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Inequalities and Injustices of Urban Green Regeneration: Applying the Conflict Analysis Perspective

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Abstract: Green regeneration has become one of the most powerful strategies for improving the quality of life in cities, supporting climate change adaptation, and reducing the carbon footprints of cities. While it is the ambition of most green regeneration projects to create benefits for residents and users, reality shows that green regeneration also reinforces existing or even shapes new 'green inequalities'. These can result from green gentrification and displacement, procedural injustices, and exclusion from participation or barriers to the access and use of newly created urban green spaces. Set against this background, the paper uses a conflict analysis perspective to look at the inequalities and injustices that evolve within the context of green regeneration. Applying social conflict theory, it seeks to understand (1) why and how green regeneration may lead to inequality and justice conflicts and (2) how conflict analysis helps to understand the nature and implications of green regeneration conflicts in more depth. As for its empirical foundation, the paper reanalyses empirical evidence that was examined in earlier projects on a residential area in the city of Leipzig, Germany.

Keywords: inequalities and justice conflicts; green regeneration; greening policies; Leipzig

1. Introduction

The green regeneration of urban areas and neighbourhoods, understood here as a field of strategies and action that aims at sustainable development and/or the upgrading of urban space in terms of creating or improving green infrastructure, particularly taking into consideration the needs of the local population as well as the sustainable development of urban space, fabric, and the ways they are used, has become one of the most powerful strategies for improving the quality of life in cities, supporting climate change adaptation, and reducing the carbon footprints of cities in terms of resource efficiency. Neighbourhood-based green regeneration includes green housing projects and the creation, enlargement, and improvement of urban green spaces, as well as numerous nature-based solutions of different types and scales. Often, green regeneration projects also include participatory and co-creation approaches. It is the ambition of most green regeneration projects to create benefits and improvements for the urban population in the respective areas/neighbourhoods or users of urban green spaces in which regeneration takes place.

Since green regeneration takes place under capitalist market conditions, we should not expect it to produce equal/just outcomes per se. The reality of many green regeneration projects shows that, despite the above-mentioned benefits, green regeneration also has implications that reinforce existing or even create new inequalities and/or injustices. These negative outcomes can result from green gentrification and the (direct or indirect) displacement, procedural injustices, and exclusion from participation or barriers to the access and use of newly created urban green spaces. So, paradoxically, or as an undesired result or unavoidable side effect, today's green regeneration does not create benefits for all per se, but can, under certain circumstances, create conflicts of interest and goals, and can lead to undesirable social consequences that undermine the positive effects of greening and can turn greening projects into instruments of a neoliberal urban agenda [1–4]. Therefore,

a critical perspective on the trade-offs of green regeneration as we experience it today is needed. In this paper, the focus will be on the conflictual settings that have emerged as a result or consequence of the unequal distribution of the benefits and burdens of urban greening policies. The conflict analysis perspective will be used to improve our understanding of the conflicts that occur as part of urban transformation under the given power and inequality conditions, as well as within a capitalist market context. This perspective facilitates a comprehensive view of greening policies that is a prerequisite for a balanced orientation in both present and future policy formulation; it will help policymakers make cities greener in a socially sustainable and responsible way.

This paper uses the conflict perspective to look at the forms of green inequalities and injustices that evolve within the context of area- or neighbourhood-based green regeneration. With respect to the main research questions, this paper seeks to understand (RQ1) why and how urban green regeneration may lead to inequality and injustice conflicts and (RQ2) how the conflict analysis approach may help us to understand the nature and implications of green regeneration conflicts in more depth. This paper makes use of social conflict theory to develop its argument and seeks to show how the conflict perspective can help to systematically understand the justice challenges of green regeneration in today's (neoliberal) urban realities. As for its empirical foundation, this paper analyses a number of local conflict settings that are understood as definable and concrete representations of conflicts with a clearly identifiable subject and involved actors/interests (see also [5]). For this purpose, this paper uses a criteria-based approach to reanalyse empirical material that was gathered during several research projects about a case study area in the inner east area of the city of Leipzig, Germany. In the final section, this paper discusses the options that urban policymakers and planners could use to address and tackle justice conflicts within the context of urban green regeneration.

2. Inequalities and Injustices as Companions of and Challenges for Green Regeneration

Green regeneration has "become one of the strongest mechanisms of transforming cities towards more sustainability and resilience" [6]. Urban green spaces provide numerous benefits for people and their wellbeing and health. For those reasons and others, such as climate change adaptation and biodiversity protection, green regeneration policies and projects are being implemented at both the citywide and neighbourhood levels. Urban policies that include strategies, plans, and programmes have increasingly employed green regeneration strategies to make urban neighbourhoods more attractive, to improve the quality of life, and to provide residents with recreational spaces and opportunities [7]. Urban green qualities became additionally important within the context of the recent global health crisis (COVID-19 pandemic) and in relation to opportunities for maintaining the quality of life and resilience in cities.

