



# Strategic Collaborative Planning for Urban Liveability: A Comparative Review of Metropolitan Area Case Studies

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**Abstract:** The issue of urban liveability has been extensively debated by global agencies and scholars, as evidenced by the New Urban Agenda, in response to the impact of urbanisation. Urban liveability pertains to the ability of urban communities to achieve a high-quality living environment. While participatory planning is often presented as a means of empowering communities to attain better living conditions, it has presented challenges for decision-makers. Furthermore, dominant actors often influence participation processes, benefiting certain community segments. As a result, collaborative planning has emerged as an approach that seeks to address the interests of multiple urban factors by promoting consensus in decision-making. This paper aims to examine the collaborative planning methods that have been used in strategic planning that have empowered the community to participate in the planning process. Content analysis was employed as a research method to explore the empirical evidence of collaborative planning that has successfully empowered community participation in strategic planning and its impact on the liveability of metropolitan areas. Correspondingly, the Melbourne, Vancouver, and Helsinki case studies were selected based on five liveable city indices. This study's findings suggest a positive correlation between the implementation of collaborative planning by the selected metropolitan areas and their status as the most liveable cities. This paper contributes to the ongoing debate on the role of collaborative planning in promoting urban liveability.

**Keywords:** Strategic planning, collaborative approach, urban liveability, metropolitan area

## 1. Introduction

The impact of urbanisation on shaping the urban area must be taken seriously as human capital, resources, and markets move from rural to urban areas, resulting in major cities becoming too concentrated (Tan et al., 2014). By 2050, over 70% of the global population is projected to be urbanised, increasing the demand for greater liveability (Tan

et al., 2014). The potential challenges that are faced by urban governance will leave them with the daunting task of mitigating the impact of urbanisation, including the deterioration of well-being for some community segments. Therefore, UN-Habitat has urged cities to be more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable to provide a liveable environment for urban dwellers through the New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat, 2016).

Urban governance, consisting of government and non-government actors, makes efficient planning decisions regarding urban land development, with the intent to promote a liveable environment for all city dwellers (Brown, 2015). Theoretically, this can be achieved through participatory urban planning processes, despite the complex and dynamic pattern of decision-making that is involved. However, communities seem to have less capacity to participate genuinely in strategic planning in urban areas, thereby exerting their influence on planning decisions due to the hegemony of neoliberalism in government development strategies (Hanssen & Falleth, 2014; Mäntysalo & Saglie, 2010). The community's lack of capacity is due to the scarcity of conventional participatory planning in educating and collaborating with the community (Wondirad et al., 2020; Mahjabeen et al., 2009; Monno & Khakee, 2012). This raises the question, "*How can collaborative planning facilitate urban governance in providing a liveable environment for multiple urban actors?*".

This paper examines the role of collaborative planning in selected strategic planning initiatives, which have effectively empowered communities to participate in the planning process, thus, enhancing the liveability of metropolitan areas. Meanwhile, the three case studies of strategic planning in Melbourne, Vancouver, and Helsinki demonstrate the power of collaboration in creating sustainable and liveable cities which align with both Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper begins by exploring the relationship between the concepts of urban liveability, community participation, and collaborative planning. Then, a selection of case studies is elaborated based on the five globally used liveable city indices to measure the ranking of liveable cities. The study uses qualitative content analysis to assess and interpret collaborative planning practices in selected case studies using established indicators. This paper concludes with a discussion of the potential connection between the practices of collaborative planning by the three metropolitan areas and their status as among the most liveable cities.

## 2. Urban Liveability, Community Participation and Collaborative Planning Nexus

Conceptually, urban liveability is associated with spatial dimension issues such as housing and infrastructure that are fundamental to the well-being of urban dwellers (Leh et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2014). It is relative to the characteristics of an area that make it appealing to live, work, and operate a business. Liveability is concerned with fulfilling community needs and their capacity to attain them (Leh et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2019). Consequently, the insufficient capacity of the community in planning participation may dampen their capability to achieve liveability. This is demonstrated through what has been described by Kaal in deliberating the concept of urban liveability. This concept is closely related to the concept of citizenship and governance, in which citizens have the right and responsibility to participate in the public process (Kaal, 2011). The interaction and communication that are built between the multiple urban actors have resulted in the public process of urban governance becoming a complex and dynamic process (Kaal, 2011; Peters & Pierre, 2012). Hence, urban liveability can be associated with the capability of urban governance to provide sufficient capacity to the community to exert their interests in the decision-making process, including planning. Also, Ling et al. (2006) have underlined critical success factors that are relative to the implementation of liveability (Table 1).

Based on the critical success factors that are highlighted by Leh et al. (2020) and Ling et al. (2006), the community needs to participate in the public process to achieve the liveability of an urban area, including its dwellers. Conceptually, participatory planning provides a distinct picture to decision-makers of public preferences, thus, contributing to better decision-making by incorporating the community's experiential knowledge into the process (Nguyen-Long et al., 2019; Innes & Booher, 2004). Furthermore, community participation is purposive in promoting the democratic way of making planning decisions. As such, the interests of all the community segments and stakeholders are inclusively addressed and considered, thus, educating the participants and resolving conflicts (Nguyen-Long et al., 2019; Innes & Booher, 2004).

Although, rhetorically, community participation is the right thing to do, it has caused dilemmas for decision-makers. In reality, the decisions are continuously influenced by those who are dominant rather than collective, leading to self-interest overshadowing the collective interest (Migchelbrink & de Walle, 2022; Monno & Khakee, 2012; Mahjabeen et al., 2009; Innes & Booher, 2004). Moreover, a conflict between national priorities and local interests has left the local government in an almost no-win situation (Newman et al., 2004). Like a 'ladder' Arnstein has described the participatory process, without delegating the power to decide, as a meaningless process that only leads to maintaining the status quo of certain community segments (Arnstein, 1969). Newman et al. further argued for the level of participation possessed by the community in the public process. They believed that community participation has yet to achieve a level where the community can influence the decision of the government (Mahjabeen et al., 2009; Newman et al., 2004).