

## Planning-Related Protest as a Key to Understanding Urban Particularities

Bertram, Grischa Frederik; Kienast, Gerhard

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Bertram, G. F., & Kienast, G. (2023). Planning-Related Protest as a Key to Understanding Urban Particularities. *Urban Planning*, 8(4), 326-339. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v8i4.7088>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Article

## Planning-Related Protest as a Key to Understanding Urban Particularities

Grischa Frederik Bertram <sup>1,\*</sup> and Gerhard Kienast <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute for European Urban Studies, Bauhaus University Weimar, Germany

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Urban Development, University of Kassel, Germany

\* Corresponding author ([grischa.bertram@uni-weimar.de](mailto:grischa.bertram@uni-weimar.de))

Submitted: 28 April 2023 | Accepted: 24 August 2023 | Published: 26 December 2023

### Abstract

Planning-related protest is a “normal” and strategic form of political participation that manifests cause-related conflict and criticises dominant norms, situations, and institutions. It goes beyond the participation offered by the (local) state while claiming action by the state and other powerful actors. Given the multitude of such protests as well as the usually local and, therefore, often small-scale causes and claims articulated, we consider these actions by citizens as everyday practices. On the other hand, protest and movement theory has focused on structural aspects like resource mobilisation and opportunity structures. We, therefore, suggest that planning protest is one of the keys to understanding the particular, place-specific characteristics that make every city unique. Protest data mining as a newly developed method to identify planning protests in local databases, digital newspaper archives, and petition platforms in a standardised approach has produced datasets of hundreds of protests that allow for comparisons between cities. The exemplary analysis of this data allows us to discuss the structural dimension of everyday action.

### Keywords

participation; planning culture; planning-related protest; political opportunity structure; protest data mining

### Issue

This article is part of the issue “Between the ‘Structural’ and the ‘Everyday’: Bridging Macro and Micro Perspectives in Comparative Urban Research” edited by Nadine Appelhans (TU Berlin) and Sophie Schramm (TU Dortmund).

© 2023 by the author(s); licensee Cogitatio Press (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

### 1. Introduction

Possibly, the best-known planning protest in Germany in recent years is the conflict on the alteration of Stuttgart’s central station including the tunnelling of all tracks, destruction of listed buildings and parts of a park, as well as redevelopment of the rail yard. After the culmination of the so-called “Stuttgart 21” protest, Selle (2013, p. 171, translation by the authors) noted that “Stuttgart is everywhere. Whenever a council decision leads to civic protest, media will append the place name with a ‘21’ — and there it is: maximum conflict.” But is this true? Do all planning protests resemble the very special case study, with up to 150,000 people shouting, “Stay on top!” in front of the station? Or does it resemble a specific political act in a particular urban setting?

In this article, we want to describe a methodology on how to explore planning-related protests as a part of

everyday life in cities in Western democracies and other societies around the globe. Protest data mining (PDM) is a quantitative approach to derive data on protests in print and online media and to prepare these extracts for statistical analysis. The methodology has been developed in an ongoing research project funded by the German Research Foundation, which aims to record and analyse planning protests in eight major German cities between 2005 and 2020. For this article, only data from five cities could be used including Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Munich with a data set of 2,075 cases in total. Beyond multiple applications to examine different types and typologies of contesting local spatial planning and claiming improvements in the built environment, the research shows that these acts of civic participation are a normal and, in this way, everyday part of planning processes. It also reveals that in protest research there is no division but reciprocity between

the structural and the everyday: Only when looking at everyday protests is the number of such processes high enough to find structure and only when applying such a structuralist approach is it possible to define common features of planning protests—and those specific in time and place.

Following some theoretical explanations of planning-related protests from a social science perspective with an emphasis on (local) opportunity structures, the PDM method will be described. After a demonstration on possible applications of protest data analysis on preliminary results from our survey in the five major German cities, the conclusion discusses possibilities and impediments in understanding and comparing cities through the everyday practice of planning protests and their structures.

## 2. Planning-Related Protest as Rational and Strategic Politics

Despite planning theories' contemporary emphasis on the many agents involved in the production of space, planning protest is often still perceived as a "state of emergency" (Selle, 2013, p. 24, translation by the authors) disturbing the routines of the "normal" planning process. It is therefore regarded as a protest against planning rather than a protest in planning, but as some "unconventional form of participation" (Hoecker, 2006, p. 11; author's translation). This perception has long prevented planning theory from realising to what extent protest has become an everyday action, not only for citizens involved in this rather normal participation (Geißel & Thillman, 2006) but also for planning practitioners facing opposition in town hall meetings, demonstrations, collections of signatures, and the like. However, with the rise of agonistic pluralism in planning theory (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Kühn, 2021; Pløger, 2004), this has dramatically changed. For the advocates of agonism, conflict—if not protest—is seen as a constant, defining element of planning processes. Yet, this turn has led to a situation where the specific characteristic of protest seems to be even less relevant as it is subsumed under those antagonistic expressions that need to be "tamed" (Bertram & Altröck, 2023, pp. 8–10).

### 2.1. Everyday Urbanism and Planning-Related Protest

This thematic issue of *Urban Planning* tries to link the micro-perspectives of everyday urbanism with comparative research that is mainly interested in structural configurations and dynamics. While the research presented in this article was built on other theoretical foundations (see Section 2.2 and the following), it seems pertinent to clarify its relationship with the everyday concept.

Originally inspired by De Certeau's (1984/2013) "notion of the everyday as a site of transformation and resistance" (Rusca & Cleaver, 2022, p. 2), the concept of "everyday urbanism" has been used in various contexts and with different meanings. In the US, 25 years

ago, urban designers Chase et al. (1999) used it to remind their profession of the importance of daily routines, neighbourhood concerns, and "the role non-experts play in ameliorating neglected urban environments" (Kaliski, 2008, p. 115). Since then, a fast-growing body of urban research has focused on encounters in "everyday public space" (e.g., Watson, 2009) or micro-spatial urban practices that are "resident-generated, low budget, and often designed to be temporary" (Talen, 2015, p. 135). Linking De Certeau's ideas with the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968), authors like Iveson (2013) explored the potential of everyday or DIY urbanism to go beyond the transformation of urban spaces towards producing alternative cities. Everyday urbanism can therefore often be understood as planning-related protest. Meanwhile, for Appelhans (2017, p. 15), studying urban development in Ethiopia, "everyday urbanisation" also encompassed "ordinary" or "mundane" local practices undertaken "by residents, cooperatives, investors or NGOs outside of state institutions." Hence, there have also been calls to shift the analytical focus of urban and planning research to "the everyday politics of city change" (Parnell & Robinson, 2012, p. 2) and the "ordinary practices of city-making" (Lawhon et al., 2014, p. 507). If there is any common denominator between these conceptions, it is the contrast between the domain described as "everyday" and the state, which is either presumed to be absent or conceived as an antagonist "that invades everyday life from the centre or the top down" (Hilbrandt, 2019, p. 353). Especially when exploring urban particularities in Western democracies with resourceful and capable citizens like Germany, "everyday agency" should be linked to an analysis of state power and spatiality. Hilbrandt (2019, p. 352) also pointed out that, through the interaction between "everyday urbanism and the everyday state," ordinary people can "co-construct the order that takes shape."

