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Co-producing just and sustainable localities: emphasising the role of local authorities in current practices in Germany

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Abstract

In current debates on socio-ecological transformation, a growing number of stakeholders are highlighting the need to consistently move away from growth pressures. Several urban and rural development initiatives are pioneering alternative local production and consumption patterns in sustainable and integrated land use. Taking a spatial perspective, we discuss promising initiatives in three fields which we see as paradigmatic for a new kind of co-produced local development geared to a fairer and more sustainable future: co-operation projects between municipalities and community enterprises, participatory approaches to sustainable land use in rural communities, and collaborative development for sustainable urban residential estates. The aim of the paper is to discuss the transformative potential of these paradigmatic initiatives and what should be done to serve their interests and promote their mainstreaming. We draw on a diverse economies framing (Gibson-Graham 2008), arguing that it is important to bring these nascent post-growth practices to the attention of academic practice as well as politicians. Understanding these newly emerging practices in their potential and constraints is key to ultimately stimulating broader societal trend towards more just and sustainable localities. We argue that German municipalities have a fair amount of leeway in shaping the interplay of stakeholders and the interface between bottom-up initiatives and top-down steering policies towards just and sustainable localities. Our analysis emphasises the agency of local municipalities and their discretionary power to initiate change and transformation.

Zusammenfassung

Im Kontext der aktuellen Debatten um eine notwendige sozial-ökologische Transformation sehen Akteure zunehmend die Notwendigkeit, sich konsequent vom Wachstumsdruck zu lösen. Im Mittelpunkt dieses Beitrags stehen Initiativen, die wir als paradigmatisch für eine neue Art von lokaler Entwicklung hin zur nachhaltigeren und integrierteren Nutzung von Flächen und zu neuen Produktions- und Konsummustern sehen. Wir nehmen drei Themenfelder in den Blick: die Kooperation zwischen gemeinwohlorientierten Sozialunternehmen und Kommunen, flächensparende und partizipative Siedlungsentwicklung im ländlichen Raum sowie die sozial gerechte Entwicklung von Stadtvierteln. Ziel des Artikels ist es, das transformative Potenzial dieser lokalen Ansätze zu analysieren und zu diskutieren, was getan werden könnte, um eine stärkere Verbreitung dieser oft noch isolierten Einzelprojekte zu fördern. Dazu beziehen wir uns auf das Konzept der ‚diverse economies‘ (Gibson-

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Graham 2008) und sehen die Notwendigkeit, diese sich neu entwickelnden Praktiken in Wissenschaft wie auch in der Politik stärker wahrzunehmen. Sie in ihren Potenzialen und Grenzen zu verstehen, zeigt Transformationswege hin zu gerechterer und nachhaltigerer Entwicklung auf. Die Analyse der lokalen Initiativen in den drei Themenfeldern verdeutlicht, dass Kommunen ihren Spielraum aktiv nutzen können, um Akteure zusammenzuführen und die Schnittstellen zwischen bottom-up und top-down strategisch zu gestalten. Die Ergebnisse betonen daher die Handlungsmöglichkeiten von Kommunen und ihren Ermessensspielraum bei der Initiierung von Veränderungen und der Transformation von Städten und Gemeinden hin zu einer nachhaltigeren Entwicklung.

Keywords local initiatives, co-production, sustainable and integrated land use, diverse economies, German municipalities

1. Introduction

In Germany as elsewhere, discourses on alternative ways of living and working have entered the spatial disciplines, spurred by activism on the ground and growing acceptance among different societal groups of the urgent need to limit consumption of our planet's resources. The aim of this article is to provide readers with insights into the current status of cross-sectoral local arrangements for sustainable and integrated land use in German municipalities. Taking a spatial perspective, we discuss three cases of promising initiatives for alternative approaches in rural and urban areas. They have been selected to showcase the current status of what is being discussed and put into practice in German municipalities recognising the needs for collaborative development towards just and sustainable localities. After analysing the scope and potential of promising co-produced local initiatives pioneering sustainable practices in land use and local development, we discuss what is needed to increase their impact. The terms 'collaborative' and/or 'co-produced' stand here for initiatives at the crossroads of civic engagement, municipal administrations and/or the private sector.