At the same time, green qualities are increasingly being 'exploited' by market strategies within the context of so-called green fixes in today's market-based urban development [2,8]. Thus, the aforementioned benefits that are provided by greening have come into conflict with greening's role as a catalyst or ingredient for the 'urban green growth machine'. As a consequence, and given that cities are characterised by socio-spatial inequalities and injustices, greening has increasingly become a part of urban policies that show ambivalent outcomes: increases in the quality of life for many, through greening, but also the reproduction of or even increases in inequalities as a result of green regeneration. Sadly enough, it seems that the often taken-for-granted, universalised benefits of greening are threatened by the existing market and power conditions and the inequalities and injustices being driven and (re)produced by them. Furthermore, green regeneration can reinforce or drive new inequalities and injustices. This is clearly indicated by the debates on green gentrification, green inequalities, and greening as contested fields of urban transformation that have become more widespread and well-known over recent decades. What are the tensions and conflicts between greening and equity described by these critical debates, and what can we learn from them about the nature and reality of today's urban green regeneration?

Seemingly, the trade-offs in the interaction between greening policies and outcomes as well as the issues of inequalities and injustices are complex and deserve more attention. After being disregarded for a long time, inequality and justice aspects have entered the debate on urban greening, ecosystem services, and nature-based solutions, etc. [9–11]. Green urban scholars are increasingly interested in the interrelations between greening and emerging, re(produced), or reinforced inequalities and/or injustices. The amount of critical studies and reflections has grown within recent years. Many scholars now acknowledge that greening does not lead to just or fair outcomes per se [12] and believe it is necessary to explore the relations between urban ecosystem services (UESs) and equity/justice issues [9] and nature-based solutions (NBSs) and justice issues [11–13]. Continuing debates on green inequalities show the manifold trade-offs and ambivalences of greening projects as they are designed and implemented in the context of existing inequalities, power structures, and market conditions; others are even proposing a shift of attention, placing socio-ecological justice as a focus of sustainability debates [14]. Evolving critical debates on eco-gentrification [15–17] and the interrelations between urban greening and justice concerns [18,19] respond to this. They highlight the emerging conflicts or trade-offs between green regeneration and its social, socio-spatial, housing market, etc., impacts and analyse the role of green regeneration with respect to the (re)production of socio-spatial inequalities and injustices.

In recent years, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has become a further driver of these types of studies [20,21]. It has been acknowledged that greening is a conflict-prone field of urban development where many different and opposing interests come together ("contested field", [6]). The analysis of such conflicts can reveal what mechanisms, conditions, and decisions trigger problems, and whether, how, and to what extent they can be tackled in terms of negotiation. Following such an approach, conflict analysis operates as an explorative method for understanding the roots, content, and dynamics of green inequalities—which is what this paper seeks to do. This approach can be embedded, in a wider sense, in the political ecology thinking that looks critically at the embedding of environmental and ecological policies and projects into a context of market economy, power relations, and inequality and their entanglements with the contextual conditions. But its attention is on the matter of conflict as a part of a larger context, representing a setting of 'escalation' or a moment when existing conditions and mechanisms of decision-making and action are being (openly) challenged.

This paper uses both the terms 'inequalities' and 'injustices'. The first is used to describe the unequal outcomes of green regeneration with respect to different groups of affected people (residents, users, etc.). The second is used to underline the fact that unequal outcomes are also a normative problem or a problem that has to be looked at from a normative perspective as well. The approach here thus also engages with the environmental and socio-spatial justice debate(s).

Conflicts or precise conflict settings, as they will be looked at here, in the context of urban green regeneration (policies) are representations of moments or processes where existing or prevailing inequalities and/or injustices are being challenged. They are moments when existing positions and legitimations have to be reconsidered, negotiated, and maybe reformulated. They are inherent parts of change and transformation; conflicts thus wield meaningful power to (re)shape and transform society. They are, however, only seldom focused on explicitly or analysed using a conceptual background of conflict analysis. This is what this paper aims to achieve.

Applying the Conflict Perspective

Conflict analysis has a long tradition in social science. Even very early (urban) sociology studies recognised conflicts as constitutional for society and societal change [22]. Conflicts are seen in this perspective not just as problems—they are means or 'arenas' where different interests and goals are being negotiated. Conflicts are thus something of a 'normality' in urban daily life and practices, they can even be seen as one of the charac-

teristics of living together in different groups of people in cities [23]. Or, to put it another way: without conflicts, society would develop in a fatalistic way and lose the capacity to change [24]. Conflicts emerge at many different points and places in urban daily life and represent the differences, inequalities, and power relations that are at play and that are continuously (re)negotiated by urban actors. They should be understood as processes and representations of a constellation of differing/opposing interests, goals, and values [25].

Urban sociology has, thus, already dealt with conflicts for a long time, both explicitly and implicitly. Recently, investigations into the role of conflicts as drivers of change or indicators of the need for change have become popular again [23,25,26]. The resulting diagnoses are often made based on urban experiences. Such an understanding of conflict not only recognises it as a necessary feature of societal development, but also as a 'productive moment' capable of driving transformation, renegotiating the status quo and the legitimations of power and inequality as well as power struggles, in order to clarify what is just and for whom under the given circumstances (see also [27]).

