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Understanding Conflict in Street Space Transformations: An Analytical Framework

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ABSTRACT

Street space transformations are increasingly being used to reduce car traffic in cities. In these processes, conflict is seen to emerge unpredictably and manifest in various, sometimes unexpected ways. We aim to contribute to the understanding of these conflicts by providing a context-specific framework for analysis, based on the assumption that conflicts over street space are potentially productive and provide learning opportunities. We develop a framework showing how conflicts evolve as urban planning, transport planning, and transition logics intersect. It clarifies what conflicts concern and why actors engage in conflict, and how we can learn from conflict.

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Introduction

Street space transformations reallocate street-level space from cars to support reduced car dependency and more sustainable urban environments. Although these interventions differ in function, goals, duration, and scale, they often generate conflict among diverse stakeholders, shaping planning outcomes and social relations (Smeds & Papa, 2023), and potentially resulting in exclusionary practices or in avoiding the issue altogether (Penny et al., 2020). Planners and other institutional actors rarely see themselves as participants in conflict (Baum, 2015), leading individuals and professional groups to adopt a depoliticized, one-sided view that frames opposition as inherently problematic. This distances conflict from everyday practice, despite its widely acknowledged role as a constitutive feature of planning (Gualini, 2015). Given these tensions, we approach conflict in street space transformations from the perspective that it can enable learning. This assumes a view of conflict as a site where social relations intensify (Simmel, 1904). Drawing on Dayton and Kriesberg (2017, p. 2) we define conflict here as “the process that arises when two or more persons or groups *manifest the belief* that they have incompatible objectives.” This definition focuses on the *manifestation of belief*, highlighting that conflict may emerge even in the absence of actual incompatibilities.

Our approach deliberately avoids anchoring conflict within any specific planning-theoretical framework (cf. Yiftachel & Huxley, 2000). Seen as sites where social relations intensify, conflicts

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can serve to make visible the values, fantasies, and attachments of actors, as well as point to institutional and structural relations, rationalities, exclusions, and beliefs. They may be productive, destructive, or both (Gualini, 2015). Conflict serves here as an empirical phenomenon that may present opportunities for learning, but is treated neither as a normative ideal, nor an obstacle to overcome (cf. Gualini, 2015; Legacy et al., 2019). Manifestations of conflict are not limited to overt opposition or contestation, but also include institutional responses such as mitigation, management, or avoidance, which themselves reveal how conflict is understood and positioned in planning practice.

This paper uses conflicts arising in street-space transformations as an analytical lens for understanding conflict. Its aim is to show how conflict can offer opportunities for learning, rather than something to avoid or suppress. Based on an integrative literature review, we identify three dominant perspectives on conflict that often intersect in street-space interventions. We then propose an analytical framework that examines who is involved, what the conflict concerns, and why and how actors engage across different stages of an intervention. The framework was developed through theoretical and empirical work in an international research project (CONFLICTEDSTREETS) on street-space conflicts and has been applied to 20 cases across the EU and Turkey.

The paper begins with a literature review that situates conflict across contexts, avoiding assumptions that it is preconfigured or spatially bounded. It first establishes street-space transformations as an analytical category, highlighting the street as a site where spatial reallocation, everyday practices, and political claims intersect. We review literature on both the content of such transformations, i.e., the types of interventions involved, and the actors engaged in conflict around them. We then show how conflict is conceptualized differently across the literature on urban planning, transport planning, and sustainability transitions. This review informs a set of analytical distinctions that together form a framework for analyzing conflicts in street-space transformations. We conclude with a brief example from a contested intervention in Gothenburg, Sweden, and discuss the framework's implications for theory and practice.

Conflict in Streetspace Transformations: An Integrative Literature Review

The purpose of an integrative literature review is to “assess, critique, and synthesize the literature on a research topic in a way that enables new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge” (Snyder, 2024, p. 335). It is therefore well-suited for offering an overview of the knowledge base on a topic, enabling critical analysis of both the literature and the key ideas and relationships surrounding it. Moreover, the integrative approach supports the (re)conceptualization and expansion of the theoretical foundations of a research field.

Rather than treating conflict as a static phenomenon tied to a single intervention or scale, the literature reviewed here supports understanding conflict as something constituted across spatial, institutional, and discursive contexts. In street space transformations, we argue that conflicts are shaped simultaneously by local planning practices, technical transport-planning rationalities, and broader political narratives linked to sustainability transitions. To capture this, the review moves across perspectives that conceptualize conflict differently, tracing where conflict is located, how it is interpreted, and how actors respond. This approach foregrounds tensions between perspectives instead of assuming a linear progression from intervention to opposition. It also offers analytical means to engage with how conflicts unfold across scales and discursive dimensions in street space transformations.

Street Space Transformations

Scholarly attention to street-level interventions with the aim of reducing car traffic generally tends to be organized either around planning concepts at the city-scale, like the 15-minute city (Barbieri et al., 2023; Guzman et al., 2024) or low-traffic neighborhoods (VanHoose et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2024), or more narrowly defined intervention types, including street experiments (Smeds & Papa, 2023; VanHoose et al., 2022) and pedestrianization schemes (Allirani et al., 2024; Parajuli & Pojani, 2018).

