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Learning From History: Tracing the Historical Retheorisation of the 20-minute Neighbourhood Concept Through the Principles of Equity, Sustainability and Resilience.

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Abstract

The 20-minute neighbourhood (20MN) has emerged as a prominent urban planning model, promoted for its potential to create sustainable, inclusive, and resilient communities. It centres on the principle of local living, enabling residents to access most daily needs - such as work, education, healthcare, recreation, and shopping - within a 20-minute walk or cycle from home. Although often presented as a contemporary innovation, the 20MN draws upon a lineage of neighbourhood planning models such as the Garden City (Howard, 1902), Neighbourhood Unit (Perry, 1929), and New Urbanism (Jacobs, 1961; Hall, 2002a; Gehl, 2010). These earlier approaches sought to integrate proximity, functionality, and community cohesion but frequently failed to address structural inequalities, questions of justice, and the distribution of power.

This dissertation examines how the principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience - frequently cited in support of the 20MN - have been reinterpreted over time and how they are represented in contemporary planning discourse.

The study adopts a historically informed qualitative approach, drawing on the concept of historicity (Gadamer, 2013) to situate the 20MN within its broader temporal and spatial lineage. Using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), it examines planning frameworks and policy documents from diverse contexts. The analysis interrogates how equity, sustainability, and resilience are defined, prioritised, and operationalised, and how these principles influence implementation strategies.

The findings indicate that while the 20MN offers a persuasive vision for more connected and liveable communities, its implementation can risk entrenching spatial and social inequalities. Equity is often treated as an aspirational ideal rather than a binding policy requirement; sustainability is framed predominantly in environmental terms, with less emphasis on its social and economic dimensions; and resilience is frequently approached as a technical capacity for adaptation, with limited attention to the political and structural factors that determine who benefits from adaptive measures.

The research concludes that realising the transformative potential of the 20MN requires embedding equity, sustainability, and resilience as substantive, contested social objectives rather than depoliticised technical targets. This requires integrated governance, enforceable policy mechanisms, and participatory processes that prioritise the needs and voices of marginalised communities. The research offers practical recommendations for policymakers and planners, including clear operational definitions, balanced emphasis on environmental, social, and economic goals, and mechanisms to ensure accountability in implementation. By situating the 20MN within its historical lineage and critically interrogating its guiding principles, the research also contributes to debates on how urban planning can advance more just, inclusive, and resilient cities.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In recent years, urban planning has increasingly embraced local living strategies to reduce carbon emissions and enhance quality of life. Among these, the 20-minute neighbourhood (20MN) has emerged as a prominent model, advocating communities where most daily needs - such as shopping, education, healthcare, and work - are accessible within a 20-minute walk or cycle from home. Presented as a response to climate change, inequality, public health challenges, and rapid urbanisation, it seeks to promote sustainability, social cohesion, and resilience.

Though widely promoted as innovative, the 20MN is not entirely new - it is a contemporary rearticulation of longstanding planning ideas with deep historical roots. From the Garden City movement and the Neighbourhood Unit to the 15-minute city, planners have continually sought to make urban life more liveable and equitable (Howard, 1902; Perry, 1929; Hall, 2002a; Moreno *et al*., 2021). While visionary, these predecessors were also critiqued for failing to address structural inequalities or deliver on inclusive promises (Hall, 2002a; Sandercock, 1998). This history underscores the need to examine the 20MN not only for its spatial design but also for its theoretical foundations and implications for urban justice.

1.2 Research Focus and Rational

This dissertation critically examines the 20MN model's historical and conceptual foundations, focusing on how the key planning principles of equity, sustainability, resilience have been defined and redefined over time. It investigates how these principles are embedded in planning discourse and shape implementation of the 20MN across various governance and policy contexts.

While planning documents often invoke these principles to support the 20MN, they are frequently used ambiguously or as technocratic buzzwords. This raises questions about what they truly mean, whom they benefit, and practical application. As the 20MN spreads globally - from Australia and Canada to the UK and France -

and is linked to goals such as climate adaptation, public health, local development, and social inclusion, doubts remain over its coherence, feasibility, and social outcomes. It is therefore important to examine whether the 20MN genuinely advances equity, sustainability, and resilience, or merely reframes existing inequalities under progressive language.

Motivated by concerns that planning rhetoric can depoliticise urban issues while sidestepping power imbalances, the research takes a historically informed, critical perspective, tracing how the model's guiding principles have evolved and how they are constructed and mobilised in practice (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Fairclough, 2013). By placing the 20MN within a broader theoretical and historical context, the research aims to reveal both its potential and its limitations as a tool for building more just and sustainable urban futures.

This is particularly relevant in the context of post-pandemic recovery and climate urgency, where calls for resilient, inclusive neighbourhoods are growing louder. The 20MN could provide a strategic framework for change, but its success hinges on aligning with the lived realities of diverse communities and making the structural changes needed for equitable urban development.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this dissertation is to evaluate the concept of the 20MN model in contemporary urban planning contexts through an understanding of historical retheorisations (or knowledge circulation) of equity, sustainability, and resilience principles in planning theory and practice (Harris and Moore, 2013; Healey, 2007).

1.4 Research Question

The research question posed is:

How does an understanding of the historical retheorisations of equity, sustainability and resilience inform contemporary urban planning practice in the implementation of the 20MN concept?

1.5 Research Objectives

To address the research question, the dissertation is guided by the following objectives:

1. To critically review the historical practice and theoretical principles of the 20MN concept and its current interpretation.
2. To examine how the practice and principles of equity were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.
3. To examine how the practice and principles of sustainability were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.
4. To examine how the practice and principles of urban resilience were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.

1.6 Methodology Overview

This study adopts a qualitative, historically informed methodology underpinned by interpretivist epistemology, recognising that planning concepts such as equity, sustainability, and resilience are socially constructed and historically situated (Bryman, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012).

The philosophical framework combines historicity, which traces the evolution of ideas within socio-political contexts (Heidegger, 1962; Gadamer, 2013), and critical discourse analysis, which interrogates how language shapes and legitimises planning narratives in both historical and contemporary contexts (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

The research design employs historical-comparative analysis (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003; Ragin, 2014) and documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003) of secondary sources, including historical planning texts, contemporary policy

documents, and academic literature selected for their international relevance and explicit engagement with the 20MN model.

This approach situates the 20MN within a broader lineage of urban planning models, identifying continuities, transformations, and ideological shifts (Hall, 2002; Healey, 2007). The methodological choices ensure transparency, reflexivity, and adherence to ethical standards (Finlay, 2002; University of Dundee, 2024).

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 Introduction outlines the topic, rationale, research focus, and structure of the study.
- Chapter 2 Literature Review explores the historical and theoretical evolution of planning principles, focusing on equity, sustainability, and resilience. It critically reviews the conceptual lineage of the 20MN and examines how these principles have been articulated in planning discourse over time.
- Chapter 3 Methodology explains the qualitative, historically informed research design and outlines the use of discourse analysis as the principal analytical method. It discusses the sources of data, including policy documents, academic literature, and professional planning texts.
- Chapter 4 Findings presents the results of the discourse analysis, highlighting key patterns and variations in how the 20MN is conceptualised and implemented across national and international contexts. It traces the retheorisation of planning principles and evaluates how they are operationalised in practice.
- Chapter 5 Discussion reflects on the findings in relation to the research question and objectives, drawing connections between historical theory and contemporary application. It critically analyses how equity, sustainability, and resilience are framed and realised within 20MN planning.

- Chapter 6: Conclusion provides the study's main insights, contributions to knowledge, and implications for policy and practice. It also identifies limitations and offers recommendations for future research.

Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive investigation into the 20MN as both a theoretical construct and a practical model. The research contributes to a more critical and historically grounded understanding of urban planning, encouraging planners and policymakers to engage deeply with the principles that shape our neighbourhoods and cities.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review traces the evolution of the 20-minute neighbourhood (20MN) concept, focusing on how historical reinterpretations of equity, sustainability, and resilience have shaped its current form. Adopting a historically informed qualitative approach and critical discourse analysis (CDA), it situates the 20MN within broader temporal and spatial contexts, drawing on legislative and policy texts, professional guidance, and scholarly literature on sustainable urban development and planning theory.

Guided by the concept of historicity (Heidegger, 1962; Gadamer, 2013), the analysis explores how the 20MN reinterprets planning traditions from the Garden City to the 15-minute city. This framing enables investigation into how planning principles are constructed, circulated, and contested, and identifies the methodological and epistemological frameworks required to assess their integration into urban strategies.

This chapter is broken down into themes, and the results of the literature review detailed for that theme. The themes identified are:

- The contemporary concept of the 20-minute neighbourhood
- Historicity and retheorisation of the practice and principle of equity
- Historicity and retheorisation of the practice and principle of sustainability
- Historicity and retheorisation of the practice and principle of resilience
- Integration of equity, sustainability and resilience into legislation

2.2 The Contemporary Concept of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood

The 20MN has become influential in urban planning, though its definition varies across policy, professional, and academic contexts. It is broadly promoted as a response to interconnected challenges such as climate change, social inequality,

public health, and community resilience (Moreno *et al*., 2021; Scottish Government, 2023b; RTPI, 2021).

It is generally understood as a spatial model in which most daily needs can be met within a short walk or cycle from home, and it is increasingly embedded in planning policies worldwide (Scottish Government, 2023; Moreno *et al*., 2021).

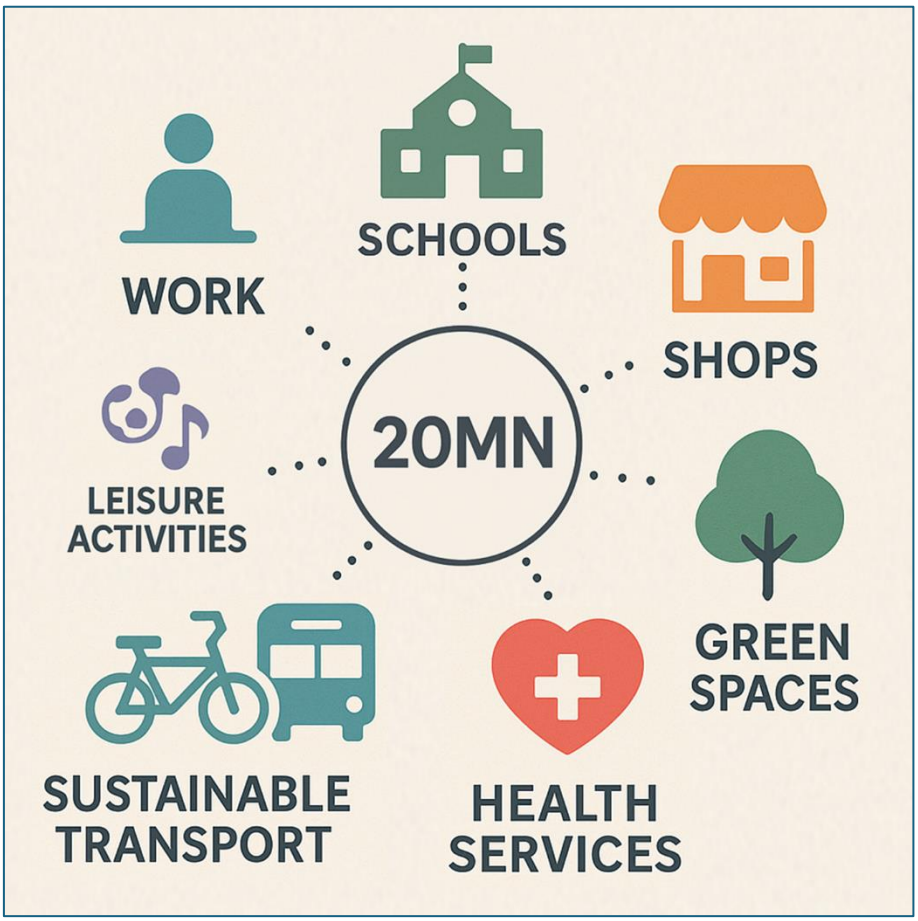
2.2.1 UK Government Approach to Living Locally

While the UK Government has not formally defined the 20MN, its principles are evident in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF), which supports development that reduces travel demand and prioritises walking, cycling, and public transport (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2024). It promotes compact, mixed-use developments consistent with 20MN accessibility goals, but without setting explicit temporal or spatial metrics. Allmendinger and Haughton (2012) note this ambiguity reflects a broader trend in English spatial planning, where broad principles replace prescriptive guidance. This “post-political” stance often produces inconsistent local implementation, particularly where development viability outweighs social objectives.

2.2.2 Scottish Government Definition of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood

Scotland is an example in the UK in terms of formalising the 20MN. In its *National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)*, the Scottish Government defines a 20MN as "places where people can meet the majority of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home" (Scottish Government, 2023, p. 18). This includes access to shops, schools, health services, workspaces, green spaces, and leisure activities, ideally all within a 20-minute walk (Figure 2.1). The concept is integrated into broader spatial strategies to promote sustainability, reduce emissions, and increase resilience in the face of climate change.

Figure 2.1: NPF4's Principles of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood



Source: Scottish Government (2023), Image is Author's own, derived through ChatGPT (2025)

2.2.3 RTPI Perspective of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) promotes the 20MN as a planning model that can address public health, environmental, and social challenges. According to the RTPI (2021), such neighbourhoods support "local living," where everyday services are accessible by foot or cycle, enabling reduced car dependency, healthier lifestyles, and stronger community ties. The RTPI also links this to the broader goals of the planning profession, including climate adaptation, levelling-up, and social equity. However, they emphasise that flexibility and local context are key to successful implementation.

2.2.4 Academic Perspective of Inclusivity in 20-Minute Neighbourhood Planning

Gehl (2010) offers a critical perspective on neighbourhood design that challenges universalist or purely metric-based approaches. This is echoed by Al Waer and Cooper (2024), who cautioning against a one-size-fits-all application of the 20NM. They stress the importance of inclusivity, co-design, and systems thinking to ensure the concept delivers equitable outcomes.

2.2.5 20MN as an Outcome of Holistic Urban Design

Gehl (2010) promotes people-centred planning grounded in lived experience rather than fixed 20-minute limits. He argues that urban environments should reflect local culture, infrastructure, and community needs, with walkability and accessibility emerging from holistic design. His human-scale approach emphasises inclusivity, participatory planning, and long-term stewardship, cautioning against technocratic 20MN rollouts that ignore socio-spatial inequalities and local context.

Holistic urban design combines environmental, social, economic, and cultural objectives, focusing on compact, mixed-use development; walkable, bike-friendly streets; inclusive public spaces; green and blue infrastructure; and participatory processes (Heath *et al*., 2010; Gehl, 2010). It supports sustainability through ecological limits and public health (Beatley, 2011; UN-Habitat, 2020), advances equity through inclusive design, affordability, and belonging (Fainstein, 2010; Agyeman *et al*., 2003), and builds resilience with adaptable, safe-to-fail systems for climate impacts (Ahern, 2011). Long-term vision, systems integration, and collaborative governance make it vital for meeting 21st-century urban challenges (UN-Habitat, 2020).

2.2.6 Barriers Toward the 20MN

Thomson and Kent (2020) identify major barriers to implementing 20MNs in Australian low-density suburbs, including entrenched urban form, car dependency,

and fragmented governance. They caution that uneven rollout may deepen spatial inequalities, advocating coordinated cross-sector planning, sustained infrastructure investment, and inclusive engagement to benefit vulnerable communities.

Fragmented governance and siloed decision-making hinder integration between transport, housing, health, and economic development, undermining the compact, service-rich environments 20MNs require. The RTPI (2021) stresses the need for place-based partnerships, cross-departmental collaboration, aligned funding, local leadership, and community engagement.

In the UK, the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA, 2021) notes a disconnect between national frameworks and local delivery. While strategic visions promote walkability and service access, enforceable guidance and funding are often absent. Capacity constraints, viability assessments, and short-term economic priorities can sideline equity and sustainability goals, limiting the creation of truly inclusive neighbourhoods.

2.2.7 Lessons from International Case Studies of the Application of the 15MN / 20MN

Internationally, the concept was embraced in cities like Melbourne and Paris, influencing UK thinking.

2.2.7.1 Paris, France

The 15-minute city, developed by Carlos Moreno and adopted by Paris under Mayor Anne Hidalgo in 2020, is a more compact relative of the 20MN. It envisions a polycentric urban form where housing, work, commerce, education, and recreation are all within a 15-minute walk or bike ride (Figure 2.2). Positioned by Moreno *et al*. (2021) as a post-pandemic strategy for resilient, liveable cities, it promotes human-scale urbanism and decentralised planning to cut emissions and revitalise local economies. While criticised for risks such as gentrification, it has shaped international urban agendas, including in the UK, through its emphasis on proximity and localism.

