

Review

# Transformational Community Engagement in Urban Infrastructure Public-Private Partnerships: A Governmentality Approach to Create Social Value

Ulohomuno Eze Afieroho <sup>1</sup>, Yongkui Li <sup>2</sup>, Yilong Han <sup>2,\*</sup>, Mohsin Ali Soomro <sup>3</sup> and Mladen Radujkovic <sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Alma Mater Europaea ECM, Slovenska Ulica 17, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia<sup>2</sup> School of Economics and Management, Tongji University, Shanghai 200092, China<sup>3</sup> Department of Building and Architectural Engineering, Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science & Technology, Sindh 67450, Pakistan

\* Correspondence: yilong.han@tongji.edu.cn

**Abstract:** Based on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, this paper overcomes the atomistic view of external stakeholder engagement research to examine the specific conditions under which community engagement in urban infrastructure public-private partnerships (PPPs) can be transformational and create social value with and for communities. In particular, it shows that a transformational approach to community engagement is, in practice, closer to a form of governance that emphasizes involved stakeholders' responsibility. It traces this line of argument through the literature and practice of social enterprises and other hybrid collaborations in the private sector. Conceptually, it contributes to a political and transformational understanding of community engagement within the context of public-private partnerships. First, by proposing a "governmentality analytical framework" for understanding and uncovering the often purposefully concealed dynamic power relations in the engagement process between the state, communities, and private investors. Second, by proposing a set of guiding principles on how to: empower communities to be organized; reconfigure the institutional environment to offer incentives and reliability; and design public-private partnerships as hybrid organizations capable of including other actors, such as non-governmental organizations.

**Keywords:** social value; transformational engagement; public-private partnerships; urban infrastructure



**Citation:** Afieroho, U.E.; Li, Y.; Han, Y.; Soomro, M.A.; Radujkovic, M. Transformational Community Engagement in Urban Infrastructure Public-Private Partnerships: A Governmentality Approach to Create Social Value. *Buildings* **2023**, *13*, 1225. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings13051225>

Academic Editor: Becky P.Y. Loo

Received: 15 February 2023

Revised: 4 April 2023

Accepted: 21 April 2023

Published: 6 May 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Urban infrastructure, such as renewable energy, roads, water supply, and drainage systems, is essentially built to make cities more efficient and has undeniable effects on the quality of life of people and the overall well-being of society [1–3]. This has resulted in a growing interest in the social value or social dimension of urban infrastructure [4–7], particularly when delivered through public-private partnerships (PPPs) [8,9]. PPPs are long-term contracts or agreements through which multiple parties including, but not limited to, the government, private sector partners, and civil society organizations, build infrastructure and provide associated services [8,10–12].

In order to attain and sustain the social value associated with PPPs, the affected community's needs, concerns, and interests need to be understood, identified, and integrated into an urban infrastructure investment decision, design, construction, and operation [13]. Bowen and his co-authors [14] described this type of community engagement as transformational community engagement (TCE).

TCE is characterized by "joint learning and sensemaking, joint management of projects with communities, and community leadership in decision-making" [14] (p. 305). This can therefore generate innovative solutions to societal challenges through shared ownership of the problem. However, while TCE might seem like a straightforward process, especially in manufacturing where rapid prototyping is possible, it does not sit well with conventional

project management, engineering, and public management traditions (which happen to be the bedrock of infrastructure PPPs). This is because the very idea of TCE speaks for a true paradigm shift from a top-down approach to that of a bottom-up approach to infrastructure planning. In addition, it requires changing and reinventing institutions, methods of service delivery, and a form of organization that can combine different societal logics (e.g., society, government, and private sector) to solve societal problems. Rather than the use of incentives, such as giving back to society or coercion, which happen to be the antithesis of multiple stakeholder collaboration [9,15].

Given these complexities, government officials and other urban actors often find this a fraught process, and when they do, it is more of a rhetorical one [16]. As a result, prevailing community engagement practices tend to follow a transactional approach rooted in reductionism [17], ignoring the institutional context and web of power relations in an urban space that enables and constrains all actors [18]. Following this, community engagement is centered on giving back to the community, used as a means of dealing with unanticipated resistance from the local community during the project delivery phase [14], and as a means of “selling (PPP) projects to the public rather than creating social value” [16] (p. 58).

Such initiatives and programs are inadequate for gaining community support, addressing local community needs, and generating social value for communities [14,19]. Arguably, evidence-based policies and regulations that provide urban actors with the guidance and parameters for a transformational approach to community engagement aimed at social value creation are lacking [20,21]. Therefore, this paper aims to develop a framework to solve this dilemma. Thus, we pose the following research question: what are the principles that can guide urban actors to develop a transformational community engagement (TCE) policy effective for social value creation in urban infrastructure PPPs?

To address this question, we adopted a problematizing review [22], guided by the theoretical lens of “governmentality” [23], to synthesize and integrate knowledge from diverse disciplines [24]. In approaching TCE as governmentality, we recognized the “steering role” of the state or government and argued for an analytical framework that can sufficiently uncover the underlying power relations that shape the depth of community engagement in a specific context and case.

Key to our paper is the developed “governmentality analytical framework” and a set of questions that could help professionals and researchers unearth this power relationship and make it productive. This, we believe, is the starting point for organizing transformational community engagement that can lead to social value creation. The rest of the paper’s structure follows this introduction section, beginning with a literature review focusing on the growing concern for social value and community engagement in urban infrastructure. Then, the research methodology used to answer the research question is explained in Section 3. Then, we present our findings (the three key constructs and theoretical lens adopted in developing the proposed framework), followed by our discussion and contribution section (Section 6). Finally, we presented our conclusion and made suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Social Value of Urban Infrastructures

Since the launch of the United Kingdom’s Social Value Act in 2012 [6], there has been a growing interest among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the additional social value an infrastructure asset can create for the community [6]. Therefore, actors in the infrastructure sector are increasingly using social values to underpin the business case for the delivery of sustainable and inclusive infrastructure PPPs and the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [25].

Yet, the concept is ambiguous because it is used interchangeably with terms such as social benefit, social impact, and social outcomes [4,6]. All these add to the confusion about what it means [4]. However, in the context of infrastructure, it refers to the improved quality of life resulting from the interaction of people, places, and built assets [2,4,6]. As

stated in [13], social value is created when urban infrastructures are planned, built, and operated to support the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the people and businesses who use the constructed asset, as well as those impacted by the asset.

