Article

Negotiating Vertical Urbanization at the Public–Private Nexus: On the Institutional Embeddedness of Planning Committees

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Abstract

While the planning and development of dense and high-rise neighborhoods are commonly perceived as primarily technical procedures, the past several decades have highlighted the growing social complexity of these processes. Neighborhood initiatives opposing development, as well as an increasing variety of public and private stakeholders involved in these processes, have led to the continual emergence of organizations that facilitate the production of urban density and verticality. Committees are founded to operate at the nexus of public and private development, while simultaneously promoting urban growth and public interests. Although they often are not formally recognized as political entities, they are constituted by political acts and hence influence planning processes. However, despite all the research into dense and high-rise neighborhood developments, academic interest has so far neglected the role of committees in these processes. This article aims to fill this gap by presenting an analysis of 23 committees engaging with high-rise housing and neighborhood developments in the three German-speaking countries of Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. First, it reveals the heterogeneity of committees, delineating four components for the institutionalization of committees. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of two committees in Austria and Switzerland, to demonstrate how these structural components influence the development of neighborhoods.

Issue

This article is part of the issue "Vertical Cities: The Development of High-Rise Neighbourhoods" edited by Brian Webb (Cardiff University) and James T. White (University of Glasgow).

1. Introduction

Vienna once aimed to have the world's tallest timber high-rise building within its city limits. While it has never really achieved this—in part due to changes in the evaluation criteria of the Council of Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, as well as a Norwegian project suddenly deciding to increase its height by 4.4 m (Linner, 2020)—the project remains indicative of the broader processes shaping Vienna's political and economic landscape. High-rise developments and urban densification are the go-to concepts for urban regions looking to simultaneously tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities of urban growth. The upward trajectory of urban densification over the past few decades is illustrated by OECD data. OECD differentiates between three statistical types of city growth: towns growing into cities, city expansion through new neighborhoods on their urban edges, and densification within the existing boundaries of cities, the latter attributed to 60% of the population growth in OECD cities between 2000 and 2015, up from 50% between 1975 and 1990. City expansion through the development of neighborhoods is attributed to further 25% (OECD, 2020, pp. 102–103).

However, urban densification and neighborhood development are becoming increasingly complex

because of the rising fragmentation of planning processes (Parker et al., 2018), as well as the continued mobilization of "not-in-my-backyard" movements (Wicki & Kaufmann, 2022). Furthermore, topics such as affordable housing, social mixing, urban greening, and soil protection are becoming ever-more pressing in planning procedures, and hence specialized expertise is needed in the administration of planning and neighborhood development processes. Because of this rising complexity, a two-year-long research project addressed the role of inter- and transdisciplinary committees involved in urban planning.

While terms such as committees, commissions, juries, or panels are mostly used in a synonymous way, we use the term "committee" as an umbrella term for distinct groups of people involved in planning processes, such as juries of architectural competitions or design review panels. Committees are defined as "institutionalized interactions with the competence to prepare or make decisions within a predefined area of responsibility. Committees are either small or medium-sized groups, whose interactions take place within a certain frequency of meetings" (Weihe et al., 2008, p. 340; authors' own translation). Their institutionalization is formalized through political acts such as laws, ordinances, or resolutions across different administrative levels (Gobert, 2014, p. 22; Krick, 2013, p. 24), and thus committees are inherently of a territorial nature.

Our research demonstrates how the German-speaking countries of Austria, Switzerland, and Germany contain a wide range of inter- and sometimes even transdisciplinary committees, founded in order to influence these planning processes; in particular, they attempt to strengthen public interests in the public-private nexus in the development of dense and high-rise neighborhoods. This article, building on the notion of inter- and transdisciplinarity, focuses on how vertical urbanization is influenced by the institutionalization of committees, which act as a specific instrument of local and regional statecraft. After identifying 23 committees involved in planning, of which 15 dealt specifically with neighborhood-level development, we analyzed them in order to answer the primary research question: Which *structural components* that institutionalize committees in the planning system can be identified? To further elaborate upon these components, we analyzed in-depth two committees that specifically deal with vertical urbanization in Vienna and the Bern city-region to answer a second research question: How do these structural components influence committees dealing with dense and high-rise neighborhood development?

The article is structured as follows: We first present our conceptual framework relating to the political economy and governance of vertical urbanization, before deeper investigating the role of committees in these processes. Thereafter, our research questions and methodical approach are introduced. We then present our results in two empirical sections. The first is the identification

and mapping of 23 committees, and the second delves into the detail of the *structural components* derived from this collection through two in-depth case studies. These are: (a) the Jury der Bauträgerwettbewerbe (Jury of the Housing Developers Competition; JHDC) of the Wohnfonds (Vienna Housing Fund; VHF) and (b) the Qualitätsteam Hochhausplanung (Q-Team Skyscraper-Planning; Q-Team) of the Regionalkonferenz Bern-Mittelland (Regional-Conference Bern-Mittelland; RCBM). The article concludes with a comparative discussion and an outlook for further research.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Embedding Planning Committees Into the Governance of Vertical Urbanization

The increasing interest in urban studies into vertical urbanization is no coincidence since the 21st century has seen a constant shattering of the records for the tallest buildings. Even Europe, where skyscraper and high-rise developments have been less prevalent than in North America or Asia, has witnessed "its greatest ever period of high-rise construction" (Drozdz et al., 2018, p. 469). Critical scholars often focus on the neoliberal agenda under which contemporary dense and high-rise developments arise. What was once termed the "sustainability fix" by While et al. (2004), namely the incorporation of ecologic goals within economic interests, is being investigated in high-rise developments in places like Jakarta, where "proponents argue that high-rise buildings can solve the challenge of housing ever-increasing urban populations, are important engines of economic development, and are beneficial because compact cities are greener and more energy efficient than urban sprawl" (Liong et al., 2020, p. 1081).