### 2.2. An Analytical Approach for Research of Protest in Planning

Planning protest is still often perceived as an irrational and affective action, especially if it includes what is often pejoratively called NIMBYs (see Lake, 1993, for a still accurate critique). When analysing these civic actions, a less normative approach seems adequate. In the social sciences, from the 1970s onwards protest has been conceptualised as a collective act of public participation that is independent of participation offers made by public authorities (Herkenrath, 2011). Rational choices lead to specific political strategies; protest is therefore not collective behaviour but collective action (Tarrow, 2011), i.e., not affective but a wilful act. Having a "twin signature," protest is not only against something; protesters at least implicitly also demand social change and therefore argue for something at the same time (Rucht, 2001). Hence, they often propose and may even provide solutions where they are perceived as a problem.

Protests are genuinely political as they constitute a political strategy (Gamson, 1975/1990), aiming at the public articulation of a tangible conflict and claiming a specific solution to a perceived problem. This may be because the protesters' interests are affected by planning, but they may also be involved as a third party or fight for the common good. Protest strategy can also aim to increase influence, mobilisation and benefits for the protest group and their leaders as "some of these unruly and scrappy challengers do eventually become members [of the elite]" (Gamson, 1975/1990, p. 143).

### 2.3. *The Specific Characteristics of Planning-Related Protest*

Planning protests are distinct from most other protests as they refer to local institutions, policies, situations, or developments. They are "rooted in collectivities with a communal base and/or with the local state as their target of action" as Fainstein and Fainstein (1985, p. 189) put it. The protests examined are urban insofar as their causes are situated in a city—not necessarily because they comply with definitions of the urban by Lefebvre (1968), Castells (1972, 1983), Harvey (2012), and others.

The topic of planning-related protest overlaps, but is not congruent with, the subject matter of the Anglo-American literature on (urban) citizenship, which examines how people fight for and defend social rights alongside formal citizenship. According to Isin (2009), "activist citizenship" emerges when people demand (civil, political, and social) rights that are not (yet) granted to them by the state. Holston (1998) focuses on population groups in the Global South that are marginalised by the respective majority society and interprets their fights as "insurgent citizenship." Following Cornwall (2002), Miraftab has made this literature fruitful for planning theory by interpreting struggles of the urban poor for the right to housing and basic services as "invented spaces" (Miraftab & Wills, 2005) and described "insurgent planning as radical planning practices that respond to neoliberal specifics of dominance through inclusion" (Miraftab, 2009, p. 32). Sager (2023) has recently broadened the picture by putting these and other forms of "activist planning" into a systematic order. He distinguishes seven categories, including community-driven activist planning, activist planning by lay planners affiliated with civil society organisations, planners working for universities (practising campus outreach), and local government.

The intersections between planning protest and the latter concepts should be explored in more detail elsewhere. Here, it is important to note that the subject of this research was not delimited based on the social characteristics of the protest actors and its embeddedness in social movements or party politics. There are even hints that many planning protests have a more affluent basis and are rather pragmatic (cf. Kraushaar, 2011; see also Bertram, 2015). First of all, it attempts to gain an overview of protests that are directed at urban or

spatial planning or from which tasks for this planning can be derived. The contributions to the planning process recorded in the process are manifold and of different intensities. While some protesters campaign for mere ideas of "another city possible" or argue for solutions to mitigate the negative effects of a plan, only very few will engage in some kind of "activist planning" and draw their own plans (e.g., 84 cases or 3.6% in the data set shown in Section 4). Nevertheless, in the social construction of the protest-to-be and its strategic framing (Snow & Benford, 1988), citizens interact with planners and the wider social context. Protests are related to planning either by problematising plans, demanding planners to produce or change planning policies or procedures, or addressing planning institutions. Regarding local spatial planning as a political process (Ache et al., 2017; Scharpf, 1973), the construction of a relationship between protest and planning also constitutes an additional reason to consider planning protests as political.

### 2.4. *The Importance of Structure in Protest Theory*

Although it is now common sense that informed citizens decide to form protest networks instead of masses unleashed by structural constraints in society, resource mobilisation (Lipsky, 1968) and especially political opportunity structure are still dominant approaches and even framing is analysed to find structures within the actions and expressions of protesters (Jasper, 2004). This emphasis on structures has been—and still is—important when identifying the rationality protesters show in their actions.

#### 2.4.1. Political Opportunity Structure

The notion of political opportunity structures as part of a political process model, first formulated by Eisinger (1973), is still one of the dominant theories in movement research today. In contrast to resource mobilisation, which focuses on factors internal to the movement, it uses external conditions to study the genesis and development of protest. Unlike earlier theories, however, it is about a context for the rational action of groups and individuals, from which constraints and possibilities for action, but also potential efficacies of movement action emerge.

The basic model is that external conditions determine the chances of success for protest and that individuals decide to engage in collective political action when success is foreseeable or the incentives for protest action are great enough (Opp, 2009). In further development of Eisinger's approach, obstacles and risks are also usually considered today. These opportunity structures are mostly regarded as objectively given, but some authors focus on the subjective evaluation of the chances of success by the protesters.

#### 2.4.2. Local Planning-Specific Political Opportunity Structure

Within local spatial planning and planning research, a contextualisation of planning processes by external framework conditions is common. It is therefore possible to amend the political opportunity structure approach into a local planning-specific political opportunity structure (Bertram, 2019). There are clear differences to protests at the national level (e.g., relatively small distance between protest subjects and objects, layperson politics, limited capacity of local government).

An essential modification of Eisinger's theory is a multi-scalar application that combines factors close to and distant from protest as well as obstacles but excludes framework conditions beyond planning or urban policy regulation to depict local multi-level politics and its range of actors. In this respect, there is still a more general, superordinate political opportunity structure beyond the planning-related one. Within the German context, activists, as well as academic literature, have often described this as neoliberal urban policy (e.g., Kamleithner, 2009; Schipper, 2010) including, for instance, property-led development, de- or re-regulation as well as austerity policies.

### 3. Identifying Planning Protest Through Protest Data Mining

As in most Western democracies, where an increase in planning-related protests has been perceived in recent years, it is important to accompany the in-depth knowledge of existing case studies with quantitative data analysis to get an overview of different protests. In the following section we will describe the new method of PDM to identify and analyse protest descriptions in newspaper articles and online sources. This allows us to show that everyday protests differ from the often rather special case studies presented in the literature. However, with hundreds or even thousands of protests being included in one data set, the result is necessarily a bird's eye view only. None of the cases is presented in detail and many questions usually asked in case studies cannot be sufficiently met.

The following description only includes the identification and processing of data, not its statistical or geographical analysis. Information on the specific application of the method is presented in the Section 3.1.