Conflicts can be about interests, goals, resources, life chances, recognition, etc., and the opposing attitudes and actions may be motivated by opposing agendas, worldviews, ideologies, values, etc. In most cases, several of these categories are intertwined. Most conflicts have a foreground (what we see) and a background (the context and constituting factors), and we need an analysis of both to understand the whole. The consideration of the context or background of a conflict is crucial for understanding its source, emergence, and dynamics, as well as options for tackling it or negotiating with the parties involved. Conflicts may be acute or creeping, they may undergo different dynamics, culmination periods, or may change their character, for example, after negotiations. There are conflicts that might be responsive to negotiation and those that are 'indivisible/impartible', i.e., that cannot be fully resolved with respect to the expectations of one or more of the involved parties. Here, the aim of negotiations is mostly to find a compromise; however, depending on the circumstances, such compromises might inadvertently end up becoming the starting point for another/follow-up conflict.

When we take conflicts as representations of a more complex challenge of societal development and transformation, their analysis can be helpful for better understanding the context, settings, and moments in which the existing power and inequality relations are being challenged by the implementation of specific policies, such as green regeneration policies. Conflict analysis can help us to understand what sometimes appears (on the surface) as a paradox, i.e., that sustainability-oriented policies lead to unsustainable results that (re)produce or even increase inequalities and injustices. Here, contextual factors come into play and conflict analysis may show how greening policies become contested if the way they are designed, planned, and implemented foils their ambitions to increase the quality of life and wellbeing, at least in a general manner. This is since existing conditions (of power relations, decision-making, market logics, and hierarchy of interest assertion) build on inequality and are not very likely to lead to just results. The conflict analysis perspective does not merely provide analysis, it also includes the discussion of options for negotiation and other possible 'exits' from the problem. Here, again, the view of the conflict in context is particularly important.

When it comes to conflicts around urban green regeneration, they are more often implicitly than explicitly mentioned and dealt with. A critical discourse has developed around the neoliberalisation of urban nature and greening policies [1,7,28]. Other studies highlight existing and emerging conflicts between the desired goals of ecological/environmental improvement and the costs of social consequences (e.g., direct or indirect displacement). Another strand of debate critically looks at conflicts emerging from the exploitation of green regeneration through market/benefit-oriented policies [29,30]. What is largely lacking are studies that provide a detailed analysis of existing/emerging green regeneration conflicts from a conflict analysis perspective and a reflection on what added value the application of a conflict analysis perspective can provide in both conceptual and methodological terms

for critically dealing with inequalities and injustices related to or resulting from green regeneration. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature.

Most conflict analyses are based on a multi-criteria approach that examine conflicts according to several aspects/dimensions, depending on what one wants to understand and/or explore. For this paper, an analytical framework was set up based on a set of criteria including (1) subject and source, (2) context, (3) involved actors and interests, (4) type of green inequalities and conflict, (5) drivers/dynamics, and (6) communication and negotiation. Figure 1 presents an overview of the criteria and their explanatory value. The choice of criteria is based on other studies of multidimensional conflict analysis (e.g., Schimmelfennig 1995, used in [23]). As mentioned above, a conflict is understood here as a process with an initial phase/constellation that leads to its emergence, but which has no determined end or solution; it is a subject of constant transformation and negotiation or other type of communication [31,32].

Category/criterion	Explanatory value
1 subject and source	Explains the subject of the conflict, its source, and how it was initiated.
2 context	Explains the framework and background of the conflict.
3 involved actors & interests	Explains the involved actors and their interests with regard to the conflict.
4 type of green inequalities & conflict	Explains the nature of green inequalities and the nature of the conflict.
5 drivers/dynamics	Explains the factors driving the conflict and its dynamics over time.
6 communication & negotiation	Explains whether/how communication works with respect to the conflict and whether/how negotiations are taking place.

Figure 1. Analytical framework for the conflict analysis. Source: author's own work, based on [23,31,32].

3. Materials and Methods

This paper represents a type of synthesis of earlier research using another conceptual framework to look at the existing evidence. It draws on empirical evidence and insights that were gathered during different research projects over a long period. Its main goal is to show how a conflict analysis approach can give us a more in-depth understanding of inequalities and injustices within the framework of urban regeneration. To do so, this paper uses the conflict analysis perspective to reanalyse empirical material about the inner east area of Leipzig, Germany, within the period between 2016 and 2021 that has (in part) already been published between 2020 and 2022 [33–36]. The included studies provide empirical evidence of green gentrification, environmental justice, and multiple barriers to UGSs, as well as inclusiveness and justice challenges and trade-offs of urban green space development for the area. This reanalysis of existing evidence and the application of another conceptual framework and analytical approach (category-based conflict analysis) allows us to learn more about the area, taken as a 'case', itself, and to explicitly show where and how the conflict perspective may enrich existing knowledge. The empirical material was updated to the present (December 2023). The empirical evidence used from earlier studies was produced by using a set of different methods: (a) small-scale municipal data analysis, (b) expert interviews, (c) document analysis, (d) analysis of housing advertisements, and

(e) experiences from a long-term transdisciplinary exchange with practitioners and decision-makers in the area including urban living lab and real-world lab projects (for more in-depth descriptions, see the references listed above).