While analytically useful, such distinctions risk fragmenting analysis by foregrounding policy concepts or typologies rather than the spatial and political conditions that shape interventions. Several aspects cut across intervention types – most notably the street as a site of everyday practices with both practical and symbolic significance, and the reallocation of space from automobility as an act with material, social, and political consequences. We therefore propose *street space transformations* as an analytical unit that centers the street as the primary spatial scale, recognizes the withdrawal of space for cars as a defining and politically charged feature, and enables the examination of conflicts through their material, social, and political dynamics.

Street space transformations involve reallocating road space – lanes and/or parking – away from cars at street level. Interventions vary in scope, from small sections of a street to networks of streets within a neighbourhood. Their duration varies from temporary experiments and seasonal regulation changes to permanent redesigns. Such transformations may begin as temporary pilots (VanHoose, 2023) and later become permanent transformations. For example, New York City's Summer Streets program temporarily opens streets for recreation and public use (Bridges et al., 2020), whereas Barcelona's superblocks constitute a permanent reconfiguration at the neighbourhood scale.

Although some street space transformations can resemble street experiments, they do not fit neatly into Bertolini's (2020) often-cited definition. He conceptualizes street experiments primarily as a spatial device, and not a policy practice, centered on streets for people, not for traffic. This excludes interventions aimed at a modal shift rather than place-making. Moreover, Bertolini sees democratic participation as a key aspect – something that, while important, is not a defining feature of street space transformations. While street experiments uphold bottom-up initiatives, street space transformations are typically initiated by governmental actors – political or administrative. Nevertheless, street space transformations often incorporate experimental elements, both in terms of spatial interventions and in the policy procedures behind them.

The reduction of space for cars is typically framed within broader goals of enhancing livability and sustainability, including lowering the climate impact of the transport sector (Hagen & Tennøy, 2021). Street space transformations often aim to promote more sustainable transport modes, such as buses, trams, and cycling – and to improve public space through pedestrianization, urban greening, or creating areas for social activities (Allirani et al., 2024). Multiple intervention types and objectives can be combined. For example, in Munich's Piazza Zenetti, parking spaces were converted into a public area with seating, a community bulletin board, and a mini library (VanHoose et al., 2022), thereby linking reduced parking with enhanced social interaction. Additional objectives may also help build legitimacy for an intervention or shift attention away from perceived losses associated with street space transformations (Scholl & Kraker, 2021).

We distinguish four phases in street space transformations: plan/policy, design, implementation, and function. For the purpose of learning from conflict, these stages help maintain a

chronology of how conflicts emerge and evolve in relation to an intervention. While aspects such as spatial design, regulation, temporality, stated aims, and experimental versus established work modes are not treated as constitutive, they remain relevant analytical considerations because they shape how interventions – and the conflicts surrounding them – develop. The following section examines how conflict is approached in research on street space transformations, including an overview of the actors typically involved. This is followed by a discussion of theoretical conceptualizations of conflict across the three interrelated bodies of literature.

Conflict in Street Space Transformations

Although a limited set of empirical studies approaches conflict in planning as produced by spatial or institutional arrangements (including Flyvbjerg, 1998; Legacy et al., 2018; Metzger et al., 2021), conflict is most commonly approached through a narrow scope: some specifically attend to opposition to interventions from different user groups like residents and retailers (Kirmizi, 2021) or between groups of road users, for example drivers and cyclists (Chen et al., 2018; Pokorny et al., 2018), or pedestrians and cyclists (Mastora et al., 2023). Others center on conflict related to participatory processes (Peltonen & Sairinen, 2010; Vigar et al., 2017) or on the contestation of planning concepts, such as the 15-minute city (Marquet et al., 2025). This means that conflict becomes attached to quite isolated aspects of interventions, posing a risk of conflict that arises from, or spills over to other aspects of an intervention may escape the scope.

Planning conflicts can also be rescaled through broader political discourses that extend beyond the specific intervention. In such cases, conflict arises from wider disagreements over values, behaviors, and beliefs related to urban mobility and becomes entangled with contested sustainability narratives (Ferrer-Ortiz et al., 2022; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2023). This enables actors who are not spatially adjacent to the intervention, and not directly affected by it, to engage in the conflict (Glover, 2025). Because reallocating space away from cars challenges the long-established primacy of automobility and everyday mobility routines, street-level interventions may therefore become contested both locally and within broader political debates.

However, as noted above, institutions often treat conflicts as barriers to implementation, which may be met with avoidance, mitigation, or procedural containment through delimited participatory practices. Meanwhile, institutional actors often fail to recognize themselves as part of the conflict. When conflicts are not acknowledged, they tend to reappear elsewhere, within or outside of a particular process, and may reshape interventions through escalation, delay, or project stagnation (Wolf, 2021).

In sum, conflict in street space transformations can be delimited, rescaled, and institutionally displaced all at once: what counts as conflict depends largely on the angle from which it is approached. This demands analytical attention to shifting perspectives from a variety of actors, as it helps make visible aspects of conflict that may otherwise remain obscured.

