

Title: Urban Proximity Policies and Political Dynamics: Analyzing the Acceptance and Electoral Consequences of Barcelona's Superblocks

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Abstract

In recent years, urban proximity policies such as superblocks have become central in shaping sustainable urban environments. However, the implementation of these policies has sparked a spectrum of reactions, ranging from robust community support to vehement opposition. The proposed study examines the multifaceted impact of superblocks, particularly focusing on their acceptance and the political price paid by the political party responsible for its implementation (Barcelona en Comú) in areas where these have been implemented.

Superblocks, conceptualized to create sustainable, proximity-based living environments, have encountered opposition and support mirroring the controversies of similar urban planning strategies globally. Notably, in cities like Oxford, London, and Edmonton, similar initiatives have been challenged by groups perceiving them as infringements on personal liberties and part of a larger climate agenda. This resistance to urban transformation is rooted in a historical skepticism towards centralized urban planning, further complicated in the post-COVID-19 context. The study delves into these dimensions, categorizing the criticisms into conspiracy theories, ideological opposition, resistance due to lifestyle changes, and legitimate concerns like social exclusion and gentrification. The research also tackles the role of post-truth tactics in urban planning debates, emphasizing how the spread of misinformation and mistrust in institutions complicates rational discourse in urban development. It proposes strategies for urban planners to address these challenges, advocating for a balance between empirical science-based insights and participatory methods to effectively tackle pressing urban issues.

Parallel to the social acceptance of superblocks, the study explores their political implications, particularly in Barcelona. Utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) data and disaggregated electoral data, the research employs a combination of Adjusted Difference-in-Differences (DiD) and Propensity Score Matching (PSM) methodologies. This approach aims to understand the electoral response to superblocks at a highly localized level. The findings reveal that areas with implemented superblocks in Barcelona showed a stronger inclination towards the incumbent party, BEC, despite an overall decline in their city-wide popularity. This pattern suggests that, in specific local contexts, the introduction of superblocks positively influences the political landscape, countering the decline in electoral support for BEC. The study thus highlights the significance of superblocks in shaping political dynamics and their role in mitigating electoral declines for parties advocating for sustainable urban policies.

In conclusion, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in implementing urban proximity policies like superblocks. It underscores the importance of considering both the social acceptance and the political dimensions in urban policy implementation. As environmental and economic challenges escalate, the findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and urban planners in balancing sustainable initiatives with public and political support. The case of Barcelona's superblocks serves as a pivotal example, demonstrating the intricate interplay between urban planning, societal acceptance, and political consequences in contemporary urban environments.