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Beyond Barcelona: Toward a Framework for the Superblock
Model

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Abstract

Originally developed for Barcelona as the *Superilla*, the Superblock is an urban planning model designed to improve livability by calming traffic and reclaiming public space at the block level. Using the foundations of Cerdà's Eixample plan, Salvador Rueda re-imagined the urban grid as a connected network of Superblocks capable of transforming the city's overall structure and function.

Although the full vision has yet to be realized, cities across Europe have begun to explore and adapt the concept. However, implementations outside Barcelona often diverge from Rueda's large-scale vision. The model is frequently applied at the single-block level and increasingly blended with other planning paradigms for example the 15-minute city and tactical urbanism. These fragmented implementations have contributed to growing conceptual ambiguity around what a Superblock is and what it aims to achieve.

This thesis argues that while Superblock-inspired projects have spread across European cities, they often reflect a selective and superficial appropriation of the original Barcelona model, emphasizing features such as pedestrianization and traffic calming while neglecting its deeper systemic vision. Through a comparative analysis of selected case studies, the research examines which elements of the model are transferred, which are omitted, and how they are reinterpreted in different local contexts. By tracing these patterns of change and the conditions under which they occur, the thesis aims to clarify the processes shaping the Superblock's adaptation and to highlight the challenges and opportunities for its transformative potential in European urban policy.

Abstract (German)

Ursprünglich in Barcelona als *Superilla* entwickelt, ist der Superblock ein städtebauliches Modell, das die Lebensqualität verbessern soll, indem es den Verkehr beruhigt und öffentlichen Raum auf Blockebene zurückgewinnt. Aufbauend auf Cerdàs Eixample-Plan entwarf Salvador Rueda das Stadtgitter neu als ein vernetztes System von Superblocks, das in der Lage ist, die Gesamtstruktur und Funktion der Stadt zu transformieren.

Obwohl die vollständige Vision bislang nicht verwirklicht wurde, beginnen Städte in ganz Europa das Konzept zu erproben und anzupassen. Allerdings weichen die Umsetzungen außerhalb Barcelonas häufig von Ruedas großmaßstäblicher Vision ab. Das Modell wird oft auf der Ebene einzelner Blöcke angewendet und zunehmend mit anderen Planungsparadigmen vermischt, etwa der 15-Minuten-Stadt oder dem taktischen Urbanismus. Diese fragmentierten Umsetzungen haben zu wachsender begrifflicher Unklarheit beigetragen, was ein Superblock ist und welche Ziele er verfolgt.

Diese Arbeit argumentiert, dass sich zwar Superblock-inspirierte Projekte in europäischen Städten verbreitet haben, diese jedoch oft eine selektive und oberflächliche Aneignung des ursprünglichen Modells aus Barcelona darstellen. Sie betonen Aspekte wie Fußgängerfreundlichkeit und Verkehrsberuhigung, vernachlässigen jedoch die tiefere systemische Vision. Durch eine vergleichende Analyse ausgewählter Fallstudien untersucht diese Studie, welche Elemente des Modells übertragen, weggelassen oder in den jeweiligen lokalen Kontexten neu interpretiert werden. Durch die Analyse dieser Veränderungsprozesse und der Bedingungen, unter denen sie stattfinden, soll das transformative Potenzial des Modells deutlicher gefasst und die Herausforderungen sowie Möglichkeiten seiner Anwendung im europäischen Planungskontext aufgezeigt werden.

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1 Introduction

Originally developed in Barcelona, the Superblock model was designed to reclaim public space from cars, reduce traffic, and improve urban livability. Introduced by Salvador Rueda in the early 2000s, the concept builds on the structure of Cerdà's Eixample grid and applies principles of urban ecology to create more sustainable neighborhoods. Rueda's approach, *ecosystemic urbanism*, aims to promote habitability, environmental balance, and social cohesion by reducing emissions, improving air quality, and creating more public space, factors closely tied to both urban health and resilience (Rueda 2019; Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024). While the Cerdà Plan and the Eixample grid are often emphasized as the main foundations of the Superblock model, some scholars have noted that this focus tends to overlook the model's deeper and more complex historical lineage (Frago and Morcuende 2024).

Superblocks aim to limit through-traffic within defined block clusters, prioritizing walking, cycling, and shared public space instead. The model has gained growing attention in urban planning circles due to its measurable benefits, especially around air quality, noise reduction, and public health (Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024; Mueller et al. 2020). In addition to improving public health, Superblocks also contribute to climate change adaptation by mitigating the urban heat island effect and increasing cities' resilience to extreme heat. By reclaiming street space for vegetation, green infrastructure, and permeable surfaces, Superblocks can help cool dense urban environments and expand much-needed green space, particularly in areas facing densification and limited land availability (Eggimann 2022).

As the concept spreads, a range of cities across Europe, such as Vienna, Berlin, and Vitoria-Gasteiz have started experimenting with Superblock-inspired projects. However, many of these implementations remain limited in scope, often applied as one-off, small-scale interventions rather than part of a broader transformation. The model is frequently adapted to fit local goals or merged with other urban paradigms like the 15-minute city or tactical urbanism, which, while useful, has contributed to some confusion about what a Superblock really is or should be.

At the same time, despite its popularity and potential, the Superblock remains underused as a systemic planning tool. While its benefits are well-documented, few cities have adopted it as a long-term, city-wide strategy. This has created a gap between the model's promise and how it is actually being implemented. This thesis explores how the Superblock has been interpreted and adapted in different European contexts. It aims to understand what these projects are trying to achieve, where they diverge from the original concept, and how a clearer framework could help guide more meaningful, scalable applications in the future.

1.1 Problem Statement and Research Gap

Despite the growing popularity of Superblock-inspired projects across Europe, there is limited evidence of meaningful policy transfer from the Barcelona model they claim to be based on. While many cities adopt similar planning features and mirror the policy discourse, using comparable terminology and referencing shared goals like livability and sustainability, they neglect to incorporate elements for a systemic vision such as coordinated ecological planning, governance restructuring, and spatial networks. This disconnect suggests that what is spreading is not the model itself, but a selective adoption of easily replicable features, such as pedestrian zones and traffic filters, without engaging the structural intent behind the original model. In doing so, the Superblock risks being stripped of its transformative potential and reduced to a flexible label, one that can obscure more than it clarifies in planning discourse and urban practice.

Existing research on Superblocks often emphasizes the benefits of the Barcelona model, such as improved health outcomes, while overlooking the broader urban transformation goals that underpin its original intent. Few studies have systematically compared how the concept has been interpreted and applied in different cities, and even fewer have approached it from a meta-analytical or typological perspective. This lack of comparative frameworks makes it difficult to assess these adaptations or extract meaningful insights for policy and planning.

This thesis addresses that gap by examining how the Superblock model has been reinterpreted across European contexts and by developing a comparative typology to evaluate these variations. In doing so, it aims to clarify the model's transformative potential and lay the groundwork for its more effective, local context-sensitive integration into urban planning practice.

1.1.1 Research Questions

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent are policy and planning principles from the original Superblock model transferred, or lost, in its adaptation across European cities?
2. What framework or criteria can be used to evaluate Superblock-inspired projects, and how do selected cases compare across these dimensions?

2 Literature Review

In recent years, European cities have been confronted with two crises. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted everyday urban life and exposed long-standing inequalities, while the increasing impacts of climate change, particularly heat stress, continue to test urban resilience and reinforce these inequalities. Together, these pressures have fueled debates about accessibility and the distribution of urban resources, while also generating interest in new urban models such as Barcelona's superblock as potential strategies to address these challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic restricted many city dwellers to their immediate neighborhoods, bringing the quality and accessibility of their surroundings under scrutiny. Lockdowns revealed the importance of proximity in meeting everyday needs and, for many, made tangible what urban theorists describe as the "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1968; Harvey 2008). In cities, this right includes not only to access to urban resources and public space, but also the collective ability to influence how they are shaped. During the pandemic, both aspects became visible: the inefficiencies of local public space and long-standing environmental and spatial injustices were amplified (Honey-Rosés et al. 2021; Ugolini et al. 2020). Before the pandemic, daily routines of commuting, work, school and leisure often masked these deficits. Once mobility was restricted, the absence of this collective right became impossible to ignore. The crisis revealed how decades of car-centered street design and underinvestment in walkable, cyclable, green, and inclusive neighborhoods left many residents without the means to meet basic social and recreational needs in their communities.

At the same time, European cities are warming at roughly twice the global average rate (Daalen et al. 2024). In addition local phenomena like the urban heat island effect can drive surface temperatures up to 10–15°C higher than surrounding areas (Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) 2025). These dynamics increase health risks across all population groups but disproportionately affect vulnerable residents, including older adults, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions. The summer of 2022 was Europe's hottest on record at the time and resulted in an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 heat-related deaths (Ballester et al. 2023) with numbers decreasing to just under 48,000 the following year (European Environment Agency 2025). In 2024, Europe again recorded its warmest year, deepening concerns about the accelerating impacts of extreme heat (Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) 2025).

In cities, the rising heat drives demand for cooling, shade, and green space, yet these resources remain unevenly distributed. Recent research among European cities shows that lower-income residents, tenants, immigrants, and the unemployed often have significantly less access to green cooling services than wealthier and property-owning groups (Rocha et al. 2024). This uneven access makes it difficult for many to find relief close to home, increasing the health risks of extreme heat.

Together, the pandemic and the climate crisis have prompted city policymakers to look for

solutions that promise to address as many challenges as possible with single framework. Recent urban policy discourse often frames such approaches as multi-issue solutions, expected to simultaneously tackle health, sustainability, mobility, and equity concerns

Together, the pandemic and the climate crisis have prompted city policymakers to look for “multi-issue solutions” and “best practices” that promise to respond to a range of challenges simultaneously (Silva and Ward 2024). These crises can be traced to a set of interrelated causes: uneven access to services and the importance of proximity, the quality of public space, the unequal distribution of public and green areas, and persistent health and equity impacts tied to long-standing problems created by car dominance as the prevailing mode of urban mobility.

In response, planning concepts such as the 15-minute city, tactical urbanism, and Barcelona’s Superblock have not only gained attention but have also been widely adopted as frameworks for urban adaptation (Moreno et al. 2021b; Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024; Teixeira et al. 2024). Yet when these models are transferred to different urban contexts, it remains uncertain whether they can achieve their intended goals or whether crucial elements are lost in the process.

2.1 Traveling urban models

Borrowing planning strategies from elsewhere has been a part of modern urban planning since the beginning in the nineteenth century. This borrowing happened often in response to contemporary and local challenges. One of the earliest examples was Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City, developed as a remedy to the “ills” of early industrialization (Hall 2014, p. 142). The Garden City spread internationally, but its implementations differed markedly from place to place. As Hall shows, the concept achieved international success but always through adaptation. The U.S. Greenbelt towns for example drew more heavily on German interwar schemes than on Howard’s original plan, while in Britain the model was later reshaped into a state-led programme of new towns (Hall 2014, 142–143).

Ward addresses this uptake elsewhere as a process that goes beyond simple copying and describes it as diffusion, understood less as direct transplantation than as a continual process of reinvention in new contexts. He thus argues that “foreign variants of the Garden City, such as *gartenstadt*, *cit -jardin*, *tuinstad*, *den-en-toshi*, or *cidade jardim*, are viewed as perfectly valid, simply different expressions of the Garden City idea in new settings” (Ward 2017, p. 82). As Ward points out, the pace of diffusion intensified in the post-war period, supported by new international organizations and professional networks (Ward 2017).

Circulation was not one-directional. Postwar European planning also engaged with American ideas, particularly those linked to mass consumerism and automobility. U.S. retail concepts inspired Rotterdam’s Lijnbaan (1953), one of the first pedestrianized shopping streets, and later the adoption of enclosed shopping malls. A parallel example concerned the rise of mass car ownership. American approaches to traffic engineering and highway design strongly shaped European planning in the postwar decades, prompting road-building programs and the reconfiguration of city centers around the car (Ward 2003). In more recent decades, circulation has included Urban Models often framed as so called “best practices”: The Bus Rapid Transit systems originating in Brazil, bicycle infrastructure solutions associated with Copenhagen and Amsterdam, and road pricing and congestion charging pioneered in Singapore before being

adopted in London and Stockholm. Other examples the more recent global uptake of concepts such as transit-oriented development, the 15-minute city, and Barcelona's Superblock. As Ward notes, translocal policy circulation has been taking place with "greater ease and speed, showing no signs of abating" (Ward 2017, p. 3).

Urban scholars started examining how planning ideas circulated and changed as they moved between contexts. Initially, they looked to political science, where research on policy transfer and diffusion had already established a vocabulary for understanding which policies move, why governments borrow ideas, how lesson-drawing occurs, and under what conditions policies succeed or fail. Lovell (2019) later describes this as the conceptual foundation on which urban scholars built and developed their own approach, policy mobilities, which adapts this framework to explain how urban models circulate, mutate, and are reassembled in new contexts.

2.2 Policy transfer, diffusion and mobilities

As Haupt (2023) notes, urban studies scholarship has increasingly adopted *policy mobilities* as a framework for understanding how urban policies circulate and transform. Yet this rise of mobilities has not rendered earlier approaches obsolete. *Policy diffusion* and *policy transfer* remain valuable in their own right, each attuned to different research questions and methodological orientations.

Policy diffusion focuses on patterns of spatial spread that are often shaped by distinct features: geographic proximity, institutional similarity, or competition among cities. This approach is preferably applied to large-scale, quantitative studies that aim to identify convergence or clustering in policy adoption across urban or national contexts (Haupt 2023, pp. 3–4). By contrast, *policy transfer* discourse is more appropriate for research that investigates what specific policy elements are adopted, who initiates transfer, and why. It supports detailed, actor-focused case studies and is especially useful when comparing how a single model, is interpreted in different settings.

At the same time, *policy transfer* has been criticized as too rigid in its assumptions. Scholars such as Stone (2017) point out that transfer studies often posit a motivated importer and a willing exporter engaged in a linear exchange of intact policies. In practice, however, the focus must instead shift to the "messy process of hybrid policies" (Stone 2017, p. 55). Similarly, Lovell (2019) argues that describing policy movement in terms of "transfer" or "export" is altogether misleading because policies often mutate as they circulate. What appears to be the same policy instrument in two different places, may take on different forms and functions in new contexts, diverging significantly from the way it was originally applied or designed (Lovell 2019, p. 64).

Against this backdrop, the policy mobilities framework developed by Peck and Theodore (2010) provides an important complementary perspective. Their approach critiques the notion of policy transfer as a rational, linear process, instead emphasizing that policies circulate through complex global networks, where they are subject to processes of translation, mutation, and hybridization. In this view, policy ideas rarely travel as intact, fixed models. Instead, they move as fragments that are reinterpreted, repackaged, and recombined as they encounter new political, institutional, and spatial contexts echoing DeLanda's assemblage theory. As Haupt

(2023) adds, policy mobilities is best suited for studies that interrogate how policy ideas mutate as they move through translocal networks, emphasizing relational space actor dynamics, and power relations. These factors shape which elements of an urban model are adopted, how they are framed, and how they are embedded within local governance systems.

At the same time, mobilities approaches are not without their own risks. Peck (2015) cautions against versions of assemblage urbanism that retreat too far into localist particularism:

The liberatory practices of assemblage urbanism will surely remain isolated if they are enacted as hermetically sealed modes of analysis, antagonistically positioned against the 'global', the cross-conjunctural, the multiscalar and the 'out-there'; if they opt to substitute accounts of closely described, in situ practices for a reciprocal concern with the recurrent formation and processual shaping of those practices; or if the adoption of an anti-essentialist sensibility on the 'inside' entails a vulgarization of theories circulating on the 'outside'. (Peck 2015, p. 179)

This warning acts as a reminder that while the mobilities framework helps move beyond the overly simplistic view of transfer criticized by Stone and Lovell, it must also avoid fragmenting into accounts so particular that comparison becomes impossible. In other words, it makes little sense to brand a transferred model as so peculiar that it cannot be researched alongside, or meaningfully compared to, other cases of policy circulation.

2.3 Overlapping Paradigms, Distinct Logics

The 15-Minute City, Tactical Urbanism, and Superblock models exemplify distinct types of urban policy packages characterized by differing degrees of conceptual definition. The 15-Minute City remains relatively vague, owing to the absence of a clear operational framework. Tactical Urbanism constitutes a deliberately loose repertoire of strategies, designed to facilitate broad civic engagement and grassroots experimentation. By contrast, the Superblock originates from an established municipal agency and is accompanied by a comprehensive framework.

As others have noted, these models can be seen as part of a broader historical lineage of neighborhood-scale planning, stretching from the Garden City movement, through mid-century ideas like the neighborhood unit, to more recent paradigms such as eco-urbanism and the smart city (Khavarian-Garmsir et al. 2023). Just as those earlier models circulated as responses to the problems of their time, the 15-Minute City, Tactical Urbanism, and, the Superblock are not isolated inventions but contemporary responses to systemic urban challenges such as socio-spatial inequalities, climate change, and the long-standing dominance of the car. They are positioned as transformative solutions that seek to restructure urban systems toward more sustainable and equitable forms.

Yet while the 15-Minute City, Superblock, and Tactical Urbanism pursue similar goals, they are grounded in distinct planning logics. The 15-Minute City emphasizes temporal decentralization and access to services within a time-based radius; the Superblock centers on spatial restructuring and network-wide transformation guided by an ecological principles; and Tactical Urbanism operates through temporality and informality, prioritizing experimentation and

grassroots participation. Because the three models pursue similar goals and their planning logics are not mutually exclusive, they are often combined or compared in urban projects and policy discussions. Their circulation is supported by a common set of signifiers, for example walkability, reduced car use, improved local accessibility, that makes selective blending appear natural, even in projects that claim to draw on only one of them. Yet such fusions can also obscure their respective ambitions, particularly when policies are transferred selectively or rebranded for local implementation. To clarify how these overlaps and distinctions play out in practice, the following subsections discuss the 15-Minute City, Tactical Urbanism, and the Superblock individually.

2.3.1 15-Minute City

In their foundational article, Moreno et al. (2021a) present the 15-Minute City (15mC) as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic addressing the need for more resilient, sustainable, and equitable urban environments. The model is structured around four guiding principles: ecology, proximity, solidarity, and participation. Central to this concept is *chrono-urbanism*, a temporal reorganization of urban life that values time savings, quality of life, and functional diversity at the neighborhood scale. These principles aim to reduce car dependency, promote local economies, strengthen social cohesion, and support environmental goals by ensuring that residents can access all essential services, including work, education, health care, and leisure/creativity, within a 15-minute walk or bike ride.

While the 15mC promotes a polycentric and human-scaled urban structure, organized to support everyday life at the neighborhood scale, it does not prescribe any specified layouts, matrices or practices beyond its temporal guideline. This flexibility makes the model highly adaptable but also difficult to define in practice. Teixeira et al. (2024) highlight this ambiguity, identifying a significant knowledge gap around definitions, strategies, instruments, and implementation. Their study proposes a framework of defining features, planning practices, and keywords, which are then used to evaluate various case studies. The authors recognize a significant knowledge gap around practical definitions, strategies, instruments, and implementation. Their study develops a classification framework of defining features, planning practices, and keywords, which is then applied to a wide range of case studies.

For example, Teixeira et al. (2024, p. 13) show that planning examples such as Barcelona's Superblocks, Melbourne's 20-Minute Neighbourhoods, and Portland's Complete Neighborhoods embody many of the same proximity principles as the 15mC, despite pre-dating the term itself (Teixeira et al. 2024, p. 13). Their classification framework thus highlights both conceptual overlaps and the diversity of approaches, suggesting that the 15mC often circulates more as an umbrella term than a sharply defined planning strategy, serving as an example for a blurred transfer.

Paris is frequently cited as the prototypical 15mC. Teixeira et al. (2024) list it among the strongest examples globally, pointing to its integration with the city's climate plan and the political framing advanced by Mayor Anne Hidalgo. At the same time, their analysis identifies Barcelona's Superblocks as fulfilling the most 15mC criteria. Such overlaps highlight both the broad appeal and the conceptual fuzziness of the 15mC: it travels easily across contexts, but risks becoming blurred or reduced to symbolic value precisely because it lacks clear guidelines

for implementation.

2.3.2 Tactical Urbanism

In contrast to the 15mC which circulates as an umbrella term, tactical urbanism can be understood as a repertoire of tactics. Formalized by Lydon and Garcia, tactical urbanism was framed as a deliberate and accessible means to achieve local goals: “[w]e describe such initiatives as tactical because they use a deliberate and accessible means for achieving preset goals while embedding flexibility into the planning and project delivery process” (2015, p. 171). Typical examples for interventions include parklets, painted intersections, or pop-up bike lanes, small-scale, temporary, low-cost interventions driven by civic actors and local communities. They intend to highlight shortcomings in policy and design and to open space for alternatives.

Tactical urbanism’s appeal lies in the capacity to have an instant, visible impact. However, Lydon and Garcia (2015) underline its limitations: “Tactical Urbanism is not a silver bullet. It won’t solve many of the pressing challenges we find in our towns and cities, but it can respond to and raise awareness about persistent problems found throughout our neighborhoods” (Lydon and Garcia 2015, p. 175). This emphasis on awareness, experimentation, and iteration shows its role as a tactical method rather than a strategic framework.

Building on this, Silva (2016) conceptualizes tactical urbanism as a form of *evolutionary urbanism*: practices that originate in self-organized, informal citizen initiatives but can evolve into semi-institutionalized forms when taken up by municipalities. In Barcelona, for instance, tactical interventions were used to test circulation changes and public space reallocations within the Superblock program.

Yet Webb (2018) cautions that this very process of institutional uptake may undermine tactical urbanism’s anarchistic and radical transformative potential. He warns that as these practices circulate, they risk being stripped of their core grassroots, participatory orientation and may even be coopted by conservative or neoliberal agendas.

Tactical urbanism thus represents a different package to be transferred. Unlike the 15mC, tactical urbanism circulates less as a comprehensive framework and more as a loosely defined collection of practices. These practices are flexible and portable, but they are not anchored in a framing strategy or overarching vision. At face value, tactical urbanism’s disruptive ideology does not in itself amount to a political project but a tool only, leaving it vulnerable to the risks identified by Webb: that its radical potential may be neutralized or redirected when transferred into new contexts.

Despite their differences, all three models are exposed to similar mechanisms of “fuzziness” as they circulate across contexts. This makes it necessary not only to identify what has been transferred, but also to analyze how the transfer process itself generates such ambiguities.

2.4 Policy transfer framework

Policy transfer research offers the necessary framework to start investigating and understanding how policies travel. It emphasizes not only the mechanisms that make transfer possible but also the content and outcomes of what is adopted in new contexts (Haupt 2023, p. 9). Secondly

Haupt notes that it is particularly well suited to small-scale, qualitative studies that seek to examine in detail why and how policies are transferred, and what consequences follow from this process (Haupt 2023, p. 10). This orientation makes policy transfer particularly useful for examining urban models, where the key concern is to determine which elements travel, how they are reinterpreted, and what consequences follow from their selective uptake.

In structure Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000) model simply outlines a set of guiding questions to help deepen the understanding of the policy transfer process by examining, what gets transferred, who's involved, why the transfer happens, and what effects it has.

What is transferred?

Dolowitz and Marsh describe a set of possible elements that may be transferred: goals, content, instruments, programs, institutions, ideologies, and ideas. This typology is useful for identifying which parts of an urban model are taken up in other projects. For instance, while some initiatives borrow only a selection features of an urban model such as pedestrian zones or traffic filtering, they may leave aside more structural components such as city-wide planning strategies.

Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) also stress the importance of distinguishing between policies, which signal broad intentions or directions of change, and programs, which are the specific courses of action used to implement those intentions. In the urban context, this distinction would translate to a policy such as reducing car dependency being operationalized through the implementation of a Superblock as a program, translating overarching objectives into a concrete framework of public space interventions. Dolowitz and Marsh introduced this distinction to underline that policy transfer can occur on different layers, thereby avoiding false equivalences and preventing analysts from conflating the superficial implementation of a tool or program with the transfer of the underlying policy objectives. This distinction becomes particularly relevant in the case of urban models like the Superblock, where fragments of the program are often borrowed without the broader policy rationale.

At the same time, however, it is important not to reduce transfer to a simple dualism of presence or absence. As McCann and Ward (2015, p. 829) reminds us, that under the lens of policy mobilities, treating policies as either “present” or “absent” risks obscuring the politics that shape how presence is constructed and absence is defined. What matters is not only whether a feature is visible in a new context, but also how its presence is reinterpreted and what its absence signifies in relation to power, interests, and framing.

What are the different degrees of transfer?

To make sense of these varying degrees of transfer, Dolowitz and Marsh propose as spectrum that ranges from direct copying, emulation, combination, to loose inspiration. Copying involves minimal or no changes. Emulation, implies that a project adopts selected “best practice” elements without replicating the full structure. Combination, also referred to as synthesis, is particularly relevant in the Superblock context, where adaptations may draw upon or merge multiple sources, planning paradigms and ideas such as the 15mC or tactical urbanism. While analytically rich, these hybrid cases can be difficult to unpack due to overlapping influence. At

the far end of the spectrum lies inspiration, where the original model serves more as a prompt for new thinking, but without any substantial policy or structural transfer.

Furthermore, the degree of transfer also depends on who is involved in the process and at what stage. In the urban context, this can range from municipal politicians seeking to signal progress to voters through visible measures, to planning departments or consultants engaging in more complex programmatic adaptations, to civic actors experimenting with selective elements on the ground.

Who's doing the transferring, and why?

Understanding the agents involved offers insight into the motivations behind Superblock adaptations. According to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) policy transfer exists on a spectrum from voluntary to coercive. While some agents actively seek out to import models in response to local dissatisfaction or specific policy problems, others may be influenced by indirect pressures such as access to international funding, climate targets, or the perceived need to remain competitive or innovative.

However transfer is not carried out by governments alone. These processes often involve a wide array of intermediaries like NGOs, consultants, professional associations, and transnational networks, each advancing their own interpretations and interests. As Stone (2017, p. 56) emphasizes, these actors are not neutral conduits of “best practice,” but play a formative role in shaping how models are defined, promoted, and adapted, sometimes advancing discordant views of what constitutes success.

Aside from these leading questions Haupt (2023, p. 3) notes, transfer theory is concerned not only with whether adoption occurs but also with the degree and success of adoption. Yet this raises the question of how success and failure are defined. Stone (2017) and McCann and Ward (2015) remind us that framing transfer in terms of a simple success/failure dualism is misleading. Transfers are rarely perfect; instead, outcomes are often partial, hybrid, and contested. Stone emphasizes that failure has multiple dimensions, and that policies may “only partially succeed” when translated into new local contexts depending on how they are perceived and reinterpreted. As she puts it: “Each iteration of transfer is a unique concoction” (Stone 2017, p. 56).