Actors in Conflicts over Street Space Transformations

Although the concept of stakeholders in planning is contested (Metzger, 2013), understanding conflict in street space transformations requires some categorization of who is involved. Conflicts between civil servants in different municipal planning departments, for example, differ markedly – in process and impact – from conflicts involving planners, citizens, and business owners. The

categories proposed below are inspired by VanHoose et al. (2025), but the final set is shaped by empirical studies that illustrate who becomes involved and how their involvement unfolds, rather than by a theoretical definition. We do not attempt to identify “true stakeholders” (Metzger, 2013), but to map forms of engagement. These analytical categories aim to delineate the relational field of conflict by distinguishing actors based on their structurally differentiated access to legitimacy and influence (Von Schönfeld, 2023). Conflict may occur both within and across categories. Actors may be differently affected throughout the course of an intervention and after implementation, making it essential to consider how actors engage over time (Verloo & Davis, 2021).

Beyond the inevitable involvement of local planning institutions, the actors engaged in conflict vary widely across interventions. At the local level, civil servants – such as project managers, engineers, and politicians – typically lead the planning, implementation, and management of street space transformations. Although these interventions may affect metropolitan regions, they are usually initiated by local councils, requiring coordination across departments. City-wide policymakers, while not directly responsible for implementation, may influence interventions through broader strategic planning. National-level political actors may also become involved (see Rye et al., 2025 for examples from Oslo, Norway).

Industry actors – including consultants, construction firms, and transport companies – can play significant roles in street space transformations. Consultants often support planning institutions by providing technical expertise, modelling, and design services (Linovski, 2024). Construction firms typically deliver the physical components of interventions, from temporary installations to large-scale infrastructure upgrades (Rye et al., 2025).

While scholars increasingly collaborate with planning institutions in practice-based research, the role of academia in conflict is often overlooked. McCormick and Hartmann (2017) for example describe researchers in Urban Living Labs as facilitators and analysts, positioning them as external mediators rather than as actors in conflict. In fact, as pilot interventions will be implemented within the research project informing this paper, researchers from multiple universities will inevitably become involved in the event of conflict.

Actors from civil society vary widely, differ in their access to legitimate arenas for expressing concerns, and are unevenly included in planning processes. To clarify this diversity, we distinguish actors by formality. The first sub-category consists of actors who engage individually or collectively through informal constellations, such as local Facebook groups or resident networks organically formed around specific interventions (Kleinhans et al., 2015). The introduction of a new circulation plan in Oxford, UK, well illustrates how street-level automobility retraction schemes can become bound up with globalized political discourse and eventually impact local settings (Antelme, 2023; Walker, 2023). The second group consists of actors who engage through formal networks or group constellations and thereby have an established platform for expressing concerns. These may include unions, NGOs, and interest organizations.

Media – from traditional outlets such as newspapers, radio, and television to diverse social media platforms – play a key role in shaping both conflict and perceptions of conflict in street space transformations (Allansson, 2025; Pettersson et al., 2021). Media channels may function as neutral arenas for debate, for example through opinion pieces or online discussions, but they can also take an active role, such as when editorial teams seek to influence public opinion or amplify particular viewpoints. While local media can serve as a platform for diverse perspectives, but is likely to amplify certain messages and steer public perceptions (Vitale Brovarone

et al., 2023). Moreover, alternative media outlets have been observed spreading misinformation about specific schemes (Antelme, 2023).

In addition, coalitions between different stakeholders, e.g., business owners and politicians, can develop and assert influence on the power dynamics of the transformation process (Rye et al., 2025).

Table 1 summarizes the actor categories discussed in this section. In the following section, we show that conflicts are understood differently across three theoretical perspectives that we consider particularly relevant for analyzing conflict in street space transformations. The aim is to illustrate how institutional logics shape interpretive frames, rather than to evaluate the substantive claims of each perspective.

Table 1. Actor categories.

Government	Civil servants and politicians at local, regional and national level (including e.g. traffic engineers, urban planners, designers, policymakers, emergency services etc.),
Research/knowledge institutions	Researchers and research institutions, including universities and other privately or publicly funded organizations, that are involved in producing, interpreting, or evaluating knowledge related to street space transformations.
Industry	Consultants, building companies, transport companies, etc.
Civil society - informal	Residents, passersby (pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers), local community, business-owners, and groups and individuals without local affiliation that are unorganized or loosely organized as in. response to interventions
Civil society - formal	Formal organizations such as NGO's, interest groups, and unions.
Media	News outlets and independent journalists including 'amateur' journalists and influencers.