#### 3.1. Integrating Online Into Protest Event Analysis

The enhanced protest event analysis (PEA; Rucht, 2001) serves as a methodological basis for our newly developed PDM method. Although PEA was developed and intensively used during the 1990s to record and analyse supra-local protests in the Federal Republic of Germany between 1945 and 1990, this method could not be applied to the object of our study: On the one hand,

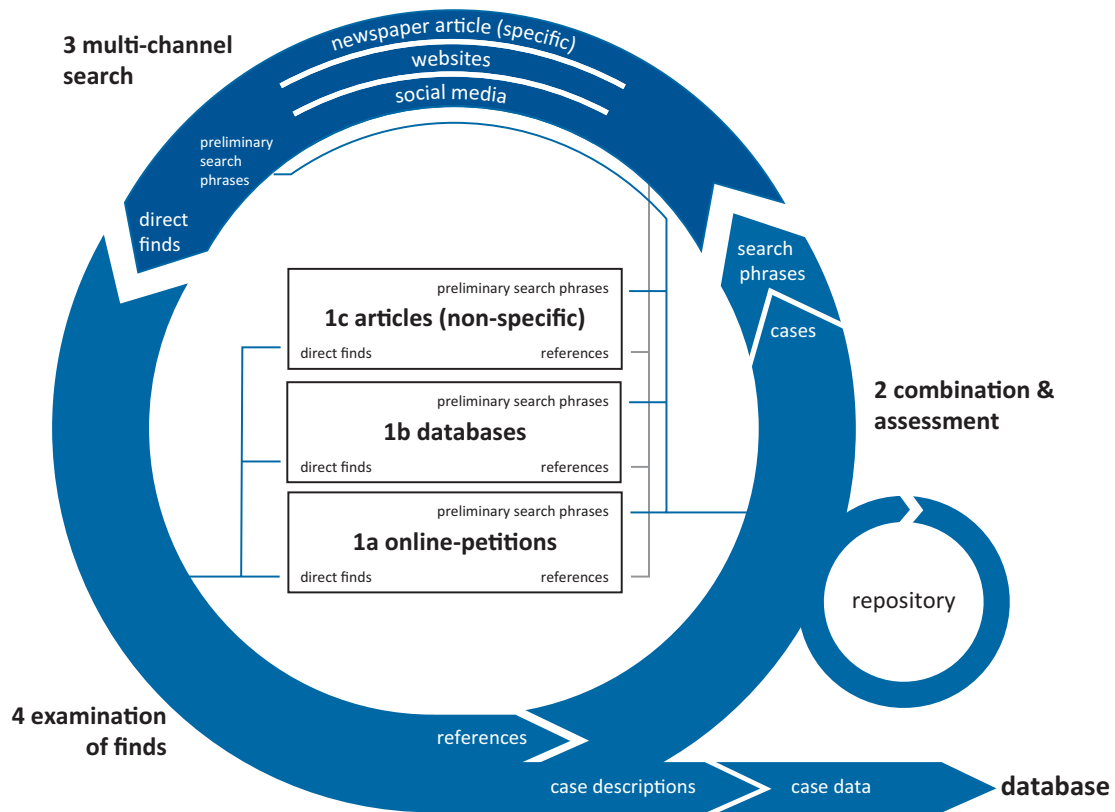
Hocke's (2002) first application to local protests showed that relying only on newspapers was not sufficient, as the results were biased. In our own preliminary study, however, his proposal to integrate police data yielded little benefit and severe practical issues (Bertram, 2019). On the other hand, and even more importantly, the rise of the internet has led to a change in the field (cf. Sassen, 2011), with additional forms of action and even online-only protests arising (Bertram & Kienast, 2023). In terms of opportunity structure, some authors argue that "the Internet...appears to enable activist groups to become more effective and more powerful than ever before" (Blood, 2010, p. 160), while others point to a completely new repertoire of online protest (Schwartz, 1996; Van Laer, 2010; Voss, 2013).

Results from the preliminary study confirm the usefulness of methodological diversity. When applying the local adaptation of PEA along with a semi-structured analysis of data collected on the internet and social media sites, only a minor part of protests was found both in newspapers and online (9.6%), while most were either identified in PEA (39.7%) or websites (50.7%; cf. Bertram, 2019, p. 224). While many cases in the data set missed attributes, it also became clear that cases found in both surveys proved to be those with the highest quality and validity of data (Bertram, 2019, pp. 226–227). At the same time, it could also be established that due to its emphasis on individual protest events, the PEA in its original form is unnecessarily detailed for planning research.

#### 3.2. Protest Data Mining as Research Design

Therefore, PDM includes basic principles of PEA but is based on the cascading approach conducted in the collection of process-produced online data. Its principal aim is to identify planning protests in print and online media in a semi-standardised way and to obtain effectively condensed protest data for statistical analysis, but at the same time to neglect the inconsistency that necessarily exists due to different sources. A circular procedure is used to identify possible cases, assess their potential, investigate these cases in different media sources, and examine the findings for inclusion into a coherent dataset (Figure 1). While the first step is only conducted once, new potential cases of planning protests are identified in all subsequent steps, and these steps can theoretically be repeated as long as new potential cases are found. Of course, in practice, an end of circulation can be declared, when the data set is saturated or may be demanded for research-external reasons (lack of resources).

Combining internet-based and newspaper research, both media are now understood as equal. This is only possible by turning away from the dedicated analysis of protest events of PEA, which, unlike in newspapers, are not consistently recognisable in process-produced internet data. The smallest element is now the planning protest. This leads to the need to continuously check



**Figure 1.** Circular approach of PDM.

whether the character of a protest changes over time in a way that makes it necessary to split it (e.g., due to a change of main actors, causes, or claims).

PDM produces different kinds of findings. Besides more or less detailed descriptions of planning-related protests as direct findings of primary interest, there are findings of secondary interest: Links to websites and social media sites containing potential further findings, as well as searchable denominations that can be used in subsequent searches of newspaper archives or search engines.

### 3.2.1. Identification of Potential Cases of Planning-Related Protest in Print and Online Media

To identify potential cases of planning-related protest, the first step of PDM focuses on three sources. First, there are internet-based platforms for so-called online petitions that provide organisations as well as individuals with a tool to collect and count signatures and send them to preselected receivers. While called petitions, the signatures usually do not have legal status and are addressed to any kind of institution and even individuals who do not have any regulated form to process complaints and other submissions. Second, several local and national organisations provide online databases for certain kinds of protests or (potential) protest activities (e.g., local referenda, citizen’s initiatives, incidents of racist violence). These often come in the form of lists that have to be screened manually. Third, online archives of local newspapers still offer the highest quantity of

possible findings, but those are hidden in thousands of articles, and sophisticated search phrases are needed to reduce the number of hits as no sufficient system of keywords is provided. Therefore, search strings contain a selection of newspaper sections and include a choice of words (e.g., protest, citizen’s initiative) while excluding others that relate to supra-local protest events (e.g., strike, mayday, war). Also, words signalling protests already found in online petitions, databases, or previous newspaper searches are excluded. The hit lists with headings and leads are screened by trained researchers, who will assess any list item with a standardised set of five criteria to ensure that any potential case of planning-related protest may match the examined time and place, the definition of protest, has a communal basis and is related to planning. To reduce biases in news coverage, for each city, two different newspapers are used.

### 3.2.2. Combination and Assessment of Potential Cases of Planning-Related Protest

In the identification process, researchers evaluate the five criteria mentioned in Section 3.2.1 in a simple way: Any criteria can match, not match, or possibly match (when the given information is insufficient). Any potential case that does not match at least one criterion will be excluded from further examination, the rest will be sorted so that any case with five matches is examined first, then those with one possible match, and so forth. This helps to effectively find a larger number of cases in time.

Within the same step, the potential cases with the best assessment (in further circles second best and so forth) are compared to combine different findings of the same cases, which occur frequently, and to reduce similar results in the search process. Validating adequate combinations often requires a first screening of the actual content of the article or entry.

### 3.2.3. Multi-Channel Search of Cases of Planning-Related Protests

The third step aims to find additional data for the cases composed before. Therefore, with the help of a common search engine, cases will be enriched with links to websites of protest groups, supporters, or planning institutions. If this is not satisfactory, a second, now specific search for articles will be conducted in one—and if necessary also a second—newspaper. If still not saturated, the most important social media platforms can be searched.