While Nethercote (2018, p. 4), in her conceptual framework for the study of vertical urbanization, particularly focuses on the role of high-rise developments "as labour and capital intensive commodities; as investments on real estate markets increasingly tied to financial markets; and as cultural artefacts of distinction in inter city competition and geopolitics and in class relations," she also emphasizes the role of the state in shaping the local expressions of vertical urbanization (Nethercote, 2018, p. 22). Verticality and density in such a context are hence not only geometrical features but elementary conditions to simultaneously "tackle and facilitate urban growth, enhance the city's competitiveness, and satisfy development fervour" (Rosen & Charney, 2018, p. 539). In this, the (European) state is not a mere spectator, but a crucial actor in the promotion, enhancement, and distribution of growth in urban regions (While et al., 2013).

Under such an entrepreneurial urban agenda, planning instruments have experienced a general reframing and contribute to urban inequalities. For example, density bonuses (Karampour, 2021) or floor-area-ratios

(Liong et al., 2020) that were established to regulate density to promote public welfare have been used to "facilitate the profitability of real estate projects for developers and local government revenues" (Liong et al., 2020, p. 1073). Also, the management of design has been attributed to promote neoliberal practices of urban competitiveness (Chen & White, 2021, pp. 2–3) in the sense that "starchitecture" and "spectacle architecture" has led to uneven distribution and delivery of well-designed spaces that enhance the quality of life (Richardson & White, 2021, p. 4).

2.2. The Rise of Planning Committees

The systems of planning and design of urban space have been reframed under an entrepreneurial urban agenda to achieve and accommodate urban growth, with verticality playing a central role in this process. Simultaneously, a rise in the number of committees involved in planning can be observed, of which design review panels are probably the most prominent example. An upwards trajectory has been observed in the literature in countries such as the US (Agrawal, 2010, p. 398), Australia (Williams, 2014), the UK (Paterson, 2011; White & Chapple, 2019, p. 598), Germany (Förster et al., 2017, p. 7), and Austria (Raspotnig, 2007). Furthermore, design review panels are also slowly being adopted in countries such as India (Agrawal, 2010) and China (Chen & White, 2021). This increase has been attributed to a variety of circumstances. Richardson and White (2021), for example, see the rise of design review panels as a result of austerity and the shrinking of public sector planning departments in the UK. Williams (2014, p. 444), on the case of Australia, connects their rising prominence to a "lack of confidence by councils and state government in the quality of advice provided by council staff." Research in Germany, on the other hand, perceives the emergence of design review panels as coupled with growing awareness of the appearance of the built environment (the German term *Baukultur*, or building cultures, plays a critical role in this context; Förster et al., 2017).

Along with the increasing prominence of committees such as design review panels, critiques of these new instruments arose in the planning, design, and urban studies literature. Williams (2014, p. 445), for example, questions the example of design review panels in Australia and whether the "panelization" of planning and design governance is used to "push through locally undesirable development and planning proposals." However, research and critique on committees also illustrate the necessity to more deeply investigate their institutional embeddedness in the system of planning, design, and building provision. The institutional embeddedness, on the one hand, shapes the overall ability of committees to influence planning and design processes; on the other hand, it influences the efficiency of the planning system in general. Thereby Williams (2014, p. 427) notes how "the trend towards paneliza-

tion is…symptomatic of an apparent inability of traditional decision-making structures to adequately handle contemporary planning and development matters" and further fragments decision-making, resulting "in a more complex planning system" (Williams, 2014, p. 444).

Insufficient or inadequate institutional embeddedness can also lead to committees and panels being viewed as anti-democratic and unclearly defined (Paterson, 2011), being influenceable by political leaders (Chen & White, 2021, p. 16), "not sufficiently open to public scrutiny" (White & Chapple, 2019, p. 598), as well as simply being ignored or dismissed by project applicants (Agrawal, 2010, p. 402). Furthermore, Paterson (2011, p. 101) notes that design review panels in the UK lack criteria to assess projects and have no relation to local or national planning policy, while Chen and White (2021, p. 16) found the opposite problem in China: "Normative urban design principles are widely used in national and local planning policy but they are not locally contextualized."

Another strand of literature focuses on the subjective and agency-dependent nature of how committees function and how they arrive at their conclusions and recommendations. White and Chapple (2019, p. 598) as well as Black (2019, pp. 5, 15–16) mention how committees and panels are influenced by individual agency and power relations that try to push through particular interests. They further emphasize the critical role of the chairperson in this regard. Silberberger (2011, 2012) investigates the iterative nature of how juries of architecture competitions come to their conclusions and sometimes deliberately depart from the original competition program. Also, a conflict of interests from panel members can occur, since most of them operate their own architectural offices, beyond their roles as part of juries (Richardson & White, 2021, p. 18). Therefore, White and Chapple (2019, p. 598) conclude that "if a panel is poorly composed, or does not have a good balance of skills, its effectiveness can be limited."

The trend towards dense and high-rise urban developments, as well as the emergence of committees as a popular instrument in planning, follow a similar temporal and directional trajectory. However, we argue that this co-emergence is interdependent and indicative of entrepreneurial forms of urban development. The institutionalization of committees is hence an important facet of understanding state intervention in vertical urbanization. Hence, in the following sections, we present a framework for the structural components of committees that are involved in the development of dense and high-rise neighborhoods.