Conceptualizations of Conflict in Research

Within urban planning theory, conflict is often treated as a *conflict of interest*, grounded in the view that planning concerns the allocation of scarce resources such as space, access, mobility, and environmental qualities. Conflict is therefore situated in the distributional politics of local space and assumed to be resolvable through negotiation, deliberation, and coordination among competing claims. Although issues of meaning, knowledge, and identity are acknowledged, they are typically treated as secondary. Forester's (2006) distinction between interests and "real interests" illustrates this dynamic, with emotions, values, identity, or historical factors interpreted as clues pointing toward underlying interests. Healey (1992), advancing a communicative approach that explicitly centers place-based learning and meaning-making, mobilizes social aspects *to resolve interest conflict* – they are not understood as potentially autonomous dimensions of conflict. Perspectives focusing on epistemic justice and the diversification of planning knowledge follow a similar path, as critique concerns how the rationalities of planning determine what, and who, counts as legitimate sources of knowledge (Smeds et al., 2023). Conflict is framed primarily in terms of exclusion, misrecognition, and inequality, and while attention is usefully shifted towards marginalized forms of knowledge, other aspects of conflict tend to be obscured. Questions concerning how particular political projects are served by specific forms of knowledge, as well as the institutional arrangements and power relations through which knowledge is authorized, mobilized, and rendered legitimate, tend to recede into the background. When conflict is primarily framed in terms of exclusion and recognition, marginalized communities risk being positioned as suppliers of alternative planning knowledge, while the institutional and structural conditions within which knowledge operates remain largely intact. Moreover, defining actors as stakeholders and the idea of "having a stake" stems from an interest-centered understanding of conflict, where legitimacy is tied to recognized interests.

This perspective reinforces the assumption that only those with a clear, acknowledged stake are valid participants in the process (Healey, 1998). However, research shows that even actors without an obvious stake can significantly shape conflicts and outcomes in street space transformations (Marquet et al., 2025).

Notions of conflict as social and rooted in competing interests differ markedly from how conflict is conceived in the technical transport field. In street space transformations, traffic engineers and technical departments often represent this expert-driven and comparatively closed field (Lindelöw et al., 2016; Willson, 2001). Transport planning is grounded in an instrumental rationality focused on optimizing the means to achieve predefined ends (Wedgwood, 2011). Within this logic, conflict is understood to arise within the technical system itself and to manifest as inefficiencies, disturbances, or trade-offs that interfere with functional optimization.

Consequently, the planning process is seen largely as a sequence in which conflict emerges as a disruption rather than as a constitutive element. This contrasts with urban planning, where conflict tends to center on social values and democratic processes, thereby making the process itself meaningful. In transport planning, attention typically centers on performance and design, while the predefined ends are seldom questioned. Within this logic, actors are framed as users rather than stakeholders, and scientific or professional expertise dominates – forms of knowledge often treated as neutral (Winter, 2021). Spatial context is largely conceptualized as a container through which interventions pass, rather than as an active social and political dimension (Cresswell, 2010). This framing sidelines political and social concerns, allowing transport perspectives to present themselves as external to the systems they operate within. This should not be understood as a lack of social awareness but as a professional strategy aimed at enhancing performance in a highly specialized and complex field (Pel & Boons, 2010). Traffic planners and engineers may restrict their attention to the immediate task to fulfil their roles, which, in practice, relegates wider political struggles and contested mobilities to a contextual background rather than to integral elements of the system.

The shift toward sustainable mobility links transport and land-use planning to sustainability-transition frameworks, particularly managerial approaches that guide transition efforts. Within this logic, conflict is read mainly as alignment with or resistance to transition processes, a framing that obscures power relations and institutional accountability (Kalt, 2024). Conflict is therefore located at the level of political projects and their moral justifications rather than in concrete institutional or spatial practices. It may be internalized as system reconfiguration or cast as an inevitable struggle with winners and losers (Köhler et al., 2009), or framed as a struggle that inevitably has winners and losers. This binary conception is often reinforced by a quasi-militarized language, in which those seen as upholding current systems are framed as enemies (Kester & Sovacool, 2017). Such discourse can also shape urban-scale transition narratives, where street experiments then become “battlegrounds” (Torrens et al., 2019), space is framed as a site of strategic mobilization (Nikolaeva et al., 2019), and opposition is labelled as “attacks” (Marquet et al., 2025) or “culture war” (Driving Urban Transitions, 2024). In street-level planning, this perspective creates false dichotomies. Even conflicts within transition agendas – such as disagreements about the direction of interventions – are structured through a winner-loser logic (Köhler et al., 2009). The politics of transitions thus produce a conception of conflict structured around moral legitimacy or even superiority, while opposition lacks political substance and tends to be framed as opposition to change. Notably, emotion is increasingly considered “an integral and important part in the success of sustainability transitions” (Martiskainen et al., 2021, p. 619).

However, it is not treated symmetrically across positions, as emotions aligned with transition agendas, such as urgency, fear, and morally righteous antagonism, tend to be framed as legitimate or necessary. Conversely, dissent tends to be disqualified on the basis of emotionality. Concepts like “transition pain” (Bogner et al., 2024) risk framing feelings of loss as a temporary maladaptation rather than a meaningful political critique. While emotions are socially conditioned (Feola & Jaworska, 2019), a transition-centric view risks recasting conflicts over values, distribution, and institutional responsibility as merely affective reactions to an inevitable process, rather than substantive knowledge capable of shaping its trajectory.