In both this and the following step, some cases will be re-evaluated and rejected as new information may show non-conformity with one of the five criteria. When new potential cases are found, they will be treated like findings in the first step and assessed, combined and searched in one of the next circles, depending on their assessment.

### 3.2.4. Examination of Planning-Related Protests

The output of the PDM consists of findings—articles, websites, and documents—that contain protest descriptions or, more generally, data. Despite the expected diversity of the findings, they are evaluated in a standardised content analysis according to the same principles and characteristics for recording in a common database. The content-analytical evaluation serves to form quantitatively analysable data sets from qualitative protest data and always follows the same sequence, which can be divided into the evaluation steps described below. These are based on PEA (Rucht & Ohlemacher, 1992):

1. Screening of found items to get a preliminary understanding of the protest to be coded.
2. Ensuring that individual findings belong to the same case and separating cases if interruptions become known (e.g., long times without protest events, changes of main actors, causes or claims).
3. Selecting the five findings with the highest information content.
4. Reading findings in chronological order and marking information to be coded in the text.
5. Coding marked text passages by assigning them to an item in the database.
6. Entering data into the database using one code sheet for each protest and categorising its items.

Given a presumably high uncertainty of findings, during the entry into the database, a comparison and, if neces-

sary, a weighting of data, which originate from different sources, is carried out. Also, for each item, coders are asked to either primarily use sources by the protesters themselves or others, especially newspaper articles. As a rule, for items concerned with the protest itself, information by the protesters is considered more relevant, while for items related to the planning process or effects, we rely on third parties. For instance, to describe causes and claims, we are looking for the representation within the protester's strategic framing, although that results in a reproduction of a part of the political action, e.g., some would rather campaign for the protection of a building, while others position themselves against the demolition. When choosing planning instruments used, we consider accounts by planning authorities or mass media as more reliable.

### 3.3. Code Sheet and Data Set

The code sheet consists of the 41 items related to content shown in Table 1 as well as several items for organisational reasons (continuous number, coder, data origin). As we want to investigate the relationship between protest and planning, apart from the attributes of the protest itself, we collect some of the planning process it is related to and especially ask for outcomes and interactions between protest, planning, and other forms of participation. While many values are simple yes/no/maybe or similar options, others are entered by choosing between inherent categories where multiple selections are usually possible. The code sheet also includes a geographical reference to enable GIS analysis, i.e., analysis of hot spots and comparison with other spatial data (e.g., demographics, election results, and building structure where available). As mentioned before, it is expected that in many cases the code sheet can only be partially completed. To give the coder a better understanding of when the necessary saturation is reached, some items are prioritised. If there is no known date, cause, and claim, the protest will not be used for analysis.

## 4. Some Results: Everyday Planning Protest in Five Major German Cities and Its Structure

To give an impression of how PDM enables an understanding of the structural dimensions of everyday planning protest, in the following we present some preliminary results of the ongoing survey in five major German cities. As mentioned above, the preliminary data set used for the five cities contains 2,075 cases. Of these, nearly one-third is located in Berlin and Munich, while the turnouts in the other cities range between 10% in Leipzig and 15% in Cologne (Table 2). Using PDM, most cases were aggregated from data found both in newspapers and online media, but proportions vary between cities, as qualities of local newspapers and the use of online media by protesters are urban particularities as well.

**Table 1.** Code sheet of PDM.

Group	Sub-group	Item	Value	Priority	
Protest	Basic information	Who? (Denomination of protest organisers)	Text	High	
		For what?	Text	High	
		Against what?	Text	High	
		Location of cause and/or claim	Geo reference	High	
	Time	Start of protest	Year	Mandatory	
		End of protest	Year	Mandatory	
	Carriers of protest	Type of protest organiser	Category	High	
		Mail address	Text	High	
		Movement affiliation	Category	Regular	
	Framing	Cause	Category	Mandatory	
		Claim	Category	Mandatory	
		Motivation	Category	Regular	
		Concern	Option	High	
	Actions	Repertoire	Category	Regular	
		Number of participants	Number	Regular	
	Planning	Reference to planning	Planning/policy field	Category	High
			(Planning) instrument	Category	High
Planning process		Start of planning	Year	High	
		End of planning with decision	Year	High	
		End of planning without decision	Year	High	
		Start of implementation	Year	High	
		Completion of implementation	Year	High	
Planning agents		Local politicians	Option	Regular	
		Local administration	Option	Regular	
		Higher level (politics and administration)	Option	Regular	
		Developers, entrepreneurs, and other private actors	Option	Regular	
Outcomes and interactions	Effects	Stop/revocation	Option	High	
		Interruption/delay	Option	High	
		Change of planning procedure	Option	High	
		Change of planning content	Option	High	
		Start of the planning in case of initiative/situational protest	Option	High	
		Third parties affected by initiative/situational protest	Option	High	
		References to other forms of participation	Petition for referendum	Option	High
	Referendum	Option	High		
	Participation beyond the statutory level	Option	High		
	Legal dispute	Option	High		
	Election campaign issue	Option	High		
	Networks	Support in politics	Option	Regular	
		Support in local politics (lowest political level)	Option	Regular	
		Support in civil society (clubs, associations, trade unions, advisory councils, etc.)	Option	Regular	
		Connections to other protests	Option	Regular	



**Table 2.** Share of planning protests found in newspapers and online in the five major German cities ( $N = 2,075$ ).

City	Cases	Share of cases found		
		In newspapers only	Online only	Both in newspapers and online
Berlin	645	9.4%	10.1%	80.6%
Cologne	301	36.5%	5.0%	58.5%
Frankfurt	279	31.5%	3.9%	64.5%
Leipzig	206	23.3%	5.3%	71.4%
Munich	644	44.9%	1.7%	53.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,075</b>	<b>27.0%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>69.3%</b>

Note: Berlin shares correspond only to new cases in the main study.

#### 4.1. Support of Planning Protests

The number of people who participate in planning-related protests clearly illustrates that protest has become an “everyday” feature of planning and form of participation (Table 3). The figures are available for approximately 40.0% of the cases recorded in PDM ( $N = 831$ ), for example, because information on signatures of support or participants in a demonstration was mentioned in the findings. For each protest, only the protest event with the highest number of participants was counted, although in each case a fluctuation of supporters, over- and under-estimations and even deliberate exaggerations can be assumed. On the one hand, the number of unreported cases is probably high. On the other hand, some individuals will be counted more than once as they participated in more than one protest.

Nevertheless, the total number is considerable: In the 16-year study period, a total of at least 3.7 million people took part in 831 planning protests, which corresponds to an average participation of 4,461 persons. Relating this number to the average number of inhabitants over the period, more than half of the number of residents were involved in one of the protests (52.0%). However, there are clear local differences: While in Munich the numbers add up to 63.0%, in Cologne only 43.0% of people protested (the even lower percentage in Leipzig cannot be compared, due to incomplete data).

There are clear differences in the average number of protesters, which do not correlate clearly with the size of the cities. The fact that in Berlin, for example, on average, significantly more people took part in a protest may also be related to the fact that smaller events receive less attention in the local press.

Looking at the size of the individual protests, it can be seen that only the two largest cities—Berlin and Munich—have protests with more than 50,000 participants, while the third largest city—Cologne—has a particularly high number of protests with fewer than 500 supporters. In Frankfurt, the proportion of cases with more than 1,000 supporters is almost as high as in Berlin, which is almost five times as large (Figure 2).