4. The Case Study: Green Regeneration in Leipzig's Inner East Area in Context

Leipzig's inner east area is a former workers' residential area that is close to the city centre. Just like the city of Leipzig as a whole, the area has been characterised by a growing population and dynamic in-migration since the 2010s, following a period of long-term decline that lasted until 2000 [37]. The area (the focus is on the two districts of Neustadt-Neuschoenefeld and Volkmarsdorf) has a high proportion of low-income households, and many of them are migrants. The area has the highest rates of 'population with an international background' in the city—greater than 30 per cent (ibid.). Rents are below the city average but have recently increased at rates that are higher than the average increase seen citywide [33]. Despite some green regeneration projects in the last three decades, the area is still underequipped in terms of high-quality green space. Greening projects after 2000 were established to reuse vacant land (after abandonment and/or demolition), encourage people to stay in the area, and improve the quality of life in a densely built residential area with a significant lack of high-quality urban green spaces. Since the 2000s, several larger-scale greening programmes have been implemented: new parks were established on former brownfield sites and existing parks were enlarged [35]. These led to an increase in the quality of life for the remaining residents, as well as better provision of and access to high-quality green areas. Since 2013, a large-scale greening project called the Eastern Park Circle (in the following: EPC, Figure 2) has been established. It was originally a civic society-based idea before being transformed into a municipal project [38]. The aim of the project was to make the former railway areas that lead through Leipzig's inner east area green to create a connected green area for walking and biking that is interspersed with small and large parks.

In general, green regeneration has increased distributional justice in the area. Participatory approaches during the creation or expansion of green space increased procedural justice and, since the community's different wants and needs were taken into account, there was also an increased justice of recognition, since a number of 'voices' were considered. An in-depth study of the Lene-Voigt-Park (part of the EPC) during the neighbourhood changes in the 2000s and 2010s showed, however, that when housing was renovated and demand increased, rents went up in the 2010s and the new park was increasingly employed as an advantage of the location by real estate agents [33]. Many low-income households had to move out, including some of those who took part in the participatory process that led to the greening of the brownfield site. Another study, looking at the EPC project as a whole, stated that green gentrification has become an issue when looking at the interplay between housing market development, greening programmes, and the opportunities and limitations facing different income groups that determine whether they move to or stay in the area [39]. In recent years, the rent level increase in the area has brought about the problem of displacement [40]. The example of Lene-Voigt-Park clearly shows that real estate agents make use of greening projects to increase the expected benefits of new housing projects or renovated properties. In summer 2020, the municipality granted preservation status to some areas in Leipzig's inner east area to protect the people living there from displacement and to keep housing costs manageable [41], having become aware of rent increases and displacement as new problems. The measure, however, was not related to green regeneration; an awareness of the potential social trade-offs of high-quality greening has only grown slowly among stakeholders and organised civic society actors within recent years.

Figure 2. Area of the East Park Circle (EPC) and green regeneration areas/projects that are subjects of inequalities and justice conflicts. Conflict settings: 1 = green gentrification/displacement around Lene-Voigt-Park; 2 = use conflicts with regards to green regeneration; 3 = participation conflicts [42].

5. Screening Conflict Settings within the Context of Green Regeneration in Leipzig's Inner East Area

When looking through the lens of conflict at the development of green regeneration and related inequalities in Leipzig's inner east area, we can identify various settings and/or areas of conflict that feature tensions between green regeneration and its impacts on inequalities and injustices. In the following Sections 5.1–5.3, these conflict settings will be introduced (for a picture and their location in the area, see Figure 2 above) and analysed according to the categories/criteria outlined in Figure 1.

Inequality and injustice conflicts within the context of green regeneration in Leipzig's inner east area operate on different scales. They also refer to different functionalities of greening and different types of inequalities that are (re)produced. Three examples of such conflict settings will be briefly described according to the analytical categories introduced above. They differ in terms of their location, subject, conflict type, and the opportunities for negotiation. Although the examples are diverse, they show where and how green regeneration has become an arena of conflict. This paper will look at what this means for further discussions and what policy implications this may have.

5.1. Green Regeneration as a Driver of Displacement?

The first conflict setting analysed refers to green gentrification/displacement as a result of renovations and green regeneration at different places in the area, among them former brownfield sites that were greened or are subjects of (green) regeneration at the moment (December 2023). These places and the surrounding residential areas have become

upgraded and are beneficial for the real estate market business. Given the context of an ever more contested housing market and the demand for green quality housing, green upgrading as part of housing renovation and construction has become an issue in the area. The implementation of the EPC greening project has additionally fuelled discussions about greening as a locational advantage for new and renovated housing. In this context, both direct and exclusionary displacement have become issues. A new arena of struggles over access to and distribution of housing has developed that has started to challenge residential upgrading in the inner east area, as well as greening policies as an additional driver of this process.