Importantly, the perspectives outlined above do not operate as neatly separated domains; they intersect in multiple ways, and the fields themselves should not be viewed as strictly distinct. Analytically, however, distinguishing them clarifies how actors locate conflict across different scales. Land-use planning literature typically frames conflict as competition among stakeholder interests, while transport-planning perspectives often draw on bounded technical rationalities that treat conflict as disruptions to efficiency, largely detached from social dynamics. As sustainability becomes increasingly central to planning, the moral claims embedded in transition narratives migrate to street-level debates. When these binaries and war-like framings enter local planning, conflict risks becoming interpersonal rather than structural, with dissent emotionalized and positioned against rationality (Flyvbjerg, 1998). The shift from facilitating to restricting auto-mobility further intensifies these tensions as perspectives intersect (Rye & Hrelja, 2020).

While critical perspectives exist across these fields, the hegemonic approaches rarely see conflict as *structurally* embedded in social relations. This points to the need for an analytical approach that can attend to how conflicts are produced and displaced when urban planning, transport planning, and transition perspectives intersect. Rather than resolving tensions, this review sheds light on how different conceptualizations of conflict collide in street space transformations, providing the basis for the analytical distinctions developed in the following sections.

Conflict, Power, and Participation

Conceptions of conflict shape how planning institutions interpret situations and determine appropriate actions. In planning practice, conflict is often viewed as something identifiable, manageable, and ultimately resolvable once its underlying drivers are understood. Yet this assumption becomes difficult to uphold in practice, as conflict is inevitably shaped by power relations, institutional assumptions about the parties involved, and the ways participation is organized (Legacy, 2017). These complexities further impact different actors’ possibilities to voice their opinions and how their efforts to do so are received.

As Flyvbjerg (2004) argues, power determines what is contextually understood as rational. It therefore plays a foundational role in shaping knowledge production and in determining whose claims are treated as legitimate. Being perceived as rational grants a privileged position in conflict, associated with neutrality and access to, or production of, factual knowledge. The “rational” actor is imagined as detached from emotion, in contrast to the supposedly irrational counterpart. Yet being in conflict inevitably involves emotional charge (Nair, 2008). This applies to all positions in conflict – including those of institutional actors (Baum, 2015; Cass & Walker, 2009). Hence, emotion and rationality are not mutually exclusive, but rather relational: *emotion becomes emotional in opposition to power*. This shows up differently across the conceptions of conflict above: planning can be understood to translate emotion according to the perceived rationality of actors’ interests; transport planning disavows the social altogether, rendering

emotion categorically irrational; and sustainability transitions codes emotion as emotional when it opposes the moral project of transitions.

Power relations further impact how engagement in planning processes is received by planning institutions. Engagement is generally framed as invited participation and hence steered by planners both in terms of process design and, ultimately, who is or isn't invited (Thorpe, 2017). This framing risks rendering the planning process predominantly closed, not least as participation tends to be treated as a procedural requirement rather than valuable in itself (McAuliffe & Rogers, 2018), and the degree to which participating actors can impact an intervention is normally predetermined. Consequently, efforts to engage in planning outside of formal channels are often seen as a means of moving beyond state power (Thorpe, 2017) and thereby inappropriate, conflictual, and even aggressive. However, participation can be understood more broadly as "a variety of techniques that bring people, things, and knowledge together in ways that can consolidate existing ways of life or create entirely new possibilities" (Grove & Pugh, 2015, p. 2). Arguably, this definition allows us to consider conflict as a mode of *self-organized participation*. We approach conflict in terms of *engagement*, regardless of prior invitation, rather than as a deviation from a planning procedure. This shift emphasizes evaluating contestation by its substance, regardless of its origin or form. It challenges institutional tendencies to dismiss opposition on the basis of formality, venue, or procedural legitimacy.

Conflict as a Site for Learning: An Analytical Framework

As described in the preceding sections, understanding conflict in street space transformations requires moving beyond familiar assumptions about why conflict emerges. Land-use planning often treats conflict as competing stakeholder interests, transport planning reduces it to disruptions in a technical system, and sustainability transitions scholarship tends to moralize it through narratives of urgency, resistance, and transformation. Each perspective brings its own logic, expectations about actors, and criteria for what counts as legitimate disagreement. Yet these framings increasingly overlap as social values, technical rationalities, and transition imperatives collide in contemporary street space change. In this section, we introduce concepts from two complementary frameworks that help analyze conflict without reducing it to predefined categories or single logics. Together, they highlight both what conflict is about and how it manifests and unfolds. Rather than viewing conflict as a problem to solve, we use these frameworks diagnostically to support learning from conflict as it arises at the intersection of urban planning, transport planning, and transition perspectives.

