



RESEARCH ARTICLE

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE CITY: BETWEEN URBAN GOVERNANCE AND POPULAR MISCONDUCT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine the implications of internalized social practices for sustainable urban development. The theoretical framework is grounded in the sociology of public action, which highlights the shared responsibility of all institutional and societal actors in building a sustainable city. Using a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data, the results reveal that popular habitus contrasts with urban norms and regulations. The identified acts of incivility or "deviant" practices relate to issues of urban squalor, changes in land use, the failure to obtain building or demolition permits in the city, and the resulting social consequences. The same applies to instances of unauthorized closures of public roads for joyful or tragic events—all of which undermine the legitimacy of urban governance. Overall, insights drawn from the empirical data—which may have implications for urban policy—were considered, so that the concept of a sustainable city does not remain merely a curious concept for African cities.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has emerged as the new ideal for advanced societies, which are committed to correcting the socio-environmental imbalances that have accumulated throughout the modern era and are concerned about their future (Cassaigne, 2009). The idea of combining urban concerns with those of sustainable development has evolved over the years into the concept of the "sustainable city." These concerns "focus on more cross-cutting themes: the reclamation of public spaces, the recycling of urban spaces and resources, (...) 'soft' mobility, the management of suburban sprawl, and the political reappropriation of the city by its residents" (Theys, 2000, p. 55). The evolution of cities has been accompanied by growing dysfunction, and, combined with social issues, environmental factors have become critical challenges (Vrain, 2003). The reasons for the emergence of the issue of sustainability stem, among other things, from the consequences of suburban development: degradation of natural areas, increased mobility and energy consumption—and thus a contribution to climate change—rising costs for local governments, and so on. For many reasons, the city has, from this perspective, become a relevant setting for sustainable action. The theoretical premise or hypothesis tested in this article is based on the assumption that social practices in the city of Ouagadougou contribute to urban insecurity. This article aims to examine, from the perspective of constructivist epistemology, the implications of societal practices for the erosion of urban sustainability. In this regard, while the available literature focuses the debate on the primacy of limiting greenhouse gas emissions in the creation of

sustainable cities (CRDD, 2011; Offner, 2006; Cassaigne, 2009; Galateau, 2013), we believe that understanding the consubstantial relationships between societal practices and sustainable urban development holds heuristic value for the epistemic community. If this is the case, the central thread of our approach is based on the following research questions: What are the social perceptions of the concept of a sustainable city? In what ways do social practices contribute to urban insecurity? What empirical considerations can contribute to sustainable urban development? It is on the basis of these questions that we wish to proceed, taking as our starting point the socially constructed concept of the "sustainable city." After first reviewing the literature and outlining the methodological aspects—and without any intention of essentializing—our aim is to highlight the prevalence of social practices that run counter to the urban norms and regulations established by public authorities. We propose to examine, respectively, social perceptions of the concept of a sustainable city; an in-depth analysis of social practices that contribute to urban insecurity; changes in land use as sources of security challenges; and the legitimacy of urban governance undermined by "deviant" practices on the part of actors. Finally, we identify proposals that could have implications for urban policy, drawn from the participants' statements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of a "sustainable city" is open to various interpretations (Béal *et al.*, 2011). It is therefore important to examine here the evolution of the concept and its scientific

interpretation. From the outset, it is important to reframe urban planning, based in particular on the integration of environmental issues that have thus far been ignored by decision-makers. According to Cassaigne (2009), this involves conceiving the urban environment from a perspective that situates the city within the context of global development. In fact, urban policies are, in most cases, largely disconnected from the planet's environmental problems (Cassaigne, 2009). The emergence of the concept of the "sustainable city" in scientific discourse stems from a line of thinking that began in the late 1960s (Cormier, 2010). Theys (2000) explains the essence of the concept by comparing it to a term previously used, that of the "ecological city." According to the author, this initial ecological approach was oriented toward a hygienist vision of the city, characterized by the expansion of green spaces, cleanliness management, and the elimination of urban nuisances. However, it should be noted that the concept of a sustainable city remains in a state of constant evolution: "The emergence of the term 'sustainable city' must be distinguished from the later development of the issue, which would cause its original meaning to evolve" (Emelianoff, 2007, p. 49). Indeed, it has undergone several successive definitions: the first approach is that of the "self-sufficient" city—that is, one that meets its needs locally. The sustainable city is then defined as one that develops without imposing the costs of its development on others; and, in its most recent sense, as one that strives to develop while preserving the quality of life of its residents, all while advancing a broader goal of sustainable development (Emelianoff, 2007). Peylet et al. argue that "the sustainable city should not be viewed as an object or a model, but as the end goal of a process of development and transformation of an urbanized area" (Peylet *et al.*, 2014, p. 38).

