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“We want more green, but…”: Protesting urban greening in Paris

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Abstract

Urban green spaces are often hailed as essential for a just transition for their benefits to air quality, cooling, and social integration. However, such projects often face resistance, which remains understudied compared to other greening controversies such as wind farms. This thesis examines justifications behind opposition to greening projects in Paris, where public action centers such initiatives.

Using a mixed-methods qualitative approach, I combine computational text analysis of petition comments protesting urban greening initiatives throughout Paris with a case study of a particular opposition movement in eastern Paris. This allows me to exploit different advantages of the qualitative research arsenal. The former method, leveraging the scope permitted by text-as-data, provides a contextualization of urban greening controversies; however, it remains static and cannot be taken at face value. Thus, semi-structured interviews provide a more in-depth exploration of this landscape.

Overall, I find that opposition to urban greening projects extend far beyond green backlash to encompass diverse justifications related to comfort, tradition, and political representation. Strikingly, protesters do not denounce urban greening *per se*, but rather the way in which it is implemented in Paris—in terms of both what it misconstrues as environmental benefits and what problems it creates. Furthermore, I uncover discursive strategies put forward by protesters to maximize the impact of their struggles. Most notably, in my focal case study, protesters over-emphasized appeals to environmentalism while under-representing more prominent concerns about unwanted change in a bid to appeal to green political opportunity structures. Finally, I conclude this thesis by discussing the social determinants of successful opposition, showing how privileged protesters leverage their social, cultural, and economic capital to propel their movement.

In times where just urban climate policies are critical to mitigating the impacts of unprecedented climate change, this study offers insights into citizen resistance to urban greening initiatives and explores pathways to foster public acceptance of the net zero transition. It also invites further inquiry into classed barriers to climate action.

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Introduction

At a time where city governments across the world attempt to push climate adaptation and mitigation policies at the local level, this thesis explores barriers to urban greening in Paris. Specifically, I interrogate how protesters motivate their opposition to local, institutional proposals for climate city-making through the cases of green coverage and sustainable transport. I extend this inquiry to these movements' ability to halt construction. Through a mixed-methods qualitative research design articulating computational text analysis and interviews, my research aims to provide an overview of the oppositional landscape across Paris and suggest avenues for more acceptable pathways to an urban green transition.

In this chapter, I lay out the genesis of my thesis. I first address why its subject matter speaks to social and political priorities. I further examine the empirical and theoretical precedents that will guide my approach and lay out a brief explanation of my methodology. Finally, I provide an extended description of the main case study that my argument hinges on.

I.1 Problem

Before delving into the specific approach I adopt in this thesis, it appears important to provide a contextualization of its subject matter. The case of my study is twofold: it addresses barriers to urban climate action before it describes a specific instance of controversy. As such, this section can be read as the first part of its justification. I will begin by introducing the rise of urban greening as a policy priority, then highlight its contestation in Paris, and, given these contextual elements, lay out the objectives and structure of this thesis.

a. Why green cities?

We are facing a climate crisis (Calvin et al., 2023). In a rapidly urbanizing world (Kahn, 2009), local governments are faced with the immense challenge of protecting their communities in the face of what has been dubbed by the French government as "the battle of the century" (Élysée, n.d.). Indeed, cities are at the forefront of the climate crisis, dually positioned as both victims and perpetrators of this global phenomenon. In terms of climate responsibility, cities concentrate an array of harmful activities that amplify their carbon footprint, highlighted by accounting for emissions linked to both production and consumption (see Harris et al., 2020 on European cities; Sudmant et al., 2018 on China, the United States, and the United Kingdom), with particular attention given to the latter because of its larger prevalence within cities' overall impact (see Genta et al., 2022 on Italy; Mi et al., 2019 on China; Minx et al., 2013 on the United Kingdom). Carbon accounting studies typically include industry, housing, mobility, or even food consumption in the (non-exhaustive) list of the most environmentally harmful activities concentrated in urban areas. Conversely, cities are among the environments that stand to suffer the most loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change. The literature on urban climate vulnerability emphasizes the adverse impact of increasingly frequent extreme weather events (Quenault, 2015), accelerated by common urban features. Notably, cities' frequent location in coastal or riverside

environments (de Sherbinin, Schiller, and Pulsipher, 2009) puts them at risk of flooding, while densification and non-adaptive architecture can contribute to the urban heat island effect (UHIE) (Deilami, Kamruzzaman, and Liu, 2018).

As such, in the outline of their upcoming special report on cities and climate change—the very existence of which highlights the crucial role of urban environments in climate change mitigation—the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) devotes three chapters to urban greening solutions that would help mitigate both "urban risks and emissions" (IPCC, n.d.). Urban greening can have multiple definitions. Most often, it refers to the practice of increasing green—in a physical sense, i.e., vegetation—coverage (Bowler et al., 2010). I extend my use of the term "urban greening" to signify a wider climate mitigation and adaptation agenda (Bulkeley, 2013a)—a policy priority for urban governments the world over which sometimes translates to transnational mayoral networks (ibid). The phrase "greening mobilities" is used in the literature to address plans to decenter automotivity in urban transportation (Bekiaris, Tsami, and Panou, 2017). In this sense, the "green" in "greening" need not solely refer to the color of vegetation; it can also reflect the colloquial use of "green" to mean "sustainable". As such, in my empirical chapters, I will use "urban greening" to refer to a range of projects and differentiate them by explicitly specifying the content of this greening.

b. Urban greening in Paris: Global praise, local controversy

In recent years, Paris has become somewhat of a poster child for urban climate change mitigation—or, at least, it has tried to take on that role. Indeed, the City of Paris has put forward multiple ambitious initiatives to accelerate its green transition. By the own admission of its mayor, Parisian politics place urban greening, in its many forms, at the center of plans for development. This is notably exemplified by the City's involvement in C40, a collective of mayors who hope to lead—by example and cooperation—urban climate action. Furthermore, in an interview with local news outlet *Le Parisien* after her mayoral victory in 2020, Anne Hidalgo describes her 2014-2020 term as "the term of the bicycle" (Martinat & Robinet, 2020) and promises that her 2020-2026 mandate will be "the mandate of revegetation" (ibid). Efforts to curb Parisian pollution levels had previously been made by her predecessor, Bertrand Delanoë, notably by encouraging pedestrianization (*Le Parisien*, 2010). Through wide-scale efforts, e.g., extending exclusive cycling lanes, revegetating public school playgrounds, or even planting urban forests, often facilitated through public votes (see for example the recent votes on taxing SUVs and increase green coverage on 500 streets throughout Paris), Hidalgo and her predecessor's approach reflects the central role of experimentation in greening the city (Bulkeley, 2013b).