In this thesis, this perspective is taken as a starting point for examining how the Superblock model circulates across European cities. The focus lies on identifying which elements of the original Barcelona model are adopted, which are omitted, and which are reinterpreted. At the same time, insights from the policy mobilities literature guide the analysis by highlighting how these elements are reshaped through processes of translation, while also helping to acknowledge complexity and avoid overly simplistic interpretations. In this way, policy transfer theory provides not only a systematic framework for comparison but also a means of making sense of the “fuzziness” that accompanies processes of policy circulation.

2.4.1 The Superblock Model

As established, the Superblock aligns closely with recent global planning narratives that present it as a solution to systemic urban challenges such as socio-spatial inequalities, climate change,

and the long-standing dominance of the car. It gained international attention not only for its measurable health and environmental benefits (Mueller et al. 2020; Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024), but also for its reliance on low-cost, tactical forms of implementation. This pragmatism further appealed to local governments, as the model could be scaled up, deliver visible results, and demonstrate political action while remaining financially manageable (Alvaredo et al. 2020). Beyond these practical advantages, its branding as part of the “Barcelona model” endowed it with legitimacy and symbolic capital, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, when cities were searching for quick, visible responses to mobility and public space challenges (Brenner et al. 2024).

Unlike the 15-Minute City or tactical urbanism, the Barcelona Superblock is rooted in built prototypes and a formal program developed by Barcelona’s Urban Ecology Agency (BCNecologia). It was first tested in Barcelona (Superilles) and Vitoria-Gasteiz (Supermanzanas), with Barcelona implementing the initial prototypes in Poblenou, Sant Antoni, and Horta from 2016 onward, and Vitoria-Gasteiz pursuing a city-wide implementation plan. Since then, the model has been engaged with internationally, for example in Buenos Aires, Australia, China, and Taiwan, and in Europe through municipal projects in Valencia, citizen-led prototypes in Germany (*Kiezblocks*), pilot projects in Vienna (*Supergrätzl*), and trials in Switzerland (Tiran et al. 2025; Staricco and Brovarone 2022; Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024). These examples represent selected cases of ongoing engagement rather than a complete list.

The range of completed Superblocks outside of Barcelona is still small, but already displays considerable diversity. In Berlin and Vienna, for example, the concept has been translated into very different local forms. Berlin’s *Kiezblocks* are bottom-up and vary by district, while Vienna’s *Supergrätzl* is top-down yet limited to a single neighborhood pilot. Neither approaches the systemic ambition of Barcelona’s original model or the city-wide plan of Vitoria-Gasteiz.

As expected, transfer processes produce change, and the academic discourse around the Superblock illustrates the conceptual ambiguities this entails. The problem begins with terminology. The version that gained international prominence was developed by Salvador Rueda and BCNecologia and later institutionalized into Barcelona’s city policy. Yet the model has since evolved within Barcelona itself: recent iterations, such as the Green Axis plan, have moved away from the original 3×3 block structure at the core of Rueda’s proposal.

Beyond this shift, the term itself has a longer and contested history in urban discourse. In planning and design debates, *superblock* has often referred to the consolidation of several city blocks into a larger unit, typically associated with modernist housing schemes or large-scale redevelopment. Rowe and Kan (2014) note that “‘superblock configurations’ involve purposeful appropriation of broader territories than is the norm in an urban area for a single enterprise, or involve development on large single land parcels as mega-plots” and typically span “at or above 200 meters by 200 meters” (Rowe and Kan 2014, p. 58). Their examples cover a wide range: newly built housing estates such as Stuyvesant Town in New York and Caoyang New Village in Shanghai, state-organized *danwei* compounds combining housing and workplaces in China, large-scale urban redevelopments like Jian Wai SOHO in Beijing, and more recent mixed-use demonstration projects, including Fukuoka’s Nexus World, Tokyo’s *Shinonome* Canal Court, and Steven Holl’s Linked Hybrid in Beijing (Rowe and Kan 2014, pp. 59–87).

In parallel, Moudon (2019) explains why the superblock has emerged as a focal unit of anal-

ysis in contemporary cities through urban morphology. They argue that earlier frameworks, centered on parcels, blocks, and plan units, were adequate for the relatively small cities of the mid-20th century, but insufficient for the vastly expanded metropolitan regions of the late 20th and early 21st century, marked by motorized mobility systems and ever-larger parcels and buildings. As a result, she proposes recognizing the superblock/supergrid as a new level of analysis, “defined dually as an area, called superblocks, which is contained within a network, called supergrids” (Moudon 2019, p. 12).

It is important to acknowledge that the scale of the Barcelona Superblock reflects a morphological focus, and as such it risks being subsumed under other, similarly scaled projects. A second dimension of this confusion lies in the fact that many initiatives at this scale address comparable goals and problems, particularly the reduction of car traffic and the reallocation of street space. This is evident in Teixeira et al. (2024), who position the Superblock as a variant of the 15-Minute City, ranking Barcelona among the strongest examples while Vitoria-Gasteiz scores lower. Similar conflation occurs when projects such as Dutch *woonerfs*, residential street designs that slow or remove through-traffic and prioritize pedestrian use, or London’s Low Traffic Neighborhoods, which restrict car access within defined areas, are grouped together or equated to the Barcelona’s Superblocks. Tactical Urbanism further contributes to this ambiguity. In Barcelona, tactical measures such as paint, planters, and temporary closures were deliberately embedded as transitional tools to build support, citizen engagement and test configurations before permanent change. Yet when transferred elsewhere, these same tactics can lose their meaning: stripped of their systemic role, they risk being adopted as standalone gestures, reinforcing the ambiguity of what counts as a “Superblock.”

The risk lies not in the attempt at systematic comparison itself, but in how conceptual ambiguity spills over into implementation practice and policy discourse. As Tiran et al. (2025) point out, “The current conceptual ambiguity of the Superblocks concept is problematic. As with other concepts, it can lead to misinterpretations, confusion in policymaking, and last but not least, the reduction of its potential for systemic change” (p.18). In other words, ambiguity does not merely complicate academic debate but can undermine the very functioning of the Superblock as an instrument of urban transformation.

Limits and risks of transfer

While the Superblock’s superficial features such as pedestrianization, traffic filtering, and temporary interventions have proven adaptable, the full systemic logic of the model is less often transferred. As Nieuwenhuijsen et al. (2024) emphasize, Superblocks deliver their full benefits only when implemented at scale, with integrated networks and supporting policy reforms. In isolated form, the interventions may reduce pollution or noise locally, but can worsen conditions on perimeter roads or cause political friction. Frago and Morcuende (2024) argue that many so-called Superblocks outside Barcelona borrow the vocabulary but lack the network logic, ecological planning, or governance restructuring that define the original concept.

At the same time, the symbolic appeal associated with the Barcelona Superblock’s popularity and momentum in international discourse also entails risks. Stone (2017) emphasizes that lesson-drawing is never politically neutral, as the attraction of foreign models often lies in their capacity to steer domestic policy choices in particular directions. In such cases, transfer fre-

quently takes the form of emulation, an ad hoc and piecemeal borrowing of ideas or rhetoric rather than the adoption of a model's systemic logic. Drawing on Meseguer, she argues that this type of transfer can amount to *satisficing*: a symbolic gesture through which policymakers signal modernity or credibility without engaging in genuine policy learning (Stone 2017, p. 61). This shift raises critical questions: what exactly are cities adopting when they refer to the "Superblock"? Which elements remain consistent, and which have been transformed, diluted, or reinterpreted? To answer these, it is essential to examine the original proposal, how it has been modified over time and what features are seen as valuable, replicable, or symbolic by other urban actors.

The literature highlights the Superblock's dual position as both a celebrated multi-issue solution and a contested, mutable planning model. Its transfer across European cities frequently results in selective uptake, hybridization with other paradigms, and terminological ambiguity, raising questions about what is actually being implemented. While research on policy diffusion and mobilities provides useful tools for understanding these dynamics, few studies have systematically assessed how Superblock principles are retained, altered, or lost in the process. Nor has a comparative framework been developed to evaluate these variations. Addressing this gap, the following chapters examine how Superblock-inspired projects in Europe align with or diverge from the original Barcelona model, and propose a typology to clarify their transformative potential and inform context-sensitive applications in urban planning.

3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of the thesis and explains how the research questions are addressed. The study is guided by two central questions:

1. Which elements of the Barcelona Superblock are transferred, omitted, or reinterpreted in other European contexts?
2. Under what conditions do these transfers occur, and what factors shape the ways in which the model is translated into local practice?

To answer these questions, the thesis employs a comparative, qualitative, multi-case study design. A baseline model, closely aligned with the BCNecologia archetype, was constructed to provide a high-fidelity reference package of the Superblock's core spatial, ecological, governance, and systemic dimensions. This baseline is used to evaluate how far specific elements of the model travel in different contexts.

The analysis combines policy transfer theory, which structures the identification of what is transferred and what is left behind, with insights from policy mobilities, which highlight how transferred elements are translated, hybridized, and reshaped under specific political and institutional conditions. Each case is first analyzed individually against the baseline, then brought into comparative dialogue to highlight recurring patterns and contextual dynamics.

The chapter proceeds in six sections. Section 3.1 outlines the research design. Section 3.2 explains case selection. Section 3.3 describes the sources of empirical material. Section 3.4 presents the analytical framework, including the five baseline categories. Section 3.5 introduces the tools used for translation and mapping. Section 3.6 reflects on the study's limitations.

3.1 Research Design

This thesis adopts a comparative, qualitative, multi-case study design. Such an approach is appropriate because urban models like the Superblock do not travel as intact policies or blueprints. Instead, as the literature on policy transfer, diffusion, and mobilities shows, they circulate in fragmented and selective ways. Certain elements are taken up while others are ignored, and as they move across contexts they are reframed, hybridized, and sometimes reduced to easily replicable features. A comparative strategy makes it possible to trace these variations and to examine how local political, institutional, and spatial conditions shape what aspects of the model are retained, diluted, or omitted.

The research is interpretative in orientation and qualitative in method. It examines how the Superblock is taken up in practice by analyzing planning documents, mobility strategies, and related reports as empirical material. These sources do more than describe interventions:

they reveal how the model is framed, which objectives are prioritized, and how governance arrangements (e.g. participation, coordination, municipal responsibility) are articulated. In this way, the study traces the circulation of the Superblock through policy discourse and planning practice, rather than through technical indicators alone.

A central methodological challenge is that the Superblock lacks a clear and consistent definition. To address this, the thesis constructs a baseline model that remains closely aligned with the archetype developed by BCNecologia and Salvador Rueda. This baseline translates the Superblock into a structured set of criteria, capturing its spatial, ecological, governance, and systemic dimensions. It functions as the high-fidelity reference package against which adaptations elsewhere can be assessed.

The policy transfer framework (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000) is then applied to this package in the case study analysis. It provides the guiding questions for each case: which elements of the baseline are transferred, which are left behind, who drives these choices, and how the resulting model takes shape in its new context. This framework makes it possible to move beyond the recurring debate over whether projects outside Barcelona count as “real” Superblocks, and instead to identify what exactly is being transferred, and in what form.

At the same time, insights from the policy mobilities literature (Peck and Theodore 2010; McCann and Ward 2015; Haupt 2023) ensure that this comparison is not reduced to a static checklist. Mobilities perspectives highlight that elements rarely move intact but are translated, hybridized, and repackaged as they circulate. Crucially, they also emphasize that these transformations are conditioned by local power relations, institutional arrangements, strategic needs, and actor interests. In other words, mobilities enrich transfer analysis by explaining not only what the adapted model looks like, but also why it takes that form.

The analysis unfolds in two stages. First, each case study is examined individually using the baseline and transfer framework to identify what is taken up from the Barcelona model, what is omitted, and how the resulting project is presented in local policy practice. Second, the cases are placed in comparative dialogue. This synthesis highlights recurring patterns of transfer and omission, and draws out the contextual factors that appear to shape these outcomes. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of all dynamics, but to generate a structured comparison that clarifies how the Superblock is adapted across European contexts.

3.2 Case selection criteria

Cases were selected to capture both rhetorical and practical engagement with the Barcelona Superblock model within a European context. This dual emphasis ensures that the study considers both symbolic mobilization, where Barcelona is invoked discursively as a planning ideal, and material realization, where interventions reshape urban form. To be included, an initiative had to position itself explicitly in relation to Barcelona’s example, either by adopting the “Superblock” label (or a local equivalent) or by referencing the Barcelona model in planning documents, activist campaigns, or public discourse. Projects also had to move beyond the purely rhetorical stage and engage with at least some of the model’s transformative aims, such as traffic reduction, public space reallocation, ecological integration, or participatory governance.

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The scope was limited to European initiatives in order to maintain a coherent policy and planning context. At the same time, variation in political and spatial settings within Europe was welcomed, as it provides the opportunity to observe how diverse conditions shape the model's adaptation. In practice, inclusion also depended on the availability of sufficient empirical material, primarily municipal planning documents, reports, and activist publications, supplemented by spatial data and media coverage.

From a wider pool of candidates, including Berlin, Hamburg, Paris, and Zurich, three cities were selected: Vitoria-Gasteiz, Vienna, and Leipzig. Other initiatives were excluded because they remained at the rhetorical stage, were too early in development, or lacked sufficient documentation for systematic comparison. Berlin illustrates this dilemma well. The Kiezblocks campaign has set the ambitious goal of creating a citywide network of 180 Superblock-inspired cells and has achieved rhetorical prominence. Yet implementation remains fragmented, with only a handful of projects approved and very few realized, and no comprehensive empirical data available. For this reason, Berlin was excluded despite its visibility.

The three selected cases serve distinct analytical purposes. Vitoria-Gasteiz functions as a calibration case. With Salvador Rueda and BCNecologia directly involved in its mobility strategy, it remains the only city to pursue Superblocks with systemic, citywide ambition, making it the closest test of transferability. Vienna and Leipzig were chosen as application cases. Both have moved just beyond the pilot stage with Superblock-inspired interventions in socially heterogeneous inner-city areas, but they differ significantly in governance. Vienna's Supergrätzl was introduced as a municipally led, top-down pilot, whereas Leipzig's Neue Nähen emerged from grassroots activism and extensive bottom-up participation. Together, these cases enable a comparative assessment of how the framework captures differences in institutionalization, participation, and governance, while holding constant certain spatial and social pressures in the pilot areas.

3.3 Data Collection and Sources

The empirical material for this study consists primarily of documentary sources. These include white literature such as official planning documents, mobility strategies, and municipal records, and grey literature including activist reports, consultancy studies, and other non-academic publications. They are complemented by spatial data and media coverage. These materials are treated not merely as background but as empirical data in their own right, since they reveal how the Superblock is framed, contested, and applied in different contexts.

For the purpose of structuring data collection, sources were grouped into three categories:

- Primary sources include municipal planning documents, strategic plans, mobility frameworks, and project design guidelines where available.
- Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed academic literature on the Barcelona Superblock and its adaptations, as well as grey literature such as consultancy reports.
- Supplementary sources constitute NGO publications, and media coverage as well as public correspondence or interviews with municipal stakeholders, project managers, or activist organizers.

Data availability varied considerably between cases. Some initiatives provided extensive technical and policy documentation, while others relied mainly on activist materials or media accounts. Language barriers and uneven transparency in municipal reporting further shaped the depth of available information.

All material was systematically coded against the baseline criteria specified in the following chapters, using qualitative content analysis to identify whether and how each criterion was addressed. Coding distinguished between full, partial, and absent alignment. Beyond this structured comparison, particular attention was paid to the discursive framings present in the documents, capturing how local actors interpreted and redefined the Superblock model.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The comparative analysis proceeds in three phases. Together, these establish the Barcelona baseline, apply it to the selected cases, and synthesize the findings across contexts.

Phase 1 — Establishing the Barcelona Baseline

An in-depth review of academic literature, publications by BCNecologia, and official planning documents was used to construct a baseline model of the Superblock. The baseline was designed to remain closely aligned with the Rueda archetype and was organized into four thematic categories: spatial structure, normative planning framework, governance and participation, and systemic integration and learning. This high-fidelity baseline served as the reference package against which adaptations outside Barcelona were assessed.

Phase 2 — Comparative Case Evaluation

Each case was analyzed against the baseline using qualitative content analysis. Alignment was coded as full, partial, or absent, with flexibility for functional equivalence when adaptations achieved similar aims in different ways. In addition to this coding, the analysis examined how local policy documents and strategies framed and reinterpreted the Superblock. Insights from policy mobilities guided this step by highlighting how transferred elements were translated and reshaped under specific political and institutional conditions.

Phase 3 — Cross-Case Synthesis

The findings from each case were then placed in comparative dialogue. This synthesis highlighted recurring patterns of transfer and omission and identified contextual factors that appeared to shape these outcomes. The aim was not to produce a comprehensive explanation of all dynamics but to generate a structured comparison that clarified how the Superblock was adapted across European contexts and under what conditions elements of the original model were more or less likely to travel.

3 Methodology

3.5 Tools used

One of the major challenges in cross-national urban research is overcoming language barriers. While academic studies and consultancy reports often exist in English, municipal documents and activist texts are typically published only in local languages. In this thesis, Google Translate was used to render key documents accessible, complemented by computer-assisted categorization tools (including ChatGPT) to filter and paraphrase large volumes of text. These tools significantly improved efficiency in identifying passages relevant to the research questions.

However, the use of such tools raises questions of reliability and authorship. To address this, translations and automated categorizations were taken only as a starting point and always verified and contextualized by the researcher. Importantly, none of the conclusions or analytical claims in the thesis were produced by AI. They remain the sole intellectual work of the author.

For generating all map segments and measurements, the software QMapShack was used. The map material was the World Topographic Map provided by Esri Inc. (2025).

3.6 Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies primarily on documentary sources. While these provide valuable insight into how the Superblock is framed and legitimized, they also reflect the perspectives of their authors and do not fully capture everyday practices or lived experiences within the projects.

Second, language barriers presented a challenge. Although translation tools were used and results were verified, some nuance in municipal and activist documents may have been lost in translation.

Third, the availability of documentation varied considerably between cases. Vitoria-Gasteiz offered extensive technical and policy material, while Vienna and Leipzig provided more limited evidence. This unevenness inevitably shaped the depth of comparison.

Fourth, two of the cases, Vienna and Leipzig, are only slightly beyond the pilot stage. As a result, the analysis focuses more on policy framings and early implementation than on long-term systemic outcomes.

Finally, the scope of the study is limited to three European cases. While this ensures a coherent policy context and allows for detailed comparison, it also means that the findings are exploratory and cannot be generalized to all international adaptations of the Superblock. Instead, the study should be understood as a step toward clarifying the conditions under which elements of the Barcelona model are transferred and reinterpreted elsewhere.

4 The Barcelona Superblock

Before examining how the Superblock has been adapted in other cities, it is essential to clarify what is meant by the model itself. What appears to be a simple question in fact requires a more nuanced answer. Despite frequent references to “the Barcelona Superblock,” the term does not denote a single fixed intervention. Rather, it encompasses a set of spatial strategies, institutional reforms, and planning concepts that have evolved within Barcelona over time. The version that gained international visibility was shaped above all by the Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona (BCNecologia) and Salvador Rueda. Yet subsequent shifts in policy and planning practice have generated further reinterpretations. What is now commonly labeled “the Superblock” is therefore best understood not as a blueprint but as an evolving planning paradigm.

4.1 The Barcelona Superblock Model: Origins

Although often presented as a recent innovation, the Superblock has deep roots in Barcelona’s planning history. Its physical template can be traced back to Barcelona’s 19th-century expansion plan, the *Eixample*,¹ developed by Ildefons Cerdà between 1855 and 1863. Cerdà envisioned a city growing to seven times its existing size (Frago and Morcuende 2024; Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024). He sought to accommodate this expansion through a grid-based design that combined foresight with adaptability. His plan introduced a grid of chamfered blocks measuring 113.3 x 113.3 m, with octagonal corners that facilitated circulation. Importantly, Cerdà left block interiors partially open, and he designed the system so that several units could be aggregated into larger blocks of 226 x 226 m. This flexibility allowed the grid to adapt to future tramway lines and to support multiple urban functions.

As others pointed out this design, ensured residents’ access to exercise, air, light, and social interaction, concepts he captured through the idea of the *intervía*, the relational space between streets and buildings (Amati et al. 2024, p. 163). This emphasis on the *intervía* highlights Cerdà’s understanding of the block as a dynamic social space rather than a simple parcel of land.

However, by the 1920s, many of these block interiors had already begun to fill in with small constructions and garages, prioritizing car storage and circulation over the open, communal spaces Cerdà had envisioned in his concept of the *intervía* (Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024; Amati et al. 2024). This shift marked a departure from the plan’s original focus on residents’ health and social life, paving the way for later proposals that would reinterpret the *Eixample*’s grid in response to the growing dominance of automobiles. For example, the Pla Macià (1932–1934) by Sert and Le Corbusier proposed 400 x 400 meter superblocks to accelerate car traffic, centered on automotive efficiency (Frago and Morcuende 2024; Amati et al. 2024). Later, Bonet

¹Catalan for extension.

and Bohigas (1958) revived the idea of grouping 3 x 3 Cerdà blocks into “supermanzanas”, foreshadowing the contemporary Superblock model but still largely oriented around modernist planning priorities (Amati et al. 2024, p. 163).

4.1.1 Institutional Foundations: The Barcelona Model

While Cerdà’s 19th-century plan had provided the morphological groundwork, it was not until the post-Franco period that Barcelona’s planning institutions re-engaged with this inherited structure in a transformative way. During the 1980s and 1990s, the city pursued a two-component planning approach, which Monclús (2003) identifies as the defining structure of the “Barcelona Model”. It combined public space improvements on a neighborhood-scale with large-scale strategic development projects (Monclús 2003). Under Mayor Pasqual Maragall, Barcelona also shifted towards a more decentralized planning system, granting greater authority to district governments and thereby facilitating the implementation of localized interventions (Frago and Morcuende 2024, p. 1061). The 1992 Olympic Games provided the political and financial momentum to align these neighborhood initiatives with broader citywide strategic goals (Monclús 2003, p. 411).

These reforms not only reshaped Barcelona’s physical form but also established the political and institutional foundations for future planning paradigms. As Frago and Morcuende (2024, p. 1056) note, the Superblock model builds directly on the decentralized urban strategies and spatial restructuring initiated under the Barcelona Model, extending the trajectory of Olympic-era reforms. These legacies also created the institutional conditions in which the Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona (BCNecologia) would later consolidate the Superblock as a distinct planning paradigm.

4.2 The Archetype – Rueda’s Superblock

The first formal proposal for a Superblock was made in the 1990s. The responsible agency was BCNecologia, under the direction of ecologist Salvador Rueda. Established as a public consortium involving the Barcelona City Council, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, and the Barcelona Provincial Council, the agency aimed to address pressing environmental and urban challenges through integrated planning. When BCNecologia was established, noise pollution stood out as the city’s most urgent challenge. Over half of Barcelona’s residents were exposed to noise levels above 65 decibels, surpassing the threshold typically regarded as tolerable for human health (Alvaredo et al. 2020, p. 175). Since road traffic was the primary source of this noise, mitigation could not be achieved through isolated interventions but demanded a structural transformation of Barcelona’s mobility system.

Within this context, the Superblock was established as the operational unit of *ecosystemic urbanism*. This framework treats the city as an interdependent system of environmental, infrastructural, and social processes, and the Superblock functions as its basic cell. At approximately 16–20 hectares, it provides the smallest spatial scale at which the principles of *ecosystemic urbanism* can be applied. Drawing on the logic of Cerdà’s grid, Rueda describes the Superblock not in terms of housing or block structure, but as a new *intervia*, a cellular unit within a mosaic

of urban connectivity. As Rueda explained in his 2019 work, “the key element in the city is not the housing but the *intervia*, the cell that becomes a piece of the mosaic of a road network, where the continuity of movement obliges the occupation of roads in its totality and not one by one” (Rueda 2019, p. 140).

The effects of this spatial logic are twofold: traffic is reduced and public space reclaimed. These outcomes underpin the archetype of the Superilla, which is structured as a tripartite system encompassing (1) the spatial unit, (2) a normative planning framework with evaluative mechanisms, and (3) a systemic network orientation.

4.2.1 Spatial Unit

The Superblock functions as the smallest systemic entity. Its spatial layout reconciles both human-scale accessibility and transportation functionality: a vehicle traveling at 20 km/h can circulate the perimeter in roughly the same time it takes a pedestrian walking at 4 km/h to cross the interior (Rueda 2019, pp. 141–142). Perimeter roads, designated for through-traffic at speeds of up to 50 km/h, connect origins and destinations across the city. Meanwhile, the internal street network (*intervias*) is limited to 10–20 km/h. Thereby, pedestrian and bicycle movement is prioritized and a wider range of social, cultural, and ecological uses is enabled. Through-traffic is prohibited. Vehicular entry is permitted if and only if origin or destination lie within the cell. At the same time, Rueda (2019, p. 12) highlights the efficiency improvements brought about by an orthogonal bus grid, decreasing intervals with the same number of busses as before.

Rueda calculated that restricting through-traffic and reallocating internal streets could allow cities to reclaim more than 70% of public space previously dominated by vehicles. Rather than requiring new construction, the Superblock represents a form of urban recycling: a reorganization of the existing street network that preserves the built fabric while opening space for leisure, greenery, active mobility, and community life (Rueda 2019, pp. 140–141).

Early implementations relied on tactical urbanism as transitional measures, using low-cost and reversible interventions such as paint, planters, and temporary furniture. Rueda projected that relying on these tactical, non-permanent interventions alone, the citywide rollout could be achieved for roughly €280 million. If more permanent measures such as advanced tree planting were included, costs would rise to about €500 million, remaining below 2% of the projected municipal budget for 2023–2030, an amount he considered manageable within ordinary fiscal planning (Rueda 2022, p. 18).

While the orthogonal grid of the Eixample district facilitated Superblock implementation, the urban cell logic is adaptable to diverse morphologies, allowing for contextual flexibility without abandoning systemic principles. The Eixample prototype was also implemented through a top-down approach, with BCNecologia and city planners directing its development based on technical criteria and planning objectives. While this enabled conceptual clarity, it left limited space for participatory design, a tension that would re-emerge in later phases and shape the trajectory of the model’s evolution.

4.2.2 Normative Planning Framework (with evaluative mechanism)

The second component of the Archetype is its normative planning framework, which embeds the Superblock within the fifteen principles of *ecosystemic urbanism*. These principles distinguish the model from conventional transport engineering or pedestrianization by framing it as a systemic vision for ecological and social transformation.