Figure 2.2: The 15-Minute City: Paris Infographic

Source: Nicolas Bascop & Micaël in 15-Minute City: A Solution to Saving our Time and Our Planet, Moreno (2024)

2.2.7.2 Portland, United States of America

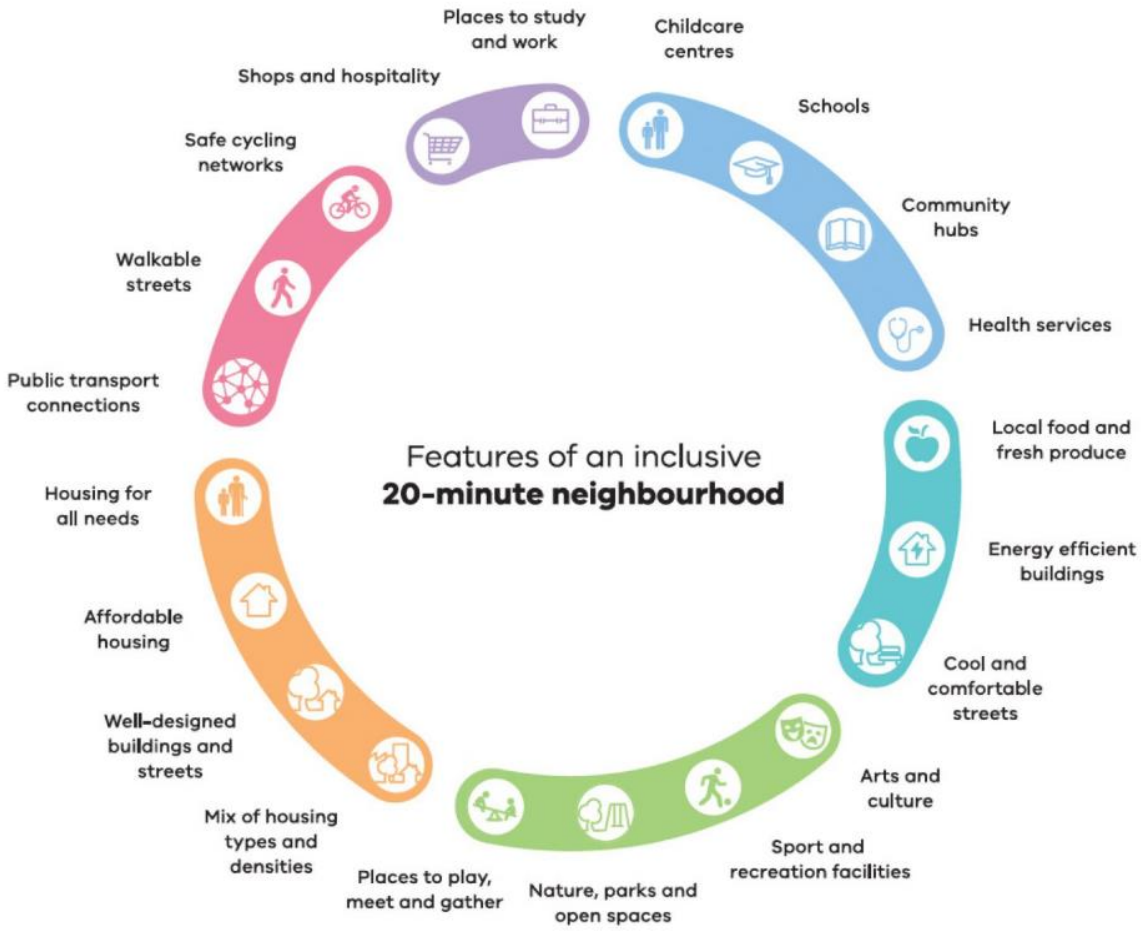
Portland, Oregon, is frequently cited as a North American example of 20MN-aligned planning. Its *Climate Action Plan* and *Portland Plan* prioritise access to daily needs within a 20-minute walk, supported by dense, mixed-use zoning and investment in transit and cycling (City of Portland, 2015). While advancing sustainability, such

initiatives risk entrenching inequalities if equity is not prioritised. Curran and Hamilton (2012) warn that “amenity-rich, walkable environments” can trigger green gentrification, as in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where sustainability upgrades caused displacement. They emphasise the need for safeguards, such as affordability measures and community control, to ensure 20MNs are both environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive.

2.2.7.3 Melbourne, Australia

Plan Melbourne defines 20MNs as places where “most everyday needs” are met within a 20-minute walk from home (Victoria State Government, 2021, p. 8). Centred on walkability, local economies, and service access, it seeks to cut car use and promote social inclusion (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: Plan Melbourne’s Features of an Inclusive 20-Minute Neighbourhood



Source: Victoria State Government (2021)

Unlike Paris' decentralised model or Portland's community-led approach, Melbourne's is institutional and retrofit-focused. Buxton and Scheurer (2021) warn that without adapting to suburban contexts, this technocratic approach may entrench inequalities. While prioritising liveability over explicit equity, it aligns with Australia's tradition of integrated land-use and transport planning, offering a scalable, policy-driven framework for local living.

2.2.8 Linking 20MN to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Contemporary 20MN frameworks often reference global agendas, particularly the UN *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). Of the 17 SDGs shown in Figure 2.4, the 20MN supports SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 3 (health and well-being), and SDG 13 (climate action) by promoting compact, connected, and inclusive neighbourhoods (United Nations, 2015a).

Figure 2.4: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Source: United Nations (2015a)

While global sustainability commitments lend legitimacy to national and municipal strategies, they risk universalising concepts that require local adaptation. As Dempsey *et al*. (2011) note, sustainability at the neighbourhood scale requires sensitivity to local socio-spatial dynamics.

In policy terms, implementation of the 20MN aligns closely with decarbonisation and mobility agendas, reducing car dependency to cut emissions, improve air quality, promote physical activity, and boost local economies. Beatley (2000) argues that sustainable cities should be “built around people, not cars,” a principle central to the 20MN’s urban form.

Global models have influenced UK urban policy, advancing walkability, localisation, and compact design. However, Lees *et al*. (2008) caution that without addressing structural inequality, such models risk being co-opted by market forces, leading to exclusionary redevelopment. Their research on gentrification shows how “liveability” and “revitalisation” narratives can mask displacement and prioritise middle-class consumption over social justice. Translating international frameworks into local planning therefore requires a critical focus on context, power, and redistribution to avoid reinforcing inequalities.

2.3 Retheorisation of the Practice and Principle of Equity

The Oxford English Dictionary (2024) defines equity as “the quality of being fair and impartial.” In planning, it refers to the fair and just distribution of resources, services, and opportunities across social groups and geographies (Campbell, 2006a). It is a normative principle that challenges planners to recognise and address disparities in access and outcomes, making it central to the pursuit of inclusive, sustainable urban environments (Fainstein, 2010; Agyeman *et al*., 2002).

Equity has been a central theme in planning from early models like Howard’s G*arden City* (1902) and Perry’s *Neighbourhood Unit* (1929), which aimed to distribute housing, services, and green space to promote welfare and cohesion, to mid-20th century shifts such as Davidoff’s advocacy planning (1965), which reframed equity as a procedural issue centred on representation and participatory governance.

Contemporary frameworks, including Fainstein’s *Just City* (2010) and Soja’s *Spatial Justice* (2010), extend the concept to recognitional equity and intersectionality, recognising urban inequality as both spatial and social. These evolving interpretations, from utopian visions and New Towns (Hall, 2002a) to advocacy and

intersectional approaches (Crenshaw, 1989; Agyeman and Evans, 2004), illustrate how equity has been repeatedly re-theorised to reflect changing socio-political contexts and priorities in planning thought and practice.

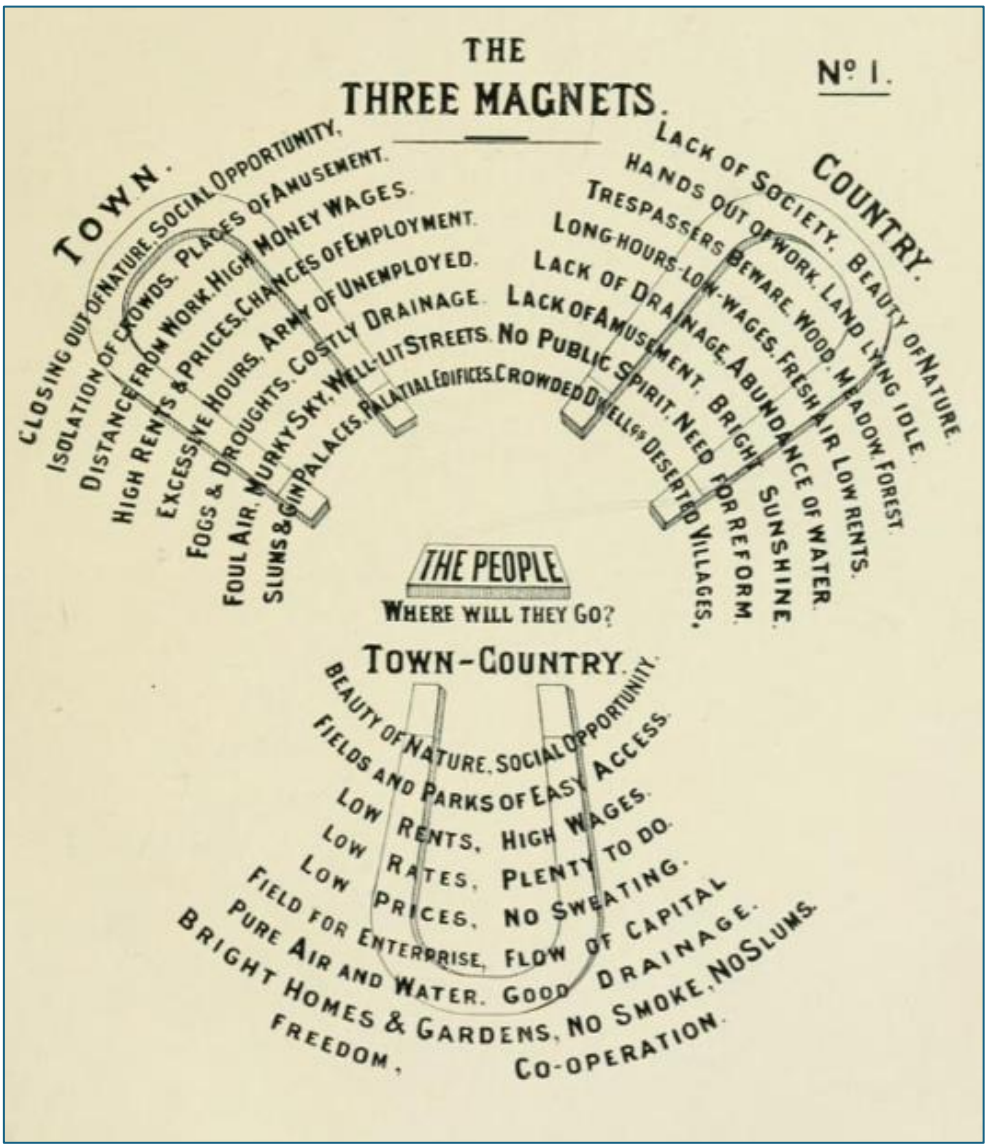
This literature review uses discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) to examine how equity has been retheorised and what this means for modern planning models such as the 20MN. By tracing conceptual shifts across historical and contemporary frameworks, the analysis highlights how changing interpretations shape practical outcomes. It also considers implications for inclusion, gentrification, and justice, emphasising the need to embed equity as both a guiding value and an operational goal.

2.3.1 Historical Foundations of Equity in Planning

2.3.1.1 Garden City Model

Early visions of equitable planning can be traced to Ebenezer Howard's *Garden City* model, which envisioned socially harmonious, self-sufficient communities combining the best of town and country (Howard, 1902) as illustrated in Figure 2.5. Howard's model was grounded in ideals of distributive justice and public welfare, reflecting a belief in the planner's role to shape morally and physically healthy environments.

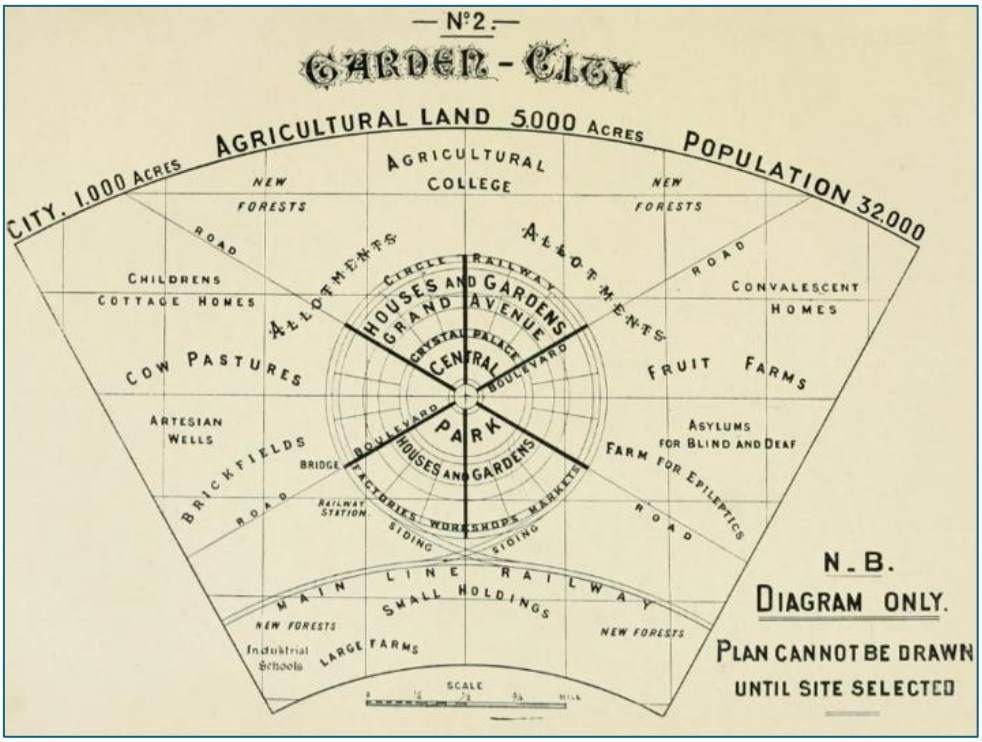
Figure 2.5: The Three Magnets from Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities of To-Morrow



Source: Howard, E. (1902)

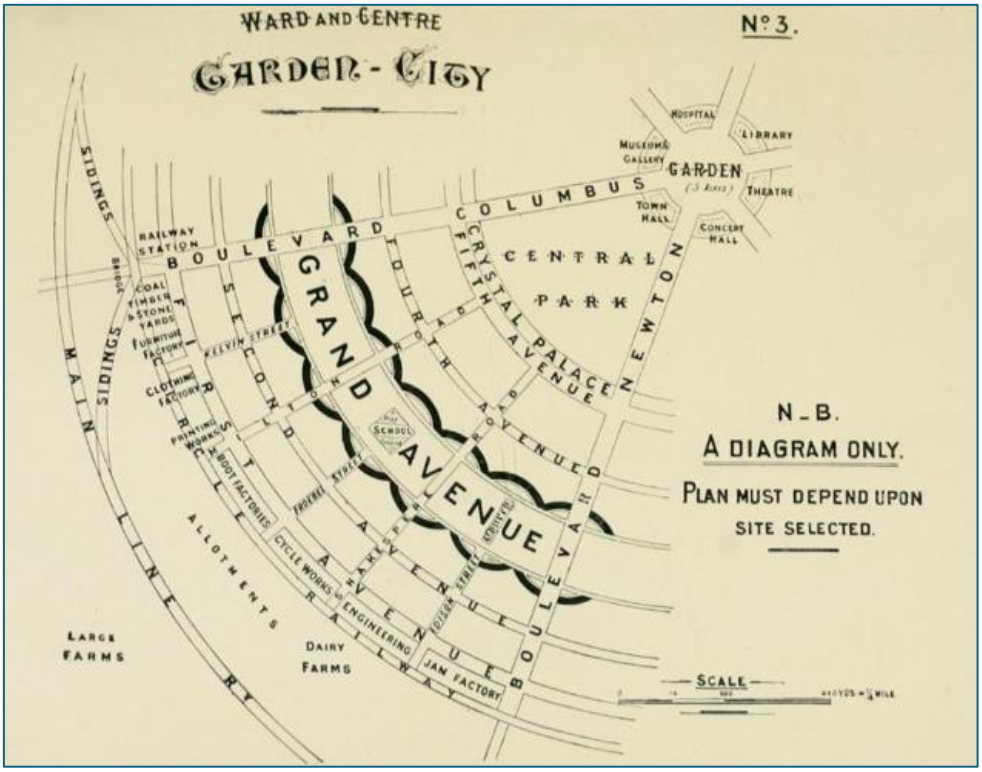
Emphasis on self-contained communities, where housing, employment, and green space were equally distributed, reflected an early attempt to address inequality through urban form (Figures 2.6 and 2.7). As Hall (2002a) notes, Howard's work aimed to "rescue the poor from the squalor of industrial cities," positioning equity as a function of environmental design.

Figure 2.6: Garden City and Rural Belt from Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities of To-Morrow



Source: Howard, E. (1902)

Figure 2.7: Ward and Centre from Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities of To-Morrow



Source: Howard, E. (1902)

However, while idealistic in its vision of moral and environmental harmony, the model has been criticised for its modernist, car-centric layouts and for relying on technocratic and paternalistic planning ideals that limited citizen agency and often failed to address deeper structural inequalities (Ward, 1992).