The most important document that relates to these policy ambitions is the Climate Plan which was revised in 2024. Multiple versions of the document have been published, with both medium-term (2024-2030) and long-term (2020-2050) iterations. Both heavily emphasize greening as part of the city's efforts toward both adaptation and mitigation. In the 2024-2030 document, transport decarbonization and "bioclimatic urbanism" (Ville de Paris,

2024)—a new set of planning practices which would center sustainability in future construction, crystallized in the Bioclimatic Local Urbanism Plan—are cited as two key levers through which Paris should reduce its emissions and provide a better quality of life to Parisians in the era of climate change. Similarly, the 2020-2050 document includes mobility and "carbon-neutral, resilient, and pleasant" (Ville de Paris, 2018) urbanism as important axes of adaptation and mitigation. For example, in the section dedicated to increasing green coverage, the City pledges "to attain [...] the objective of 40% of the territory being permeable revegetated surfaces" (ibid, 64). Regarding the decarbonization of transport, it promises to invest in carbon-neutral public transportation by 2025, to provide financial incentives for individuals to adopt lower-emitting vehicles, and to facilitate education programs for young children to learn how to ride a bicycle responsibly. Complementary targeted plans, e.g., the Bicycle Plan and the Biodiversity Plan, further detail these objectives. Beyond these political communications, the first results of Paris's greening policies have been released. According to AirParif', a publicly-backed organization that measures air pollution in Paris and its surrounding region, PM2.5 and NO_2 experienced, respectively, a 55% and 50% diminution (Airparif, 2025) over the past two decades. These positive results, as well as the City's overall ambitions, have garnered international attention, mostly positive. *The Guardian* notably titled that Paris was experiencing a "green revolution" (Moore, 2023), while specialized environment-focused magazine *Imagine 5* dubbed Hidalgo "Paris's greenest mayor ever" (Langkjaer-Bain, n.d.).

However, despite their acclaim outside Parisian and French boundaries these policies routinely spark controversy on the ground. Local news outlet *Le Parisien* regularly communicates about local struggles to stop the City's greening projects (see for example Abran, 2025; Abran & Canier, 2024; Julien, 2024), while protesters take to social media and petition websites to voice their discontent. In 2019, the *New York Times* devoted a front page article to this fierce opposition, describing Hidalgo as "forward thinking" and celebrating her "courage", but acknowledging the unpopularity of her "war on cars" through interviews with residents and professionals alike (Nossiter, 2019). These tensions reveal that, while, politically, greening projects are constructed as entirely beneficial to the environments in which they take place, this perception of progress is not necessarily shared on the ground. Exploring this gap could reveal underlying issues with greening projects as they are currently constructed and provide a more nuanced portrayal of protesters than that of conservative victims of the "war on cars" (ibid).

c. Research objectives

These controversies invite sustained analysis for two main reasons. First, against the need to green cities, opposition to greening projects has the potential to halt necessary efforts toward adaptation and climate change mitigation. Second, the unpopularity of greening projects fuels politicians, including at the local level, who capitalize on this discontent to campaign on anti-net-zero platforms (Paterson, Wilshire, and Tobin, 2023). As such, understanding what part(s) of these projects could be improved for greater acceptability can help accelerate a smoother green transition.

The overall objective of my research, expressed here as a comprehensive objective (CO), can be broken down into multiple precise objectives (PO).

CO: Develop empirically-grounded knowledge of the substance of opposition to greening policies in Paris.
PO1: Identify and classify the reasons given by protesters across the city.
PO2: Investigate the formation of these counter-discourses against the City's construction of urban greening using an illustrative case study in eastern Paris.
PO3: Identify strategies and tensions in mobilizing these counter-discourses to produce successful[1] opposition.

These objectives can thus be translated into four large research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What registers do protesters use to motivate their opposition to urban greening?
RQ2: How do they reconcile these justifications with the public construction of urban greening as a social and environmental benefit?
RQ3: What strategies do protesters put into place to build a credible counter-movement?
RQ4: How does protesters' positionality[2] impact their opposition?

The structure of this thesis follows the order of the guiding POs. Using a dataset of online complaints against City proposals to accelerate the transition targeting mobility and green coverage, Chapter 1 provides an overview of the anti-greening landscape in Paris (RQ1). Chapters 2 and 3 build on this contextualization through a case study of a successful movement that halted a flagship project in eastern Paris. Chapter 2 addresses a typology of discourses mobilized by actors to denounce the project (RQ1, RQ2), while Chapter 3 deepens the analysis by examining which discourses are given prevalence and how they are supported to maximize the movement's impact (RQ3, RQ4).

I.2 Literature

My case study, while not fully explained by the existing literature, sits at the crossroads of multiple strands that have been addressed by social researchers. Through an overview of empirical precedents, this section will explain how this thesis can add to the scholarship around the different elements that make my case.

a. Examining barriers to climate action in social science research

[1] The word "successful" refers to the fact that my principal case study is that of a movement that was effectively able to stop construction.

[2] Mainly expressed in terms of class privilege and capabilities, but also relates to age, experience in the neighborhood, etc.

Climate action is not unpopular in and of itself. Indeed, a recent study found that a staggering 89% of respondents to a representative survey spanning 125 countries support escalating climate action at the national government level (Andre et al., 2024). This sparked a shared conversation between academics and activists about how to best leverage this widespread support for climate change mitigation policies. Yet publicizing the information that most people across the world are in favor of climate action does not address the underlying issue that many remain opposed to these policies. Notably, the finding that there is a global groundswell for political climate action eclipses differences between stated and actual preferences. Moreover, it ignores non-national contexts, e.g., the local scale explored here. Furthermore, anti-net-zero populism is gaining political ground across the Western world (Huber, 2020; Paterson, Wilshire, and Tobin, 2023; Vihma, Reischl, and Nombo Andersen, 2021), and the prospect of ambitious climate action at the political level is dwindling. Thus, this thesis intends to nuance the limits of acceptability.

Barriers to climate action benefit from a variety of scholarship across thematic and disciplinary lines. Recent scholarship in cognitive science has notably found that individuals may be unwilling to change their behavior because of a mismatch between norm detection and the actual practices and beliefs of others, the perception that the burden of change will be unfairly distributed, or a lack of reputational incentives (Grandin, Boon-Falleur, and Chevalier, 2021). Meanwhile, behavioral economists contend that lack of information, economic constraints, or lack of regulation can hinder participation in climate mitigation strategies at the household level (Stankuniene, Streimikiene, and Kyriakopoulos, 2020). These insights are precious and can guide part of the scholarly understanding of these barriers; however, they do not examine the essential mediation of individual beliefs and attitudes by larger external actors—e.g., organizations and institutions—providing limited applicability from a social change perspective. Norgaard (2018) thus identifies sociology's potential to investigate macro-level reasons behind the lack of an effective response to the looming threat of climate change as a major contribution of the discipline to the "ecological imagination" (ibid).