The fifteen principles underlie a structured framework of four planning axes (compactness, complexity, efficiency, and social cohesion), and seven assessment areas (a summary of the different categories can be found in Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Urban Design Principles Structured by Axes and Areas

Axes / Areas	Principles
Compactness and Functionality	
Land Use	1. Compactness vs. Sprawl; 2. Decompression vs. Compression
Mobility and Services	3. Accessibility vs. Private Mobility; 4. Citizens vs. Pedestrians
Complexity	
Public Space and Liveability	5. Liveability in the Public Space
Urban Organisation	6. Complexity vs. Simplification; 7. Hyperconnectivity
Efficiency	
Green Spaces and Biodiversity	8. Greenery vs. Concrete
Urban Metabolism	9. Self-sufficiency vs. Dependency; 10. Water Self-sufficiency with Local, Renewable Resources; 11. Reduce, Reuse and Recycle vs. Waste; 12. Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation
Social Cohesion	
Social Cohesion	13. Social Cohesion vs. Social Exclusion; 14. Universal Access to Housing in More Sustainable Buildings; 15. Balanced Allocation and Distribution of Facilities

In addition BCNecologia developed this orientation alongside a concept of 3-level-vertical planning, which includes the underground, surface, and roofs. Each layer hosts complementary functions, logistics and infrastructure below, mobility and public space at grade, and green infrastructure or energy capture above. According to the agency, this vertical layering enables a fully eco-integrative approach and therefor surpasses conventional urbanism, which typically addresses only the surface level. It incorporates logistical infrastructure, mobility systems, green infrastructure, and energy capture across the vertical dimension (Alvaredo et al. 2020, pp. 29–31).

Embedded in the framework is a system of indicators designed to guide implementation, enable learning and ensure accountability. BCNecologia developed a system of indicators aligned with the above principles and domains. These indicators are: (1) adaptable to different scales (municipality, neighborhood, Superblock), (2) calibrated to reference values (minimums, maximums, or ideal ranges), and (3) interpreted through typologies (e.g., consolidated vs. new urban fabric). This multiscale orientation ensures that the Superblock cell is not an isolated design but always situated within broader neighborhood, municipal, and metropolitan strategies (Al-

varedo et al. 2020; Rueda 2019).

In addition to its technical framework, the Archetype incorporates further normative dimensions. One concerns urban citizenship. Rueda distinguishes between the “pedestrian” and the “citizen”. Whereas conventional planning treats the pedestrian only as a mobility unit, the citizen holds the right to inhabit, appropriate, and transform public space. “Today,” he writes, “the limited possibility of exercising citizen rights relegates us to pedestrians” (Rueda 2019, p. 145). In this sense, the Superblock becomes a platform for civic rights, including rest, culture, participation, and interaction, not just movement.

Ecological measures are treated as an integral part within this framework. Superblocks are designed to facilitate a green network that emerges alongside the mobility reorganization. Rueda emphasizes that soil permeability and green coverage are critical indicators of ecological health. Superblocks facilitate new green corridors and squares, increase tree cover, and allow for urban gardens and permeable soils that mitigate flooding and reduce the urban heat island effect (Rueda 2019, pp. 149–150).

Finally, the framework was conceived from the outset as transversal, reaching beyond mobility to integrate climate, biodiversity, energy, health, and public space policies. As Alvaredo et al. (2020) emphasize in their retrospective on BCNecologia, this methodological orientation was explicitly designed to link ecosystemic urbanism to a wider range of municipal strategies.

4.2.3 Systemic Network Logic

While the Superblock is often described as a spatial unit, a recent Superblock research review stresses that it only functions as intended when implemented as part of a citywide network. As Nieuwenhuijsen et al. (2024) argue, the Superblock is not merely a localized intervention but a restructuring of the entire urban mobility system. Its environmental and health benefits (reductions in air pollution, noise, traffic injuries, and heat exposure) scale non-linearly only when multiple Superblocks are deployed in a coherent mesh. In isolated form, the model risks inconsistency and unintended consequences. Pollution, for example, may decline within Superblocks but increase on perimeter roads due to traffic rerouting. Likewise, noise levels are not uniformly reduced and remain problematic in adjacent corridors (Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024).

According to analyses, such as the ones performed by Mueller et al. (2020, p. 9), potential health impacts are striking. They estimate a number of 667 premature deaths per year in Barcelona, that could be avoided by a full implementation. However, the evidence also suggests that these gains depend on citywide coherence and complementary policies, including public transport reform, speed reductions, and environmental zoning. In other words, the Superblock model on its own does not fully solve the underlying health or environmental challenges; rather, it acts as a critical enabling layer within a broader transition toward sustainable urbanism.

This systemic orientation reinforces the understanding that the Superblock is inherently interdependent. It succeeds not by isolating cells but by transforming the urban grid as a whole. It does so through layered changes to circulation hierarchies, mobility systems, land use, and ecological networks. As later chapters will show, this network-based coherence was increasingly challenged during subsequent phases of implementation, when political, infrastructural,

4 The Barcelona Superblock

and procedural pressures pushed the model toward fragmentation.

5 Evolution of the Barcelona Superblock model

The Superblock model, as initially proposed by Salvador Rueda and BCNecologia, underwent a substantial process of formalization and institutionalization within Barcelona's urban governance framework. This began with the creation of BCNecologia itself. Over time, the agency developed a methodological foundation that culminated in a formalized certification framework for ecosystemic urbanism drawing from international sustainability certification systems such as LEED-ND, BREEAM Communities, and CASBEE that are used to assess and accredit urban plans and neighborhood-level projects (Rueda 2018). The publication of the document positioned the Superblock as both a planning concept and a measurable sustainability intervention.

A pivotal moment in the institutionalization process occurred when BCNecologia was commissioned to draft the 2013–2018 Urban Mobility Plan (PMU). This marked the first time the Superblock was embedded in official city policy, transitioning from a technical concept to a central component of Barcelona's strategic mobility vision. It redefined Barcelona's road hierarchy by combining Superblocks with the implementation of an orthogonal bus network, designed to streamline surface public transport along high-capacity corridors while diverting through-traffic from local streets. This dual intervention aimed to reorganize circulation patterns, reduce private vehicle use, and reclaim space for pedestrians and cyclists. The plan proposed 66 targeted actions structured around safety, sustainability, equity, and efficiency, framing the Superblock not as an isolated design solution, but as a foundational unit in a systemic mobility transformation (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2013).

Further formalization occurred through the May 2016 Government Measure titled "Let's Fill Streets with Life: Establishing Superblocks in Barcelona," issued by the Commission for Ecology, Urban Planning and Mobility (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016). This document articulated a comprehensive rollout strategy, integrating Superblocks into broader plans such as the Barcelona Green and Biodiversity Plan and the Barcelona Commitment to Climate. It also laid out the governance structure, participatory processes, territorial priorities (including Eixample, Gràcia, and Sant Martí), and funding timeline for implementation. Standardized levels of intervention (basic, tactical, and structuring) were defined to allow for both immediate action and long-term transformation. A formal indicator system was introduced to monitor sustainability outcomes in areas such as air quality, noise, habitability, accessibility, energy, and social cohesion. In short, the Superblock was no longer an isolated pilot but an operational, repeatable program embedded within citywide planning practice (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016).

The Superblock model underwent a significant transformation following the 2015 change in municipal government. The new administration approached the previously planned Superblocks with greater urgency, introducing a revised strategy that overlaid "green corridors"

5 Evolution of the Barcelona Superblock model

onto the existing 3×3 Superblock structure (Magrinyà et al. 2023, p. 12). Rather than continuing with the original configuration, the government argued that it was too difficult to implement in practice, citing obstacles such as bus routing and unloading logistics. As a result, the program was restructured around green axes (*eixos verds*), streets designated to prioritize pedestrians and greenery. At the intersections of these axes, new civic squares were planned. This effectively replaced the cell-based logic of the Superblock with a corridor-based strategy. Politically, the redesign of intersections as squares was presented as a continuation of Rueda's emphasis on reclaiming public space, even though the systemic network logic of the original model was abandoned.

The 2013–2018 Barcelona Mobility Plan (PMU) was thus succeeded not by further Superblock expansion, but by the green axes strategy, which later became central to the updated 2024–2030 Mobility Plan (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2024). This shift marked a move away from block-level to neighborhood-scale interventions. While still referenced rhetorically, the 2024–2030 Urban Mobility Plan no longer features the superblock as a central planning tool. Instead, it prioritizes green axes and civic squares, effectively replacing the superblock model as the operative framework (Magrinyà et al. 2023). The change followed a series of implementation challenges during the first phase of adaptation, including incompatibilities with bus networks, logistical constraints for loading and unloading, and limited social consensus in some neighborhoods (e.g. Poblenou). In response, the green axis model based on transforming every third street, was framed as more compatible with the city's infrastructure and more politically and socially viable. As Magrinyà et al. (2023) note, the green axis strategy has since become the core of Barcelona's spatial model.

This evolution raises critical questions for how the Superblock has been adapted abroad. Many international projects were initiated before the green axis strategy displaced the original model and therefore reflect the prototypical Rueda Superblock rather than Barcelona's current approach. In this sense, they are not outdated, but aligned with an earlier stage of the model's evolution. Meanwhile, Barcelona's present strategy, more accurately described as a green axis framework, represents a significant conceptual shift that has not yet been widely acknowledged or adopted elsewhere.

6 Establishing the Superblock Baseline

Establishing the Barcelona baseline serves two purposes in this thesis. First, it defines the reference model against which adaptations outside of Barcelona can be assessed. Without a clear statement of the model's defining characteristics, it would be difficult to determine what has been transferred, modified, or omitted. Second, it recognizes that the "Barcelona Superilla" is not a fixed entity: it has evolved through distinct phases before being transferred, which makes the identification of the *what* circulates across borders more difficult. Understanding these internal changes is therefore essential to interpreting the results of the policy transfer analysis.

To resolve this tension, the chapter proceeds in three steps. It first introduces the three-component framework that characterizes the foundational model. It then presents a typology of Barcelona iterations, situating the Rueda Archetype, the Institutional Policy Superblock, and the Green Axis model in relation to one another. Finally, it derives a detailed list of baseline criteria from academic literature, strategic planning documents, and policy frameworks, which will subsequently serve as the benchmark for assessing adaptations.

6.1 Three-Component Framework

As outlined in Section 4.2, the Rueda Archetype can be characterized through three core dimensions. For the purposes of comparative analysis, these are here consolidated into a three-component framework consisting of:

1. A spatial unit: a defined physical module, typically a 3×3 Cerdà grid cell, with a perimeter–interior traffic logic.
2. A normative planning framework: the principles of ecosystemic urbanism, which integrate environmental, social, and mobility objectives, supported by vertical planning, evaluative indicators, and ecological–civic dimensions.
3. A systemic network logic: the orientation of individual cells toward functioning as part of a coordinated, citywide mesh, ensuring that local interventions contribute to ecological, mobility, and social objectives at the metropolitan scale.

Taken together, these components form the conceptual core of the Barcelona Superblock model. They define not only its physical and technical structure but also its normative orientation and systemic ambition. Absence of any one component, or of the interdependent logic that links them, would indicate a significant reduction in alignment with the original framework, and make it more difficult for an adaptation to fulfill the ecological, mobility, and social objectives set out in the Archetype.

6.2 Typology of Barcelona Iterations

The evolution of the Superblock in Barcelona can be systematically divided into three main iterations. An overview of the core differences between the three iterations is provided in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Comparison of Barcelona Superilla Iterations

Feature	Type 1: Rueda Archetype	Type 2: Institutional Policy	Type 3: Green Axis Model
Normative Framework	Ecosystemic urbanism	Present, de-emphasized	absent
Evaluative Mechanism	Full indicator set	Partial, inconsistently applied	Absent
Network Logic	Strong	Moderate	Present but corridor-based, without the interdependent cell-network logic of the archetype
Tactical Urbanism	Transitional or permanent within systemic logic	Primary delivery mode	Visual emphasis
Participation	Implicit integration	Formally introduced	Present
Institutionalization	BCNecologia-led	Municipal-led	Municipal-led
Ecological Integration	Strong	Moderate	Fragmented

The Rueda Archetype represents the foundational model. Developed before the first prototype was implemented, it reflects a *pre-feedback* design: the cell logic, ecosystemic urbanism framework, and full indicator set were elaborated conceptually but had not yet been tested in practice. This version can best be described as an ideal type: a model that may never be fully realized in practice. As an aspiration, however, it provides a useful evaluative reference, that can be compared to an *attainable perfect* that many assessment tools adopt as their benchmark. The Archetype therefore marks the zero stage of learning, a coherent vision against which later iterations can be assessed.

The Institutional Policy Superblock emerged with the *Let's Fill Streets with Life: Establishing Superblocks in Barcelona* 2016 policy paper. This version introduced participatory processes and tactical urbanism as a core delivery method, together with a more flexible approach to spatial units. While the ecosystemic framework and indicator system were formally retained, the 2016 Ajuntament de Barcelona (2016) Government Measure shifted emphasis toward tactical interventions and participatory processes as the main delivery mechanisms. The framework continued to exist as a reference, but it no longer structured implementation as directly as in the Archetype and associated documents listed in Table 6.1.

The Green Axis Model, formalized in the 2021 Pla Superilla Barcelona, constitutes a more decisive shift. It redefines the concept around linear corridors and intersection squares, abandoning the systemic cell-based logic of the Archetype and reframing the Superblock brand as a program of greening and public-space regeneration. In this sense, it is a Superblock in name only: while ecological measures remain, they are fragmented and disconnected from the ecosystemic framework that had anchored the earlier iterations.

For the purposes of this study, the Green Axis model can be set aside in establishing the Barcelona Superblock Baseline. While still relevant as Barcelona's current policy, it no longer treats the Superblock as a systemic development tool. The focus therefore lies on the two earlier iterations, the Archetype and the Institutional Policy Superblock, as the theoretical and practical versions from which international adaptations most directly draw. While the Green Axis model can be set aside in defining the Barcelona baseline, it nevertheless retains relevance for the subsequent analysis under the urban mobilities lens, particularly in cases where the "Superblock" label may be invoked rhetorically but the actual intervention corresponds to corridor-based greening strategies.

6.3 Baseline Criteria for Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis in this thesis evaluates how closely Superblock adaptations align with the Barcelona baseline model. To do this, eighteen criteria have been defined, drawing from the foundational Rueda archetype, strategic planning documents, and the evolution of the model through its first implementations.

In cases where the documents showed differing definitions, the ones closer to Rueda or more restrictive ones were taken.

It is important to note, however, that the definitions provided in official documents are not always entirely consistent or prescriptive. This leaves a certain leeway in how the model is interpreted and implemented in practice, especially when transferred to other urban context. In particular, Rueda's own descriptions of the Superblock are comparatively strict regarding circulation, for example, allowing motor vehicle entry only when the origin or destination lies within the unit. Although the PMU (p. 329, 2013) defines interior access strictly as excluding through-traffic, other municipal documents use softer formulations (e.g. 'protecting neighbourhoods from through traffic') (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016, p. 2). This creates some leeway in interpretation when the model is transferred to other contexts.

These criteria capture not only the physical and spatial qualities of the concept, but also its governance, policy integration, and systemic characteristics. The criteria are grouped into four thematic categories.

Rather than assessing direct replication, the analysis focuses on functional equivalence. This acknowledges that international adaptations occur in diverse political, morphological, and institutional contexts, where local conditions may require to modify approaches. For each criterion, the table provides:

- A description and examples applicable in various contexts.
- The conditions for awarding a full or partial score.
- Blank fields for recording the score and any relevant notes during case study evaluation.

6.3.1 A: Spatial structure

The first set of criteria aligns with what has previously been described as the spatial unit of the Barcelona archetype. These constitute built requirements or skeleton of what Rueda defines

as the “cell.” Such requirements are present both in the foundational descriptions produced by Rueda (2019) or Alvaredo et al. (2020) and in successive iterations of the Barcelona Urban Mobility and policy papers (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2013; Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016), in which the Superblock functions as the central unit for redevelopment.

It should be emphasized that these criteria are not wholly independent, but represent different aspects of a closely interrelated design logic. For example, the circulation criterion specifies restrictions on vehicular access, but does not determine the hierarchy of modes within the unit, which is instead addressed through modal priority.

Modal priority, in turn, establishes the distribution of rights between users but does not prescribe specific speed levels, which are covered separately under speed regulation. Similarly, the spatial unit criterion describes the overall scale of intervention without reference to internal circulation or user hierarchy.

In Rueda’s original formulations, these dimensions are presented as an integrated whole. For comparative purposes, however, they are here disaggregated into discrete criteria. This allows systematic analysis of how different adaptations address, or fail to address, the underlying design logic of the archetype.

Table 6.2: Assessment Criteria A: Spatial Structure

No.	Criterion	Definition & Examples
1	Spatial Unit	3×3 block structure of 400 × 400 m (~16–20 ha), or a planning unit of comparable scale adapted to local urban morphology.
2	Perimeter/Interior Logic	Through-traffic is prohibited; interior streets permit access only for residents, deliveries, and essential services, while perimeter streets carry motor traffic flow.
3	Modal Priority	Within interiors, pedestrians have right-of-way, cyclists are accommodated, and motor vehicle use is clearly de-prioritized and restricted to deliveries and essential services (e.g. Removed curbs, shared-space layouts).
4	Speed Regulation	Low-speed limit $\leq 10\text{--}20$ km/h; design cues (narrow lanes, raised crossings, chicanes, signage) to support compliance.
5	Public Space Reallocation	$\geq 50\%$ of space reallocated to non-motorized uses; removal of traffic lanes; sidewalk widening; conversion of parking to plazas and play streets.

6.3.2 B: Normative Planning Framework

The normative framework criteria address whether interventions are connected to the ecosystemic urbanism model underlying the Barcelona Superblock. This can occur in two ways. First, through explicit reference: documents may cite ecosystemic urbanism directly, or reproduce its terminology. Second, through implicit embodiment: interventions may fulfill the underlying ecosystemic logic by integrating ecological, social, and mobility layers without naming the framework explicitly. This distinction reflects the difference between nominal reference and functional realization. While few planning documents outside Barcelona cite BCNecologia or Rueda directly, a Superblock transplant may nonetheless achieve the ecosystemic ambitions in practice by fulfilling these underlying criteria. Accordingly, two types of criteria are combined here: one tracing explicit connections to the BCNecologia framework (including the three-

level planning logic), and another assessing whether interventions embody these principles in practice. An ideal representation would include both.

Public Realm Transformation (Activity Programming)

Alongside this normative dimension, the criteria also evaluate how reallocated street space is repurposed for ecological integration and civic functions, focusing on the conditions that make transformation possible. It should be noted, however, that these criteria cannot establish whether such transformations have in fact been realized in practice; doing so would require detailed empirical study of built projects, whereas the present analysis is limited to policy frameworks and documentation materials.

The spatial criteria capture the built configuration of the unit, by contrast, the present set considers whether the technical interventions are accompanied by measures that transform the public realm. The underlying relationship is conditional: ecological and civic measures rely on the prior reallocation of public space, even if in practice these dimensions are often introduced simultaneously through tactical means. Ecological integration can be assessed more directly, through interventions such as native vegetation, surface permeability, and climate-adaptive features. The civic dimension is less tangible but remains central if the Superblock is to realize its ambition of turning the resident into an active citizen. This criterion, *Activity programming*, addresses whether reclaimed space is activated for community use, ensuring that streets serve more than mobility functions. Examples include play areas, seating, cultural events, and spaces for civic interaction.

Ecological Integration

Within the ecosystemic framework, ecological measures are treated as a structural component of Superblocks rather than ornamental add-ons. Rueda (2019, p. 149) identifies soil permeability as a key indicator of ecological health, since it restores parts of the urban water cycle by enabling infiltration, retaining rainfall, and reducing flood risk. From this base, vegetation layers add further functions: they protect soils from compaction, enable organic waste composting and nutrient cycling, filter pollutants, and sequester CO₂. Tree cover extends these benefits by providing shade, thermal comfort, noise reduction, and wind buffering.

Ecological ambitions in the Superblock also extend to biodiversity. Vegetated corridors, green roofs, and permeable ground surfaces are designed not only to improve microclimatic comfort but to establish habitat continuity across the city. By supporting pollinators, increasing tree canopy, and reconnecting fragmented green areas, Superblocks are conceived as biodiversity nodes within an urban ecological network (Rueda 2019, pp. 149–150; Alvaredo et al. 2020, pp. 30–31).

Beyond these localized effects, ecological integration strengthens climate resilience. By substituting impermeable asphalt with permeable materials, expanding vegetation, and incorporating vertical greening strategies, Superblocks mitigate the urban heat island effect and improve adaptation to extreme weather. BCNecologia's simulations for the Eixample, for example, showed that such measures could reduce surface energy balances by more than 35%, translating into cooler pavements, buildings, and public spaces (Rueda 2019, pp. 151–152).

For the purposes of this study, ecological integration is operationalized as a baseline criterion. Interventions are assessed on whether they incorporate climate-adaptive design (permeable pavements, shading, stormwater retention), extend vegetation and soil functions beyond ornamental planting, and embed biodiversity enhancement into the design. Crucially, these measures are not evaluated in isolation but in terms of how far they contribute to ecological networks and systemic urban resilience.

Tactical approach

The role of tactical interventions is described differently across sources. Rueda’s formulations present tactical elements as the means through which circulation change and public space recovery are enacted. By contrast, the 2016 Government Measure “Let’s Fill Streets with Life” (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016), building on lessons from the first prototypes, formalizes tactical interventions within a three-phase model. Here, tactical measures are conceived as provisional and reversible, part of an ongoing process of public-space improvement situated between basic initiatives and structural redesign. As the document notes, “they allow changes to start as pilot tests, which are later evaluated so that a decision can be taken on their continuation, improvement or, where appropriate, cancellation [...] as a means of finding a consensus between the various players involved [...]” (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016, p. 33).

Degree of Permanence

These critical points are what the criterion “Degree of Permanence” seeks to capture: whether tactical interventions demonstrate continuity beyond their provisional form. This is particularly difficult to assess in the context of tactical urbanism, which by definition relies on flexibility and reversibility. Ajuntament de Barcelona (2016, pp. 32–34) makes clear that such measures can reduce resistance to change but must also retain adaptability, allowing experimentation and incremental improvement. In turn, this flexibility enables broader public participation.

In order to operationalize this criterion for comparative analysis, a hybrid categorization was adopted. Here, “Full” denotes either permanent works, as the outcome of tactical interventions, or ongoing tactical interventions that clearly operate as long-term instruments of change (e.g. enforcing circulation shifts, reclaiming public space, and sustaining civic use and engagement). “Partial” refers to tactical measures that are provisional or symbolic.

Table 6.3: Assessment Criteria B: Ecosystemic Framework and Public Realm

No.	Criterion	Definition & Examples
1	Normative framework	Explicit reference to ecosystemic urbanism as defined by BCNecologia, or an equally comprehensive framework that can be applied systematically referencing ecosystemic urbanism.
2	3 Layer Planning	Integration of surface, underground, and rooftop planning functions, or equivalent vertical integration addressing public realm, infrastructure, and building envelope/roof space.
3	Activity Programming	Activation of public space for community use; provision for play, seating, cultural events, civic interaction (e.g. benches, play streets, cultural programming, markets).

Continued on next page

4	Green and ecological integration	Ecological and climate-adaptive design; vegetation and shade provision (tree planting, native species); biodiversity features (habitat continuity, pollinator planting); permeable materials; water management and adaptive surfaces.
5	Tactical Approach	Application of tactical methods to achieve circulation change and public space recovery (filters, paint, furniture, planters, bollards, etc.)
6	Degree of Permanence	Extent to which measures are implemented as permanent works vs. temporary setups; use of long-term materials and construction (e.g. asphalt redesign, curbs) instead of provisional elements (paint, cones, planters).

6.3.3 C: Governance & Participation

The third category concerns itself with the leadership and stakeholders in the project.

Institutionalization

Institutionalization concerns the degree to which the model is formally codified in statutory plans, regulations, and governance structures. In Barcelona, this occurred most clearly with the 2013–2018 Urban Mobility Plan, which embedded the Superblock in the city’s official road hierarchy, and again with the 2016 Government Measure, which defined levels of intervention and established indicators. This introduces a tension with the ecosystemic principles: while the Archetype provided a systemic vision, it did not prescribe the formal structures through which it would be carried into practice. Embedding the model institutionally therefore added a new dimension, ensuring continuity beyond individual projects or political cycles. For this reason, institutionalization is treated here as a baseline criterion in its own right, complementing participation and cross-sectoral integration as core governance dimensions of the Superblock framework.

External Policy Integration

A distinctive feature of the Barcelona Superblock is its transversal integration into wider policy frameworks. As Alvaredo et al. (2020, pp. 29–31) emphasize in their retrospective on BCNe-cologia, the methodology was explicitly designed to be cross-sectoral, linking Superblocks to climate strategy, biodiversity planning, mobility policy, and public space design. This transversal orientation ensured that the model was not confined to transport engineering or isolated urban design projects, but embedded as part of a broader ecological and social transition.

This cross-sectoral integration was later formalized in the 2016 Government Measure “Let’s Fill Streets with Life”, which explicitly positioned Superblocks as a cross-cutting intervention tied into Barcelona’s Climate Plan, Green and Biodiversity Plan, and health agendas (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016). Embedding the model across statutory strategies and thematic plans provided both political legitimacy and continuity beyond electoral cycles, while also aligning the Superblock with wider co-benefits such as public health improvements, social equity, and ecological resilience.

Participation

One of the most contested aspects of the Barcelona Superblock experience is the role of public participation. The Rueda Archetype envisioned the transformation of residents into active citizens, but this remained largely aspirational. In practice, the first implementation in Poblenou (2016) exposed a critical shortcoming. As Zografos et al. (2020) document, residents and business associations felt excluded from decision-making, noting that the pilot was introduced suddenly and without sufficient explanation. Opposition culminated in a neighborhood referendum in 2017 in which a majority voted against continuation, albeit with a low turnout. This case illustrates how inadequate participatory processes undermined legitimacy and generated backlash.

At the same time, other studies highlight a more nuanced picture. Oliver and Pearl (2018), drawing on fieldwork in San Martí, describe how the Urban Ecology Agency embedded the Superblock pilots within a broader process-based framing. Using the Ecological Urbanism tool, the agency carried out internal diagnoses and complemented them with community workshops, temporary simulations, and co-learning exercises. While participation was sometimes introduced later than ideal and remained politicized, it nevertheless played a structuring role, allowing residents to appropriate and influence the design in iterative ways.

Taken together, these accounts reveal that public participation in Barcelona was not simply absent or present, but contested and inconsistently framed. In some instances it was tokenistic; in others it created opportunities for co-production and learning. Precisely because of this variability, participation must be treated as a baseline criterion: its presence, quality, and timing decisively shape whether the Superblock functions as a systemic, citizen-oriented transformation or risks being rejected as a top-down imposition.