The ideas of sustainable development promoted by international environmental conferences (the 1968 UNESCO Conference on the Biosphere, the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the 1992 Rio Conference, etc.) and the publication of several books beginning in the postwar period have become so widespread that they are now commonplace (Sorignet, 2013). The city, as a place where people and human activities (commerce, industry, culture, education, etc.) are concentrated, is characterized in particular by the presence of activities that help organize social life. Thus, as Hamman (2012, p. 23) states, "cities represent forms of social crystallization," and sustained attention is recommended, primarily through sound economic and social governance, among other measures. It is in this sense that, in line with the dynamics of sustainability, Cassaigne (2009, p. 82) argues that "sustainable development is social, urban, and economic."

Our decision to situate this study within the field of the sociology of public action (Lascoume and Le Galès, 2018) requires us to conduct an analysis of urban governance, relating it to the actual practices and strategies of a wide range of actors. With regard to the concept of urban governance, the MHU (2014) attributes a semantic meaning to it that is similar to that of urban management. Indeed, it appears that urban management is understood as being. The implementation of measures and actions that contribute to ensuring the proper functioning of the city by guaranteeing the conditions for the use of a wide range of urban services: economic development, social cohesion and integration, land use, transportation, housing, elimination of substandard housing, environmental protection, waste management, water supply, provision of

services and facilities, protection and revitalization of cultural heritage, promotion and development of culture, etc. (MHU, 2014, p. 43). Furthermore, in agreement with Le Galès (2003), Marchal and Stébé (2008) define urban governance as "a process of coordinating actors, social groups, and institutions to achieve specific goals that are collectively discussed and defined in fragmented, uncertain environments" (Marchal and Stébé, 2008, p. 106). In other words, governance is a way of bringing together a set of public and private actors, norms, and regulations that contribute to the stability of the urban world, its direction, and the forms it will take in the future. It contributes to the legitimization of public action in the sense that Boussaguet et al. (2019, p. 332) define legitimacy as "the capacity of those in power to address and resolve problems (...), and to be accountable for the social acceptability and effectiveness of public action."

The issue of urban sustainability is thus framed in terms of urban governance. There is a growing trend in empirical research focused on urban development and, above all, a general shift in research topics toward issues of the urban environment and urban cleanliness [Green (1982) ; Jole (1982), (1986), (1989), (1991) ; Peeters (1982) ; Preli and Clavel M. (1984), cited by Bouju (2009)]. Similarly, Bouju (2009) highlights the fact that the sociological critique of urban sanitation through public policies is a major research theme in cities of both the Global South and the Global North [Jole (1986), (1989), (1991) ; Bertolini and Chabert d'Hieres (1987) ; Navez-Bouchanine (1987), (1988), (1989) ; Poloni (1990) ; Rathje and Murphy (1992)]. Moreover, Burkina Faso's National Sanitation Policy and Strategy document cites "a sociological lack of understanding of individual and group behaviors" (PSNA 2007, p.19)¹ as a factor hindering the eradication of barriers to sustainable urban development.

Moreover, the issue of urban governance "requires (...) a sociological analysis of the actors, their roles, and the forms of legitimization of public action" (Gaudin, 2004, p. 216). The contribution of all stakeholders is sought to improve waste management and, consequently, to pave the way for sustainable urban development. Thus, according to Lascoumes and Le Galès. The intertwining of levels, forms of regulation, and networks of actors has led to a reevaluation of statist conceptions of public intervention in favor of much more open analytical frameworks (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2009, p. 6). In other words, the concept of "governance" now takes into account—more so than in the past—situations in which public and private actors interact, and in which the state or local governments no longer hold a dominant position in a process that has become highly collaborative.

METHODS

The methodological framework is based on an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to analyze sustainable urban development in the context of urban governance under the strain of public disorder in the city of Ouagadougou. With an estimated area of 52,000 hectares, of which 21,750 hectares are urbanized (INSD, 2022), Ouagadougou has a population of 2,875,000 and a population density of 1,025 inhabitants per square kilometer. In this socio-anthropological study, three main data collection techniques

¹ National Sanitation Policy and Strategy (PSNA), Adopted by the Council of Ministers on July 4, 2007.

were employed : literature review, questionnaire survey, and in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. The use of a literature review is based on the principle that the social sciences are cumulative and draw upon previous research (Quivy and Van Campenhoudt, 1995). The socio-anthropological approach involves moving beyond the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy (Olivier de Sardan, 1995) and combining sociological and anthropological methods in the spirit of methodological decompartmentalization. With regard to the stakeholders surveyed to understand the implications of their practices and behaviors on the development of a sustainable city, we administered questionnaires and conducted interviews with informants from a wide range of backgrounds. Data were collected in August–October 2017 and supplemented with updated data from December 2025. The primary target group for data collection consisted of heads of households, real estate developers, institutional stakeholders responsible for the environment, land use planning, and sanitation, local elected officials from the municipality of Ouagadougou, and housing brokers. The quantitative component is based on a questionnaire administered to heads of households, selected using a “random sampling method”². This method, which falls under the category of stratified sampling, “is particularly applicable in the fields of housing and spatial planning” (Albarelo, 1999, p. 115). With regard to the interviews, the diversification of profiles and information saturation—as criteria for methodological evaluation (Pirès, 1997)—served as the guiding principles for this approach.