Empirical precedents in the sociological study of barriers to climate action has focused on a variety of subjects, from the skepticism toward IPCC reports (Sanford et al., 2021) to the emergence of a climate counter-movement in elite spheres (Brulle, 2014; Culhane, Hall, and Timmons Roberts, 2021; Farrell, 2016). Most relevant to our discussion, however, is the now established literature on opposition to wind energy development (see for example Bell et al., 2013; Burningham et al., 2015; Haggett, 2011), as—while typically set in rural settings—it approximates the specificity understudied urban settings by similarly focusing on localized projects. Petrova (2016) summarizes that, overall, protesters of wind farm development organize their discourse around the large categories of visual, environmental, socio-economic, and procedural critiques. Yet there are three main arguments to avoid generalizing these results *a priori* to opposition to urban greening projects. First, wind energy development typically takes place in rural areas (Van Der Horst & Toke, 2010). Second, wind energy development hinges on the installation of large infrastructure, which arguably warrants more visual justifications than urban greening. Third, wind energy

development has adverse environmental impacts at the building stage (Kaldellis et al., 2016), inviting a green critique that cannot be assumed as automatic for more plural iterations of urban greening.

b. Opposing urban greening

Concurrently, accounts of opposition to urban greening are few and far between, notably because of the cognitive dissonance of critiquing measures with proven social and environmental benefits (see for example Bowen & Lynch, 2017; Chiesura, 2004; Sykes, 2022). Still, frameworks are emerging to critique these policies. In a special volume dedicated to examining controversies around urban sustainability (mostly in France and neighboring countries), Boissonade and his colleagues (2015) put forward the following five categories of critique: unsustainable development (whereby development, particularly its economic iteration, surpasses sustainability), technicist sustainability, a procedural critique of policy instruments used to implement sustainable urban policies, governmentalization of conducts, and green value (the devaluation of an "ecological varnish" when it is applied to any and all projects). They thus argue that sustainable urban development has the potential to attract controversy not because of its goal of improving cities' resilience and reducing emissions, but because of issues with the mainstream vision of sustainability associated with these efforts. This argument further reinforces the aforementioned importance of not solely relying on citizens' willingness to see their governments take ambitious climate action, since critiques tend to be centered around the moral foundation of specific actions rather than their overarching objectives. With that said, let us move on to a more precise assessment of the literature around these critiques in the context of the two facets of urban greening we are most interested in, i.e., sustainable mobility and revegetation.

The former category of urban greening policies benefits from a more comprehensive scholarly account of barriers to implementation and lay reservations. The historical hegemony of automotivity (Gössling, 2016) has driven many policies targeting car users (Newman, Kosonen, and Kenworthy, 2016; Selzer 2021). Hence, a growing body of literature across different strands of social science has emerged regarding the public acceptance of these policies (see for example Marcheschi et al., 2022; Oltra et al., 2021; Pritchett, Bartington, and Neil Thomas, 2024). The results of these studies indicate that place attachment, perceived impacts on self-assessed quality of life, perceived policy fairness, and equality of impacts across space and social categories can all impact the degree to which these sustainable mobility policies are accepted by residents and other local users. My thesis thus seeks to explore whether these results pertain to the context of Paris, where, to the best of my knowledge, such studies have not yet been conducted. More importantly, I further propose to extend this attention to the public acceptance of urban greening policies to political challenges in revegetating urban areas, which have not benefited from the same academic interest.

Part of why academic accounts of opposition to green coverage projects are limited at this point is likely that urban green spaces are constructed, in much of the existing literature,

as wholly beneficial spaces—see our above discussion of purported social and environmental benefits of urban green spaces. Furthermore, some authors contend that urban green spaces boast high public acceptability (Brown & Glanz 2018, Sikorski et al. 2018)—anecdotal evidence, such as the data garnered from across Paris used for this thesis, suggests that there is no reason to believe that the purported Yes-In-My-Backyard (YIMBY) effect of urban green spaces is universal. However, sociologists are increasingly calling this normative framing into question, along two lines of critique. First, the equation of "green" with "good" was constructed via a moral social imaginary, even as green spaces reproduce bourgeois conceptions of urban space and pre-existing inequalities (Angelo, 2021). Second, the mode of implementation of greening policies can have adverse effects. Green gentrification and neoliberal critiques emerge as the most influential strands of this emerging literature, and are often intertwined. The former concept is defined as "new or intensified urban socio-spatial inequalities produced by urban greening agendas and interventions, such as greenways, parks, community gardens, ecological corridors, or green infrastructure" (Anguelovski et al., 2019, 1065). The latter concept, notably championed by critical "right to the city" (Harvey, 2015) scholars, denounces an "entrepreneurial treatment of environmental problems" (Béal, 2009). This entrepreneurial turn is defined by its championing of market-driven sustainable change, and supposedly targets the middle class (Krarup, 2022)—reflecting Boissonade's aforementioned critique of sustainable urban development as being primarily concerned with development, not sustainability.

While these strands of the literature help diversify the academic treatment of urban greening, they have limited valence to the case at hand. First, I expect concerns about gentrification to be minor in my focal case study because the neighborhood has already undergone multiple waves of gentrification and because Parisian residents benefit from stringent tenant protections. My focal case study concerns middle-class residents in a progressive neighborhood, whose characteristics are associated with support for environmental action in the eco-habitus literature (Carfagna et al., 2014). In this sense, I provide insight into an understudied group whose reasons for opposing urban greening are, at this point, unclear. Second, the neoliberal angle is at best indirect, as the projects I analyze throughout this thesis are put forward by public actors and are intended to modify circulation, green coverage, or both, not directly bring forth commercial development.

c. Exploring new environmental social movements

One final defining feature of this thesis is that it deals with the construction—or, rather, the extension—of a social movement. The literature surrounding the mutations of pro-environmental mobilizations has flourished since the popularization of Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion in 2018 (De Moor et al., 2021); however, mobilizations that protest climate action are an emerging and important field of inquiry. Currently, the concept of green/climate backlash is gaining scholarly traction (see for example Patterson, 2023; Tallent, 2024; Vihma, Reischl, and Andersen, 2021); however, this framework eclipses the fact that some protests are not about climate action per se, but rather how current iterations fail to address the problem. This is a first reason to consider the relevance of previous work on

environmental movements to this thesis. This theoretical interest translates to my focal case study, where resident organizations united with a major French environmental organization, claiming to defend sustainability despite protesting a greening project. In this sense, they, at least to some degree, view themselves as climate activists, not green backlash groups.

Mobilisations écologiques (2023) examines the recent evolutions of environmental movements in France, providing some guiding insight into what topics and themes currently steer ecological discourse in activist spheres. Comby & Dubuisson-Quellier's argument reaffirms the continued relevance of hierarchical spheres, as "conflictual [...] mobilizations remain directed *against* spaces of power" (10). For contemporary mobilizations, however, these spaces of power encompass more than just political structures to include concerns about socio-economic determinants, most saliently gender, race, and class—although, as Paddeu's chapter explains, these approaches remain "*à la marge*" (47) in France, especially compared to places where they are already established, e.g., the United States (Mohai, Pellow, and Timmons Roberts, 2009) or India (Gill, 2016).