These positive impacts can range from job creation, noise reduction, improved air quality, resilience to man-made and natural disasters, social inclusion, etc. [7]. Nevertheless, this is only one piece of the puzzle, even though it is an important industry practice that requires development. This is because what social value means for a project and how to create it within the local community remains one of the most difficult challenges faced by industry practitioners [6,26].

For instance, the outcomes that improve the quality of life and how to deliver them will look different in various contexts. Therefore, one of the most important contextual factors is who will be affected and what their needs are, since making a decision on who will be affected by a project is conducted by drawing a line around a particular relevant area or location [13]. This assertion suggests that, even though social value is holistic in scope, it also focuses on people, is highly dependent on context, and is inherently local to a particular area. Therefore, its definition, in the context of urban infrastructure, should include an identified group of people impacted by a project and a set of agreed-upon outcomes that will improve these people's quality of life.

## 2.2. Interdependency of Community Engagement and Social Value

The extensive literature on stakeholder engagement practices in infrastructure PPPs has paid attention to local communities' engagement as an opportunity to gain community support, manage social risk, and create social value [12,27]. In creating social value, the affected community's needs, concerns, and interests need to be identified and integrated into the urban infrastructure's investment decision. This also needs to be communicated and enhanced throughout the infrastructure life cycle [13].

Yet, despite the logic of community engagement being at the center of social value creation in practice, community engagement is rarely associated with transformational or co-creation conceptions of participatory planning [19]. Dominant community engagement practices are often transactional with a pre-existing agenda and without the community—"a group of people, organizations, or businesses whose relationships are tied to a common geographical location, have a common interest, and share values" [28] (p. 43), taking a collaborative role in framing problems and creating solutions [14]. The transactional approach to community engagement is used as a means of dealing with unanticipated resistance from the local community during the project delivery phase [14]. So, it is more like a trust-building exercise that helps reduce conflict and manage reputational issues. Hence, there is silence about the co-creation of value in the engagement process [29]. The transactional approach to community engagement also failed to understand and address the underlying tension between community goals and other stakeholders' goals [29], the embeddedness of community engagement in the broader institutional context, and the sociopolitical dynamics of infrastructure PPPs [18]. Perhaps they tried to avoid the greater rigor of stakeholder analysis, which could have unpacked "finely grained narratives about the actual communities" [30] (p. 40). Eskerod and Larsen [31] have attributed this to the fact that infrastructure and project management researchers tend to draw on a reductionist approach to define, categorize, and analyze stakeholders, mainly by their generic economic functions or groupings—external, secondary, and non-market stakeholders.

This is because local communities are classified as external or secondary stakeholders in most research. This approach ignores the community's differing perceptions, behaviors, needs, and expectations [32]. Additionally, the strengths and opportunities of engaging the local community are often underestimated in infrastructure stakeholder engagement practices [7]. As a result, in practice, the local communities have largely been granted a subordinate role in infrastructure project stakeholder management, despite being the end-users of the asset. As suggested by Eskerod and Huemann [17] (p. 39), "a paradigm shift in the foundational values of project stakeholder management" is required to address

the pressing needs of local communities and achieve sustainable development. This falls in line with the earlier works by [30] that challenged the notion of communities being seen as passive “recipients” and thus advocated for a form of community engagement in which community members are recognized as “agents” of change with local and relevant knowledge that the projects can benefit from.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research is conceptual and is triggered by the authors’ reflection over time on real-life problems, such as why the local community is not engaged as a partner with a vested interest, as with other stakeholders, in infrastructure PPPs. Given that, they are the end-users and eventually pay for the service, either directly or indirectly through user fees or taxes, respectively. Based on our lived experience and evidence from the literature and practice of social enterprises and other hybrid collaborations in the private sector, we took a relational and co-creationist stand to frame TCE in the context of urban infrastructure PPPs as a policy and strategic decision to orchestrate multiple actors to create social value rather than a moral obligation to give back to the local community. Such a view, we acknowledge, challenges the unintentional or determined “accepted yet unhelpful assumptions” [33] (p. 60) that underpin the current transactional approach to community engagement.

These assumptions, we observed, are rooted in the reductionist conventional project management, engineering, and public management traditions (which are the bedrock of infrastructure PPPs). Therefore, our goal is best executed through a problematizing review [22], supported by research from multiple disciplines and real-world experience [34], rather than formulating, identifying, and filling up gaps in the existing literature. Thus, adopting Alvesson and Sandberg’s [22] three-level approach (although we interchanged the second and third steps), in our data gathering and analysis, we integrated previously developed concepts and knowledge from diverse disciplines [33,34] into a framework or model.

First, based on our experience, we identified a set of foundational literature across social enterprise, infrastructure project management, public management, and community engagement. These papers form our “starter set”. We carefully read this literature and deductively identified three constructs related to engaging local communities to create social value. The three identified constructs become the focus of our data gathering and analysis in the second stage. During the second stage, our data gathering and analysis focused on identifying and reviewing classic literature for each of the three constructs identified in the first stage, as tabulated in Table 1. Finally, we adopted a backward and forward snowball approach [28], where we explored papers referenced by our classics set and papers citing papers from our classics set using Google Scholar.

**Table 1.** Key constructs or conditions in the governmentality framework for TCE.

| Starter Sets | Theme Identified   | Source  | Theme Adopted                                      | Analytical Focus  |
|--------------|--|---------|--|---|
|              | The community should be organized or empowered   | [35,36] | The community as a definitive stakeholder          | Mental mode or shared beliefs that influence the subjective perception of communities   |
| [8,14,16]    | An enabling institutional environment  | [37,38] | The centrality of national institution environment | How far does the institutional environment in a country, composed of its political, judicial, international, and regulatory institutions, affect community engagement |
|              | A hybrid form of organizing with an emphasis on social value combined with the pursuit of economic value | [39]    | Urban infrastructure PPPs as hybrid organizations  | How to obtain the governance structure right; who is in and who is out and when   |

Our data collection and analysis approach allowed us to read a limited set of carefully selected texts, challenge their interpretations by considering alternative perspectives and sources of inspiration, work with doubt, and recognize intuition while aiming for insight [22]. Our analysis followed an iterative process between stages and within stages. In reading the selected literature, we moved back and forth, focusing on what the literature says, what we know from our practical experience, and what we wanted to know about the research question and theoretical point of interest [34].