Our perspective is on the local level, and specifically on the important agency of local authorities in promoting sustainable local development and land use in co-operation with local stakeholders. Our paper draws on the literature on alternative or diverse economies (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013; Zademach and Hillebrand 2013; Gibson-Graham 2008) that emphasise a plural understanding of economies and the need to bring (marginalised) alternative practices more to the fore. We selected the three cases as being indicative of "performative practices for 'other worlds'" (Gibson-Graham 2008: 613) and as paradigmatic for the arguments we want to establish: first, to encour-

age collaborative development between municipalities and community enterprises for more sustainable and integrated local development. Second, to widen the perspective beyond city-regions, taking greater account of the potential of small municipalities in rural areas for more sustainable development. Third, to illustrate the current status in collaboratively developing and financing sustainable urban residential areas. The case studies emphasise the agency of local authorities and their discretionary power to initiate and transform localities. Our aim is to understand the relevance of these emerging practices and discuss their transformative potential for more equitable and sustainable localities in Germany.

2. Understanding local initiatives as performative practices

The works of *Gibson-Graham* stand for opening up "imaginative space for economic alternative" (2008: 613) in geography. Their landmark publication on "diverse economies" (2008) was published at a time when there seemed to be no alternative to the current paradigm of capitalist production. *Gibson-Graham* (2008: 614) argued that we should "become open to possibility rather than limits on the possible". The concept of diverse economies challenges hegemonic visions of the (capitalist) economy, calling for a plural understanding of economies taking into account non-market transactions and non-profit-oriented forms of economic organisations. The concept points to the social embeddedness of economies, emphasising the role of trust, reciprocity, solidarity, or cooperation in existing economic practices (*Gibson-Graham* 2014: 151). Such motivations and influencing factors are usually neglected or downplayed in mainstream economic thinking with its emphasis on private gains, profit, self-interest and competition, and its focus solely on

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formal market and profit-oriented transactions. In this tradition, academic research in the spatial sciences has a role to play, seeking to theorise in ways which go beyond existing paradigms. It may thus help reveal alternatives to current ways of understanding and framing social realities. Works in this tradition have a performative aim, taking up as yet absent positions and bringing (marginalised) nascent practices on the ground to the attention of academic practice as well as politics. Following this tradition, spotlighting local spaces of transformation and newly emerging practices is central to understanding what might ultimately stimulate broader societal developments and “shift trajectories away from social injustices and environmental destruction” (Schmid and Smith 2020: 16).

A diverse economies framing brings to the fore existing economic practices in a locality “that provide social and habitat maintenance, economies that could be developed further in order to achieve increased well-being”, and sheds light on the local players actively engaging in these practices (Hillebrand and Zademach 2013: 18). In highlighting existing practices for the common good, and challenging profit-oriented assumptions about how space is managed and produced today, a diverse economies framework also intersects with related claims for post-growth (Schmelzer and Vetter 2019; Seidl and Zahrnt 2010) or sustainable development (James 2015). Sustainable development and post-growth concepts share the belief that alternative framings (or a redefinition) of economic growth narratives are needed, allowing for a development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” as emphasised by the seminal *Brundtland Report* (1987: para. 27). In line with this aim, sustainable development in localities calls for changes across the different domains of economics, ecology, politics and culture towards ‘circles of sustainability’ (James 2015).

Sounding the alarm 50 years ago, the Club of Rome triggered academic critique of a model of perpetual economic growth and its costs in terms of exhausting finite natural resources (Meadows et al. 1972). In the meantime, the ecological crisis has rapidly gained pace, presenting challenges that seem almost insoluble; certain developments, such as the loss of biodiversity, are now even irreversible. To some extent, though not in a fundamental way, these developments and the severe financial and economic crises of the last decades have triggered a (modest) re-orientation

