the vast discrepancy in waterfront housing prices versus neighborhoods such as Furuset, a residential and surburban area northeast of Oslo that has suffered from a "sense of poor urban quality" (Akbarinejad et al. 2023, p. 4). He pointed out that in Norway, there is ongoing discussion around housing development and the suburbanization of poverty, though not much policy to speak of, which stands out given Norway's broader political vision of the social welfare state. For example, the dominance of discussion over policy was arguably a feature of the 2023 webinar *Housing for All*, organized by Habitat Norway, an NGO working on problems related to urban settlement in the Global South and North.[27]

Røe argued that the concept of green urbanism has been strategically used by development actors in a deregulated environment, and pointed out that this strategic use has posed challenges to scholars and urban practitioners in the past ten years. He explained that new development proposals generally have some representation of sustainability, including aspects such as green roofs, a focus on livability, high quality outdoor areas, technical aspects related to energy use, a focus on car sharing, or access to public transportation. This representation of sustainability is often used to market development projects; however, a broader view of social infrastructure (Klinenberg 2018) produces a more complex portrait. Røe referenced the example of older infrastructure knocked down for the sake of new developments, and pointed out that unsustainable practices can continue in the absence of clear regulations; these practices can contradict with ambitious targets related to emissions reductions and environmental protection. Therefore, Røe argued that there is a gap between the representation of sustainability in proposals, texts, images, and renderings, and the actual implications for socio-economic and environmental wellbeing.

[27] During the 2023 webinar *Housing for All*, former Chief City Planner of Oslo Ellen de Vibe argued that "housing is not only about buildings and construction, but is equally about identity, belonging, and social networks." As Per Gunnar Røe stated in the interview that there is much discussion surrounding sustainable housing but not much policy to speak of, the implications of the climate crisis for sustainable urban living require further research in this area. Degrowth advocate Jason Hickel, speaking at the Arne Næss Symposium in 2023, argued that housing should be seen as a fundamental human right to achieve socially and economically just spatial arrangements. Ellen de Vibe addressed this point while moderating the *Housing for All* webinar, asking: *is affordable and secure housing a vision, or is it utopian*? Seeing as de Vibe (OAT 2022) pointed out that diverse residential areas must meet climate challenges and "secure integration and cohesion without the segregation that creates inequity," developing spatial solutions that aim for more equitable housing arrangements remains a contested issue.

Addressing Fainstein's (2012) definition of the *just city* and its relationship to 'Green Oslo', Røe referred to the core components of the definition. These include *diversity*, building on the concept of recognitional justice and the avoidance of humiliation or disrespect (Honneth 2004), *democracy*, focusing on procedural justice that "calls for equitable and democratic involvement of all stakeholders in energy decision-making" (Lee & Byrne 2019), and *equity*, relating to distributional justice and the perceived fairness of allocations of economic goods and resources among members of society (Bojer 2005).

Addressing the Bjørvika development's relationship to these core components, Røe argued that it falls short of Fainstein's (2012) definition. He pointed out that the architectural competitions behind it had little public participation, an issue with the competitive format more broadly: "Architectural competitions make participation quite difficult, because it is confined to the professional discussion." Within these competitions, projects may be presented to the public – a partly democratic process – though substantive dialogue with the public does not typically center on local needs and uses. This assessment led him to the conclusion that "it's quite clear Barcode doesn't contribute to diversity." Its lack of diversity stems in part from the specific workplaces established at Bjørvika, including KPMG and other financial actors, as well as high-end restaurants and cafes. Røe pointed out that these workplaces are supported by an economically disadvantaged service class, which is typically the case when it comes to high-end city development projects. As a result, those supporting the function of areas such as Barcode typically live at the outskirts of the city (if they are not students) due to the lack of affordable housing. Addressing the distributional aspect of the *just city*, Røe stated that access to social infrastructure does not solve the 'problem of distribution' if those working in the area are not able to afford living in the vicinity. He pointed out that the high-end developments of the Fjord City have not managed to solve these problems, requiring more careful consideration of how planners can work within Fainstein's framework to achieve just results in the built environment.

Røe argued that these contradictions between the marketing of sustainable projects and the social, economic, or ecological consequences at street level return to the idea of just planning processes. He linked the desire to achieve just results for city dwellers to the concept of *commoning the city* – framing urban space as belonging to its inhabitants and not just its owners.

In the co-written paper “Diversifying the Compact City” (2023, p. 13), Røe, along with his co-authors, notes that what ‘commoning’ means in urban contexts is a matter of nuanced debate. The authors adopt a “broad view of the concept, understanding it as a modal shift in politics from individual to collective terms, as the countermovement to privatization and enclosure” (ibid.). This countermovement is particularly relevant to the question of compactness and density, as researchers have highlighted the environmental impact of urban sprawl (Johnson 2001). Røe pointed out in the interview that there is, of course, a need for private spaces, but seeing the city as a common asset is not a utopian dream. He stated that various urban researchers have suggested community ownership of shared spaces (i.e., housing projects where residents have a degree of control over rent and conditions). Furthermore, Røe’s research on the compact city (2023, p. 14) shows that there are “a number of practical projects already existing in cities that are in line with the agenda of commoning the compact city.” These projects are not limited to municipal governments providing “amenities and public infrastructures to its citizens” despite resource constraints, but also “a host of activist, stakeholder, and neighbourhood-driven activities centered on sharing across sectors of food, energy, governance, and more” (ibid.). Adopting a community-oriented view of just planning processes, it becomes clear that such activities can provide alternative pathways to the align with the principles of sustainability *and* commoning.

At the conclusion of the interview, Røe argued that new projects can consider the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the *just city* concept (Fainstein 2010). This holistic view is also in line with a broader interpretation of urban belonging in ‘Green Oslo’. He cited positive examples that can be analyzed, including urban living labs that develop the ideas needed to create new districts. Although he noted that urban living labs seldom deal with structural issues such as ownership and access, Røe stated that these positive examples need to be built on continuously: “The planning process has to be organized in a new way involving civil society actors and civic organizations to create a new social infrastructure for the city with goods that are accessible for *all* groups.” This statement mirrors the conclusion about interaction between urbanists and organizers in the compact city: “Our entry point on commoning suggests closer interaction with community organizers and activists as well as sociologists on the investigation of formations of social capital” (Haarstad et al., 2023, p. 18). Røe’s view of social and civic engagement drew similarities to themes expressed by Claudia Yamu, an architect and urban planner based at OsloMet.

In an interview with Yamu, she discussed top-down versus bottom-up approaches to planning, and the ability of policies, practices, and planning frameworks to respond to the needs of city dwellers. Referencing the famous image of Le Corbusier's hand hovering over *La Ville Radieuse* (see figure 6 below), she argued that skepticism towards top-down approaches to planning emerged from the shortcomings of modernist paradigms that viewed the *city as a machine.*

Figure 7 – Le Corbusier's hand hovering over La Ville Radieuse; Architecture Daily (2007).

Yamu noted that there is a need for a both approaches, and that the difficulty lies in identifying citizens' needs through bottom-up approaches and implementing them through top-down policy frameworks and approaches to strategic planning. This difficult balance speaks to the need to work across different scales, and to develop urban sustainability policies that work at the national *and* city level. She pointed out that this remains a central challenge of developing sound urban policy and civically inclusive frameworks of planning.

On the question of Oslo's environmental identity, Yamu encouraged a multi-dimensional approach to interpret urban sustainability: "Very often [city planners] just focus on one dimension, and do not consider the interconnectedness of other dimensions." Although she argued that Oslo is *not* an overall frontrunner when it comes to sustainability, she addressed the difficulty of interpreting vague terminology and the need to recognize specific areas where the city is outperforming or underperforming. She identified specific niches where the city is performing well, such as the use of electric vehicles and the efficient public transportation network. However, she argued that: "Oslo struggles in the same way that a lot of other European cities are struggling when it comes to sustainability." Yamu described this struggle as a conflict between the wants, desires, and needs of city dwellers and existing policies and conditional frameworks. She argued that handling this tension, as well as the complexity and chain effects that exist in the built environment, requires planners to consider social aspects of urban sustainability such as the interaction of backgrounds, cultures, and mindsets. Given the significant social responsibility that accompanies this, Yamu emphasized that maintaining the highest ethical standards is of utmost importance.

On the question of civic engagement in the planning process, and the need to increase literacy around urban planning and design to encourage greater participation, Yamu pointed out that while there is academic enthusiasm, this ties together with the research-practice gap. Addressing the different levels of possible engagement – ranging from passive to active – she stated there are two main issues that stand in the way, despite the prevailing academic enthusiasm behind co-creative processes of planning. The first constraint is time: people need to involve themselves, and the constraints of daily life often prevent individuals from taking a greater role in contributing to community projects. The second is constraint is available resources: planners need at least one to two weeks to achieve 'full engagement', which evidently circles back to the first constraint.

Addressing the closure of this participation gap in urban planning, Yamu stated that, "the most important thing is to build trust among people, stakeholders, and decision-makers." This involves continuous effort, building awareness, changing mindsets, and convincing the actors involved that small steps in the right direction are valuable. She pointed out that developing social trust and serious dialogue should be combined with "protecting democracy and respecting diversity." Given the historical trust in public institutions that exists in Norwegian society (Brezzi et al. 2021), there are arguably fewer barriers for planners to develop positive drivers of public participation and civic engagement when compared to countries with low trust in government such as the United States (Pew Research Center 2020).