Table 6.4: Assessment Criteria C: Governance & Participation

No.	Criterion	Definition & Examples
1	Institutionalization	Integration into formal policy and planning frameworks Formal embedding of the model in statutory plans, regulations, or governance structures, ensuring continuity beyond individual projects or political cycles.(e.g., mobility plans, climate strategies).
2	Integration with Broader Policy	Links to mobility, climate, health, and social equity plans. Integration with Broader Policy – Alignment of the model with other sectoral strategies and thematic agendas (e.g., climate action, public health, social equity, biodiversity). Cross-references to mobility, climate, health, and equity strategies (policy alignment and co-benefits).
3	Participation	Community involvement in planning and design (e.g., co-design workshops; consultations) with documented influence.

6.3.4 D: Systemic Integration & Learning

The third component of the baseline framework concerns the systemic logic of the Superblock. As emphasized in the archetype chapter (4.2), the Superblock can only function as intended when implemented as part of a contiguous citywide network rather than as isolated cells. This systemic orientation is therefore an indispensable layer of the model, complementing the spa-

tial unit and the normative framework. In operational terms, three criteria capture this systemic dimension.

First, the **Indicator System**, which establishes measurable benchmarks for key outcomes such as air quality, modal share, and public space use. Second, the **Monitoring and Feedback Loop**, which links implementation to ongoing evaluation, enabling adaptive management and iterative learning. Third, the **Network Orientation**, which ensures that Superblocks are planned and sequenced as interdependent units within a citywide rollout strategy rather than one-off interventions.

Together, these criteria reflect the understanding that the Superblock is not simply a spatial reorganization but an enabling layer in a broader transition toward sustainable urbanism. Its systemic coherence derives from linking performance measurement, adaptive governance, and network deployment, without which the model risks fragmentation and a significant reduction in alignment with its original objectives.

Table 6.5: Assessment Criteria D: Systemic Integration & Learning

No.	Criterion	Definition & Examples
1	Indicator System	Use of measurable indicators to track performance. Metrics for modal share, air quality, noise, public space use, etc., defined and applied.
2	Monitoring and Feedback Loop	Reporting, audits, and surveys feeding adaptive management and iterative improvements. Data collection and evaluation used to refine implementation.
3	Network Orientation	Unit planned as part of a contiguous or functionally interdependent network, or equivalent configuration ensuring connectivity at the city scale. Planned sequence for scaling across the city. District-by-district rollout; pilots with documented expansion schedule and milestones.

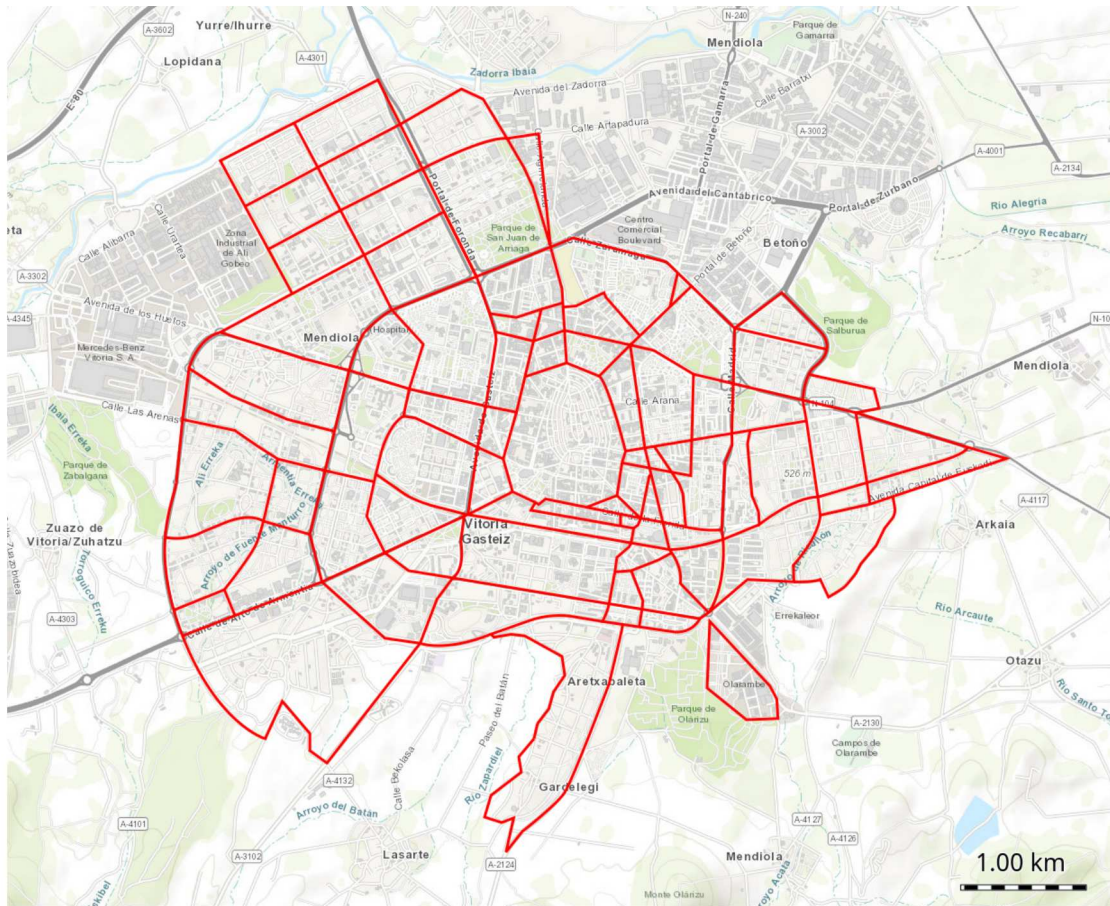
6.3.5 Criteria Assessment Specification

In Table 6.6, the criteria established above are collected and assigned a scale for partial and complete fulfillment. If a criterion is not at least partially fulfilled, it is unfulfilled. Each score is assigned an discrete value between 0.0 (absent) and 1.0 (fulfilled), with partial fulfillment being scored at 0.5. The specific scores and their definitions can be selected more or less granular, depending on the scope of the analysis. For the purposes of this thesis, where the focus lies on establishing a trend in transfer, the broad definitions below were established.

Table 6.6: Assessment Criteria: Meta-categories A–D with Full and Partial Conditions

Category	No.	Criterion	Full	Partial
A	1	Spatial Structure	Similar scale and coherent spatial extent.	Significantly smaller/larger or irregular to the point of obstructing intervention logic.
	2	Perimeter/Interior Circulation	All interior streets restricted; clear perimeter accessibility.	Incomplete restriction, weak enforcement, or perimeter network not continuous.
	3	Modal Priority	Pedestrian/cyclist priority codified and enforced.	Shared priority or weak enforcement.
	4	Speed Regulation	Low limit and design supports compliance.	Low limit without physical/regulatory enforcement.
	5	Public Space Reallocation	70% or more of space reclaimed.	35% or more of space reclaimed.
B	1	Normative Framework	Comprehensive framework operationalization.	Rhetorical or thematic only.
	2	3 Layer Planning	All three layers addressed or equivalent.	Only two layers or superficial integration.
	3	Green and Ecological Integration	Biodiversity-enhancing and connected.	Ornamental or isolated greening.
	4	Activity Programming	Regular, diverse cultural programming & spaces provided	Sporadic or single-use events or little community space provided.
	5	Tactical Approach	Tactical methods applied throughout.	Tactical methods only in isolated areas.
	6	Degree of Permanence	Predominantly permanent works.	Mix of permanent and temporary measures.
C	1	Institutionalization	Formally embedded.	Informal, tests or pilot stage only.
	2	Integration with Broader Policy	Thorough linking and cross-referencing.	Little linking or cross-referencing.
	3	Participation Mechanism	Documented influence on design.	Consultation without influence.
D	1	Indicator System	Comprehensive set of indicators established and applied.	Only sporadic use of indicators.
	2	Monitoring and Feedback Loop	Recurring monitoring activities and documented influence on planning.	Only sporadic monitoring and/or influence on planning.
	3	Network Orientation	Continuous or functionally interlinked network.	Isolated units or disconnected projects.

7 Vitoria-Gasteiz



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Figure 7.1: Outline of the 79 supermanzanas in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the Basque Country, has engaged with the Superblock model for nearly two decades, making it the longest-running project outside Barcelona. In local planning discourse, the concept is referred to as *supermanzana*, a term which will be used consistently in this case study (Alvaredo et al. 2020, p. 129).

The city's engagement with the Superblock model began with the Sustainable Mobility and Public Space Plan (Spanish: *Plan de Movilidad Sostenible y Espacio Público*; short: PMSEP)

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adopted in 2007. Developed by the City Council through its Environmental Studies Center (Spanish: *Centro de Estudios Ambientales*; short: CEA) in collaboration with BCNecologia, the plan segmented the entire city into 79 supermanzanas (Figure 7.1). According to the 2017 evaluation, this made Vitoria-Gasteiz the first city to embed the Superblock model at a citywide scale (PMSEP Evaluation 2017, p. 16). This sequencing highlights a distinctive timeline: while Barcelona was the birthplace of the Superblock concept, it was Vitoria-Gasteiz that first integrated the model into a statutory plan, almost a decade before Barcelona implemented its first physical prototype in Poblenou (2016). With BCNecologia directly involved, this early collaboration created a context in which strong alignment with the original framework could be expected.

The case is also notable for its urban morphology and scale. Vitoria-Gasteiz is a medium sized city (CEA 2021, p. 34) with a population of roughly 260,000 (EUSTAT 2025), about one quarter the size of Barcelona's population of 1.73 million and comparable to a single district such as Sant Martí (around 250,000) (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2025). Unlike Barcelona's orthogonal Eixample grid, the city's historic and modern fabric follows a radial pattern, which required adapting the spatial logic of the Superblock to a different street configuration (Alvaredo et al. 2020, p. 130).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Vitoria-Gasteiz also experienced growth pressures linked to an expansive urban development model. New neighborhoods such as Zabalgana, Salburua, and later Aretxabaleta were built on the periphery, increasing travel distances and lowering overall density (Aguado-Moralejo 2021). This contributed to greater dependence on motorized mobility, while some central areas showed signs of decline due to insufficient public investment in housing and public space. Together, these challenges fueled recognition of the need for change and culminated in the adoption of the PMSEP in 2007 (Aguado-Moralejo 2021).

Since that turning point, Vitoria-Gasteiz has been repeatedly recognized for its sustainability policies. Most notably, it was named European Green Capital in 2012 and received the Global Green City Award in 2019 from the Global Forum on Human Settlements under the United Nations Environment Programme (Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council 2025).

7.1 Project Overview

A cornerstone of the 2007 PMSEP was the Citizens' Pact for Sustainable Mobility (*Pacto Ciudadano por la Movilidad Sostenible*), signed the same year (PMSEP Evaluation 2017, p. 9). The Pact was the outcome of a participatory process conducted between October 2006 and April 2007, through the newly constituted Citizens' Forum for Sustainable Mobility (*Foro Ciudadano por la Movilidad Sostenible*). Bringing together nearly one hundred actors from across civil society, politics, and technical fields, the Forum agreed on guiding principles that became the basis of the Pact. Critically, the Forum committed to monitoring and controlling the PMSEP's implementation, ensuring ongoing integrity to its principles. In subsequent years, it was institutionalized as the Elkargune de Movilidad, an advisory forum designed to embed participation and accountability in local mobility policy (Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz 2018).

The participatory legitimacy of this process was recognized at the European level when Vitoria-Gasteiz received the CIVITAS Award for best citizen participation initiative in 2010, a

distinction that highlighted the city's extensive stakeholder involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the PMSEP 2007 (CIVITAS Initiative 2010). In this sense, the Pact provided both political legitimacy and participatory grounding, ensuring that the supermanzana was framed not merely as a technical design but as a socially endorsed project.

Building on this foundation, in 2010 the City Council formally commissioned BCNecologia to design a Central supermanzana pilot (Alvaredo et al. 2020, p. 130). The proposal was structured around BCNecologia's system of indicators, which integrated spatial, ecological, and social dimensions. In practical terms, the pilot responded to the rise in car trips within the city by prioritizing active mobility and reallocating street space to pedestrians.

From Ambition to Adaptation

The financial crisis of 2008 quickly reshaped the ambitions of the PMSEP. By 2011, the municipality suspended plans for a full structural rollout of supermanzanas. As the CIVITAS programme observed:

"... there was an important change in the philosophy of the superblock model in 2012. Due to the economic crisis context, the Environment and Public Space Department of the Municipality adapted the plans to develop all the superblocks of the city center, trying to apply the philosophy of the superblock scheme without having to spend a great amount of money to make public works and deep changes in the structure of streets. Thus, signaling painting and rearranging furniture is the work we are performing to achieve the desired effects."(CIVITAS Initiative 2010, p. 46)

This shift marked the transition from an expansive master plan to a more incremental implementation strategy. The PMSEP continued to define supermanzanas as the city's central conceptual tool, but interventions were increasingly phased and often tied to other projects such as street renovations or underground parking (PMSEP Evaluation 2017).

Budgetary constraints have remained a decisive factor. The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* explicitly warned of reduced resources following major investments in the BEI electric bus and tram extensions (CEA 2022, p. 39). Between 2021 and 2024, the city's own budget for mobility fell by 6.9% (from €24.6m to €22.9m), while allocations to the municipal transport company TUVISA rose by 30.5% (from €26.3m to €34.3m). Overall, mobility spending increased by 12.4% , but the shift in funding favored public transport operations over infrastructural transformation, including supermanzanas (PMSEP Evaluation 2025, p. 146).

In this context, the *PMSEP (2021-2025)* introduced a three-level framework that adjusted the scope of interventions to the local context of each supermanzana (pp. 88-91). The aim was not to impose a uniform model but to differentiate the depth of intervention according to local conditions. While all three levels shared the principle of eliminating through-traffic, they varied in scope:

- **Nivel 1. Tactical supermanzanas.** They are defined in the PMSEP as interventions intended to avoid through-traffic across the unit, but without reallocating the roadway to pedestrians. These supermanzanas rely on a repertoire of reversible tactical measures to limit motor traffic flows without major construction works. They are generally

applied in more recently developed neighborhoods with wider sidewalks and no significant space deficit, where small adjustments can provide improved pedestrian continuity. Importantly, these interventions are conceived as provisional stages that remain open to future more structural interventions.

- **Nivel 2. Eguzkiloire street.** This type of supermanzana is intended for compact neighborhoods with a shortage of public space, where full structural reform is not feasible due to parking needs or spatial constraints. The PMSEP recognizes that in such settings the street must also serve residents' ordinary daily activities, rather than traffic alone. Interventions are marked by the symbolic *eguzkiloire*¹ emblem, which signals pedestrian priority and entry into a calmed zone. Measures typically combine traffic calming with modest public space enhancements, such as outdoor seating, cultural activities, or small-scale street greening measures.
- **Nivel 3. Urban redesign.** In the PMSEP this level refers to comprehensive interventions in dense central areas. Internal streets are rebuilt as continuous pedestrian-priority platforms, most surface parking is removed, and space is reallocated to everyday, cultural, and leisure uses. Unlike Nivel 1 or Nivel 2, which rely on tactical or symbolic measures, Nivel 3 introduces permanent structural changes that deprioritize cars completely within the supermanzana.

The city abandoned the idea of a systematic rollout and instead follows an opportunistic mode of implementation. Without a dedicated master plan, interventions are introduced only when opportunities arise, typically in connection with street renovations or other public works. In these cases, the municipality integrates principles established in the PMSEP (PMSEP Evaluation 2025, p. 20). The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* notes, this has produced a mixed reality: some supermanzanas have undergone structural interventions, others only tactical traffic calming, and many have not been acted upon at all (PMSEP Evaluation 2025, pp. 98–99). This uneven outcome underscores the importance of evaluating how far Vitoria-Gasteiz's evolving approach still aligns with the Barcelona Superblock framework.

7.2 Framework alignment

The assessment of alignment draws on successive mobility plans (PMSEP) and their evaluation reports, complemented by other strategic documents. While the original 2007 plan was not accessible, its evaluation provides a systematic account of both achievements and shortcomings after ten years of implementation, offering a more reliable empirical basis for analysis.

7.2.1 A: Spatial Structure

The first dimension concerns the spatial structure of the supermanzana. The application of the framework is complicated by continuing additions to policy and shifts in implementation

¹The Eguzkiloire ("eguzki" = sun, "loire" = flower) is a traditional Basque symbol of a wild thistle often placed on the doors of baserri (farmhouses). In Basque mythology, it serves as a protective emblem, believed to guard against storms, lightning, illness, evil spirits, witches and now cars

approach. The *PMSEP Evaluation (2006-2016)* developed through the participatory process in the Foro, places the plan in full alignment with the five baseline spatial criteria and, in some respects, even broadens them (pp. 10–13). Notably, the principle of coexistence and interoperability between modes expands on the baseline by emphasizing shared use and safety rather than strict separation, while the goal of efficiency in energy use links mobility reform to wider sustainability objectives. The subsequent *PMSEP (2021-2025)* continued this trajectory, reaffirming these goals and embedding them within an expanded framework that explicitly links mobility reform to broader sustainability, climate, and equity priorities. At the same time, the introduction of differentiated intervention levels (Nivel 1–3) created a tiered system that has contributed to divergence between the framework as codified in planning documents and the practice of implementation.

A.1: Spatial unit (partial)

In policy, the 400 × 400 m cell is explicitly defined as the basic planning unit. The archetype itself allows for some adjustment to urban morphology, acknowledging that strict regularity may not always be possible. In Vitoria-Gasteiz, the first projects nevertheless departed substantially from this guideline. The Sancho el Sabio Superblock, implemented as a pilot between 2009 and 2011, covered only 7.5 ha², while the “Central Superblock” was outlined at an oversized scale of 86 ha, encompassing 17.5% of the city’s total activities, 11,751 dwellings, and 21,613 inhabitants (CIVITAS Modern Project Consortium 2013, p. 13). The spread in unit size illustrates the difficulty of transferring the 400 × 400 m model to a historic fabric structured by irregular street networks

The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* reintroduces the urban cell as a technical instrument, again defined at 400 × 400 m (p. 49). At the same time, it concedes that when supermanzanas are applied to consolidated urban fabrics, they take the form of urban recycling and their size must adapt flexibly to the existing street network. In historic districts this implies smaller, irregularly shaped supermanzanas, while in new developments the recommended dimension of 400–500 m per side is retained, since at this scale the integration of all modes can be ensured (p. 60). The divergence therefore lies less in the principle itself than in its adaptation to the historic fabric, where the definition of the spatial unit remains more fluid than the archetype would suggest. Since the framework applied here defines the 400 × 400 m cell as the reference unit, these concessions and the extreme variation in practice mean that the criterion can only be considered partially fulfilled.

A.2: Perimeter / Interior Logic (Partial)

The elimination of through-traffic is articulated as a guiding principle and is formally implemented across the different intervention levels (Nivel 1-3). The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* provides a systematic classification that illustrates how this principle has been applied in practice, but also how opportunistic rollout has produced uneven outcomes. Some supermanzanas remain at Nivel 0, where no measures were taken or only minor works occurred. Others were classified at Nivel 1, 2, or 3 depending on the depth of intervention, and a further category of

²The area was measured from the layout given in CIVITAS Modern Project Consortium (2013, p. 5).

mixtas was introduced to capture cases where different streets within the same unit received different treatments, combining structural change, tactical calming, or no action at all (PMSEP Evaluation 2025, pp. 98–101).

Taken together, this shows that while the perimeter–interior logic is embedded in policy and implemented in practice, its application has been inconsistent. The opportunistic rollout has produced a fragmented landscape, with some supermanzanas fully aligned, others only partially transformed, and some left untouched. Within the strict framework definition used here, the criterion can therefore be considered only partially fulfilled.

A.3: Modal Priority (Partial)

The intervention levels (Nivel 0–3) are distinguished by the degree to which modal priority is applied. In the *PMSEP (2021-2025)* pedestrians are formally prioritized within supermanzana interiors, and cyclists are accommodated, while motor vehicle access is limited to residents, deliveries, and essential services. In practice, however, implementation remains uneven across the three intervention levels. In practice, however, implementation varies by type. Tactical Nivel 1 supermanzanas still rely on sidewalks as the main pedestrian realm, with vehicles permitted at low speeds and modal priority only weakly enforced. Nivel 2 Eguzkilore streets reinforce the principle through thresholds, signage, and surface markings, but cars often retain a visible presence. Only Nivel 3 supermanzanas fully realize the criterion, with continuous pedestrian platforms and design features such as removed curbs and raised crossings (CEA 2022, pp. 50–51).

Taken together, this indicates that modal priority for pedestrians and cyclists is codified in the plan but remains inconsistently achieved in practice. Within the framework definition applied here, the criterion can therefore be considered only partially fulfilled.

A.4: Speed regulation (Partial)

The regulation of speed limits within the supermanzana is directly structured through the classification of intervention levels. The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* reproduces the standard of the Archetype that sets 10 km/h as the normative threshold for interior streets, but this strict application is reserved for Nivel 3 supermanzanas (pp. 50–51). In contrast, Nivel 2 Eguzkilore streets are permitted at 10–20 km/h, while Nivel 1 tactical supermanzanas allow interiors to operate at 20–30 km/h.

On the basic grid of the city, the general limit is set at 30 km/h, with 50 km/h retained for selected corridors carrying higher traffic volumes. The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* confirms that this tiered system is applied in practice, recording 10–20 km/h in Eguzkilore streets of the inner ring, 20–30 km/h in tactical applications elsewhere, and 30–50 km/h across the broader network (PMSEP Evaluation 2025, p. 173).

This tiered system shows that while the 10 km/h threshold of the Archetype remains the normative reference point, its strict application is limited to Nivel 3 supermanzanas, whereas higher limits are accepted in Nivel 1 tactical supermanzanas and Nivel 2 Eguzkilore streets. Speed regulation can therefore be considered partially fulfilled.

A.5: Public Space Reallocation (Partial)

The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* is formally committed to the 70% reallocation principle of the Archetype and explicitly requires expanded sidewalks with a minimum width of 5 m on streets carrying vehicular traffic (CEA 2022, p. 54). The accessibility section further highlights the removal of architectural barriers and the adaptation of sidewalks in congested and commercial areas (pp. 92–94). More broadly, the plan embeds public-space transformation in a normative code and links it to a catalog of citizen rights, conceiving space as multifunctional, inclusive, and connected through *ejes conectores* that link key activity areas and elements of green infrastructure (CEA 2022, pp. 83–85).

In practice, however, the extent of reallocation is conditioned by modal priority, which is itself uneven due to the tiered system of intervention levels. In Nivel 1 tactical supermanzanas, car access and parking are still permitted, which limits the degree of space recovery, while Nivel 3 supermanzanas allow for full redesign. This makes systematic assessment of alignment with the reallocation principle difficult, as the transformative potential depends directly on the level of intervention applied in a given unit.

To support evaluation, the *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* introduces indicators, including one tracking the number of parking spaces removed and reconverted into public space (pp. 95–96). While this demonstrates intent, no systematic results are published against the metric. More detail is provided for Indicator 5 (*Reparto del espacio público por supermanzana*), which measures the distribution of space across pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, private vehicles, and green areas. Results for 2020 and 2023 show only marginal shifts: pedestrian space remained broadly stable (19.6% to 19.4%), cycling increased slightly (0.92% to 0.97%), private car space declined from 16.5% to 15.5%, and green areas increased marginally (24.35% to 24.51%). The evaluation itself cautions, however, that the two datasets are not strictly comparable because of changes in categorization. As a result, while the indicator provides useful snapshots of allocation, it does not offer systematic evidence of progress over time.

Taken together, this suggests that although public-space reallocation is strongly codified in policy, implementation remains uneven across intervention levels and only partially verifiable through available data. Accordingly, the criterion is only partially fulfilled.

7.2.2 B: Ecosystemic Framework and Public Realm

B.1: Normative Framework (Full)

The *PMSEP (2021–2025)* is the first mobility plan in Vitoria-Gasteiz to adopt ecosystemic urbanism explicitly as its normative foundation. In the *Marco Estratégico* (Strategic Framework, pp. 47–66), the four pillars (see axes in Table 4.1) are elaborated through the full set of 15 principles associated with the Archetype. These principles are not simply reproduced, but discussed in detail and translated into the conditions of Vitoria-Gasteiz, specifying densities, accessibility rules, habitability standards, environmental targets, and the supermanzana as the territorial unit for the balanced distribution of facilities.

The plan then moves beyond the archetype to a second layer of codification. Through the *Elkargune* the 15 principles are expanded into twenty guiding principles and strategic objectives (CEA 2022, pp. 67–70). These form the normative basis for the plan's objectives, lines of

action, and concrete measures.

Taken together, this dual structure demonstrates that ecosystemic urbanism was both formally codified and politically localized: the archetypal principles were integrated into statutory planning, while their operational translation was secured through participatory governance.

B.2: 3 Layer Planning (Partial)

Earlier planning documents did not engage with the three layer model of ecosystemic urbanism. The CIVITAS pilot and the *PMSEP Evaluation (2006-2016)* focused exclusively on the surface layer, while the subsoil was addressed only in relation to underground parking and logistics, while the vertical/rooftop dimension remained absent.

The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* marks the first explicit adoption of the three-layer framework. In the section on the Tools of New Urbanism, the plan argues that traditional surface-focused regulation of land use is inadequate to manage contemporary urban demands (p. 56). It thus positions the three-layer approach (subsoil, surface, and rooftop) as a necessary tool for systemic urbanism.

In practice, however, implementation lags behind this ambition. The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* does not report measures addressing subsurface logistics, energy storage, or service galleries, nor does it monitor rooftop functions such as green roofs or solar energy. Interventions remain overwhelmingly surface-bound, limited to circulation changes and incremental greening. The result is that the three-layer approach exists in policy but has not been applied in practice, amounting to only a partial fulfillment of the criterion.

B.3: Activity Programming (Partial)

The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* expands the role of supermanzanas by framing public space as a civic arena rather than only a space for traffic interventions or landscape improvements. In the *Marco Estratégico*, this is expressed through a catalog of citizen rights, including the right to walk, stay, play, exchange, and participate (CEA 2022, pp. 83–85).

Within the tiered intervention framework, Nivel 2 Eguzkilore streets is described as enabling a wider range of uses by allowing commercial activities such as cafés and restaurants to expand into former parking lanes and by encouraging cultural or recreational programming in the street. Nivel 3 goes further by reclaiming interior streets as *plataformas únicas*, continuous curb-free surfaces designed for civic and cultural life. These interiors are conceived as spaces for everyday use and leisure, where staying, playing, cultural events, and participation take precedence over traffic.