Participants were asked questions regarding, among other things, perceptions of a sustainable city, the “unauthorized closure of public roads,” safety concerns related to power walking in the city, the identification of practices and behaviors that hinder the development of a sustainable city, issues surrounding real estate development, and the management of the living environment. At the conclusion of the fieldwork, a total of one hundred twenty-five (125) participants were surveyed, including ninety-three (93) via questionnaires and thirty-two (32) via interview guides. To analyze the data collected through questionnaires, we performed a computerized analysis using Excel, a quantitative data analysis software, supplemented by tables and graphical representations. The preferred analysis technique for the qualitative component was thematic content analysis, a technique that “offers the possibility of methodically processing information and testimonies that exhibit a certain degree of depth and complexity” (Quivy and Van Campenhoudt, 1995, p. 230), which ultimately enabled us to develop a definitive framework for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following a review of the literature on the trilogy of social practices, urban governance, and sustainable cities, as well as a presentation of methodological considerations, the research findings are organized into three lines of analysis, which shed light on popular incivility in the context of urban governance. More specifically, these lines of analysis first address the participants’ discourses on the concept of a sustainable city.

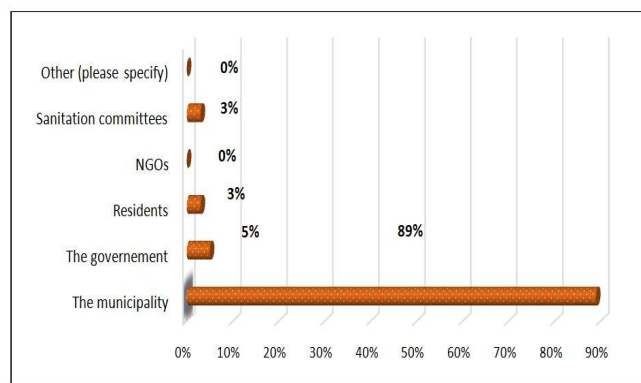
Second, popular habitus as vectors of urban insecurity are analyzed; and finally, the text focuses on reflections drawn from the empirical corpus that are anchored in the ideals of sustainable urban development. Indeed, to use medical terminology that is widely employed in contemporary social criticism (Savado, 2013), we believe it is necessary and urgent to address all forms of “social pathology” affecting urban sustainability, whether through its symptoms or its causes.

Social Perceptions of the Concept of a Sustainable City: The interviewees’ perceptions of the concept of a sustainable city vary widely. Indeed, the diversity of interpretations of the concept and its polysemic nature are evident in the scholarly literature [Choay (1980) ; Giraut (1996) ; Godard (2001) ; Vrain (2003) ; Cormier (2010) ; Bernie-Boissard and Chevalier (2011) ; Levy and Emelianoff (2011) ; Hamman (2012) ; Peylet (2014)]. Before delving into the discourse on the sustainable city, it is important to accept, as Wackermann (2000, p. 220) does, that “urban malaise stems, in truth, as much from unsuitable territorial structures as from pernicious behaviors cultivated over the centuries.” Furthermore, Giraut argues that “the practices of actors are not consistent with the structural achievements necessary for building a sustainable city” (Giraut, 1996, p. 242). If this is the case, in this section we analyze the defining characteristics of a sustainable city from the respondents’ perspective. And in this analysis of urban sustainability, the environmental dimension plays a significant role. A variety of authors have demonstrated the centrality of the environmental aspect in building a sustainable city as an extension of sustainable development, which is itself based on environmental, social, and economic pillars (Levy and Emelianoff, 2011 ; Hamman, 2012). Based on this ideal of environmental consideration and in accordance with his definition of the characteristics of a sustainable city, an institutional actor and expert on environmental issues states :

“A sustainable city is one where you’ve managed to make the population aware of the need to protect the environment. Everyone must understand that trash needs to be collected, trees need to be planted, and that it is their responsibility to contribute to all initiatives undertaken at the municipal level. And this requires leadership from the city government itself, because it is the city’s responsibility to provide a healthy living environment for its residents. “The construction of gutters and waste removal—it is the city government’s responsibility to establish a fee-based waste collection system. The spirit of a sustainable city is to ensure that future development opportunities are not compromised” (Institutional actor responsible for environmental preservation, excerpt from an interview).