Citing her study of mobility inequality in Indonesia (Hidayati et al. 2021), which sought to close the 'participation gap', Yamu put forward the thought-provoking conclusion that: "social norms and values override spatial potentials." This research (ibid.) underscores the extent to which evaluative beliefs shape interaction in the built environment, often in unexpected ways (i.e., whether or not residents walk in a walkable neighborhood). Considering the role of evaluative beliefs in environmental decision-making, this conclusion is relevant to the question of how social norms and values shape the ways in which individuals are inclined to act in urban environments. Additionally, development projects such Tjuvholmen and Bjørvika demonstrate that existing economic arrangements and financial considerations can also override spatial potentials. The primacy of economic growth in planning discussions and the tendency toward high-end

developments that cater to the interests of the economic elite are key examples of how the transformative potential of architecture, planning, and design may be curtailed in 'Green Oslo'.

Yamu argued that responding effectively to these socio-spatial dynamics in green cities requires some training in evidence-based design "where you analyze data to get a factual reality." Accordingly, in the discipline of urban planning, practitioners aim to bring factual realities together with 'consensus realities'. She pointed out that this balance of fact and consensus encourages practitioners to consider 'how messages are conveyed', which can be difficult given the existence of disciplinary language bubbles.

Therefore, moving beyond language bubbles and the tendency to revert to *déformation professionnelle* requires practitioners to move outside of 'disciplinary blind spots'. Yamu referenced the Delphic maxim *know thyself,* and stated that this is a lifelong path for planners to walk: "It's a very active way of being, listening, transcribing, linking to [one's] expertise, and creating." This approach requires a genuine sensitivity to the needs of people while staying grounded in a pragmatic and practice-oriented approach; however, Yamu argued that the need for pragmatism among planners is also balanced by an optimistic view of what can be achieved.

Yamu referenced a statement by Bernd Scholl, professor of spatial development at ETH Zürich, that "as planners we create guidelines for the future." Scholl's statement is reminiscent of the declaration by architect and systems theorist Buckminster Fuller that: *we are called to be the architects, of the future, not its victims*. The establishment of "guidelines for the future" also falls in line with Ruth Eaton's (2002, p. 239) writings on the *ideal city* and utopian thinking in city planning, which Yamu pointed out is always balanced by the possibility of dystopian futures. Therefore, "choosing utopia" requires planners to respond in dynamic ways to the challenges of the future, balancing pragmatism with idealism. This outlook also draws similarities to William Becker's (2012) conclusion that since creating the architecture needed to respond to global challenges can be a daunting task: *vision needs a seat at the negotiating table*. Positive outlooks on the transformative potential of green cities can therefore aid in building the political will necessary to pursue ambitious proposals and bold solutions.

Referring to the interest in futuristic urban design and visions of *smart city* development as a response to current challenges in the urban sphere, Yamu pointed out that these trends require additional sensitivity when it comes to the methods used by planners and practitioners, an issue she has tackled from a pedagogical perspective:

> We do a lot [of research] on technology-driven cities, smart cities, sustainable cities, and we also teach about the technocratic or societal dangers within them... Especially at our master's program, we're at the forefront of thinking [about] how to plan with data – including big data, qualitative data, and quantitative data. It's also a sensitive matter… because you can lie with data. So, your ethical standards have to be very high.

The statement above emphasizes the ethical responsibility placed on urban planners (and educators within the discipline), one that is arguably increasing due to the implications of climate change for city dwellers. While Yamu stated that she thought the concerns around concepts such as smart cities, technocratic solutions, and issues such as urban surveillance are entirely valid, her own research has revealed how digital technologies can be used responsibly and ethically to examine urban vulnerability. In a case study of Herrenberg, Germany (Dembski et al. 2020), *digital twins* were "implemented in a visualization platform for virtual reality and… presented to the general public," revealing the potential for digital technologies to play a role in collaborative processes.

It is therefore necessary to consider to what extent current development strategies in 'Green Oslo' enable collaborative and empowerment-oriented approaches to planning. When asked about the call for closer interaction between and city planners and organizers, the XR activist Magnus stated:

> I've never received any notification from any city planners. If they've been doing that, at least it's not with XR. With urban planners it's been nonexistent to my knowledge…

This lack of contact between the two groups is arguably understandable, as XR exists as a decentralized and autonomous network of activists and organizers. The decentralized structure and absence of a clear chain of command makes serious dialogue at the city planning level difficult from an organizational perspective. Which activists would take a leading role in organizing productive collaboration, and how could the consensus-driven decision-making structure allow for the negotiation of conflicting aims and objectives? A more structured approach may therefore be necessary for cross-disciplinary dialogue to produce tangible results or solutions.

Speaking with Magnus about what collaboration might look like in practice, he argued that the capacity of XR as an imaginative body can be useful in co-creative planning processes, linking to the concept of prefigurative activism:

> A part of XR is you have this prefigurative activism. Prefigurative activism is that you are the culture you want to show. You're being the change you want to see… Within that regenerative culture, you have a lot of ideas that are connected. For example, not everyone but many [in XR] are animal activists, vegan, or vegetarian, and that also relates to city gardens and how to use green spaces… The level of interaction where they can gain something from activists is hearing their visions and ideas for how the future should look… That's what XR does very well. We're looking at systems and structures.

The statement above underscores not only the terrain of environmental values *within* XR (highlighted in chapter 5.1), but also demonstrates the strengths of the network as an imaginative body. The "visions and ideas" described by Magnus surrounding alternative urban futures arguably create room for underexplored frameworks such as eco-centrism to enter professional dialogues, as highlighted by Magnus' interaction with Marianne Borgen, the mayor of Oslo. He went on to discuss the strengths of XR's approach to deep system transformation, and pointed out that these imaginaries may play a role in moving from surface level solutions such as green roofs towards a broader vision of what civic engagement around sustainable urbanity could achieve:

> It's very easy when this civic engagement is individualized – let's have *this* garden on *this* rooftop – which is important, because it creates certain environmental values. That might be the first step to engaging into a more systemic or continued approach. I'm not saying that's unimportant… But that energy needs to be focused on systemic causes and systems as well. That's also what I would like to see when they talk about civic engagement… I think they should talk to activists to really understand the structural reasons and to make their commitment about deep system change, and not just about individualizing responsibility.

Most XR members interviewed for this thesis returned to the idea of promoting systemic change and deep system transformation when asked about their potential contributions if engagement with civil society and activist groups was pursued in the planning process. While many offered limited responses to the specific role of architecture in the green transition, Einar, an activist introduced in chapter 5.1, drew from his background in environmental psychology:

> When I was studying psychology in Bergen, we had some lectures about environmental psychology and the psychology of architecture. I learned a very short sentence that still is in my ears: *the hypnotic effect of architecture*… Even if you don't know much [about architecture], it has an effect on you…

Einar's description of this 'hypnotic effect' emphasized that the structure of the built environment shapes conscious and unconscious decision-making in urban landscapes. He went on to describe how physical structures and aesthetic preferences in cities have measurable impacts on physiological systems: concepts such as walkability, open space, or the 'greenness' of the city have a substantive impact on the psychological wellbeing of city dwellers. He referenced research he had seen that both medical patients and prisoners have different stress responses and bodily reactions when they have access to natural light and green areas. Einar went on to argue that this "healthy relationship to nature" should receive greater attention when it comes to development proposals, linking it to Norwegian's relationships to cabin life.

> Now there is a tendency here in Oslo that we focus more on [the loss] of nature. We have a city with many cabin owners in the mountains. That's a Norwegian thing – to have a cabin… The average measure [for a cabin in the mountains] is eighty-five square meters. I think it's pretty close to the average in towns and cities. They want a cabin *out* in nature that is destroyed by the building. Fields are destroyed with dynamite. It's like small towns out in the mountains, and it's tremendously bad for the animals. It [causes] irreversible damage done to the landscape.

The statement above is of interest for two reasons. First, it links the experience of urban life in Norway to the experience of a nature that is rendered external. However, in order to experience this external nature (in the context of cabin life), delicate environments are disturbed and ultimately "destroyed" to establish dwellings that resemble "small towns" rather than the traditional definition of cabins as small shelters in remote areas. Second, it puts forward a comparison of the size of urban dwellings and cabins. While Einar's description of cabin size was linked to the notion of environmental destruction (i.e., the making of small towns in previously undisturbed environments), it brings the issues of densification, compactness, and access to the foreground. This issue of access to livable urban space was also a topic Røe described throughout his interview, as increasing housing prices in the Fjord city push low-income families and residents to the periphery of the city, generating tension with Fainstein's (2012) concept of the *just city*.

Einar described more diverse examples of direct action campaigns in the city, particularly in Oslo's surrounding fjord and forests. While the focus of XR has been on stopping the continuation of oil extraction, there are also examples of collaborative action on other key environmental issues. He

defended these campaigns as effective examples of eco-centric organizing – actions grounded in the protection of nonhuman life without justifications that rely on anthropocentric reasoning:

> We are planning to have different actions connected to *Oslofjorden* – the Oslo fjord. And these are complex matters. The fjord has problems on many levels and many sources of pollution. For example, south around the area of Drøbak the fjord narrows, and the passage is not deep enough for the biggest ships. The coastal authorities want to use dynamite to make it deeper. That will affect the conditions for fish to lay eggs. It's quite crazy… That's one type of action. Another is that we have connected with *Skogsopprøret*. It's called Riot for the Forest. When the forest owners are cutting trees, they have big, big machines like monsters. Afterwards, they plant like they do in the Amazon, turning it into a monocrop plantation. Some in XR will join that group.

Einar's description of the various 'fronts' of the movement underscores the tension between the city, the forest and the fjord. It also presents action groups such as *Skogsopprøret*, or the Forest Rebellion, as the 'front guard' defending against the destruction of *marka*."[28] Despite his enthusiasm for direct action grounded in eco-centric thinking, he pointed out that these concerns are not widely shared among urban residents and practitioners in the built environment:

> Ordinary people don't know anything about it. Ask every person in Oslo – the biggest urbanists – do you like the woods? Oh yes, they are wonderful! All people say so, but they don't know what is happening.