3. Methodical Approach and Research Questions

The research presented here is part of a much bigger research project which specifically dealt with the role of inter- and transdisciplinarity in urban planning and neighborhood development. While institutionalization

and not inter- or transdisciplinarity is the focus of this article, it is still important to address the basic assumptions of the research project, because they influenced to collection and selection of our empirical examples:

1. Committees are founded to mediate and influence increasingly complex development processes of dense and high-rise neighborhoods.
2. Committees involved in dense and high-rise neighborhood developments have adopted an interdisciplinary composition to tackle the multiple challenges deriving from urban growth.

Based on these assumptions and the definition, we reached out to a network of 87 experts from academia and planning practice in the three German-speaking countries of Austria, Switzerland, and Germany to identify inter- or transdisciplinary committees involved in neighborhood development processes. We received 90 relatively institutionalized organizations and groups from our network, of which 23 aligned with the aforementioned committee definition (see Table 1). The other 67 organizations we received were either organizations bigger than the committees or informal networks of individuals. Fifteen of these 23 have a direct influence on the planning and implementation of neighborhoods; furthermore, most of them were established in the last 20 years, reflecting the dynamic we identified in the increasing emergence of committees. We then undertook a two-step analysis to answer our research questions.

First, it was necessary to obtain a clearer picture of the different institutional components of the committees. Therefore, we prepared a brief profile for each of the 23 committees by using available data from the internet and scientific databases and mapped them using different categories to answer the first research question: Which *structural components* that institutionalize committees in the planning system can be identified? Second, we chose two committees based on their involvement in the development of neighborhoods and their interdisciplinary composition. We analyzed these two committees by gaining data from 11 qualitative expert interviews and various types of documents (annual reports, evaluations, etc.) which we then coded using MAXQDA software. The in-depth analysis of these two committees allowed us to answer the following research question: How do these structural components influence committees dealing with dense and high-rise neighborhood development?

4. Classification of Planning Committees

4.1. Mapping: Approaching a Classification of Planning Committees

The 23 analyzed committees are displayed in Table 1 with some of the key characteristics. At first, they seem to display a high level of heterogeneity. While some are situated at the national level, others were institutionalized on a municipal or even directly at the neighborhood level. Some committees were able to directly make decisions while others were "only" able to give recommendations, often depending on the stage of the planning and/or permit process they are involved in. Also, from a processual perspective, there were significant differences between them. While many committees are only integrated into planning and building processes at singular points, others dealt with specific projects from the earliest planning stages until the completion of the whole neighborhood. As could be expected, interdisciplinarity was dealt with very differently. Some committees "just" included different planning professionals (architects, landscape planners, traffic engineers, etc.); other committees could even be described as transdisciplinary, by combining actors from academia, politics, and planning practice.

To provide an overview of the different types of committees, we mapped them according to a matrix with three different variables, using information from the profiles we developed for each committee. First, we sorted the committees on a y-axis with regards to the administrative and political levels they are attached to. Second, we checked which stage of the planning or building permit process the committee is involved in and mapped it on an x-axis, using the neo-performative model of spatial governance (Janin Rivolin, 2017, pp. 13–14). For the z-axis, we used colors to illustrate the committees' decision-making power according to Diller's (2019) classification of planning instruments.

The result of this classification is mapped in Figure 1. Of course, it must be considered that this classification is based on the relatively small sample of the 23 collected committees and needs further elaboration in the future. However, three abstract categories of committees can be derived from it. First, in the development of spatial strategies between the regional and the national level, committees can mostly be considered as methodical instruments that develop basic research for planning processes; or, they have a "procedural" nature, in that they are formed to network members across the multi-tiered levels of governance. This is especially important in federal countries like Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. In Austria, for example, ÖREK-Partnerschaften (partnerships) have been founded for the implementation of the goals of the Austrian Spatial Development Concept (ÖREK).

Second, during the process of acquiring building permits, various forms of quality control or advisory committees have been developed that are situated on either a federal state/cantonal level, a regional level, or a municipal level and are, in some instances, composed in an interdisciplinary manner, from planners of various disciplines to social scientists and real-estate economists. The recommendations of these committees are mostly non-binding and report to political decision-making bodies. Design review panels, for example, can also be placed in this category. The two case-study committees that are

Table 1. Overview of the 23 identified committees.