#### 4. Defining the Key Construct of the Governmentality Framework for TCE

As stated in Section 1, evidence-based community engagement approaches in urban infrastructure development are often a result of policy and regulation that provide urban actors with the guidance and parameters for engaging communities in social value creation [6,26,27]. After reading and analyzing the data sets as outlined in Section 3, we identified three constructs, which we described as the framework conditions. Table 1 summarizes the constructs adopted in developing the model, which are elaborated in the following sections.

##### 4.1. Condition 1: Organised and Enabled Community Stakeholders

Transformational community engagement calls for a paradigm shift in how urban actors (the private and public sectors) approach their relationships with community stakeholders. This revolves around the community's real opportunity, capacity, and willingness to engage with the private and public sectors to create and enhance social value. In addition, it requires urban actors to see the community as a definitive stakeholder, "a well-informed group of people bound by a sense of community to fulfill their unmet needs through collaboration" [40] (p. 189). This requires an understanding of the societal norms, values, religion, etc. that influence the subjective perception of communities and their attitudes in a given situation.

Every community has a prevailing structure that continuously shapes its behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes in a particular environment [41]. These prevailing structures are the shared beliefs, customs, and traditions that exist in a certain society [37]. The mental model developed from the shared beliefs becomes the basis for ascribing their interpretation of the value in a given situation, hence how they express their interests and expectations [41]. The distinction between government institutions and those of the community offers a clue as to how communities could be understood, approached, and engaged. It also offers a clue as to how the community needs to be recognized in creating spaces for TCE.

This is important for an urban infrastructure PPP in terms of acquiring community support and creating social value because, although shared beliefs, norms, etc. are slow to change, they "have a lasting grip on the way a society conducts itself" [38] (p. 597). The crucial role of social norms and how societies seek to overcome contracting and collective action that would have hindered their development have been extensively studied in the social sciences. For instance, Ostrom and Ahn [36] have argued that shared beliefs and norms in a community do affect their assets, capabilities, and willingness to engage or partner with external groups to solve a collective problem. In this sense, a community can become organized or form a meaningful stakeholder group based on "values, and goals in the context of a socioeconomic issue" [42] (p. 42). As a meaningful social group, they can take collective action in support or opposition of a PPP in a given situation.

Thus, we argued that communities are organized (or can be empowered to become organized) and can become significant and reliable stakeholders who can offer meaningful collaboration towards social value creation through their dense networks of relationships, civic engagement and participation, local identity, and norms of interpersonal trust, including the reciprocity that opens opportunities for various forms of participation and collective action [35,36].

Several empirical studies have demonstrated how communities have collaborated with governments and non-governmental organizations in solving societal problems, such as the building of sustainable and inclusive infrastructure [43–45]. Despite generally opposing top-down infrastructure PPP models, evidence from these case studies revealed increasingly well-organized, committed, and engaging communities around the world. Notwithstanding, in practice, all communities (whether or not organized) must operate within the state’s boundaries [46]. In addition, urban infrastructure PPPs involve multiple stakeholders within and outside the community with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests, influencing how effectively and efficiently a PPP can engage a community to create social value [28,46]. In other words, the institutional environment matters.

#### *4.2. Condition 2: The Centrality of the National Institutional Environment*

According to North [37], institutions are the policies, legal frameworks, and codes of conduct that create order and reduce uncertainty in a society. Institutions increase the benefits of cooperative solutions to problems and create an enabling environment for realizing potential gains from the transactions and interactions within an environment [46]. When the institutional frameworks and institutions necessary to support seamless social-economical transactions within a context are absent, weak, or deficient, it can trigger higher transaction costs for resources and engagement [47] and reduce the likelihood of delivering social value [46]. Even when the institutions are well established, as in the case of most developed countries, they are often deeply hierarchical institutions with very strong state power. This, we contend, explains the failure or difficulty of innovation and transformational engagement, particularly in the context of urban infrastructures, where the national institutional environments explicitly or implicitly influence how PPPs are structured and governed.

Keller and Virág argued that a country’s institutional arrangements “offer constraints and opportunities that are always subject to interpretation and contestation by actors” [48] (p. 3). For instance, in most developing countries, the national government defines the rules of the game. In contrast, urban infrastructure is built, managed, and governed by sub-national governments in most countries. Yet, the sub-national governments are often curtailed by material, constitutional, and institutional factors connected to their position in the national political system’s hierarchy [48]. Under this condition, community engagement could be expensive, leading to social disorder and conflict and project delays [49].

As a result, PPP promoters and even public authorities are skeptical about the value of involving the community in PPP investment and project decisions. Consequently, for an urban infrastructure PPP to deliver social value in addition to economic value, the institutional context (political, legal, and regulatory) must be configured to recognize the need for collaboration between the local community, private sector, and public sector. This must be aligned with the country’s development goals and vision for a given urban area.

Addressing these complexities would require significant government intentionality. In other words, national governments need to play a direction-setting role through a mix of supportive policies, standards, and regulations and incentive mechanisms that attract private sector participation and community involvement [48]. However, prevailing infrastructure PPPs, stakeholder engagement practices, and research tend to erroneously and implicitly assume that community engagement happens only at the operational level (the project and infrastructure asset), ignoring the centrality of national institutions in the process. Although an adequate institutional setting is not sufficient to ensure transformational community engagement, it is certainly necessary.

#### *4.3. Condition 3: Urban Infrastructures PPPs as Hybrid Organizations*

Urban infrastructures PPPs generally involve multiple stakeholders from within and outside the community with diverse and, sometimes, conflicting interests, influencing how effectively and efficiently the PPP can engage the community to create social value. Nevertheless, decision-making within urban infrastructure PPPs is often conducted in

a highly contested space, thus catching up with complex challenges. In addition, social value is highly contextual and inherently local, and its creation is a long-term process that requires ongoing negotiation with the community wherein the infrastructure is being built [6,18,26].

These challenges raise questions about the governance of urban infrastructure PPPs. Such questions reflect the underlying tension in a joint value-creating engagement process where multiple actors, including the community, can collaborate to plan, finance, build, and operate an urban infrastructure that delivers social value. Such collaborations must respect the community and institutions, and their partnership design must reflect this [49]. So, the PPPs that create social value will require the involvement of communities [50], who are the beneficiaries of the constructed asset, even though engaging directly with them may complicate the governance and coordination of the multiple actors and institutions involved in an urban infrastructure PPP [27,49].