The interview with Einar harkened back to statements by Ellen de Vibe (OAT 2022) that despite the overarching desire for urban space to be defined by harmonious interaction, they also function as spaces for struggle and conflict. This struggle and conflict can be identified in acts of civil resistance in both the fjord and the forest, as demonstrated by the actions of XR on the waterfront and the connection to groups such as *Skogsopprøret*. Developing a more nuanced understanding of these struggles and their implications for just city building requires closer consideration of the interaction of ethics and aesthetics in the Fjord City.

Although the theme emerged in several interviews with XR activists, the interview with Einar was perhaps the most substantive example of the social and cultural influence of *friluftsliv* on conceptions of the 'good life' in cities. Although the term translates directly to *open air living*, its role in the Norwegian social and cultural imaginary is more difficult to define.

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[28] This quote was translated from Norwegian and taken from the Facebook page for the *Skogsopprøret* action group.

The roots of *friluftsliv* come from "the self-image of Scandinavians as a nature loving people" (Sandell & Sorlin 2000), viewed as "a way of living close to the beautiful landscapes of the country" (Gelter 2000, p. 79). In this sense, *friluftsliv* transcends the boundary between ethics and aesthetics, envisioning 'the good life' as a physical connection to natural beauty. This outlook was grounded in the 'back-to-nature' movement of the eighteenth century, which influenced Scandinavian culture "as a reaction against urbanization and industrialization" (ibid.). Although the prevalence of anti-urban sentiments has arguably decreased in Norwegian cultural and political discourse (McNeill 2017), the connection between cultural notions of beauty and distance from the urban core was still identifiable in interviews with both activists and urbanists.

The pursuit of *friluftsliv* as a pathway towards the good life was a recurring theme, particularly when it comes to fostering healthy cultures of environmental interaction. It was possible to identify potential examples of cognitive dissonance on this topic, as most activists adopted the ecocentric perspective that humans (and human settlements) are a part of nature, while also arguing that moving away from the urban core can be seen 'a return to nature'. Furthermore, while some activists expressed concern over increased proximity between city dwellers and formerly undisturbed environments, they also noted that curing ecological illiteracy requires city dwellers to cultivate relationships to their environment. This ambiguity surrounding 'natural' living in urban space and whether or not developing eco-ethics requires dwellers to move beyond the boundaries of the city requires further research on the normative assumptions of open air living in cities.

If social conceptions of *rootedness* are derived from relationships to marka rather than relationships the city itself, what are the implications for the *ecologies of urban belonging*? While traditional notions of open air living were grounded in a notion of *return to* and *longing for* nature (Anker 2022), global crises such as climate change are grounded in the acceleration of *change* (Eriksen 2016). In order to draw inspiration from the social imaginary of *friluftsliv*, urbanists may consider how open air architecture could support biophilic urban forms. Rather than viewing the ecology of urban belonging at a 'return' to natural spaces at the periphery of the city, practitioners can seek to (gently) merge traditional notions of *friluftsliv* with contemporary understandings of the 'green city'. This can be achieved by relying on the transformative potential of creative practices, joining ecological aesthetics and ethics.

5.5 The Aesthetics of Just Urban Transitions

The following section will focus on the arguments put forward by interviewees surrounding the aesthetics of the green transition in the face of the planetary ecological crisis. While section 5.1 outlined the terrain of urban values that emerged throughout the research process, the following pages will examine how aesthetic and ethical principles can come into conflict *or* become mutually reinforcing. Analyzing this balance of values points towards a closer inspection of how aesthetic concepts such as urban 'greenness' relate to the pursuit of justice in the Fjord City.

As Næss (1993) argued, the Kantian distinction between 'moral' and 'beautiful' actions is relevant to the current ecological crisis. Following this philosophical outlook, performing a moral act is one that is prescribed by moral law: "you do it simply because it is your duty" (ibid., p. 67). Conversely, Kant argued that an action performed simply because one is inclined to do so (i.e., *it feels natural*) may be described as beautiful. Although beauty itself does not necessarily express any specific notion of morality, it can be useful in conveying ethical values – acting a symbol of morality (Wang 2018, p. 870). Building on the distinction that Kant made in his 1759 work, *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus*, Næss (1993, p. 71) concludes that fostering *inclination* is essential to address the global ecological crisis; moralizing can be too narrow and patronizing to foster inclination towards sustainable actions, leading to an invitation to 'act beautifully'. This conclusion has implications for the aesthetic *and* ethical responses to the global ecological crisis, as "[organizing] society with all this in mind may lead to a recognition and acclamation of such acts, and be a decisive factor that at last will decrease unsustainability" (ibid.).

This invitation to organize action according to aesthetic and ecological principles is not restricted to the domain of ethical theory: "Recently there has been in Norway and other countries an upsurge of interest in environmental ethics at the government level. It is accepted that there is a moral aspect – that everybody, including governments, has a *duty* or *obligation* to act in ecologically responsible ways" (Næss 1993 p. 68). Given that the moral appeal to reorganize cities around principles of environmental sustainability is gaining ground in public and political discourse, the distinction between 'moral' and 'beautiful' action may be of particular interest to researchers examining the potentials and obstacles to urban beauty in the climate crisis.

Keeping in mind the distinction between moral and beautiful acts as responses to the climate crisis, one might consider the inclinations of urbanists when it comes to 'green aesthetics' in the Fjord City. Jonny Aspen (2013) has addressed the inclination of architects and designers to replicate aesthetic strategies that cater to the needs of the financial elite and creative classes. These developments, in the absence of stronger regulation and ecological principles of sustainability, may result in forms of *zombie urbanism* that are in contradiction with the genuine needs of city dwellers (ibid.). Additionally, the previous section outlined how urban planners and designers in Oslo have been inclined to develop more participatory and co-creative strategies of planning that recognize the needs and uses of green urban environments. These strategies, ranging from community participation in the planning process to the creative use of digital technologies, can play a vital role in bridging the gap between urbanists' desires for aesthetically pleasing built spaces and the ethical imperative to address the needs of city dwellers, both human and nonhuman.

Several climate activists also pointed to existing inclinations towards unsustainable and aesthetically displeasing visions of urbanity. Speaking with Kjell, an XR member contacted through an organizing meeting at Greenhouse Oslo, he addressed the existing gaps in design philosophy that lead to unsustainable urban outcomes, linking this critique to the notion that urban space is typically restricted by petro-mindsets:

> We structure our cities so much around roads and concrete – just look around you. Do you really need all that concrete? Do you really need this petro-mindset as the rationale for how you design?

The statement above is particularly helpful in underlining how the visions of climate activists may come into conflict with existing paradigms of design thinking. He noted that activists may be especially helpful in emancipating urban space from the constrictions that stem from grounding urban practices in the use of unsustainable materials. However, when it came to the use of alternative materials, he recognized that activists' lack of professional knowledge presents a limitation to providing urbanists with technical solutions. Kjell's assessment of current approaches to green urban aesthetics in Oslo related back to a critique of the *pristine nature myth*, and he encouraged urban practitioners to think more holistically about the function of nature within urban space, both in terms of its ethical importance and aesthetic consequences:

> Why do you need to put tons of money into – for example – cutting grass? Everything is supposed to look nice. It's not supposed to be wild. The concept of [wilderness] in the city is seen as dirty. It's not refined. Is that really the case if you imagine that we're a part of nature? We *are* nature, and we have to acknowledge that our economies, our democracy, our food, [and] our water directly depends on nature. But everything you see in the city is nature as pristine and something controlled by our sense of beauty. So instead of having those [urban spaces] as objects that we can look at and utilize and instrumentalize for our use, maybe instead the functioning of that can be the purpose that they actually serve. That we could drink the water, that we could harvest food… because that visualizes the function that nature actually holds for us, so it's also a representational challenge.

The passage above centers on the eco-centric belief that 'nature within cities' can be viewed as an extension of the understanding that humans are themselves a part of nature. As described above, urban lawns were cited as an example of how the strict aesthetic management of the built environment can conflict with eco-centric principles. This was referenced as an instance of existing aesthetic preferences for pristine nature among urbanists. It serves as a symbolic conflict between the need to develop biophilic cities and integrate nature into urban life (Beatley 2011), favoring a diversity of nonhuman life, and the insistence on narrow, aesthetic preferences for orderliness. Kjell's critique of the instrumentalization of urban nature was also linked to the view that the function of urban ecology ought to take precedent over "our sense of beauty."

Kjell's conclusions may be viewed as contrasting with the traditional Nature/Society divide that was characteristic of disciplines such as environmental until the 1990s (Melosi 1993). A number of sub-disciplines shifted away from the Nature/Society dichotomy in the subsequent two decades, leading to the emergence of conceptual approaches such as *urban political ecology*. Heynen et al. (2006, p. 2) argue that this shift was essential in moving away from the rigidity of previous frameworks, as "attention has to be paid to the political processes through which particular socio-environmental urban conditions and made and remade." In the case of 'Green Oslo', it can be said that these political processes play a role in shaping conceptions of 'greenness' by placing outsized importance on issues such as the electrification of vehicles, as argued by urban planner Claudia Yamu, stemming from the ambiguity of concepts such as urban sustainability. Importantly, Kjell argued that the conceptual division of nature and society is still prominent among urbanists:

> Today, nature in the city center has all these old, wrong mindsets [about] the wild. That's something that urban planners don't necessary think about, but I think they could be interested in learning more about that.