First, we draw on Wolf's (2021) framework of *substantive*, *procedural*, and *relational conflict*, pointing toward how conflicts are manifested, experienced, and potentially escalated. *Substantive conflicts* concern the substance of a policy or intervention and involve decisions regarding design, regulation, or implementation. *Procedural conflicts* arise when the fairness, transparency, or legitimacy of a process is contested. Such conflicts may refer to decision-making, participation, representation, and access to information. *Relational conflicts* involve the deterioration of personal relations and trust. They are usually characterized by antagonism, speculation, and personalization of disagreement. Wolf (2021) treats these categories as dynamic and tied to conflict escalation: most conflicts begin with substantive disagreements and, as they intensify, take on procedural and eventually relational dimensions. These concepts clarify what actors in conflict disagree about.

Second, we draw on Coppens (2014) distinction between *distribution*, *perception*, and *value conflicts* to apprehend what is at stake for actors in conflict. These concepts are particularly

useful for moving beyond a narrow focus on conflicts of interest and for distinguishing how meaning, knowledge, and moral claims can shape conflict. *Distributive conflicts* arise when stakeholders pursue incompatible goals related to the allocation of scarce resources such as street space, environmental goods, mobility options, or public funding. Conflicts of interest fall within this category. *Perception conflicts* stem from disagreements over knowledge or facts and may occur even when actors share a common goal (Kennedy & Pronin, 2008). Such conflicts involve disputes over pathways towards transitions (Henderson, 2020), how streets should be regulated (Hamilton-Baillie & Jones, 2005) or whether an intervention will deliver its intended outcome (Bratt Börjesson & Eliasson, 2026). They can lead actors to view opponents as biased or irrational while assuming their own position is neutral. *Value conflicts*, by contrast, concern deeper incompatibilities related to ethics, identities, politics, and worldviews. They may stem from contested understandings of sustainability (Glover, 2025), car culture (Parajuli & Pojani, 2018), public space, or the role of the state.

Taken together, these concepts form the basis for how we approach conflict as a site of learning and as potentially multidimensional. Rather than treating them as fixed categories, we use Coppens' and Wolf's distinctions as sets of analytical questions.

A Framework for Analyzing Conflicts in Street Space Transformations

Building on the arguments developed in the preceding sections, Table 2 presents the framework for analyzing conflict in street space transformation. The framework is organized around five questions addressing: the characteristics of the intervention; the stage of the planning process in which conflict emerges; the actors involved; what they are in conflict over; and why they engage in conflict. The first three questions are primarily descriptive, while the final two draw on the frameworks developed by Coppens (2014) and Wolf (2021). As noted earlier, we do not seek to expose hidden motives or emotions; our understanding of actors' actions and reasons is based on what is, or is not, expressed and enacted.

The framework can be applied in several ways. It has been used for cross-case comparative studies across countries and planning contexts (authors, forthcoming) as well as for detailed examinations of how conflicts unfold over time and across planning stages in a single case

Table 2. A framework for analyzing conflicts in street space transformations.

What characterizes the intervention?					
Scope and aim	Duration	Established/ experimental	Participation		
When is conflict taking place?					
Plan/policy	Design	Implementation	Function		
Who is in conflict?					
Government	Research, knowledge	Industry	Civil society, formal	Civil society, informal	Media
What is the conflict about?					
Substantial		Procedural		Relational	
A.1 What substantial issues are actors concerned with?		A.2 Is the process as such contested?		A.3. Are personal/intergroup relations at stake?	
Why do actors engage in conflict?					
Distribution		Value		Perception	
A.4 What distributional issues are at play		A.5 What values are under contestation?		A.6 How do stakeholders' perceptions differ?	

(authors, forthcoming). Each of the six analytical sub-questions can be used to explore a specific dimension of conflict, or combined to provide a deeper, more comprehensive analysis of a case.

Case Study: Understanding Conflict in a Street Space Transformation

Below, we apply the framework to a conflicted street space transformation on Sölgatan in Gothenburg, Sweden. Given space constraints, we cannot provide a full account of the case or its multidimensional conflict; instead, we offer a focused snapshot structured around the analytical questions. Further analyses of how the conflict unfolded across planning stages will be presented in Sun et al. (forthcoming) and Rye and Pettersson-Löfstedt (forthcoming).

Characteristics, Planning Stages, and Actors Involved

Contextual features of interventions are essential for understanding the conflicts they generate. These include the specific changes introduced through street space reallocation, what is removed, what is added, the aims and timing of the intervention, and whether design and planning approaches are experimental or established. We also consider who planners invited to participate, as this often helps explain why conflict arises. In analyzing how conflict manifests, we first identify when it occurs in relation to planning stages, which allows us to order conflict events chronologically and structure the analysis. We then define the actors involved according to the proposed categorization.

In the case of Sölgatan in Gothenburg, the street space reallocation involved removing 140 parking spaces to create bike lanes. The aims were to quickly improve safety and access for cyclists and to test cost-effective, semipermanent solutions that could be scaled across the city. The intervention was experimental in both policy and design, relying on provisional technical measures and surface-level modifications. Public involvement was limited to invitation-only informational meetings, alongside dialogue with a local renters' union and a cycling advocacy organization.

Conflict emerged even before the intervention was publicly announced, continued throughout all planning stages, and persisted during implementation. Actors from all categories engaged. The conflict had two parallel dimensions: one internal to the planning institution and one playing out in public. Notably, the institutional conflict significantly affected the project, producing a 1.5-year delay in what was initially expected to be an eight-month process.