Name, city	Country	Administrative scale	Year of foundation	Number of members
Fachbeirat für Stadtplanung und Stadtgestaltung, Vienna	AT	Municipality	1929	12
AG Raumbedarf, Innsbruck	AT	Municipality	2020	8
Gestaltungsbeiräte	AT	Municipality	1983	Varying depending on municipality
Grundstücksbeirat, Vienna	AT	Neighborhood	1984	12
Bauträgerwettbewerbe, Vienna	AT	Neighborhood	1995	12
Aspern Beirat, Seestadt Vienna	AT	Neighborhood	2011	6
Raumplanungsbeirat, Vorarlberg	AT	Federal state	?	14
Österreichischer Beirat für Baukultur	AT	Country	2008	28
ÖREK-Partnerschaften	AT	Country	2011	8–20
Fachkommission Städtebau des Kanton St. Gallen	CH	Canton	2018	6
Stadtentwicklungs-Lenkungsausschuss der Stadt St. Gallen	CH	Municipality	2016	8
Stadtforum Zürich West	CH	Neighborhood	1996	49
Kernteams für Entwicklungsgebiete der Stadt Zürich	CH	Neighborhood	2001	6–8
Quartierkommissionen, Bern	CH	Neighborhood	2001	20–30
Qualitätskommission Agglomeration Freiburg	CH	Region	2018	3
Qualitätsteam Hochhausplanung, Region Bern	CH	Region	2009	5
Lares Gender- und Alltagsgerechtes Planen & Bauen	CH	Country	2013	10
Rat für Raumordnung, Schweiz	CH	Country	1997	14
Forum Pergolenviertel, Hamburg	DE	Neighborhood	2011	Varying
Konsortium Prinz-Eugen-Park, Munich	DE	Neighborhood	2016	21
Beirat der HafenCity GmbH, Hamburg	DE	Neighborhood	2005	12
Beirat für Konzeptvergabeverfahren	DE	Neighborhood	Since 1990	Varying depending on project
Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung, Germany	DE	Country	1967	17
Beirat für Raumentwicklung, Germany	DE	Country	?	28

more deeply investigated in Section 5 both belong to this category.

Third, many committees that were founded in the last 20 years are committees that have procedural as well as quality-control elements, to guide and consult about singular, large-scale neighborhood development projects throughout the entire process, from the development of a spatial strategy to the final building permit approvals. Examples are the advisory boards for Seestadt Aspern in Vienna and HafenCity in Hamburg. In some instances, committees in these categories involved members from various planning disciplines as well as the social sciences. Committees such as the Stadtforum Zürich West or the Forum Pergolenviertel in Hamburg are composed in a participatory way with planning officials, politicians, as well as citizens.

4.2. Defining the Structural Components of Planning Committees

While we were thus able to identify specific groups of committees, our data did not reveal much about the institutional embeddedness of the committees. Referring to the definition by Weihe et al. (2008), formal institutionalization can be identified as the key characteristic to differentiate committees from other groups of
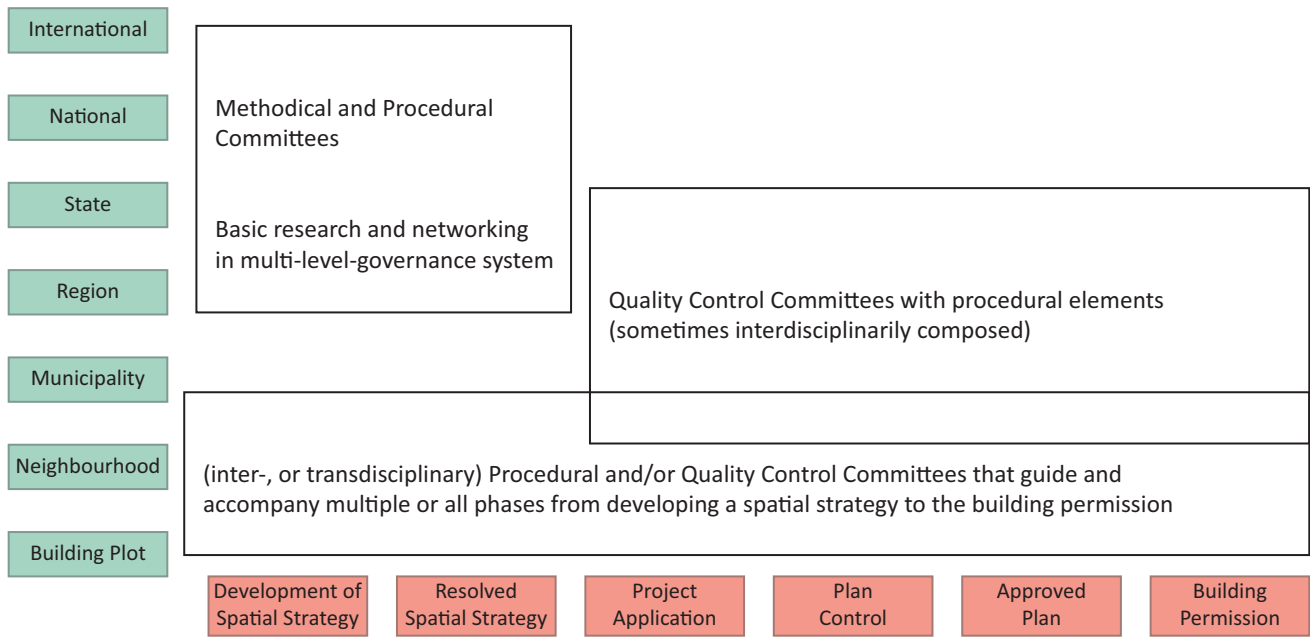
Figure 1. Classification of committees involved in planning and building permit processes in the German-speaking countries of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland.

individuals. In our cases, committees are mostly either founded directly by political acts (such as laws or resolutions) or, in some cases, as private clubs with a charter or statute (often incentivized by public funds). In both cases, formal institutionalization defines the number and formal roles of the members as well as the committees' spatial, temporal, and functional areas of responsibility. To further improve our understanding of committees and to develop some common components, we utilized additional literature from planning and political theory (Diller, 2019; Gobert, 2014; Nullmeier et al., 2008) as points of departure for how to analyze committees. By constantly comparing and iterating the profiles of the 23 committees with this literature, we were able to develop four "structural components" of committee institutionalization. Table 2 illustrates these components and their attributes.