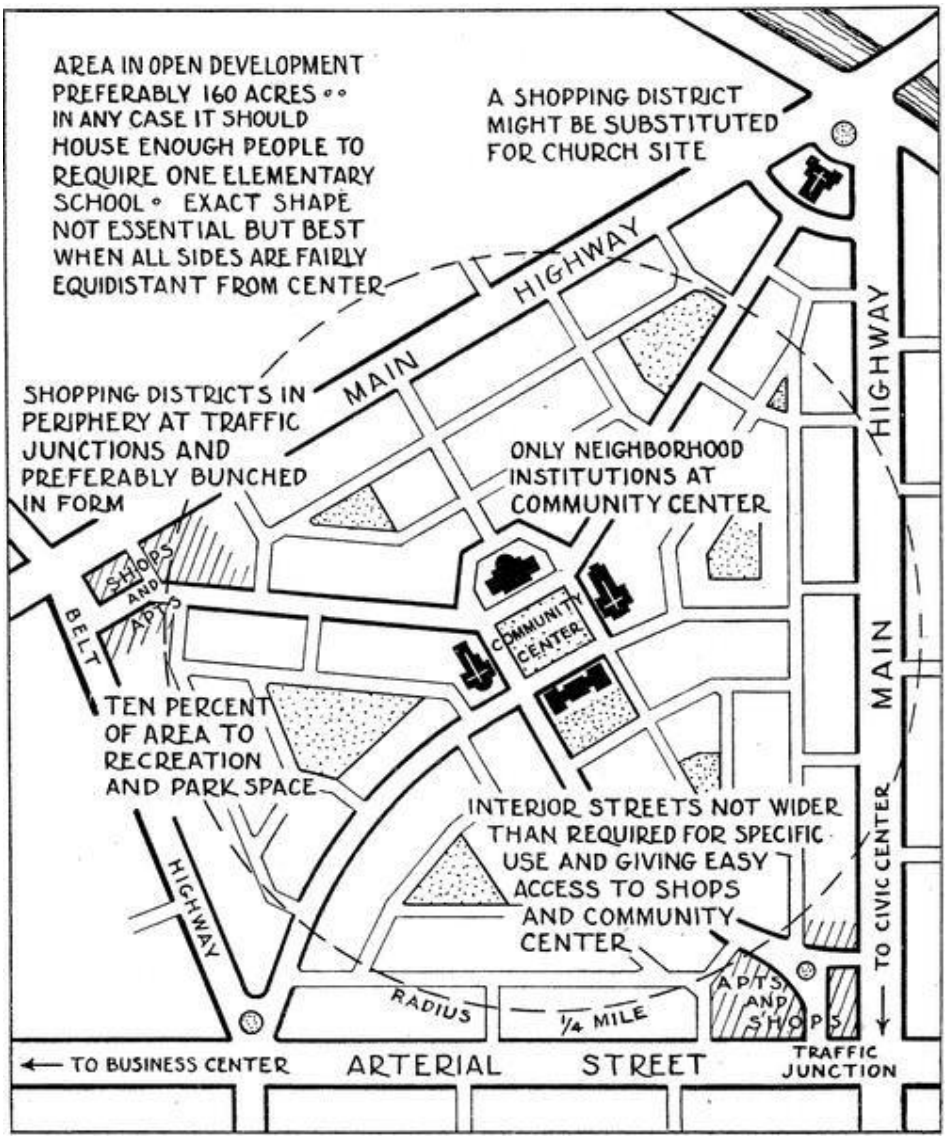
2.3.1.2 Post World War 2 New Towns Initiative

Similarly, the UK's New Towns initiative post-World War II aimed to decentralise population and distribute resources more equitably. Towns like Milton Keynes sought to embed spatial equity through well-planned layouts, integrated green space, and access to employment and housing. However, as Imrie and Raco (2003) argue, while these spatial objectives were commendable, the underlying models often failed to account for deeper social dynamics, including cultural diversity, participatory governance, and structural inequalities. Their analysis highlights how early efforts at equitable planning were frequently top-down and technocratic, limiting their capacity to respond to complex socio-political realities (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Tewdwr-Jones, 2011).

2.3.1.3 Emergence of the Concept of the Neighbourhood Unit

Alongside these movements, the *Neighbourhood Unit* concept, developed by Clarence Perry in the 1920s, introduced a spatial logic to equity – formalising the idea through a template that placed schools, parks, and retail services within walking distance of every household (Figure 2.8). Perry's model became influential in mid-20th-century American planning, promoting standardised access to services and reinforcing the principle of neighbourhood-based resource distribution.

Figure 2.8: Clarence Perry's Neighbourhood Unit



Source: Perry, C. (1929)

However, both Howard and Perry's models largely presupposed homogeneous populations and often failed to challenge deeper socio-political exclusions based on class, race, or gender (Sandercock, 1998).

This model remains influential in modern iterations such as the 20MN. Yet critics argue that the *Urban Unit's* rigid spatial determinism can obscure more fluid, relational understandings of community and identity (Mehaffy *et al*., 2015).

2.3.2 Distributive to Procedural Equity

By the mid-20th century, equity in planning was framed mainly through a distributive lens, focusing on equal access to urban services and infrastructure (Harvey, 1973). This perspective was embedded in the rational-comprehensive model - a technocratic approach grounded in the belief that planning problems could be solved through objective analysis, linear decision-making, and maximising public benefit. It involved setting goals, assessing alternatives, and selecting the most efficient option (Faludi, 1973; Taylor, 1998). While influential, it was criticised for prioritising efficiency over equity and sidelining public participation (Allmendinger, 2009). Urban renewal projects under this paradigm often displaced low-income and minority communities, undermining equitable development (Jacobs, 1961).

In the 1960s, this infrastructure- and efficiency-oriented view was challenged by advocacy planning, championed by Paul Davidoff. Arguing that a pluralistic society requires pluralistic planning, Davidoff (1965) called for planners to represent marginalised groups, reframing equity as a matter of voice, representation, and redistribution. This marked a shift toward procedural equity, making equity both a political and participatory objective. While advocacy planning introduced more democratic ideals, it also revealed the limits of participation within systems dominated by entrenched power structures (Sandercock, 1998).

This evolution from distributive to procedural equity reflects a broader shift in planning thought, expanding the concept from the allocation of services to active engagement with the political, social, and cultural dimensions of urban justice.

2.3.3 Equity, Justice and Inclusion

Building on earlier critiques, planning theory began incorporating recognitional equity - the acknowledgment and respect of cultural, social, and historical differences in how communities experience urban space. Rooted in Fraser (1995) and Young (1990), it moves beyond distributive equity to stress visibility, voice, and dignity for marginalised groups. In planning, this involves engaging with diverse identities - across race, gender, disability, religion, and class - and recognising how historic

injustices and structural discrimination shape spatial experience. While the 20MN aspires to inclusivity through proximity and accessibility, its focus on spatial metrics (e.g., walkability, service radius) often assumes a universal user, overlooking differing needs. Critics warn that without culturally responsive engagement, intersectional analysis, and historically informed design, the model risks reinforcing exclusions, particularly in areas with histories of disinvestment (Agyeman and Evans, 2004; Fincher and Iveson, 2008).

These ideas underpin Fainstein's (2010) *Just City*, which reframes planning through equity, democracy, and diversity. Rejecting technocratic and market-led approaches, she prioritises redistribution, recognition, and inclusion, urging planners to consider not only what is allocated but also who decides and under what terms. The *Just City* model strengthens the case for ensuring 20MNs are not only sustainable and efficient but also just and representative.

Soja's (2010) concept of spatial justice extends this by arguing that injustice is materially embedded in urban form and must be addressed through both spatial and systemic change.

Intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), further refines planning theory by showing how race, class, gender, disability, and other identities intersect to shape urban inequality. This lens deepens understanding of equity as multi-scalar and context-specific, challenging one-size-fits-all approaches in favour of place-based, historically informed interventions (Lees *et al*., 2008).

These theoretical shifts reflect broader philosophical insights about historicity: concepts like equity are not fixed but are shaped by socio-political context. As Gadamer (2013) and May (2011) note, values such as justice and fairness evolve over time, mediated by culture, discourse, and power. Recognising this underscores the need for planning frameworks, including the 20MN, to embed equity in ways that respond to both present-day realities and long-standing structural inequalities.

2.3.4 Equity and Discourse

Discourse analysis reveals that planning language is never neutral. Fairclough (2013) argues that discourse shapes social realities, defining what is considered “desirable” or “just.” Terms like “inclusive neighbourhoods” or “sustainable access” can mask structural inequalities if not backed by concrete policy. Foucault (1972) similarly shows that discourse produces and sustains power relations - highly relevant in planning, where policy narratives may conceal displacement, gentrification or exclusion.

In frameworks such as Scotland’s *NPF4* and local development plans, equity is often framed through proximity and accessibility (Scottish Government, 2024). However, such discourse rarely confronts deeper inequalities around land, tenure, or affordability, reducing equity to a design issue rather than addressing its structural dimensions.

2.4 Retheorisation of the Practice and Principle of Sustainability

Sustainability is defined as “the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level; the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance” (Oxford University Press, 2024). In urban planning terms, sustainability has become a defining concept, frequently invoked in visions of resilient, inclusive, and low-carbon futures. Campbell (1996) framed sustainability within an urban planning context as the capacity to meet present needs without jeopardising future ones, while requiring constant negotiation between environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity.

However, the meaning and application of sustainability have evolved considerably, shaped by ideological, institutional, and discursive shifts (Dryzek, 2005; Connelly, 2007). This review critically explores how sustainability has been retheorised over time - from early environmental determinism to contemporary notions of socio-ecological justice - drawing on discourse analysis to examine how language and power frame sustainability in planning.

2.4.1 Utopian Foundations and Proto-Sustainability

The roots of sustainability in urban planning trace back to early 20th-century utopian models which, though not labelled “sustainable,” embedded proto-sustainability ideals. Howard’s *Garden City* (1902) promoted a balance between urban and rural life through green space, self-sufficiency, and decentralised living. Perry’s *Neighbourhood Unit* (1929) advanced walkable, service-rich areas fostering community cohesion - an early proximity logic resonant with the 20MN.

While discussed elsewhere in this review as neighbourhood planning foundations, their relevance here lies in anticipating sustainability through spatial structure, balanced land use, and social integration. Hall (2014) observes that these models were inspired by moral and environmental goals but limited by technocratic delivery. Their value lies in articulating spatial strategies to harmonise human needs with environmental and social wellbeing rather than offering fully formed sustainability frameworks.

These early ideas provided the groundwork for later sustainability discourses, particularly decentralisation, compactness, and integration - principles now embedded in the 20MN model.

2.4.2 Environmental Origins of Sustainability in Planning Thought

Sustainability in planning emerged from environmental determinism and ecological science. McHarg’s *Design with Nature* (1969) advanced a systems-based approach, advocating land-use decisions shaped by ecological constraints. This early “ecological planning” laid the foundation for integrating sustainability into spatial planning but was criticised for its technocratic tone, often sidelining social and political concerns (Campbell, 1996).

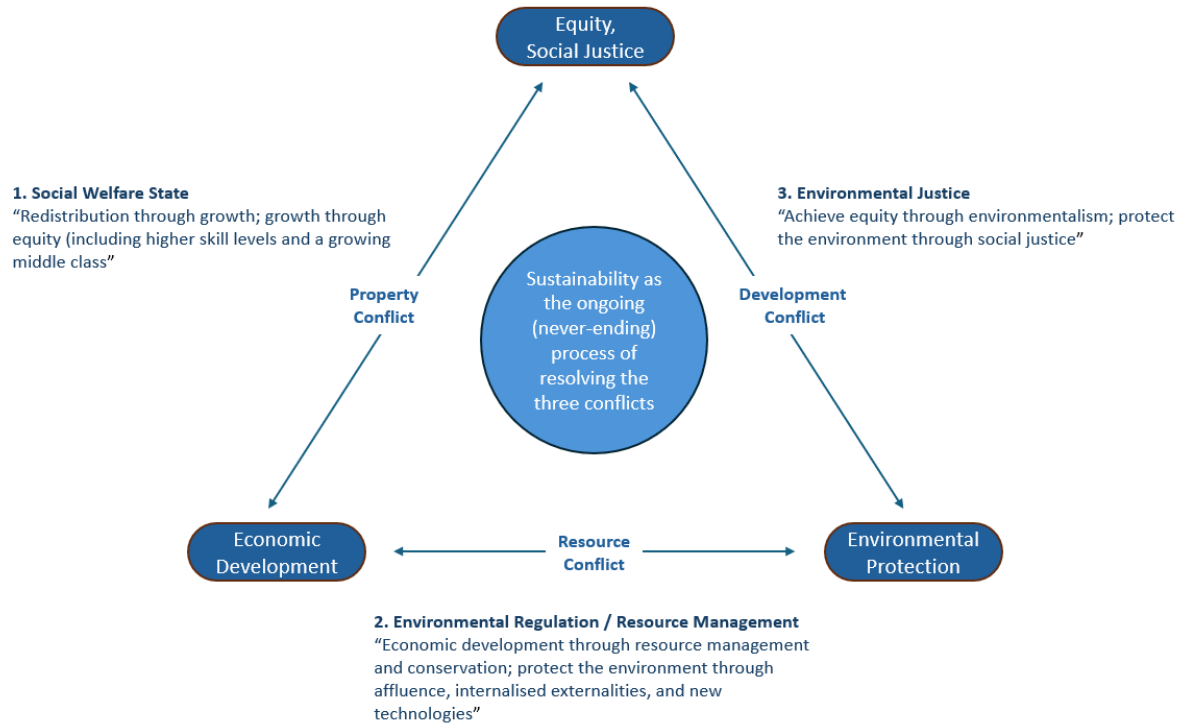
Modern sustainability discourse stems from the *Brundtland Report*, which defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Our Common Future, WCED, 1987, p. 43). This intergenerational framing positioned

sustainability as a moral and political imperative, balancing environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity. However, critics such as Redclift (2005) argue its broad definition enabled the continued primacy of economic growth while diluting commitments to justice and redistribution.

2.4.3 The Sustainability Triangle and Environmentalism

The 1990s marked a shift in sustainability discourse with the "three-pillar" model, promoted in the UN's *Agenda 21* at the 1992 Rio Summit, framing sustainability as a balance between environmental, economic, and social factors (United Nations, 1992; Elkington, 1997; Purvis *et al*., 2019). Campbell's (1996) "planner's triangle" (Figure 2.9) illustrates the inherent tensions between these goals, portraying planning as a continual negotiation between competing priorities. In practice, selective emphasis often allowed one or two pillars - typically the economic vertex - to dominate, while environmentalism, though elevated in the 1990s, frequently lacked structural commitments to equity.

Figure 2.9: Campbell's Planner's Triangle



Source: Campbell, S.D. (1996, 2016), Re-imaged by Author (2025)

This imbalance led to criticism that sustainability was being reduced to ecological performance, neglecting redistribution, recognition, and participation. Early 2000s discourse around “smart growth” and “sustainable urbanism” reframed sustainability in market-friendly terms. While concepts such as compact cities and mixed-use development became central to planning, they often lacked mechanisms for affordability, social equity, or meaningful democratic participation.

Rydin (2010) argues that these models, though labelled sustainable, are frequently implemented through technocratic governance prioritising managerial efficiency over inclusivity. Her analysis reveals how institutional structures can narrow sustainability to form and functionality, depoliticising it into a design challenge rather than a transformative framework for social and environmental justice.

2.4.4 Sustainability’s Links to Justice, Resilience and Rights

Agyeman *et al*. (2002, 2003) advanced “just sustainabilities,” stressing that ecological sustainability is inseparable from social equity. They argue that true sustainability requires fair resource distribution, participatory governance, and cultural recognition, asserting that “environmental quality and human equality are inextricably linked” (Agyeman *et al*., 2003, p. 5). This reframing integrates justice, resilience, and rights-based approaches, urging planners to view neighbourhoods as social as well as spatial constructs (Agyeman, 2013). In practice, 20MN frameworks must ensure equitable access for marginalised communities while preventing eco-gentrification.

Fainstein’s *Just City* model similarly frames sustainability as an ethical, redistributive project, prioritising the well-being of the least advantaged (Fainstein, 2010).

Urban resilience discourse, rooted in ecological systems theory (Holling, 1973), has shifted planning toward adaptation in the face of climate change. Yet Vale (2014) and Meerow *et al*. (2016) warn that “resilience” can depoliticise sustainability, shifting responsibility to communities rather than addressing systemic inequities.

Harvey (2012) and Lefebvre's (1991) "right to the city" perspective extends sustainability to include democratic control of urban space and resistance to speculative development. This challenges market-led interpretations, positioning sustainability as a question of ownership, participation, and rights, moving beyond form and function toward structural transformation.

2.4.5 Discourse and Planning Language

Discourse analysis shows that sustainability language is shaped by power, ideology, and institutional framing. As Fairclough (2013) notes, planning discourse does more than describe reality - it defines what is seen as desirable and legitimate. Terms like "green," "liveable," and "sustainable" are often used loosely, reinforcing dominant practices rather than challenging them.

Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse as power-knowledge highlights how sustainability narratives in policy documents often depoliticise planning, framing it in managerial rather than democratic terms. While *et al*. (2004) describe the "urban sustainability fix," where environmental goals are folded into growth agendas without addressing structural inequality. Their analysis of Manchester and Leeds shows how entrepreneurial urbanism privileges competitiveness over social justice - an issue mirrored in 20MN policies, which can prioritise green infrastructure and modal shift while overlooking affordability, displacement, and governance.

For example, Scotland's *NPF4* (Scottish Government, 2023b) promotes design-led development, low-carbon transport, and placemaking but rarely engages with land reform, community agency, or systemic inequality.

Beatley's *Green Urbanism* (2000) adds a holistic dimension, drawing from European models that integrate compactness, walkability, and environmental stewardship with cultural and community values. His work provides both precedent and normative grounding for neighbourhood-based sustainability, aligning closely with the 20MN's aim to localise daily activities and reduce car reliance.

Together, these critiques and models underline the need to interrogate whose interests sustainability discourse serves, ensuring that frameworks like the 20MN combine environmental ambition with social justice and democratic inclusion.

2.5 Retheorisation of the Practice and Principle of Resilience

The Oxford English Dictionary (2024) defines resilience as “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.” In urban planning, the concept of resilience is often invoked in the context of climate change, disaster preparedness, socio-economic shocks, and public health crises. Davoudi (2012) explains it as the capacity of cities, communities, and systems to absorb, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses - such as climate change, economic disruption, or social upheaval - while maintaining essential functions and pursuing long-term sustainability and equity.

However, like equity and sustainability, resilience is not a static or universally defined concept.