among important institutional players, including the EU and OECD, towards alternative ways of measuring well-being beyond economic growth (OECD 2011), policy support for more inclusive economies, such as a focus on social economies (OECD/EU 2019), or the transition to a circular economy (European Commission 2016). Moreover, criticism of capitalism as the dominant economic system has moved from the margins back to centre-stage, even among economists (Raworth 2017; Mazzucato 2018). But it is also fair to say that, although the harmonious coexistence of ecological, economic and social development is invoked in political programmes, whether in Germany (see the German Commission on the equivalence of living conditions (Kommission “Gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse” 2019)) or Europe (see the Green Deal for Europe (European Commission 2019)), in practice economic growth interests still often take precedence over other interests. As with economics, spatial research and spatial planning remain largely rooted in a traditional growth paradigm (oekom/ARL 2020). There is, however, a growing awareness of the need for more sustainable practices among planners, and at the same time a steady burst of experimentation with alternative ways of living and working at local level, collective initiatives or activist projects, both in Germany and elsewhere (Hülz et al. 2020; Lange 2020). These newly emerging practices can also be seen as forms of agency that challenge and transform established, traditional political and social arrangements. An analysis of these initiatives reveals that sustainable development is not just a purely ecological, but also a cultural undertaking, challenging the habitual practices of local players and institutions, but also the values underlying policies and programmes, and ultimately also power relations. Understanding the limitations and structural barriers which newly developing, local, experimental projects face is crucial for identifying possible ways of overcoming them and for defining the implications for politics, but also academic practice.

These newly developing projects in Germany are the focus of our article. We are particularly interested in emerging practices at the crossroads of civic engagement and local administrations, with or without the private sector. Drawing their strength from transdisciplinary interaction, we see them as seedbeds for long-term change in development patterns and practices, driven by mundane, day-to-day acts of collaboration. In Germany, public policymakers, in line with the constitution, see their political mandate in balancing the competing interests of local players for

the common good (Albers and Wékel 2017), in contrast to more liberal planning regimes such as in the USA or Great Britain. In general, and compared to other European countries, German local authorities possess a high degree of autonomy (Ladner et al. 2019). In practice however, due to tighter municipal budgets in recent years, those struggling financially are limited in their steering power. Nevertheless, they still play an important role in initiating processes, shaping regulatory frameworks and setting examples. Based upon a growing insight among local authorities that sustainable local development can only be achieved in cooperation with a wide variety of civil society and private sector stakeholders, more deliberative or participative forms of governance have developed in recent years, with local stakeholders actively involved in the (co-)production of decisions and developments (Holtkamp et al. 2006). In regional and urban development, such new forms of governance yield numerous advantages, such as tapping new resources through cooperation projects involving private, public and civil society stakeholders, or generating new forms of local spatial production ('socio-spatial innovations') (Albrechts 2013; Moulaert et al. 2016).

Co-producing just and sustainable localities, according to our understanding, calls for approaches cross-cutting multiple and interdependent domains (economics, ecology, politics and culture) (James 2015: 48). Based upon such multi-dimensional understanding, a conceptual framework helping us consider processes towards more equitable and sustainable localities would encompass several components: (1) economies to achieve increased well-being, including non-profit-oriented forms of development and economies for the common good; (2) spatial planning beyond the traditional growth paradigm and ecological land use, including reductions in local land use and cover (e.g. the re-use of existing buildings or the redevelopment of brownfield sites); (3) transdisciplinary and participatory forms of governance, including new forms of collaboration among stakeholders; (4) forms of development that support greater equity, solidarity and cooperation within and across localities.

Based upon this conceptual framework, we present three cases in the following section, and discuss the findings in section 4.

3. Analysing sustainable development practices in urban and rural communities

In the following, we analyse promising local initiatives and their potential for more sustainable practices in land use and local development in three fields. They have been carefully selected to depict current practices of collaborative development in German municipalities towards just and sustainable localities. The three examples are a) the "Nachbarschaft Samtweberei Krefeld", an initiative representing co-operation projects between municipalities and community enterprises; b) the rural municipality of Kirchanschöring, an initiative involving broad sectors of the population in implementing a comprehensive sustainability strategy; and c) the new urban neighbourhood Prinz-Eugen-Park in Munich, an initiative showcasing the state of current practice in collaboratively developing sustainable residential areas.