Kjell's arguments above draw a comparison to Timothy Beatley's (2011) defense of biophilia in the built environment. Beatley (ibid. p. 6) states that the importance of nature to urban life suggests "everything that we design and build in the future should incorporate natural elements to a far greater extent." He (ibid.) argues that this incorporation can overcome the artificial distinctions between indoor and outdoor space, and that wilder urban areas and urban forms to move past archaic dichotomies. Similarly, Kjell's preference for protecting the function of ecosystems in the built environment encourages urbanists to acknowledge urban environmental qualities, not simply in the absence of their instrumental value to humans, but as foundational to human *and* nonhuman wellbeing. This involves a transition away from the programming of pristine nature, taking an approach that places greater importance on the function urban ecologies play in the healthy lives of all city dwellers.

Readers may conclude that 'Green Oslo' has fallen short of this holistic vision of urban forms in the biophilic city. Returning to the interview with Per Gunnar Røe, he pointed out that developers and financial actors currently play the largest role in driving development trends. While politicians and municipal planners negotiate with stakeholders and set general guidelines, the reality of developers' ownership of property in the Fjord City can result in forms of unsustainable urbanism that disregard social aspects such as access to infrastructure or ecological aspects such as species richness and increased biodiversity. As Røe argued, many new buildings have green roofs, which are effective in storing water and supporting biodiversity; however, these can also become problematic when used strategically in the negotiation process of green development. He pointed out that most rooftop gardens are not public, and those that are may not function as 'truly public' in the way that green spaces on the urban floor do. Røe returned the issue of accessibility, and the risks of aesthetic strategies that fall short of Fainstein's (2010) definition of the *just city*, particularly when it comes to distributive justice. In the absence of stronger guidelines, the strategic use of green spaces in negotiating processes may result in socially stratified forms of tiered urbanism. In this dystopian paradigm, the city floor is dominated by private and commercial interests while admission to 'green' or aesthetically pleasing spaces is restricted to privileged classes with access to elevated urban areas.

Røe also referenced research by Isabelle Anguelovski (2022) on green gentrification and stated that this has become a key issue in Oslo. Here, the example of Hollendergata was discussed – a neighborhood in Grønland that has a tendency towards gentrification while still maintaining a substantial amount of public housing. Røe stated that Hollendergata was promoted as a green or sustainable project, characterized by car sharing, bicycle parking, and energy efficient infrastructure. However, increasing housing prices have raised the issue of accessibility, as new 'green buildings' are directed at what Jonny Aspen would characterize as the creative classes. Røe pointed out that this is one example of gentrification with a thought-provoking paradox. The will and the intentions point to a degree of interest in promoting urban sustainability. Nevertheless, in the absence of policy and regulation to prevent displacement, it can produce results that are more aptly described as the aesthetics of green gentrification. Without using the label of zombie urbanism, Røe argued that green gentrification in such neighborhoods can occur when the needs of local populations are disregarded in favor of generic strategies to develop the green image of the city. Stronger guidelines of 'green urbanism' may therefore be essential in achieving an alignment between moral principles and aesthetic preferences.

Turning to positive examples where aesthetics and ethical principles are more closely aligned, Røe pointed to the Oslo Opera House, designed by Snøhetta architects and perhaps the most recognizable example of waterfront architecture in the city. He stated that the accessibility of the promenade is not just a superficial amenity for passers-by, but an affirmation of the idea that public spaces should be used by all, and foster closer and more dynamic interaction among city dwellers. Following Røe's thinking, establishing accessible public spaces can be a focus of planning, design, and architecture approaches that aim to uphold Fainstein's (2010) vision of the *just city*.

According to Rasmus Reinvang, a social scientist and political advisor with the Green Party, the Opera House is not only an example of urban beauty with 'illusions to icebergs'; it is also serves as a "symbol of democracy" (Rote 2017). Readers familiar with the angular features of the Opera House may also conclude that the absence of elliptical or round design is characteristic of the "rationalism peculiar to post-enlightenment Norwegian society" (Garvey 2003, p. 250). According to anthropologist Pauline Garvey (ibid.), this prevailing rationalism exists with "a cultural context dominated by enlightenment ontology." While the building is grounded in the Norwegian concept

of *allemannsretten*, or the ‘right to roam’, the limited statements by Snøhetta around its sustainability points to a conceptual ambiguity described in the interview Claudia Yamu. However, drawing from an eco-aesthetic perspective, it can also be stated that the Opera House serves as an intriguing example of the interaction of different environmental elements. Although the building’s pristine design is not an effective example of biophilic urbanism, its placement on the Oslofjord, the presence of natural light, and its effective use of open space transitioning from the urban floor to the roof points towards a dynamic interaction between the elements of water, air, light, and earth.

Directly across from the Opera House, the new Munch Museum looms over pedestrians on the street. Similar to its iconic neighbor, the building is an example of modernist design principles, with angular features and a strategic use of natural light. However, dissimilar to the Opera House, the Munch does not incorporate the dynamic interaction of natural elements, instead favoring a recycled, industrial aesthetic: “Sixty metres in height, clad in recycled, perforated aluminium panels of varying degrees of translucency, and with its distinctively leaning top section, the tower is a highly visible landmark from all sides. (Munch Museet 2023). The museum has stated that the new development was ‘built for the future’, “[transforming] Oslo’s skyline, yet [bowing] respectfully towards the city that surrounds it” (ibid.). Nevertheless, those who walk beneath the structure may also describe its architecture as threatening to crash down on the urban floor, rather than serving as any respectful homage to its surroundings. This has been the subject of public debate (Bloomberg 2023), as many city dwellers viewed the building as an eyesore when compared to the merging of aesthetic visions at the Opera House and new Deichman Library.

The Norwegian branch of the social media movement *Architectural Uprising* took part in this debate, putting out a poll to over ten thousand voters on the ‘uglification’ of Nordic architecture. The results of the poll revealed that Oslo’s new Munch Museum and National Museum were regarded as the top contenders – perceptions that contrast with the municipality’s efforts to market itself as a cultural capital. Critics of the movement, such as art historian Ingrid Halland, have pointed out that the overuse of terms such as ‘modernism’ can result in broad condemnations of a diverse range of design perspectives (Bloomberg 2023).

While blanket criticisms can hinder productive dialogue, public perception of the new Munch's modernist ambitions serves as an example of the social tensions that result from zombie urbanism. Although its designers stated that "many of the architectural choices are climate-driven," (Munch Museet 2023), the new Munch arguably reveals what Andersen and Røe (2017, p. 314) describe as "socially insensitive and decontextualized urban design." This insensitivity towards the perception of urban beauty produces urban outcomes that fail to integrate into the broader fabric of the city. In this context, the disconnect between current trends in design thinking, the tendency towards zombified urban outcomes, and the genuine needs of city dwellers reveals that the 'beautification' of the urban core remains contentious. By disregarding this discourse on the value of urban beauty in the lives of everyday city dwellers, developers run the risk of producing forms of tiered urbanism where the experience of beauty is reserved for the upper echelons of the city.

Despite this dissonance over the qualities associated with urban beauty, it is possible to identify positive cultures of interaction with urban nature(s) in Oslo. Public parks and landscape architecture present an opportunity to examine the potential of open air architecture in the green transition. At Ekebergparken to the southeast, the open air sculpture part incorporates artistic instillations into the environment, surrounded by panoramic views of the city. In addition to the sprawling collection of sculptures, the park is home to more than 40 species of nesting birds (Ekebergparken 2023), and wildlife is regularly spotted in areas previously used for farming, grazing, and logging. Former pastures now bear closer resemblance to meadows, with insect life returning to a cultural landscaped steeped in agricultural history. Given the proximity to downtown Oslo, this transition space relates directly to the environmental identity of the city, maintaining a noticeable human footprint while providing concrete examples of how the transformation of the landscape has promoted social and ecological wellbeing.

The human presence at Ekebergparken is not hidden to enable an escape into 'pristine nature'; rather, the impact of creative design choices can be felt as individuals move through environments that transcend the archaic division of *natural* or *unnatural* spaces. In this sense, the notion of *friluftsliv* at Ekebergparken is transformed by aligning the desire to experience natural beauty with the need to foster positive cultures of interaction with nonhuman nature.

However, the limitations of this example of open air architecture become apparent when focusing on civic engagement and city dwellers' participation in the making of ethical spatial arrangements. At Ekebergparken, the city dweller undoubtably functions as a patron or visitor, rather than a participant in the process of urban greening. Their position as a spectator points to a limited capacity to take a more active role in improving environmental conditions. In this sense, the success of Ekebergparken lies in its reliance on the creative capacity of artists and landscape designers. In order to expand research on spatial affordances for creativity, it may be helpful to consider how open air architecture can engender new forms of engagement among city dwellers, allowing them to contribute to the accumulation of creative capacity.

Fortunately, community-led actions to improve environmental conditions in the Oslofjord offer a window into civic-oriented approaches to foster positive cultures of interaction with urban nature(s). The community action group *Fjord CleanUP* has organized year-round volunteer efforts to gather and remove marine waste. The cleanup events are open to the public and provide wetsuits for volunteers to dive underwater and haul waste from the bottom of the fjord, ranging in size from handfuls of plastic to piles of abandoned e-scooters. In addition to collaborating with marine scientists on the fjord's ecology, *Fjord CleanUP* has turned its mobilizing efforts towards a part of the 'urban floor' that is typically disregarded in development discourses. The subterranean zones of the city, as is often the case, are not considered integral to the pursuit of sustainability despite the constant threats faced by marine life due to development processes and the constant flow of traffic on the water. However, city dwellers taking part in the Oslofjord cleanup have adopted an ethic of stewardship over the urban floor. This ethos of collective responsibility goes beyond the construction of artificial reefs, as was the case at Tjuvholmen (Elleffsen 2017). It encourages city dwellers to go below the surface and beneath the city's foundations to physically lift up the discarded objects that have amassed underwater. As marine life in the fjord cannot turn away from this pollution, so too should city dwellers be willing to sift through the sunken wreckage of the urban metabolism. While this example of biophilic action along the waterfront is limited in scale, achieving truly biophilic urban forms may be achieved by combining the transformative potential of open air architecture with the mobilizing potential of community action.