Our conceptual findings show that addressing this challenge calls for the balancing of partnership efficiency and beneficiary integration through a hybrid form of governance [39]. This form of governance “transcends the borders of traditional sectors, policy domains and jurisdictional levels by combining different contradicting mechanisms (state, market, networks and self-governance) in new and innovative ways that foster co-production between different societal actors” [51] (pp. 69–70). Following this call, we proposed, in line with Battilana and Lee [39], that the success of urban infrastructure PPP lies in their hybridity, which enables them to combine multiple societal logics in creating value for all parties, including the community. Still, the current purchaser (government) provider (private sector) model, adopted in PPP projects, excludes the community from their partnership, thus limiting community engagement to that of regulatory compliance, philanthropy, or transactional.

Designed as a hybrid organization, the PPP can be structured to include other government agencies and non-profit organizations to provide services to communities. For example, an education PPP can partner with a non-profit organization or a religious organization to ensure that low-income students have access to education. A PPP can also leverage civic crowdfunding (see [45]) to gain community support and secure funding for infrastructure such as a renewable energy project [52] and waste management [27].

In this sense, they can earn trust and legitimacy to collaborate with multiple actors, including communities, and create value, not through business or public interests alone but through their distinct forms of hybrid governance [53] and business model that is market-oriented and mission-centered on social value creation [54,55]. For instance, social initiatives such as nature-based design, the provision of jobs for locals, mainstreaming gender and climate change, and addressing health issues could be factored into the delivery model and contract through appropriate sharing of risk and responsibilities between all actors according to their expertise.

## 5. Theoretical Underpinning: Governmentality

Transformational community engagement as conceptualized and explained throughout this study followed Bowen and his co-authors argument that “conventional wisdom suggests that community engagement” should move from “managing responses to particular issues, to co-creating solutions to social challenges” [14] (p. 307) and emerging PPP research and practice that have emphasized collaborative or relational approaches to stakeholder engagement, particularly when used to address societal challenges [49,52]. This is because addressing societal challenges such as social value creation necessitates engaging with impacted communities in a multi-stakeholder collaborative setting [56]. The authors went further to state that the involvement and participation of communities or people in a multiple stakeholder collaboration “makes the existing cooperation more diverse and realistic, thus considering the social aspect, which brings it closer to the complexity of real urban ecosystems”. In this context, the roles of the public, private, and people become those of facilitator, provider, and end-user, respectively [56].

As a result, such engagement is neither governed by a high level of monitoring nor by a price or contract mechanism alone. Rather, it is characterized by a situation in which complementary trust and reciprocity lead to interdependent relationships, collaboration, and investment sharing toward problem solving. Therefore, as a facilitator in the engagement process, the state needs to govern from a distance through appropriate rationalities and technologies of government. This shared some similarities with the Foucauldian concept of governmentality [23].

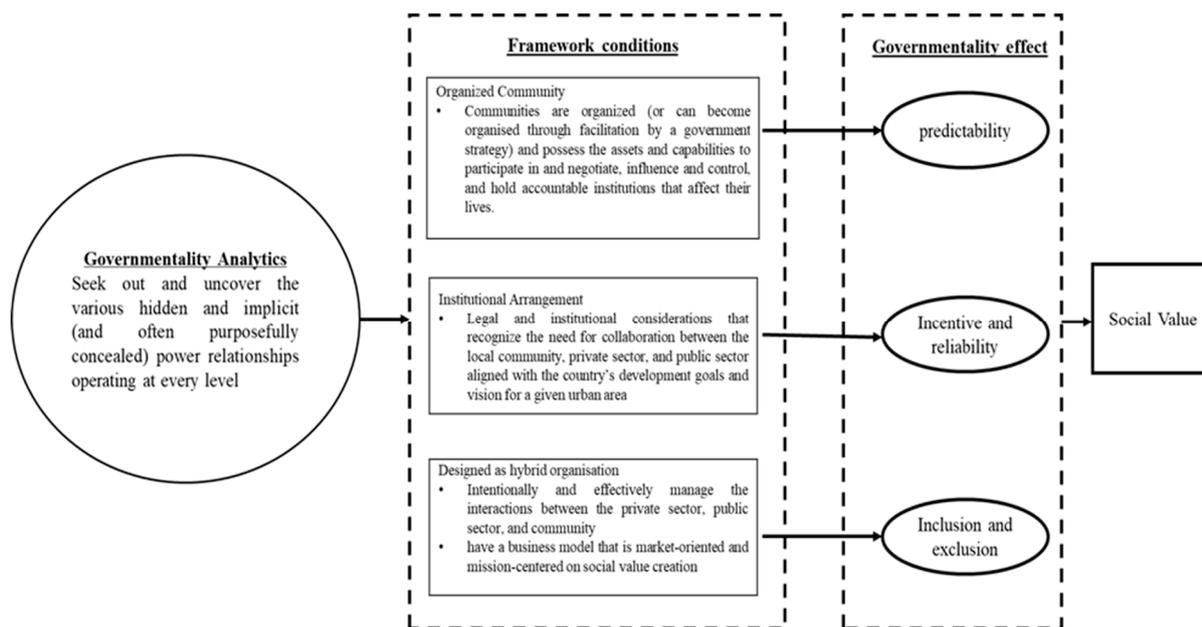
Governmentality is generally associated with the willing participation of the governed or subjects. The literature on governmentality asks: “by what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies, and vocabulary are authority constituted and rule accomplished? or give effect to governmental ambitions” [57] (p. 175), such as social value creation in urban infrastructure PPPs. These strategies and techniques through which different forms of government seek to enact policies and programs of government are generally referred to as “technologies of government”. In Foucauldian analysis of government, the technologies of government used to engage with the world always embody some form of truth or underlying rationality. Rationalities define the field to be governed, the agencies involved in governing it, the means used, and the ends to be achieved [23,57].

Viewed from this perspective, social value can be described as “government rationality”—a lens through which they represent, assess, and intervene in the building of urban infrastructures that create value for all impacted communities through PPPs. Following this perspective, we conceptualized TCE as technologies of government [23] used to re-imagine and reconfigure institutions and shape understanding and beliefs to be able to enroll a wider range of government institutions, impacted communities, private sector partners and intermediaries, including non-governmental organizations, and international organizations as willing actors in building urban infrastructures that create social value.