These remarks suggest a lack of “environmental awareness” among the population, which does not always maintain a healthy relationship with the urban environment when it comes to waste management. The behavior of urban stakeholders is marked by environmental damage that offers no guarantees for future generations. The discussion also reveals contradictions regarding responsibility for improving the living environment, which, according to the respondent, is attributed exclusively to the municipality. This viewpoint is consistent with that expressed by the heads of households surveyed on the question of who is responsible for managing the urban living environment; their views are reflected in the graph below :

² The principle of randomness means that the researcher devises a route to follow based on spatial guidelines. For example, interviewing the head of household in every fourth house to the left of the six-meter mark and the same number to the right (Albarelo, 1999). This principle involves a random selection of geographic paths in choosing the individuals for the sample.



Source: Field survey, December 2025.

Figure 1. Stakeholders in Urban Environment Management

A look at Figure 1 shows that nearly 90% of respondents attribute responsibility for managing the urban environment to the municipality, compared with only 5% who attribute it to the state. However, in light of the insights from the sociology of public action inspired by Lascoume and Le Galès (2018), all stakeholders—who, incidentally, must set aside mutual accusations—share responsibility for managing urban sanitation and, by extension, for building a sustainable city. Furthermore, based on the discussion outlined above, a connection is drawn between the sustainable city and the ecological city, namely “a city that is egalitarian, united, just, civic-minded, peaceful, safe, clean, and ‘natural’” (Galateau, 2013, p. 141). The issue of waste management falls to the municipality, which is responsible for urban sanitation.

This responsibility is, in fact, disputed by the municipality, which defers certain aspects to the ministries in charge of the environment and urban planning. Regarding urban expansion, respondents expressed a range of views. The strategy employed by those who contribute to the perpetuation of this practice is for landowners to sell their plots and relocate to the outskirts in the hope of receiving a new allocation. It is true that the law recognizes everyone’s right to housing, but that does not mean that every citizen must necessarily be allocated a plot of land ! The right to housing is fundamentally different from the right to property :

In the major cities we look to as models today—Paris, for example—how many people live in rental housing? There are a lot of them. But here, everyone wants to own their own home—it just can’t work! It’s a political choice, and housing developments can only be built with the government’s approval. Take the case of downtown itself—the government district, where they’re in the process of moving to Ouaga 2000. But it’s a waste of land ! You have large plots, often over 2,000 m², with just a small building on them. Meanwhile, the government is going out to rent even more buildings from the private sector (Director of Urban Planning and Municipal Land, excerpt from an interview). This outburst by the interviewee reflects an urban policy that contributes to the city’s excessive expansion. The result is a failure to make “rational” use of existing urban land and the leasing of administrative buildings to the private sector—all of which generate additional costs that could otherwise be allocated to the development of other urban infrastructure. He is quick to point out the lack of civic-mindedness that prevails in the city, leading to practices that—even in a compact urban setting—could have a negative impact on urban sustainability.

According to civil society actors, building a sustainable city requires an institutional commitment to urban planning. Civil society, active in all socioeconomic sectors, does not remain indifferent in its efforts to monitor urban development projects. Gosselin (2012) shows in this regard that protest movements against the ZACA³ project, for example, emerged in the context of a growing awareness among civil society following the assassination of Norbert Zongo⁴. Today, perceptions regarding the reasons for the failure of urban sustainability—particularly in terms of urban sprawl—are realities identified by civil society actors :

Ouagadougou is a city that impoverishes workers. Just look at the problem of repeated worker strikes ; look at where some of them have to live just to get to work. Wages are low, and there’s no public transportation for them or their children who need to go to school—it’s a real hassle! The issue of distances resulting from the city’s sprawl is therefore crucial in Ouagadougou. (...). Personally, I think that urbanization based on the sprawl model is a failure (Secretary General of the Burkina Trade Union Confederation (CSB), excerpt from an interview). The interviewee’s comments underscore the limitations of urban sprawl in building a sustainable city and, consequently, his decision to revisit the development of a compact, dense city, which proves to be more manageable. His comparison between the distances travelers must cover in a sprawling city and the perceived low incomes of workers aligns with the analysis by Thisse et al. (2004), who found that “low-income workers face significant barriers to employment due to the distance to their jobs” (Thisse *et al.* 2004 : 161). The ideals pursued by the ZACA project, as discussed by Gosselin (2012), are part of this effort to create a compact city, even if the vigorous eviction measures do not meet with everyone’s approval.