If formal institutionalization is the prerequisite for a committee, this implies that other actors must have

come to conclude that it is necessary to come together in the first place. This again implies that the committee is embedded within some broader form of social organization. We defined these characteristics in the components Setting and Scope and Scale. The term "setting" captures the political and administrative network within which the committee operates. While some committees are directly attached to political decision-makers, others work to connect different organizations. Most of the committees have administrative resources (personnel who prepare meetings and direct the committees' consultations to other relevant bodies) that directly connect the committee to the larger organization around them.

Scope and Scale entails the tasks, responsibilities, and competencies of a committee that are grounded in some form of territoriality. In many cases, committees have been founded to "work" at a new spatial scale beyond the traditional administrative levels of government. In the case of the German-speaking countries, the region or the

Table 2. Structural components and attributes of planning committees.

Components	Attributes	Original sources
Setting	Degree of embeddedness in the planning system	Weihe et al. (2008) Gobert (2014) Nullmeier et al. (2008) Williams (2014)
Scope and Scale	Definition of tasks and responsibilities Definition of spatial scale	
Temporality	Period of existence or period of office Frequency of meetings and stage of involvement in the planning process	
Decision-Making Power	Procedural committees Quality-control committees Methodical committees	Diller (2019) Gobert (2014) Williams (2014)

neighborhood would be such spatial scales that, up until now, there are no formal administrative levels. Besides the regional or supra-national level, many committees are also explicitly formed to deal with the neighborhood level, making Scope and Scale an especially relevant characteristic for neighborhood developments.

Committees are highly characterized by Temporality that has at least two manifestations. On the one hand, many committees are characterized by an inherently time-limited existence. After a certain period of time, either the mandate of personnel sitting on the committee ends, or the committee dissolves completely. On the other hand, temporality also refers to the point or period of time when the committee is dealing with at least one planning task, as well as its position within the various stages of the planning and building permit process. While some committees deal very intensively with only one planning project for a certain period of time, others meet regularly and have a changing agenda of various planning-related topics. Temporality hence depends on the committee's Setting as well as its Scope and Scale.

Finally, committees have some form of Decision-Making Power, through which they can influence planning procedures and shape entire neighborhood development projects. Devolving decision-making powers to committees is a highly political question; accordingly, a wide spectrum of different decision-making capacities was observed and could be grouped into three kinds of decision-making capacities. First, procedural committees have a controlling function in planning processes, by making final decisions or passing resolutions for the further progress of a planning initiative. Second, quality-control committees consult final decision makers such as mayors, heads of state, governments, or other procedural committees. Their task is to bring objective expertise into planning processes to ensure high-quality planning results. Third, methodical committees compile and provide data, reports, or analysis to inform planning processes with basic research; thus, they aim to increase the quality of the final decisions. Of course, hybrid committees that include more than one decision-making capacity do also exist.

5. Discussion of Case Study Results from Bern and Vienna

To further deepen our knowledge of these structural components, we chose two committees explicitly dealing with neighborhood developments in territories characterized by urban growth and whose members were selected in an interdisciplinary way. Both can be characterized as quality-control committees, which need to be integrated into planning and building permit processes as specific requirements arise. After briefly introducing the two committees (see Table 3 for an overview of the case study committees), we analyze how these components influenced the formation of interdisciplinary committees engaging with neighborhood developments, in a context of simultaneous growth-promotion and facilitation for both cases.

The first committee is the JHDC of the VHF. Vienna is frequently cited as one of the fastest-growing cities in Europe (Görgl et al., 2020, p. 378) and is widely considered a model for social housing policies. As the administrator of housing subsidies, the VHF plays an important role in this. The JHDC consists of an interdisciplinary team of 12 experts, who discuss and judge neighborhood development projects with more than 500 housing units, as well as projects where either building plots or VHF funds are used. In 2020, 1,737 housing units with a total volume of €232.1 million were built with VHF funds (wohnfonds_wien, 2021, p. 49).

The second committee is situated in the city-region of Bern, with a heritage of skyscrapers that were built between the 1950s and 1970s that is unique to Switzerland (Verein Region Bern, 2009, p. 2). Furthermore, the Bern city-region is still growing at a fast rate; Switzerland introduced some of the strictest planning regulations to protect soil and landscape in the last few years. Because of this heritage and pressure for development, the 75 municipalities assembled in the RCBM passed a skyscraper concept as part of their regional development plan in 2009. Therein, the formation of a quality-control committee for skyscraper planning, or Q-Team, was resolved. It is mandatory to include this

Table 3. Overview of the case study committees.

City or Metropolitan Region and Committee	Population		Metropolitan GDP/capita		Institutionalization
	Total 2020	Growth 2011–2020	Volume	Annual Growth 2010–2020	Founding Body Year of Foundation Number of Members
City of Vienna VHF JHDC	1.921 million	11.9%	€51,400/capita	1.15%	VHF 1995 12 members
RCBM Q-Team	416,156	7.1%	CHF 106,858/capita	0.1%	RCBM 2009 Five members

Sources: Stadt Bern (2021a, 2021b); Statistik Austria (2021); Verein Region Bern (2009); wohnfonds_wien (2021).

committee in the development of high-rise projects by municipalities and private developers.