In practice, however, there is little evidence that such activities have been realized. The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)*, monitors only spatial distribution (for example indicator 5 on the share of space allocated to pedestrian and stay zones, p. 95) and greening (indicator 6 on tree-canopy coverage, p. 96). These indicators capture allocation but not actual use. Metrics for cultural events, commercial activation, or other forms of social programming are absent. As a result, while activity programming is firmly embedded in the normative framework, its implementation and monitoring remain limited, amounting to only partial fulfillment of the criterion.

B.4: Green and Ecological Integration (Partial)

In the *PMSEP Evaluation (2006-2016)* the scope of green and ecological integration was barely developed, limited mainly to tree planting, isolated green passages, and pedestrian improvements (PMSEP Evaluation 2017, pp. 12–13)

The current *PMSEP (2021-2025)* broadens this dimension within the ecosystemic urbanism framework by calling for reductions in asphalt, expanded permeable surfaces, and the renaturalization of reclaimed spaces (pp. 58–59). These ambitions are tied to ecological design strategies such as green corridors, shade provision, permeable pavements, and soundscapes (p. 93), while also recognizing ecological connectors as part of the wider network.

Monitoring in the *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* relies on indicator 5, which measures the distribution of public space (including green areas), and indicator 6, which maps tree-canopy coverage (pp. 95–98). The evaluation highlights renaturalization projects at Los Herrán, Plaza Aldabe, and Portal del Rey as tangible progress. Yet these interventions remain largely confined to surface treatments. Other related ecology-promoting strategies such as biodiversity management, ecological connectivity, and sponge-city functions are not addressed in the indicators. As a result, green and ecological integration is only partially realized.

B.5: Tactical Approach (Full)

In earlier phases, tactical methods played a central role in Vitoria-Gasteiz. During the CIVITAS pilot (2009–2011), interventions relied heavily on paint, signage, and street furniture to test circulation changes at low cost. The PMSEP 2017 evaluation also noted that economic constraints after the financial crisis led the city to suspend structural rollout and instead apply supermanzana interventions incrementally, primarily through tactical means.

The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* systemizes this logic through the hierarchy of supermanzana levels, with the Nivel 1 supermanzanas explicitly defined as tactical interventions. Nivel 2 Eguzkilore streets represent an intermediate approach. Traffic calming is reinforced through thresholds and symbolic devices. While less provisional than Nivel 1, Nivel 2 still employs non-permanent interventions and does not require full street reconstruction. It can be understood as a semi-tactical stage that stabilizes changes without advancing to the structural transformation of Nivel 3.

The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* (2025, pp. 98-102) further confirms that tactical and semi-tactical methods remain the dominant mode of implementation, with Nivel 3 interventions as the exception. In practice, this has led to the institutionalization of tactical approaches at two levels: fully provisional (Nivel 1) and semi-structural (Nivel 2). This dual pathway provides flexibility and broad coverage under resource constraints, while embedding tactical practice as a consistent instrument of mobility planning. Within the framework assessment, the criterion is therefore considered fully fulfilled.

B.6: Degree of Permanence (Full)

The first CIVITAS pilot in Sancho el Sabio (2009–2011) shows that permanence was intended from the outset. While the intervention began with low-cost materials to test feasibility, the

CIVITAS evaluation records, that it was later consolidated with durable works (CIVITAS Modern Project Consortium 2013).

The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* addresses permanence explicitly by distinguishing between the three levels of supermanzanas: Nivel 1 relies on provisional measures but keeps the option of later consolidation open. Eguzkilore streets involve more substantial refurbishments, even if they still employ surface markings and temporary infrastructure. Nivel 3 foresees comprehensive, durable reconstruction (CEA 2022, pp. 88–91). The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* confirms that while selected plazas and nodes have been reconfigured with permanent materials, the majority of interventions remain at Nivel 1 or 2 (PMSEP Evaluation 2025, pp. 171–176).

What stands out in Vitoria-Gasteiz is that once interventions are implemented, they are not rolled back but stabilized, meaning that even tactical or semi-tactical measures tend to acquire permanence over time. In this sense, the criterion can be considered fulfilled.

7.2.3 C: Governance and Participation

C.1: Institutionalization (Full)

As described earlier, the supermanzana was formally embedded in the city's planning frameworks from the beginning. The PMSEP 2007 introduced the supermanzana as a core tool for structural change in urban mobility. The plan was politically anchored in the *Pacto Ciudadano por la Movilidad Sostenible* (2007), ratified by the municipal council, which provided broad participatory legitimacy. Successive evaluations confirm that the supermanzana scheme represented the main technical instrument for reorganizing traffic and public space (PMSEP Evaluation 2017, p. 11). In the *PMSEP (2021-2025)* the model was further consolidated. The document is not simply framed by the supermanzana but is built around it: the model constitutes the organizing principle of the *PMSEP (2021-2025)* itself and serves as the foundation for its broader strategy of inclusive and sustainable public space, effective only alongside citywide traffic reduction.

This centrality is echoed in other overarching municipal documents, most notably by the *Pla Urbana 2030 Vitoria-Gasteiz* where supermanzanas are framed as a transformative tool to calm traffic and recover public space, particularly in central areas and along the rail corridor (p. 98). The plan presents them as part of a wider strategy for inclusive, sustainable public space, effective only alongside citywide traffic reduction (CEA 2021, pp. 21, 64).

Other overarching municipal planning documents, such as the provisional draft of the general urban development plan for Vitoria-Gasteiz (Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz 2025) do not name supermanzanas explicitly. Instead its statutory norms (e.g. stormwater management, permeability, multimodal corridors) on public space design create the regulatory conditions necessary for their realization. Finally, partial plans and addendums such as for *Sector 21, Jándiz-Oeste* (PGOU 2023) apply the model at the micro-regulatory level by defining requirements for among others: drainage basins, tree planting, and pedestrian pathways. As such it ensures reproducibility of superblock features in new developments.

Taken together, these overarching instruments show that the supermanzana has been mainstreamed into multiple layers of local policy, from mobility strategies to statutory zoning law, thereby ensuring continuity beyond individual projects or political cycles. Within the frame-

work assessment, the criterion of institutionalization is therefore considered fully fulfilled.

C.2: Integration with Broader Policy (Partial)

By contrast, cross-linkages to other sectoral strategies remain less developed. The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* acknowledges connections with overarching frameworks such as the General Urban Development Plan (PGOU), the Elkargune de Movilidad, and EU-level strategies like the *Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy* and Spain's *Estrategia de Movilidad Segura, Sostenible y Conectada 203* (pp. 38-39). The plan further references the UN Sustainable Development Goals (pp. 69-70), yet these links, like the other frameworks, remain largely declarative rather than operational and are not translated into binding targets or coordinated implementation mechanisms. For this reason, the criterion is considered only partially fulfilled.

C.3: Participation (Full)

The first PMSEP 2007 originated out of the participatory process already described in the introduction. The plan itself acknowledged the role of the Citizens' Forum for Sustainable Mobility in monitoring its development, but it did not establish formal participatory mechanisms within its governance structure. Nor did it define indicators or procedures for evaluation, leaving these tasks informally to the Forum (PMSEP Evaluation 2017, pp. 9–10, 16).

In contrast to its predecessor, the *PMSEP (2021-2025)* includes a dedicated *Plan de Participación Ciudadana* (pp. 316–318), which defines the framework for public involvement in mobility governance. It positions the Elkargune de Movilidad as the reference space for debate and monitoring, and incorporates the *Aula de Ecología Urbana* as a channel for education and awareness-raising, complementing deliberation with broader public outreach (p. 318). The plan sets out clear objectives: to guarantee broad participation (including associations, vulnerable groups, and sectoral stakeholders), to ensure transparency, to connect different actors, and to create spaces for deliberation and accountability.

It also established three levels of participation: political, technical, and citizen. The role of the Elkargune and thematic groups as operating on the main citizen-level forums, and the *Aula* supporting cultural change through educational programs. The scope of participation was explicitly defined: it should enable dialogue, contrast, and monitoring, while ultimate decision-making authority remained with the municipal government.

This sectoral framework has since been reinforced by the Municipal Participation Plan (2020–2023), a citywide strategy designed to combine and standardize mechanisms of citizen engagement across all policy areas. While it does not address supermanzanas directly, the plan institutionalizes participatory channels such as the Elkargune de Movilidad, Auzogunes (Basque: neighborhood participation forums), and participatory budgeting (*Mejorando Vitoria-Gasteiz Hobetuz*) (Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz 2020, pp. 6–8).

Although the *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* reports participation mainly in terms of awareness and outreach, the consolidation of formal mechanisms and their reinforcement through the broader municipal plan demonstrate that participation is structurally embedded. Within the framework assessment, the criterion is therefore considered fully fulfilled.

7.2.4 D: Systemic Integration and Learning

D.1: Indicator System & D.2: Monitoring and Feedback Loop (Full)

Indicators were first applied in Vitoria-Gasteiz in 2010, when BCNecologia tested its sustainability indicator system at the scale of the supermanzana (Centro de Estudios Ambientales (CEA), Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz 2010). This early exercise marked one of the first attempts to apply the evaluative layer of the Barcelona archetype, but it remained a pilot and was not carried forward in later planning cycles.

A more systematic approach was introduced with the *PMSEP (2021-2025)*, which connects its nine Strategic Objectives (OE.1–OE.9)³ (pp. 276–279) to a comprehensive set of 60 indicators (IND_1–60) (pp. 329–339). The objectives themselves are derived from the 20 guiding principles agreed in the participatory framework, which in turn expand and localize the 15 principles of ecosystemic urbanism. This creates a clear accountability chain: the normative foundations are translated into objectives, and these are monitored through quantifiable measures.

The indicators are assessed on a biennial basis, with the Evaluation 2025 providing the first cycle of reporting. The evaluation confirms progress in several areas but also highlights methodological challenges, such as limited comparability of certain datasets between 2020 and 2023 (pp. 95–98). This demonstrates that the evaluation functions not only as a reporting mechanism but also as a feedback tool, pointing to the need for refinement and iterative improvement. In this sense, the indicator system functions not only as a reporting mechanism but also as a feedback tool for refinement and iterative improvement, amounting to full alignment with the criterion.

D.3: Network Orientation (Full)

The *PMSEP (2021-2025)* defines the superblock as the statutory unit of mobility and urban regeneration. The Marco Estratégico presents the supermanzana as the structural cell of the mobility system and urban recycling (pp. 59–60). The plan identifies 79 superblocks to be implemented across two scenarios, ESMAI (interior ring) and ESM (rest of the city), and illustrates this with network maps (pp. 173–174). It also establishes the three-tiered Superblock interventions, ensuring a consistent design logic across the city. The *PMSEP Evaluation (2021-2025)* reaffirms this systemic orientation by classifying all 79 units into these categories and listing completed projects such as Zabalgana, Salburua, Aldabe, and Portal del Rey (pp. 173–176).

The systemic approach is supported by explicit integration with cycling, public transport, and green infrastructure networks. The plan foresees 92 km of segregated primary cycling routes along main corridors, plus a secondary network of shared spaces between supermanzanas. This strategy has been linked to the increase in cycling mode share from 3% (2006) to 8.5% (2019) (CEA 2022, pp. 109–110). Public transport is connected to the same logic through the tram extensions to Salburua and Zabalgana and the new BEI (Bus Eléctrico Inteligente) line (pp. 128–130). Superblocks are further embedded in a network of pedestrian corridors and ecological connectors, ensuring permeability and continuity at the urban scale. In this framing, the superblock is not an isolated intervention but a node within a contiguous system of

³OE stands for *Objetivo Estratégico*

interdependent, low-traffic cells that provide coherence at the district and city scale.

Vitoria-Gasteiz embeds the network principle directly into statutory planning. Superblocks are mapped across the city, linked to cycling, transit, and ecological networks, and monitored as elements of a systemic framework. This sets the approach apart from pilot-based experimentation, aligning implementation with the city's broader structural transformation strategy. Within the framework assessment, the criterion of network orientation is therefore considered fully fulfilled.

7.3 Policy transfer and reinterpretation

In Vitoria-Gasteiz, the transfer of the Barcelona Superblock model reached unusual fidelity: not only normative goals but also instruments, programs, and institutions were taken up. The PMSEP codified the supermanzana as the statutory unit of mobility and public space planning, and has done so since 2007. More than that, while mobility plans in Barcelona mention the Superblock as a strategic tool and introduce separate documents to address it, the PMSEP is built in its entirety around the supermanzana. BCNecologia directly shaped the pilot, and the participatory forum Elkargune institutionalized citizen involvement. This exceeds the selective uptake common in other European cases and verges on copying. Importantly, Vitoria-Gasteiz remains the only example where the Superblock continues to be implemented as a structural tool in line with its original conception, whereas in Barcelona the green axis strategy has effectively replaced the cell logic. All layers of the normative framework were transferred and institutionally embedded, though indicators and monitoring procedures remain unevenly applied. In this sense, all core elements of the Rueda Superblock traveled.

One area of adaptation was the development of indicators and monitoring. was the reinterpretation of the model through a three-level typology. This skewed the alignment. If scored separately, Nivel 3 interventions would reach near full alignment with the spatial criteria, except for the spatial unit itself. This is due to Nivel 3 being applied in the densest part of the historic city core, with the greatest spread of supermanzana area.

The most significant adaptation was the reinterpretation of the model through a three-level typology. This skewed the alignment: if scored separately, Nivel 3 interventions would reach near full alignment with the spatial criteria, except for the spatial unit itself. This is due to Nivel 3 being applied in the densest part of the historic city core, with the greatest spread of supermanzana area. While this tiered system diluted internal coherence and the potential of the superblock, it simultaneously represented closer alignment with Barcelona's Type 2 (see Table 6.1). The typology can be read as a direct translation of Barcelona's 2016 Government Measure Let's Fill Streets with Life, which defined basic, tactical, and structuring interventions as sequential steps in an ongoing process of public-space improvement. In Vitoria-Gasteiz, however, this sequencing was reinterpreted: tactical measures were reframed as a permanent layer within the systemic rollout. This made the model more feasible under constrained resources but also carried the risk of stabilizing provisional forms and softening permanence as a criterion. In this way, the adaptation exposes an ambiguity already present in Rueda's and BCNecologia's own formulations, where the tactical dimension was never clearly defined as either transitional or permanent.

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With regard to participation, the Vitoria-Gasteiz model can be understood as an advancement of the Barcelona archetype. In Rueda's conception, participation was envisioned only implicitly through the transformation of residents into active citizens, but it was not structurally defined or embedded in governance arrangements. In Vitoria-Gasteiz, by contrast, the Foro/Elkargune was central to the creation of the goals and principles of the first PMSEP. Later iterations went further by embedding participation directly in the *PMSEP (2021-2025)*. A notable feature is that the instrument was not only institutionalized within the mobility plan, but also embedded within a broader set of municipal participation strategies. In this sense, what was initially created around the first PMSEP was adapted and advanced into a governance tool in its own right. Equally important, the Elkargune was entrusted not only with formulating goals but also with monitoring implementation, embedding participation in both agenda-setting and evaluation.

A final point of divergence concerns the programmatic dimension. While the Rueda Archetype never specified concrete rollout strategies, it postulated a systemic application of the superblock as a citywide framework. By contrast, Vitoria-Gasteiz shifted to an opportunistic mode of implementation. Rather than following a structured sequence, interventions were introduced when opportunities arose, often tied to street renovations or other public works. This approach risks reducing the model to symbolic gestures, particularly as Nivel 1 supermanzanas, originally conceived as tactical and transitional, have been institutionalized as a distinct implementation type. As the *PMSEP Evaluation (2006-2016)* document shows, this risks stabilizing temporary measures as endpoints rather than steps toward systemic change.

Transfer in Vitoria-Gasteiz was anchored in municipal institutions, with the CEA and City Council as lead actors and BCNecologia as an external knowledge broker. Crucially, the Citizen Pact and its institutionalization through the Foro/Elkargune de Movilidad provided genuine participatory legitimacy and shaped the PMSEP's initial design, distinguishing the case from more top-down transfers elsewhere. The underlying motives can only be inferred rather than directly established from the framework analysis. Available evidence suggests a layered rationale: problem pressure from rising car use and degraded public space, alignment with EU mobility and sustainability agendas, reputational signaling through CIVITAS and Green Capital awards, and pragmatic adaptation to fiscal constraints. Adoption was therefore both functional as in responding to local mobility challenges, and strategic by positioning Vitoria-Gasteiz as a European sustainability leader while reconciling systemic ambition with limited budgets.

As a verdict, in Vitoria-Gasteiz, everything traveled: goals, instruments, programs, institutions, and ideas. Alignment was strongest at the normative, design, and institutional levels, where the supermanzana was codified, ecosystemic principles were embedded, and participatory legitimacy was secured. By contrast, the hybridization of instruments and programmatic adaptations produced only partial alignment in practice. Tactical solutions are at risk of stabilizing as transformative endpoints and generating friction when comparing them to the underlying normative goals. The case shows that without sustained and continuous ambition behind a network rollout, transfer risks fracturing into discrete tactical cells. Vitoria-Gasteiz stands out as strong in terms of formal adoption and monitoring, yet its material configuration remains patchy, illustrating how copying in policy can coexist within hybridization.

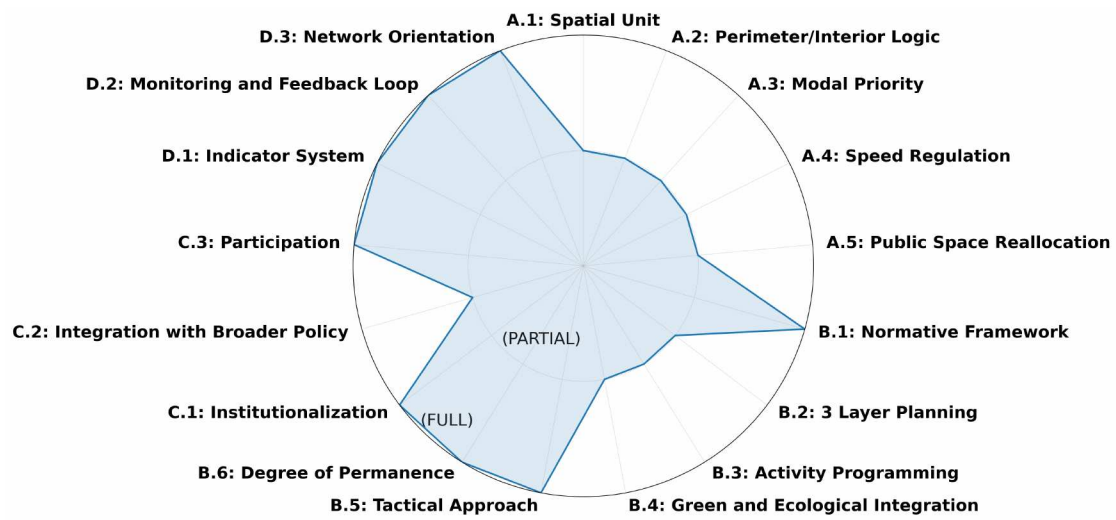
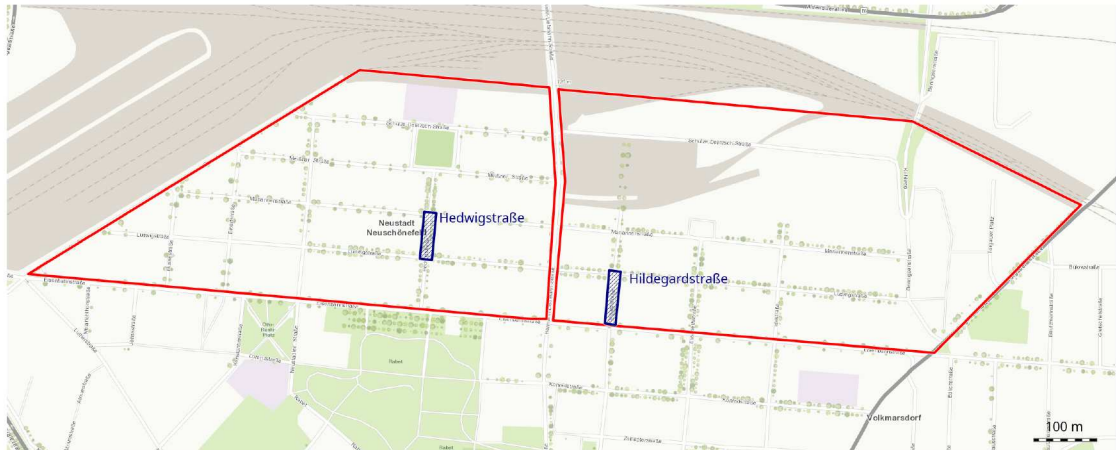


Figure 7.2: Framework analysis Vitoria-Gasteiz, scores for individual points.

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Figure 8.1: Outline of the project in Leipzig.

Leipzig is the largest city in the German Free State of Saxony formerly part of East Germany. Its current population stands at 632,562 (Amt für Statistik und Wahlen, Stadt Leipzig 2025), about 2.5 times the population of Vitoria-Gasteiz. In recent decades, Leipzig has transformed from one of Germany's most emblematic shrinking cities into a growing urban hub, after losing more than 100,000 inhabitants during the 1990s due to post-socialist transformation processes. The city's population reached its lowest point in 1998 before entering a period of dynamic regrowth in the 2010s, with annual growth rates exceeding 2% (Schwarz et al. 2021, p. 5). Leipzig is widely considered a "second-tier European city," functioning as an important regional hub for culture, education, and the economy (Schwarz et al. 2021, p. 2). Its demographic profile is comparatively young (Stadt Leipzig, Amt für Statistik und Wahlen 2024, p. 25), with strong inflows of students, creative workers, and young families, which has earned it a reputation as "Hypezig" (Mardin 2020).

In Germany, the Superblock model has been reinterpreted and localized under various labels such as *Kiezblocks* in Berlin, *Superbüttel* in Hamburg, and *Superblock West* in Stuttgart. These projects exemplify the selective transfer and adaptation of the Barcelona idea to German planning cultures. Unlike the more centralized and institutionalized approach in Spain, German implementations are largely driven by civil-society initiatives, often coordinated by NGOs or neighborhood associations, and only gradually embedded into municipal planning structures

(Glöckner and Schmidt 2023).

In Leipzig, the citizen-led association Superblocks Leipzig e.V. initiated the project *Neue Nähen – SUPERBLOCKS Leipzig*. After a fully implemented one year pilot on Hildegardstraße in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld it culminated in the ratification of the decision to expand the model into the adjacent neighborhood of Volkmarsdorf in April 2024 (Haase and Schmidt 2024, p. 42; Stadt Leipzig, Amt für Statistik und Wahlen 2024) (see plan in Figure 8.1). The project relied on a broad repertoire of participatory formats to engage the socially heterogeneous population of Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarsdorf. While the process was conflicted, particularly around traffic and parking, it is widely regarded as a productive negotiation of interests, with evaluations reporting perceived improvements in safety, livability, and social interaction (Haase and Schmidt 2024, pp. 56–63; Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024).

8.1 Project Overview

The *Neue Nähen – Leipziger Superblocks* initiative was launched in 2021 by the civil-society association Superblocks Leipzig e.V., which acted as the project sponsor. The project was adapted to and funded by the programme *Post-Corona-Stadt* (post-covid city) of the National Urban Development Policy. The engagement of Superblocks Leipzig e.V. led to the city's first one-year traffic experiment on Hildegardstraße in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld, inaugurated in May 2023 during the international VeloCity conference. Conceived as the entry point to a wider Superblock area covering Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarsdorf, the project combined tactical interventions with scientific monitoring and co-production between municipal departments, NGOs, and residents.

Following the pilot, the city commissioned the engineering firm Bernard Gruppe ZT GmbH to elaborate a permanent traffic plan for Leipzig-Ost (the area of eastern Leipzig). Their technical report from February of 2024 proposed two variants for the long-term implementation: the “Grüne Achse” (Green Axis), which emphasizes north–south connections via Hedwig- and Hildegardstraße, and the “Grüne Brücke” (Green Bridge), which focuses on creating east–west continuity across Herrmann-Liebmann-Straße (Bernard Gruppe 2024a, pp. 28–32). In both scenarios, modal filters and traffic-calmed areas are combined with new green spaces and improved conditions for active mobility. The Green Axis was recommended as the preferred option, to be realized in several phases, beginning with the permanent retention of the Hildegardstraße pilot as a fixed element of the Superblock concept (Bernard Gruppe 2024a, p. 44).

The report further outlines a five-step implementation plan, starting with the installation of all additional modal filters and expanding in subsequent phases to include new traffic-calmed areas, a bicycle-priority street, and eventually continuous neighbourhood centres along Hildegardstraße and Hedwigstraße (Bernard Gruppe 2024a, pp. 44–48).

The project was accompanied by the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ, Leipzig) as a scientific partner. UFZ researchers provided ongoing process evaluation and reflexive monitoring, situating *Neue Nähen* within debates on co-production, resilience, and transformative urbanism (Haase and Schmidt 2024). Their work emphasized the project's role as a *Reallabor* (urban living lab), documenting participatory practices, conflicts, and learning effects, and framing the Leipzig Superblocks as both a local experiment and a contribution to

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broader urban transformation debates.

Superblock Leipzig e.V.

To understand the Leipzig Superblock, it is necessary to frame the association behind it. The following section draws primarily on publications by Superblocks Leipzig e.V. itself (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024). The association traces its origins to grassroots impulses during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the lockdown made spatial inequalities in Leipzig-Ost particularly visible: overcrowded housing, scarce playgrounds, avoidance of public transport, and increased car use turned the public realm into a space of insecurity. Local activists responded with informal actions, such as the temporary closure of Hildegardstraße during Parking Day 2020, and in 2021 formally established Superblocks Leipzig e.V. as a non-profit association, successfully applying for federal funding under the post-covid city programme.

The handbook produced by Superblocks Leipzig e.V. to document the project in Leipzig-Ost explicitly identifies the Barcelona Superblock model as its source of inspiration (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, pp. 20–28). The association aims to redesign car-dominated streets through experimental interventions such as diagonal filters and temporary traffic-calmed zones, while explicitly linking these measures to broader objectives: public health, gender-sensitive and child-friendly planning, climate resilience, and the equitable distribution of urban space. Ideologically, the initiative positions itself as a democratic, participatory, and multicultural experiment, emphasizing co-production with residents and relying on multilingual and accessible communication to ensure broad inclusion regardless of origin or education. By foregrounding gender and age diversity and explicitly addressing the gendered dimensions of automobility, the association situates its work within wider concerns for justice and equality. In this way, Superblocks Leipzig e.V. frames solidarity, multicultural inclusiveness, and everyday participation as the social foundations of a resilient city.

Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarisdorf are identified by the association as the primary target area for intervention. In their own description, these districts are characterized by high density, poorly equipped housing, and limited access to green or recreational space, conditions that place particular pressure on families with children. At the same time, despite having one of the lowest rates of car ownership in Leipzig (around 20 percent in 2023), the area is heavily affected by cut-through traffic. The contrast between a vibrant commercial axis (Eisenbahnstraße, with its international businesses and services) and quieter residential streets marked by congestion and limited open space illustrates the contradictory dynamics of the quarter (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, pp. 56–60).

These characteristics are confirmed in academic research, which shows that Leipzig's Inner East combines above-average shares of migrant households, welfare dependence, and residential fluctuation with affordable rents, marking it as the city's key arrival neighborhood (Haase et al. 2020, pp. 92–94). More broadly, arrival neighborhoods in Germany are typically co-produced through affordability constraints, housing-market discrimination, and the provision (or lack) of infrastructures for newcomers, which link them structurally to socio-economic disadvantage (Hanhörster et al. 2023, 1410–1412). By embedding its intervention in this context, the association frames the Superblock not merely as a traffic measure but as a response to overlapping urban inequalities, environmental justice issues, and contested processes of neighborhood

change.

8.2 Framework alignment

The evaluation of Leipzig's pilot relies on a core set of municipal documents. At the strategic level, the policy paper *Leipzig in Bewegung - Die Mobilitätsstrategie 2030* and the corresponding implementation framework, *Mobilitätsstrategie 2030 für Leipzig – Rahmenplan zur Umsetzung*, establish the overarching framework for a sustainable reallocation of street space. At the technical level, the consultancy report prepared by Bernard Gruppe translates the Superblock concept into Leipzig's context. On this basis, the *Verkehrsuntersuchung: Erstellung einer verkehrsplanerischen Konzeption im Kontext der geordneten städtebaulichen Entwicklung in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld und Volksmarsdorf nördlich der Eisenbahnstraße – Superblocks Leipzig* elaborates circulation scenarios and design principles, while the ratified *Beschlussvorlage VII-DS-09329* defines the official project area and authorizes the pilot on Hildegardstraße. Together, these documents form the planning and governance foundation for the *Neue Nähen – Superblocks Leipzig* project.

8.2.1 A: Spatial Structure

A.1: Spatial unit (Full)

The *Beschlussvorlage Nr. VII-DS-09329* (Stadt Leipzig 2024b, p. 6) defines the project area north of Eisenbahnstraße as comprising the neighborhoods of Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volksmarsdorf. While described administratively as a single *Superblock Leipzig*, the area is in practice divided into two *Wohngebiete* (living areas) separated by Hermann-Liebmann-Straße, a main transit axis that remains outside the scope of traffic-calming measures. Based on the area boundaries given by Stadt Leipzig, Neustadt-Neuschönefeld encompasses approximately 20 hectares and Volksmarsdorf approximately 24 hectares. Both correspond to the expected scale of a neighborhood-sized intervention.

The project area fulfills the spatial unit criterion with qualifications. While the defined units are of appropriate size, the division by Hermann-Liebmann-Straße prevents the formation of a single coherent cell, resulting instead in two distinct units coordinated under one planning framework.

A.2: Perimeter / Interior Logic (Full)

The traffic concept underpinning the *Neue Nähen – Superblocks Leipzig* project (Bernard Gruppe 2024a, p.9 ; Stadt Leipzig 2024b) establishes a clear perimeter/interior separation. Through-traffic is to be removed from the two contiguous *Gründerzeit* (founding era) quarters, while circulation for motorised traffic remains on the surrounding arterial roads (Hermann-Liebmann-Straße, Eisenbahnstraße, Torgauer Straße).

Within the two areas, the plan deploys modal filters at intersections and mid-blocks, partial pedestrianization, and the conversion of existing parking into short-term, delivery, and car-sharing spaces. These interventions prevent cars from cutting through the neighborhood

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but maintain permeability for walking and cycling. Accessibility for residents, deliveries, and emergency vehicles is explicitly guaranteed.

The Hildegardstraße pilot demonstrated the approach in practice: a diagonal filter eliminated through-traffic on the street while preserving local access, with the official evaluation confirming that the measure serves its purpose and ensured accessibility even for heavy vehicles (Stadt Leipzig 2024b, p. 11). The wider project foresees a stepwise expansion of this logic across both neighborhoods.

The adopted design keeps car traffic on the designated perimeter network, while filters and targeted conversions remove it from interior streets without compromising local access. The perimeter/interior criterion therefor counts as fulfilled.

8.2.2 A.3: Modal Priority (Full)

Within the Superblocks Leipzig project, modal priority is established through a combination of traffic law instruments and physical redesign. Central to this approach is the designation of *verkehrsberuhigter Bereich* (traffic-calmed area), applied to selected interior streets. In such zones, pedestrians have legal priority, walking speed applies to all vehicles, and parking is limited to demarcated spaces. This creates a shared-space logic in which motor vehicles are explicitly subordinated to pedestrian use. In the Hildegardstraße pilot, this designation was tested and confirmed to function without compromising local accessibility for deliveries and emergency services (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 9).

In addition, the planning documents designate specific interior street segments to be reallocated for redesign. In these locations, curbs are to be removed and surfaces reconfigured to create areas for greening, play, and seating, with layouts adapted to multi-functional use. The redesigns are conceived as co-designed interventions, to be developed in participatory processes with residents, businesses and schools before permanent construction. A first example has already been implemented in front of the school Wilhelm-Wander-Schule on Hildegardstraße (Stadt Leipzig 2024c), where a traffic-calmed area was combined with a redesigned segment to prioritize children's safety and provide opportunities for play. (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 35–37).

The staged implementation plan reinforces this logic. In Step 1, all additional modal filters are to be installed simultaneously, establishing a coherent circulation system and integrating delivery/loading zones. Subsequent phases (Steps 2–5) progressively extend traffic-calmed areas to further streets, creating continuous neighborhood centers on Hildegard- and Hedwigstraße. In this way, the pilot design tested on Hildegardstraße becomes the template for a phased consolidation of modal priority across both quarters (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 44–48).

By combining a strong legal designation with physical redesign and a phased rollout, Leipzig ensures that pedestrians are prioritized and motor vehicles subordinated. Modal priority can therefore be considered in full alignment with the Barcelona baseline.

A.4: Speed regulation (Full)

Speed regulation in the Leipzig Superblock project is primarily achieved through legal designations under German traffic law. Selected interior streets are designated as *verkehrsberuhigter*

Bereich (traffic-calmed area), where only walking speed is permitted, pedestrians have unconditional priority, and vehicles may not exceed 7 km/h. This is notably stricter than the Barcelona model, which typically sets design speeds of 10–20 km/h. The Hildegardstraße pilot tested this approach, combining the shared-space designation with design cues such as narrowed carriageways, curb removal, and added street furniture to enforce slow speeds in practice (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 9).

Outside of these specific redesign segments, the broader network remains regulated as a *Tempo-30-Zone*, in which a speed limit of 30km/h is deployed, including the perimeter streets (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 14). Compliance is further supported by modal filters, diagonal bollard arrays at intersections, and mid-block closures, which prevent through-traffic and reduce incentives to accelerate.

Leipzig's speed regulation not only meets but exceeds the Barcelona baseline: interiors are legally limited to walking speed with strong design enforcement, while perimeter streets operate as Tempo-30 zones. This corresponds to full alignment with the criterion.

A.5: Public Space Reallocation (Partial)

Referencing the Hildegardstraße prototype, around 17 parking spaces and five taxi stands were removed and converted into seating areas, greenery, and encounter zones through the use of tactical elements such as benches and flower planters (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 36–37).

While this represents a visible reallocation of space from cars to civic use, Leipzig's proposal requires that in many cases a 4.5 m bidirectional lane must remain open to ensure access for service and emergency vehicles (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 46). This constraint limits the potential for fully pedestrianized plazas or extensive sidewalk widening.

Looking ahead, the Bernard Gruppe's long-term plan foresees the removal of about 280 car spaces in the green axis variant (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 28–24) and 320 spaces in the green bridge variant (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 30–31). These re-allocations would enable continuous pedestrian-priority zones and neighborhood plazas, suggesting a possible shift toward fuller alignment if phased implementation is realized.

At the pilot level, the projects shows partial alignment, with potential for full alignment in future phases.

8.2.3 B: Ecosystemic Framework and Public Realm

B.1: Normative Framework (Absent)

The traffic concept defines a set of goals for Leipzig's Superblock initiative: traffic calming, safety improvements, improved public space quality, service accessibility, and modal shift toward walking and cycling (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 5, 23). While this establishes a normative orientation, it remains narrowly sectoral, focused on traffic and public space.

By contrast, Superblocks Leipzig e.V. situates the project in a broader normative discourse around equity, inclusion, resilience, climate justice, and co-production (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024). These principles strongly echo the ecosystemic values of Barcelona's model. However,

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they do not appear explicitly in the traffic concept or the official ratification documents and thus lack formal institutional anchoring.

Leipzig's normative frame is fragmented, combining a sectoral planning rationale with civic narratives, but without integration or adoption of the equity-oriented social norms into municipal policy, which is why this criterion counts as not met.

B.2: 3 Layer Planning (Absent)

Neither the traffic concept nor the Neue Nähen pilot concept explicitly addresses vertical integration of surface, underground, and rooftop planning functions. The plan's interventions are confined to the street level, focusing on circulation changes, modal filters, and reallocation of curbside parking into seating, greenery, and play functions.

The "Handbuch of Superblocks Leipzig e.V. does reference broader ecological ambitions such as greening, climate adaptation, and justice-oriented public space use et these are framed in terms of surface-level interventions (planters, seating, tactical redesigns of the roadway), without systematic integration of building envelopes, rooftop greening, or subsurface infrastructure planning.

As measures remain confined to the street surface without integration across vertical dimensions, the criterion is assessed as absent.

B.3: Activity Programming (Partial)

In the Hildegardstraße prototype (2023), public space was reprogrammed with benches, planters, and small play surfaces, creating immediate opportunities for sitting, playing, and social encounters. In the Bernard Gruppe Verkehrskonzept, two central hubs (*Quartierszentren*) are identified: Hildegardstraße in Volkmarsdorf and Hedwigstraße in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld. They will serve as focal points for neighborhood activity and interaction (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 48). The plan also maps key destinations such as shops, gastronomy, schools, playgrounds, and cultural facilities, showing their potential role as anchors for everyday use and community life (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 20; Bernard Gruppe 2023, p. 18)

However, no explicit provision for cultural events, markets, or programmed activities is included in the traffic concept. Instead, such events are coordinated externally by actors like the *Quartiersmanagement Leipziger Osten* (Neighborhood Management Leipziger Osten), which regularly organizes festivals, cultural programming, and civic interaction formats in the area (Quartiersmanagement Leipziger Osten 2024). Thus, while physical spaces for activity are foreseen, their activation relies largely on neighborhood management and civic initiatives rather than the municipal plan itself.

The prototype and plan provide designated spaces and hubs for activity, but formal cultural programming is absent and remains dependent on civil society and Quartiersmanagement structures, why the alignment can be counted as partial.

B.4: Green and ecological integration (Partial)

The traffic concept recognizes the role of green infrastructure, but integration remains modest. The plan notes existing assets such as the Stadtteilpark Rabet, Mariannenpark, and smaller playgrounds and green courtyards within the neighborhoods (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 19–20). It also proposes street tree planting and roadside greening, largely tied to traffic-calmed areas and modal filters. The *Quartierszentren* at Hildegardstraße and Hedwigstraße (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 48) are envisioned as focal points where greenery could support microclimate and public space quality.

In the Hildegardstraße prototype (2023), tactical planters and small-scale vegetation were introduced, providing shade and improving local climate comfort. These “Pop-Up” elements were temporary and limited, but they demonstrated potential for climate-adaptive design.

The handbook of Superblocks Leipzig e.V. extends the ambition: it explicitly frames Superblocks as responses to climate resilience, biodiversity, and equitable access to green-blue infrastructure, referencing shade provision, cooling, and social-ecological justice. However, these values are not codified in the municipal plan, which lacks systematic measures for biodiversity corridors, permeable surfaces, or integrated water management (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, pp. 5–6). The lack of codified measures for biodiversity, permeability, or water management means ecological integration remains limited, and the criterion can therefore only be assessed as partially fulfilled.

B.5: Tactical Approach (Full)

Leipzig adopted a tactical-first approach to circulation change and public space recovery. The Hildegardstraße pilot (2023) was implemented as a *Reallabor* (real-world laboratory) using bollards to block through-traffic, reclaimed parking spaces converted into seating and planting areas, and floor markings to reprogram the street surface (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 34–37).

The traffic concept further emphasizes a phased and flexible implementation, which, while not explicitly framed as tactical urbanism, corresponds to its logic of incremental and reversible transformation (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 23, 44–48).

Civil society also pioneered tactical methods before the municipal pilot. Superblocks Leipzig e.V. and its forerunner initiatives organized Parking Day closures (2019–2021) and temporary interventions on Hildegardstraße and adjacent blocks, experimenting with diagonal filters, seating, and Pop-Up installations (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, pp. 30–36). These grassroots actions directly inspired and legitimized the later municipal pilot.

Leipzig demonstrates a tactical-first approach throughout, combining grassroots interventions with a municipal strategy that explicitly mandates tactical methods as the entry point to Superblock implementation, why this criterion is counted as fulfilled.

B.6: Degree of Permanence (Full)

The Hildegardstraße pilot was implemented as a tactical intervention, but the *Verkehrsuntersuchung* sets out a pathway to make it permanent. In Step 1 of the phased plan (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 45), the temporary diagonal closures on Hildegardstraße are to be replaced by fixed

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modal filters with permanent signage, thus consolidating the pilot into durable infrastructure. According to the implementation report of the City of Leipzig, this process has already begun, with provisional barriers converted into long-term installations under formal traffic regulation (Stadt Leipzig 2024a). Since there is a clear trajectory from tactical pilot to permanent infrastructure, this criterion is fulfilled.

8.2.4 C: Governance and Participation

C.1: Institutionalization (Absent)

Leipzig does not institutionalize Superblocks as a named model, but the commitment to circulation change, traffic calming, and public space reallocation are increasingly embedded in the city's statutory mobility frameworks. The *Stadtentwicklungsplan Verkehr und öffentlicher Raum* defines transport policy as city policy, with binding modal-split targets (27% walking, 20% cycling, 23% public transport by 2025) and a monitoring cycle every five years (Stadt Leipzig, Dezernat Stadtentwicklung und Bau 2015, p. 11). The *Mobilitätsstrategie 2030*, adopted 2018 through a ratified implementation plan (Stadt Leipzig 2020), further anchors sustainability goals within Leipzig's policy architecture, linking them explicitly to the city's climate emergency declaration and the Green City Plan. It introduces permanent structures in the Office for Transport and Civil Engineering (program management, cross-departmental coordination) and outlines communication, legal, and financial mechanisms to ensure continuity across planning cycles (Stadt Leipzig 2020).

The first extension of the *Mobilitätsstrategie 2030* (2023) confirms that Superblock-related measures are now part of the consolidated multi-year action plan. They are scheduled within the city's 2025/26 budget and assigned to the newly established specialist forum *Fachforum Mobilität*, which integrates municipal departments, political representatives, and civil society actors in monitoring and implementation (Stadt Leipzig 2023a).

In this way, the tactical and pilot-based Superblocks Leipzig is embedded in Leipzig's statutory planning and budgeting frameworks, ensuring its continuation in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarisdorf. What remains open, however, is whether Leipzig will scale the concept systemically across the city. At present, there are no institutional barriers to doing so, but also no explicit commitments to replicate the model beyond Leipzig-Ost. Since a city wide adoption of the Superblock as a tool has yet to occur the criterion is counted as absent.

C.2: Integration with Broader Policy (Partial)

The previously discussed criterion of Institutionalization shows that Leipzig's Superblock goals are consistent with broader mobility and climate strategies (Stadt Leipzig, Dezernat Stadtentwicklung und Bau 2015; Stadt Leipzig 2021), integration with other policy fields, however, remains limited.

The clearest external linkage to overarching strategies is the project's origin in the federal Post-Corona-Stadt program of the Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik (NSP), which provided funding for the Hildegardstraße pilot. In addition, the Bernard Gruppe plan grounds the interventions in § 45 Abs. 1b Nr. 5 StVO, the so-called Experimentierklausel, which authorizes

traffic authorities to introduce restrictions or modal filters in support of “orderly urban development” (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, p. 34). This legal basis connects the project to Germany’s national regulatory framework for traffic experiments and traffic calming.

Beyond these points, integration into wider strategies such as public health, social equity, or biodiversity is not explicit. While Superblocks Leipzig e.V. emphasizes values of inclusion, gender- and child-sensitive planning, and climate justice, these remain part of civil-society discourse rather than tied to codified municipal strategies.

Policy integration in Leipzig is therefore assessed as partial: connections exist through pandemic recovery funding and national traffic law, but broader integration with health, equity, or ecological strategies is absent.

C.3: Participation (Full)

Participation is central to the Leipzig Superblock process, though with different emphases in civil society, municipal planning, and scientific reflection.

At the institutional level, the *Projektbeirat* (project advisory board) functioned as the core arena of co-production. It brought together representatives of the city administration, city council, the UFZ, and civil society to negotiate goals, monitor progress, and guide the traffic concept (Haase and Schmidt 2024, pp. 41–48).

On the civic side, *Superblocks Leipzig e.V.* defines its mission explicitly in terms of democracy, co-production, and inclusion (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, p. 5). The organization aims to empower all social groups, prioritizing multilingual communication, gender- and child-sensitive planning, and accessibility regardless of educational background. It initiated tactical urbanism and co-production workshops before municipal adoption, organizing Parking Day closures, street festivals, *Straßenschulen* (street classrooms), *Mitmachforen* (participatory forums), and the mobile *Wunschbüro* (mobile office for ideas/requests), which together activated a broad spectrum of residents and fostered collective agency (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, pp. 5–6, 30–36).

On the municipal side, the concept for traffic calming prescribes that future traffic calmed areas and reallocated areas are to be implemented only after proactive outreach participation formats (on-site consultations with residents and businesses) (Stadt Leipzig 2024b, pp. 11–12). The synopsis of the 2023 *Forum Leipziger Osten* shows how feedback influenced design: businesses’ concerns about access led to an increase in loading zones from 3 to 6; residents’ requests for safe play led to the designation of a *Spielstraße* (play street) on Hedwigstraße and a pedestrian zone on Schulze-Delitzsch-Straße. Additionally calls for more greenery resulted in tree planting and drinking fountains commitments (Stadt Leipzig 2023b, pp. 5–14).

The *UFZ Report* highlights the experimental depth of this participation. Formats ranged from large-scale surveys and participatory forums to neighborhood-level interventions. The project board anchored city officials, civil society, and science, while continuous street-level dialogue created what the UFZ terms a urban living lab for co-production (Haase and Schmidt 2024, pp. 42–48). The report emphasizes that Leipzig’s participation reached a density far beyond usual planning practice, but also produced conflict, described as a “doppeltes Partizipationssparadoxon”: broader inclusion generates both more legitimacy and more contestation (Haase and Schmidt 2024, pp. 56–63).

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Leipzig thus demonstrates unusually comprehensive participatory practices, combining civic-led initiatives, municipal feedback loops, and scientific monitoring; participation can therefore be assessed as fully aligned with the criterion.

8.2.5 D: Systemic Integration and Learning

D.1: Indicator System (Absent) / D.2: Monitoring and Feedback Loop (Partial)

The Leipzig pilot was explicitly framed as a Reallabor, with observation, feedback, and adjustment built into the process. Monitoring was carried out through a mix of quantitative and qualitative tools: a large-scale online survey (May–Nov. 2023, 463 respondents)(Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, p. 106), a mobile Wunschbüro with 344 personal interviews, and participatory events (e.g. Mitmachforen, Straßenschule), all of which doubled as data collection instruments. (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024, pp. 72, 84–90)

Indicators were applied in practice, though not systematized in a municipal framework. The handbook *Auf die Straße, fertig, los!* outlines potential metrics for Superblocks, including traffic counts, air quality measurements, accident statistics, and surveys of perceived safety and quality of stay (Superblocks Leipzig e.V. 2024). In the Leipzig case, emphasis was placed on traffic volumes (especially through traffic), modal share, and subjective evaluations of safety and livability. These results were reported back to the Stadt Leipzig's Verkehrs- und Tiefbauamt and the Bernard Gruppe for integration into the formal traffic concept as documented (Stadt Leipzig 2023b).

However, unlike Barcelona's formalized indicator sets, Leipzig lacks a stable, institutionalized monitoring system with predefined thresholds for success. Indicators remain project-based and discontinuous, dependent on civil-society initiative and short-term research funding. The criterion for indicators is therefore absent, while monitoring is assessed as partial: meaningful practices were established, but without long-term institutional anchoring they remain provisional.

D.3: Network Orientation (Absent)

The Bernard Gruppe plan expands the pilot area from Hildegardstraße to cover the contiguous neighborhoods of Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarisdorf. The five-step implementation sequence provides internal connectivity, as well as linking to the surrounding infrastructure (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 44–48).

However, there are no explicit policy steps for citywide scaling. The concept is framed as a district-based intervention rather than part of a systematic network. The logic is consistent at the neighborhood scale, but systemic aspirations beyond the project area are missing.

D.4: Integration with Urban Fabric (Partial)

Within its defined scope, the plan ensures integration with the cycling network, public transport and pedestrian corridors, drawing on the preliminary traffic analyses performed (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 10–20). Stepwise measures include the designation of Ludwigstraße as a

Fahrradstraße, extended traffic-calmed zones, and greened neighborhood centers along Hedwig- and Hildegardstraße (Bernard Gruppe 2024b, pp. 44–48). These provide continuity for walking and cycling, creating an interdependent network at the district level.

According to current planning this connectivity will not stop at the project boundary. Notably, the area is directly bounded to the north by the railway corridor that forms the alignment of the Parkbogen Ost, a planned 8 km green cycling and walking route through eastern Leipzig (Stadt Leipzig 2017). The plan foresees two variants: a northern route on the disused railway tracks and a southern route along adjacent streets. While the traffic concept does not aim at coordination with the project, it is explicitly mentioned.

Integration with the surrounding urban fabric is strong at the district scale: cycling, walking, and transit are directly embedded into the plan, with stepwise measures providing internal continuity. External links, such as the Parkbogen Ost corridor, are acknowledged but not systematically coordinated. The criterion is therefore assessed as partial, reflecting solid local integration but only limited alignment with broader citywide networks.

8.3 Policy transfer and reinterpretation

The radar-chart for Leipzig (see 8.2) shows that the spatial dimensions of the framework transferred most closely when compared to the baseline criteria. The Hildegardstraße pilot and the subsequent traffic concept reproduce the perimeter–interior separation and, for a large portion of interior streets, established walking speed as the standard, going further than the Barcelona baseline. Only the reallocation of public space remained partial, constrained by the requirement to maintain a 4.5 m access lane for services and emergency vehicles.

Participation was unusually broad and clearly documented, involving civic actors, municipal planners, and scientific institutions. This enabled a genuine co-production of both the pilot and the rollout plan. Tactical interventions were central to the process and have already been consolidated into permanent measures, indicating a credible path toward permanence. The prominence of civic actors reflects a wider German trend, in which Superblock initiatives are typically spearheaded by civil-society organizations rather than by municipal administrations.

Monitoring was present but provisional. Surveys, interviews, and participatory formats provided valuable feedback, yet without a stable indicator system or predefined success thresholds learning remains fragile and initiative-dependent. In Dolowitz and Marsh terms, the transfer represents programmatic emulation without a policy-level evaluative infrastructure.

Institutional transfer was largely absent. The Superblock was not codified in statutory frameworks but instead carried forward by civil-society actors. The systemic layers that would anchor the project more broadly, such as the ecosystemic framework and vertical planning dimensions, were not incorporated into local planning processes. In practice, tactical and pilot interventions guided by the ideals of Superblocks Leipzig e.V. substituted for a missing systemic framework, producing a strong district-scale example but not a citywide program.

Overall, Leipzig exemplifies hybrid emulation. The city adopted Barcelona’s goals and core instruments, but adapted them through German traffic law (StVO §45(1b) “Experimentierklausel”) and local planning routines. It is not copying, since no network rollout or indicator regime exists. At the same time, it is more than loose inspiration because perimeter logic, legal

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speed standards, and circulation filters are materially in place. The result is two well-formed cells that stop at the district scale. The case shows how a model can be materially faithful at the level of the cell, yet non-systemic without a network plan and indicator backbone. Taken together, Leipzig demonstrates how the Superblock can be translated into a civic-led neighborhood intervention while losing coherence at the systemic level. It remains a persuasive district-scale experiment, but without a network strategy and codified evaluative framework it risks remaining an isolated cluster of interventions rather than evolving into a contiguous mesh.