Social Practices as Drivers of Urban Insecurity: A Challenge for Sustainable Cities: Practices that undermine urban sustainability are diverse. They range from real estate development mechanisms to the issue of unsanitary conditions, including acts of incivility, indiscipline, and defiance of state authority. Consequently, we believe it is important to revisit the diverse opinions of the interviewees in order to identify who bears responsibility for “urban disorder,” given that, according to public policy, “the sustainable city is built first and foremost by its residents, who are its primary actors” (Mathieu and Guermond, 2011, p. 26). When asked to describe the practices and strategies of actors that are not aligned with urban sustainability, the interviewees undertook an analysis of these multifaceted practices. Some immediately offered their assessment of the historical and future prospects of the city of Ouagadougou. For the latter, the city is expanding at an accelerated pace. This is linked to the fact that today virtually everything is concentrated in Ouagadougou, due to the lack of a nationwide urbanization policy. Practices that are detrimental to sustainable urban development stem in part from migration—or even the importation of “rural ways” into the city—as this interviewee laments :

Ouagadougou now has a cosmopolitan population, most of whom come from rural areas. Do you think someone who has

³ A major urban development project in the capital, Ouagadougou, known as the ZACA project (Commercial and Administrative Activities Zone).

⁴ A journalist from Burkina Faso who is believed to have been murdered on December 13, 1998.

been educated in urban living would go so far as to pick up their trash and dump it in the gutters? You can't build a sustainable city by raising livestock on plots of land set aside for residential use (Director of Urban Planning and Municipal Land Management, excerpt from an interview).

This disapproval of social practices (imported from rural areas) echoes that already expressed by the mayor of Ouagadougou himself, who stated that "you can't behave like you're in the countryside when you're in the city. 'The city is not a place for grazing and livestock.'" The presence of stray animals is thus a concern in a city where traffic issues are already acute due to narrow roads, a rapidly growing population, and the "anarchic" occupation of public spaces. Thus, it is not uncommon to encounter, right in the middle of traffic in Ouagadougou, a herd of animals without a herder blocking the road—a situation that creates problems related to sanitation, hygiene, and safety. This problem has not gone unnoticed by municipal authorities, who have launched "a crusade against stray animals." According to the authorities, this campaign against stray animals constitutes "a strong message sent to the public to raise awareness about respecting the rules of citizenship" (Mayor of Ouagadougou, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article79208>, accessed July 8, 2026). In addition, people who go for walks along public roads are victims of insecurity caused by public incivility.

We don't have enough designated space for sports. We make do along the main roads. But we have to be constantly vigilant because many drivers don't follow the traffic rules (Housekeeping Manager, excerpt from an interview). In Ouagadougou, engaging in daily physical activities such as walking has become an integral part of city dwellers' lives. Pumain and Mattel (2011) highlight the lack of space set aside for sports, noting that the gentrification of city centers has contributed to the repurposing of public spaces for other uses under the pressure of urgent urban planning priorities. However, physical activity is now considered a key determinant of health. Moreover, "in 2004, the promotion of physical activity was declared a 'public health priority' by the World Health Organization" (Charrière, 2011, p. 347). According to the author, physical inactivity contributes to the development of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, and certain cancers. "Walkability" for recreational purposes is a source of insecurity in Ouagadougou, due to the narrowness of public roads combined with a lack of civic-mindedness or widespread disregard for traffic rules in daily life.

Changes in Land Use: A Source of Security Concerns: In the wake of anti-social practices that hinder the development of a sustainable city, a phenomenon considered "trendy" today in Ouagadougou—and highlighted by informants—involves changes in land use. Residential lots and administrative reserves are gradually being converted into commercial spaces through tax evasion schemes, with all the social consequences that may result, as highlighted by the Director General of Territorial Development (DGMT):

"We receive a huge number of applications for changes in land use and changes to administrative reserves, even though we should be receiving very few if urban planning schemes were followed. When you use a residential lot to build a gas station, imagine the consequences for nearby residents and other users in the event of a fire! Similar cases are all too common in the city of Ouagadougou, and we are currently considering the establishment of a land-use enforcement agency" (DGMT,

excerpt from an interview). As we can see, the situation regarding requests to change land use—as described by the respondent—reflects the commitment of a minority to act within the law and comply with legal requirements, in contrast to a majority that carries out such changes "illegally." Addressing the issue of sanitation in the city of Ouagadougou, the interviewee below describes social practices that run counter to the development of a sustainable city and points an accusing finger at the woman whose actions stand out the most: There are some neighborhoods in Ouagadougou that, when you enter, they're worse than pigsties! So when you're in the city, you have to identify with being in the city. When you try to draw someone's attention to this issue, they say, 'look at you, acting fancy,' or 'are you saying you're different from us now?' We all have to stay in this behavior of mediocrity, etc. Women who, out of habit, pour toilet water or dishwater into the street when it would be much simpler to make a cesspit. You put flowers in front of your yard, and the sheep will eat everything (Director of Urban Planning and Municipal Land, interview excerpt).