Thus, our concept of TCE as governmentality finds its concrete expression in the rationalities and technologies of government, which are “inextricably interconnected and co-produce one another” [58] (p. 11). Rationalities underpin government programs, and the technologies of government put rationalities into practice since they are used to implementing government programs. In addition, the subjects, or the governed, in the lens of governmentality are “active subjects”. Viewed from this perspective, active subjects can shape and influence the process of conduct, which could lead to “counter conduct”. In this context, “counter-conduct” did not necessarily require a rejection of government in general; “rather, the emergence of counter-conduct signals ‘a perpetual question’, found in the very ‘pre-occupation’ about the way to govern and the search for ways to govern” [59] (p. 4).

Following this view, Flohr [60] argued that if governmentality defines the space into which invited actors are governed, then counter-conduct is about the subject’s effort to re-define the fields of possible action. Thus, resistance itself could be studied from a governmentality perspective. In the context of urban infrastructure PPP, the “governed space” created can be rife with both visible and invisible power/knowledge relations, values, and norms. From this perspective, the realization of a TCE policy is not always linear. It faces resistance from the subjects, which gives rise to revisions and alterations of the initial ideas and knowledge that launched it (the TCE policy).

Therefore, we argued that the governmentality approach to TCE, as illustrated in our framework in Figure 1, offers a better nuance for understanding and capturing the practical expression of power (visible and invisible) operating at the level of rationalities and technologies of government that influence domination and resistance in a country’s urban space.



**Figure 1.** Governmentality framework for transformational community engagement.

Figure 1 connects the three constructs identified in Section 4 as the conditions for transformational community engagement aimed at creating social value in urban infrastructure PPPs in a country. In applying the framework to facilitate or organize a transformational approach to community engagement, government (policy makers) should first seek out and uncover the various hidden and implicit (and often purposefully concealed) power relations between government, private investors, and citizens that influence domination and resistance in a country's urban space, and then purposefully alter or reconfigure the broader institutional context through appropriate governmental technologies, strategies, or programs to:

- Empower, organize, and enable communities to become definitive stakeholders.
- Enable national institutions to play a direction-setting role through a mix of supportive policies, standards, regulations and incentive mechanisms that attract private sector participation and community involvement in urban infrastructure development.
- Frame urban infrastructure PPPs as hybrid organizations with a business model that is market-oriented but mission-centred on social value creation within a defined urban area.

Therefore, we argued that the governmentality approach to TCE, as illustrated in our framework in Figure 1, offers a better nuance for understanding and capturing the power relations between government, private investors and citizens, and facilitating transformational community engagement within a country urban space.

## 6. Discussion

Given that the governance of urban infrastructure PPPs is a highly contested space with a wide range of actors and institutions, and community engagement is a subset of PPP stakeholder engagement, how these multiple actors interact is critical to the co-creation of social value within the community. Second, the rhetoric, framed around the concept of “less state involvement” in urban infrastructure PPPs, does not work—especially when considering their transformational impact on society. This is because infrastructure is “clearly and almost without exception, led by the state and often financed by the state” [61] (p. 551), and in a PPP, the state is responsible for community engagement. Therefore, policymakers and urban actors need to realize that the directional setting role of the state is critical to the dialectical interaction between the multiple stakeholders.

The governmentality approach to TCE, unlike prevailing transactional approach, recognized the directional setting or steering role of the state in creating an enabling environment for meaningful engagement within the broader institutional context. Yet, TCE does not depend on contracts, tight monitoring, or control in the traditional sense of a “strong government”. It depends on the ability of the national government to mobilize relevant and involved actors into a network, in a manner that enables them to share responsibility for the problem, and together develop a process for co-creating social value throughout the infrastructure life cycle. In other words, the state uses its actions to stimulate the actions of others to collaborate with impacted communities. Viewed from this perspective, TCE is a means, strategy, and technique of government used to “weave domination and subjectivation”, into institutional arrangements “while paying attention to the knowledgeability and capability of all actors and institutions involved” [62] (p. 11). This is without reverting too much to hierarchical forms of governance [63]; through the design of a more collective and coherent practical consciousness within that will make sense [64] from how: projects and partners to implement them are chosen, different institutions and actors are organized and connected, and the processes, tools, norms, and incentives mechanisms within which the multiple partners operate and connect to outside actors.

Building on the first insight discussed above, the starting point for designing an effective TCE policy is the problematization or analytics of government. That is, identifying and uncovering the various covert and overt power relationships operating at every level and direction of our framework conditions in “specific situations (a country’s urban space) in which the activity of governing comes to be called into question” [23]. In other words, policymakers need to empirically investigate the various “everyday practices” of governing and the rationalities of resistance, paying particular attention to how beliefs underpin the attitudes, desires, and actions of the subjects (communities, non-governmental actors).

To inquire into the importance of TCE for creating social value in this manner is to problematize and understand the ‘practice’ within which it exists. For instance, what is built, what is not built, how PPPs are structured, how the various levels of government interact, how the community is engaged, and how institutions are arranged and governed. These are fundamental social-political questions that can guide urban actors to fish out the complex power/knowledge relations and interconnectedness in a country’s urban space. In particular, the governmentality approach to TCE draws attention to how a country’s culture, political and economic system, and “steering ability” of the state or government can shape the effectiveness and depth of community engagement. Following this perspective, an effective governmentality analysis of the TCE aimed at creating social value needs to address the following non-exclusive list of questions:

1. What are the features and dimensions of the embedded institutions, such as shared beliefs, societal norms, and values? How do these embedded institutions shape involved actors (communities, private sector partners, etc.) attitudes, perceptions, and willingness to participate in community engagement and collaborate to create social value?
2. What is the general nature of a country’s institutional environment (property rights, political and administrative systems, sector legislation) and how does this shape actors’ openness and motivation to engage with communities in a transformational manner?
3. What are the dominant policy regimes (national and sub-national) in a country’s urban space? How do they influence or shape the governance of urban infrastructures? What are their origins? How open are they to change?
4. How does the state steer multiple actors to deliver urban infrastructure and other related public services?