2.5.1 Historical Foundations: Utopian Models and Structural Resilience

Resilience has roots in early 20th-century utopian planning, notably Howard’s *Garden City* (1902), which envisioned self-contained communities able to withstand industrial urban decline through a balanced town-country model ensuring food security, employment, and social cohesion. Perry’s *Neighbourhood Unit* (1929) similarly promoted walkable, self-sufficient enclaves organised around schools and community hubs - an early form of resilience through design.

Post-war UK New Towns, such as Milton Keynes and Cumbernauld, adapted these principles to decentralise overcrowded cities and foster socially mixed populations (Hall, 1999). Yet critiques argue these top-down visions overlooked the complexities of lived experience (Ravetz and Roberts, 2000). While they advanced spatial and infrastructural resilience, they often neglected social agency and adaptability.

2.5.2 Early Ecological Resilience and Systems Thinking

Resilience entered planning theory in the 1970s through ecological systems thinking. Holling (1973) defined “ecological resilience” as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change. This evolved into “adaptive resilience,” which shifted emphasis from maintaining stability to enabling transformation and flexibility (Walker and Salt, 2006). These ecological concepts initially shaped planning responses to environmental hazards, disaster preparedness, and infrastructure design.

Early applications tended to focus on robustness - flood protection, coastal defences, energy redundancy, and transport continuity - aimed at restoring equilibrium after shocks (Vale and Campanella, 2005). However, this technocratic framing often abstracted resilience from its social and political contexts, treating communities as passive recipients rather than active agents.

Davoudi (2012) critiques this “engineering” view, calling for a shift toward transformative resilience - one that values adaptability, learning, and social capacity alongside infrastructure. In this perspective, resilience is not only about “bouncing back” but also “bouncing forward,” evolving in response to change. Planning, therefore, must integrate institutional flexibility, participatory governance, and community empowerment (Meerow *et al*., 2016), marking a discursive shift from purely ecological resilience to socio-spatial resilience that embeds equity and inclusion.

2.5.3 Urban Resilience and Policy Discourse

The 2000s saw “urban resilience” rise as a key policy discourse, driven by climate change, urban inequality, and economic volatility. May (2011) notes that planning ideas are “products of their time,” shaped by specific challenges and contexts. This retheorisation from physical to socio-ecological resilience is reflected in the UN’s *Making Cities Resilient* (2010) campaign and the Rockefeller Foundation’s *100 Resilient Cities* initiative (2013), which defined resilience as the capacity of

individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems to survive, adapt, and grow despite chronic stresses or acute shocks (Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

Resilience is also shaped by discourse. Foucault (1972) and Fairclough (2013) argue that language shapes realities and power relations. Scholars warn this framing can mask state withdrawal and shift adaptation burdens to communities (Joseph, 2013). Cretney (2014) highlights its political and ethical dimensions, cautioning against strategies that shift responsibility from institutions to individuals and communities.

Davoudi (2012) describes resilience as a "boundary concept," flexible enough to gain widespread acceptance, yet vague enough to obscure its normative foundations. Meerow *et al*. (2016) stress contradictions: who defines it, whose resilience is prioritised, and what trade-offs are made. Foucault's (1972) discourse theory helps explain how resilience can serve neoliberal agendas, reframing vulnerability as a failure to adapt. Cote and Nightingale (2012) argue such framings legitimise inequality and depoliticise planning, underscoring the tension between resilience as empowerment and as responsibility.

2.5.4 Social Resilience: Justice, Participation and Transformative Adaptation

Recent scholarship reframes resilience as a socially embedded and politically charged concept. Ideas such as "social resilience" and "community-based adaptation" emphasise agency, empowerment, and collective learning (Adger, 2000; Berkes and Ross, 2013), shifting from simply "bouncing back" to transforming unjust systems.

Coaffee and Lee (2016) argue resilience should be defined in terms of rights and inclusion, drawing on spatial justice, the right to the city, and participatory planning. Normative anchors such as Fainstein's (2010) *Just City* and Agyeman *et al*.'s (2002) "just sustainability" foreground redistribution and recognition, positioning resilience as a means to address root causes of vulnerability – not merely managing its effects.

Aligned with Soja's (2010) *spatial justice*, this perspective critiques resilience policies that prioritise capital over collective well-being. As Fairclough (2013) warns, terms like "resilient communities" risk masking power asymmetries unless grounded in inclusive, redistributive action.

2.5.5 Discourse, Language and Power: Framing Resilience in Planning

Applying discourse analysis reveals how the language of resilience shapes, and is shaped by, political and institutional agendas. According to Fairclough (2013), discourse is a key mechanism through which ideas gain legitimacy and shape social practice. The term "resilience" carries connotations of strength, adaptability, and common sense, yet these associations can mask deep ideological tensions.

Foucault (1972) reminds us that discourse governs what is sayable and thinkable, defining policy norms and marginalising alternatives. In planning, resilience discourse often obscures power relations by presenting urban risks as universally shared and resilience as apolitical. Yet, as scholars have argued, not all communities have equal resources, rights, or opportunities to be resilient (Cote and Nightingale, 2012).

This is particularly relevant in relation to 20MN and place-based planning approaches, where resilience is often embedded in the language of "local capacity," "flexible infrastructure," and "community adaptation." Without structural reform, such language risks reinforcing uneven development and spatial exclusion.

2.6 Integration of Equity, Sustainability and Resilience in Legislation

Over the last two centuries, equity, sustainability, and resilience have been progressively integrated into legislative and policy frameworks at international, national (UK), Scottish, and local levels. These principles have evolved in response to industrialisation, social reform, environmental degradation, and more recently, climate change and socio-spatial inequality. This section of the literature review traces the historical development and institutionalisation of these core planning

principles, demonstrating how they have been embedded, contested, and re-theorised in urban governance.

2.6.1 International Frameworks Aligning with 20MN Principles of Equity, Sustainability and Resilience

At an international level, the integration of equity, sustainability, and resilience into urban planning has largely been shaped by multilateral organisations and global policy agendas. The *Brundtland Report* (WCED, 1987) positioned sustainability as an intergenerational and multidimensional goal linking ecological protection, social equity, and economic growth. Equity was anchored earlier in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948), which affirmed housing, health, and well-being as fundamental rights, while resilience gained prominence later through the *Hyogo Framework* (UNDRR, 2005) and the *Sendai Framework* (UNDRR, 2015), which shifted planning agendas from disaster response to proactive risk reduction and adaptive capacity. These principles were reinforced in *Agenda 21* (United Nations, 1992) and the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations, 2016), which called for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities.

The UN *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), particularly Goal 11, have influenced national and regional planning frameworks by embedding sustainability and resilience in urban policy targets (United Nations, 2015a). Meanwhile, equity has been integrated more broadly through goals related to social inclusion, gender equality, and reducing inequalities (SDGs 5 and 10).

Figure 2.10 charts the integration of equity, sustainability and resilience at an international level.

Figure 2.10: International Frameworks Supporting 20-Minute Neighbourhood Principles

- 1948 – United Declaration of Human Rights (UN): Rights to housing, health, well-being (E).
- 1972 – Stockholm Declaration: Environmental responsibility; foundation for sustainable policy (S).
- 1987 – Brundtland Report: Defines sustainable development; intergenerational needs (S, R).
- 1992 – Earth Summit / Agenda 21: Sustainable cities; community participation; local agendas (S, E).
- 1996 – Habitat II (Istanbul): Inclusive, safe, resilient cities; community-based planning (E, R, S).
- 2000 – Millenium Development Goals: Slum reduction; water access; universal education (E, R).
- 2005 – Hyogo Framework (UNDRR): Disaster-risk reduction in planning (R).
- 2005 – C40 Cities: Walkability, lower emissions, urban equity via city collaboration (E, S, R).
- 2015 – SDGs: SDG 11—sustainable, inclusive, resilient cities (E, S, R).
- 2015 – Paris Agreement: Urban climate action; efficiency; adaptation (S, R).
- 2016 – New Urban Agenda: Accessibility, participation; sustainable, inclusive, resilient cities (E, S, R).
- 2020s – EU Green Deal / Urban Agenda: 15/20-minute cities; climate-neutral, green, just transitions (E, S, R).

Key: *Principles of Equity (E), Sustainability (S), Resilience (R)*

Source: Author's own (2025)

2.6.2 UK Legislation and Policies Supporting 20MN Principles of Equity, Sustainability and Resilience

Early UK planning legislation in the 19th century was reactive, addressing industrial-era public health and housing conditions. *The Public Health A*ct (UK Government, 1848) and *Housing Act* (UK Government, 1890) established foundations for equity by improving sanitation and providing social housing for the working class. Today, the *Equality Act* (UK Government, 2010) shapes spatial justice through the *Public Sector Equality Duty*, requiring local authorities to consider equity in planning decisions.

The post-war *Town and Country Planning Act* (UK Parliament, 1947b) embedded state-led land-use regulation, enabling more comprehensive, plan-based governance. While initially focused on economic growth, it laid the groundwork for integrating social and environmental concerns. Sustainability entered UK planning more formally after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (United Nations, 1992). The *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act* (UK Parliament, 2004) shifted towards a plan-led system underpinned by sustainable development, while the *National Planning Policy Frameworks* (MHCLG, 2012; 2018; 2019; 2021; 2023; 2024) institutionalised sustainability but faced criticism for privileging development over equity (Tait and Inch, 2015).

Resilience rose in prominence post-2010, driven by climate change adaptation and flood risk policy. The *Climate Change Act* (UK Parliament, 2008), though not planning legislation, significantly shaped policy, linking resilience to mitigation, adaptation, and long-term environmental risk management.

Figure 2.11 follows the integration of equity, sustainability and resilience at a UK level.

Figure 2.11: UK Legislation and Policy Supporting 20-Minute Neighbourhood Principles

- 1843 – Public Health Act (UK): Early urban health planning; equitable access to sanitation (E, R).
- 1890 – Housing Act: Slum clearance; powers for social housing; public health link (E, R).
- 1947 – Town and Country Planning Act: Modern plan-led system; orderly land use in the public interest (E, S).
- 1980 – Local Government, Planning and Land Act: Urban regeneration; public service provision (E, R).
- 1990 – Environmental Protection Act: Pollution control; waste and environmental quality framework (S, R).
- 2000 – Transport Act: Integrated, sustainable transport; public transport and active travel (S, E).
- 2004 – Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act: Spatial planning; Local Development Frameworks (S, E).
- 2008 – Climate Change Act: Legally binding emissions targets; low-carbon planning (S, R).
- 2010 – Equality Act: Consolidates anti-discrimination law; Public Sector Equality Duty in planning (E).
- 2011 – Localism Act: Community powers; neighbourhood plans (E, R).
- 2017 – Clean Growth Strategy: Clean energy, smart transport, green infrastructure (S, R).
- 2020 – National Design Guide: Walkable, inclusive, well-designed neighbourhoods (E, S, R).
- 2023 – Levelling Up and Regeneration Act: Spatial inequality reduction; improved access and local autonomy (E, R).

Key: Principles of Equity (E), Sustainability (S), Resilience (R)

Source: Author's own (2025)

2.6.3 Scottish Legislation and Policies Supporting 20MN Principles of Equity, Sustainability and Resilience

Scotland's planning system, historically aligned with the UK model, diverged following devolution in 1999. Early legislation such as the *Public Health (Scotland) Act* (UK Parliament, 1867) and *Housing (Scotland) Acts* (UK Parliament, 1930; 1987) embedded early equity principles through sanitation and social housing. The *Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act* (UK Parliament, 1947a) mirrored the UK's social-democratic ethos, embedding state control over land use and a welfare-oriented planning approach.

Post-devolution reforms increasingly prioritised sustainability and resilience. *The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act* (Scottish Parliament, 2006) made sustainable development a statutory duty, reinforced by the *Climate Change (Scotland) Act* (Scottish Parliament, 2009). The *Planning (Scotland) Act* (Scottish Parliament, 2019) added statutory duties to consider climate change, inclusive growth, and equalities.

National Planning Frameworks - *NPF1* (Scottish Executive, 2004), *NPF2* (Scottish Government, 2009), *NPF3* (Scottish Government, 2014), and *NPF4* (Scottish Government, 2023b) - have progressively embedded climate mitigation, adaptation, and spatial justice. *NPF4* explicitly aligns with the UN SDGs, net-zero targets, and the 20MN model, advancing regional balance and resilience. While these frameworks are praised for integrating environmental and equity goals, critics note persistent tensions between economic growth imperatives and equitable land use outcomes.

Figure 2.12 follows the implementation of equity, sustainability and resilience into Scottish legislation.

Figure 2.12: Scottish Legislation and Policy Supporting 20-Minute Neighbourhood Principles

- 1867 - Public Health (Scotland) Act: Sanitation; disease control (E, S).
- 1930 - Housing (Scotland) Act: Slum clearance; housing provision (E, S).
- 1947 – Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act: Orderly development; public interest, housing, welfare planning (E, S).
- 2003 – Land Reform (Scotland) Act: Community ownership/access; spatial equity and local empowerment (E, R).
- 2005 – Planning etc. (Scotland) Act: Streamlined system; community engagement; sustainable land use (S, E).
- 2009 – Climate Change (Scotland) Act: Ambitious carbon targets; resilience/adaptation framework (S, R).
- 2011 – Achieving a Sustainable Future: Regeneration Strategy: Inclusive growth; area-based inequality (E, R).
- 2014 – Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act: Stronger community control over services/assets (E, R).
- 2019 – Planning (Scotland) Act: Local Place Plans; regional strategies; community-led development (E, S, R).
- 2020 – National Transport Strategy 2: Active travel, equitable access, reduced car dependency (S, E).
- 2021 – Scotland's Housing to 2040: Long-term housing for inclusive, sustainable, resilient communities (E, S, R).
- 2023 – National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4): Explicit 20MN support; climate-conscious development; spatial equity (E, S, R).

Key: Principles of Equity (E), Sustainability (S), Resilience (R)

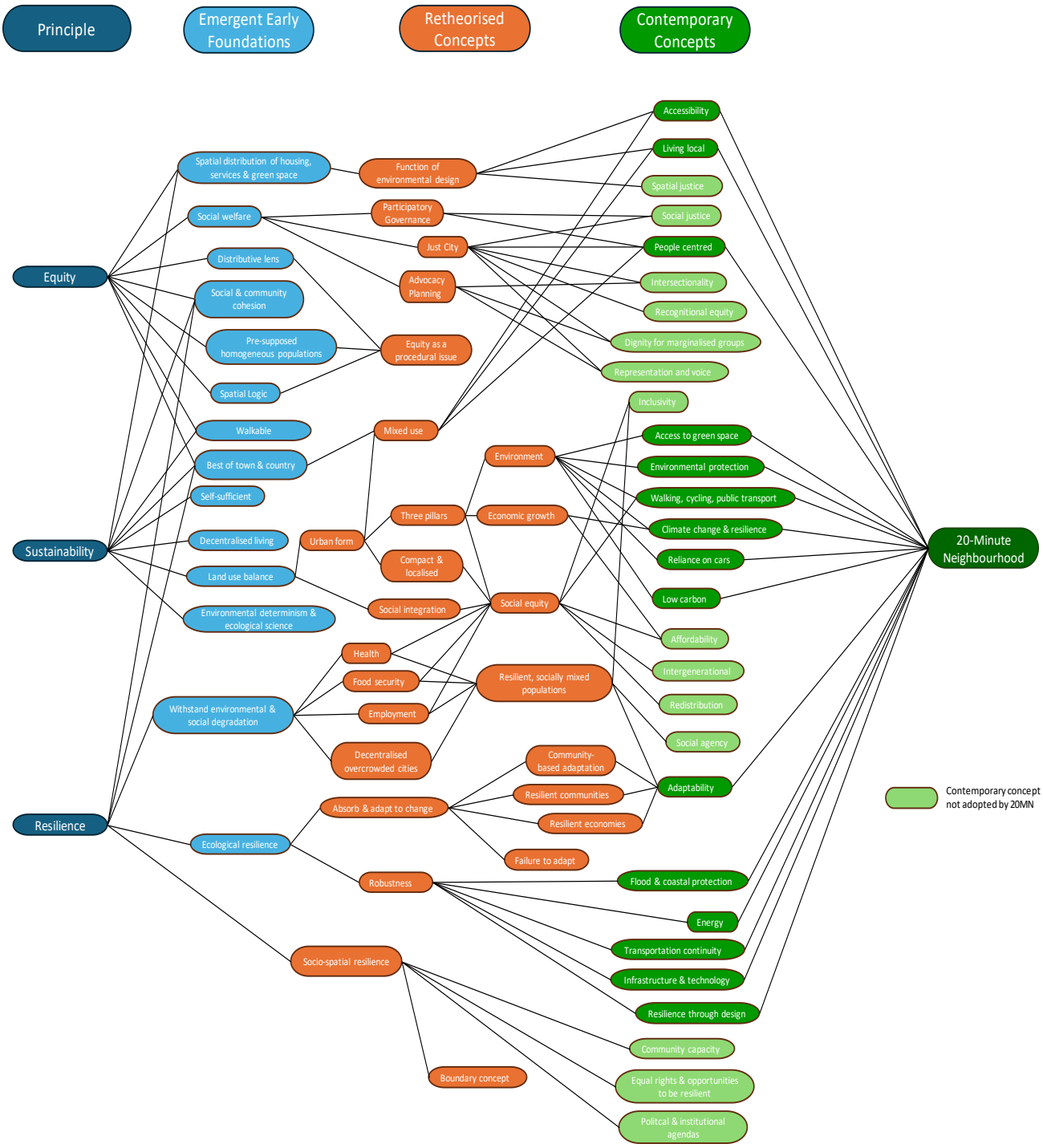
Source: Author's own (2025)

2.7 Conceptualisation of Literature Review

The literature review is designed not simply as a descriptive account of past planning theories but as a thematic and historically informed interrogation of how core concepts have evolved and continue to influence contemporary models like the 20MN.