Selected to reflect diverse settings (rural/urban; tight market/weak market localities) in Germany, the cases shed light on current sustainable development practices in locally specific, yet characteristic ways. In focusing on three specific cases providing a wealth of information for the depicted fields, we are aware of similar practices elsewhere in Germany. As far as possible, we make reference to such examples in the text below. The greatest criticism of case study-based research designs relates to a lack of generalisability of the statements obtained (Yin 2009: 5). However, case studies are not generally used to derive statements for the entirety of all cases, but to generate critical, context-dependent knowledge and provide conclusions for possible aspects to be investigated on a broader empirical basis (George and Bennett 2005: 83). In our case, the analysis of the case studies is followed by a critical discussion of the evidence in Section 4. Methodologically, this paper draws on data collected in three ways: (1) desktop research on co-produced projects for sustainable and integrated land use in Germany; (2) both authors' participation in a three-year scientific working group of the ARL – Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association (ARL's working group on post-growth economies (2016–2020)); (3) documentary analysis, on-site visits and informal talks with representatives of the selected initiatives.

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3.1 Co-operation projects between municipalities and community enterprises

Community enterprises, as a sub-sector of social enterprises or the third sector, can be seen as the heart of co-producing just and sustainable localities. As defined by Bailey (2012: 1), community enterprises “emerge from local communities at the neighbourhood level, work in partnership with the public and private sectors, and provide a range of services to meet social, economic and environmental needs”. Though there are no exact figures available on the size and dimension of community-based organisations or enterprises in Germany, existing studies point to their relevance and potential for sustainable local development, based on their societal embeddedness at the crossroads of a locality’s economic, social, cultural and spatial development (Christmann 2012; Flögel and Gärtner 2015; Jähnke et al. 2011; Zimmer and Bräuer 2014).

By way of example, we are highlighting the “Nachbarschaft Samtweberei Krefeld” as one of several initiatives (BBSR 2020; see also *ExRotaPrint* in Berlin-Wedding (*ExRotaPrint* n.d.); *Zentralwerk* in Dresden (*Zentralwerk* n.d.)) where the acquisition of land and buildings, supported by non-profit foundations, has enabled community enterprises to have a sustainable impact on neighbourhood regeneration (Bailey 2012). In the case of the Samtweberei, the co-operation between the Krefeld city administration and a community enterprise led to the re-use of existing buildings, helping regenerate the neighbourhood. The Krefeld city administration transferred ownership of an abandoned factory complex in a disadvantaged area to the non-profit foundation Montag Stiftungen in Bonn free of charge, on a leasehold basis. The non-profit foundation, whose mission is neighbourhood development oriented toward the common good, invested in the large complex, creating high-quality office space and housing, alongside semi-public spaces for neighbourhood use. The revenue generated from the investment (housing rents, office space rents) is used to maintain the buildings or flows back into the neighbourhood to fund charitable projects on a permanent basis. At the same time, the local community benefits from social returns. More specifically, as a contractual obligation to rent office space, companies undertake to invest their expertise and a certain amount of their time in neighbourhood work and initiatives every year.

Executed as a pilot project (2014-2018), the foundation has now placed the management of the “Nachbarschaft Samtweberei Krefeld” in the hands of a non-profit company (“Urbane Nachbarschaft Samtweberei gGmbH”). Highlighting the benefits of such a community-orientated perspective on local development, there is a growing network of similar initiatives in Germany (BBSR 2020; *Netzwerk Immobilien* 2021).

3.2 Participatory approaches to sustainable land use in rural municipalities

Our second example focuses on the potential of holistic approaches for sustainable rural development. A large share of the German population lives in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas. A growing number of projects tackling topics related to alternative economies can be observed there in the form of ‘cittaslow’, transition towns, bioenergy villages, eco-villages or pesticide-free communities (*Zukunftskommunen* 2021). A key area for which local authorities are responsible is land use and the provision of housing. As in most countries, rural life is synonymous with living in one’s own home, as reflected by the fact that the share of privately-owned properties is significantly higher in rural than in urban areas in Germany. This high share is seen as one reason why the issue of housing provision receives less political attention in rural areas (*Gkartzios and Ziebarth* 2016). However, there is a shortage of rental and, in particular, social housing. A key challenge is to use land as a finite resource, reducing net land take and focusing on inner village development (*Gerend* 2020).