This categorisation does not take into account the different sizes of the five cities, with Berlin more than six times as big as Leipzig. When categories are used in relation to city size, it becomes apparent that protests are relatively large in the two cities with less than one million inhabitants and below average in Berlin (Figure 3). In Frankfurt and Leipzig, nearly half of the cases are supported by one person per 1,000 inhabitants or more, while in Berlin only 23.0% of the protests are that large.

#### 4.2. Planning Fields

To illustrate the kind of protests analysed and to show some differences between the five cities, we take a brief

**Table 3.** Supporters of planning protests and share per inhabitants in the five major German cities ( $N = 831$ ).

City	Protests with known numbers of supporters	Sum of supporters (maximum)	Supporters per protest	Inhabitants **	Share of supporters among inhabitants
Berlin *	185	1,885,702	10,193	3,525,958	53.0%
Cologne	157	438,354	2,792	1,026,604	43.0%
Frankfurt *	127	363,604	2,863	705,497	52.0%
Leipzig *	86	158,695	1,845	547,992	29.0%
Munich	276	860,928	3,119	1,368,689	63.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>3,707,283</b>	<b>4,461</b>	<b>7,174,739</b>	<b>52.0%</b>

Notes: \* preliminary data; \*\* average of 31.12.2004 and 31.12.2020. Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt (2022); for Leipzig in 2020, Sächsisches Landesamt für Statistik (2023).

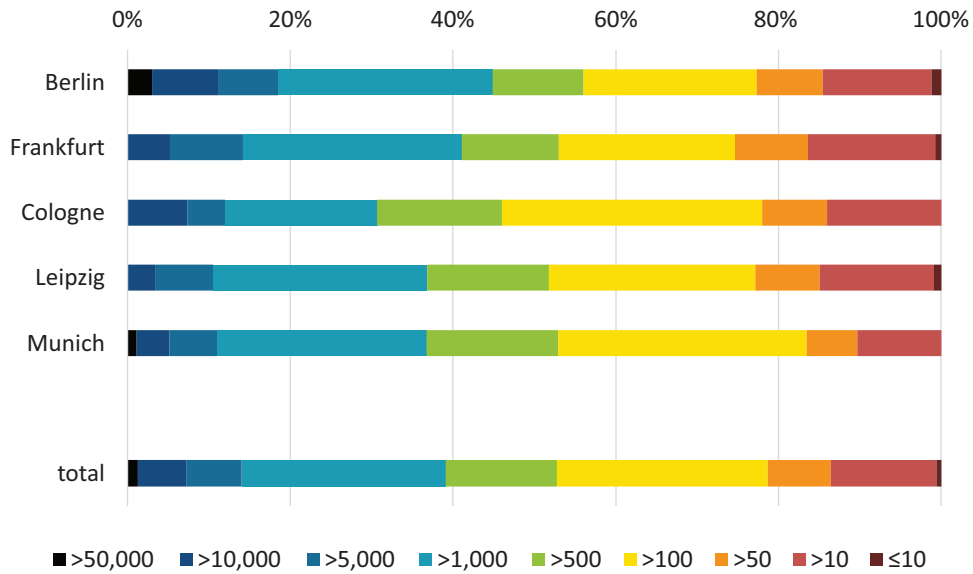


Figure 2. Categorised range of protest size (N = 831).

look at the item planning field, i.e., a categorised description of the content of the contested plans or—in what we call initiative protests—the plans or more general ideas protesters propose.

For this purpose, 66 different categories of planning fields have been summarised into the eight main categories shown in Figure 4. In any city, technical infrastructure and especially different aspects of transportation will be the main focus of planning protests (30.0%). In Leipzig, this focus is even more dominant (39.1%), as there have been various protests concerned with public transport, flight routes, traffic calming measures, and especially the expansion of the cycle path infrastructure. Even in Berlin, where the share is only half as big as in Leipzig, no other category includes more protests (23.3%). Interestingly, in initiative protests, the propor-

tion of protests related to technical infrastructure and mobility is even higher (42.6%), claiming e.g., traffic calming or pedestrian crossings. In Cologne, more than half of initiative protests relate to this planning field (53.8%).

However, despite lower shares of protests, there are larger discrepancies between cities in other planning fields: The share of protests concerned with land use changes, and the construction or destruction of buildings in Cologne nearly doubles that of Leipzig (31.3% to 16.7%). Meanwhile, in Leipzig, the percentage of protests related to migration (both contesting refugee shelters or demanding better housing for migrants) is remarkably high (9.9% as compared to the 3.6% average). The same is true for other planning fields originating in fights of Leipzig’s far-left subculture for alternative spaces. In Frankfurt and Berlin, the research project recorded par-

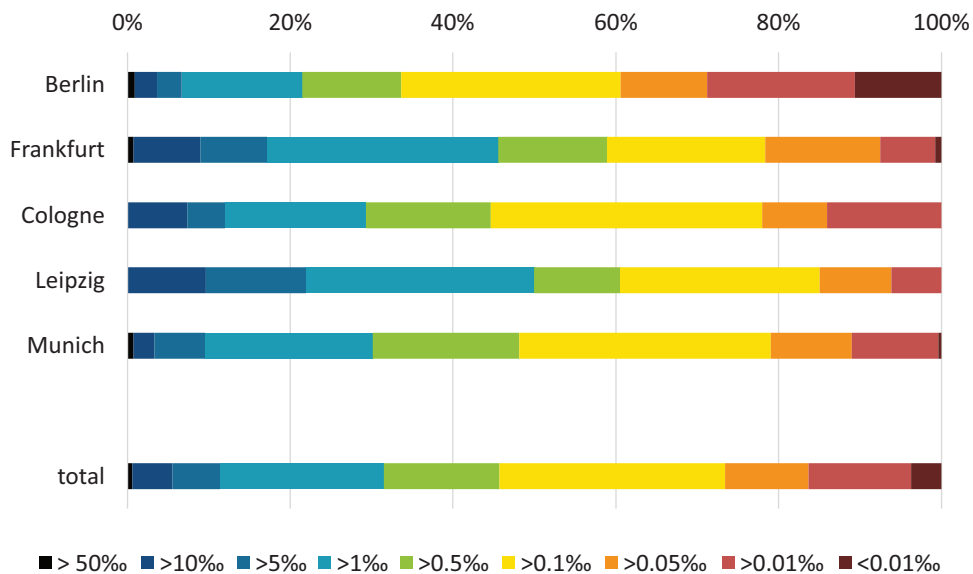


Figure 3. Categorised range of protest size in relation to city size (N = 831).