Figure 2.13 provides a visual conceptualisation that maps the principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience from their historical foundations, through retheorisation, to their convergence into the contemporary 20MN concept.

Figure 2.13: Conceptualisation of Literature Review: Principles of Equity, Sustainability and Resilience from Historical Foundations to Contemporary 20MN Concept



Source: Author's own (2025)

While this figure demonstrates that the 20MN is not a standalone or novel planning model but a conceptual nexus that draws from a legacy of planning traditions, it also raises several questions as set out in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Emergent Analytical Questions and Their Alignment with Research Objectives

No.	Emergent Question	Linked Objective(s)
1	Has the principle of equity been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	Objective 2
2	Has the principle of sustainability been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	Objective 3
3	Has the principle of resilience been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	Objective 4
4	What aspects of equity are lacking within the 20MN concept?	Objective 2
5	What aspects of sustainability are lacking within the 20MN concept?	Objective 3
6	What aspects of resilience are lacking within the 20MN concept?	Objective 4
7	To what extent does the 20-minute neighbourhood function as an integrated planning model that meaningfully balances equity, sustainability, and resilience in both theory and practice?	Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4
8	In what ways have historical planning approaches (e.g., Garden City, Neighbourhood Unit) influenced the conceptual foundations of the 20MN, and where do they diverge?	Objective 1
9	How do national planning frameworks (e.g., Scotland's NPF4) interpret the 20MN, and what assumptions about urban life and justice underpin these interpretations?	Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4
10	What are the potential risks of depoliticisation within 20MN rhetoric, particularly when historical lessons about exclusion and gentrification are not acknowledged?	Objectives 2 and 3

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to examine the historical retheorisation of the 20-minute neighbourhood (20MN) through the principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience. The study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist methodology, combining literature review, historical-comparative analysis, and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to trace how planning ideas evolve and become embedded in contemporary frameworks.

The 20MN is treated both as a contemporary planning strategy and as a construct rooted in earlier theories. This dual perspective allows the research to explore conceptual shifts over time and the discursive processes shaping current policy.

Table 3.1 summarises how each research objective aligns with the methods employed, clarifying the logic underpinning the research's design.

Table 3.1: Research Objectives and Corresponding Research Methods

Research Objective	Research Method(s)
To critically review the historical practice and theoretical principles of the 20-minute neighbourhood concept and its current interpretation.	- Literature Review - Historical-Comparative Analysis - Critical Discourse Analysis
To apply discourse analysis exploring how the practice and principles of equity were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.	- Literature Review - Critical Discourse Analysis
To examine how the practice and principles of sustainability were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.	- Literature Review - Critical Discourse Analysis
To examine how the practice and principles of urban resilience were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.	- Literature Review - Critical Discourse Analysis

This design reflects the research's commitment to understanding planning concepts as historically situated and discursively produced. The literature review engages with past and current scholarship; historical-comparative analysis traces continuities and shifts; and CDA examines how language constructs and reconfigures core concepts over time.

The following sections set out the philosophical foundations of the methodology and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretivist philosophy, supporting a historically informed and discursively aware examination of planning concepts. It assumes that the principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience are socially constructed and historically situated rather than fixed, prioritising interpretation, context, and critical reflection over generalisability or positivist objectivity (Bryman, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Gadamer, 2013).

The epistemological stance shapes the understanding of knowledge as co-constructed between researcher and subject, mediated by context, history, and culture (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Gadamer, 2013). Epistemology concerns what counts as valid knowledge and how it is acquired, while the philosophical orientation informs method selection through underlying beliefs about reality and interpretation. An interpretivist approach is particularly suited to tracing the evolution of planning ideas and their expression in language and policy.

Aligned with these foundations, the study employs historical-comparative analysis and CDA to explore how planning knowledge evolves and circulates over time. This approach enables critical engagement with planning texts, revealing underlying assumptions and ideological framings within the 20MN model, and examining how policy narratives mobilise these concepts to reinforce or challenge dominant power structures (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003; Harris and Moore, 2013; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

3.2.1 Interpretivist Epistemology in Planning Research

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretivist methodology grounded in the premise that social realities are constructed through meanings attributed by individuals and institutions. Interpretivism, as Bryman (2016, p.28) notes, “stresses the importance of understanding the meanings that individuals attach to their actions,” aligning with this research’s focus on the retheorisation of equity, sustainability, and resilience. Bryman’s work supports a historically informed research strategy that privileges context, meaning, and conceptual evolution over time.

May and Perry (2022) offer a framework for understanding how social research is shaped by evolving epistemologies, methodological choices, and institutional contexts. Their emphasis on reflexivity and critical awareness is particularly relevant to historically situated concepts, acknowledging that planning ideas are shaped not only by evidence but also by shifting values, ideologies, and power relations.

In urban planning, meanings are influenced by technical considerations as well as ideological, cultural, and historical factors (Davoudi, 2012). An interpretivist approach is therefore well suited to examining how equity, sustainability, and resilience are constructed and contested, providing analytical tools to interrogate the 20MN as both a planning intervention and a discursive, historically embedded concept.

3.2.2 Philosophical Framework

This research is guided by a philosophical framework that combines historicity and CDA as interpretive tools for examining the temporal and ideological construction of planning concepts.

3.2.2.1 Historicity

Historicity recognises that social ideas and institutions evolve within specific socio-political and cultural contexts, challenging the notion that planning concepts are fixed or universally applicable (Somers, 1998; May, 2011). In planning research, it

highlights how meanings, ideologies, and power relations shift over time (Koselleck, 2004), underscoring the contingent nature of concepts often treated as normative, such as equity, sustainability, and resilience (Healey, 2007; Davoudi, 2012). For example, sustainability has moved from early environmental stewardship to encompassing carbon reduction, mobility, and social inclusion.

A historical lens also draws on Foucault's (1977) genealogical approach, which traces the re-emergence of models such as the *Garden City*, *Neighbourhood Unit*, and more recently the *15-* and *20-minute city*, each reinterpreted in response to changing agendas (Ward, 2004; Freestone, 1986). Planning ideas circulate globally, adapting to different spatial and temporal contexts (Harris and Moore, 2013; Hein, 2018), making the 20MN a reassembled concept rooted in inherited urban forms. Heidegger's (1962) view of understanding as inherently temporal, and Gadamer's (2013) "fusion of horizons," further support engaging with historical texts as evolving sources of meaning.

Historicity also informs critical perspectives on institutional memory and policy transfer. Concepts like Healey's (2007) "path dependency" reveal how established frameworks shape future planning, often giving the appearance of novelty to historically embedded models. Adams *et al*. (2015) emphasise that engaging critically with planning history enriches contemporary practice, positioning the 20MN as a product of evolving ideologies. This lens enables the tracing of conceptual shifts in equity, sustainability, and resilience while situating the 20MN within its broader intellectual lineage.

3.2.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Complementing historicity, CDA examines how language constructs, reinforces, or challenges power relations, ideologies, and social inequalities (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Policy texts and planning documents are treated not as neutral artefacts but as embedded with values and strategic framings. In planning research, CDA exposes how discourses legitimise certain interventions while marginalising others (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). Terms like "smart growth"

or “resilience” can carry neoliberal or technocratic assumptions beneath an inclusive veneer (Legacy, 2017; Raco, 2005).

Drawing on Foucault’s (1972) notion of discourse as a vehicle for power and knowledge, CDA interrogates how urban policies naturalise particular planning logics while excluding alternatives. Fairclough (1995; 2013) emphasises language as a social practice shaped by political interests, operating across policy, implementation, and public participation. This aligns with Bowen’s (2009) view of documents as socially constructed artefacts, legitimising specific framings over time.

CDA also advances critical planning theory by revealing how language constructs subject positions (e.g., “citizen,” “planner”) and spatial imaginaries (e.g., “compact city”), shaping inclusion and exclusion (Richardson and Jensen, 2003). Applied to the 20MN, it reveals how the model is framed to align with policy priorities while potentially obscuring inequality or displacement.

Together, historicity and CDA form a philosophical foundation for a historically informed critique of the 20MN, enabling analysis of both its conceptual evolution and its current policy deployment.

3.2.3 Overview of Research Methodologies and Qualitative Approaches

Urban planning is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on geography, sociology, political science, environmental studies, and economics to engage with the complexities of urban space (Campbell, 2006b; Healey, 2007). This breadth is reflected in the variety of methodologies used within planning research.

Quantitative methods, those employing statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques, are valuable for land-use modelling, transport forecasting, and demographic analysis (Creswell, 2014; Batty, 2013). Yet scholars increasingly highlight the importance of qualitative and interpretive approaches for examining the normative, discursive, and historical dimensions of planning (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Sandercock, 2003).

Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand social phenomena through non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, and texts (Creswell, 2014). Interpretive approaches further emphasise the meanings individuals and groups assign within their contexts (Walsham, 1995). Creswell (2013) stresses the value of qualitative inquiry for exploring complex and evolving phenomena, advocating inductive reasoning and interpretive depth. This perspective underpins the research's use of discourse and document analysis to trace conceptual shifts in planning theory and interrogate the historical foundations of the 20MN.

3.3 Research Design

This section details the overall research design, justifying the choice of a qualitative, historically informed framework and explaining how methodological strategies support the research's aims.

The approach enables examination of how planning concepts have been reinterpreted over time and embedded in the 20MN model. It is grounded in the premise that planning ideas are inseparable from their socio-political and historical contexts, and that meaningful analysis requires attention to both their conceptual lineage and their contemporary discursive framing.

3.3.1 Qualitative Research Orientation

This study adopts a qualitative, historically informed framework to explore the evolving nature of planning principles. Qualitative methods provide the depth and flexibility needed to investigate meanings and discourses over time (Creswell, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017).

Grounded in interpretivist epistemology, it assumes social reality is constructed through negotiated meanings among individuals, institutions, and communities (Bryman, 2016). As Bryman (2016, p. 22) notes, "interpretivism emphasises the meaningful nature of social phenomena and the necessity of understanding them from the perspective of those engaged in them." This perspective supports tracing

how equity, sustainability, and resilience have been reinterpreted across shifting societal values, governance priorities, and power relations.

Qualitative inquiry also supports inductive reasoning, enabling themes to emerge from detailed analysis. Creswell (2013) highlights its capacity to explore complex phenomena in context, while Denzin and Lincoln (2017) emphasise the co-construction of meaning and the role of reflexivity.

To capture conceptual evolution, the research employs historical-comparative analysis, which reveals patterns of continuity and transformation across contexts (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003; Ragin, 2014). Document analysis and CDA further interrogate policy documents, academic texts, and institutional reports. CDA examines how language frames ideology (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak and Meyer, 2009), while Harris (2013) underscores its value for studying how planning knowledge circulates and is recontextualised across time and space.

3.3.2 Historical-Comparative Analysis

Historical-comparative analysis provides a systematic means of examining planning concepts across time and space, identifying both continuities and ruptures in ideology and practice (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003). This complements documentary analysis by situating planning models within their socio-political and economic contexts.

Models such as Howard's *Garden City*, Perry's *Neighbourhood Unit*, and Moreno's *15-Minute City* illustrate how proximity, cohesion, and neighbourhood autonomy are repeatedly reinterpreted (Hall, 2002b; Gehl, 2010). For instance, the *Garden City's* response to industrial urbanism has been rearticulated in the 20MN through sustainability and mobility agendas.

Healey (2007) highlights how paradigms evolve through shifts in governance and institutional logics, moving from narrow ecological framings of sustainability toward integrated approaches combining liveability, resilience, and justice. Ragin's (2014)

configurational comparative method further demonstrates how political priorities, design practices, and socio-economic conditions interact to reshape concepts.

This approach reflects Friedmann's (1987) and Healey's (1997) view of planning as normative and ideational rather than purely technocratic, enabling critical interrogation of the ideological underpinnings of the 20MN. It allows assessment of whether the 20MN represents a genuinely innovative response to contemporary challenges or a reworking of longstanding principles.

As Hall (2002a), and Harris and Moore (2013) note, planning concepts are "circulated, translated, and reassembled" across contexts, reinforcing the value of historically grounded comparative analysis in tracing how ideas are adapted to shifting agendas.

3.3.3 Methodological Justification

Given the research's conceptual and historical focus, discursive analysis of secondary sources is more appropriate than collecting primary data through interviews or surveys. As Hall (2002b, p. 101) observes, "planning history and theory research often requires focusing on the circulation of ideas through texts and discourse rather than direct empirical observation."

Documentary analysis enables engagement with a wide range of planning knowledge, from canonical texts to contemporary policy, helping to identify both dominant narratives and alternative perspectives within the 20MN discourse. Historical-comparative analysis further recognises that planning ideas rarely emerge anew but evolve through temporal and spatial diffusion, being "circulated, translated, and reassembled" (Harris and Moore, 2013, p. 1501).

Using peer-reviewed and authoritative sources ensures transparency, rigour, and replicability. Combining historical-comparative analysis with CDA offers a robust framework for interrogating both the intellectual origins of the 20MN and its current policy deployment.

3.4 Data Collection

Documentary analysis is used as the primary method of data collection, focusing on secondary textual sources to trace the historical and discursive development of the 20MN. As a well-established qualitative approach, documentary analysis is particularly suited to historical and policy research, enabling examination of the content, context, and meaning of texts over time (Bowen, 2009; Scott, 1990).

Documents are treated as socially constructed artefacts rather than neutral records. Prior (2003) notes that they both reflect and shape social knowledge and power relations. The exclusive use of secondary data aligns with the research's aim to provide a comprehensive, historically grounded investigation.

Sources include historical planning texts, contemporary policies such as the Scottish Government's *NPF4* (2023b), academic literature, and reports from organisations including the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. These materials enable analysis of how equity, sustainability, and resilience have been theorised and operationalised across contexts.

Selection criteria focused on relevance to the 20MN and influence within planning discourse: (a) explicit reference to 20MN principles or equivalents, (b) production or endorsement by government or planning bodies, or (c) recognition as critical historical precedents. Priority was given to sources with significant policy relevance or academic impact.

This reliance on secondary sources is appropriate to the research's historical and conceptual focus, avoiding primary methods (e.g., interviews, surveys) less suited to capturing the breadth and depth of historical discourse.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

This section describes the analytical strategies used to interpret the selected documents, focusing on how CDA is applied to trace conceptual developments and uncover underlying power dynamics in planning discourse.

3.5.1 Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis is a qualitative method for systematically evaluating texts, images, and other media to interpret meaning, context, and significance (Bowen, 2009). It enables critical examination of planning texts - policies, reports, historical treatises, and academic literature - by tracing conceptual development and discursive framing over time. As Bowen (2009, p. 30) notes, this approach "provides background and context, a means of tracking change and development, and a way to verify findings from other data sources."

The method is iterative and integrated with research design and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Beyond summarising knowledge, it identifies theoretical constructs, historical framings, and discursive themes that shape how planning ideas are interpreted and contested (Silverman, 2014). Prior (2003) stresses that documents are active instruments in constructing social reality, highlighting their role in shaping meaning, institutional memory, and discourse - particularly relevant for analysing how concepts are legitimised, reinterpreted, or resisted.

Sources range from historical works such as Howard's *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (1902), Perry's *Neighbourhood Unit* (1929), and Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), to contemporary frameworks including Scotland's *NPF4* (Scottish Government, 2023b). Influential academic contributions - Agyeman *et al*. (2003), Berger (2000), Fainstein (2010), Davoudi (2012) - provide theoretical depth, while planning charters, manifestos, and global declarations situate the 20MN within global discourse.

Documentary analysis is well established in historical and policy-oriented planning research, where textual sources often replace primary data (Scott, 1990; Bowen, 2009). Systematic use of secondary materials - spanning historical texts, legislation, academic literature, and institutional reports - supports a comprehensive, historically grounded investigation without reliance on interviews or surveys (Johnston, 2014).

By integrating foundational and contemporary sources, this research applies a comparative, temporally sensitive lens to trace how planning concepts are

institutionalised or transformed, providing a robust document-based methodology for examining the conceptual underpinnings of the 20MN.

3.5.2 Application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study applies CDA to examine how planning language constructs social realities and shapes power relations (Fairclough, 1995). CDA is particularly effective in revealing how concepts are framed, legitimised, or contested in both historical and contemporary contexts.

The analysis proceeds in two stages:

1. Historical mapping – tracing how equity, sustainability, and resilience have been framed and reframed in literature and archival sources, highlighting dominant and alternative discourses.
2. Contemporary comparison – analysing how these principles are mobilised in current planning policy and practice, with emphasis on the 20MN, to assess whether historical retheorisations are integrated or overlooked.

As Fairclough (1995, p. 9) notes, CDA "unpacks the relations between discourse and power and explores how dominant discourses can reproduce or challenge existing social structures." Applied to the 20MN, CDA reveals how planning language influences knowledge construction and policy priorities.

By analysing policy documents, academic texts, and institutional reports, CDA identifies the assumptions, values, and power dynamics underpinning planning discourse. This provides a nuanced evaluation of how the 20MN reflects or diverges from historical antecedents and how such shifts shape its role as a contemporary planning model.

3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a core principle of qualitative research, requiring critical reflection on the researcher's role, assumptions, and potential influence on the research process

(Finlay, 2002). Rather than pursuing unattainable objectivity, qualitative inquiry acknowledges that a researcher's background, beliefs, and experiences shape data collection and interpretation. Positionality - including social identity, disciplinary training, and professional perspective - must therefore be recognised for its impact on research outcomes (Berger, 2015), ensuring transparency and accountability in methodological choices.