Even though these practices are harmful to environmental hygiene and their health, urban households keep dumping dirty water in their yards and especially in the streets. To be more specific, it turns out that "Ouagadougou holds (...) the unfortunate record for the highest proportion, with 78.6% of households engaging in such a practice" (Ouattara and Somé, 2009, p.88). However, regarding this urban waste management, Dorier-Apprill (2002) points an accusing finger at public authorities who do not always ensure the availability of dumping sites. He also regrets that "while collection and cleaning are now the key words that help improve the appearance of neighborhoods, the issue of dumping and storage sites remains unresolved" (Dorier-Apprill, 2002, p.127). The heaps of garbage that we can't get rid of, the stagnant and polluting wastewater, the potholes that worsen due to lack of maintenance—these are nightmares experienced in cities. Ouattara and Somé point out similarly that wastewater is "either dumped in the street (40.2%) or in the yards of homes (39.3%). Only 5.6% of households have septic tanks and 1.1% have soakaway pits to dispose of their wastewater" (Ouattara and Somé, 2009, p.88).

We can see this entanglement of social, political, and even religious considerations in urban management and sanitation issues, which leads Bouju (2009) to say that "according to popular conceptions, the characteristic of public space was that it belonged to no one. It was therefore, according to custom, freely accessible" (2009, p.147). Regarding the issue of declining citizenship, it appears that city dwellers have lost the civic commitment to help the state and local communities keep the city clean (Rafael and Oliva, 2008), even in front of their own homes, leaving the responsibility to the authorities. This lack of citizenship worsens incivility in Ouagadougou in the sense that citizenship expresses "an identity based on a sense of belonging to the political community and thus a source of social connection" (Etienne et al. 2004, p.71). Besides, the ownership of the citizen's living environment benefits them primarily, not to mention the pride of living in such a setting.

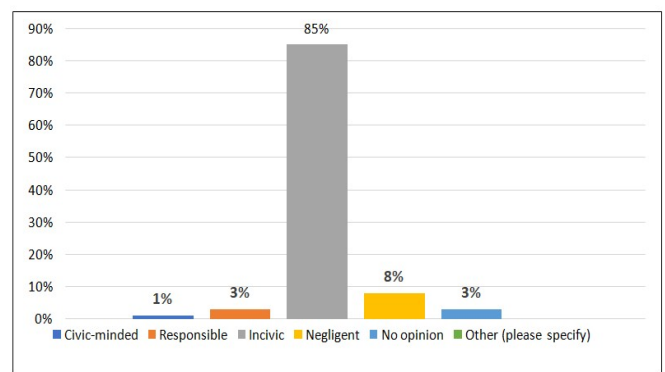
A legitimacy of urban governance scuffed by 'deviant' practices: Deviance indeed catches the attention of sociologists and especially politicians, who make regulating social practices and urban behavior a priority for any sustainable urban development (Martin and Truong, 2015).

This kind of classification relates to the behavior of the people of Ouagadougou and their relationship with urban life. The sociology of deviance covers "the study of delinquent phenomena and, more broadly, any form of practice that deviates from the norms specific to a social group or to a particular society" (Lebaron, 2014, p. 87). When asked institutional actors about what the State or local authorities are doing to better regulate social practices commonly seen in the city, the responses swing between mutual accusations and denial of responsibility. The fact that public roads in Ouagadougou are irregularly closed for the celebration of happy or unfortunate events—which even seems to have become the norm given their frequency and the ‘silence’ of the authorities—poses a threat to urban mobility, which is already a ‘nightmare’ for city residents.

Hum ! Very often we close the six meters when there is an event in the neighborhood. The people understand, and it allows us to secure the site of the ceremony (Household head, interview excerpt). Such discourse reflects the internalization of a practice that seems to have become an informal norm for the population. In African cities, street closures exist, even if they serve different functions. In South Africa, street closures have become firmly established in the urban fabric of neighborhoods. They have existed since 1992, just before the end of Apartheid, on the recommendation of South African police stations, notably in the Sandton neighborhood north of downtown (Dirsuweit, 2009) to combat crime. However, these closures are controversial among the population. According to some pressure groups. These measures cause social divisions, make cities dysfunctional, and lead to greater polarization in society. (...) Some are worried about the impact of street closures on road traffic; others see them as 'selfish' and self-interested practices (Dirsuweit, 2009, p. 392).

In general, on the issue of closing public roads, the uncivil behavior of the actors and the improvisation of the activities in question are criticized. Bouju blames this uncivil behavior on "an undisciplined and uncivil urban population that does not respect the rules of communal life" (2009, p.151). The idea that 'people have learned to live with it' means that citizens are used to living with practices that go against urban norms and regulations. During their socialization, they have adopted this habit of bypassing or avoiding urban legislation in every way. According to Lebaron (2014), norms refer to all the binding rules established within a society. They are passed on through socialization.