When we look at the *subject and source* of this conflict, we can observe both direct, indirect, and more significantly, exclusionary displacement of lower-income households—as shown in the above-mentioned study on Lene-Voigt-Park. The park has become a selling point in housing advertisements in this area [33]. Households with a limited/low income have been either forced to move out of the area (direct displacement) or cannot enter it due to the level of housing costs (indirect displacement). Rents have increased at an above-average rate in the area during the last decade. Looking at the conflict *context*, it clearly relates to the fact that the housing market in Leipzig's inner east area has become more contested and that gentrification is now an issue in some parts of the area. In relation to the *actors and interests* involved, the conflict is between the interests of owners and developers who seek to exploit the locational advantage of housing around the green space and those of residents who either want to stay in the area but cannot pay the increased rents or cannot enter the area anymore due to the requested rents. The municipality acknowledges the problem but has limited influence. The increased *dynamics* of displacement in the area, however, led to action by the municipality in 2020. The area around Lene-Voigt-Park was granted preservation status[1] to protect the residential population from above-average increases in rent and luxury renovations [33]. At the same time, the EPC greening continues in other places and might lead to increasing housing costs in adjacent residential areas [39]. When looking at the way the conflict has been *communicated and negotiated*, it can be stated that it was discussed mostly retrospectively, i.e., at a time when displacement had already begun and the changing composition of residents in the area had become visible. It was not an open conflict at a larger scale, but the granting of the preservation status to the area in 2020 demonstrates the municipality's fear of a second wave of (luxury) renovation and a new wave of displacement [33].

5.2. Conflicts Related to the Use of Urban Green Spaces (UGSs) within Green Regeneration

The second conflict setting demonstrates a completely different type of controversy. As mentioned in the introduction to the case study, from the 2000s onwards, a number of new UGSs have been created in the area, most of them in the midst of inhabited areas. These spaces include small to medium-sized parks. Generally, these newly created UGSs have substantially improved the quality of life and increased the opportunities for recreation in Leipzig's inner east area. In addition to this, however, new conflicts have emerged with respect to the use of those spaces by different groups of people living in the area. Some groups of residents are excluding other groups of residents from using the spaces. The behaviour of these groups and how they use the UGSs are key elements in this conflic setting.

The *source* of the conflict lies in the fact that, in the area, there is an ongoing lack of high-quality UGSs and a growing population with highly diverse usage interests, wants, and needs. Subsequently, and especially since there is still a lack of high-quality green spaces across the area, competition has developed between *different uses and groups of users* of UGSs. Subsequently, usage interests have become a *subject* of conflict that has emerged from a general *context* of high-quality UGS scarcity. Different degrees of opportunity to determine one's own usage interests among competing interests and user groups have led to barriers for some users and, in extreme cases, potential user groups have been excluded from using green spaces due to the exclusionary appropriation of the spaces by

others. Usage conflicts include many different potential user groups and intersects with discriminatory, racist, etc., attitudes and practices. Usage conflicts can create (additional) barriers and limit the accessibility of UGSs for potential groups of users [34]. While actors such as the neighbourhood management and the municipality are interested in keeping the UGSs accessible for many potential users, they also have to tackle discriminatory practices and act against exclusionary appropriation and the racist and hostile attitudes behind them. The fact that people with different cultural backgrounds can have different ways of using UGSs makes the conflict around usage interests even more complicated. When looking at the *dynamics* of usage conflicts, they have increased as the number and diversity of usage interests in the population has grown over the last few years, and conflicts related to usage interests have become more apparent as a problem. There are high, diverse, and opposing expectations among potential users and residents with regards to the future use of a former brownfield site that is intended to be transformed into a neighbourhood park. Usage (interest) conflicts and *exclusion has increasingly become a topic of local discussion. The actors involved have been* surveyed and a series of local discussions are being organised. Scientific work on environmental justice conflicts and barriers hindering the use of UGSs has explored the topic from different angles [34,35].

5.3. Conflicts of Participatory Green Regeneration

The third conflict setting detected here refers to participation, which has been a crucial component of green regeneration in the area for decades. During the period of population shrinkage (1960s–2000), greening became one of the major strategies for counteracting the decline of Leipzig's inner east area and encouraging people to stay by increasing their quality of life, and, at that time, new green spaces were established in a participatory way. Residents were included in the process of designing new UGSs to make sure that those who should benefit from them saw their wants and needs reflected in the newly created sites. On a more general level, participation in urban regeneration has become a backbone of Leipzig's development and policymaking. Participation should also guarantee a fair and just way of involving people in local regeneration processes and improve the attractiveness and legitimacy of the measures. Currently (December 2023), the city has routine schemes for participation that often form an obligatory part of planning processes. The municipality has also established a coordination structure that deals exclusively with participation as part of urban planning and development [43]. Despite this, participation (here, as part of green regeneration) does not happen on neutral terrain but takes place within the context of existing power relations and conditions of inequality. This has become increasingly visible at the neighbourhood level where exclusion by participation [44] and unequal opportunities to be heard and get involved have become matters of discussion. Thus, participation in green regeneration is now also an arena of conflict, all the more so under conditions of a more contested housing market and increased struggles over scarce resources such as housing, space, and usable green space.