In planning research, reflexivity is especially important because concepts such as equity, sustainability, and resilience are politically and ideologically charged, shaped by wider social and historical forces (Davoudi, 2012; Sandercock, 1998). A reflexive stance enables critical engagement with these contested ideas and awareness of how personal values or theoretical preferences may influence interpretations of texts, policies, and models.

Denzin and Lincoln (2017) highlight reflexivity's role in the co-construction of meaning, which aligns with this research's interpretive and historically informed approach. Recognising how planners and communities have reshaped these principles over time reflects their view of research as iterative and engaged.

Practical strategies - including journaling, peer discussion, and a positionality statement - enhance rigour and credibility (Lincoln *et al*., 2011). By embracing reflexivity, the study strengthens both its analytical depth and ethical integrity.

3.6.1 Analytical Framework

To ensure coherence, the research adopts an integrated analytical framework linking philosophical assumptions, epistemological stance, methodological choices, and research objectives to the findings and interpretations that inform understanding of the 20MN concept (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Analytical Framework: Connecting Philosophy, Method, and Interpretation

Component	Description	Connection to Research Outcomes
Philosophical Foundation	Interpretivism – Assumes that reality is socially constructed, historically situated, and shaped by language, values, and power structures.	Allows nuanced understanding of how planning principles (equity, sustainability, resilience) are contextually interpreted over time.
Epistemology	Historicity and Constructivism – Knowledge is not objective or static but co-produced through discourse, culture, and temporal context (Gadamer, 2013).	Justifies focus on tracing retheorisations and reinterpretations of concepts across planning periods.
Research Question	How does an understanding of the historical retheorisations of equity, sustainability and resilience inform contemporary urban planning practice in the implementation of the 20MN concept?	Anchors the investigation and ensures findings remain focused on both historical insight and its relevance to current practice.
Objectives	Review historical development of 20MN; examine retheorisation of equity, sustainability, and resilience.	Guides thematic structure of findings and enables alignment between theoretical development and planning implications.
Methodological Strategy	Qualitative, historically informed, document-based research.	Enables in-depth exploration of planning texts and policy documents across time.
Primary Methods	- Literature review - Historical-comparative analysis - Critical discourse analysis	Facilitate the identification of discursive shifts, ideological framings, and conceptual continuities related to the 20MN.

Data Sources	- Historical planning texts - Policy documents (e.g. NPF4) - Academic literature - Institutional and organisational reports	Provide rich empirical base to analyse how planning principles are embedded or rearticulated in contemporary urban frameworks.
Analysis Approach	Thematic and discourse analysis – focus on language, power, and conceptual development over time.	Illuminates how equity, sustainability, and resilience have been framed and reframed in planning narratives influencing the 20MN.
Expected Contribution	Reveal the intellectual lineage of the 20MN and critically assess whether its current framing reflects transformative planning or risks depoliticisation.	Offers critical insight for practitioners and policymakers into the strengths and limitations of the 20MN as a planning model.

This framework provides a transparent, logically connected process in which findings emerge from an interpretive reading of historical and contemporary discourses, grounded in the overarching aim of critically evaluating how retheorised planning principles inform the 20MN in current practice.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As this research involved no human participants or primary data collection, ethical risks were minimal, and formal ethical approval was not required. However, ethical standards still guided the appropriate use, citation, and critical but fair representation of all sources, in line with the University of Dundee's *Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics*. Ethical engagement extended beyond procedural compliance to encompass reflexivity, positionality, and epistemological responsibility.

3.7.1 Informed Ethical Practice

The study analysed publicly available texts. All secondary sources were fully cited using the Harvard system, with no confidential or restricted material accessed.

Following completion of the University of Dundee's *Ethical Approval for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Participants Checklist 1* (Appendix 1), formal approval was deemed unnecessary.

3.7.2 Positionality and Reflexivity

CDA requires attentiveness to the researcher's role in interpreting meaning. The author maintained a reflexive stance, recognising how their academic background, professional values, and ideological leanings influenced the selection, framing, and interpretation of texts.

3.7.3 Representational Ethics

Quotations and excerpts from public policy texts were used ethically, ensuring they were not taken out of context or misrepresented. Competing perspectives were presented fairly, avoiding assumptions about the motives of policy actors or institutions, consistent with interpretive responsibility and textual integrity.

3.7.4 Epistemic Responsibility and Sensitivity

Given the normative weight of concepts like justice, inclusion, and urban inequality, the research avoided overgeneralisation and reductionism. Following critical planning scholarship principles, tensions or ambiguities in discourse interpretation were acknowledged and explored rather than minimised.

3.8 Limitations

The reliance on secondary documentary sources means some historical perspectives - particularly those of marginalised or underrepresented groups - may be absent from official texts (Bowen, 2009). This was mitigated by selecting diverse sources spanning multiple periods and discourses.

As qualitative discourse analysis involves researcher interpretation, reflexivity and transparency in analytical choices were maintained to ensure credibility (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017).

Finally, the absence of primary empirical data limits the ability to capture current stakeholder perspectives. Future research could address this through interviews or real-world observations.

3.9 Alternative Methods

Alternative approaches such as semi-structured interviews, detailed case studies, or spatial analysis could have been employed to provide additional triangulation and empirical breadth (Flick, 2018; Yin, 2018). However, this research has concentrated on Critical Discourse Analysis as the most appropriate method for addressing the research aims, while recognising that future research could productively combine CDA with such approaches to capture a wider range of perspectives.

3.10 Summary

This chapter outlined the qualitative, historically informed methodology, grounded in interpretivist epistemology. The combined framework of historicity and CDA supports analysis of how equity, sustainability, and resilience have evolved and been retheorised in relation to the 20MN. Documentary analysis of secondary texts provided comprehensive data, while CDA enabled nuanced examination of planning discourse.

Methodological choices were justified by the research's conceptual focus, ensuring transparency, ethical integrity, and acknowledgement of limitations, thereby offering a robust basis for critically investigating planning theory and contemporary urban practice.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of the critical discourse analysis, organised thematically around the research's objectives.

Section 4.2 examines the historical and theoretical roots of the 20MN concept. Sections 4.3 – 4.5 then explore how the planning principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience have been retheorised over time and how those evolutions appear (or are omitted) in contemporary 20MN discourse and policy.

Table 4.1 maps each research objective, and emergent questions, to the corresponding sections of this chapter in which the findings are discussed.

Table 4.1: Mapping of Research Objectives and Emergent Questions to Findings Sections

Objective	Emergent Analytical Question	Chapter Section (Findings)
Objective 2	Has the principle of equity been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	4.2.1 and 4.3.2
Objective 3	Has the principle of sustainability been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	4.2.5 and 4.3.3
Objective 4	Has the principle of resilience been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	4.2.4 and 4.3.5
Objectives 2	What aspects of equity are lacking within the 20MN concept?	4.2.1, 4.3.2, and 4.3.4
Objective 3	What aspects of sustainability are lacking within the 20MN concept?	4.2.5, 4.3.3, and 4.3.6
Objective 4	What aspects of resilience are lacking within the 20MN concept?	4.2.4, 4.3.1, and 4.3.5
Objectives 1–4	To what extent does the 20-minute neighbourhood function as an integrated planning model that meaningfully	4.2 and 4.3

	balances equity, sustainability, and resilience in both theory and practice?	
Objective 1	In what ways have historical planning approaches (e.g., Garden City, Neighbourhood Unit) influenced the conceptual foundations of the 20MN, and where do they diverge?	4.1.2 and 4.2.2
Objectives 1–4	How do national planning frameworks (e.g., Scotland's NPF4) interpret the 20MN, and what assumptions about urban life and justice underpin these interpretations?	4.2.3 and 4.3.1
Objectives 1–4	How do international frameworks (e.g., SDGs, New Urban Agenda) shape the interpretation of the 20MN and its alignment with global planning discourses?	4.2.6 and 4.3.7

4.2 Historical and Theoretical Foundations of the 20MN

The 20MN concept is firmly anchored in earlier urban planning traditions that emphasised proximity and comprehensive community design. In the early 20th century, Ebenezer Howard's *Garden City* (1902) and Clarence Perry's *Neighbourhood Unit* (1929) offered detailed spatial models for meeting everyday needs within a defined area. Howard envisioned self-contained settlements, balanced between town and country, where housing, employment, and green space were equally distributed - an early articulation of spatial equity and self-sufficiency. Perry translated these ideas into a practical formula, codifying walkable access to schools, parks, and shops for every household, integrating mixed land uses to counter industrial era overcrowding and unhealthy living conditions.

Contemporary 20MN frameworks draw explicitly on these precedents. *Plan Melbourne* defines a 20MN as that which enables people to meet their daily needs within a 20-minute walk or cycle from home (Victoria State Government, 2021). Paris' *15-Minute City* similarly promotes urban form in which essential needs are accessible by foot or bicycle within a 15-minute radius (Moreno, 2024). These

continuities show that the underlying proximity principle - treating access as a social good - has been remarkably durable over more than a century.

However, these early models also highlight limitations that remain relevant today. Both Howard's and Perry's visions assumed relatively homogeneous populations and were implemented through top-down, technocratic planning (Ward, 1992). Garden Cities and post-war New Towns often delivered spatially equitable designs on paper but neglected inclusivity in practice. In many mid-century New Towns, rigid spatial layouts and centrally determined land uses failed to reflect community needs or adapt to local cultural dynamics. As a result, the promise of social mix frequently faltered, and patterns of class or racial segregation persisted.

The modern 20MN inherits both the strengths and weaknesses of these traditions. While compact, mixed-use designs and walkability echo past ideals, the risk of co-option remains - where such models might drive gentrification and displacement rather than inclusion. Critics warn that without safeguards, the appeal of proximity can be harnessed to serve property-led regeneration rather than genuine community empowerment.

Planning frameworks today integrate the 20MN with varying degrees of specificity. Scotland's *NPF4* defines it as access to shops, schools, healthcare, and green space within a reasonable distance (Scottish Government, 2023b). The RTPI frames it as a tool for "local living," linked to health, environmental, and social objectives. By contrast, the UK's *NPPF* retains looser language such as "reduce the need to travel," offering broad encouragement without binding commitments. While this flexibility enables adaptation to different contexts, it can also dilute accountability - leaving gaps between vision and delivery, particularly in areas facing resource constraints or fragmented governance.

In summary, the findings indicated that the 20MN is less an innovation than a re-articulation of enduring planning logics (proximity, mixed use, and integrated neighbourhood design) now reframed within contemporary sustainability and resilience agendas. Its present-day advocacy is therefore grounded in precedent and shaped by how current policies (like *NPF4* and *SDGs*) frame urban priorities.

These findings fulfil Objective 1 by tracing the conceptual lineage of the 20MN to earlier planning models and demonstrating how inherited spatial logics and normative assumptions continue to shape its modern form, for better and for worse.

Table 4.2 summarises the key attributes of the *Garden City* and *Neighbourhood Unit* and their influence on the 20MN model.

Table 4.2: Comparison of Foundational Urban Planning Models Influencing the 20MN

Attribute	Garden City	Neighbourhood Unit	20-Minute Neighbourhood
Origin	Howard (1898)	Perry (1929)	Contemporary (2010s–present)
Spatial Scale	City & satellite towns	District (~5,000 people)	Neighbourhood (~15–20 mins walking)
Core Features	Greenbelt, radial layout	School-centered, bounded roads	Mixed-use, proximity-based services
Transport Mode	Rail & walking	Cars outside, walking inside	Active travel: walking & cycling
Equity Focus	Minimal	Functional, not equity-focused	Increasing focus on justice/inclusion

4.3 Equity: Retheorisation and the 20MN

Equity in urban planning has evolved from a narrow focus on distribution to a broader, multidimensional understanding of justice. Howard's *Garden City* (1902) and Perry's *Neighbourhood Unit* (1929) reflected a distributive conception of equity: every resident was to enjoy equal access to space, amenities, and healthier living conditions. These designs assumed that equitable provision of facilities would, by itself, lead to equitable outcomes.

By the 1960s, the limitations of this approach were exposed. Advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965) argued for procedural equity, insisting that equity requires representation of marginalised voices, not just material provision. Later, Fainstein's *Just City* (2010) and Soja's S*patial Justice* (2010) frameworks expanded the focus to

include rights, recognition, and political agency for disadvantaged groups. Intersectional planning research further highlights that inequalities are embedded across race, class, gender and ability, meaning that one-size-fits-all solutions often fail diverse communities.

Current 20MN discourse often reverts to a distributive framing, emphasising physical accessibility and proximity to services. Policy documents, such as Scotland's *NPF4* (Scottish Government, 2023b), uses language highlighting walkability and cycling access as equity indicators. While valuable, this approach risks conflating spatial access with substantive equity, overlooking the structural and recognitional dimensions. For example, a 20MN plan may ensure walkable access (a 20MN indicator) to fresh food markets but fails to consider whether residents can afford those goods, whether shops reflect cultural needs, or whether local businesses are protected from displacement.

Such omissions can have real-world consequences. Plans highlighting "inclusive neighbourhoods" may inadvertently narrow equity to a design problem - solved by placing amenities within a certain radius - sidesteps critical questions of land tenure, housing affordability, and institutional discrimination. This is especially relevant in regeneration areas where new amenities can accelerate property values, pricing out the very populations the policy sought to serve.

To bridge this gap, scholars advocate supplementing the 20MN with participatory and culturally responsive approaches (Agyeman *et al*., 2003; Connelly, 2007; Davoudi, 2000). These methods prioritise co-creation with local communities, recognising diverse constraints and aspirations. Intersectional planning further insists that accessibility measures be tailored to different user groups - considering, for example, the mobility needs of disabled residents or the safety concerns of women and children.

In essence, while 20MNs promote proximity and connectivity as proxies for equity, they cannot guarantee justice without integrating redistributive, recognitional, and procedural dimensions.

The findings address Objective 2 by demonstrating how contemporary planning policy and frameworks reinterpret equity through a procedural lens yet often stop short of tackling its structural foundations.

4.4 Sustainability: Retheorisation and the 20MN

Sustainability has undergone a significant transformation in planning discourse. Early models of Howard's *Garden City* (1902) and Perry's *Neighbourhood Unit* (19290 incorporated environmental principles implicitly - balancing town and country, compact development, and accessible open space. These foundations introduced the logic of compact, mixed-use neighbourhoods that the 20MN embraces today.

The *Brundtland Report* (WCED, 1987) brought sustainability explicitly into policy, defining it as meeting present needs without compromising future generations, and embedding the triad of environment, economy, and equity. This was reinforced by the "three pillars" model (Elkington, 1997; Purvis *et al*., 2019) and Campbell's (1996) planning triangle, which visualised inherent tensions between these dimensions. This framing is useful for understanding how the 20MN's emphasis on compact form and walkability may privilege certain sustainability dimensions over others.

In practice, the sustainability agenda often became a balancing act rather than a transformative project. The "smart growth" and "sustainable urbanism" movements of the 2000s reframed density and mixed use as inherently sustainable, sometimes at the expense of deeper social goals. Green infrastructure, low-carbon mobility, and compactness were championed, but without parallel commitments to affordability or land justice.

The 20MN narrative largely inherits this environmental emphasis. Policy texts link it to UN SDGs - especially SDG11 (sustainable cities), SDG3 (health), and SDG13 (climate action) - and to climate mitigation strategies. Examples include *Plan Melbourne*, Paris' *15-Minute City*, and Scotland's *NPF4*, all of which portray walkable, compact neighbourhoods as central to reducing car dependency and emissions. Beatley's *Green Urbanism* (2000) reinforces the idea that compactness supports both cultural vibrancy and ecological stewardship.

However, the findings indicate gaps in how sustainability is understood in 20MN policies. Discourse tends to frame sustainability in technical or physical terms - design-led transport systems, green corridors, renewable energy integration - while paying less attention to socio-political issues such as land reform or housing access. The “urban sustainability fix” thesis warns that environmental initiatives can be co-opted by growth-oriented agendas, leading to eco-gentrification when new green amenities displace vulnerable groups. Applied to the 20MN, this suggests that policy narratives emphasising green infrastructure and walkability might still ignore who can afford to live in these amenity-rich areas.

Agyeman’s “just sustainability” approach offers a corrective, insisting that environmental aims must be linked to equity and rights. Yet few 20MN policies fully adopt this perspective, tending instead toward value-neutral language (“sustainable communities” or “resilience”) that avoids redistribution debates. This climate framing of the 20MN tends to prioritise carbon reduction and mobility, and may not systematically integrate social or ecological justice considerations.

These findings address Objective 3 by illustrating how the 20MN’s sustainability discourse often privileges environmental performance and spatial efficiency while overlooking the deeper social justice and political dimensions that are central to a more transformative sustainability agenda.

4.5 Resilience: Retheorisation and the 20MN

Resilience in planning has expanded from a focus on physical robustness to a socio-ecological understanding of adaptability. The early applications of Howard’s *Garden City* and post-war New Towns stressed self-sufficiency, decentralisation and “socially mixed” populations seen as more resilient to change, but prioritised order and infrastructure over community agency. Holling’s (1972) concept of ecological resilience introduced the idea of systems absorbing disturbance, but for decades this remained framed as an engineering challenge of “bouncing back” rather than transformation - with an emphasis on hard infrastructure and limited attention to social structures.

By the 2000s, resilience discourse was reframed through initiatives such as the UN's *Making Cities Resilient* (2010) and the Rockefeller Foundation's *100 Resilient Cities* (2013). This shift defined urban resilience holistically as the capacity of communities and systems to survive, adapt and grow despite stresses. Scholarly discourse followed suit, reframing resilience as involving institutional flexibility, community learning, and social cohesion – a move towards "transformative resilience". This retheorisation emphasises not just shocks (storms, economic crises) but also chronic stresses like inequality.