The insight provided by Pierre Bourdieu is quite illustrative when it comes to the topic of 'transgression' of these norms, as he explains that 'the more individuals belong to close social groups, the more their habitus resemble each other' (Delas and Milly, 2012, p.330). Indeed, these individuals have durably adopted a way of life in line with behaviors that deviate from the prevailing urban norms. In this way, 'deviant behaviors, or those perceived as such, fit into social logics and historical constructions' (Martin and Truong, 2015, p.4). As for the link between sanitation and sustainable urban development in the city, the views, although varied, all agree in criticizing the lack of a real sanitation policy combined with the prevalence of uncivil behavior among city residents. Moreover, when it comes to understanding what respondents think about the population's behavior regarding the urban environment, the responses are summarized in the chart below.



Source: Field survey, July–December 2025

Figure 2. Public Attitudes Toward the Urban Environment

Reading Chart 2 suggests that over 80% of respondents consider the population to be uncivil regarding the urban environment, while less than 4% are seen as civil or responsible on the matter. This uncivil behavior includes all types of incivility (Sigué, 2018) and is noticeable in all areas of urban life in Ouagadougou, whether in cleanliness, sanitation, or in real estate and land developments. When asked about the use of building or demolition permits in the city of Ouagadougou by the population, most respondents tend to say that they don't really follow these urban regulations. So why this attitude toward the law ? The reason is simple. No one is willing to 'throw themselves into the lion's mouth' if they don't have to, one might conclude. Indeed, following these rules means that people are expected to make sacrifices to pay the associated fees and taxes, while enforcement measures are hardly effective. The statement below from the Director of Urban Planning and Municipal Land shows the consequences of these civic attitudes and social relations toward urban norms, both for the individual and for sustainable urban development : We're living in a climate of lawlessness. How many buildings have collapsed in Ouagadougou ? People don't really care about building permits. Even those who have them, when it comes to execution, the administration isn't there to supervise—where you should be using 14mm rebar, they use 8mm. You're putting your life and others' in danger ! (Director of Urban Planning and Communal Land, excerpt from an interview).

Real estate projects must follow the rules set by the technicians in charge of urban planning and housing. The requirements for a building or demolition permit are part of an effort to comply with the standards of sustainable urban development. Yet, for most Burkinabè, having the financial means and the plan for their building seems enough to start construction. Building or demolishing requires having prior authorization. However, the reality aligns with what Rosenczveig points out, lamenting that "adults are often unaware of the legal rules that govern life in the city" (Rosenczveig, 2014, p.17). From this point of view, social interactions with urban norms need to be reconsidered, since developments hardly follow these standards. This can be attributed to the citizens' lack of civic sense. In short, the logic and strategies of the actors behind practices of bypassing regulations are rooted in economic and social reasons and are reinforced by the contradictions of institutional actors in putting laws into practice. These considerations, exacerbated by a population that has internalized a habit of breaking rules, mean that the social minority that relies on these regulations often takes shortcuts to maximize profit.

This is the case with the paradox where buildings constructed with permits collapse because implementation on the ground is riddled with irregularities and forged technical specifications. Likewise, the issue of illegal occupations of spaces, street shops, and sidewalk stalls that block traffic—all these uncivil practices hinder the construction of a sustainable city.

For social practices filled with urban sustainability: The overview of the issue of contradictions between the practices/behaviors of actors and the building of a sustainable city highlights proposals or implications in terms of urban policies that need to be taken into account. Most of the points raised by the interlocutors in this section oscillate between descriptions and recommendations for measures that could help overcome obstacles to sustainable urban development. From this perspective, the proposals made by the majority of interlocutors can be summed up in the triad of awareness-regulation-enforcement. As for the constraint, this option stems from the idea that 'forced and obliged, people would in fact change their habits and practices' (Galateau, 2013, p.146), because building a sustainable city requires the creation of a society that respects urban regulations. In this analytical perspective, research and interviews with informants led to suggestions for improving practices from both institutional and societal viewpoints, in order to lay the foundations for sustainable urban development. These suggestions are aimed at the state, the private sector, municipalities, and the population as a whole, as highlighted by the participant below:

From all sides, the State must enforce discipline. In traffic, in real estate developments, the urban environment, etc. It needs to improve living conditions and set up spaces for sports and places of worship (Real estate developer, interview excerpt). As we can see, the purpose of this interviewee's speech is to provide decision-making support for public actions aimed at improving the urban living environment. In relation to walking as a leisure activity that is good for health and environmental awareness in the city, we share Charrière's (2011) reflection, which highlights several examples of exemplary policies. A report titled 'Let's design our living spaces to make us want to move' lays out urban planning proposals for decision-makers and urban planners to promote physical activity. Also, it emerges that in April 2009, 'the city of Montreal launched a pilot project, "Green, Active, and Healthy Neighborhoods," aimed at redeveloping neighborhoods to increase active modes of transport such as walking and cycling' (Charrière, 2011, p.353). In the same year, 2009, the magazine *Urbanité* published a special issue focused on the role of urban planners and developers in relation to physical activity in the city. In France, various actions are carried out by the network of active cities under the National Nutrition Health Plan (PNNS)⁵.