Finally—and importantly for a discussion of opposition to urban greening projects—Dechézelles's chapter addresses opposition to "large planning projects" (79), arguing that these are characterized by the formation of coalitions between actors from "different sectors of the sociopolitical space (residents [...], farmers, elected officials, environmental activists, naturalists, purveyors of alternative life projects)" (81). Because of this diversity of actors mobilized, she argues, framing the struggle is fraught with tension surrounding which discourses and methods are acceptable, e.g., deciding between conventional actions and civil disobedience. Dechézelles concludes that the most internally acceptable grounds on which to mobilize the wider public are appeals to "numbers, expertise, and calls to morality" (82). Finally, important here is her claim that place attachment is central to protesting planning projects that would change these well-loved spaces—something that is also clearly attested to in international accounts of opposition to sustainable infrastructure projects, e.g., the aforementioned wind farms literature (see Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010 on the United Kingdom; Hall, Ashworth, and Devine-Wright, 2013 on Australia; Lombard & Ferreira, 2014 on South Africa).

Taking stock of the latest literature on French environmental movements, it seems that particular attention should be given to the role of place attachment, internal tensions between types of actors mobilized within the same movement, and bridging the gap between environmental activism and other social issues. However, these actualizations remain limited. First, the newfound reliance on class structures has mostly analyzed how middle-class activists dominate the activist scene, even in underprivileged areas (Carmichael & McDonough, 2018) or how deprived populations view and redefine environmental activism (Comby & Malier, 2022), but fails to account for the specificity of such efforts in purely middle and upper-class conflicts. By investigating a case in a relatively privileged area of eastern Paris, my thesis sheds light on this understudied group.

Second, current scholarship provides a limited account of movements that seek to redefine policies that are currently presented as socially and environmentally sustainable. Where previous research has focused on movements that attempt to make new public problems emerge, this thesis focuses on a counter-movement that challenges the construction of urban greening as a solution to the public problem(s) of cities' vulnerability and contribution to climate change. Counter-movements are defined as "a particular kind of protest movement which is a response to social change advocated by an initial movement [...] a conscious, collective, organized attempt to resist or to reverse social change" (Mottl, 1980, 620). Meyer & Staggenborg (1996) provide a framework for analyzing the rise of counter-movements through the lens of what they call "the political opportunity structure" (1633), explaining that counter-movements draw on the established playing field of the actor they are protesting to critique them within their own frame(s): "once a movement enters a particular venue, if there is the possibility of contest, an opposing movement is virtually forced to act in the same arena" (ibid, 1649). As such, this framework is precious to analyze competing expectations toward social and environmental sustainability between institutional actors who promote urban greening and civil society actors who protest them.

I.3 Theoretical framework

The previous section has focused on projected empirical contribution. Here, I will detail the theories and frameworks I intend to rely on to analyze my results, further situating my thesis among different approaches to studying my phenomenon of interest and in the wider field of sociology.

a. Anchoring within currents

This first subsection will attempt to situate my work in the wider strands of sociology, beginning with my setting (urban areas) and my theme (broadly speaking, sustainability). I have previously exposed the reasons for which the green transition is a policy priority in cities the world over. Similar trends have emerged in academia, where environmental sociology has become more conventional, notably because of its engagement with other strands of the discipline (Scott & Johnson, 2016). While some urban social researchers have tackled environmental questions for decades, the intersection between these two strands has only gained significant traction in recent years. As it stands, urban sociology marginally engages with environmental sociology, despite urban and ecological crises being increasingly interconnected (Angelo & Greenberg, 2023). Efforts to "[environmentalize] urban sociology" emphasize the importance of "[denaturing] processes taken to be natural rather than social and political" (ibid, 260). Conversely, environmental sociology developed using more rural case studies—as previously mentioned, this is reflected in the wider literature around barriers to the green transition. As such, my research answers calls to leverage the emerging intersections between these two traditions. Finally, my research speaks to more local strands of the sociology of public action. First, my research reflects a timely interest in urban climate governance (see Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2012). Furthermore, I contribute to this literature both by studying the reception of climate change mitigation projects in a single city and

through an extensive case study of one such controversy. Finally, my interest in framing processes[3] (Benford & Snow, 2000) emphasizes problem construction and its role in countering unwanted governmental action. By studying such mobilizations, I must also draw from the sociology of social movements, specifically environmental social movements, where the framing literature has also been largely leveraged (see for example Buzogány & Scherhaufer, 2022; Vu et al., 2020). The interplay between all these strands of the discipline reflect the complexity of my subject matter, which mixes political contestation with the wider environmental policy agenda and place-based mobilization logics.

b. Taking social movements seriously

The aforementioned strands of sociology I wish to insert my work into are interwoven thematically; however, they are home to a rich diversity of epistemologies. In other words, while they each suggest (purportedly) relevant social phenomena to be looked at, they do not in themselves provide one lens through which researchers should look at them.

The literature around opposition to urban greening, or even climate action or policy in general, tends to take one of two directions in terms of how protest movements are analyzed. One approach, which is particularly present in the environmental gentrification literature, is to challenge the *status quo* of sustainability discourse and argue that protesters are not against climate action, but rather in favor of a green transition that embraces class politics and protects underprivileged communities. This is the rhetoric behind the "just green enough" (Curran & Hamilton, 2018) literature, which emphasizes a need for development focused on "social justice and environmental goals as defined by the local community, those people who have been most negatively affected by environmental disamenities, with the goal of keeping them in place to enjoy any environmental improvements" (ibid, 3). This framework works well in places where the local community faces reasonable risk of displacement following urban greening development; however, as I have previously discussed, this cannot reasonably be expected to apply to my focal case study. As such, my case is not the target setting of the "just green enough" literature.

In settings that are less explicitly deprived, such as the one I am studying, there is a tendency to dismiss protesters' opposition to climate action as ill-intentioned or selfish. Terms such as "climate backlash" (Vihma, Reischl, and Andersen, 2021) or "green discontent" (Rodríguez-Pose & Bartalucci, 2024), frequently used at the beginning or even in the title of articles, implicitly discredit protesters before the analysis even begins. Indeed, through this lexicon, authors imply that protesters are driven first and foremost by their disavowal of environmentalism. Other times, within the analysis, researchers dismiss protesters' concerns as NIMBYism (see critique from Devine-Wright, 2005). More recently, scholars of environmental controversies have applied entire classifications designed with the purpose of countering protesters' complaints, most saliently "discourses of climate delay" (Lamb et al., 2020). Pflieger & De Pryck (2023) warn against the increasing popularity of

[3] Detailed below, in section c).

Lamb and his colleagues' framework, arguing that it risks simplifying protesters' intent: "while statements emphasizing social justice may be intended to delay action, it can also be meant to set the conditions for ambitious climate action" (1). The authors thus call for more sustained attention to the "full context" (ibid, 2) of discourses used by actors who oppose some iteration of climate action. This warning against the threat of oversimplification also extends to studies about urban greening itself, with calls for researchers to avoid "[naturalizing] the values ascribed to nature" (Angelo, 2019, 1). As such, in this thesis, I extend critical attention to the construction of urban greening as wholly positive beyond settings at risk of gentrification; in doing so, I thus follow previous scholarship in refraining from dismissing protesters' concerns as anti-environmentalism.

c. From justification to framing

The final theoretical component of this thesis pertains to my interest in analyzing why protesters are reluctant to see (purportedly) sustainable urban change, and what registers they put forward to both justify themselves and mobilize around what they perceive to be an injurious experience (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat, 1981). As such, I rely on two main frameworks that respectively address registers by which it is deemed acceptable to justify opinions and the processes by which these frames are used and communicated: Boltanski & Thévenot's (2006[4]) theory of the worlds of justification and Benford & Snow's (2000) tripartite theory of framing, as well as subsequent additions to both theories.