The Bavarian municipality of Kirchanschöring with its 3,300 inhabitants is an outstanding example of a participatory process involving broad sectors of the population in implementing a comprehensive sustainability strategy. Based on publicly established redevelopment measures in the village renewal programme in the 1990s, the municipality set clear guidelines for ‘social, fair, solidary and sustainable’ municipal development. The municipality has gained certification under the ‘Economy for the Common Good’ (“*Gemeinwohlökonomie*”; *International Federation for the Economy for the Common Good* 2021; *Talavera and Sanchis* 2020), a voluntary auditing method measuring a municipality’s contribution to the common good in a variety of fields such as organisational development, entrepreneurial as well as charitable activities. Kirchanschöring is one of the first municipalities to have

undergone this audit. Other “common good” communities are Mäder and Nenzing in Vorarlberg, Austria, and Breklum, Bordelum and Klixbüll in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. In addition to sustainable energy production and regional agricultural production, the responsible use of land and inner village development are important topics in Kirchanschöring. With professional support from architects and planners, the municipality has investigated alternatives to the mainstream housing development of recent years, i.e. the construction of houses for single families. For example, higher-density communal housing for different target groups is planned. Similarly, apartments for elderly people with the option of assisted living are being built, while collaborative planning processes have been initiated with a view to building homes for young families in joint building projects, thereby reducing land take. While such offers are widespread in urban areas, they are not yet well established in rural areas. Kirchanschöring cultivates a culture of dialogue with all stakeholders, driven by the town’s mayor. Projects are developed in innovative participatory formats, e.g. citizen fora and citizen councils alongside the municipal council, municipal administration and active civil society stakeholders. Measures aimed at raising awareness for more sustainable ways of living are an important part of the strategy. The developments in this municipality serve as inspiration for neighbouring communities and are part of a regional strategy (Integrated Rural Development (ILE) Waginger See – Rupertiwinkel).

3.3 Collaborative development for sustainable residential areas

In densely populated areas featuring exponential increases in property prices and low vacancy rates such as Munich, Hamburg or Frankfurt/Main, planning authorities have to break new ground, especially in terms of sustainable housing development and affordable housing (Kleist et al. 2018). In our third example, the focus is on two municipal instruments, the active involvement of developers in sharing the cost of developing building land, and the benefits of involving housing cooperatives.

In the prospering city of Munich, politicians and planners face a growth dilemma, having to balance social housing provision and ecological necessities (Reiß-Schmidt 2021). Munich has established so-called SoBoN (Socially equitable land use) guidelines in the

housing market, requiring investors and landowners who benefit from public planning through the increased value of their land to bear a share of the costs and burdens (*La Fabrique de la Cité* 2019; Merk and Thalgott 2020). For example, private investors help co-finance housing-related public infrastructure such as access roads or social infrastructure, while at the same time agreeing to construct new subsidised housing (alongside free-market housing) (*City of Munich* 2021). In this way, the city hopes to ensure the supply of affordable and accessible housing, also for lower-income households, in the long run. Obviously, such contractual agreements between the city and investors work in tight housing markets, with housing developers continuing to benefit from sufficient – albeit lower – profits. It is nevertheless an exemplary municipal strategy to combat the high and still rising inequality in the housing market, with the city aiming to provide a wide-ranging offer of housing for all income groups. In addition to Munich’s two municipal housing companies which offer homes to lower-income households, an increasing number of community-oriented residential housing projects, organised as housing cooperatives or joint building partnerships, are supported. Joint building partnerships are a specific form of collaborative housing under which private individuals jointly develop residential property (Seemann et al. 2019). Cooperative housing is a form between renting and owning and has a long tradition in Germany. Cooperative members pay a moderate fee for a flat belonging to all shareholders of the cooperative, including themselves. This joint ownership model makes housing affordable, while at the same time giving members the possibility to participate in the decisions of the cooperative (Reynolds 2018).