5.1. Setting

Even though both committees engage with neighborhood developments, albeit in different contexts with regard to scale (city vs. city-region), they share common characteristics when it comes to the organizational setting in which they are embedded. The JHDC as well as Q-Team are coupled with organizations that are not the official, permission-giving planning authorities at the municipal or cantonal level. The Q-Team is linked to the spatial planning administration unit of the RCBM, while the planning authorities are the 75 municipalities of the region and the canton. In the Viennese case, the VHF is responsible for the administration of the housing subsidies, for which quality control measures such as the JHDC have been implemented, while the municipality of Vienna administrates the official planning and building procedures. This can lead to confusion on behalf of developers, who possess limited knowledge of the planning system. For a smooth operation of the committees, it is thus critical that their "mother organizations" have provided them with administrative personnel to communicate with developers, prepare project-specific documents for each committee's meetings, protocol them, ensure that deadlines are met, and coordinate development projects with the relevant planning authorities. These personnel resources are, in both cases, mentioned as essential for the efficient and successful work of the committees.

This institutional setting in the planning system implicates that both committees must comply with the regulations of the relevant planning system and/or specific regulations for the committees. For Q-Team, for example, rules regarding the governance and evaluation of projects have been implemented as part of the regional skyscraper concept of 2009. Furthermore, Q-Team has to deal with communal planning regulations from over 75 municipalities, whereas JHDC is embedded into the complex Viennese planning system. The new building laws (*Wiener Bauordnung*) of 2019 stipulate that in every housing project with more than 5,000 m² of floor area, more than 70% of the housing units must be affordable and/or subsidized, increasing pressure on the VHF and JHDC. Therefore, the limit of housing units for JHDC has been increased from 300 to 500 to accelerate planning processes, since conflicts between the JHDC and other committees in the Viennese planning system can arise, as one of the directors of JHDC reported: "In the worst case, a developer has to deal with five planning committees in one neighborhood." The setting of a committee needs to be well coordinated within the overall permit process and is thus closely linked to issues of temporality, as the chair of Q-Team illustrated:

> If we are included too late into the preliminary talks of projects, for example in the evaluation of the location,

then our committee cannot be fully effective. In these cases, a situation can arise in which the planning procedures are more or less done, but many of the core quality criteria of the skyscraper concept have not been adequately included and we need to give critical remarks to the cantonal planning department.

If the setting of a committee is not adequately aligned with the overall planning system, considerable coordination deficits can arise, leading to postponements as well as confusion on behalf of the developers.

5.2. Scope and Scale

While the committees are formally embedded in organizations that work on the municipal and city-regional scale, the neighborhood or the building plot are the relevant spatial scales for both committees in their daily work. The scope of their work hence derives from challenges set at these spatial scales. Because of the unique heritage of skyscrapers in the RCBM and the pressures for further (re-)development of skyscrapers through urban growth, Q-Team was founded with the goal to create "positive examples of skyscraper developments in the Bern city-region and the launch of a differentiated and continuous debate about the role of skyscrapers within the region" (Verein Region Bern, 2009, p. 49, authors' own translation). To achieve these goals, Q-Team has the task and responsibility to support municipalities as well as investors and project developers during the planning phase of skyscrapers. To fulfill it, Q-Team can rely on planning instruments such as the criteria of the skyscraper concept. For the mostly small municipalities in the RCBM, this scope of Q-Team, as well as the regional scale within which is embedded, has the additional benefit that they can rely on experts who work with transparent quality criteria from different disciplines when they negotiate with investors and project developers. Thereby, the power imbalance between municipality and developers is levelled, positively affecting the local state's role in growth management.

In the Viennese example, the VHF is responsible for the acquisition of building plots for further development and allocation to public and private developers, while the need for quality control is inscribed into financing laws. However, the JHDC itself is not institutionalized through these laws but instead, through the VHF itself; it is only responsible for housing projects subsidized by the VHF through funding or provision of VHF-owned building plots. As in the case of Q-Team, JHDC work is guided and aided by quality-control criteria. JHDC uses a four-pillar model, in which architecture, economy, ecology, and social sustainability are the abstract criteria from which more detailed criteria are derived. As the expert responsible for social sustainability noted, the responsibilities and associated quality-control criteria can change over time. Back in 2009, the Viennese councilor for housing development explicitly demanded

a stronger focus on social topics in housing developments with associated quality criteria. Again, together with experiences from Q-Team, this demonstrates how interdisciplinary planning committees can strengthen the public hand's role vis-à-vis primarily growth-oriented developers. On the other hand, the spatial fixation with territorialized neighborhoods and building plots clearly delimits the committee's scope. In both cases, the committees are restricted by institutionalized fixation on singular projects, even though it would often be necessary to discuss the projects' embeddedness within the wider urban fabric.

5.3. Temporality

Questions of temporality play an important role when it comes to the facilitation of urban growth. The Q-Team meets six to seven times a year, while JHDC held a total of five jury sessions in 2020. In the case of rejection or a negative judgement, developers lose important time during which construction prices may rise. While in the case of Q-Team, developers may return to the committee at a later point with an improved project, developers that fail to secure a Viennese housing development competition have amassed costs for the drafts of the projects but received nothing to implement. As the chair of the JHDC explained, this can, in some cases, lead to more than 20 losing projects. Even winning projects must interact with other VHF quality control committees to guarantee the qualities that allowed the projects to win are secured during the overall planning process. Furthermore, these projects must still go through the formal process of acquiring building permits from the city of Vienna. As the directors of the VHF explained, rejection during the competition but also critical remarks during the further planning process can lead to resentment from the developers. However, as Q-Team was able to learn, the opposite can also be true, as some developers use the expertise of the committee to improve their projects and receive quicker approval from planning authorities in return.