In 20MN discourse, resilience is often portrayed as a natural outcome of localisation: neighbourhood-scale, access to jobs, services, and green infrastructure are said to strengthen adaptive capacity and reduce dependency on vulnerable global supply chains. Planning text frequently references terms such as "community capacity", "flexible infrastructure" and "local adaptation," suggesting that compact, self-sufficient areas can better withstand climate, economic, and public health disruptions.

Yet this framing can obscure structural realities. Critics such as Cretney (2014) note that resilience rhetoric sometimes shifts responsibility from governments to communities, celebrating adaptation without addressing systemic barriers. For example, a local plan may emphasise flood resilience through green infrastructure but neglect the fact that low-income residents may lack the resources to recover from disasters, even with improved physical defences.

Moreover, the positive connotations of resilience (strength, adaptability) can mask power dynamics. If all neighbourhoods are cast as needing to be resilient, then problems like poverty or lack of affordable housing are subtly reframed as individual shortcomings rather than policy failures. Without explicit commitments to equity, resilience planning risks reinforcing existing inequalities, particularly if investments are concentrated in already-advantaged areas.

To counter this, scholars call for embedding "resilient justice" alongside "just sustainability," ensuring that resilience strategies address the root causes of vulnerability. This means coupling localised service provision with structural reforms that distribute risk and capacity more fairly, supported by equitable funding

mechanisms, participatory governance, and targeted support for marginalised groups. In practice, this requires going beyond design and infrastructure to actively empower communities, recognising that without explicit attention to justice, resilience discourse can place disproportionate burdens on those already most vulnerable. Without such deliberate embedding of equity, the 20MN's promise of proximity and adaptability risks masking persistent inequalities, assuming neighbourhoods are inherently resilient simply because of their spatial form.

Objective 4 is fulfilled by showing that while the 20MN reflects contemporary, community-oriented resilience thinking, its effectiveness depends on explicit justice integration rather than assuming proximity alone delivers equitable resilience.

4.6 Integrative Findings: Converging and Conflicting Discourses

Across all three principles, the findings highlight a pattern of conceptual convergence in theory but divergence in application. Equity, sustainability, and resilience are frequently cited in policy rhetoric, yet are unevenly integrated and often reduced to managerial objectives.

The 20MN model, while conceptually holistic, tends to privilege environmental and spatial efficiency over social transformation. This reveals tensions between historical ideals and their contemporary policy translation.

Taken together, these integrative findings address Objective 1 by showing how historical and theoretical foundations shape the interplay of principles within the 20MN, and Objectives 2–4 by revealing how equity, sustainability, and resilience are operationalised in practice, and how tensions and trade-offs emerge between them.

4.7 Summary of Findings

This section synthesises the core insights from the analyses of equity, sustainability, and resilience, identifying recurring themes, discursive patterns, and divergences between historical ideals and contemporary interpretations of the 20MN.

- Equity is largely framed as accessibility, with limited engagement in structural and procedural dimensions.
- Sustainability has broadened discursively but remains shaped by design-led and technocratic framings.
- Resilience features prominently in rhetoric but is underdeveloped in relation to justice and community agency.
- The 20MN model draws selectively on historical planning ideals, often without acknowledging their social and political roots.

Across national and local policy discourses, the 20MN engages with these principles both explicitly and implicitly. However, integration remains partial and uneven. Equity and sustainability are frequently invoked in aspirational terms yet rarely embedded through enforceable mechanisms. Resilience is typically framed more technically than socially.

A key finding is the absence of a coherent framework that meaningfully integrates all three principles. This gap directly addresses the overarching emergent analytical question (Q7): *to what extent does the 20MN function as an integrated planning model?* The evidence presented here indicates that current interpretations fall short of such integration, underscoring the need for deeper theoretical critique in the following discussion chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) presented in Chapter 4 through the lens of the dissertation's four research objectives.

Organised thematically, it examines how the planning principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience have been retheorised from historical precedents to contemporary frameworks and reflects on the implications for urban planning policy and practice. The discussion is grounded in the conceptual and theoretical literature introduced in Chapter 2, offering a critical synthesis of how historical ideas are refracted through contemporary discourse, particularly in relation to the 20MN model.

To demonstrate how the following discussion aligns with the research framework, Table 5.1 maps each research objective and emergent analytical question to the corresponding subsection within this chapter.

Table 5.1: Mapping of Research Objectives and Emergent Questions to Discussion Sections

Objective	Emergent Analytical Question	Chapter Section (Discussion)
Objective 2	Has the principle of equity been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	5.2.1 and 5.4.1
Objective 3	Has the principle of sustainability been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	5.2.5 and 5.4.5
Objective 4	Has the principle of resilience been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	5.2.4 and 5.4.4
Objectives 2	What aspects of equity are lacking within the 20MN concept?	5.2.1 and 5.4.3
Objectives 3	What aspects of sustainability are lacking within the 20MN concept?	5.2.5 and 5.4.6

Objectives 4	What aspects of resilience are lacking within the 20MN concept?	5.2.4 and 5.4.2
Objectives 1–4	Has the principle of equity been fully adopted within the contemporary 20MN concept?	5.2 and 5.4
Objective 1	In what ways have historical planning approaches (e.g., Garden City, Neighbourhood Unit) influenced the conceptual foundations of the 20MN, and where do they diverge?	5.2.2 and 5.3.1
Objectives 1–4	How do national planning frameworks (e.g., Scotland's NPF4) interpret the 20MN, and what assumptions about urban life and justice underpin these interpretations?	5.2.3 and 5.3.2
Objectives 1–4	How do international frameworks (e.g., SDGs, New Urban Agenda) shape the interpretation of the 20MN and its alignment with global planning discourses?	5.2.6 and 5.4.7

5.2 Planning Logics and the Legacy of Proximity

Objective 1 sought to explore the historical and theoretical lineage of the 20MN. The findings reaffirm that it is not a novel invention but an evolution of established planning paradigms, most notably the *Garden City* (Howard, 1902) and *Neighbourhood Unit* (Perry, 1929). Both promoted spatial proximity, enabling daily needs to be met within walkable distances.

As summarised in Table 5.2, these precedents continue to shape contemporary planning logics. Yet, their selective invocation in policy discourse often romanticises compactness and accessibility while overlooking the socio-political contexts in which they emerged. Earlier models were shaped by technocratic, top-down planning and frequently excluded considerations of class, race, and gender. This selective inheritance reflects a wider tendency in planning to use historical references as rhetorical legitimation while downplaying past exclusions.

Table 5.2: Key Precursors to the 20MN

Concept / Model	Approximate Date	Core Proponents	Core Principles / Influence on 20MN
Garden City	1902	Ebenezer Howard	Self-contained towns with housing, work, parks, greenbelts; local economy.
Neighbourhood	1920	Clarence Perry	Urban block centered on school/shop/park; walkable radius.
Modernist / Zoning	1920s – 1950s	Le Corbusier et al.	Auto-centric, mono-functional redevelopment.
Urbanist Critiques	1960s	Jane Jacobs, Jan Gehl	Mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, diverse, human-scale planning.
15 / 20 Minute City	2010s	Carlos Moreno et al.	Proximity, sustainability, digital connectivity, climate resilience.

Objective 1 is addressed by demonstrating that the 20MN is simultaneously spatial and ideological. Proximity is not merely a design feature but a normative construct that frames how communities are imagined and governed. For the 20MN to function as an inclusive framework, historical narratives must be critically interrogated, ensuring that spatial accessibility is accompanied by social inclusivity and procedural justice.

The evolution of the principles underpinning the 20MN is summarised in Table 5.3, tracing how each has been retheorised within planning discourse over time.

Table 5.3: Summary of Retheorisations of Core Planning Principles

Principle	Historical Conceptualisation	Retheorised Understanding	Implication for 20MN
Equity	Distributive justice; access to services (Howard)	Recognition, participation, intersectionality (Fainstein, Crenshaw)	Ensure affordability, representation, and justice-oriented governance
Sustainability	Environmental harmony via	Integrated social-	Requires inclusive design, policy alignment, and

	spatial form (Perry)	ecological justice (Agyeman et al.)	access to green infrastructure
Resilience	Physical robustness and decentralisation	Adaptive capacity, community empowerment (Davoudi)	Must address social vulnerability and institutional flexibility

5.3 Equity and the Limits of Accessibility

Objective 2 sought to examine how the concept of equity has evolved and how these shifts influence 20MN discourse. The findings demonstrate that equity is predominantly framed in terms of accessibility - specifically walkable access to services and amenities. While this reflects a distributive view of justice, it inadequately addresses issues of recognition, participation, and redistribution.

To aid in understanding these shifts, Table 5.4 outlines the evolution of equity thinking in planning, summarising its key dimensions, implications, and associated theorists.

Table 5.4: Evolution of Equity Thinking in Urban Planning

Equity Dimension	Core Idea	Planning Implications	Key Theorists
Distributive Equity	Fair access to services, amenities, and infrastructure	Focus on spatial access (e.g., walkability)	Harvey (1973), Rawls (1971)
Procedural Equity	Inclusion in decision-making processes	Participatory planning, advocacy planning	Davidoff (1965), Sandercock (1998)
Recognitional Equity	Respect for diverse identities and lived experiences	Culturally responsive planning, intersectionality	Fraser (1995), Young (1990)
Redistributive Equity	Addressing structural	Resource reallocation, anti-	Fainstein (2010), Soja (2010)

	injustices and power imbalances	displacement strategies	

Equity in planning has undergone significant transformation, from early distributive frameworks to more recent theories of recognitional and procedural equity. Yet current 20MN discourse often flattens these distinctions. Policy documents such as *NPF4* (Scottish Government, 2023b) and *Plan Melbourne* (Victoria State Government, 2021) focus on ensuring uniform access without sufficiently engaging with the differing needs of diverse populations or the systemic inequalities that shape spatial experience.

A central tension lies between promoting walkable, amenity-rich neighbourhoods and the risks of gentrification and displacement. Areas designed to be equitable through improved accessibility often become attractive for market-led development, pricing out the very communities they aim to serve. In this context, equity becomes a double-edged sword - simultaneously a planning objective and a mechanism of exclusion.

This discussion fullfills Objective 2 by explaining how accessibility-led approaches can under-specify recognition, participation, and redistribution in 20MN policy.

Without explicit strategies for recognitional and procedural equity - such as inclusive planning processes, tenant protections, and targeted investments - the 20MN risks becoming a technocratic solution that overlooks deeper social injustices. A more robust equity lens must move beyond metrics of access to embrace frameworks of participation, redistribution, and anti-displacement.

5.4 Sustainability and the Tensions of Green Urbanism

Objective 3 addressed the role of sustainability in the discourse surrounding the 20MN. The findings revealed that the model is frequently positioned as a vehicle for achieving sustainability goals, particularly those related to climate mitigation, reduced car dependency, and green infrastructure. However, this framing often

aligns with a depoliticised model of "green urbanism" that privileges design over social transformation.

Historically, sustainability has evolved from ecological determinism to encompass more holistic concerns with justice, equity, and intergenerational wellbeing. Yet, contemporary planning discourse tends to reduce sustainability to technical solutions - such as modal shifts or green space provisioning - while sidestepping critical questions about who benefits from these interventions and who may be displaced as a result.

To contextualise the sustainability discourse in planning, Table 5.5 outlines its evolution, highlighting the shift from narrow ecological concerns to broader notions of justice and intergenerational equity.

Table 5.5: Evolution of Sustainability Thinking in Planning

Era	Dominant Framing	Key Theorist	Planning Implication
Early 20th Century	Environmental determinism, green space	Howard, Perry	Walkability, but little on justice
Post-1987	Three-pillar model (environmental, economic, social)	WCED, Redclift	Sustainability as a vague balance of goals
2000s–Present	Just sustainabilities	Agyeman, Campbell	Must integrate justice and community inclusion

The discussion highlights the risk of what scholars term the "sustainability fix" - the instrumentalisation of ecological goals to support market-led urban development. For example, green infrastructure projects can raise property values and catalyse eco-gentrification in the absence of affordability measures. Similarly, density and compactness, though environmentally efficient, can exacerbate housing precarity if not matched with inclusive design policies.

True sustainability must therefore be anchored in social justice. This requires moving beyond aesthetic or infrastructural solutions to integrate frameworks of just sustainabilities, climate justice, and socio-economic redistribution into planning practice. The 20MN, if critically implemented, has the potential to embody such principles, but current discourse reveals a gap between sustainability rhetoric and transformative practice.

This discussion advances Objective 3 by showing how environmental metrics dominate at the expense of social and economic dimensions of sustainability.

5.5 Resilience and the Politics of Adaptability

Objective 4 explored how resilience is conceptualised in the implementation of the 20MN. The findings show that resilience is often framed in terms of community adaptability, localism, and infrastructural flexibility. While these are important, they risk overshadowing the structural conditions that shape vulnerability and adaptive capacity.

Planning discourse increasingly embraces the language of resilience, yet this language often obscures the political and economic determinants of risk. The emphasis on community resilience can devolve responsibility onto local actors without addressing the need for institutional investment, policy alignment, and structural reform. This mirrors critiques in the literature that resilience discourse, when uncritical, can serve as a neoliberal strategy for offloading state responsibility.

The evolving understanding of resilience in urban planning is illustrated in Table 5.6, which contrasts conventional resilience thinking with transformative, justice-focused approaches.

Table 5.6: Evolution of Resilience in Planning

Era	Core Concept	Key Insights
1970s–1990s	Ecological/system robustness	Return to equilibrium; shock resistance
2000s–2010s	Socio-spatial resilience	Learning, adaptability, networks
2010s–Present	Transformative resilience	Equity, institutional change

A just resilience approach emphasises the need to understand who is expected to adapt, to what, and under what conditions. Without this framing, resilience policies may inadvertently reinforce systemic inequities, particularly in underserved or marginalised communities. The 20MN must therefore be implemented with attention to social infrastructure, participatory governance, and institutional accountability.

Resilience should not be a euphemism for coping but a mandate for transformation. Planning for resilient 20MNs requires embedding social safeguards, redistributive mechanisms, and inclusive decision-making processes that empower communities rather than burden them.

This discussion addresses Objective 4 by contrasting technical preparedness with justice-oriented approaches to resilience.

5.6 Reflections on Intersections and Implications

The seventh analytical question prompts a broader assessment of the 20MN model as a whole. Evidence from *NPF4* and selected local plans reveals that while equity, sustainability, and resilience are each present, they are rarely interwoven. This fragmented integration creates a disconnect between policy rhetoric and holistic spatial justice. The 20MN therefore risks becoming a flexible container for diverse ambitions rather than a unified model grounded in cohesive principles, limiting its transformative potential.

This synthesis consolidates Objectives 2–4, demonstrating how the principles interact, overlap, and at times conflict within the 20MN, shaping its practical implementation. The interrelationship of these principles can be illustrated visually,

with equity, sustainability, and resilience forming the core pillars of the 20-minute neighbourhood model (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Equity, Sustainability, and Resilience as the Core Pillars of the 20MN

Source: Author's own, derived through ChatGPT (2025)

These principles provide the conceptual foundation of the 20MN. Their intersections highlight the potential for integrated, justice-oriented planning to deliver the 20MN in practice, and the risks of fragmentation if pursued in isolation.

A recurring theme across all four objectives is that the 20MN is framed as a holistic and inclusive planning model, yet its operationalisation often depoliticises equity, sustainability, and resilience. Policy discourse tends to privilege spatial and design-based solutions while neglecting the socio-political structures that shape urban life.

The analysis underscores the need to embed critical theory, historical awareness, and intersectional justice into contemporary planning. Local living cannot be achieved through metrics or infrastructure alone but must be rooted in lived realities, attentive to power, and responsive to historical exclusions.

The 20MN holds transformative potential, but only if implemented with care, reflexivity, and a commitment to justice. Policymakers must resist universal models and instead embrace context-sensitive approaches that centre participation, redistribution, and accountability. In doing so, the 20MN can move beyond a technical blueprint to become a meaningful tool for equitable and sustainable urban futures.

Bringing together insights from across the discussion, Table 5.7 outlines an integrated framework for justice-oriented 20MN planning, identifying key principles and practical implications.

Table 5.7: Integrated Framework for Justice Oriented 20MN Planning

Principle	Planning Tools	Key Outcomes
Equity	Affordable housing, inclusive zoning	Anti-displacement, representation
Sustainability	Green infrastructure, active transport	Emissions reduction, access to nature
Resilience	Community hubs, social networks	Adaptability, decentralised service provision

5.7 Implications for Contemporary Urban Planning

The findings call for a re-politicisation of urban planning discourse. Planners and policymakers should critically interrogate whose interests are served by concepts like the 20MN and ensure that language aligns with action. There is also a need for more inclusive and historically aware planning practices that engage communities not just as beneficiaries but as co-creators of urban futures.

As Fairclough asserts, language functions not as neutral medium, but as a form of social practice that both acts and represents (Fairclough, 1995, 2010). Therefore,

planning must be understood not just as technical design but as a process of meaning-making that influences social realities.

Embedding CDA into planning practice can help reveal hidden assumptions and power structures that shape outcomes.

5.8 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The study's reliance on secondary sources limits the ability to capture lived experiences and the perspectives of stakeholders. Future research could incorporate interviews or participatory methods to assess how different communities perceive and engage with the 20MN. In depth comparative case studies could also illuminate how local context shapes outcomes.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the principles underpinning the 20MN – equity, sustainability, and resilience – are not recent innovations but are historically grounded ideas that have been retheorised over time.

Through CDA and historically informed literature, this discussion has shown that these principles have each undergone significant shifts, moving from narrow, technical understandings to broader, systemic ones: equity now emphasises recognition and structural justice, sustainability integrates ecological with social transformation, and resilience privileges adaptation and empowerment over static stability.