One current example of sustainable urban housing policies is the new urban neighbourhood Prinz-Eugen-Park in Munich, on the site of former military barracks. In an attempt to bridge the gaps between social, ecological and economic sustainability, the Department of Urban Planning and Building issued guidelines for developing Germany’s largest timber-construction 570-apartment estate, thus setting new standards in the field of climate protection and the development of a new, socially mixed and integrated neighbourhood (*City of Munich* 2017). In the context of a public call for tenders specifying the housing development standards and regulations in this area, municipal housing associations, joint building partnerships, housing cooperatives and private property developers were able to submit tenders. The outcome is that the apartments

are a mixture of subsidised or privately financed rental apartments and owner-occupied condominiums, creating a social mix of residents of differing incomes and ages. In an early planning phase, the future residents founded a neighbourhood cooperative to coordinate common activities including, for instance, initiatives that promote sharing or swapping instead of owning (e.g. tools, cars, clothes). Most of the buildings offer space for community-oriented uses, such as common rooms, co-working spaces, communal roof gardens and urban gardening. Planning specifications helped reduce the number of cars, with car-sharing and e-mobility options made available. In this case, the administration used its discretionary powers to define and develop sustainable residential areas, giving precedence to and encouraging the establishment of housing cooperatives as an alternative to free-market housing development. Such practices are not specific to Munich. Another example worth looking at is a bottom-up development process in Hanover, where the newly founded cooperative “Ecovillage Hannover” aims to become a low-cost eco-settlement and the largest tiny house estate in Europe (*Ecovillage Hannover* 2021).

4. Discussion

The three cases highlight very diverse settings, from urban to rural, from cities with tight housing markets to those with weak markets. As stated above, our aim is to showcase the selected examples as current practices striving for more sustainable land use and local development, and to review potential measures for stimulating broader societal developments towards just and sustainable localities. *Table 1* lists how the discussed three cases promote such localities, in line with our conceptual framework. In the following section we critically discuss the possible conclusions for further research and political and planning practice, drawing on the steps listed in the table.

Powers of local authorities

The cases illustrate the discretionary powers of local authorities towards sustainable development. In booming cities like Munich, planning authorities can suggest and implement regulations targeting more sustainable housing and mobility development, ranging from specifications for socially equitable land use and the involvement of different stakeholders to setting high ecological and social design standards. The city of Munich also retains a share of the generated

surplus or financial profit of private developers to fund social and community infrastructure. Cities like Krefeld with weaker housing markets can enter into agreements with non-profit organisations for the re-development of abandoned land and buildings. In the case of Krefeld, the municipality alone would not have had the financial and human resources to re-develop the abandoned site. Cooperation with a strong investor, in this case a non-profit organisation, enabled this project to be executed. Especially in smaller rural communities, as in the case of Kirchanschöring, a significant asset for shaping sustainable processes is manageability and size: people know each other and the group of relevant stakeholders to be involved is likely to be smaller. The impact of innovative local leaders, in this case the mayor, and their leadership play an important role on the journey towards more equitable and sustainable development. An essential factor to be observed in all cases is the political will to consistently involve local stakeholders and to follow a sustainable path, even if politically difficult.

Implementing new practices

Furthermore, we looked at the cases in terms of their relevance for “performative practices for ‘other worlds’” (*Gibson-Graham* 2008: 613; *Gibson-Graham* 2014) and for shaping visions of alternative futures. In the case of Krefeld, the *Samtweberei* is integrated into the neighbourhood, promoting networking and interaction between the neighbourhood community and *Samtweberei* user groups. It is thus a good example of new practices for planning community-orientated, high-quality investments in regeneration neighbourhoods. In the second case, Kirchanschöring, attention is paid to establishing fora and arenas allowing public and private stakeholders and citizens to cooperate and to promote and implement practices in line with the principles of an “Economy for the Common Good”. This case highlights efforts to make progress in deliberative and participative processes and involve all stakeholder groups in the village in a joint undertaking for a more sustainable future. In the third case, Munich, we see how a city holds investors responsible for providing affordable housing and supports non-profit housing cooperatives, thereby encouraging the establishment of alternatives to free-market housing development. These practices showcase ways and means for local societies to incrementally progress towards more integrated, sustainable land use through changing local governance practices in planning, administration and participation.