Another aspect of temporality is the period committee members serve. The JHDC as well as Q-Team are institutionalized without a date of expiry, but in both cases, the members must rotate after a certain timespan. In Q-Team, the five members are elected for a period of four years by the RCBM, while JHDC members are elected for three years by the directors of the VHF and the Viennese councilor for housing development. Members are only allowed to be re-elected once, while another re-election after an absence from the committee is possible. Duration of membership is a very delicate topic in both cases, as members of the committees are frequently confronted with conflicts of interest and associated critiques from individuals and organizations outside of the committee. In Vienna, the chair of JHDC criticized how strange situations arise when members of the committee must leave the room because one of their own projects is being discussed. This is a critical component for the committees since low degrees of legitimacy lead to losses in the acceptance and stability of the committee.

5.4. Decision-Making Power

In the end, every institutional consideration arrives at the question of who decides what. Both committees examined in-depth constitute a mixture of procedural and quality-control capacities. The procedural capacities come into action because, in both cases, some form of planning regulation demands the inclusion of the committee, and their decision and recommendations lead to further actions by other organizations or individuals. While the quality-control capacities differentiate with regards to the number and discipline of different experts as well as their evaluation criteria, the procedural capacities of the two committees are subtly differentiated. Both committees' institutionalizations allow them to discuss and judge neighborhood development projects with far-reaching consequences. However, there are some restrictions: Q-Team can address every skyscraper, but not every neighborhood development project; JHDC is restricted to projects that are built with subsidies from the VHF and those with more than 500 housing units (for projects under 500 housing units, another quality-control committee exists). This connection to the setting as well as the scope and scale of the committees are mechanisms to not complicate planning procedures but install a new procedural step for topics of pre-defined political importance.

In the case of JHDC, competition winners are permitted to acquire building plots for development. However, the planning process is far from finished; many other authorities can influence the specific outcomes. The VHF has quite strict possibilities to penalize developers, even a complete reset of the planning procedure reverting to the original competition winner if projects do not adequately include the core qualities of jury decision in further planning stages. However, legitimate economic considerations are quite often a central argument with which to push through changes from the competition project, after the planning process within the quality-control mechanisms of VHF is finished. In Bern, Q-Team has to be included in all planning processes that include skyscrapers and is thus in a formally strong position to influence these processes through its recommendations. Even though these recommendations are not mandatory, their setting within the planning system strengthens these non-mandatory outcomes. If developers and municipalities, as local planning authorities, have a diverging opinion from Q-Team, they have to justify and explain this opinion to the cantonal planning department. Q-Team, therefore, exemplifies the informal power a committee without final decision-making capacity can exert over planning processes.

5.5. Comparative Discussion

Our aim with this article is to illustrate the structural components that influence the work of committees involved in the development of dense and high-rise neighborhoods and to understand how committees are embedded in the wider planning system around them. We see these results in context to Nethercote's notion, that the state, and in our cases especially the local and federal state, is one of the "key shapers of the local contours of urban expansion" (Nethercote, 2018, p. 4). The JDHC of the VHF and the Q-Team of the RCBM provide key case studies in the formulation of four structural components for the institutionalization of committees as well as the interactions between them (summarized in Table 4).

Table 4. Comparative overview of JHDC and Q-Team.

Components	JHDC VHF	Q-Team RCBM
Setting	• Viennese planning and housing tradition with strong focus on affordable housing; 56.5% of all rental apartments are owned by the city of Vienna or non-profit building organizations • Adaptions of planning and building law to further promote social housing • VHF was founded in 1984 by the city of Vienna as a non-profit organization to promote affordable housing; JHDC is one instrument of quality control for new buildings and neighborhoods • VHF provides administrative personnel for the preparation of meetings and communication with external actors	• Heritage of skyscrapers from the 1950s to the 1970s in city-region with towns and small municipalities with limited administrative resources • New Swiss spatial planning law restricts building land reserves and conserves the landscape • RCBM is a regional planning organization coordinating the planning and building activities of 75 municipalities in the Bern city-region; approval of skyscraper concept within regional development plan of 2009 • Spatial planning unit of the RCBM provides administrative personnel for the preparation of meetings and communication with external actors
Scope and Scale	• JHDC judges housing developments within the limits of the City of Vienna with more than 500 apartments, where subsidies or building plots of the VHF are used • Projects are evaluated using the four-pillar model (architecture, economy, ecology, social sustainability)	• Q-Team consults the 75 municipalities of the RCBM and private developers with regards to skyscraper developments • Projects are evaluated with regards to the principles of the regional development plan for skyscrapers
Temporality	• Twelve interdisciplinary members of the JHDC meet for around five jury sessions per year, lasting usually one to three days • Project application stage: Around 10 to 20 teams of housing developers and architects apply for subsidies or building plots of the VHF • Further quality-control cycles for winning projects with the building plot commission (*Grundstücksbeirat*)	• Five interdisciplinary members of the Q-Team meet for around six to seven jury sessions per year • Plan control stage: Project applications receive recommendations from Q-Team and can be re-called for later meetings
Decision-Making Power	• Focus on interdisciplinary quality control of neighborhood developments with final judgment based on the four-pillar model • Strong procedural element due to allocation of housing subsidies or building plots for winning projects • Final approval of building permits by the building department of the City of Vienna (MA37)	• Focus on interdisciplinary quality control of skyscraper developments as well as recommendations for efficient permit process • Informal procedural element, since recommendations are non-binding, but are considered by the cantonal planning department • Final approval of building permits by one of the 75 municipalities

Committees in general, and the two cases in particular, can be understood as a public-private nexus, in which policy goals are negotiated and operationalized before final political and administrative decisions are made. In this context, it is important to note that both of our case examples are not directly attached to formal planning authorities, but to organizations that themselves exist outside of or in between the formal and traditional levels and bodies of government and administration, with specific mandates in securing the public interests of affordable housing, design quality, and landscape protection in the production of dense and high-rise neighborhoods. As the case of Vienna—having recently regained first place in *The Economist*'s ranking of the world's most livable city (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022)—illustrates, such "soft" goals can also indirectly contribute to the promotion of urban growth and competitiveness.