Here, the *subjects/sources* of the conflict are the ways in which participation around green regeneration is being organised and carried out. Different ideas and voices are being heard and some interests have greater opportunities than others to be considered and to influence the final decisions. This, in particular, has led to the de facto marginalisation of groups who are not 'participation savvy' and to a situation where those people experience procedural injustice. *Context wise*, participation has become a central pillar of urban green regeneration projects. Participants express their interests, wants, and needs. The local community is not equally represented and involved in participation. Marginalisation and social power relations are (re)produced by participation. Among the *actors involved*, there are (as a rough outline) 'strong voices', opinion leaders who assert their interests with expertise and rhetorical skills; 'weak voices', who see their interests neglected or refused; and actors, who have an intermediate position and an interest in balancing differing concerns (e.g., the neighbourhood management). Other actors such as the municipality have an ambivalent position but also an interest in keeping participation manageable. Since

participatory greening has increased in importance and made the problems more obvious, an awareness of procedural injustice has risen, too. An additional challenge is to involve international newcomers who represent a decisive part of the area's population. When looking at how the conflict is being *tackled or communicated*, it is now, after a long period of not being dealt with, receiving more attention from local actors and decision-makers. They started a discussion about the improvement of participation procedures and strategies to make participation more accessible (e.g., to remove language barriers, organise participation in a family friendly way, etc.).

6. Learning from Green Regeneration Conflicts: Discussion and Conclusions

This study aimed to analyse the inequality and justice challenges of urban green regeneration using the conflict analysis approach. Three different conflict settings in Leipzig, Germany, were looked at in depth. The following section will discuss the results of the analysis and respond to the research questions listed in the introduction. The first section provides general insights about the conflict settings in Leipzig and responds to RQ1. The second section answers RQ2 by discussing the added value of applying the conflict analysis perspective in order to understand the interplay between urban green regeneration and inequalities and injustices in greater depth.

6.1. Where and Why Does Urban Green Regeneration Lead to Inequality and Justice Conflicts?

The example of Leipzig's urban green regeneration and related conflicts showed that there are several areas or settings in which greening is related to conflicting goals and interests, etc., that are clearly connected to existing inequalities and injustices. Although the described conflict settings are very different in terms of their subject and also the nature, shape, and negotiability of the conflicts, there are some general observations that can be made and that help us to better understand the interaction between the context of area development, existing inequalities and justice challenges, and the realities and practices of green regeneration. In the following, cross-case insights will be provided according to the categories of the analysis.

Subject and source of the conflict. The subjects of the conflicts are different but relate to the context/background of existing inequalities and injustices that are reinforced by population (re)growth and growing pressure through re-densification and increased housing costs. In this context, green regeneration forms part of a larger 'arena of conflict on access to and distribution of scarce resources'. Green regeneration itself is not a main driver but it forms part of a threat of displacement as a result of upgrading in situations where resources are scarce. The arena of conflict includes topics like gentrification and the use of UGSs and public space as well as the role of participation and involvement within the process of green regeneration.

Context. Across the settings, the context of dynamic population regrowth in Leipzig and the city's inner east area after a long period of shrinkage is vital for understanding the new arenas of conflict and the ties between them. This regrowth brought about a new influx of diverse groups of residents, re-densification, increased pressure on urban land, and a more contested housing market. In this context, urban (re)growth is a crucial condition for and driver of green regeneration conflicts that are clearly related to inequalities and injustices. In a context of regrowth, urban greening takes on a different role than it does in the context of shrinkage, for example, where it helped to make residential areas more attractive and balance the negative impacts of decline, abandonment, and vacancies in order to encourage people to stay. This changed role of urban greening that increasingly becomes an asset and ingredient of upgrading has to be considered for a better understanding of the concerns and conflicts related to green regeneration (conflict setting no. 1, see also [45]). At the same time, usage conflicts arise as a result of increased usage density of UGSs and an increased diversity of usage demands and interests (setting no. 2) that are also (increasingly) reflected in participation (setting no. 3).

Involved actors and interests. There is a broad range of actors and interests involved in the conflicts around green regeneration. As setting no. 1 has shown, there is a conflict between real estate market actors interested in green housing as an asset and return-on-investment factor and residents who are interested in staying in the area and paying affordable rents, even after green regeneration. As setting no. 2 underlined, there are conflicts between the UGS usage interests of different groups of potential users that increased in scope due to the increased use of UGSs in the context of population (re)growth. Related to this, conflicts between different groups of residents and local actors have also emerged within participation processes on the design and development of green spaces in the area, as described in setting no. 3. Despite the different nature of the settings and the different configurations of the actors and interests involved in them, there are two causal links that form a tie between them: (1) the struggle between private/market interests and public and/or residents' interests and (2) the disputes between the opposing interests of diverse residential groups living in the area and the way that different actors have unequal social power positions and involvement/roles in participatory processes. This shows how existing inequalities and hierarchies of social power relations unavoidably impact on how green regeneration is being shaped and implemented and that, depending on the conditions, there is a risk that green regeneration will (re)produce inequalities or enlarge existing ones [35]. The green gentrification conflict additionally points to the fact that interests in counteracting residential gentrification are largely limited to the housing sector and do not consider the role of UGSs or green regeneration as a driver of upgrading in contested housing markets.

Despite newly created UGSs, the area still has an undersupply of high-quality green spaces. Usage conflicts have increased in recent years and exclusionary practices have become more frequent. Some usage interests are being marginalised and some people are being excluded from access and/or use of UGSs as a result of unequal power relations and acts of exclusionary appropriation of the UGSs. The lack of high-quality UGSs fuels this problem.