The study of justifications hinges on the idea that "persons face an obligation to answer for their behavior [...] to other persons with whom they interact" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 37). In their seminal book *On Justification* (2006), Boltanski & Thévenot contend that the study of justifications can help "bring out common elements in seemingly contrasting explanatory methodologies" (28) between the study of individual versus collective behavior.[5] Indeed, the authors argue that appealing to "higher common [principles]" (ibid) is as much of a task for collective entities, e.g., the world of organizations, as for the multitude of individuals who compose them and who must agree on which systems of legitimacy to mobilize. As such, they describe their approach as a "bilevel configuration, incorporating both the level of particular persons and a level of higher generality" (ibid).

Boltanski & Thévenot's framework has previously been argued to particularly suit the analysis of planning controversies (Buclet, 2023; Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016). The authors argue that relying on the worlds of justification extends the analytical power of sociology to examine controversies beyond "conflicts of interest [...] [focusing] on what people consider to be the right way to deal with an issue. Each party develops its own truth, whether it is a profound belief or a tactic to win a decision, on the basis of grandeurs considered to be unassailable" (Buclet, 2023)—and, by extension, that this approach can help

[4] I use the 2006 English translation. The original book was published in 1991.

[5] In the context in which Boltanski & Thévenot contributed to the rise of pragmatic sociology, this opposition referred to the rift between methodological individualism and the Bourdieusian strand of sociology.

discern between competing worldviews among participants, between opposing sides but also within the same party.

On Justification distinguishes six worlds: inspired, domestic, opinion/fame, civic, industrial, and market. Succinctly put, the inspired world of justification hinges on artistic and singular expressions; the domestic world relies on group loyalty; the world of opinion/fame strives for recognition; the civic world appeals to higher moral values and rights; the industrial world celebrates productivity and efficiency; and the market world is concerned with monetary gain and, more generally, possession. Importantly, a later addition by Lafaye & Thévenot (1993) supplanted this original typology with the concept of ecological justification, making appeals to nature a world of justification in its own right—albeit often imbricated in pre-existing worlds, e.g., the civic world. Like previous authors (see for example, in environmental sociology, Finch, Geiger, and Harkness, 2017), I use the worlds of justification as "a frame of reference of legitimacy systems mobilized by actors" (Serra & Buclet, 2020, 3). Tables 1 and 2 replicate Finch, Geiger, and Harkness's (2017) summary of the seven worlds of justification:

Table 1: Summary of the worlds of justification (1) - Inspiration, domestic, and opinion

Categories	Inspired	Domestic	Opinion/Fame
Mode of evaluation (worth)	Grace, singularity, creativeness	Esteem, reputation	Grace, singularity, creativeness
Test	Passion, enthusiasm	Trustworthiness	Popularity, audience, recognition
Form of relevant proof	Emotional involvement and expression	Oral, exemplary, personally warranted	Semiotic
Qualified objects	Emotionally invested body, the sublime	Patrimony, locale, heritage	Sign, media
Qualified human beings	Creative beings, artists	Authority	Celebrity
Time formation	Eschatological, revolutionary, visionary moment	Customary part	Vogue, trend
Space formation	Presence	Local, proximal anchoring	Communication network

Table 2: Summary of the worlds of justification (2) - Inspiration, domestic, and opinion

Categories	Civic	Industrial	Market	Green
Mode of evaluation (worth)	Collective welfare	Technical efficiency	Price, cost	Environmental friendliness
Test	Equality and solidarity	Competence, reliability, planning	Market competitiveness	Sustainability, renewability
Form of relevant proof	Formal, official	Measurable criteria, statistics	Monetary	Ecological ecosystem
Qualified objects	Rules and regulations, fundamental rights	Infrastructure, project, technical plan	Freely circulating monetary good or service	Pristine wilderness, healthy environment, natural habitat
Qualified human beings	Equal citizens, solidarity unions	Engineer, professional expert	Customer, consumer, merchant, seller	Environmentalist, ecologist
Time formation	Perennial	Long-term, planned	Short-term, flexible	Future generations
Space formation	Detachment	Cartesian space	Globalization	Planet ecosystem

This Boltanskian classification is used as a helpful heuristic to make sense of the categories of justification that emerge from my data and help insert them into a wider sociological discussion. My reliance on it should not be taken to signify an insertion of my work inside the current of pragmatic sociology, nor should readers expect this thesis to subscribe to the entirety of Boltanski & Thévenot's "orders of worth" framework.

The question of how these worlds of justification are mobilized—i.e., what operations they justify—remains. I thus supplement the Boltanskian heuristic by borrowing from the literature on framing processes and counter-mobilizations. Benford & Snow classify social movements' reliance on diagnostic (denouncing a problem), prognostic (proposing solutions), and motivational (inspiring mobilization, usually based on values) framing processes (Benford & Snow, 2000). Unlike its conceptual predecessors, e.g., Felstiner's transformation of disputes theory which first outlined the naming-blaming-claiming sequence (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat, 1981), Benford & Snow's framework does not expect framing processes to linearly progress from one frame to another, instead allowing for them to continually be redefined and intermeshed. This is a significant addition to a previously rigid literature on

how social movements discursively frame their struggle; it speaks to case study because the interplay between many different actors makes it challenging to extract a linear chronology of framing operations. Finally, as previously mentioned, Benford & Snow's work has been mobilized extensively in the environmental social movements literature, providing a valuable theoretical precedent.

I.4 Methods

This thesis hinges on a mixed-methods research design with a qualitative epistemology. To gauge the grammar of opposition to urban greening at the macro level of Paris, I rely on computational text analysis. This is supplemented by more traditional methods, such as interviews (N = 31) and manual content analysis of online comments, to understand these justifications at the meso (organizational) and, to a lesser extent, micro (individual) levels. This section presents the value of this plural approach, then succinctly details each of my methods. Ethics and positionality are further discussed in the appendix.

a. Epistemological foundations of mixed qualitative methods

At first glance, the expression "mixed qualitative methods" may seem like an oxymoron. Broadly speaking, mixed methods combine two methods at the data collection and/or analysis stage(s) (Small, 2011). Given recent developments, then, describing them as the incorporation of both quantitative and qualitative methods in the same research project does not capture the full extent of epistemologies that can underlie the decision to rely on multiple families of methods (Pearce, 2012)—something which is demonstrated by my reliance on computational text analysis.