Table 1 Sustainable land use practices: what is needed for greater impact. Source: own elaboration

Dimension	Factors contributing to more just and sustainable localities
<p>1) Alternative economic approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovative monitoring approaches (e.g. ‘Economy for the Common Good’ accounting) - Initiatives that promote sharing or swapping instead of owning (e.g. tools, cars, clothes) - Reinvesting some of the revenue generated from new investments in community initiatives - Political will of decision-takers to enable non-profit land use and to support community-based land development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convinced and convincing key players (such as the mayor or local council) - Locally-specific, innovative awareness-raising measures to convince inhabitants of the benefits of a more sustainable lifestyle - Participatory approaches to involve committed local stakeholders in a joint undertaking for a more sustainable locality
<p>2) Ecological land use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concepts for building less space-consuming housing and business parks - Skilful application of existing planning and building provisions - Concerted urban policy and planning guidelines promoting sustainable land use - Players focusing on reusing existing buildings or brownfield sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipalities holding private investors responsible for the development of affordable housing and social infrastructure - Agencies, networks or non-profit foundations as brokers and enablers of social innovation - Long-term support for professional capacity-building of planners, architects, sociologists, etc. for sustainable development concepts - Consistent evolution of planning tools and legal instruments at municipal and regional level towards a more holistic and sustainable approach
<p>3) Collaboration of local authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entering into cooperation with strong (non-profit) investors in weak-market cities (e.g. Stiftung trias, or Montag-Stiftungen) - Agencies, networks or non-profit foundations as brokers and enablers of social innovation (e.g. Social Impact gGmbH, Montag-Stiftungen, Immobilien) - Political will to consistently involve local stakeholders and to follow a sustainable path even if politically difficult - Promotion of housing cooperatives, joint building partnerships and their prioritised consideration in the allocation of land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of calls for concepts (concept tendering procedures) and urban development contracts that enable sustainable, community-oriented neighbourhoods - Priority public funding for research and social innovation labs - Funding policies consistently promoting post-growth strategies and their implementation - Supporting policy framework for community enterprises, incl. legal forms of organisations
<p>4) Social justice concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mix of different players in the housing sector oriented towards common welfare - Promotion of multifunctional meeting points, shared spaces, etc. in neighbourhoods - Concerted urban policy and planning guidelines promoting affordable housing / socially equitable land use (e.g. socially equitable land use guidelines Munich) 	

Understanding impacts through in-depth studies

Major transformation theories and broad visions are essential for more equitable and sustainable development, as are detailed insights into day-to-day practices of sustainable living and working. The analysis of the three cases has generated insights into the important agency of local authorities and can give hints for further academic research. Further projects might build on the presented findings, focusing in greater depth on aspects of procedural and distributional justice (i.e. their inclusiveness or exclusiveness with regards to different societal groups, or user conflicts), an aspect beyond the scope of this article. This could encompass, for instance in the case of the Samtweherei, a thorough study of the generated added value for different community groups in the neighbour-

hood. Likewise, there might be differentiated (according to social class) access to housing cooperatives in the Munich case. In the case of eco-villages, or also in the community of Kirchanschöring, it would be interesting to analyse in greater depth the negotiation processes between those who already live sustainably and the more ‘conventionally living’ households, and ways in which the latter could potentially be introduced to more sustainable practices. More in-depth studies are needed to analyse current practices, following the example of Schmid 2020 on Stuttgart’s Community Economy. Such studies are important for analysing in greater depth the potential of local practices, the challenges facing them, and ways of improving governance processes on the ground.