Type of green inequalities and conflict. Despite the differences of the described settings, the core of the larger arena of conflict is about (a) access to and distribution of resources in a context of increasing scarcity, no matter whether it is affordable housing, accessible UGSs, or opportunities to express and actualise one's interests, wants, and needs through participation, and (b) the context of a market-based housing supply and urban land development under conditions of (re)growth that continuously (re)produce and fuel green inequalities and injustices as shown under (a). Having said this, the individual conflict settings and related green inequalities are of course diverse. But their main driver is the above-mentioned situation; they are different representations of this same arena of conflict.

Drivers and dynamics. The number and scope of conflicts related to green regeneration has increased since Leipzig's inner east area became a focus of regrowth, re-densification, and in-migration. Pressure on urban land has intensified and housing costs have risen at an above average rate. As the available resources have become scarcer, the struggles related to their access, distribution, and use have become more pressing. Unequal power and social power relations have resulted in inequalities in participation processes as well. At this stage, it is important to underline that the conflicts are not really about greening, but about privilege and disadvantage under competitive conditions where resources are scarce. It is not the greening itself that represents the problem, but the capitalist/market exploitation logics behind it. This underlines what recent gentrification studies say, that we have to look at the mechanisms behind the processes that we see and that increase exclusionary pressure on lower-income people, e.g., [46] (p. 73, 59). Green gentrification conflicts thus also show malfunctions of green regeneration policies as they are practiced under the given conditions, or at least reveal how the effects of those policies can be 'foiled' by changing housing market conditions in growing cities. To avoid green housing from increasingly becoming a privilege instead of something accessible to mainstream society, it is necessary to tackle the conflict between green regeneration's goals of environmental

sustainability and economic profitability (that latter of which is frequently tied to social exclusivity) (ibid.).

Communication and negotiation. At the time when this paper was written, the communication about and negotiation of green regeneration-related conflicts show a range of ambivalences. First, awareness of the conflicts around green regeneration has grown in the area and among the involved actors (municipality, intermediaries, civic society, and, partly, the housing market). This opens up space for the issue to be dealt with in a more deliberate way. Second, insufficient attention has been paid to the potential for green regeneration to (re)produce displacement and inequality within the larger process of area regeneration and greening projects, such as the EPC, despite the fact that instruments were implemented to counteract displacement in the housing sector (preservation status). Existing conflicts are at least fuelling an awareness of how closely housing and green regeneration may act together as factors for displacement in contested housing markets, but this is yet to become a topic in larger-scale participation processes, for example. Here, the above-mentioned 'productive moment' of conflict could help to bring this issue onto the agenda. But it is also the diverging and opposing interests of actors involved in green regeneration as well as unequal social power relations that make the articulation and negotiation of conflicts a challenge. Additionally, it is the different ways in which people are affected by green regeneration and its outcomes that lead to conflicts that make the democratic governance of this situation difficult, not to mention that political and ideological interests are often found behind green regeneration policies, which may hamper a serious negotiation.

In summary, one can conclude that under market and (re)growth conditions, we cannot expect green regeneration to produce equal or just outcomes. Or, to put it differently, under such conditions, inequality or injustice-driven conflicts that are directly related to greening polices will become more likely. Increasingly, green regeneration runs the risk of becoming exploited by the interests of market-based upgrading in areas that are heavily affected by in-migration and have become more diverse due to their residential structure. In such areas, the seemingly politically neutral territory of green regeneration becomes a 'fig leaf' of neoliberal urban strategies, as mentioned in a growing number of studies [47,48]. Related conflicts are not just struggles between different interests or goals, they are 'institutionalised' in a way, i.e., created by the very conditions of regrowth, in-migration, and increased market pressure on urban land.

6.2. Learning from Conflict Analysis: How It Helps to Improve the Discussion and Knowledge on Urban Green Regeneration's Challenges

This paper demonstrated how conflict analysis can help to gain a better understanding of the controversies and trade-offs surrounding green regeneration in Leipzig's inner east area. Although the focus was on a specific example and setting, there are some general points that can be learnt from the analysis that address broader theoretical and methodological questions.

As we have seen, *the conflict analysis helped to show the trade-offs of green regeneration, related ambivalences, and multiple perspectives on its outcomes*. Conflicts challenge existing conditions and processes and their results/outcomes. They may help to reveal the blind spots of a green regeneration success story. They show that greening itself is not the solution per se, that it not just or fair per se, and that it can be exploited by strategic and market interests ('fixes'). In particular, the conflicts surrounding green gentrification and increased exclusionary pressure underline that the problem behind green inequalities is not the green spaces but the structures and mechanisms of (capitalist) inequalities that also exist in relation to who is a beneficiary of green regeneration and who is not. Of course, this question may affect people differently at different points in time, as was the case for people who took part in the participatory process leading up to the creation of Lene-Voigt-Park in the early 2000s and then, after the park was completed, were subsequently priced out of the area [33]. A retrospective appraisal of this conflict may raise awareness among

decision-makers and planners about how quickly changed contexts may change the effects of green regeneration for different groups of people.