Computational text analysis broadly refers to an active area of methods research that is not bound by the traditional qualitative/quantitative dichotomy and can be used across traditions (Brandt, 2024; Evans & Foster, 2019; DiMaggio et al., 2015). It hinges on analyzing textual data using a family of methods derived from computational linguistics and computer science. I use unsupervised text clustering techniques, which have been argued to suit qualitative research for multiple reasons[6]. From a practical standpoint, resulting topic models are the product of qualitative modeling decisions on the part of the researcher, such as text preprocessing operations or the number of topics to be produced[7]. These methods are also more broadly associated with qualitative epistemologies. Mohr and his colleagues (2013) argue that they can reveal "cultural readings of text and their poetic meanings" (677), especially when supplanted with human interpretation. Similarly, Nelson (2020) uses these methods to devise the computational grounded theory framework, whereby researchers make inductive inferences from initial topic models and then go back and forth between human engagement with the data and computational pattern detection and refinement operations. Through a close, deep reading of the source material, the researcher is thus able to refine the

[6] Further details are available in section 1.1c.

[7] Chapter 1 further details these decisions.

analysis with interpretations that algorithms cannot replicate, while still leveraging the computing power of unsupervised text clustering.

Computational text analysis can thus follow a qualitative epistemology in and of itself. Paired with semi-structured interviews, it leverages the extensive power of qualitative methods by combining the interactive character of face-to-face interactions with the scale and scope of unsupervised text clustering of (semi) large datasets. Both methods extend each other. In this thesis, I use the latter technique to contextualize the wider landscape of opposition to urban greening in Paris, with special attention given to latent cultural themes, and follow with a more precise case study where I engage with activists themselves to deepen this understanding.

b. Computational text analysis

Using a purposive sampling approach, I built a corpus composed of comments (N = 8,003) under online petitions that oppose a greening project in Paris (N = 45). Most denounce either projects that are fully focused on mobility or projects that focus on green coverage with a mobility element; I also include two miscellaneous petitions as planned outliers. These are computationally analyzed for two reasons. First, computational methods epistemologically suit the analysis of online data (Rogers, 2015); as such, the numeric is both the object and the method of my analysis. Second, the size of my sample makes it challenging to manually analyze; while this is a small-N study, the results of my text analysis are comprehensible enough to be interpreted, albeit with caution.

As previously mentioned, computational text analysis is an umbrella term that can have many different implementations. I adopt Structural Topic Modeling (STM),[8] which allows the researcher to control for features of the documents. I thus control for the type of project being denounced, location, year, and petitions themselves. The modeling was conducted using the programming software R. Emerging topics were manually labeled and interpreted with inspiration from the frameworks outlined above.[9]

c. Case study and fieldwork

Further to this contextualization, I used two complementary methods to gain insight into my focal case of the Canal Walkway project. First, to get a sense of the local opposition landscape, I gathered publicly-available online documents produced by protesters and affiliated organizations and qualitatively analyzed them using thematic coding techniques.[10] The documents of interest included activist video transcripts, the body and comments of the focal petition, minutes from public meetings between residents and the City, and relevant

[8] The decision to rely on STM will be further detailed in Chapter 1's "Methods" section.

[9] Section 1.1d further details these operations.

[10] In total, this analysis yielded 1,221 total coded passages, distributed across five grandparent codes.

blog articles. This exploratory analysis provided me with information that helped me construct my interview guide and guided my interview sampling approach, as the documents highlighted the most active actors in the opposition as well as where I might encounter them.

I organized my semi-structured interviews around an interview guide[11] that was minimally revised throughout the project; the main revisions included rewording and the addition of a specific question about political affiliations beyond what I had initially called "citizen engagement". During my interviews, I often left space to "play the innocent" (Hermanowicz, 2002, 486), deliberately painting myself as more ignorant regarding both the project and the wider processes at play than I was, to "put the respondent in the position to be a kind of teacher" (ibid).[12] In total, I conducted 31 interviews, which lasted between roughly 40 minutes and two hours and 45 minutes.[13] I approached most interviewees at meetings where the Walkway was discussed and adopted a snowball sampling strategy from there. This led me to discover a tight, interwoven ecosystem of local organizations, local councils, and city government at the heart of the Walkway controversy, which shaped and permeated the ideas of even the least connected opponents. Most contacts were secured easily—strikingly, activists seemed eager to share their points of view, reflecting their overall sentiment of "not being heard" or "being held in contempt" by City officials. The names of interviewees and their respective organizations were anonymized to preserve their privacy.

Further to their transcription, interviews were subjected to up to three rounds of coding using MaxQDA. The first round was exploratory, exclusively consisting of *in vivo* codes (reflecting direct quotes). The second round applied process coding—codes which capture actions, usually beginning with a verb in its gerund form (Saldaña, 2016)—to these preliminary *in vivo* codes. Finally, the third round organized resulting process codes into a grandparent-parent-child system. The first five interviews were coded thrice to produce a preliminary coding system; following interviews were not subjected to the preliminary *in vivo* coding step. Reflecting my overall method, interviews were transcribed and coded iteratively in batches, meaning that my coding of the initial interviews guided that of further transcripts.

I.5 Extended case description

a. What is the Canal Walkway project?[14]

[11] Available in the appendix.

[12] Beyond this strategic objective, it was also a way for me to anticipate how interviewees would react to my appearance. In other words, I had anticipated prior to beginning my fieldwork that I would be perceived as inexperienced and, perhaps, naive, because of my age and gender (Flanigan, 2023). Further information on how my positionality influenced the way interviews were conducted is available in the appendix.

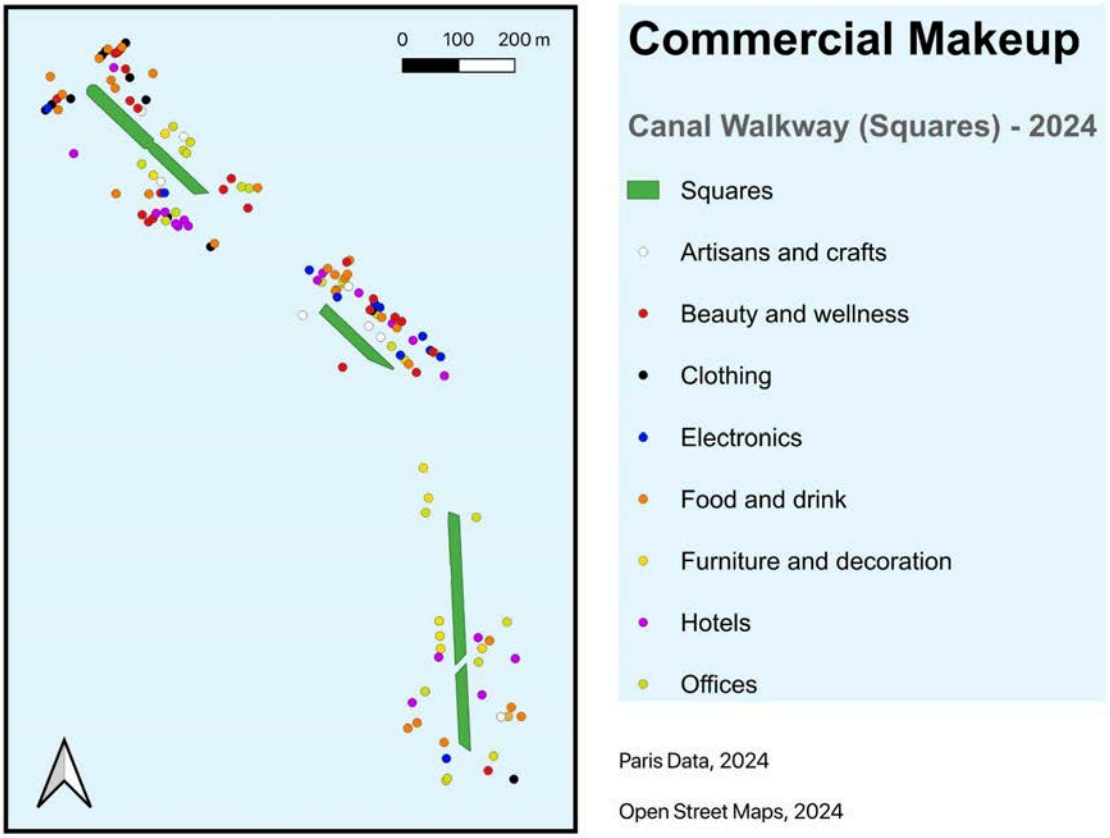
[13] A table summarizing all interviewees and their characteristics is available in the appendix.