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Supporting bottom-up initiatives

Most of the community enterprises in German neighbourhoods are model projects, or civil-society, bottom-up local development actions dependent upon the stamina and (financial and human) resources of a few key players (non-profit foundations, community groups) able to build coalitions, secure political support, and develop a long-term vision and approach. While there is obviously a certain groundswell to be seen in the development of such initiatives, higher-level political recognition is still limited. More specifically, a supporting policy framework to nurture and support their potential is needed in order to fully exploit the potential of community enterprises and mainstream sustainable practices. New initiatives emerging in governance regimes at the crossroads of civic engagement and local administrations, with or without the private sector, need to be integrated into land use topics. Such initiatives are often driven by bottom-up initiatives that see themselves not only as founders but also as urban or regional developers using vacant buildings and spatial resources. Many of the cooperatives or community enterprises feature local know-how, an orientation towards the common good and the willingness and commitment of local people to get involved in the development of their surroundings. City neighbourhoods or villages seem to be the right level for people to get involved and directly see the effects of any actions taken. These place-specific, bottom-up developments need to be included in the collaborative design of local strategies. On the municipal side, supportive structures and honest offers of participation and co-design in early planning stages are necessary.

Municipal responsibility for planning and steering developments

German municipalities have a broad range of legal instruments and planning tools at their disposal (Pahl-Weber and Henckel 2008). Invested with planning autonomy, they have the responsibility to act in line with the interests of the common good. Within a multi-level governance system, local authorities thus have discretionary power – but also the obligation – to initiate change and gear local development towards post-growth strategies. Apart from the need for cooperation in local decision-making processes, as mentioned above, a political commitment is also needed to strategically leverage existing planning tools and instruments in allocating development rights and regulating change. For instance, urban development contracts, or calls for concepts, are municipal instru-

ments allowing sustainable and community-oriented land use, enabling community enterprises and cooperatives to offer affordable housing and community facilities on a long-term basis. However, in cities with tight housing markets, a strong political will on the part of local decision-makers is needed to transfer municipal buildings or land to local community-based or non-profit organisations, as economic interests often remain dominant. At the same time, regulations need to be adaptable, as rigid guidelines often prevent experimental approaches and consequently stakeholder learning processes. There is a need for the consistent evolution of planning tools and legal instruments at municipal and regional level towards a more holistic and sustainable approach. Finally, 'soft' local development measures, such as awareness-raising and capacity building are essential for converting theoretical knowledge into personal action. This includes capacity building among decision-makers in politics and public administration, as well as promoting integrated and sustainable local development among planners, architects, sociologists etc.

5. Conclusions

Establishing truly sustainable practices, alternative economies and collaborative practices in planning and politics takes time, perseverance and cross-fertilisation. In this article, we have detailed what emerging practices in urban and rural projects can tell us about the way forward to incrementally push local societies towards more integrated and sustainable development. We are aware that the discussion of three cases in the depicted fields cannot provide an encompassing insight into the social realities on the ground. Nevertheless, the cases show the important agency of local authorities in the field of sustainable and integrative land use. Key determinants are access to land, skilful application of existing planning and building provisions, process design and participative politics – determinants often within the responsibility of public administrations and political decision-makers and giving them discretionary power to initiate and transform local communities. Important player-related success factors are transparency in the design, organisation and management of the process as well as a focus on future-relevant topics. More long-term political support for networking seems to be necessary as well as the harnessing and mainstreaming of the experience gained in these projects, in the form of priority funding for research and social innovation labs.

Implications for academic practice include the integration of different disciplinary approaches and the implementation and evaluation of transdisciplinary science-practice collaboration projects. More in-depth studies are needed to better understand the potential, constraints and restrictions of emerging alternative economies practices. The detailed analysis of current practices, and how these practices transcend, change or conflict with the current economic growth paradigm and challenge habitual routines but also power constellations, will enhance our knowledge on what is needed for broader societal shifts towards just and sustainable localities. More research is needed, covering still more cases, on the incremental journey towards a collective understanding of the processes towards more integrated and sustainable development, and the important role of local authorities. This understanding is more important than ever, as there is an urgent need to mainstream sustainable development in policies at all levels. In light of the pressing need for sustainability, a regulatory framework and binding commitments are just as essential as experimental projects. As regards land use, the key issue is to reduce new land use by exploiting inner-urban potential, for example by re-using vacant industrial and commercial areas and by increasing the density of building development. At an intermunicipal and regional level, binding commitments for reducing land take are necessary.

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