Our understanding of both cases reveals a considerable influence on the planning politics of the cities of Bern and Vienna through formal as well as informal factors. Both committees gain particular power through the weight their recommendations are granted in formal planning procedures, albeit in different ways. In the Viennese case, the JHDC does not approve building permits, and the competition-winning projects can still be altered until the final permits are issued. The JHDC, however, makes an important pre-selection of large neighborhood development projects, with more than 500 apartments coming into consideration for housing subsidies and building plots owned by the VHF. Since the VHF is a powerful actor in the Viennese system of housing provision, JHDC clearly pre-defines the appearance of new dense and high-rise neighborhoods in the city of Vienna, thereby shaping housing policy and living conditions for decades to come. In contrast, the power of Q-Team in the Bern city-region is more nuanced. Even though its recommendations are not officially binding for the municipalities, Q-Team can strengthen the negotiating position for small municipalities vis-à-vis private developers in particular. This occurs, for example, because non-recognition of the Q-Team's recommendations must be explained to the cantonal planning department.

Both cases demonstrate that the institutionalization of committees plays a crucial role in their ability to fully exert power over the balancing act in vertical urbanization; namely seizing the opportunities of urban growth, while simultaneously securing public interests such as affordable housing and public green spaces. This article thus underscores the literature that shows how a rising number of committees and fragmented decision-making structures can lead to an increasingly complex jurisdictional and procedural setting, which can, in effect, prolong the development of dense and high-rise neighborhood developments. There is a constant danger that neighborhood development processes become too complex, individual projects become stuck, and important time in the provision of housing and services is lost.

Intersections and confusions with other committees or planning departments are quite common, as we were able to learn in Vienna. To minimize such effects, the Q-Team includes not only recommendations regarding the project itself in its feedback, but also recommendations with regards to an efficient planning and development process. As the chair of Q-Team noted, Q-Team identifies its role in these processes as a "facilitator," and these recommendations are "highly regarded by the developers." While committees may not be large in the number of members, their institutional embeddedness can significantly influence, improve, distract, or prolong planning procedures of complex processes such as dense and high-rise developments.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

Even though the literature on committees, as well as our own empirical research, note a rise in their number and diversification, planning committees remain a neglected field of study, from political science to planning (Weihe et al., 2008, p. 339). As such, our research has particularly focused on committees as an instrument of the (local) state in the shaping of vertical urbanization. While we do not argue that our cases stand in contrast to Nethercote's (2019) study of Melbourne, or Rosen and Charney's (2018) study of Jerusalem, they illustrate that specific planning instruments such as committees need to be considered within the state's role in the production of vertical urbanization. Both committees under investigation are embedded in local and federal states that have taken legislative and financial measures to promote public interests, and, at the same time, try to seize the opportunities of density and verticality in the global competition of city-regions. The committees do not question density and verticality as a means to promote and secure urban growth, but rather mediate the production of density and verticality as a form of public-private nexus.

This article proposed examining the institutional embeddedness of planning committees using the structural components of Setting, Scope and Scale, Temporality, and Decision-Making Power to better understand the local states' involvement in the production of dense and high-rise neighborhoods, as one important manifestation of vertical urbanization. Our research suggests that the rise of committees leads to a paradoxical situation in an era of entrepreneurial urban development. On the one hand, committees such as the two case study examples in Bern and Vienna are certainly able to increase the public administration's negotiating power vis-à-vis private developers. On the other hand, committees and their institutional embeddedness also contribute to increasingly complex planning and building permit processes, since a new level of decision-influencing is introduced into such processes.

Complex planning and permitting processes favor established property development agencies and architectural offices, as we were able to learn in both cases.

The analysis of the two cases along the identified four structural components illustrates that project applicants such as planners and developers need to have specific knowledge about the institutional embeddedness of the committees to "smoothly" navigate the processes of achieving a building permit. Our analysis is therefore indicative of the importance of what Nethercote (2018, p. 20) calls intermediaries that "exist between capital markets and urban production." Established city-regional hegemonies can hence be reproduced; the fact that most of the members involved in planning committees run private offices themselves can be detrimental to the credibility of the committees. Such structures certainly call for further academic investigation.

While we were able to derive important insights through which structural components of committees are institutionalized and how these influence neighborhood development processes, further research is necessary also on other aspects of committees. First, with regards to the Setting, for example, the intentions that legitimated the committees' foundation and the relation of how they work in practice and interact with other bodies in the planning system needs further examination. Second, the Scope and Scale needs to be more clearly defined, as well as how this definition can be implemented in the daily practice of committees, especially when they have to deal with a plethora of small municipalities with their own institutional logics. Third, how long should a committee exist, and how often should it meet? Temporality includes critical and highly political facets such as increasing conflicts of interest the longer the committee meets with the same personnel. Fourth, even if committees have no formal Decision-Making Power, they can influence political decision-making and, as Williams (2014, p. 445) argued, help to push through resisted development projects. These are just a few examples in which a more detailed analysis of the role of committees in the production of urban density and verticality would find fertile ground.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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