What is the Conflict about?

First, we consider *what* is being contested. This is answered by posing the first three analytical questions, A.1-A.3 in Table 2, paying attention to how conflict manifests in relation to substantive, procedural, and relational issues.

A.1 What Substantial Issues Are Actors Concerned with?

At the plan and policy stage, substantial conflict took several forms. Publicly, the conflict surfaced in local media, where both the reallocation in general and the removal of parking in particular were contested. Internally, municipal engineers questioned the political assignment

behind the intervention, arguing that the experimental mandate and surface-level design were insufficiently substantiated and posed traffic-safety concerns. Project managers, however, interpreted the engineers' stance as opposition to the intervention itself, especially the removal of parking. Interviews later revealed that the engineers would have preferred to remove all parking permanently. The conflict therefore remained substantive throughout, though different actors identified different objects of contention.

A.2 is the Process as Such Contested?

Procedural conflict emerged even before the public controversy, as project managers deliberately excluded traffic engineers from the plan and policy stage. While framed as a pragmatic move to meet the politically mandated timeline, engineers perceived it as a bypassing of the established decision-making process and a dismissal of their expertise. This exclusion later created problems during the design stage: when engineers eventually reviewed the plans, they repeatedly judged the design insufficient from a traffic-safety perspective. For engineers, these concerns were substantive; for project managers, they appeared procedural and were interpreted as deliberate attempts to stall the process.

A.3 Are Personal/Intergroup Relations at Stake?

Across all stages, the conflict also took on relational dimensions. Editorials in local media and discussions on social media quickly personalized the dispute, portraying planners and politicians as ideologically driven and detached from residents' everyday realities. Individuals were named and criticized, and at one point, a planner's personal information was posted in a local Facebook group. While project managers and politicians actively engaged with civil society and the media, traffic engineers distanced themselves from this aspect of the conflict. In the Söggatan case, relational conflict was not a late-stage escalation but present from the outset. Publicly, it appeared ideological, whereas internally it manifested as interpersonal tension.

Why Do Actors Engage in Conflict?

Second, we pose the analytical sub-questions A4–A6 in [Table 2](#), highlighting what is at stake, and *why* the actors engage in conflict.

A.4 What Distributional Issues Are at Play?

The removal of parking and reallocation of street space were the primary distributional triggers for stakeholder engagement. In the public realm of conflict, the intervention was framed in media and social media as imposing losses on residents while benefitting a vague and infrequent group of cyclists, and as a waste of public funds. Institutionally, distributional conflict also concerned how burdens were allocated: during the plan/policy stage, project managers assumed responsibility for handling complaints as a mitigating measure, while other departments sought to deflect public contestation throughout the process. Distributional conflict thus concerned material resources, economic priorities, and the division of institutional labor.

A.5 What Values Are under Contestation?

In public statements from the municipality, interviews with politicians, the intervention was framed either as a moral necessity in response to sustainability and mobility challenges. In editorials in local media and among critics on social media it was seen as an expression of ideologically driven car- and even class-hostility. Internally, project managers viewed experimental methods as a responsible response to urgency, while traffic engineers saw them as violations of professional safety norms and established procedures. Actors, therefore, engaged based on incompatible values related to responsibility, safety, urgency, and fairness. Although these issues overlap with substantive and procedural matters, they are not easily resolved through adjustment of either.

A.6 How Do actors' Perceptions Differ?

During the design phase and onward, residents, informal civil society actors, and a local newspaper editor repeatedly challenged the empirical basis of the intervention arguing, for example, that municipal parking and traffic data were incorrect or even falsified as they conflicted with residents' lived experiences. Institutionally, traffic engineers' safety concerns were not treated as experiential expert knowledge but were instead interpreted as conservatism or deliberate stalling. Project managers, in turn, were portrayed as unprofessional and unfamiliar with the local context. Such contestation is often driven by feelings of being misheard, invalidated, or mischaracterized, and therefore invokes broader issues of values and relationships.

What, then, can we learn from applying the framework to the Sångatan case? The brief analysis above shows how the framework helps make sense of the multifaceted nature of conflict in street space transformations in a structured yet non-reductionist way. It reveals multiple dimensions of conflict, moving beyond one-dimensional explanations that attribute disagreement solely to conflict of interests (Forester, 2006), only a matter of different professional rationalities (Watson, 2003), or simply a matter of different groups being in favor, or against change (Geels, 2014).

The case demonstrates that procedural conflict extends beyond citizen and business engagement to include institutional inclusion and exclusion. It further shows that relational conflict can emerge at the outset rather than through escalation, shaped by assumptions rooted in urban planning, transport planning, and sustainability-transition logics. In Sångatan, relational conflict between planners obscured the fact that they shared the same overall goal and were, in fact, engaged in disputes over different substantive issues.