While the 20MN represents a contemporary synthesis of these ideas, emerging as a flexible and adaptable framework capable of addressing modern urban challenges, the analysis does reveal gaps between rhetorical commitments and actual practices, particularly around justice and inclusion.

However, if implemented critically and inclusively, the 20MN holds potential for transformative change. Its success therefore depends on how deeply these planning

principles are embedded in implementation, not just in spatial form but through policy, governance, and community engagement.

By acknowledging the historical retheorisations of these concepts, planners and policymakers can design neighbourhoods that are not only accessible and efficient but also just, inclusive, and future ready.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation critically examined the 20-minute neighbourhood (20MN) concept through the lens of historical and theoretical retheorisations of equity, sustainability, and resilience.

The research aimed to evaluate the 20MN as a planning model not simply in spatial or technical terms, but as a deeply political and historically situated practice. In doing so, it sought to expose how foundational planning principles are translated - sometimes strategically diluted - within policy discourse and implementation.

This concluding chapter evaluates the extent to which the research has answered the central research question and fulfilled the four objectives set out in Section 1.4, reflects on its key contributions to planning theory and practice, and considers the implications of the findings for the future of urban planning, particularly in relation to the implementation of the 20MN model.

6.2 Conclusions in Relation to the Research Question

The research question asked:

> *"How have the practices and principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience been retheorised from past to present, and how are these principles represented in contemporary 20-Minute Neighbourhood planning frameworks?"*

The research has demonstrated that while the 20MN model is widely promoted as an innovative planning approach, its conceptual foundations are deeply rooted in earlier urban planning traditions such as Howard's *Garden City*, Perry's *Neighbourhood Unit*, and the pedestrian-oriented urbanism of Jacobs and Gehl. While these precedents promoted proximity and integration, they often lacked inclusivity, social justice, or adaptability to diverse contexts.

Chapter 4 demonstrated that contemporary adaptations such as those in Melbourne, Paris, and Portland reveal that the 20MN can be flexibly interpreted to fit local governance structures and priorities, but this flexibility can also lead to inconsistent implementation.

Equity, sustainability, and resilience have each evolved in significant ways, shaped by socio-political shifts and evolving planning paradigms:

- Equity has expanded beyond infrastructure distribution to include procedural justice, recognitional equity, intersectionality and anti-displacement measures, though operationalisation remains uneven.
- Sustainability has shifted from a narrow technocratic environmental focus to more integrated justice-oriented approaches yet risks of co-optation and greenwashing persist.
- Resilience has progressed from engineering robustness to adaptive, community-based approaches, but often defaults to technical preparedness in practice.

Through discourse analysis across various contexts, the research finds that these principles are frequently referenced in rhetoric without substantive embedding in governance or policy delivery, creating a gap between stated ambitions and on-the-ground outcomes.

This research has met its aim by critically examining the 20-minute neighbourhood as a historically situated and politically shaped planning practice, using a historicity lens to reveal both the continuities and departures from its conceptual origins. It has answered the research question by demonstrating how the principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience - each with their own historical trajectories - now converge and overlap in contemporary interpretations of the 20MN, while also exposing the tensions, gaps, and risks that challenge their full integration in practice. In doing so, the research provides a nuanced, evidence-based evaluation that connects historical insight to present-day policy and delivery.

6.3 Conclusions in Relation to the Research Objectives

The following sections outline how the research addressed each of the four objectives.

6.3.1 Addressing Objective 1

Objective 1: To critically review the historical practice and theoretical principles of the 20MN concept and its current interpretation.

The historical and theoretical review, undertaken through a historicity lens, confirms that the 20MN concept represents a contemporary reframing of long-standing urban planning principles, with its historical roots shaping its current application. The overlapping influences of equity, sustainability, and resilience are evident in its evolution, revealing that these principles have been variously emphasised or downplayed at different points in history, but now converge as central, mutually reinforcing drivers of policy and design. However, historical fragmentation of these principles into separate policy domains has left integration uneven, requiring policy approaches that prioritise social and governance structures alongside physical design.

This historical perspective provides the foundation for understanding how each principle has developed and how they interact in shaping the contemporary 20MN.

6.3.2 Addressing Objective 2

Objective 2: To examine how the practice and principles of equity were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.

Equity has shifted from an often-implicit aim to a clearly articulated policy objective within the 20MN framework, demanding targeted strategies for inclusivity, access, and social justice. Its relationship with sustainability and resilience is intrinsic - equity shapes who benefits from environmental and resilience measures, while in turn

depending on sustainable and resilient systems to create fair, accessible urban environments. Yet, without measurable targets and enforcement mechanisms, there is a danger that equity ambitions will remain aspirational, particularly where tensions arise between social priorities and economic or environmental objectives.

This evolving treatment of equity directly influences the framing of sustainability within the 20MN, particularly in determining who benefits from environmental and resilience strategies.

6.3.3 Addressing Objective 3

Objective 3: To examine how the practice and principles of sustainability were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.

Sustainability remains a dominant lens for interpreting and implementing 20MNs, though its earlier emphasis on environmental performance is now tempered by recognition of social and economic dimensions. The interconnections with equity and resilience are clear: sustainable urban systems are essential to long-term equity, and resilient frameworks ensure that sustainability gains can be maintained in the face of disruption. Nonetheless, in practice, environmental performance continues to dominate, with social and economic sustainability applied inconsistently. This imbalance risks undermining the holistic intent of the 20MN model and limiting its capacity to deliver broad-based benefits.

This imbalance underscores the importance of resilience as a means to maintain and protect sustainability gains over time.

6.3.4 Addressing Objective 4

Objective 4: To examine how the practice and principles of urban resilience were retheorised from past to present and implications toward influencing the contemporary principles of the 20MN concept.

Resilience has progressed from a largely reactive stance to an adaptive, community-centred approach, emphasising preparedness, flexibility, and capacity-building. Its influence is inseparable from sustainability, which provides the systems needed to endure, and equity, which ensures resilience measures benefit all community members. Together, these principles reinforce the ability of 20MNs to thrive amid environmental, social, and economic change. However, resilience remains underdeveloped in implementation, with limited policy tools and real-world evidence of its integration into 20MN delivery, leaving its role vulnerable to being overshadowed by more established sustainability measures.

This underdeveloped integration of resilience highlights its potential to safeguard and strengthen the long-term outcomes of equity and sustainability within the 20MN framework.

6.3.5 Overall Conclusion for Objectives

Collectively, these conclusions demonstrate that all four research objectives have been met, providing a coherent and critical evaluation of the historical evolution and contemporary framing of the 20MN. The analysis shows that equity, sustainability, and resilience - while each possessing distinct conceptual histories - operate as overlapping and mutually reinforcing principles within the 20MN model. At the same time, persistent imbalances, policy gaps, and implementation challenges reveal that their integration is not yet fully realised in practice. By addressing each objective in turn, this study not only meets its stated aims but also offers a deeper understanding of how these principles must work in concert if the 20MN is to achieve its transformative potential.

6.4 Contributions to Knowledge

The central contribution of this research lies in its conceptual reframing of the 20MN. By situating the model within a historical continuum of planning ideas, the research challenged the perception of the 20MN as a universally progressive solution. Instead, it presented the model as a malleable framework that must be critically interrogated and contextually tailored.

The research also contributed to planning theory by unpacking how these core principles have been retheorised in policy and discourse.

Rather than treating these concepts as static or self-evident, the research traced their genealogies and exposed the ideological assumptions embedded in their use. In doing so, it highlighted the importance of discourse in shaping planning outcomes and the need for planners to remain critically aware of how language constructs urban realities.

These contributions align closely with the research objectives. Objective 2, for instance, is met through the critical examination of equity's evolution into a multidimensional construct; Objective 3 is addressed by tracing sustainability's reframing through participatory and justice lenses; while Objective 4 is reflected in the reinterpretation of resilience as community-driven adaptability.

The comparative analysis of international case studies provided insight into best practices and cautionary tales for applying the 20MN model. The inclusion of multiple governance contexts revealed how flexible implementation must be matched by rigorous safeguards to ensure equitable outcomes.

6.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this research offer critical insight for how contemporary urban planning practice - specifically in relation to the 20MN - conceptualises and operationalises equity, sustainability, and resilience. While the 20MN has gained prominence as a progressive planning framework, this research suggests that its practical deployment often lacks a critical examination of historical precedent and theoretical nuance. The discourses around equity and resilience, in particular, are frequently depoliticised and underdeveloped in policy documents, risking the reproduction of systemic urban inequalities.

The analysis revealed a strong continuity between the conceptual underpinnings of historic planning models and current 20MN strategies. However, these are often re-presented in contemporary contexts without sufficient acknowledgement of their

limitations or exclusions. Similarly, while sustainability is prominently featured in 20MN rhetoric, it is often treated in technocratic or environmental terms, with limited attention to social justice and participatory governance. The resilience framing is also predominantly infrastructural and risks transferring responsibility for adaptation to communities without adequate structural support.

In light of these findings, the following implications for policy and practice are proposed to support more transformative, inclusive, and reflexive urban planning outcomes:

6.5.1 Reposition Equity as Foundational, Not Peripheral

Contemporary 20MN policy documents often present equity as an ancillary benefit rather than a guiding principle. This risks reinforcing spatial inequality, particularly where policies do not engage meaningfully with the structural drivers of exclusion. To strengthen equity outcomes, planning authorities and policymakers should:

- Introduce equity impact assessments at the outset of neighbourhood planning processes, ensuring risks of displacement or service gaps are identified and addressed.
- Institutionalise co-production approaches, enabling marginalised groups - including renters, ethnic minorities, and disabled residents - to shape the vision and delivery of 20MN strategies.
- Implement supportive policy tools such as rent controls, inclusive zoning, and tenure diversification to protect vulnerable populations from the unintended consequences of area-based regeneration.

6.5.2 Advance Sustainability Through a Justice-Oriented Lens

The study highlights that sustainability within 20MN discourse is frequently reduced to environmental and efficiency metrics, with limited engagement with questions of social justice or intergenerational equity. A shift towards "just sustainability" is necessary to fully realise the integrative goals of spatial planning. This requires:

- Redesigning sustainability indicators to include measures of wellbeing, affordability, and democratic participation alongside environmental performance.
- Supporting locally driven sustainability innovations, such as energy co-operatives, community gardens, or car-free schemes, that reflect the needs and knowledge of residents.
- Applying international frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals in a way that is context-sensitive and community-informed, rather than prescriptive.

6.5.3 Expand Resilience Beyond Technical Infrastructure

The resilience agenda embedded in contemporary planning largely emphasises physical robustness and continuity of infrastructure. While important, this framing tends to obscure the social and political dimensions of resilience. Policy and practice must instead prioritise:

- Enabling communities to develop adaptive capacities through social infrastructure, including spaces for gathering, mutual aid networks, and community learning hubs.
- Recognising resilience as inherently political, with uneven distributions of risk and capacity requiring redistributive interventions.
- Embedding resilience justice in strategic planning frameworks, ensuring that interventions address root causes of vulnerability and not just symptoms.

6.5.4 Engage Critically with Historical Precedents

This research has shown that many principles now rebranded under the 20MN model have long-standing historical origins. However, these precedents are often selectively invoked without critical reflection. To avoid replicating past limitations, practitioners should:

- Undertake structured historical reviews of planning models to surface unintended consequences and assumptions that shaped their outcomes.

- Engage critically with legacy models, acknowledging their role in both enabling and constraining inclusive urban development.
- Collaborate with researchers across disciplines, including urban historians, geographers, and sociologists, to foster deeper contextual knowledge in policy design.

6.5.5 Develop Transparent Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

Finally, a recurring challenge identified in this research is the absence of robust mechanisms to track the real-world impacts of 20MN implementation. Without such mechanisms, the risk of symbolic policy gestures remains high. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- Planning departments adopt comprehensive monitoring frameworks that combine quantitative data (e.g., accessibility indices, housing diversity) with qualitative insights (e.g., lived experience surveys, participatory evaluations).
- Evaluation findings be made publicly accessible and used to inform iterative improvements to planning strategies.
- Local authorities establish accountability mechanisms that incorporate resident feedback and enable course correction where necessary.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

As a desk-based, qualitative study, this dissertation was limited by its reliance on secondary literature and policy documents. While discourse analysis provided rich insight into planning narratives and ideological framings, it did not incorporate primary data from planners, policymakers, or communities affected by 20MN implementations. Future research incorporating interviews, participatory methods, or GIS-based spatial analysis would enhance the depth of this work (Flick, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Furthermore, as a discourse analysis, this research is limited by the interpretive nature of its methodology. While this approach allows for rich theoretical exploration of policy language and conceptual framing, it does not provide direct insight into how

these discourses are experienced or resisted by communities. Interpretive bias and researcher positionality may also shape the reading of texts, underscoring the need for triangulation with empirical data in future studies.

While international case studies were used to contextualise the 20MN's evolution, they were not examined in-depth. However, this limited review does not detract from the theoretical significance of the case studies. A more comprehensive case study approach would yield further insight into the dynamics of local adaptation and resistance, providing more balanced comparative insights.

6.7 Recommendations for Future Research

This research opens several avenues for future investigation:

- Comparative studies of neighbourhoods branded as 20MNs versus those that are not.
- Policy implementation research examining delivery, enforcement, and outcomes across jurisdictions.
- Critical analysis of planning institutions and how they shape the uptake of equity, sustainability, and resilience in practice.
- Participatory action research engaging communities in co-designing 20MN principles tailored to their own needs.

6.8 Final Reflections

The 20MN is a compelling idea. It promises a return to human-scale planning, supports climate action, and encourages healthier lifestyles. Yet this research has shown that without deep attention to context, power, and history, it risks becoming a technocratic solution that reproduces existing inequalities.

To realise the transformative potential of the 20MN, planners must engage critically with its underlying assumptions, confront its historical baggage, and resist the temptation to treat it as a neutral or universal model – there is no 'one-size fits all' scenario. It must be reimagined as a tool for advancing urban justice, being capable

of fostering not only liveable neighbourhoods, but inclusive, resilient, and equitable ones.

This demands a planning practice that is historically informed, politically conscious, and centred on the lived realities of diverse publics.

This research contributes to a growing but still underdeveloped body of literature that interrogates the normative assumptions embedded in 20MN discourse. By tracing the conceptual genealogies of equity, sustainability, and resilience, it draws attention to the need for deeper critical engagement with how these principles are deployed - often uncritically - in contemporary urban planning rhetoric.

Only through historically grounded, politically conscious, and participatory planning can the 20MN evolve beyond a compelling slogan into a transformative tool capable of shaping just urban futures, truly serving the plural publics it claims to benefit.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Ethical Approval for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Participants Checklist 1

University of Dundee

Ethical Approval for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Participants

CHECKLIST 1: Does your project require ethical approval from a School Research Ethics Committee (SREC)?

Section A: Definition of Research	YES	NO
A1. Is Your Project Research?	√	

If YES please proceed to Section B.

If NO please see guidance on requirements for registering and approval of clinical audit and service evaluation projects with NHS Tayside Clinical Governance.

Section B: Collection and Analysis of Data From or About Human Beings	YES	NO
B1. Does the project involve collecting primary data from, or about, living human beings (this includes data collected via interviews, surveys, social media or any other data containing identifiable information including the completion of consent forms)?		√
B2. Does the project involve analysing primary or unpublished data from, or about, living human beings?		√
B3. Does the project involve collecting or analysing primary or unpublished data about people who have recently died, other than data that are already publicly available?		√
B4. Does the project involve collecting or analysing primary or unpublished data about or from organisations or agencies of any kind, other than data that are already publicly available?		√

If you have answered YES to ANY of these questions your project will require ethical approval: please proceed to Section C. If you answered NO to ALL of the questions you will not require formal ethical approval.

If your project does not require ethical approval, and you wish to publish your findings, you may still wish to seek approval from the relevant SREC in order to meet journal requirements. If so, please proceed to Checklist 2.

Section C: Healthcare or Social Care Research 'In or Through the NHS'?[1]	YES	NO
C1. Does the project involve patients, their carers or volunteers in the NHS (in hospital, General Practitioners, community care)?		
C2. Does the project involve the investigation of the safety or efficacy of a medicine, foodstuff, medical device or placebo in humans?		
C3. Does the project involve access to collections of patient data?		

[1] For overseas healthcare research please refer to the Checklist 1 Guidance for Researchers

C4. Does the project involve use of any NHS resources including staff time, clinical support services (e.g. biochemistry, haematology) or NHS facilities (e.g. consulting rooms)?		
C5. Does the project involve research within prisons?		
C6. Does the project involve adults (aged 16 or over) with incapacity (i.e. lack of capacity to make decisions for themselves)?		
C7. Does the project involve social care research with NHS patients or a mix of NHS patients and social care users?		
C8. Does the project involve the use of tissue for genetic analysis/diagnosis or a therapeutic purpose (e.g. the use of DNA for analysis or RNA when used to provide information about DNA for research (section 45, Human Tissue Act))?		
C9. Will the project use anonymised tissue and associated data from NHS patients that is surplus to diagnostic and surgical requirements and will be obtained from a tissue bank (e.g. Tayside Biorepository)?		

If you answered YES to ANY of the questions C1 – C8 above your project is likely to require NHS REC approval or may fall under other approval schemes (e.g., Caldicott Guardian). You must therefore contact the Tayside Medical Science Centre (TASC) Research Governance Office (TASCgovernance@dundee.ac.uk) for advice. TASC will advise if the project should be designated as healthcare research and which research approvals are required.

If you ONLY answered YES to question C9, you should obtain ethical approval through the Tayside Biorepository (https://www.tissuebank.dundee.ac.uk/?page=contacts).

If you have answered YES to ANY questions in section B and NO to ALL questions in section C please proceed to Checklist 2 as you will require approval from a School SREC.

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