It may be argued that pursuing biophilic (or *wilder*) urban forms in 'Green Oslo' is still experimental (Beatley 2016), and yet this experimentation can draw from eco-aesthetic concepts and the creative use of environmental elements to envision just futures that fall outside of current design paradigms. It was noteworthy that Ingrid, a climate activist and designer interviewed in front of *Stortinget*, supported the notion that both activists and designers have a role to play in communicating hopeful futures at a time of environmental crisis:

> Design and art is a great way to help visualize and make [the climate crisis] real for people. It's hard to get people to move towards a future that looks gloomy. We need hope. We need to have faith in something positive. And unless someone can render that for you it's very hard for people to believe in it and work towards it. All of those things tie together in what I do [as a designer].

When asked about specific aesthetic concepts that may play a role in this hopeful communication, Ingrid referenced *solarpunk*, an aesthetic, philosophical, and activist movement that envisions speculative worlds where social ecology and the democratic use of renewable energy technology (particularly solar) support the flourishing of humans and nonhumans in their collective environments (Reina-Rozo 2021, p. 50). Ingrid argued that this speculative vision can be incorporated into design thinking, and that creative experimentation can expand beyond the realm of fiction. She pointed out that the speculative nature of *solarpunk* should not act as a barrier to envisioning alternative futures for cities, and that it can be used as a communicative tool:

> When it comes to design, we need more solarpunk, basically. If you can manage to bake that into design [thinking] and marketing, we can actually sell the idea of a better future, and then it doesn't become a negative thing that people are resisting. It can actually be something that people want to join, because of course it's better…

Ingrid's optimism surrounding the imaginative potential of *solarpunk* was balanced by a general pessimism surrounding the state of the planetary ecological crisis and the existing aesthetic strategies of 'Green Oslo'. However, it was significant that she viewed the concept as a pathway towards a "better future," as it can be considered a *speculative energy imaginary* "in so far as it is consciously created in order to explore specific kinds of alternative futures" (Williams 2019, p. 3). Imaginaries play an essential role in shaping aesthetic preferences as well as individuals' views surrounding what can be achieved. Therefore, the following section will examine the potential of urban imaginaries in the climate crisis as well as their discursive connection to 'Green Oslo'.

5.6 Urban Imaginaries in the Climate Crisis

The following section will conclude by examining a point worthy of further exploration in comparative urban research: the potential of urban 'imaginaries' to deepen the existing discourse surrounding 'Green Oslo' and enable a discussion of alternative and just futures.

Urban imaginaries can be understood not just as 'matters of the mind', but as an interconnected set of values, institutions, laws, and symbols that "form part of our everyday lives in the city, encompassing tourism, city branding, art and architecture, planning, policymaking, and more" (Lindner & Meissner 2018, p. 1). Given that contemporary urban studies research has scrutinized the position that imagination plays in shaping cities (ibid.), addressing existing eco-ethical blind spots in 'Green Oslo' can incorporate the urban imaginaries of environmental activists as an informative element that shapes the city's public culture.

As the comparative analysis has shown, climate change maintains a strong position in relation to the values and mindsets of climate activists in Oslo, playing a distinct role in shaping their visions of the potential futures that lie ahead, ranging from utopian to dystopian. This balance of idealism and pessimism, as pointed out in chapter 2.5, can be identified in the long history of envisioning ideal cities, which Eaton (2002) argues has harbored seeds of utopian *and* dystopian thinking. The comparative analysis has also demonstrated that the practices of urbanists in Oslo, particularly among architects and planners, are grounded in a pragmatic approach to what is feasible within existing systems and conditional frameworks. As Claudia Yamu argued in her interview, bottom-up strategies of engagement are needed to understand the needs or desires of city dwellers, and are be combined with top-down strategies of implementation and policymaking. Therefore, this understanding of what can be achieved within the urban sphere, particularly in response to climate change, can be expanded by combining the professional knowledge of urban practitioners with the urban imaginaries of climate activists. This expansion might play a critical role in bringing ecocentric thinking and speculative energy imaginaries out of the realm of abstraction and into the decision-making processes that shape 'Green Oslo'.

It should be noted that despite the widespread eco-grief and climate anxiety of activists in Oslo, a sense of idealism surrounding the potential of deep system transformation was featured in most interviews with XR members. Speaking with Ingrid, the climate activist and designer introduced in chapter 5.2, she highlighted the shift in values that stems not just from ecological awareness and literacy, but also from an imaginative capacity to envision alternative futures:

> Because I'm aware of the negative consequences of climate change and issues like labor exploitation – all of it – I'm not able to enjoy the good things because it hurts too much to know… I want to be freed of that, and that's not going to happen in my lifetime. But [we can] find a balance where you can help people see that things could be better.

The passage above serves as a reminder that the interconnected nature of the climate change, global ecological breakdown, and economic injustice (Hickel 2020) is an existential concern among a subset of environmentally conscious city dwellers. While the statement that mitigating the negative consequences of climate change cannot be achieved in a single lifetime points to structural limitations, Ingrid's statement emphasized that there are existing pathways to escape the 'treadmill of production' (Gould et al. 2015) driving global ecological breakdown. Similarly, the XR organizer Solveig expressed that this escape requires new thinking outside of the growth paradigm. When asked what an environmentally ethical future would look like, she stated: "I think it would mean putting nature, nonhumans, *and* humans above profits. It doesn't mean putting an end to profits, but not having profits put first. So that's deep system change." While some may remain skeptical of the feasibility of deep system transformation, it is possible to identify positive examples of movement towards alternative futures in the urban sphere.

As Claudia Yamu pointed out, urban planning students at OsloMet are particularly sensitive to issues such as climate change and environmental injustice. Similarly, the interview with Ruth, a student of landscape architecture at AHO, highlighted the climate association (*KAHOS*) as a positive example of young practitioners tackling environmental issues head-on. A generation of justice-oriented planners with the technical skills to implement urban solutions will be essential in breaking out of ecologically destructive or socially inequitable planning paradigms and moving towards alternative futures. This positive shift among environmentally conscious youth in 'Green Oslo' may create openings to engage in co-creative and pioneering processes at the city level – a necessary component of the pathway towards just and livable urban futures.

6. CONCLUSION: LIVABLE FUTURES ♦ LIVABLE CITIES

6.1 Assessing Eco-Ethical Urbanism in Oslo

This thesis has explored the undertheorized aspects of Oslo's environmental identity through a comparative analysis of contrasting perspectives on the city's approach to eco-ethical city building. In pursuing this exploratory approach, the thesis outlines diverging views surrounding eco-ethics in the 'green city' and the pathways towards livable futures in the urban sphere.

An interdisciplinary approach was necessary to assess the strengths and weaknesses of current lines of argumentation and to move beyond the disciplinary boundaries that prevent citizens and practitioners from rethinking the future of sustainable urban space. These boundaries range from the urban blind spot in environmental ethics (Light 2001) to the ecological blind spots in the planning, architecture, and design of biophilic cities (Beatley 2011). Contemporary research (Sayin et al. 2022) has demonstrated that that the "splintering and siloification in urban studies" requires alternative approaches to bridge the gap between different schools of thought. This thesis builds on the call to 'move beyond siloification' (ibid., p. 264) and 'put comparison to work' (Robinson 2014) by considering how the environmental identity of 'Green Oslo' is shaped by discursive practices and direct action. To develop a more nuanced understanding of the perception of the city's identity among politically engaged and environmentally conscious city dwellers, it has examined climate activism and pioneering urban practices as key elements necessary to understand the complex terrain of environmental values.

In response to the first two research questions on diverging views surrounding Oslo's environmental identity, it is important to consider the diversity of urban environmental values that were highlighed through the comparative analysis of qualitative interviews. Drawing from the responses of XR organizers throughout the city, the contested values existing within urban spaces come to the foreground. These interviews were characterized by a general enthusiasm when it came to the city's recognition of climate change as an urgent concern, coinciding with skepticism towards the image politics driving the city's reputation as a frontrunner for urban sustainability.

Among the most prominent themes in interviews with climate organizers was the need to clarify ambiguous definitions of sustainability that shape the identity of the city and to consider the environmental and civic values that can serve as guiding principles in the making of urban space. As ecocentric justifications for the protection and defense of nature in the urban sphere are typically disregarded in the professional discourses of urbanists, the activists interviewed for this expressed a desire to expand current discourses on participatory planning and civic engagement in 'Green Oslo'. This conclusion draws similarities to Kristin Kjærås' (2023, p. 11) research on the politics of urban densification in Oslo, whose informants argued that "participatory planning does not suffice in addressing the structural inequalities of urban densification and other participatory development processes must be sought." Considering the severity of the climate crisis, increasing structural inequalities, and the time constraints to arrive at just and equitable spatial arrangements, embedding serious dialogue in solution-oriented policy frameworks may be an essential tool in promoting social and environmental justice in the built environment.