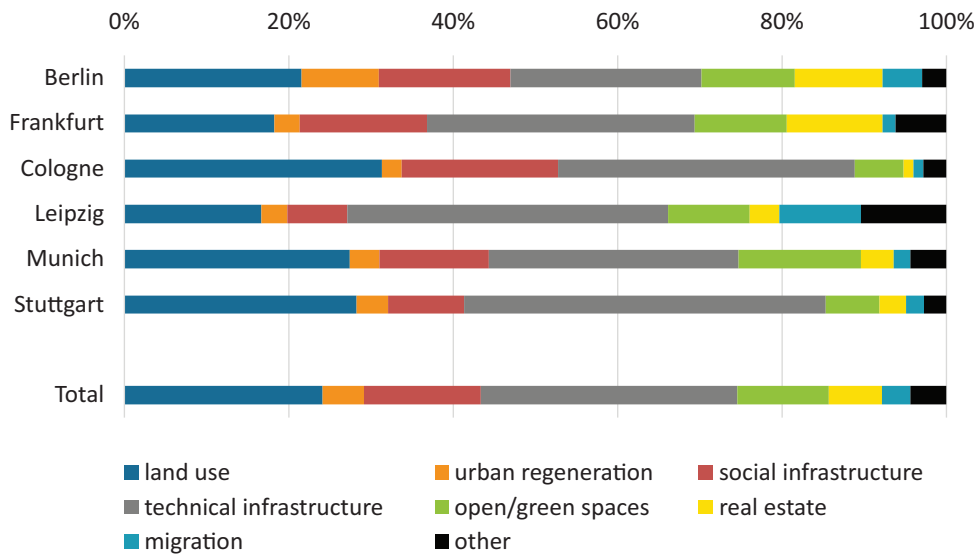


Figure 4. Share of planning protests in categorised planning fields (N = 1,897).

ticularly high numbers of planning protests related to real estate and especially rents (11.6% and 10.7% as compared to 6.8% average), as there have been large manifestations of tenant movements respectively. By contrast, in Munich, the city with the tensest housing market in Germany, the share of these protests is below average (4.0%). As Munich is also the most densely built of the five cities, urban green spaces are especially contested (14.9% as compared to 11.5% average). Among these protests is

also an alliance of several protest organisations for a local referendum to protect all existing green areas.

#### 4.3. Organisers of Planning Protests

The main organisations to undertake planning protests are (groups of) individuals and citizens’ initiatives, i.e., action groups that may either have formed for this protest or already existed before (Figure 5). Either of

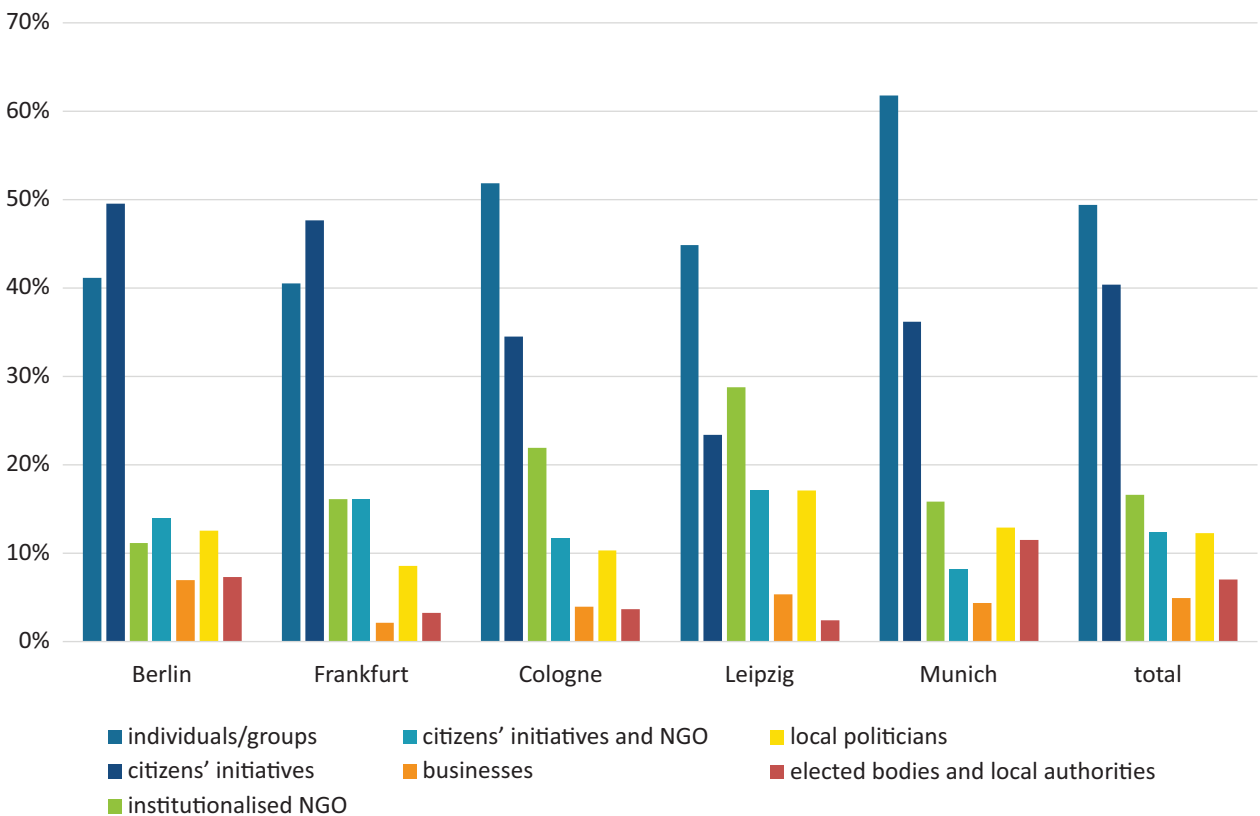


Figure 5. Protest organisations (N = 2,284; multiple selections).

these actors is involved in nearly every case. However, the proportion of the two values (groups of) individuals and citizens' initiatives differs from city to city, which might depend on different denominations used by local media as the difference between a group of neighbours and a citizens' initiative is not much more than having a name and a spokesperson. The share of institutionalised NGOs, like environmental groups and other associations, is much lower but still significant. Local political parties and individual council members are part of nearly every eighth protest, in Leipzig even every sixth (16.0%). Elected bodies—especially elected bodies at the district level—participate in 7.0% of all cases; in Munich, they even take part in 11.0% of all planning protests.

#### 4.4. Outcomes of Planning Protests

Planning protest is an everyday exercise because it is remarkably successful. There are many cases where changes in planning have (already) been reported: Over 18.0% have reached goals claimed by the protesters (though often not all the goals have been reached); nearly 10.0% have managed to achieve changes in planning contents; 7.0% have led to changes of planning procedure; another 7.0% caused interruptions of the planning process. Taken together, one-third of protests had an effect (Table 4), but there are significant differences between cities: In Frankfurt, only half as many protests as in Berlin were successful (10.0% to 20.0%). In Munich, where nearly 45.0% of protests showed some effect, there were more changes of plans and less success. In contrast to all other cities, in Leipzig, the planning procedure was changed more often than the contents. Yet, this may not mean that protests without references to such changes have been unsuccessful.

### 5. Conclusion

At least in the five major German cities and during the 2005 to 2020 period, planning a protest is not a “state of emergency” but an everyday action for protesters, planners, and local politicians alike. The few statistics given in this article already show that by applying PDM and comparing data, we can see differences in the local planning-related political opportunity structure: Within Cologne and Leipzig, the two cities where mobilisation is lower

in terms of the share of inhabitants showing support for planning protests, NGOs are involved in more protests—maybe as a substitute for popular support, maybe as an indicator that the local opportunity structure does not provide for as many independent protests to emerge. Only in Berlin and Munich, the two largest cities, which have a significant lower tier of local government at the borough level, is there a noticeable level of support by local elected bodies and politicians—usually at the borough level. While, of course, the numbers of supporters are higher in the larger cities, in comparison to city size, they are highest in Munich, possibly explaining the fact that it is also the city where most changes implemented in urban politics and planning related to protest demands could be observed.