The Sångatan case further shows that loud and polarized contestation may operate largely on a symbolic level – focused on political discourse and perceptions of sustainability and mobility transitions – while leaving the intervention itself mostly unaffected. By contrast, the internal conflict within the municipality, a dimension often overlooked in planning-conflict literature, had significant consequences for both the process and personal relationships.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has developed an analytical framework for examining who is involved in conflict, what the conflict concerns, and why and how actors engage, across different stages of an

intervention. It offers a renewed perspective on conflict in street-space transformations by treating it as an inherent and dynamic feature rather than something to avoid or mitigate, as proposed by some studies in urban mobility (Ogrzyzek et al., 2021; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2023). As such, it contributes to the contemporary debate on conflict as an opportunity for institutional learning in urban planning (Gualini, 2015; Verloo & Davis, 2021). We conclude the paper by discussing theoretical implications, then those for practice, and finally offer concluding remarks.

Starting with the theoretical implications, we have shown that conceptualizing conflict from multiple perspectives accentuates its inherently multidimensional nature in street space transformations. Conflict is produced, shaped, and sometimes displaced through the intersection of different logics associated with urban planning, transport planning, and sustainability transitions. Instead of categorizing conflicts into predefined types, the proposed framework is based on a set of exploratory questions that guide the analysis of conflict. This approach helps reveal how competing logics generate layered and shifting forms of contestation and enables examination of how conflicts evolve dynamically over time and across different stages of planning. Through our example case, we illustrate that the framework can uncover how conflict that appears as interpersonal may be structurally embedded in professional rationalities and worldviews aligned with the three theoretical perspectives. Relatedly, conflicts may not be strictly tied to specific interventions but may circulate through planning processes and into wider public debates - as illustrated by both the ongoing public conflict on Sölgatan and previous research (Glover, 2025).

Turning to implications for practice, one important contribution of this paper is that recognizing conflict as an inherent feature of street space transformations enables a clearer distinction between what conflict is about and why actors engage. The framework makes it possible to see when actors are contesting different aspects of an intervention for different reasons, surfacing misrecognition and competing problem definitions. In doing so, conflict becomes not merely an obstacle to be managed or avoided, but a productive site for learning - a valid point for both for theory and practice. The why-questions in the framework help identify which dimensions of policy and intervention in street-space transformations give rise to conflict. In practice, they point to three overarching sources of contention within mobility-related planning initiatives. First, conflicts often emerge because the distribution of space is inherently political and affects how different groups are prioritized. Second, divergent interpretations arise from contrasting epistemic framings - differences in how knowledge, expertise, and discourse define what is considered legitimate or desirable. Third, underlying beliefs about sustainable mobility transitions and the political positions attached to them shape why actors contest interventions in distinct and sometimes incompatible ways. While developed as an analytical framework, the typology may also support practitioners in identifying and responding to emerging conflicts before during planning processes and offer a broadened vocabulary for addressing conflict.

The nuanced view of conflict we propose has further implications for practice, as it shows that conflict management strategies aimed at mitigating or depoliticizing conflict may displace rather than resolve it, with consequences for both institutional learning and trust among different stakeholders. Tracing conflicts across the stages of interventions reveals how attempts to contain conflict can shift it elsewhere in the process. This displacement can limit opportunities for reflexive learning and weaken the credibility of planning institutions.

The framework encourages a critical examination of the planning process, particularly within planning institutions. As the case study illustrates, the interplay among institutional stakeholders across substantive issues, procedural choices, and relational dynamics can influence outcomes in multiple ways. These range from delaying project implementation to escalating tensions in

inter-organizational cooperation to shaping how other actors and the wider public perceive and respond to transformation initiatives. Consequently, the framework points to the need for greater transparency and flexibility within planning processes, enabling practitioners to better understand and address the underlying concerns that manifest as conflict.

In addition, broadening conceptions of participation to include any contestation of the procedural dimension of the conflict limits the risk of obscuring institutional forms of exclusion that are central to how conflicts emerge and how interventions unfold. When participation is understood primarily through its visible and organized manifestations rather than through all actors who ought to be able to engage, important structural dynamics remain hidden. This can lead practitioners to overlook whose voices are systematically excluded and how those exclusions shape both conflict and planning outcomes. By conceptualizing contestation as a form of participation, the framework extends existing research on participation by drawing attention to institutional barriers that shape engagement even within institutions.

In conclusion, this paper reframes conflict in street space transformations as a potentially valuable source of insight rather than a deviation. The analytical framework turns to conflict as a multidimensional, emerging, and shifting process in which urban planning, transport planning, and transition rationalities intersect. Posing analytical questions instead of relying on fixed typologies highlights how conflicts evolve and how professional assumptions shape procedural decisions, including relational tensions rooted in established worldviews. For practice, the framework clarifies differences between what conflict concerns and why actors engage, surfacing misrecognition and competing problem definitions. The focus on manifestation highlights that mitigation-oriented strategies may in fact escalate conflict, for example by displacing conflict and undermine institutional trust. Finally, broadening participation to include diverse forms of contestation helps uncover institutional exclusions that shape how conflicts arise. Taken together, the framework demonstrates that conflict is an inherent aspect of street space transformations, which, while potentially disruptive, likely provides opportunities for reflection, learning, and more responsive planning.

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