Regarding the practices of blocking gutters with garbage and toilet waste, an unfair and counterproductive situation for urban living quality, it is suggested to avoid turning the collectors, gutters, and rainwater drainage channels into trash dumps. It would also be necessary to carry out a comprehensive cleaning of retention and drainage structures. Both the authorities and the people share responsibility for the repeated floods in the city of Ouagadougou. This responsibility comes down to practices like 'the bad habit of systematically throwing garbage into the gutters, and the tendency to build kiosks around the gutters to the point of blocking them or preventing road

services from cleaning them' (Quotidien "Le Pays" n° 6144, Tuesday, July 19, 2016, p.6). It is also suggested to rehabilitate modes of transport focused on gentle travel, respectful of traffic rules, in order to face the challenge of urban mobility, because 'the damage caused by the use of cars in the city is today unanimously recognized and denounced' (Godard, 2001 : 112). Along the same lines, one could agree with Sigué when he raises the question about the issue of 'two-wheelers in Ouagadougou' : 'given the tragically increasing number of fatal or disabling accidents, increasingly involving two-wheelers, isn't it finally time to limit the import of these vehicles ? Many of our young people, the hopes of tomorrow, die in our cities due to the disorderly and sometimes premature use of these motorcycles' (Sigué, 2018, p. 94). Obviously, this question calls for a positive response, especially due to the ongoing proliferation of this type of vehicle on urban roads that are hardly up to standard. All of this is combined with road incivility, which worsens the mobility issue. Moreover, Cusset and Sirpé share the same view when they suggest significantly reducing the relative share of two-wheelers in trips (1994, p.204) in Ouagadougou by favoring public transport or even restructuring the entire urban transport system. Added to this proposed therapy is the strengthening of road civility. Flaws like speeding, ignoring traffic lights by drivers and motorcyclists, not keeping safe distances between cars, and the abundance of fake driving licenses must be subject to exemplary punishment. Indeed, "it goes without saying that too many unpunished flaws eventually make traffic hellish and exhausting. But the government should beware, because a state where insolence and doing whatever one wants go unpunished ultimately sinks into the abyss" (Sigué, 2018, p.94). The consequences of incivility here are similar to those of corruption : a sort of weapon of mass destruction for ethical and moral values and can plunge society into a widespread crisis, as Ouédraogo asserts. In the same vein as the proposals made to lay the groundwork for socially sustainable practices, various viewpoints have been expressed. According to the head of cleanliness in the municipality of Ouagadougou :

We first need to establish environmental education at the root. If children are born and grow up with environmental education, awareness will start from the ground up. Also, the laws need to be enforced by restoring the authority of the state. Today, if you want to draw someone's attention to sanitation issues, they'll tell you it's democracy. But democracy isn't chaos ! (Director of Cleanliness of the Ouagadougou municipality, interview excerpt).

On this topic, it is recommended to strengthen the civic and democratic capacities of stakeholders, which involves inventing a new social contract with urban areas. Similarly, Levy and Emelianoff (2011) suggest reinforcing civic education, or education about the city, as solutions for citizen participation in urban planning. The same goes for the proposal that "it is imperative to place moral and civic education at the heart of the education issue" (Sigué, 2018, p.109-110). This approach could eventually help promote a shift in mentality and behavior among stakeholders to tackle urban disorders.

CONCLUSION

This study looks at the impact of common uncivil behaviors on weakening urban sustainability. The goal is to understand societal practices as drivers of urban insecurity and obstacles to

⁵ Active Cities PNNS : <https://www.reseauxvillesactivespnns.fr/>

sustainable urban development. The theoretical framework is based on the sociology of public action, which shows the shared responsibility of all institutional and societal actors in building a city that cares about intergenerational equity. In-depth interviews, surveys, and direct observation were used to collect data, and analyzing this data helped to find answers to the research questions. Research has shown that the practices and behaviors of urban players do not contribute to building a sustainable city. These practices, which result from the incivility or unneighborly behavior of city actors, are varied. They include issues like unsanitary conditions, acts of incivility, indiscipline, and changes in parcel use. The same goes for internalized 'deviant' practices that undermine the legitimacy of urban governance. Examples include the irregular closing of public roads for celebrations or other events, failing to get the necessary permits to build or demolish in the city, and the social consequences that come with these actions. Also, a gap has emerged between urban standards and the practical realities of the actors involved. The sheer number of regulatory frameworks and legal texts contrasts with their actual implementation on the ground. Incivility, ignorance, lack of awareness, or simply the 'laxity' of public authorities—actors' logics, practices, and behaviors are internalized and incorporated (Bourdieu, 1980) by a significant portion of the population. Moreover, at a time when 'smart cities' are as much objects of curiosity as they are curious phenomena within the social sciences, exploring this concept involves another field of reflection that we could delve into in the context of sustainable urban development.

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