[14] In this section and throughout my thesis, I sometimes draw from planning documents without citing my source. This is because providing a precise citation would compromise the anonymization of my research setting.

The Canal Walkway is a large project that aims to build a walkway along the Grand Boulevard, one of the main axes of eastern Paris. Currently, the space that the project targets is divided into two sections, both of which consist of two one-way lanes on either part of a centerpiece. The centerpiece of the Canal Walkway's northern section is one of Paris's most famous emerged canals, popular with residents and tourists alike. The centerpiece of the Canal Walkway's southern section comprises four green neighborhood squares,[15] which cover the canal. These squares were all surrounded by gates at the time the project was proposed. These gates date back to 1994, when the space was last majorly changed. These two sections will henceforth be referred to as the "Canal" and the "Squares" sections.

This thesis deals with contestation around the Canal Walkway, which primarily took place around the "Squares" section. This section of the Walkway is more residential and has a more diverse commercial makeup than the touristic "Canal" section, which mostly boasts retail stores, restaurants, and bars. Figure 1 displays all commercial establishments within a 100-meter radius of each square in the "Squares" section of the walkway—a distance chosen because, in planning terms, it reflects each square's area of attraction (APUR, 2010).

Figure 1: Commercial makeup of the Canal Walkway's "Squares" section



[15] "Parks" would perhaps be a more accurate translation as it directly accounts for the green dimension of the space, where English-language uses of the word "square" typically refer to non-greened plazas surrounded by buildings. However, as I explain in later chapters, the lexicon of the "square" is important to protesters.

Source: Author, 2025 | Data: Paris Data, 2024; Open Street Maps, 2024

As such, the "Squares" section of the walkway boasts a diverse commercial fabric, mainly within the service industry—though the category of offices is more blurry and could refer to the headquarters of agricultural or manufacturing companies. In any case, it seems to be a space of consumption rather than production. A distinctive feature of this area of Paris is the unusually high concentration of businesses linked to the construction industry, i.e., artisans and furniture/decoration.[16] Now that the nature of the space has been described, let us move on to the changes proposed through the City's flagship project.

The project primarily focuses on the "Squares" portion of the walkway to ensure a walkable continuity, in keeping with the "Canal" portion's features. Regarding this goal, the City identifies two main areas of improvement: opening the centerpiece to make it more continuous for pedestrians and soothing automotive circulation around the space to provide a calmer environment. Opening the centerpiece requires getting rid of the aforementioned gates, while soothing automotive circulation relies on restricting car access on the boulevard. Official documents mention that while some cars will still be able to access the space, the project is intended to suppress their presence altogether in the semi-near future. Furthermore, the proposed walkable continuity is described as green, reflecting the City's promise of adding 4,000 square meters of green coverage to the space. Planning proposals consider increasing the green coverage of the centerpiece by adding lawns and planting more trees, but no further concrete elements are given in official City communications, which only show the spirit of the envisioned extension of green coverage.

b. Overview of actors

The controversy opposes two types of actors: institutional actors inside City Hall, and protesters, who may or may not be involved in a larger organization. This subsection aims to clarify the complex relationships—and occasional overlap—between these entities. A summary of all my interviewees, which includes organizational involvement (or lack thereof), is also available in the appendix.

The Canal Walkway was proposed by Anne Hidalgo's cabinet, in conjunction with specialized departments, at the central City Hall level—with consent and approval from the focal *arrondissement* Town Hall.

Who plans Parisian projects?

Paris is composed of 20 districts, called *arrondissements*, each of which has its own Town Hall (in addition to the central City Hall). *Arrondissement* Town Halls have traditionally held a rather symbolic role, whereby they "held a consulting power (funding and urbanism) and a power of decision-making concerning proximity equipment with educational, social,

[16] This will be further developed in Chapter 2, as it plays an important role in the contestation.

cultural, athletic, and informational objectives" (Verpeaux, 2018, 34). When the Canal Walkway project was proposed, it emanated from the central City Hall, which consulted the impacted *arrondissements*' mayors, who gave their approval. The *arrondissement* mayors were then instrumental in communicating the project to residents through local democracy programs and public meetings and cooperated with the City on the ground if asked.

However, in the 2024 Climate Plan, urban greening has been identified as one of the levers by which this decentralization should be accelerated in the coming years, whereby *arrondissement* Town Halls will play a central role in facilitating planning projects, impact studies, and awareness campaigns (Ville de Paris, 2024).[17]

Due to the highly local nature of the project, opposition is highly concentrated at the neighborhood level, with support from the Parisian chapter of a nationwide environmental organization. One organization, Il faut sauver le Grand Boulevard (IGB for future reference), was created specially to protest the project, while frame bridging (Snow et al., 1986) efforts have increasingly been uniting activists dedicated to different causes around the common struggle of the Walkway. Some protesters decide to remain unaffiliated, while many are either involved in the dedicated organization (IGB) or have been brought to the project by one of their allies. Table 3 summarizes the main organizations involved in the contestation,[18] as well as their characteristics and place in the anti-Walkway movement:

Table 3: Summary of anti-Walkway organizational landscape (1)

Actor	**Conseils de Quartier[19]**	**Construction industry**	**Il faut sauver le Grand Boulevard (IGB)**
Summary	Local democracy organizations[20] with thematic working groups. They are meant to be apolitical, but members lean anti-Walkway.	Market interest group aiming to preserve access to parking and delivery spots for the construction industry.	The focal organization, created specifically to protest the Canal Walkway. Almost exclusively composed of residents.

[17] This carries important implications for academic interest in further urban greening plans in Paris, presumably including the Walkway—which is currently halted—should it be re-proposed in a different form.