The interviews with urbanists in Oslo were essential to analyze the potentials of and barriers to pioneering urban practices (Pittaluga 2020). Despite the municipality's strategic engagement with green image politics to promote its environmental identity, these interviews revealed that more nuanced language is needed to interpret the city's relationship to specific environmental values and principles. This emphasis on the discourse of environmental identity and urban sustainability in Oslo was central when speaking to Claudia Yamu and Jonny Aspen, who argued that policymakers can embrace new terminology to assess concepts ranging from urban vulnerability to shallow sustainability. These interviews also stressed that expanding the existing discourse is necessary to avoid the pitfalls of ambiguous definitions, which include discursive barriers such as the reversion to *déformation professionnelle* (as described by Yamu) or structural barriers such as the tendency to produce anemic built environments that resemble forms of *zombie urbanism* (Aspen 2013). A holistic analysis of these barriers and their relationship to the city's environmental identity can aid contemporary researchers who seek to understand the visions, planning, and discourses guiding the development of 'Green Oslo' (Røe 2016). This conclusion also aligns with the call to 'move beyond siloification' in contemporary urban studies (Sayin et al. 2022, p. 264) and to examine the diverse values, schools of thought, and imaginaries that have the potential to contribute to the creation of just and biophilic cities.

This thesis has explored the available pathways to bridge the discursive gap discussed above. Contemporary approaches to participatory planning and design in cities have focused on viewing *city dwellers as participants* (Fagence 2014), a stance that was reinforced by the interviews with Claudia Yamu, Per Gunnar Røe, Jonny Aspen, and Martin Løken. This transition towards co-creative processes enables the professional class of urbanists to foster closer interaction with environmentally conscious citizens that adhere to a *more-than-human* view of urban environmental justice. By expanding discursive planning (Pløger 2001) to include city dwellers adhering to ecocentric worldviews, a richer discussion of urban experiences and urban beauty can allow for new research on the *genius loci* of the 'green city' (Norberg-Schulz 1980).

In this sense, Oslo is a particularly engaging site for interdisciplinary research on the *spirit of place* in the green transition, as biophilic urbanism has the potential to reshape the distinct character of coinhabited spaces. This conclusion supports Norberg-Schulz's (ibid., p. 18) assertion that "The structure of a place is not a fixed, eternal state," as the dynamic interaction between city dwellers and urban nature(s) in 'Green Oslo' will continue to transform its place-identity.

In the context of urban transitions towards environmental sustainability, it is also necessary to address how the 'green city' may be viewed as an object of transition, as argued by Petter Næss and Nina Vogel (2012). The authors (ibid., p. 6) argue that "[as] a technical artifact, a city is so to speak by its nature unstable. Transitions in urban built environment and transport infrastructure take place continually." Næss and Vogel (ibid., p. 40) situate this discussion of instability within the context of transition theory, which argues that research should examine the ways in which urban structures change, and how these "…changes can be for the better or for the worse, seen from a sustainability perspective." Here, the comparative analysis of how activists and urbanists view the representational meaning of green space is especially helpful in determining how the municipality's definition of sustainability produces architectural developments (or 'signs') that can be misaligned with the outlooks of environmentally conscious citizens. The interview with Jonny Aspen emphasized that this misalignment can occur as a result of the structural tendency towards zombie urbanism, while Claudia Yamu argued that it can occur by not combining bottom-up strategies of civic engagement with top-down strategies of policy implementation.

Interviews with climate activists underscored how misalignment can occur through ideological divisions ranging from issues such as the Rights of Nature to the primacy of economic growth. However, the XR organizer Magnus argued that resolution of these ideological tensions is possible through serious dialogue at the policy-making level, despite the dissonance that can occur when ecocentric argumentation comes into conflict with anthropocentric pragmatism. This argument was reinforced by Claudia Yamu, who argued that closer engagement with the civic sector is required to maintain the highest ethical standards among planners, particularly as the needs of city dwellers are dynamic – responding to shifting social, economic, environmental, and political conditions. Therefore, if the city is "by its nature unstable" (Næss & Vogel 2012, p. 6), then developing new, sustained forms of participatory planning is necessary to respond to material changes to the built environment driven by the 'green transition'. Given that the twenty-first century can be regarded as an era of *accelerating change* (Eriksen 2016), the conditions of increasing uncertainty require dynamic mechanisms to respond to shifting socio-ecological needs.

Prominent planners such as Ellen de Vibe have demonstrated their willingness to lean into civic engagement and establish productive dialogues on climate change at the community, neighborhood, and city levels. The rhetoric supporting the co-creative making of green urban space is arguably more pronounced in Oslo than in other major metropolitan areas (Andersen & Skrede 2017, p. 587). Therefore, while urban space in the city is still an 'arena for struggle and conflict' (as described by Ellen de Vibe at the OAT 2022), participatory approaches offer a platform for the negotiation of conflicts surrounding eco-ethical urbanism and 'green' place-identity.

This thesis has highlighted ecological perspectives and activist struggles that challenge the characterization of Oslo as an 'ideal type' (Røe 2016, p. 17). However, it has also affirmed the city's comparative value to urban-environmental researchers aiming to uncover the complex socio-ecological and political conditions that support or hinder the transition away from current development paradigms. In this regard, the creative experimentation enabled by participatory and creative processes of planning and design enables a solution-oriented approach to the pioneering urban practices that seek to have a positive impact on urban life and urban experiences.

6.2 The Promise of Pioneering Urban Practices

As the municipality of Oslo has expressed a desire to "accelerate the green transition" (Oslo Kommune 2019), the city itself can be viewed as a transition space in the shift towards environmentally sensible planning, architecture, and design. As this thesis demonstrates, the interaction of perspectives among climate activists and urbanists support a multi-dimensional view of the relationship between city dwellers and urban nature(s). This multi-dimensional view involves the recognition of *nature within the city*, as opposed to an object that is rendered external to the lives of urban residents. Building on Paola Pittaluga's (2020, p. 1) research, analyzing the arrangement of transition spaces enables researchers to pull apart "traditional, dichotomous categories of interpretation," including "center/periphery, urban/not-urban, open/closed, abandoned/lived, public/private." However, from a conceptual standpoint, the dichotomous categories mentioned above can also serve as useful analytical tools. It can be said that creative experimentation and pioneering urban practices can be identified at the periphery of current discourses and development processes. As discussed in chapter 5.1, climate activists engaging in ecocentric actions have struggled to receive greater recognition in the arenas of policymaking and planning, arguably relegating their values to the periphery of the 'Green Oslo' discourse.

The comparative analysis demonstrates how pioneering urban practices that "open the way to creative, subversive, empowerment oriented forms of spatial transformation" (ibid., p. 3) can be identified in various parts of the city. These include the creative use of public spaces by activist groups to engage in civil disobedience, with direct action and creative forms of resistance such as *artivism* taking place throughout the city and in surrounding areas. If policymakers seek to improve spatial affordances for creativity in the green city, drawing inspiration from creative resistance against climate catastrophe in the civic sector may stimulate the sustained dialogue needed to develop innovative urban solutions. Furthermore, increased engagement with policymakers and professional urbanists may provide avenues for ecocentric values and concepts such as urban downscaling to receive greater consideration. The inclusion of these alternative paradigms can open the door to alternative spatial solutions that fall outside of current strategies.

Interviews with urbanists also underscored that pioneering urban practices exist at the periphery of current institutional approaches. While Jonny Aspen and Ruth (the student of landscape architecture introduced in chapter 5.2) demonstrated that AHO has begun an institutional shift towards climate change awareness, they also pointed out that disciplinary obstacles stand in the way of more serious engagement with environmental issues. Current barriers to engagement were also noted by AHO's rector Irene Alma Lønne, who stated that "Climate-involved students [...] are unsure whether they will be attractive on the regular architectural job market if they become too concerned with climate and the environment during their studies."[29] Despite this concern over personal and institutional barriers for urbanists to address the climate crisis, emerging groups such as KAHOS, the climate association for AHO's students, highlight that a growing number of young people entering the professional class of urbanists in Oslo have engaged in collective organizing to address global environmental issues. Furthermore, urban living labs (referenced by Per Gunnar Røe in chapter 5.3) are yet another example of experimental spaces for city building. This creative experimentation can further contribute to the development of new modes of thought and alternative spatial arrangements that promote social and ecological wellbeing.

It can be argued that pioneering urban practices are slowly exiting the periphery of current discourses surrounding 'Green Oslo', though further research is necessary to examine the challenges of implementation at the city or municipal level. Nevertheless, the willingness among urbanists to challenge existing practices and paradigms of development is another example of Oslo's comparative value to researchers. Alternative urban imaginaries, grounded in the pursuit of just and alternative futures in which communities can peacefully coexist, can be addressed within academia and policymaking, supporting the transition towards genuinely sustainable futures. How these urban imaginaries can be implemented in current policy frameworks and planning models is worthy of further consideration, and future research might address the intersection of speculative urban imaginaries and hegemonic paradigms of development. By bridging this gap, researchers can move beyond surface level approaches to participatory planning (Kjærås 2023) and address underexplored areas of urban environmental thought.

[29] Statement translated from Norwegian and published in the article "Vil klimavaske skolene" (*Arkitektur* 2023).

6.3 Creative Collaboration in the Built Environment

The comparative analysis developed in this thesis supports creative engagement between activists and urbanists as a pathway towards alternative spatial arrangements, particularly to investigate the undertheorized relationship between urban environmental aesthetics and socio-ecological ethics.

Comparative urbanism provides an opportunity to examine these issues in part because of its "openness to conceptual revision" (Robinson 2016, p. 188). As Robinson argues (ibid.): "Such an approach would mobilize the potential to start conceptualization from any city and to draw insights from a wide array of contexts…" The topic of environmental identity has received little attention when it comes to the social experience of sustainable built environments, particularly at a time of global ecological crisis. This thesis responds to the gap in the scholarship by exploring how co-creative collaboration can bring underexplored concepts and paradigms to the foreground.