This analysis can provide useful insights for policymakers and researchers to develop community engagement policies and strategies that are grounded in the social, political, and institutional characteristics of a country. The goal of the government in this context is to enable a dedicated and intentional process at the “policy level”, in which social values are articulated, and the “operational level”, in which those values are enhanced and created

to empower all the relevant stakeholders. The purpose of a PPP, therefore, is to link these dimensions in such a way that the infrastructure creates social value for the community alongside economic value for the promoters of PPPs.

Taken together, our paper contributed to the PPP stakeholder engagement literature by addressing the role played by agency (state, community, and private sector), autonomy, interdependency, and the broader institutional context in the shaping of governance networks toward a pre-defined goal. Thus, our paper opens a space for governmentality through community engagement [23] aimed at transforming societies especially urban areas through urban infrastructure investments that generate social value [65,66], because “play a fundamental role in the provision of essential services, such as transport, communication, and health care, to support the basic livelihood of residents” [67] (p.1). Community engagement in this sense is used to structure the field of possible action, which shapes the conduct of subjects to align with the objectives of “advanced liberal” governments, which in this case is social value creation with and for communities.

Nevertheless, government must be intentional in deliberately altering or reconfiguring institutions to transform the relations between the state (government), society (communities), and market (private firms) in the context of urban infrastructure development PPP for this framework to be successful. For instance, local content policies can be used to empower underserved community groups to become significant and reliable stakeholders who can offer meaningful collaboration towards social value creation through their knowledge.

## 7. Conclusions

Although various government and multilateral organizations have introduced several social value principles, toolkits, and guidelines, there is still little theoretical and practical guidance on how governments can organize or facilitate a transformational approach to community engagement aimed at creating social value with and for communities [20,49]. As a result, in practice, a transformational approach to community engagement is rarely practiced in urban infrastructure PPPs [20]. In this conceptual paper, we build on Foucauldian governmentality to argue that TCE in the context of urban infrastructure PPP is an art of government or technologies of government to steer multiple actors to engage with communities in a transformational manner to co-create social value with and for the communities wherein infrastructure is built or impacted by infrastructure.

This differs from the dominant transactional approach to community engagement, which is centered on giving back to communities. While deeper form of engagement with communities in PPPs can be complex because communities are a disparate group of people not bound to the PPP contract, we argued that by assuming a “steering role” the state could reduce this complexity by designing PPPs as hybrid organizations, empowering communities to collaborate through techniques such as crowdfunding, and creating enabling institutions, processes, and incentives to facilitate transformational engagement and social value creation.

Based on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, this paper presents a framework that resonates with project stakeholder engagement [16,17,19] and social sustainability [19] research that seeks to overcome the atomistic view of external stakeholder engagement research to examine the specific conditions under which community engagement in urban infrastructure public-private partnerships [8,11,16,20] can be transformational and aimed at creating social value for communities [1,2,14]. In this regard, our paper adds to and offers relevant contribution to the literature that helps to reconcile the social value agenda with the field of urban infrastructure PPP, which are often at odds in light of the latter’s tendency to ignore the directional setting or steering role of the state in creating an enabling environment for meaningful engagement within the broader institutional context [49,50,52,56,64,65].

However, this framework requires further empirical work. At present, it solely draws on inputs identified in the literature on PPPs, project management, community development (in healthcare and energy/climate), and sustainability, as well as on systematic logical deductions.

Therefore, the theoretical basis underlined in this paper initiates a wider reflection on the empirical testing of the framework to help further validate the findings presented in this paper. By doing so, we opened an arena for entering specific local experiences and verifying models across the application area. The model can be further verified in specific environments, thereby leading to a well-defined and tested holistic model for community engagement policy and practice in the field of infrastructure PPP and the broader stakeholder engagement field.

In addition to the analytics question listed in Section 6, a further research question could be: under what form of organization can local communities be members of a PPP organization? Additionally, for a collaboration that will have a transformative impact, as envisaged in this study, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the complexity, risks, and opportunities when a community becomes both a primary (investor) and a secondary stakeholder. Nevertheless, this paper tends to initiate a prospective shift towards the provision of opportunities. This is expected to enhance knowledge of social value, community engagement, urban infrastructure, and the courage to adopt a new mindset in sustainable and inclusive infrastructure research, practice, and policymaking that is centered around the communities that happen to be the end-users of infrastructure assets.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, U.E.A. and Y.H.; methodology, U.E.A. and Y.H.; formal analysis, U.E.A.; resources, U.E.A., Y.L. and Y.H.; writing—original draft preparation, U.E.A.; writing—review and editing, U.E.A., Y.L., Y.H., M.A.S. and M.R.; visualization, U.E.A. and Y.H.; funding acquisition, Y.L. and Y.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This material is based in part upon work supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China under Grant No. 72001160, the National Social Science Fund of China under Grant Nos. 19VVDL001 and 18ZDA043, and the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities under Grant No. 22120220296.

**Data Availability Statement:** Some or all data, models, or codes that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors are grateful to the reviewers, whose insightful comments and helpful suggestions significantly contributed to improving this paper.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Cui, Y.; Yu, S. Social benefit of urban infrastructure: An empirical analysis of four Chinese autonomous municipalities. *Util. Policy* **2019**, *58*, 16–26. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
2. Cidik, M. Project-managing the social value of built assets: A call for a focus on value manifestation. In Proceedings of the 36th Annual ARCOM Conference, Virtual, 7–8 September 2020; Volume 36, pp. 35–44.
3. Jiang, W.; Lei, J.; Sang, M.; Wang, Y.; Ye, K. A Conceptual Framework for Modeling Social Risk Tolerance for PPP Projects: An Empirical Case of China. *Buildings* **2021**, *11*, 531. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
4. Raiden, A.; King, A. Social value, organisational learning, and the sustainable development goals in the built environment. *Resour. Conserv. Recycl.* **2021**, *172*, 105663. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
5. Montalbán-Domingo, L.; García-Segura, T.; Sanz-Benlloch, M.A.; Pellicer, E. Social sustainability in delivery and procurement of public construction contracts. *J. Manag. Eng.* **2019**, *35*, 04018065. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
6. Mulholland, C.; Chan, P.W.; Canning, K.; Ejohwomu, O.A. Social value for whom, by whom and when? Managing stakeholder dynamics in a UK megaproject. *Proc. Inst. Civ. Eng.-Manag. Procure. Law* **2020**, *173*, 75–86. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
7. Fitton, S.; Moncaster, A. Social value, infrastructure and stakeholder engagement: A complex triangle. *Proc. Inst. Civ. Eng.—Eng. Sustain.* **2021**, *175*, 194–201. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
8. Cui, C.; Liu, Y.; Hope, A.; Wang, J. Review of studies on the public–private partnerships (PPP) for infrastructure projects. *Int. J. Proj. Manag.* **2018**, *36*, 773–794. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
9. Medimagh, S.; Triki, A. The PPP performance based on the co-creation with customers. *Built Environ. Proj. Asset Manag.* **2019**, *9*, 642–654. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
10. Wang, H.; Xiong, W.; Wu, G.; Zhu, D. Public–private partnership in Public Administration discipline: A literature review. *Public Manag. Rev.* **2018**, *20*, 293–316. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