Yet, the many discrepancies shown for the item planning field indicate that in local planning-related protests, opportunity is not restricted to planning procedures, politics, and mobilisation, but that planning content, more general planning-related policies and situations in the urban structure are equally important causes for protest. As already presumed by Bertram (2019), protesters are only able to mobilise support when the alternative solutions they (often implicitly) propose are compatible with planning policies yet independent and divergent enough to be clearly recognised. Based on the additional but preliminary data, we now suspect that particularities of the built environment of cities also contribute to the local opportunity structure. There seems to be reciprocity not only between the structural and everyday as explicated above, but also between political and environmental urban structures. However, these dependencies seem to be complex: For example, in Munich—the most densely populated city with the highest rents—there is a relatively high proportion of protests to stop further densification but there are far fewer rent-related protests than for instance in Frankfurt and Berlin. Apparently, in the Bavarian capital, citizens can be more easily mobilised to protect urban green spaces but are suspicious of protesters claiming new solutions for a housing market that has been a top priority of local planners and politicians for decades. In Berlin, on the other hand, where rents have been comparably low for a long time and the share of tenants is high, as those are experiencing sharp rent increases, it was even possible to mobilise a majority in a local referendum for expropriating large

**Table 4.** Percentage of planning protests with outcomes in five major German cities ( $N = 2,041$ ; multiple selections).

City	Success (as defined by protesters)	Interruption of the planning process	Changes in the planning procedure	Changes to the planning content	Any kind of effect
Berlin	20.2%	10.2%	7.0%	9.9%	32.2%
Cologne	15.7%	4.8%	3.2%	8.7%	27.6%
Frankfurt	10.1%	6.1%	5.0%	7.3%	22.8%
Leipzig	17.6%	6.4%	8.3%	5.1%	27.6%
Munich	16.6%	5.6%	8.5%	11.6%	44.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>33.4%</b>

housing stocks. Frankfurt serves as a cross-check. Here, rents have been similarly high as in Munich, but in contrast, local civil society has been contesting this situation for decades, too.

Thus, planning a protest conceptualised as part of everyday life in major cities can be seen as a key to understanding urban particularities, i.e., the differences that under the harmonising effects of globalisation still exist between cities—even within one country. Of course, there are historic path dependencies and structural differences between rich and poor cities or former Western and Eastern Germany (the latter here only represented by Leipzig). We can recognise a local-specific opportunity structure that is built upon these path-dependencies and structures, but also (re)produced in the everyday activities of citizens, politicians, and planners. Yet, what planning protests throughout all five German cities have in common is that most of their protagonists do not use this kind of participation because they lack (civil, political, and social) rights as indicated by Isin (2009) and others working on the activism or insurgent actions of marginalised groups. Instead, the rationality of these actions is that of an attention economy and a still predominantly representative democracy (Bertram, 2019).

Transforming everyday action into structural data allows analysis of particularities and commonalities. However, this is only a small part of the possible applications of PDM. It provides the basis for the identification of a protest typology that depicts a spectrum of themes and development patterns, as well as for the investigation of case studies that illustrate these typologies. Thanks to the recording of locations of causes and claims, protest typologies can be related to socio-spatial data and thus allow not only for a comparison between cities but also between different boroughs within one city. The database can serve as a starting point for in-depth studies, e.g., on planning-related protests concerning public space, commercial development, or various aspects of urban mobility. As the data analysis is not yet completed, case studies are still to be developed. However, we have already been able to show that the methodology presented is a way to combine the analysis of specific planning protests with an analysis of local planning-political opportunity structure.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the German Research Foundation for funding the research project.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### References

Ache, P., Krüger, T., & Richter, S. (2017). Stadtpolitik [Urban politics]. *Raumplanung, 2017*(189), 6–7.

- Appelhans, N. (2017). *Urban planning and everyday urbanisation*. transcript.
- Bäcklund, P., & Mäntysalo, R. (2010). Agonism and institutional ambiguity: Ideas on democracy and the role of participation in the development of planning theory and practice—The case of Finland. *Planning Theory, 9*(4), 333–350.
- Bertram, G. F. (2015). Postdemokratischer Protest? Anlässe und Trägerschaft städtischer Proteste [Post-democratic protest? Occasions and organisers of urban protests]. In U. Bitzegeio, J. Mittag, & L. Winterberg (Eds.), *Der politische Mensch: Akteure gesellschaftlicher Partizipation im Übergang zum 21. Jahrhundert* [The political man: Actors of social participation in the transition to the 21st century] (pp. 75–110). Dietz.
- Bertram, G. F. (2019). „Aber nicht so!": Theorie und Praxis, Ansprüche und Wirklichkeiten bürger-schaftlichen Planungsprotests in Berlin 2005 bis 2015 [“But not like this!": Theory and practice, demands and realities of civic planning protest in Berlin 2005 to 2015] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Kassel. <http://doi.org/10.17170/kobra-20190129119>
- Bertram, G. F., & Altröck, U. (2023). Jenseits agonistischer Planungstheorien: Die „Normalität“ von Protesten und ihr Einfluss auf die Konfliktaustragung in der räumlichen Planung [Beyond agonistic planning theories: The “normality” of protests and their influence on conflict resolution in spatial planning]. *Raumforschung und Raumordnung/Spatial Research and Planning*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.14512/rur.1674>
- Bertram, G. F., & Kienast, G. (2023, March 27). *Planning-related protest in major German cities via online petitions, social media and the internet as a rational and strategic form of e participation* [Paper presentation]. 7th Urban e-Planning Conference, Lisbon, Portugal.
- Blood, R. (2010). Activism and the internet: From e-mail to new political movement. *Journal of Communication Management, 5*(2), 160–169.
- Castells, M. (1972). *La question urbaine* [The urban question]. Maspéro.
- Castells, M. (1983). *The city and the grassroots: A cross-cultural theory of urban social movements*. University of California Press.
- Chase, J., Crawford, M., & Kaliski, J. (1999). *Everyday urbanism*. Monacelli Press.
- Cornwall, A. (2002). Locating citizen participation. *IDS Bulletin, 33*(2), 1–10.
- De Certeau, M. (2013). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press. (Original work published 1984)
- Eisinger, P. K. (1973). The conditions of protest behavior in American cities. *American Political Science Review, 67*(1), 11–28.
- Fainstein, S. S., & Fainstein, N. I. (1985). Economic restructuring