The interviews conducted with climate organizers often challenged foundational assumptions associated with modern development policies (i.e., an insistence on economic growth and GDP as the measure of prosperity in the built environment). As these perspectives are often relegated to the periphery of moral debate, drawing from activist discourses represents the kind of 'thinking from elsewhere' that stems from a "new repertoire of comparative methods" (Robinson 2016, p. 188). Likewise, interviews with urbanists revealed innovative approaches to viewing planning and design as tools that not only improve the quality of the urban environment, but also reshape the environmental identity of the city itself. These interviews enabled a discussion of the pathways towards communicative planning as a key solution to the climate crisis in cities.

In response to the second (sub-)question on perceptions of urban beauty and environmental aesthetics, this thesis argues that contrasting normative assumptions between activists and urbanists point to different interpretations of what can reasonably be viewed as beautiful at a time of global ecological crisis. This conclusion builds on Arne Næss' (1993) definition of *beautiful action*, as the comparative analysis pointed to distinct interpretations of how city dwellers, developers, and planners should be inclined to act in accordance with ecological principles.

Current approaches to 'green urbanism' in Oslo arguably point to narrow aesthetic preferences that have produced built environments in which urban nature(s) are strictly programed and managed. This aesthetic paradigm is demonstrative of views grounded in the notion of pristine nature, in contradiction with Beatley's (2016) call for wilder and more organic urban forms. As argued by the XR activist Magnus, recognizing the value and function of urban ecosystems, as well as city dwellers' responsibility to them, is vital to move in the direction of urban biophilia and the pursuit of spatial arrangements that support a diversity of human and nonhuman life.

By connecting visions of 'Green Oslo' among urbanists to the experiences of activists, it may be possible to bridge the knowledge gap between those engaged in planning and design and those engaged in the defense of ecological values. Interviews with climate activists in Oslo pointed to the perception of urban beauty as being linked to deep system transformation and a more holistic view of the green transition that supports changes in political and philosophical thought (i.e., recognizing the Rights of Nature in cities), the transformation of economic systems (i.e., supporting degrowth and urban downscaling), and broad societal shifts (i.e., fostering closer relationships and to nature within the city's limits). This vision of deep system transformation has practical implications for co-creative planning, particularly when it comes to recognizing nonhumans as participants *or* key stakeholders, which has thus far not been a priority of planning processes. Additionally, this outlook has implications for aesthetic preferences in 'Green Oslo', as it supports the shift away from the myths of pristine nature. While these ideals have not yet been embraced within existing urban frameworks, the transition towards participatory planning at the municipal level could support more serious dialogue on these issues.

Interviews with urbanists revealed that in the absence of co-creative collaboration to establish just cities (Fainstein 2010), narrow interpretations of sustainable urbanity threaten to produce forms of zombie urbanism (Aspen 2013) and result in processes of green gentrification that inequality (Cavicchia 2021; 2022). As Claudia Yamu argued, the need for planners (as well as architects and designers) to adhere to the highest ethical principles requires continuous engagement with the public to determine the needs of city dwellers.

If more substantive forms of creative collaboration can be achieved, it may be possible to arrive at a meaningful alignment between ethical principles and aesthetic preferences.

This conclusion also mirrors the moral imperative described by Næss (1994) to move beyond shallow notions of anthropocentric responsibility to the nonhuman world. Reexamining the alignment of urban ethics and urban aesthetics in 'Green Oslo' can build on Elaine Scarry's (1999) arguments in *On Beauty and Being Just* that recognition of beauty can help bring the concept of fairness out of the realm of abstraction. As Scarry (ibid., p. 57) argues, the 'banishing' of beauty from humanities research in the late twentieth century, "[damaged] our capacity to attend to problems of injustice." That is not to say that questions of beauty have been entirely disregarded in contemporary humanities research; rather, serious discussion of beauty in spaces that are coinhabited is often overshadowed by the political arguments against attention to aesthetics. However, serious and sustained dialogue on beauty in the *more-than-human* city and its spatial arrangements can enable the visualization of fairness in the climate crisis.

This conclusion is also aligned with Næss' (1993) arguments surrounding beautiful action and the need for spatial arrangements to make city dwellers feel inclined to act in accordance with ecological principles. As Næss (1993, p. 71) argued, the invitation to act beautifully may be a decisive factor in fostering the *inclination* to act sustainably: "Tell me about your beautiful acts today! Do the authorities encourage such acts?" This encouragement may, at last, mobilize urban populations to organize collectively to address the climate (and nature) crisis.

6.4 Closing Remarks: Seeking Livable Futures

As the climate crisis threatens to fundamentally reshape human and nonhuman life in an increasingly urbanized world, it is worth remembering that the burdens are not borne equally by all. The most vulnerable communities, as is so often the case, face its impacts disproportionally, requiring an immediate response to address pressing issues of social and environmental justice. Given the projected increase in urban populations and the potential for unjust outcomes in the built environment, pursuing ethical spatial arrangements remains one of the most pressing challenges of our time. These conditions point to the need for a societal response to envision the making of cities as a collective and common endeavor, transcending disciplinary and ideological boundaries to safeguard the wellbeing of present and future generations.

This thesis has argued that shifting perspectives on human and nonhuman wellbeing in the requires collective action in the urban sphere, moving beyond current practices and processes of development driving humanity towards an environmentally unstable future. In pursuing this endeavor, guided by principles of justice, collective organizing and creative experimentation remains vital. By transcending conventional disciplinary and ideological divisions that lead to stagnation and unsustainability in the urban sphere, it becomes possible to challenge prevailing policies and paradigms that are enabling fossil fuel development and the degradation of the planet's remaining unbuilt environments. This ethos of *just transformation* is grounded in a holistic understanding of the interconnectivity of cities, city dwellers, and their coinhabited environments.

The thesis has examined the critiques surrounding Oslo's reputation as a frontrunner for sustainable development (chapter 4), current trends in planning and design that to result in unjust urban outcomes (chapter 5), and the eco-ethical gaps in current approaches that function as a barrier to the creation of wilder, biophilic urban forms. Equal attention should be placed on the opportunities and mechanisms for collaboration and co-creative experimentation to build livable cities in the twenty-first century. This experimentation can motivate contemporary scholarship in the fields of eco-ethics and green urbanism to tackle issues of justice head-on.

The ethical imperative to pursue environmentally just and socially responsible approaches to urban development points to the need for contemporary research to consider the built environment as a knowledgescape and an urban terrain of diverse environmental values and ideals. Similarly, arriving at 'urbanized' visions of ecological ethics at a time of increasing development requires scholars to look truthfully at the world as it is – a world increasingly of our own design.

Eco-ethical scholarship cannot shy away from the problems associated with twenty-first century urbanization, especially as philosophical tension continues to manifest in contested understandings of concepts such as urban sustainability. Current gaps in research can be overcome by engaging with the ethics of ecological urbanism and by recognizing the actions of activists and urban practitioners pursuing socio-ecological justice in cities such as Oslo. The urban blind spot in environmental ethics (Light 2001) cannot be met with enduring silence – nor can the social and ecological blind spots of sustainable urbanism be left to the whims of developers.

If the city is to be regarded as one of the most important 'frontlines' in the climate crisis, then scholars can recognize these geographical spaces as sites of philosophical diversity, where the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of ecological urbanism remain fiercely debated.

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APPENDIX I: Glossary & Index

The following glossary offers limited definitions of key terms and concepts addressed in this thesis. These do not represent the full breadth of scholarship, and are only intended to offer a resource for readers interested in identifying where in the text these terms are addressed more fully.

Term	***Definition***	***Page References***
Artivism	A portmanteau referring to the combination of activism and artistic practices – i.e., the use of art to engage in political speech and motivate societal change.	77
Built Environment	Defined by its contrasting to the *unbuilt* or natural environment – referring to spaces shaped by the processes of architecture, building, design, and effected by human activity more broadly.	N/A
Ecocide	Denoting "various measures of devastation and destruction which have in common that they aim at damaging or destroying the ecology of geographic areas to the detriment of human life, animal life, and plant life" (Gauger et al. 2012, p. 3-4).	55
Urban Eco-Ethics	The study of moral values and relations between humans and nonhumans in urban environments, building on Fox's (2000) work on *ethics in the built environment.*	7, 9, 10, 13, 18, 19, 20, 68
Embodied Knowledge	Referring to knowledge that resides in the body; 'knowledge bred of familiarity' or savoir de familiarité (Tanaka 2011, p. 149).	79, 80
Degrowth	An emerging school of economic thought grounded in the reduction in levels of production and consumption to reduce material throughput, as well as socio-ecological harm.	94 – 100

Green Gentrification	Referring to processes in which the 'greening' of environments furthers socio-economic inequality. These processes involve the use of green amenities which increase property value and displace local residents.	118, 131
Green City	Also referred to as 'sustainable cities' or 'eco-cities' and denoting the transition among urbanists to plan, design, and build in accordance with principles of sustainability. The ambiguity of this concept is a central topic of this thesis.	N/A
Pioneering Urban Practices	Referring to urban practices that "open the way to creative, subversive, empowerment-oriented forms of spatial transformation" (Pittaluga 2020).	14, 38, 47, 55, 69, 87, 125 – 129
Rights of Nature	A legal instrument and jurisprudential philosophy that supports giving nonhuman nature inherent rights to exist and thrive, contrasting with the traditional legal view of *nature as a resource*.	18, 21, 80 – 81, 131
Smart City	A city in which digital tools, technologies, and solutions are implemented to improve the efficiency of existing services. 'Smart' approaches to urban governance typically involve the use of large data sets to identify areas where operations can be optimized.	109
Solarpunk	Referring to an energy imaginary that envisions speculative worlds where social ecology and the democratic use of renewable energy technology (particularly solar) support the flourishing of humans and nonhumans in their collective environments (Reina-Rozo 2021).	122