11. Delhi, V.S.K.; Mahalingam, A. Relating institutions and governance strategies to project outcomes: Study on public–private partnerships in infrastructure projects in India. *J. Manag. Eng.* **2020**, *36*, 04020076. [CrossRef]
12. Li, X.; Yuan, J.; Liu, X.; Ke, Y.; Jia, S. Identifying Critical Influencing Factors of the Value Creation of Urban Rail Transit PPP Projects in China. *Buildings* **2022**, *12*, 1080. [CrossRef]
13. UKGBC. Framework for Defining Social Value. 2021. Available online: <https://ukgbc.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/05144157/Framework-for-Defining-Social-Value.pdf> (accessed on 15 November 2022).
14. Bowen, F.; Newenham-Kahindi, A.; Herremans, I. When suits meet roots: The antecedents and consequences of community engagement strategy. *J. Bus. Ethics* **2010**, *95*, 297–318. [CrossRef]
15. Meuleman, L. The cultural dimension of metagovernance: Why governance doctrines may fail. *Public Organ. Rev.* **2010**, *10*, 49–70. [CrossRef]
16. Boyer, E.J.; Van Slyke, D.M.; Rogers, J.D. An empirical examination of public involvement in public-private partnerships: Qualifying the benefits of public involvement in PPPs. *J. Public Adm. Res. Theory* **2016**, *26*, 45–61. [CrossRef]
17. Eskerod, P.; Huemann, M. Sustainable development and project stakeholder management: What standards say. *Int. J. Manag. Proj. Bus.* **2013**, *6*, 36–50. [CrossRef]
18. Söderlund, J.; Sydow, J. Projects and institutions: Towards understanding their mutual constitution and dynamics. *Int. J. Proj. Manag.* **2019**, *37*, 259–268. [CrossRef]
19. Sierra, L.A.; Pellicer, E.; Yepes, V. Social sustainability in the lifecycle of Chilean public infrastructure. *J. Constr. Eng. Manag.* **2016**, *142*, 05015020. [CrossRef]
20. Bice, S.; Neely, K.; Einfeld, C. Next generation engagement: Setting a research agenda for community engagement in Australia’s infrastructure sector. *Aust. J. Public Adm.* **2019**, *78*, 290–310. [CrossRef]
21. Zheng, X.; Liu, Y.; Sun, R.; Tian, J.; Yu, Q. Understanding the decisive causes of PPP project disputes in China. *Buildings* **2021**, *11*, 646. [CrossRef]
22. Alvesson, M.; Sandberg, J. The problematizing review: A counterpoint to Elsbach and Van Knippenberg’s argument for integrative reviews. *J. Manag. Stud.* **2020**, *57*, 1290–1304. [CrossRef]
23. Dean, M. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 2nd ed.; Sage Publication: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2010.
24. Jacobsson, M.; Söderholm, A. Project studies beyond the straitjacket: An escape artist’s manual. *Proj. Manag. J.* **2020**, *51*, 411–419. [CrossRef]
25. Thacker, S.; Adshead, D.; Fay, M.; Hallegatte, S.; Harvey, M.; Meller, H.; Hall, J.W. Infrastructure for sustainable development. *Nat. Sustain.* **2019**, *2*, 324–331. [CrossRef]
26. Doloi, H. Community-centric model for evaluating social value in projects. *J. Constr. Eng. Manag.* **2018**, *144*, 04018019. [CrossRef]
27. Ahmed, S.A.; Ali, S.M. People as partners: Facilitating people’s participation in public–private partnerships for solid waste management. *Habitat Int.* **2006**, *30*, 781–796. [CrossRef]
28. Bhaskara, G.I. The Local Community as a Stakeholder Group and Its Participation in UNESCO’s World Heritage Nomination Process: Jatiluwih Village, Bali, Indonesia. Ph.D. Thesis, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK, 2015.
29. Chow, V.; Leiringer, R. The practice of public engagement on projects: From managing external stakeholders to facilitating active contributors. *Proj. Manag. J.* **2020**, *51*, 24–37. [CrossRef]
30. Dunham, L.; Freeman, R.E.; Liedtka, J. Enhancing stakeholder practice: A particularized exploration of community. *Bus. Ethics Q.* **2006**, *16*, 23–42. [CrossRef]
31. Eskerod, P.; Larsen, T. Advancing project stakeholder analysis by the concept ‘shadows of the context’. *Int. J. Proj. Manag.* **2018**, *36*, 161–169. [CrossRef]
32. Teo, M.M.; Loosemore, M. Understanding community protest from a project management perspective: A relationship-based approach. *Int. J. Proj. Manag.* **2017**, *35*, 1444–1458. [CrossRef]
33. Gerald, J.; Söderlund, J. Project studies: What it is, where it is going. *Int. J. Proj. Manag.* **2018**, *36*, 55–70. [CrossRef]
34. Gilson, L.L.; Goldberg, C.B. Editors’ comment: So, what is a conceptual paper? *Group Organ. Manag.* **2015**, *40*, 127–130. [CrossRef]
35. Ostrom, E.; Walker, J.; Gardner, R. Covenants with and without a sword: Self-governance is possible. *Am. Political Sci. Rev.* **1992**, *86*, 404–417. [CrossRef]
36. Ostrom, E.; Ahn, T.K. A social science perspective on social capital: Social capital and collective action. *Rev. Mex. Sociol.* **2003**, *65*, 155–233. [CrossRef]
37. North, D. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1990.
38. Williamson, O.E. The New Institutional Economics: Taking Stock, Looking Ahead. *J. Econ. Lit.* **2000**, *38*, 595–613. [CrossRef]
39. Battilana, J.; Lee, M. Advancing research on hybrid organizing—Insights from the study of social enterprises. *Acad. Manag. Ann.* **2014**, *8*, 397–441. [CrossRef]
40. Lee, S.; Baek, J.S. Nature-inspired design for self-organized social systems: A tool for collaborative communities. In Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on Engineering Design (ICED2019), Delft, The Netherlands, 5–8 August 2019; Volume 1, pp. 189–198.
41. Young, H.P. The Evolution of Social Norms. *Annu. Rev. Econ.* **2015**, *7*, 359–387. [CrossRef]
42. Schneider, T.; Sachs, S. The impact of stakeholder identities on value creation in issue-based stakeholder networks. *J. Bus. Ethics* **2017**, *144*, 41–57. [CrossRef]