Furthermore, many of the described conflicts show the ambivalences of green upgrading and the improvement of UGSs. They lead to benefits for many, but not for all and, what is more, make some groups of people the 'losers' of this upgrading (e.g., through displacement or a rejection of their interests in participation-based decisions). Depending on the circumstances, green regeneration may reinforce existing power inequalities/imbalances or create new ones with beneficiaries and those who face new disadvantages or receive no benefit at all.

Furthermore, the conflict perspective allows us to understand problems in their complexity and as bundles of interacting factors and processes. Criteria-based conflict analysis makes it possible to understand the dynamics and logics of these complex processes and to discover 'productive moments' as part of a conflict story, e.g., when existing practices are challenged, or undiscussed problems are articulated and finally lead to increased knowledge and awareness among decision-makers or the local civic society.

The conflict analysis also *showed how established practices of green regeneration and their results have led to new challenges when the context changes; conflicts are expressions of this change and related challenges.* In the case of Leipzig's inner east area, it is mainly the changed role of greening from a strategy to fight abandonment and vacancies under the conditions of population shrinkage towards an element that potentially supports upgrading and its socially undesirable consequences in a context of dynamic (re)growth, re-densification, and an increasingly contested housing market. The intensifying controversy surrounding gentrification and displacement make greening a subject of debate and rejection, even though it is not responsible for upgrading. While green regeneration was applied as a strategy to counteract decline and abandonment during the period of shrinkage, and participatory greening was introduced to legitimise larger-scale changes, these logics do not work anymore in times of increased segregation and displacement, as they may produce undesired outcomes or effects. In times of growth, market pressure and real estate interests increase the role of green spaces as an asset for increasing housing profitability. Therefore, today's green regeneration has to be considered more explicitly in conjunction with the housing market and real estate development, the development of socio-spatial segregation, and the opportunities for households from different income levels to access the housing market. The introduction of the preservation status for parts of Leipzig's inner east area in 2020 showed that there is rising awareness about these issues but that housing and the UGS sector are still seen as separate aspects and are not looked at with respect to their interaction. Aside from the issue of upgrading, increased UGS usage conflicts can be read as a result of in-migration (that, in a shrinkage context, were seen as a highly desirable development) and a diversification of demands related to UGS use.

The reported conflicts within participation show, on the one hand, *that existing inequalities and social power relations are often reproduced in participatory processes and that they cannot simply be avoided, even though they are diametrically opposed to the aims of participation,* i.e., *to generate more inclusive and just outcomes.* In some cases, the way participation is being organised and carried out is making procedural injustices even worse. Existing knowledge and social power biases lead to a situation where participation runs the risk of becoming an instrument for pushing through particular interests in spite of its ambition to achieve inclusiveness and transparency. The way participation is being implemented may even harm or delegitimise its results. On the other hand, conflicts that emerge during participation show how some residential groups challenge the prevailing perspectives about what types of green regeneration are desirable and how they should be best implemented. *Conflicts thus also indicate increased awareness and express the criticisms of stakeholders and residents with respect to the shortcomings of current practices.* These concerns are increasingly seen as issues that need to be tackled and can be read (according to conflict theory) as 'productive moments' of conflict, i.e., when conflicts and their understanding may facilitate action to change dysfunctional realities or practices see, e.g., [26].

As the green gentrification literature has explored, green regeneration is a driver of displacement but is only part of a larger problem [45,49]. The conflict behind green gentrification and the related displacement is one between the role of housing as a market asset and source of market benefit and as a social infrastructure and home for people. Greening becomes an element that increases the value and attractiveness of housing assets and, seen from the other perspective, also increases the risk that lower-income households will be displaced. There is no social-ecological paradox behind green gentrification and displacement after the improvement of UGS, and it does not make sense to play off the goals of affordability and greening against each other since this conflict only exists at the surface and not at the heart of the problem [50,51]. Here, *conflict analysis helps to disentangle the aspects of the problem and to clearly distinguish between what is happening in the foreground and in the background*.

By and large, looking at conflicts may help us to better understand the nuances, ambivalences, and challenges of current green regeneration efforts. The analysis of these conflicts often reveals entry points for negotiation or a debate on how challenging realities can be improved in terms of more justice and less inequality in a greener city(scape). Conflict analysis may also enrich the wider view that, e.g., the political ecology perspective takes. A more systematic dealing with cross-fertilization potentials between both perspectives, conflict, and political ecology would be very beneficial and can be seen as a future avenue of research, especially with reference to where, when, and how environmental policies and projects and their impacts in a given context lead not just to unjust and unequal outcomes but this is also being challenged by parts of the urban society and/or becoming a subject of social/political struggle.

As such, conflict analysis is not just a helpful analytical exercise or way to contribute towards the development of theories; it can also be of great importance for transdisciplinary research and the production of practical knowledge. Hopefully, this paper has shown how a critical and productive look at existing and emerging conflicts can contribute to the urgently needed discourse on how green regeneration can be shaped in a way that better considers inequality and justice issues and concerns.

Note

1 The adoption of the preservation status in June 2020 provides evidence for an acknowledged risk. Around Lene-Voigt-Park, rents increased at a higher rate than in the entire area itself and the income of new residents is considerably higher than that of the population that lived in the area twenty years ago [41].

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