Spirit of Place	Referring to Christian Norberg-Schulz's (1980) phenomenological and Heideggerian approach to studying place identity, focusing on the distinct character of places – i.e., the lived qualifies that differentiate places from spaces.	31 – 35, 38, 70, 127
Urban Form	Denoting the physical and material characteristics of a city, including the physical structures, development patterns, and aesthetics of the built environment. These characteristics can emerge through deliberate decision-making processes (i.e., building bike lanes), or through spontaneous social phenomenon (i.e., city dwellers preferring to congregate in specific locations).	5, 11, 13 – 14, 24, 30, 46, 57, 65, 101 – 102, 113, 117, 121 – 122, 131 – 133
Urban Sustainability	Denoting the application of principles of sustainability in the urban sphere, which can include equitable social, economic, and ecological arrangements.	N/A
Urban Metabolism	A model or framework of analysis to examine the inflows and outflows of goods, services, or resources throughout the cityscape. These models typically center on the dynamic interactions between human and nonhuman components of the built environment.	31, 74, 102, 121
Zombie Urbanism	Referring to Jonny Aspen's concept of socially decontextualized approaches to urban planning, architecture, or design, in which the needs and uses of the built environment are supplanted by the preference to mirror strategies pursued in other cities.	36 – 40, 57, 59, 64, 98, 115, 118, 120, 126, 131

APPENDIX II: Interview Guides

The first interview guide provided a template for semi-structured interviews conducted with ten climate activists and organizers in Oslo over the course of five months. It functioned as a general outline with open-ended questions, with the intention to leave room for flexibility and improvisation when speaking with individual respondents. These questions have been organized into five sections, and they have been formulated to allow for a comparative analysis of the research questions. However, this is not a formalized list, and more individualized questions were asked to respondents in order to address the themes described below:

Themes	***Definition***
Introduction	• Initial description of interdisciplinary background • Introduction of thesis project and research aims • Obtain verbal or written consent for audio recording
Background	• Ask for description of respondent's background • Ask for respondent's initial views on Oslo and urban life • Ask how respondent became aware of climate issues
Activism	• Discuss how respondent became involved with direct action • Discuss specific instances of direct action in the city • Discuss policymakers' responses to environmental activism • Ask about the pathways towards civic engagement on climate • Ask for details related to future demonstrations / protests
Identity	• Discuss collective identity in the Oslo climate movement • Discuss Oslo's relationship to environmental identity • Discuss identification with nonhuman nature
Urbanism	• Discuss the pathways towards sustainable urbanism • Discuss the moral responsibility of cities in the climate crisis • Discuss Oslo's relationship to sustainability and eco-aesthetics
Conclusion	• Allow respondents to emphasize issues • Ask about potential contacts for future interviews • Allow respondents to make final remarks before concluding

** Any updated contact information will be obtained from respondents after interviews for future communication.*

After introducing the project and obtaining consent to participate in the study, audio from the interviews was recorded and stored digitally for a period of two years (following NSD guidelines). Digital storage enabled the use the anonymized data as reference material throughout the analysis phase. The interviews began with a series of 'warm-up' questions intended to get the respondents comfortable giving long-form responses. It then transitioned to the topics of environmental activism and identity, before asking more conceptual questions on urban environmental ethics. Respondents were reminded that they should provide detailed or descriptive answers if possible, and were encouraged to give lengthier answers to the questions most relevant for the analysis.

The second interview guide provided a template for semi-structured interviews conducted with five 'urbanists' Oslo over the course of five months, including urban practitioners and academic researchers. Similar to the first guide, it functioned as a general outline with open-ended questions, with the intention to leave room for flexibility to discuss specific areas of expertise. These questions have been organized into six sections, and they have been formulated to allow for a comparative analysis of the research questions. As the guide does not serve as a formalized list, individualized questions were asked to gather insight into professional experiences:

Themes	***Definition***
Introduction	• Initial description of interdisciplinary background • Introduction of thesis project and research aims • Obtain verbal or written consent for audio recording
Background	• Obtain basic information about work background • Ask for respondent's initial views on Oslo and urban life • Ask how respondent became aware of climate issues
Urban Development	• Discuss current trends of urban development in Oslo • Discuss the shortcomings of current development strategies • Discuss pathways towards civic engagement in the urban sphere
Sustainability	• Ask for respondent's definition of sustainability • Ask respondent about the barriers to urban sustainability • Ask respondent about the future of sustainable urbanism
Climate Change	• Discuss respondent's views surrounding the climate crisis • Discuss the potential for urbanism to adapt to climate change • Discuss respondent's views surrounding eco-ethics
Conclusion	• Allow respondents to emphasize issues • Ask about potential contacts for future interviews • Allow respondents to make final remarks before concluding

APPENDIX III: Consent Form

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to examine how climate activists envision urban environmental justice in Oslo, Norway. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project
This master's thesis project will investigate how environmental identity shapes climate activists' views on eco-ethics and global justice in Oslo, Norway.

It will involve a comparative analysis of qualitative interviews with Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace activists. The project seeks to shed light on how identification with 'Nature' shapes biospheric values and eco-ethics in the built environment.

The primary research question is:

- How do climate activists and urbanists interpret the city's 'green' identity and reputation as a frontrunner for sustainable urban development?

This research project will investigate ongoing academic debates taking place within the field of climate ethics by focusing on climate activists' philosophical perspectives, biospheric values, and collective identities in the built environment. This will be achieved by conducting qualitative interviews with climate activists and organizers, followed by an analysis of how their statements fit into the larger discourses taking place within the field of environmental ethics. Data collected from interviews will be fully anonymized and deleted upon the completion of the thesis.

Who is responsible for the research project?
The Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) at the University of Oslo is the institution responsible for this project. SUM has played a significant role in advocating for interdisciplinary research around environmental awareness and climate activism.

The Arne Næss Programme on Global Justice and the Environment works to "stimulate creative research and debate on the philosophical, ethical and legal dimensions of [the] socio-environmental challenges of our time". The aims and objectives of this research inquiry are aligned with the goals of the Arne Næss program, as it seeks to bring research on urban environmental activism together with theoretical questions related to intergenerational responsibility.

Why are you being asked to participate?
The sample has been selected through attendance at Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace events in Oslo, Norway. Activists and organizers associated with XR and Greenpeace have been contacted through organized meetings and demonstrations from 2022-2023.

Individuals from this network have been selected to participate in qualitative interviews as a result of their knowledge and expertise related to the central themes of this master's thesis. This limited sample represents only a portion of the full spectrum of ethical viewpoints, but provides a detailed portrait of individual experiences.

What does participation involve for you?
Participation in this study involves a semi-structured, qualitative interview. The interview includes questions related to activist practices, environmental identity, and eco-ethics in the built environment. Participation will take approximately 45 minutes and will begin with confirmation of consent. Written notes will be kept during the interview to transcribe additional information.

After introducing the project and obtaining consent to participate in the study, audio from the interviews will be recorded and stored digitally for a period of three years (following NSD guidelines). This extended period of storage will make it possible to use the anonymized data solely as reference material. The interviews will begin with a series of 'warm-up' questions to obtain basic information about the participant. It will then transition to the topics of environmental activism and identity, before asking more conceptual questions on urban environmental ethics. Respondents will be reminded that they should provide detailed or descriptive answers if possible, and they will be encouraged to give lengthier answers to the questions that are most relevant for the comparative analysis.

Participation is voluntary
Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data
We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

The student researcher (Andrew Turner Poeppel) and project leader (Prof Nina Witoszek) will have access to the interview data. Personal data will be encrypted and stored on a single laptop. The list of names and contact details will be stored separately from the interview data, and no unauthorized persons will be able to access personal data.

Participants will not be recognizable in any publications, and identifying information (name, age, occupation, etc.) will be removed to maintain anonymity.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
The project is scheduled to end September 2024. All personal data and research materials will be deleted at the end of the conclusion of the project, and no unauthorized persons will have access to the information during the duration of its storage.

Your rights
So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University of Oslo, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?
If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:
Centre for Development and the Environment via Prof Nina Witoszek

- Our Data Protection Officer: Charlotte Kildal (charlotte.kildal@sum.uio.no)
- Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no)
  Or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader	**Student Researcher**
Prof Nina Witoszek	Andrew Turner Poeppel

Consent Form

I have received information about the project “Climate Ethics in the Built Environment” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I understand the scope the project and give consent:

☐ to participate in a qualitative interview study

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project:
Approx. Sept. 2024

(Signed by participant, Date)

APPENDIX IV: Figures & Images

FIGURE 1:

Schmitt, Michael T., Caroline ML Mackay, Lisa M. Droogendyk, and Daphne Payne. "What predicts environmental activism? The roles of identification with nature and politicized environmental identity." Journal of Environmental Psychology 61 (2019): 20-29.

FIGURE 2:

Screenshot taken from Google Earth; September 1st, 2023.

FIGURE 3:

“Overlevde Utøya - i Dag Tok Politiet Ham På Equinor Sitt Tak.” E24, August 26, 2021. Signe Fuglesteg Luksengard.

FIGURE 4:

Aasmundsson, Kjetil F. “Extinction Rebellion: – Equinor Er Hyklerske (Oppdatert Sak).” Naturpress, May 13, 2019.

FIGURE 5:

“Demonstration at Stortinget.” October 1, 2021, Andrew Turner Poeppel.

FIGURE 6

“Demonstration at Stortinget.” October 28, 2022, Andrew Turner Poeppel.

FIGURE 7

Le Corbusier’s hand hovering over La Ville Radieuse; *Architecture Daily* (2007).