- turing and the rise of urban social movements. *Urban Affairs Review*, 21(2), 187–206.
- Gamson, W. A. (1990). *The strategy of social protest* (2nd ed.). Wadsworth. (Original work published 1975)
- Geißel, B., & Thillman, K. (2006). Partizipation in Neuen Sozialen Bewegungen [Participation in new social movements]. In B. Hoecker (Ed.), *Politische Partizipation zwischen Konvention und Protest* [Political participation between convention and protest] (pp. 159–183). Budrich.
- Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso.
- Herkenrath, M. (2011). Theorieansätze der Bewegungsforschung [Theoretical approaches in movement research]. In M. Herkenrath (Ed.), *Die Globalisierung der sozialen Bewegungen* [The globalisation of social movements] (pp. 32–57). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Hilbrandt, H. (2019). Everyday urbanism and the everyday state: Negotiating habitat in allotment gardens in Berlin. *Urban Studies*, 56(2), 352–367.
- Hocke, P. (2002). *Massenmedien und lokaler Protest: Eine empirische Fallstudie zur Medienselektivität in einer westdeutschen Bewegungshochburg* [Mass media and local protest: An empirical case study on media selectivity in a West German movement stronghold]. Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Hoecker, B. (2006). Politische Partizipation: systematische Einführung [Political participation: Systematic introduction]. In B. Hoecker (Ed.), *Politische Partizipation zwischen Konvention und Protest* [Political participation between convention and protest] (pp. 3–20). Budrich.
- Holston, J. (1998). Spaces of insurgent citizenship. In L. Sandercock (Ed.), *Making the invisible visible: A multicultural planning history* (pp. 37–56). University of California Press.
- Insin, E. F. (2009). Citizenship in flux: The figure of the activist citizen. *Subjectivity*, 29(1), 367–388.
- Iveson, K. (2013). Cities within the city: Do-it-yourself urbanism and the right to the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37(3), 941–956.
- Jasper, J. M. (2004). A strategic approach to collective action: Looking for agency in social movement choices. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 9(1), 1–16.
- Kaliski, J. (2008). Everyday urban design: Towards default urbanism and/or urbanism by design? In D. Kelbaugh & K. McCullough (Eds.), *Writing urbanism: A design reader* (pp. 115–119). Routledge.
- Kamleithner, C. (2009). „Regieren durch Community“: Neoliberale Formen der Stadtplanung [“Governance through community“: Neoliberal forms of urban planning]. In M. Drilling & O. Schnur (Eds.), *Governance der Quartiersentwicklung: Theoretische und praktische Zugänge zu neuen Steuerungsformen* [Governance of neighbourhood development: Theoretical and practical approaches to new forms of governance] (pp. 29–48). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Kraushaar, W. (2011). Protest der Privilegierten? Oder: Was ist wirklich neu an den Demonstrationen gegen “Stuttgart 21”? [Protest of the privileged? Or: What is really new about the demonstrations against “Stuttgart 21”?]. *Mittelweg*, 36(3), 5–22.
- Kühn, M. (2021). Agonistic planning theory revisited: The planner’s role in dealing with conflict. *Planning Theory*, 20(2), 143–156.
- Lake, R. W. (1993). Planners’ alchemy transforming NIMBY to YIMBY: Rethinking NIMBY. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 59(1), 87–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369308975847>
- Lawhon, M., Ernstson, H., & Silver, J. (2014). Provincializing urban political ecology: Towards a situated UPE through African urbanism. *Antipode*, 46(2), 497–516.
- Lefebvre, H. (1968). *Le droit à la ville, suivi de: Espace et politique* [The right to the city, followed by: Space and politics]. Edition Anthropos.
- Lipsky, M. (1968). Protest as a political resource. *The American Political Science Review*, 62(4), 1144–1158.
- Miraftab, F. (2009). Insurgent planning: Situating radical planning in the Global South. *Planning Theory*, 8(1), 32–50.
- Miraftab, F., & Wills, S. (2005). Insurgency and spaces of active citizenship. The story of Western Cape anti-eviction campaign in South Africa. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 25(2), 200–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X05282182>
- Opp, K.-D. (2009). *Theories of political protest and social movements: A multidisciplinary introduction, critique, and synthesis*. Routledge.
- Parnell, S., & Robinson, J. (2012). (Re)theorizing cities from the Global South: Looking beyond neoliberalism. *Urban Geography*, 33(4), 593–617.
- Pløger, J. (2004). Strife: Urban planning and agonism. *Planning Theory*, 3(1), 71–92.
- Rucht, D. (2001). Protest und Protestereignisanalyse: Einleitende Bemerkungen [Protest and protest event analysis: Introductory remarks]. In D. Rucht (Ed.), *Protest in der Bundesrepublik: Strukturen und Entwicklungen* [Protest in the Federal Republic: Structures and developments] (pp. 7–25). Campus.
- Rucht, D., & Ohlemacher, T. (1992). Protest event data: Collection, uses and perspectives. In R. Eyerman & M. Diani (Eds.), *Issues in contemporary social movement research* (pp. 76–106). SAGE.
- Rusca, M., & Cleaver, F. (2022). Unpacking everyday urbanism: Practices and the making of (un)even urban waterscapes. *WIREs Water*, 9(2), Article e1581. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wat2.1581>
- Sächsisches Landesamt für Statistik. (2023). *Bevölkerungsstand des Freistaates Sachsen nach Kreisfreien Städten und Landkreisen. 31. Dezember 2020, A | 1 – j/20* [Population status of the Free State of Saxony by independent cities and districts].

- 31 December 2020, A | 1 – j/20]. [https://www.statistischebibliothek.de/mir/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/SNHeft\\_derivate\\_00009548/statistik-sachsen\\_al1\\_bevoelkerungsstand-kreis.pdf](https://www.statistischebibliothek.de/mir/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/SNHeft_derivate_00009548/statistik-sachsen_al1_bevoelkerungsstand-kreis.pdf)
- Sager, T. (2023). *Activist planning case studies 1990–2020*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Sassen, S. (2011). Die Macht des Digitalen: Ambivalenzen des Internet [The power of the digital: Ambivalences of the internet]. *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 2011(2), 93–104.
- Scharpf, F. W. (1973). *Planung als politischer Prozeß: Aufsätze zur Theorie der planenden Demokratie* [Planning as a political process: Essays on the theory of the planning democracy]. Suhrkamp.
- Schipper, S. (2010). Unternehmerische Stadtentwicklung zwischen interkommunalem Wettbewerb und lokaler Regulation: Untersucht am Beispiel der Stadt Münster [Entrepreneurial urban development between intermunicipal competition and local regulation: The example of the city of Münster]. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 9(2), 138–163.
- Schwartz, E. (1996). *Netactivism: How citizens use the Internet*. O'Reilly.
- Selle, K. (2013). *Über Bürgerbeteiligung hinaus: Stadtentwicklung als Gemeinschaftsaufgabe? Analysen und Konzepte* [Beyond citizen participation: Urban development as a community task? Analyses and concepts]. Rohn.
- Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. In B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi, & S. G. Tarrow (Eds.), *From structure to action: Comparing social movements across cultures* (pp. 197–217). JAI Press.
- Statistisches Bundesamt. (2022). *Regionaldatenbank, Fortschreibung des Bevölkerungsstandes* [Regional database, population update] (Code 12411) [Database]. <https://www.regionalstatistik.de/genesis/online?operation=download&code=12411-01-01-4&option=ffcsv>
- Talen, E. (2015). Do-it-yourself urbanism. *Journal of Planning History*, 14(2), 135–148.
- Tarrow, S. G. (2011). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Van Laer, J. (2010). Activists online and offline: The internet as an information channel for protest demonstrations. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 15(3), 347–366.
- Voss, K. (2013). Grassroots-Campaigning im Internet [Grassroots-campaigning on the internet]. In R. Speth (Ed.), *Grassroots-campaigning* (pp. 183–200). Springer.
- Watson, S. (2009). The magic of the marketplace: Sociality in a neglected public space. *Urban Studies*, 46(8), 1577–1591.

## About the Authors



**Grischa Frederik Bertram** is an associate professor for spatial planning and research at the Bauhaus University Weimar. He was a senior researcher at the University of Kassel. His PhD on protest in local spatial planning in Berlin was published in 2019. He studied urban planning at the University of Kassel (Dipl.-Ing., 2004, 2006) and the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. His main research areas include local governance, planning theory, and sustainable spatial development.



**Gerhard Kienast** is a researcher at the Department for Urban Regeneration and Planning, University of Kassel. He studied urban and regional planning at TU Berlin (Dipl.-Ing., 2001), Instituto Politécnico Nacional (Mexico City), and the Berlin Centre for Rural Development. His main research areas are urban governance, planning performance, housing policy, and civic protest in local spatial planning. He is a member of Trialog, Association for Scientific Research into Planning and Building in the Developing World.