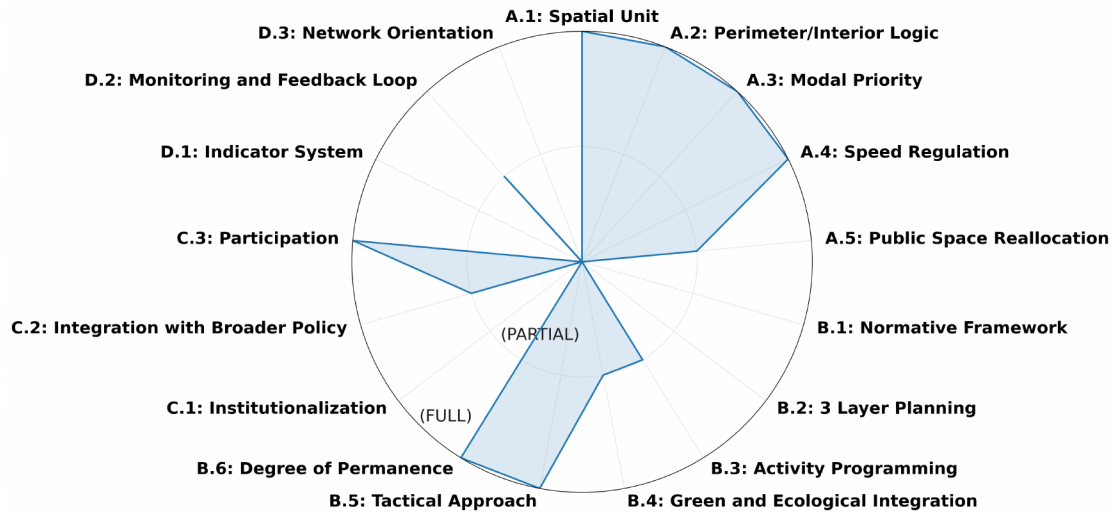
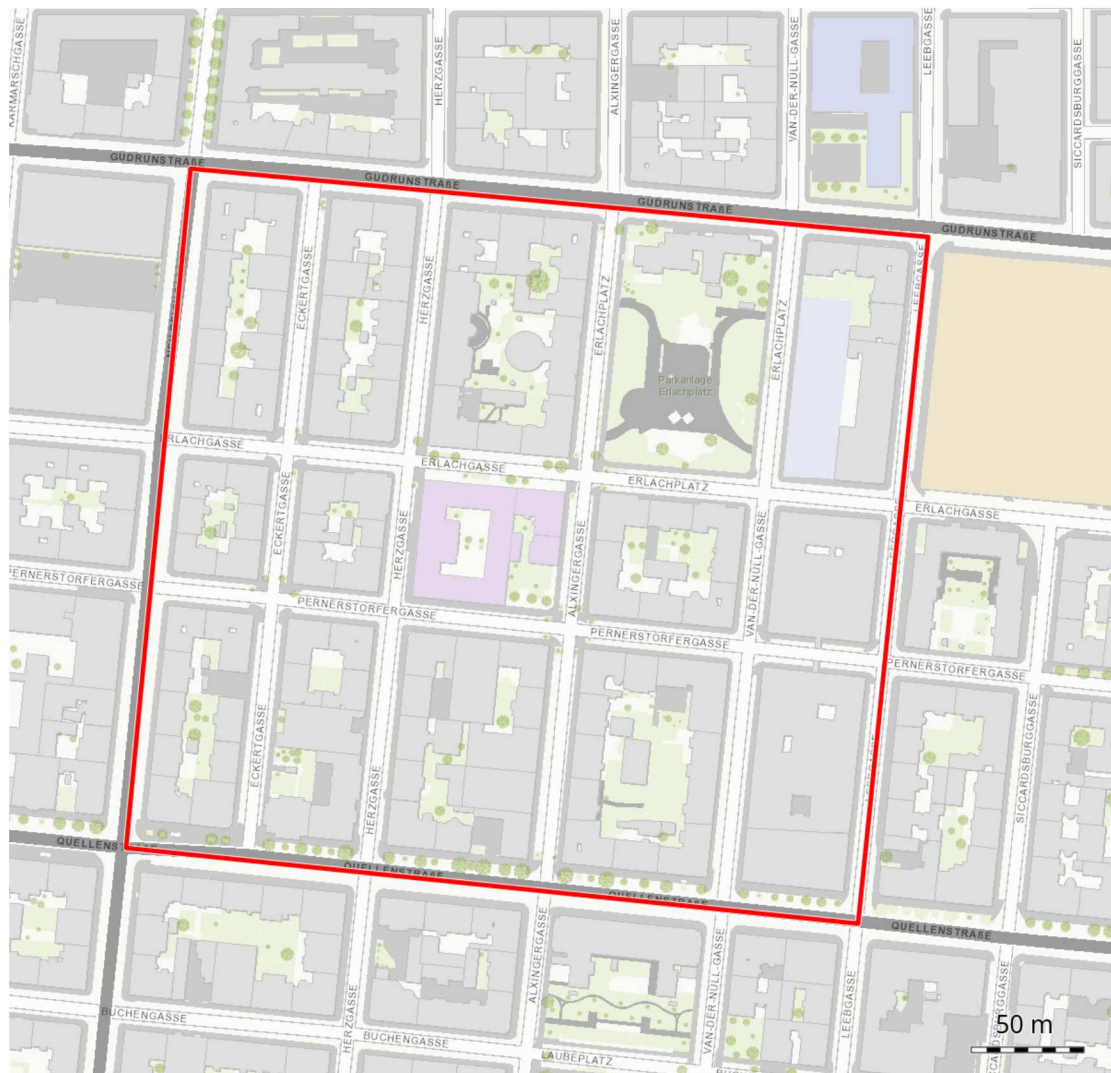


Figure 8.2: Framework analysis Leipzig, scores for individual points.

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Figure 9.1: Outline of the Supergrätzl Favoriten

Vienna is the largest of the three case studies, with a population of just over 2 million resi-

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dents (MA 23 2024, p. 66) spread across 23 districts.

The 10th district, Favoriten, where Vienna's first Superblock pilot "Supergätzl Favoriten" is located, is the city's most populous district with around 220,000 inhabitants, making it larger than many medium-sized European cities on its own (MA 23 2024, p. 300). Demographically, Vienna is also among the most diverse cities in Europe: approximately 45,4 % of the population has a migration background, with the share being higher in Favoriten (54.8%) (MA 23 2024, p. 67). The demographic composition of Favoriten is similar to the one in Leipzig: Relatively young population compared to the rest of the city. The district combines high levels of social and cultural diversity accompanied by socioeconomic challenges, including lower incomes and limited political representation, since large shares of residents lack voting rights in local or national elections (Neier 2023).

Vienna's institutional setting provides a distinctive backdrop for the Superblock experiment. As both a city and a federal state (Bundesland), Vienna enjoys a relatively high degree of autonomy and resources compared to other European cities (Kazepov and Verwiebe 2021, p. 11). Since the 1920s era of "Red Vienna," the city has pursued socially inclusive urban development, anchored in a strong tradition of municipal housing. Today, over 1800 council housing complexes accommodate one in four residents, a policy designed to secure social mix and prevent residential segregation (Neier 2023, p. 3). This legacy has given Vienna an international reputation as a "just city," even as pressures of population growth, liberalization of rent controls, and migration have begun to create insider-outsider divides in housing access (Litschauer and Friesenecker 2021, p. 63).

At the same time, Vienna is confronted with problems of environmental injustice. A recent spatial analysis found that ethnic minorities are disproportionately segregated from access to urban vegetation, with local hotspots of inequality concentrated in Favoriten and Ottakring (Neier 2023, p. 8). While the district overall has a share of 35.1% of green space (excluding agricultural spaces) (MA 23 2024, p. 300), the project area itself has only 4.7%, mainly concentrated in a single park (Erlachpak) (LAUT 2021a).

These areas combine dense populations, high shares of foreign-born residents, and lower vegetation cover, intensifying vulnerability to climate-related risks such as urban heat. It is precisely in this context that the *Supergätzl Favoriten* emerges as a test case. By integrating traffic calming, redistribution of public space, and new greening strategies, it seeks to address both climate adaptation and questions of social justice in one of Vienna's most most pressured districts.

9.1 Vienna Case: Limitations of Source Access

This study relies primarily on the analysis of policy and publicly available planning documents. In the case of Vienna, access to planning material is structurally limited: official plans are not systematically published or updated online. Furthermore, full access often requires in-person consultation at the planning office and in other Superblock related cases disclosure has only occurred after legal proceedings (wien.ORF.at 2023). As a result, the analytical reconstruction of the *Supergätzl* relies on a partial documentary record, consisting of the SUPERBE research project, a small number of publicly available brochures and strategy papers, and secondary

analyses in peer-reviewed studies.

This reliance should not only be seen as a methodological shortcoming but also as a reflection of Vienna's governance practice. As Sepehr and Felt (2023) show in the context of smart city policies, Viennese policy documents often function as tacit governing devices, setting the terms of urban transformation while largely excluding citizens' voices. Felt and Sepehr (2024) further show that participation is typically reduced to "projectified" experiments, inviting citizens into pre-framed agendas rather than enabling them to shape priorities. The limited accessibility of primary material, combined with these dynamics, indicates not only the evidentiary constraints of this study but also points to the city's structural opacity and the contested legitimacy of the Supergrätzl project within public discourse

9.2 Project Overview

Vienna's engagement with the Superblock model started in research and was soon after acknowledged politically. On the research side, the exploratory project SUPERBE (2018–2020) tested the transferability of Barcelona's Superblocks to Austrian conditions through a scientific workflow of literature review, GIS-based identification of candidate areas, and scenario modeling of mobility, energy, CO₂, and public-space effects (Frey et al. 2020, p. 9). Using an extensive list of criteria (e.g. street-network morphology, public-transport accessibility, tree cover, access to green space, modal split, and population density) SUPERBE prioritized three Gründerzeit quarters for the implementation of a Superblock pilot. Neubau, Favoriten, and Hernals, were identified as sites of high density, low greenery, and substantial car exposure (Frey et al. 2020, p. 46). For each, the project team developed implementation concepts and modeled impacts. In Favoriten, for example, modeling suggested daily savings of $\sim 738kg$ of CO₂ and $\sim 2644kWh$ of energy by shifting short car trips to walking and public transport (Frey et al. 2020, p. 75). SUPERBE thus functioned as a decision-support tool, not a blueprint, demonstrating co-benefits and design levers for a climate-aligned transfer.

In parallel, the 2020 Viennese coalition government program by the parties SPÖ–NEOS ("Fortschrittskoalition für Wien") created the political mandate to pilot the model. It rebranded the concept locally as the *Supergrätzl* and framed it as a designated traffic-calmed area that may only be accessed by vehicles for access to local destinations and that priority is given to traffic calming, de-sealing, and greening of streets around educational institutions (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs. Landesorganisation Wien and - Das Neue Österreich 2020, pp. 160–161). By this definition the Viennese government linked the concept explicitly to greening and unsealing. Taken together with the ecological criteria in SUPERBE, this can be read as a localization of the Barcelona model into Vienna's neighborhood and climate-policy discourse.

While academic studies focus on the municipal pilot, project reports highlight additional civic initiatives that have emerged or taken up the Superblock. The Radlobby "Supergrätzl Basemap" documents both official and bottom-up Superblock-like efforts across the city, while in Lichtental (Alsergrund), a Local Agenda 21 group developed a neighborhood Supergrätzl proposal using citizen-science traffic counts, co-creative workshops, and AR/VR visualizations, activities lightly supported within the TuneOurBlock living-lab framework (Dieckelmann et al. 2024, pp. 10–11).

9.3 Framework alignment

9.3.1 A: Spatial Structure

A.1: Spatial unit (Partial)

In SUPERBE, the superblock was formalized as a flexible planning cell rather than a rigid 16 ha template. Candidate units were delineated by higher-order streets and public transport lines, then filtered by edge lengths of 200–400 m and areas between 4 and 16 ha (Frey et al. 2020, p. 40). The project explicitly highlighted that sites should be adapted to the irregular structure of *Gründerzeit* (founders period) districts and coordinated with district-level planning and long-term feasibility. A Supergrätzl information brochure later addressed this principle more broadly: it defined comparable planning cells in the range of 7–21 ha, while also retaining the guideline of edge lengths between 200 and 400 m and two to six cross streets per edge as orientation for design and feasibility checks (Deistler et al. 2022, p. 10). The sanctioned Supergrätzl Favoriten area demonstrates this approach in practice: it comprises about 15 blocks with an area of 9.5 ha (LAUT 2021b).

SUPERBE and later city documents defined planning cells using criteria consistent with the Superblock model (edge lengths, enclosure by higher-order streets, integration with transit), but the realized pilot in Favoriten falls below the archetypal 16 ha cell size. Vienna thus applies elements of the spatial logic without reproducing the full basic unit. The criterion is therefore only partially met.

A.2: Perimeter / interior Circulation and A.3: Modal Priority (Full)

SUPERBE identified the separation of perimeter and interior streets as the transferable core of the Superblock model. Through-traffic is to be removed from the interior, while perimeter streets carry motorized flows. Inside the planning cells, access remains possible for residents, deliveries, and emergency services (Frey et al. 2020, pp. 52–53). To translate this logic to Vienna, SUPERBE proposed the reclassification of interior streets as *Wohnstraßen* or *Begegnungszonen*. These designations allow pedestrians to use the carriageway freely, restrict motor vehicles to low speeds, and give priority to walking and cycling. Implementation concepts detailed level-surface designs with dedicated frontage zones for pedestrians and greening, narrowed one-way carriageways, and provision for cycling against the direction of travel. Access for service and emergency vehicles was secured by checking turning radii (Frey et al. 2020, p. 54).

The Favoriten pilot applied this approach partially: a new pedestrian zone in Herzgasse calms a former through-route, while four diagonal filters block cut-through traffic and create small squares. Raised surfaces are planned but not yet built. Pilot documents explicitly frame these measures as supporting active mobility and climate adaptation (Deistler et al. 2022)

The criteria are fulfilled. The pilot demonstrates perimeter/interior separation and modal priority by de-prioritizing motor traffic in favor of walking, cycling, and public space quality.

A.4: Speed regulation (Partial)

In SUPERBE, speed reduction in the interiors was proposed as part of the exploratory concept rather than a binding regulation. The study identified Wohnstraßen (walking speed) and Begegnungszonen (20 km/h) as appropriate legal designations, but presented them only as potential instruments. To encourage compliance, the implementation concepts illustrated narrowed carriageways, raised crossings, and chicanes as design cues, without constituting enforceable standards (Frey et al. 2020, p. 54).

The Supergrätzl brochure later described interiors as Tempo-30-Zonen with options for Wohnstraßen, Begegnungszonen, or pedestrian zones, combined with raised surfaces and curb extensions (Deistler et al. 2022, p. 14).

The fulfillment of the criterion can be classified as partial: the speed reduction is framed as essential, yet it remains unclear how interior streets will be regulated in the final concept and which designations will apply.

A.5: Public Space Reallocation (Partial)

SUPERBE highlighted public space gains as a major co-benefit of the Superblock model. The concepts illustrated the removal of traffic lanes, sidewalk widening, and the conversion of parking into plazas, play streets, and green surfaces, with cross-sections showing how carriageway reductions could free space for trees, seating, and cooling elements (Lorenz et al. 2020, pp. 50–54).

In the Favoriten pilot, these ideas were applied most visibly in the creation of a new pedestrian zone in Herzgasse. This intervention calmed a former through-traffic axis, improved safety at the MS Herzgasse school entrance, and created a forecourt space that doubled as a site for participation (Stadt Wien, MA18 Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung et al. 2022).

Both SUPERBE and the Favoriten pilot show a clear intention to reallocate traffic space to public use. The criterion is partially met, as actual interventions have so far been limited to selected streets and there are no binding plans for a more comprehensive reallocation.

9.3.2 B: Ecosystemic Framework and Public Realm

B.1: Normative Framework (Absent)

SUPERBE did not adopt BCNecologia's ecosystemic urbanism as a binding framework but worked with a set of parallel goals aligned with Vienna's planning discourse. The project linked the Superblock model to themes of climate protection, energy reduction, and public-space quality by selecting corresponding metrics. This approach, however, positioned Superblocks less as an ecological master framework and more as a decision-support tool demonstrating co-benefits.

As mentioned above, at the political level, the coalition paper for 2020 presents the Supergrätzl as contribution to improving the quality of public space in front of schools (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, Landesorganisation Wien and - Das Neue Österreich 2020). Academic studies note that the selection of Favoriten was also driven by equity goals: modeling showed that health and climate benefits would be greatest in lower-income districts with higher shares of migrant residents, and the project was reframed as a redistributive intervention to improve

living conditions in socially disadvantaged areas (Brenner et al. 2024). This equity framing ties Supergrätzl to Vienna's broader planning tradition of redistribution, situating the pilot not only within climate strategies but also within the city's socio-political culture.

While these connections point towards larger normative ambitions, there is no explicit written evidence that a comprehensive framework comparable to ecosystemic urbanism or a set of defined principles have been adopted.

B.2: 3 Layer Planning (Absent)

SUPERBE concentrated on the redistribution of surface street space, without developing any systematic integration of underground infrastructure or rooftop/façade layers.

The Favoriten pilot likewise remained focused on surface-level measures such as pedestrian zones, tree planting, micro-open spaces, and temporary furnishings, with no evidence of coordinated interventions across underground or rooftop levels (Deistler et al. 2022).

The Viennese adaptation addresses the surface realm extensively but does not demonstrate vertical integration across underground, surface, and rooftop layers.

B.3: Activity Programming (Partial)

SUPERBE envisioned Superblocks primarily as opportunities to technically reconfigure street space. Its implementation concepts focused on reallocating carriageway width through level-surface designs, frontage zones, narrowed lanes, and greening strips, and they suggested possible ancillary uses such as a "Bistrozone" (space for cafes and restaurants) along building edges (Frey et al. 2020, pp. 50–51). These measures pointed to the potential for neighbourhood-oriented use of reclaimed space, but the study did not commit to activity programming in the sense of organising play, cultural events, or commercial functions.

The Supergrätzl Favoriten pilot put this principle into practice with temporary programming during the pilot phase. The most visible example was the Supergrätzl-Straßenfest, which staged the future pedestrian zone across Herzgasse, Pernerstorfergasse, Alxingergasse, and Erlachgasse. Activities included workshops and guided walks to collect local input, children's cycling courses, community cooking, and other leisure offerings, demonstrating how the street could host civic and cultural functions. Other pilot measures added temporary seating and play furniture, creating immediate opportunities for interaction and stay (Stadt Wien, MA18 Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung et al. 2022, Deistler et al. 2022). This indicates partial alignment: while activity programming was demonstrated during the pilot, it remains unclear whether such measures will be sustained or institutionalized in later phases.

B.4: Green and ecological integration (Partial)

SUPERBE illustrated how carriageway reductions and unsealing could create space for trees and new green surfaces, measures expected to improve the microclimate (Frey et al. 2020, pp. 43, 50–54). Candidate sites were also evaluated using indicators such as tree cover and access to green space.

The later Supergrätzl information brochure reinforced this framing, linking unsealing and greening to wellbeing and local climate benefits in dense *Gründerzeit* quarters (Deistler et al. 2022). At the citywide scale, the *Smart Klima City Strategie Wien 2022* adds broader ambitions such as sponge-city principles, rainwater retention, and facade or roof greening (Deistler and Homeier 2022, pp. 83–87), but these remain strategic directions not tied to the Supergrätzl pilot.

The Favoriten pilot itself concentrated on temporary circulation changes and participatory events. While concept documents foresaw new trees, unsealing, micro-open spaces, and cooling elements, these were part of the planned structural phase and not implemented during the pilot (Stadt Wien 2022, pp. 15–16; Stadt Wien, MA18 Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung et al. 2022).

The Supergrätzl concept and pilot emphasize tree planting, shade, and unsealing, but there is no information on water cycles or biodiversity, leaving these aspects unaddressed, why this criterion is qualified as partially fulfilled.

B.5: Tactical Approach (Full)

SUPERBE suggested that circulation changes and space recovery could first be tested with low-cost, temporary measures before structural redesign. This included the use of filters, markings, and provisional furniture as a way to trial circulation concepts and reclaim street space. The project also distinguished between three stages of the superblock during its implementation process: (1) preliminary experimental implementation (*tactical urbanism*); (2) short-term trials without permanent features (*Barcelona testrun*); and (3) permanent implementation with permanent restructuring (*Barcelona structural redesign*). In this way, tactical measures were included as the first stage, and partially the second stage of implementation (Frey et al. 2020, pp. 38–39).

The Favoriten pilot explicitly adopted this approach. During the pilot phase, diagonal filters were marked with paint and temporary furniture, the new pedestrian zone in Herzgasse was furnished with mobile elements, and workshops and exhibitions were held directly in the re-allocated spaces to test their use (Stadt Wien, MA18 Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung et al. 2022).

The tactical criterion is fully met. Tactical interventions were central to both SUPERBE's staged model and the Favoriten pilot, using paint, furniture, and temporary installations to trial circulation changes and activate participation.

B.6: Degree of Permanence (Full)

SUPERBE conceptualized implementation as a staged process, beginning with temporary tactical interventions, followed by short-term trials, and culminating in permanent redesign.

According to city reports, the Supergrätzl Favoriten has now entered its structural construction phase, moving towards permanent redesign of streets and public space (Stadt Wien 2025). With the Supergrätzl Favoriten entering its structural construction phase, the transition from provisional to durable works is clearly established, marking full alignment with the criterion

9.3.3 C: Governance and Participation

C.1: Institutionalization (Partial)

At the city level, the Supergrätzl is only weakly institutionalized. It appears in the *Wiener Klimafahrplan* (2022) as one among several measures for traffic calming and safety improvements to help achieve CO₂ reduction goals, and in the *Smart Klima City Strategie Wien* (2022) as an example within the broader category of comprehensive traffic calming (Erker et al. 2022, p. 54, Deistler and Homeier 2022, p. 57). Both strategies mention the model only in passing, as an illustrative tool rather than a dedicated statutory framework.

At the federal level, however, the *Austrian 2030 Mobility Master Plan* (2021) explicitly names superblocks as a best practice example of forward-looking traffic calming, alongside concepts such as the 15-minute city and public space reallocation. This national reference lends additional legitimacy to Vienna's pilot projects, embedding the concept into Austria's overarching climate and mobility strategy, even if not mandated in local statutory plans (Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology 2022, p. 22). Institutionalization is therefore assessed as partial. At the city level, the Supergrätzl is referenced in climate and smart city strategies only as an illustrative measure, not as a programmatic framework, while at the federal level the Mobility Master Plan 2030 explicitly cites Superblocks as best practice, providing a national anchor but without binding effect locally.

C.2: Integration with Broader Policy (Partial)

The Viennese Superblock plan is not presented as an independent urban paradigm, but as a practical instrument to advance city strategies on climate, mobility, health, and equity.

SUPERBE (2020) framed the model as a decision-support tool embedded in climate and energy targets. Candidate areas were assessed with indicators such as CO₂ emissions, energy demand, and tree cover, positioning Superblocks as a means to adapt statutory goals on emissions reduction and microclimate improvement.

Municipal brochures (Deistler et al. 2022, Stadt Wien, MA18 Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung et al. 2022) likewise present the concept as part of Vienna's climate adaptation agenda, highlighting unsealing, greening, shading, and cooling to align with the Urban Heat Island Strategy (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, MA 22 – Umweltschutz 2015) and the *Klimafahrplan*.

The Favoriten pilot emphasized safety around schools and livability for families, linking the model to public health and child-friendly city policies.

Politically, the project was reframed after 2020 as a redistributive intervention, prioritizing a working-class district with a high share of migrant residents, connecting it to Vienna's equity-oriented planning tradition (Brenner et al. 2024).

Biodiversity and broader ecological integration remain weak. While SUPERBE modeled gains in tree cover and permeable surfaces, these were framed mainly in terms of microclimate adaptation.

Integration with broader policy is therefore assessed as partial. The Supergrätzl is framed in relation to climate adaptation, livability, health, and equity agendas, and has been politically reframed through an equity lens, but these connections remain thematic rather than codified through explicit cross-references.

C.3: Participation (Partial)

SUPERBE framed participation as accompanying pilot projects through “information, consultation, and cooperation”, without extending to co-decision (Frey et al. 2020, p. 76).

The Supergrätzl Favoriten pilot broadened this with a range of participatory events initiated by partners including the Bezirksvorstehung Favoriten, Mobilitätsagentur Wien, Wiener Gesundheitsförderung (WIG), WieNeu+, Kinderfreunde, GB, and Lokale Agenda 21*. These included outdoor exhibitions, workshops using ground-plan markings, and temporary furniture to test street uses, as well as child- and youth-oriented formats such as the *Physik-Mobil* experiment station (Stadt Wien, MA18 Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung et al. 2022).

Brenner et al. (2024) add critical insight from interviews: in step one, traffic rerouting and parking removal were decided in a conventional top-down mode by planners and district politicians, with residents merely informed afterwards (p. 10). In step two, participation was channeled through multipliers who helped co-design uses of freed-up public space (pp. 10–11). While this expanded the repertoire of participatory formats, the level of local residents’ influence remains unclear. There is no public documentation showing whether inputs from residents directly shaped design or regulatory decisions, leaving the process lacking transparency.

The criterion is partially fulfilled. The pilot featured a diverse set of engagement activities and outreach, but participation was structured around multipliers, not residents directly, and the actual decision-making power of local inhabitants remains unclear.

9.3.4 D: Systemic Integration and Learning

D.1: Indicator System (Partial)

SUPERBE applied a structured set of quantitative indicators in its modeling, including modal split, vehicle-kilometers travelled (VKT) avoided, CO₂ emissions, energy use, tree cover, and public-space allocation (Frey et al. 2020, p. 78). These metrics were used to compare candidate sites and estimate co-benefits.

The Favoriten pilot, however, does not define a systematic indicator framework. Project materials refer only to broad goals such as safety, stay quality, greening, and climate adaptation, without linking them to measurable metrics. The criterion is (weakly) partially fulfilled. SUPERBE demonstrated the use of indicators for planning and comparison, but the pilot phase lacks a transparent monitoring framework with defined performance metrics.

D.2: Monitoring and Feedback Loop (Partial)

In the Supergrätzl Favoriten pilot, feedback was gathered during the temporary interventions through exhibitions, workshops, and surveys aimed at capturing local reactions to new street layouts and uses (Deistler et al. 2022). These formats allowed residents to comment on design elements, but they were event-based rather than embedded in a systematic monitoring framework.

Academic research has provided some evaluation, for example, Brenner et al. (2024) applied transport modeling and health assessment to estimate potential outcomes of the Favoriten Su-

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perblock. These analyses demonstrate possible sustainability impacts but were conducted independently of municipal monitoring.

There is no evidence of a structured municipal system of reporting, adaptive auditing, or iterative evaluation directly linked to the pilot. No indicator-based monitoring cycle has been published that would allow systematic learning and scaling across districts.

The criterion fulfillment is therefore assessed as partial: feedback formats and external evaluations existed, but systematic monitoring and adaptive management remain absent.

D.3: Network Orientation (Absent)

SUPERBE framed Superblocks in Vienna as comparable planning cells but did not develop a citywide network plan. The GIS-based screening identified multiple potential areas (Neubau, Favoriten, Hernals) where the model could be tested, and the report emphasized the desirability of coordinated implementation across districts. However, no interlinked rollout sequence or systemic expansion schedule was elaborated.

Vienna's subsequent *Supergrätzl* framework also lacks a network logic. The 2020 coalition agreement mandated pilots, but without a district-by-district plan or milestones for expansion. The brochures and concept documents position the *Supergrätzl* as a neighborhood-scale intervention, often around schools or green deficits, but do not set out how multiple units would be connected into a contiguous pedestrian, cycling, or green network (Deistler et al. 2022, pp. 10–11).

The Favoriten pilot (9.5 ha) is to date the only implemented unit. While participatory materials describe the project as a starting point, there is no documented sequence for scaling to other quarters. Connectivity with broader walking and cycling networks is noted in general terms (opening one-way streets, adding bike parking), but not as part of a systematic low-traffic cell network (LAUT 2021b).

Brenner et al. (2024) mention that other districts have allocated funding for possible Superblock experiments, but that progression of these projects remains uncertain. Unlike Barcelona, where Superblocks form part of a city-wide programmatic strategy, Vienna's adaptation remains local and exploratory (Brenner et al. 2024, p. 10).