43. Edelenbos, J.; van Meerkerk, I.; Schenk, T. The evolution of community self-organization in interaction with government institutions: Cross-case insights from three countries. *Am. Rev. Public Adm.* **2018**, *48*, 52–66. [CrossRef]
44. Grotenbreg, S.; Van Buuren, A. Facilitation as a governance strategy: Unravelling governments' facilitation frames. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 160. [CrossRef]
45. Gasparro, K. Defining Community Investment in Infrastructure Delivery. Stanford Global Project Centre Working Paper. 2017. Available online: <https://gpc.stanford.edu/publications/defining-community-investment-infrastructure-delivery> (accessed on 22 November 2022).
46. Nederhand, J.; Klijn, E.H.; van der Steen, M.; van Twist, M. The governance of self-organization: Which governance strategy do policy officials and citizens prefer. *Policy Sci.* **2019**, *52*, 233–253. [CrossRef]
47. Nwauche, S.; Claeyé, F. Institutional Voids: Impediment to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in South African Municipalities. In Proceedings of the UNTFSE International Conference in Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland, 25–26 June 2019.
48. Keller, J.; Virág, T. A drop in the sea or catalyst for change: Diverse effects of the place-based approach in Europe. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2021**, *30*, 1–19. [CrossRef]
49. Ng, S.T.; Wong, J.M.; Wong, K.K. A public private people partnerships (P4) process framework for infrastructure development in Hong Kong. *Cities* **2013**, *31*, 370–381. [CrossRef]
50. Keys, L.A.; Huemann, M. Project benefits co-creation: Shaping sustainable development benefits. *Int. J. Proj. Manag.* **2017**, *35*, 1196–1212. [CrossRef]
51. Keane, S. Smart hybridity: Potentials and challenges of new governance arrangements. *Administration* **2020**, *68*, 69–73. [CrossRef]
52. Batidzirai, B.; Trotter, P.A.; Brophy, A.; Stritzke, S.; Moyo, A.; Twesigye, P.; Madhlopa, A. Towards people-private-public partnerships: An integrated community engagement model for capturing energy access needs. *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* **2021**, *74*, 1–15. [CrossRef]
53. Bishop, S.; Waring, J. Becoming hybrid: The negotiated order on the front line of public–private partnerships. *Hum. Relat.* **2016**, *69*, 1937–1958. [CrossRef]
54. Quélin, B.V.; Kivleniece, I.; Lazzarini, S. Public-private collaboration, hybridity and social value: Towards new theoretical perspectives. *J. Manag. Stud.* **2017**, *54*, 763–792. [CrossRef]
55. Villani, E.; Greco, L.; Phillips, N. Understanding value creation in public-private partnerships: A comparative case study. *J. Manag. Stud.* **2017**, *54*, 876–905. [CrossRef]
56. Xue, Y.; Temeljotov-Salaj, A.; Engebø, A.; Lohne, J. Multi-sector partnerships in the urban development context: A scoping review. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2020**, *268*, 122291. [CrossRef]
57. Rose, N.; Miller, P. Political Power Beyond State: Problematics of Government. *Br. J. Sociol.* **1992**, *43*, 173–205. [CrossRef]
58. Bröckling, U.; Krasmann, S.; Lemke, T. From Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France to studies of governmentality: An introduction. In *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*; Bröckling, U., Krasmann, S., Lemke, T., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2011.
59. Odysseos, L.; Death, C.; Malmvig, H. Interrogating Michel Foucault's counter-conduct: Theorising the subjects and practices of resistance in global politics. *Glob. Soc.* **2016**, *30*, 151–156. [CrossRef]
60. Flohr, M. Regicide and resistance: Foucault's reconceptualization of power. *Distinktion J. Soc. Theory* **2016**, *17*, 38–56. [CrossRef]
61. Moulaert, F.; Rodríguez, A.; Swyngedouw, E. *The Globalized City: Economic Restructuring and Social Polarization in European Cities*; OUP Oxford: Oxford, UK, 2003.
62. Blundo, G.; Le Meur, P.-Y. Introduction: An Anthropology of Everyday Governance: Collective Service Delivery and Subject Making. In *The Governance of Daily Life in Africa: Ethnographic Explorations of Public and Collective Services*; Blundo, G., Le Meur, P.Y., Eds.; African Social Studies Series; Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2009; Volume 19, pp. 1–38.
63. Cornea, N.L.; Véron, R.; Zimmer, A. Everyday governance and urban environments: Towards a more interdisciplinary urban political ecology. *Geogr. Compass* **2017**, *11*, e12310. [CrossRef]
64. Simard, M.; Aubry, M.; Laberge, D. The utopia of order versus chaos: A conceptual framework for governance, organizational design and governmentality in projects. *Int. J. Proj. Manag.* **2018**, *36*, 460–473. [CrossRef]
65. Corticelli, R.; Pazzini, M.; Mazzoli, C.; Lantieri, C.; Ferrante, A.; Vignali, V. Urban Regeneration and Soft Mobility: The Case Study of the Rimini Canal Port in Italy. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 14529. [CrossRef]
66. Ling, S.; Shoufeng, M.; Ning, J. Sustainable urban transportation development in China: A behavioral perspective. *Front. Eng. Manag.* **2022**, *9*, 16–30. [CrossRef]
67. Huang, W.; Lu, C.; Fang, D. City and infrastructure engineering and management. *Front. Eng. Manag.* **2021**, *8*, 1–4. [CrossRef]

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.