Vienna's adaptation identifies suitable neighborhood cells and demonstrates one pilot, but neither SUPERBE, nor municipal planning documents establish a network orientation or rollout plan comparable to the systemic grid logic envisioned in Barcelona.

D.4: Integration with Urban Fabric (Partial)

SUPERBE defined candidate planning cells along Hauptstraßen and ÖV-Linien (tram/bus), ensuring a basic fit with the existing street and public transport network (Frey et al. 2020, pp. 40–41). Its evaluation also included indicators such as tree cover and access to green space, linking site selection to the surrounding ecological context. The Favoriten pilot framed the *Supergrätzl* as a “bicycle-friendly island” that offers an alternative to heavily trafficked perimeter roads and a potential starting point for wider cycling improvements (Stadt Wien 2022). While this shows sensitivity to immediate surroundings, systematic integration with city-wide cycle routes, green corridors, or neighboring planning projects is not documented. Integration with

the existing public transport and ecological structure is evident, and the pilot acknowledges connections to surrounding arterial roads. Yet broader alignment with city-wide cycling or green infrastructure networks, or neighboring development areas, remains weak leading this to be classified as partially aligned.

9.4 Policy transfer and reinterpretation

Since the material is relatively scarce, the transfer analysis for Vienna remains limited and must be read with caution. The Supergrätzl Favoriten nevertheless illustrates that the core spatial logics of the Superblock can be reproduced (see Figure 9.2). The perimeter–interior separation is established, modal priority is implemented through the reclassification of interior streets, and tactical trials have been consolidated into structural redesign, most visibly along Herzgasse. At the same time, the spatial unit remains slightly below the archetypal size, speed regimes are inconsistently applied, and public space reallocation is only partial.

The ecosystemic dimensions are largely absent: neither a codified normative framework nor three-layer planning has been adopted, while ecological integration is restricted to tree planting, shading, and surface-level unsealing. Participation was diverse but largely project-based, with limited transparency regarding its influence on regulatory decisions.

Institutionalization remains partial, as the Supergrätzl is mentioned in climate and smart city strategies and in the federal Mobility Master Plan 2030, but without statutory force or a citywide rollout. Indicators and monitoring were employed in the SUPERBE study to compare candidate sites, yet the pilot itself lacks a stable evaluative framework, and no network orientation has been defined beyond Favoriten.

Taken together, Vienna demonstrates a credible translation of the Superblock at the level of a single cell, but with weak systemic anchoring. Without codified indicators and a citywide rollout strategy, the Supergrätzl risks remaining a persuasive neighborhood intervention rather than serving as a building block for systemic transformation.

An additional feature of the Vienna case is the dual dynamic in the translation process. The municipality acted as the main mover, embedding the Supergrätzl within Vienna's planning culture, while scientists and research consortia provided a technocratic lens through modeling and scenario analysis. This created two complementary but also contrasting modes of interpretation. On the one hand, the project reflects Vienna's established planning tradition, often described as top-down and redistributive, with the Social Democrats pursuing a "politics of small steps": a long-term, multi-staged approach that privileges compromise and incremental change over rapid systemic transformation (Brenner et al. 2024, p. 8). On the other hand, the scientific input added a strong, technical framing, oriented towards indicators and modeling, but with limited attention to participation principles, since these fell outside the scope of the research design. This duality illustrates how the model was adapted to the local planning culture and simultaneously filtered through an academic lens, reinforcing Vienna's incremental, technocratic mode of translation.

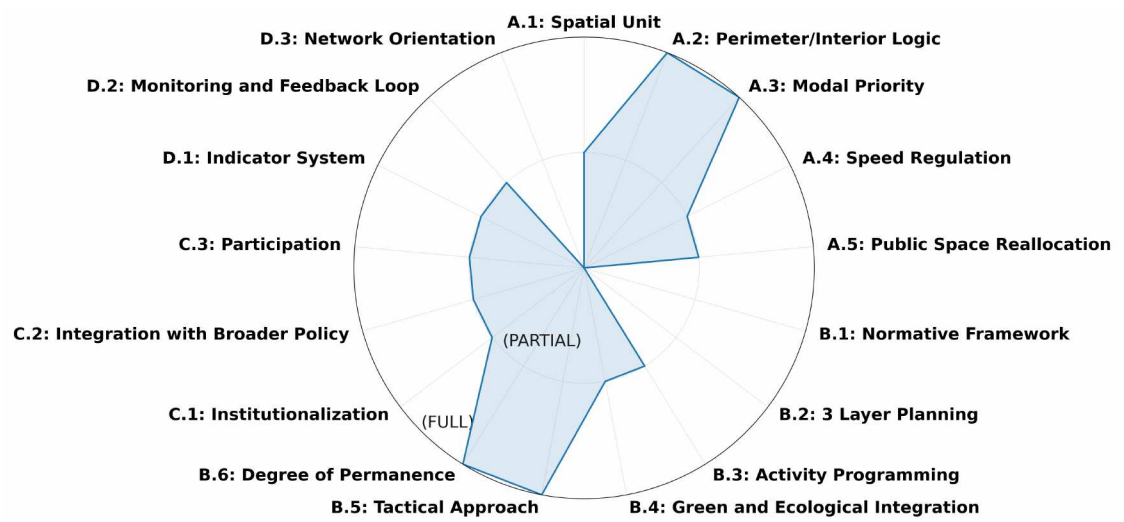


Figure 9.2: Framework analysis Vienna, cores for individual points.

10 Comparative Reflections and Outlook

10.1 Framework Discussion

Before turning to the comparative analysis, this section reflects on the performance of the evaluative framework itself. This thesis set out to define a framework adapted from the baseline model of the Barcelona Superblock, as established in Chapter 6.

The first test was its systemic application in Vitoria-Gasteiz. Here it became clear that the finely grained categories did not always fit the differing levels of analysis scope: at the level of a single superblock the categories worked neatly. By contrast, the systemic application was more problematic because it had to accommodate three tiered intervention levels within one discussion, which introduced ambiguity the framework was not designed to resolve.

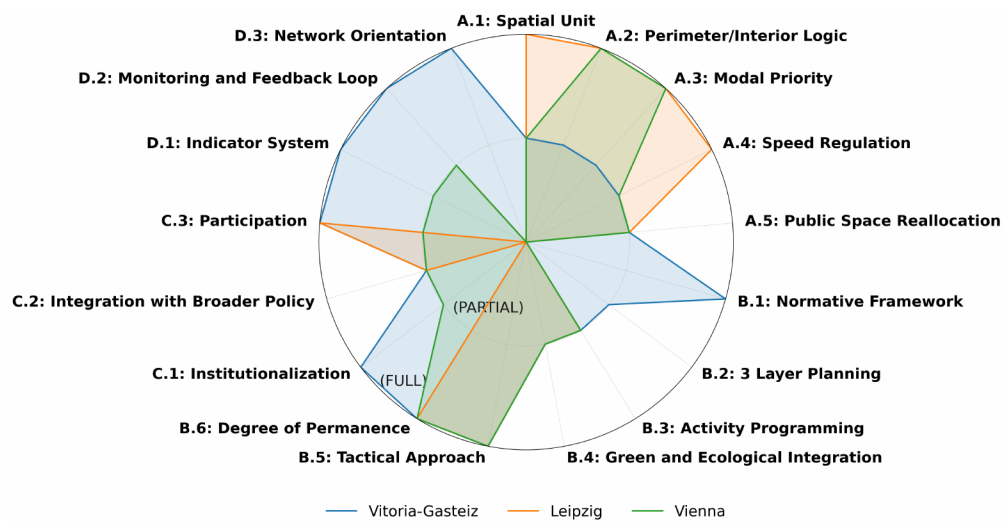
Where the framework fell short was in the broader categorization. Connections and pre-conditions that make sense in a fully developed systemic model proved less useful in early pilot stages, for example when examining existing monitoring or feedback loops. Other categories were too fluid for reliable assessment. For instance, permanence is difficult to apply: tactical interventions are by design not permanent, and their intent is not easily measurable. Similarly, activity programming attempted to integrate the social component, but in practice it could only be captured indirectly; a more accurate assessment would require further empirical studies. The analysis also relies on an established paper trail of policy documents. Where such documentation is absent, more explorative approaches, including information-confirming interviews, would be necessary to clarify gaps.

In relation to the research questions, the framework therefore helped to clarify which elements of the Barcelona Superblock travel most readily, above all the spatial logics and tactical tools, and which are more fragile, such as the ecosystemic framework, indicator systems, and network logic. In this sense, the checklist function proved useful in mapping alignment and identifying gaps. At the same time, the added perspectives remained largely interpretative. This does not invalidate the approach but shows that the framework is less suited to processual aspects: it can point to where elements are missing, yet the explanation of why they are absent requires further research.

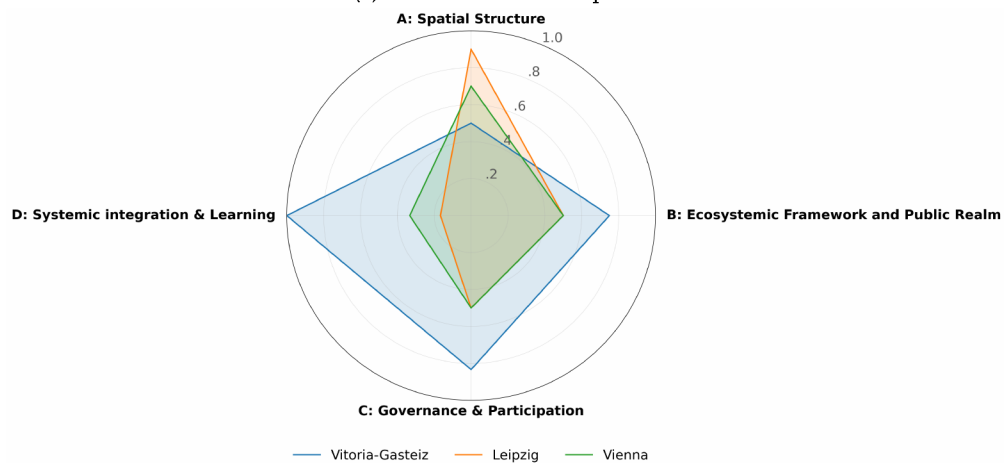
Finally, these limitations are compounded by the fact that Barcelona itself has moved away from the systemic cell logic toward the Green Axis model. The typology of models introduced in Chapter 6 was intended to address this evolution, but it nevertheless raises the question of whether the archetype remains the most relevant baseline for transfer, or whether subsequent iterations should also be considered. The framework is thus strongest in assessing fidelity and systemic alignment, but less capable of capturing divergent, innovative, or processual elements that fall outside the predefined indicators.

10.2 Cross Case Analysis

In this section, the focus shifts from the individual case studies to what can be learned from overlaying the results of the respective framework analysis. The radar chart in Figure 10.1b makes the contrasts visible at a glance: Vitoria-Gasteiz demonstrates the highest degree of alignment across categories, Leipzig performs strongly at the spatial and participatory levels but shows only weak institutionalization and systemic anchoring, and Vienna reproduces the spatial and tactical pathway but achieves only partial institutionalization. Taken together, these patterns underline that while all three projects translate the Superblock at the level of the cell, they diverge markedly in how far they embed the systemic and evaluative layers that make the model more than a localized intervention (See Figure 10.1b).



(a) Scores for individual points.



(b) Scores across category.

Figure 10.1: Framework analysis - Comparison

10.2.1 A: Spatial Structure

On the structural level, the comparison shows that the basic cell logic of the Superblock is consistently transferred. As discussed earlier, the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz skews the results, since alignment varies across the different levels of supermanzanas.

A distinctive issue arises in the definition of the spatial unit across Vienna, Vitoria-Gasteiz, and Leipzig. The morphological dimension is decisive here: while a block structure is retained in both Leipzig and Vienna, the conditions differ. In Vienna, the Gründerzeit layout does not fully correspond to the cell layout defined in the Archetype, but the parameters developed in the SUPERBE study. In Leipzig the spatial logic could be reproduced with higher fidelity. By contrast, the radial and irregular layout of Vitoria-Gasteiz's inner city diverges most strongly from BCNecologia's concept of a consistent cell structure, producing the widest variation in unit size. This suggests that in future assessments the role of block size and urban morphology should be evaluated more systematically.

Beyond morphology, the analysis raises a deeper question about transferability. Rueda's Archetype postulated the 400 × 400 m cell as the basic building block, but the cases show that this dimension is neither universally applicable nor always treated as essential. In Vienna and Vitoria-Gasteiz, cells smaller than the archetypal size have been accepted as valid units. Such adjustments can be a necessary technical response to dense or irregular fabrics where a strict grid is impractical, but they also raise the risk that the model's coherence erodes if the size criterion is loosened too far.

In this respect, Vienna and Leipzig illustrate two contrasting pathways. In Leipzig, the scope of the pilot in Leipzig-Ost was selected by a citizen initiative and subsequently translated into technical form by specialist consultants. Here the cell logic was reproduced with relatively high fidelity to the archetype. In Vienna, by contrast, the definition of the unit was first modeled through indicators developed by academics and practitioners within the SUPERBE research project. This process resulted in candidate areas that were about half the size of a standard superblock. Only in the later stage, when the Favoriten site was selected for implementation, did considerations of social equity begin to play a decisive role. These contrasts suggest that local actor knowledge may at times provide a more appropriate basis for defining the spatial scope of a superblock than reliance on predefined or modeled criteria.

Public space reallocation constitutes another difficult parameter. Assessing gains against BCNecologia's 70% benchmark would require a consistent methodology for measuring and classifying public space. None of the policy documents in the three cases offer a systematic or quantifiable way to translate this target into practice. The reasons may be partly technical: public space itself is difficult to identify and categorize, particularly in borderline cases such as semi-open spaces, privately owned plazas, or areas where access depends on consumption. But the issue is also conceptual. In many adaptations, the production of public space is not addressed as a distinct and measurable goal, but instead treated as a secondary effect of traffic calming. Vitoria-Gasteiz represents a partial exception, since the PMSEP explicitly codifies public space recovery and links it to indicators. Yet here too, the absence of a clear classification of public space limits comparability and makes it difficult to assess how far the benchmark of extensive reallocation is actually being achieved.

If public space reallocation is not declared as a central target, it risks being relegated to a

byproduct of traffic calming. This directly contradicts Rueda's foundation, where the 70–30% reallocation of space achieved by rerouting traffic was framed as the defining core of the superblock model. Barcelona itself illustrates this shift: the original interior logic of recovering block interiors has been abandoned in favor of the Green Axis approach, where interventions are concentrated at intersections along corridors. While still beneficial, this strategy sidelines public space recovery as the metric of transformation and weakens the systemic ambition of the model.

This comparison suggests that the structural dimension is the most readily transferable element of the Superblock model. Its coherence, however, depends on whether local morphology and regulatory frameworks can sustain perimeter–interior separation and support clear reallocation targets.

10.2.2 B: Ecosystemic Feedback and Public Realm

This category highlights the elements of the Superblock model that extend beyond its physical configuration and examines how far they are retained in transfer across the case studies. The normative framework and three-layer planning appear in full only in Vitoria-Gasteiz, which is unsurprising given BCNecologia's direct involvement in the PMSEP. Yet even here, the principles were not simply copied but developed into a locally adapted framework. The analysis, however, does not aim merely to determine whether the systemic principles of the archetype are formally present. Rather, it is concerned with whether the normative goals of the archetype are retained in translation, and if not, which alternative goals are emphasized or substituted in their place. Leipzig offers the clearest case of reinterpretation, where civic groups emphasize social cohesion, participation, and justice as the defining goals of the Superblock. In Vienna, by contrast, no equivalent reframing has taken place. The references to the model are largely confined to technical studies and climate-policy instruments rather than embedded in a broader normative framework.

More generally, this points to the importance of establishing and codifying a set of guiding principles early in the process. These need not replicate the Barcelona framework, but some form of normative orientation is necessary to act as a systemic anchor. Without such a framework, implementations risk being derailed or reduced to isolated measures with limited transformative effect. At the same time, the presence of a framework is itself an asset. As noted in the introduction, cities often look to import models that appear successful or already proven elsewhere. Yet a model such as the Superblock cannot fulfill its intended purpose if it travels without clear goals attached. Vienna illustrates this risk. While the Supergrätzl pilot applied some of the spatial logics of the model, the absence of an explicit normative framework meant that reallocation and ecological ambitions were not codified as objectives. This left a void in terms of presenting a clear rationale to the outside, making it difficult to communicate why the project was being undertaken. As a result, the Supergrätzl risks being perceived as a technical traffic-calming measure, losing political momentum and failing to establish itself as a step toward systemic transformation.

Ecological integration remains weak across all three cases, rarely moving beyond the basic provision of green infrastructure. This is underscored by the complete absence of three-layer planning, even though the archetype framed vertical integration as essential to systemic eco-

logical transformation. At the policy level this absence is notable, as climate change mitigation and climate justice are recurring objectives and one of the main reasons researchers and practitioners engage with the model in the first place. In Vienna the gap is particularly striking, given that Favoriten was explicitly identified as a heat-exposed district. Measures such as rooftop or facade greening could directly address this issue, yet they have not been systematically integrated. A similar pattern is visible in ecological integration more broadly: while tactical measures such as temporary planters or pocket greening travel easily, more substantive interventions such as soil permeability, biodiversity corridors, or vertical greening are far less common. This reflects a cost and feasibility gradient: inexpensive, reversible measures are widely adopted, whereas resource-intensive restructuring remains rare.

Following the feasibility logic, tactical urbanism was successfully adapted in all three cases. As the case studies demonstrate, it has moved beyond its original role as a temporary strategy for testing interventions (Lydon and Garcia 2015) and has instead taken on the character of a programmatic tool. In Dolowitz and Marsh terms, tactical urbanism has shifted from functioning as an instrument within a broader policy orientation to becoming a programme in itself, that is, a specific course of action through which intentions are implemented.

Although tactical urbanism was not conceived by Rueda as a distinct stage of the Superblock, but rather as a repertoire of provisional interventions, it has since become a programmatic staple. The details of application, however, differ. In Vienna it was framed as a temporary stage in a phased process leading to structural redesign; in Leipzig it was incorporated into a step-wise development plan; and in Vitoria-Gasteiz it became a typology in its own right, with the risk of undermining the transformative potential of the model. What has become fixed across cases is the role of costs. In Vitoria-Gasteiz, fiscal constraints pushed tactical measures to the foreground, while in Vienna the prototype was always intended to proceed to structural construction, and in Leipzig external funding was secured in advance. The Vitoria-Gasteiz experience in particular suggests that focusing solely on cost reduction carries the risk of stabilizing tactical measures as permanent substitutes for systemic change. By contrast, what has not been consistently implemented are the democratic and experimental ambitions that Rueda originally associated with tactical practice. More generally, the relationship between governance, participation, and tactical interventions in Rueda's mix remains difficult to define and even harder to transfer.

Overall, this comparison shows that while tactical urbanism travels easily, broader ecosystemic principles and ecological ambitions do not. Where guiding principles are absent or not codified, feasibility dominates, and tactical measures risk consolidating as endpoints rather than transitional stages. This underlines the need for governance arrangements that can anchor such principles institutionally and sustain them across planning cycles. The next section therefore turns to participation and institutionalization, examining how far the three cases established durable structures to support the Superblock model beyond individual projects.

10.2.3 C: Governance and Participation

Participation aligns strongly in both Vitoria-Gasteiz and Leipzig, but the mode of embedding differs. In Vitoria-Gasteiz it is fully institutionalized through a traditional participatory body, the Elkargune, which functions as a permanent forum within municipal governance. In Leipzig,

by contrast, participation emerged through a series of experimental formats such as citizen labs and living labs, which created multiple points of engagement before being formally integrated into the plan. Vienna occupies an intermediate position, adopting a top-down pilot structure while drawing on participatory activities, but without providing transparency on how inputs translated into decisions. If participation is not explicitly codified as having an impact, its role risks being reduced to consultation or symbolism rather than genuine co-production. The comparison shows that both bottom-up participation, as in Leipzig, and traditional institutional frameworks, as in Vitoria-Gasteiz, can function effectively when clearly embedded in governance. The unresolved question is whether a hybrid model such as Vienna's can achieve similar durability, given that bottom-up practices were not institutionalized from the outset but outsourced to third-party multipliers.

Vitoria-Gasteiz remains the only case besides Barcelona where the Superblock is institutionally embedded in statutory documents. Vienna references the Supergrätzl in its climate and smart city strategies and in the federal Mobility Master Plan 2030, but here the model is framed largely as an illustrative tool for reallocating public space rather than as a comprehensive framework. Leipzig, by contrast, has advanced a district-based pilot supported by federal funding and local budgets, yet the Superblock is not codified in municipal mobility strategies or statutory frameworks.

Across the cases, institutionalization remains primarily tied to mobility planning, whereas the Rueda archetype can be understood as engaging multiple governance dimensions, including ecological, social, and health concerns. Stronger integration with climate or social strategies might be expected but has not materialized. Vitoria-Gasteiz comes closest to such integration, demonstrating a more structural interplay between mobility and other agendas, though without achieving a comprehensive cross-sectoral framework.

Broader policy alignment also remains partial. The Superblock as it appears in Barcelona or Vitoria Gasteiz is embedded as a measure within mobility plans, which makes it difficult to establish strong connections to other sectoral domains such as climate, health, or social policy. The only dedicated stand-alone policy is Barcelona's Let's Fill Streets with Life (2016), which sets out tactical and participatory logics and general objectives, but is not systematically tied to other sectors. This suggests that the multi-goal character of the Superblock Archetype is difficult to institutionalize: proven only successful embedded in, and effectively redefining, an entire mobility plan. At the same time, weak or indirect ties to policy documents can expose the model to strategic shifts, as illustrated by Barcelona's move toward the Green Axis strategy.

Participation and institutionalization emerge as critical for giving the Superblock model durability. Vitoria-Gasteiz and Leipzig show that both traditional and experimental approaches can work when they are clearly embedded in governance, while Vienna illustrates the fragility of hybrid arrangements where participation is outsourced and institutional anchoring remains partial. Across all cases, institutionalization is tied mainly to mobility planning, with limited links to ecological or social agendas, which narrows the model's systemic potential.

10.2.4 D: Systemic Integration and Learning

Among the four framework dimensions, systemic integration and learning emerges as the least developed. Only in Vitoria-Gasteiz have indicators and feedback cycles been formally

institutionalized, although their application remains uneven. In Leipzig and Vienna, by contrast, monitoring is confined to project-based surveys, workshops, or externally commissioned research and is not embedded within municipal systems. This comparison underscores that meaningful self-evaluation presupposes the existence of a strong normative framework: without codified principles and measurable thresholds, monitoring practices risk remaining provisional and largely symbolic. Vitoria-Gasteiz illustrates the significance of institutionalized evaluation, whereas Leipzig and Vienna demonstrate that in the absence of systemic anchoring, learning processes remain fragmented and experimental. Furthermore, without a normative framework to provide clear benchmarks, feedback cannot be translated into systematic, goal-oriented learning.

This shows that systemic integration and learning remain the weakest dimension of transfer. Where normative frameworks and clear benchmarks are absent, monitoring cannot evolve beyond provisional exercises, leaving projects fragmented and experimental rather than consolidated as systemic transformations.

10.3 Outlook: Potentials and Directions for Further Research

This thesis has aimed to identify the archetypal features of the Barcelona Superblock and to analyze their transfer, selective reinterpretation, or omission within the planning practices of three European cities. The comparison shows that spatial elements such as perimeter/interior separation, modal priority, and speed regulation are consistently reproduced, though in locally specific forms. By contrast, the systemic and evaluative dimensions, ecosystemic frameworks, indicator systems, and network logics are far more fragile. Across the cases, these dimensions are not absent but take divergent forms. In Leipzig they are reinterpreted through civic framings of justice and participation, in Vienna they appear only as thematic references within climate or smart-city agendas, and in Vitoria-Gasteiz they are applied through typologies that facilitate implementation but dilute coherence. The analysis therefore indicates that the core principles of the model do travel, yet systemic anchoring remains the exception rather than the rule, achieved most clearly in Vitoria-Gasteiz but largely absent in Leipzig and Vienna.

The second aim of this thesis was to develop and test a framework for evaluating Superblock-inspired projects. The four-part framework introduced here, covering spatial structure, ecosystemic/public realm, governance/participation, and systemic integration/learning, has proven useful in distinguishing between different degrees of alignment. It makes it possible to identify which elements are fully adopted, which are only partially present, and which are absent, rather than reducing outcomes to binary categories of success or failure. Applied to the three case studies, the framework revealed high structural alignment across all projects, but weaker performance in systemic categories. At the same time, the application has shown that some criteria require refinement, particularly permanence, which should be tied more closely to systemic anchoring and network orientation.

Researchers such as Eggimann acknowledge that the Superblock lacks a clear definition and nevertheless identify modeling, simulation, and rapid implementation as central avenues for future research (Eggimann 2025). This points to a twofold disconnect from what this thesis has demonstrated. First, the model itself has already shifted away from the systemic ambition

of Rueda's archetype, as shown both by the limited number of systemic applications outside Barcelona and by Barcelona's own turn toward the Green Axis strategy. Second, the definitional ambiguity produces a circular problem: calls for more modeling presuppose stable parameters, yet it remains unclear what exactly constitutes a Superblock. In this way, research risks reinforcing the uncertainty rather than resolving it.

By contrast, this thesis has identified which archetypal features carry the greatest risk of fragmenting the model in transfer. Public space reallocation, the core of Rueda's transformative vision, is in danger of being reduced to a byproduct of traffic calming. The ecological dimension, including three-layer planning and substantive green infrastructure, remains almost entirely absent. Tactical urbanism travels easily, yet instead of serving as a transitional stage, it risks consolidating as a programme in its own right. In this process, it ceases to function as an instrument for participatory or democratic change and loses its value as a low-cost tool with a tactical signaling effect. Finally, the cell logic itself, once considered the foundation of the model, has proven negotiable and variably applied. This raises a fundamental question: if the cell logic is open to negotiation, what remains of the Superblock as a model? When every intervention can be framed as a superblock, the risk is that the term loses its specificity and explanatory power.

Among these discoveries, the most critical finding is the role of institutionalization. Without embedding guiding principles, indicators, and participatory mechanisms in statutory frameworks, the Superblock risks remaining a pilot or a branding exercise rather than a systemic transformation. Institutional anchoring does not guarantee success, but it is the necessary condition for sustaining coherence and ensuring that tactical measures serve as steps in a broader process rather than endpoints in themselves. Future research should therefore address both the technical feasibility of ecological measures and the conceptual clarity of the model, so that the Superblock can continue to evolve without losing the systemic ambition that made it a transformative idea in the first place.

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