[18] The question of which organizations to see as main actors is complicated, and this list should not be read as an exhaustive account of every actor that mobilized against the Walkway. I relied on oral testimony from interviews to gauge which organizations were mentioned by multiple interviewees, and—from a more practical standpoint—prioritized those whose members I interviewed so as to provide readers with an overview of the organizations I will mention in this thesis.

[19] There are two Conseils de Quartier where residents organized against the Walkway within institutional confines. The socio-economic makeup of participants is similar across the two Conseils de Quartier and do not warrant further exploration; one attracts noticeably younger participants, but this did not translate to my interview sample.

[20] Each *arrondissement* is divided into neighborhoods. Each of these neighborhoods has a designated Conseil de Quartier.

Primary ambition	Encouraging local democracy	Preserving their market	Halting construction
Scale of influence	Local	Local	Local
Local power	Limited, dependent on the City	Mixed: access to the City, corporatist ambitions so no local anchorage beyond their own market	Limited, too young
Activity level[21]	++	++	+++
Number of interviewees[22]	15	1	13

Table 4: Summary of anti-Walkway organizational landscape (2)

Actor	**Paris Conservation**	**For a Neighborhood Walkway**	**Too Much Traffic**
Summary	The Parisian chapter of a large federation of environmental organizations. Organized court procedures and a working group.	A local organization that opposes the project as it currently stands, but wants to put forward a different critique than that of IGB.	A local organization which fears that restricting car use on the boulevard will worsen traffic congestion on their street.
Primary ambition	Organizing alternative proposals	Proposing a progressive critique	Limiting collateral damage
Scale of influence	Citywide	Local	Local
Local power	Significant, largest environmental organization in France	Mixed: too young and too marginal, but more in line with the City	Limited, too young
Activity level	+++	+	+
Number of interviewees	7	1	4

c. Summary of events

The Canal Walkway project was announced in spring 2023 through a public meeting with residents. Further engagement with Conseils de Quartier was conducted throughout the summer of that same year. The City's proposal immediately drew opposition, and IGB was

[21] In the anti-Walkway contestation, assessed through conversations with representatives.

[22] These categories are not mutually exclusive.

quickly created. To mitigate this opposition, the City launched a consultation process with a private consulting agency, culminating in the dissemination of a questionnaire asking residents about the changes they would like to see in the "Squares" section of the walkway. The results were communicated via a public meeting in early 2024.

However, the perception that this consultation was inadequate, coupled with the fact that construction was set to begin in the spring, fueled the opposition. In support of IGB, which lacked the seniority to take legal action, Paris Conservation took the City to the administrative court twice in spring 2023. Their first complaint, a recourse for misuse of authority, argued that the Walkway had been wrongly presented as a series of medium-scale projects when, in fact, it constituted a single project spanning over 10 hectares. Per the Environmental Code, for projects equal to or exceeding 10 hectares, impact studies must be conducted—something which the City had not done. As the City began construction before the court's decision, Paris Conservation filed a second complaint—a temporary suspension injunction, which is an urgent means whereby plaintiffs can have the execution of the event or action they are protesting immediately suspended—and won. The City decided to appeal the sentence and took the case before the Council of State, France's highest court for administrative law. The Council of State confirmed the administrative court's decision to order the suspension of all construction until impact studies were conducted—thus ending what a prominent Parisian newspaper called a "legal soap opera".[23]

It has been nine months since the final legal decision was reached. Since then, the project has been in limbo. On the institutional level, the City has entered negotiations with organizations and is reportedly preparing the necessary impact studies to be able to legally re-propose the project. On their side, the major organizations involved in the opposition have been working on reaching new actors. Most notably, Paris Conservation launched a working group with peripheral neighborhood organizations, knowledgeable actors, and mission-oriented partners to work on alternative proposals, while the two Conseils de Quartier most closely involved with the anti-Walkway movement have organized meetings with other Conseils de Quartier that the project would impact in order to centralize a counter-power rooted in local democratic processes. As of May 2025, no official alternatives have been put forward, and no further communications were released by the City of Paris.

With all that said, let us draw our attention back to the wider context of urban greening in Paris as we progress to the first chapter, which details my computational text analysis.

[23] The article is not cited to preserve my case's anonymity.

Chapter 1. The semantics of opposition to urban greening in Paris

> "Mrs Hidalgo, where does all this money you dilapidate [...] come from? From your taxpayers [...]. Have some modesty, Mrs Hidalgo, listen to the people with diverse competences who express themselves around you, do what you know how to do correctly and nothing more." - *Protester of a greening project in the center of Paris*

Urban greening projects in Paris routinely draw opposition from residents. Yet because of how numerous these controversies are and because of their geographic and thematic diversity, it is difficult for the naked eye to assess discursive similarities across these controversies. In this section, I thus propose a topic modeling approach to gauging the overall landscape of opposition to Parisian urban greening projects using a corpus of comments left under online petitions. The initial output will be interpreted and labeled, then discussed. Further explorations aim to gauge topic prevalence (and how it is influenced by time and location), as well as correlations between topics. These operations are all supplanted by a close reading of relevant documents, maximizing the qualitative value of my findings (Nelson, 2020). Robustness checks will confirm the stability of these results both within the Structural Topic Model (STM) framework and externally.

1.1 Research design and analytical strategy

Before delving into the results of my topic models, it appears important to guide readers through the technical process. It involved two main phases: data preparation and model estimation. Importantly, neither phase entails a "correct approach", nor was my approach entirely intuitive. They were both the results of initial decisions—specifically, the decision to use petition comments as my data and the decision to rely on STM rather than other modeling approaches. Thus, in this section, I will systematically explain these initial decisions before getting into the specifics of how my data was prepared and my models estimated.

a. Why work with petitions?

Studying online petitions is stimulating for researchers because of their timeliness, analytical promises, and accessibility. Online activism has been dubbed Protest 2.0 (Petray, 2011, 925): "like Web 2.0, it can exist alongside its predecessor, but it has also displaced its older counterpart to a certain extent" (ibid). In other words, web-based organizing is redefining social movements, with online petitions becoming a particularly fruitful "novel [form] of collective action" (Harrison et al., 2022, 1). Online petitions are easy to create, take seconds to sign, and can be easily shared, making them increasingly popular. They also provide a unique platform that combines first-hand justifications and richness, especially when compared to alternative data sources. For example, while press articles and social media posts are popular data sources to study opposition to climate action (see for example Falkenberg et al., 2022; Paterson, Wilshire, and Tobin, 2024), protesters' quotes are usually mediated by journalists in the former, increasing the risk of interpretive conflict (Borland,

1991) and character limitations on certain platforms (e.g., Twitter) impact the extent to which protesters can justify themselves in the latter. Finally, increasing API restrictions impede researchers' ability to exploit social media content (Trezza, 2023). As theaters of potentially long-form, verbatim justifications, petitions thus constitute an under-exploited (Harrison et al., 2022) yet analytically potent source of data on controversies.

My analysis relies only on petition comments—not the bodies of petitions—because of differences in the aim of these texts. Petition bodies are the window of petitions; they are written by organizers or spokespeople to advertise their struggle to the general public. Given these objectives, I anticipate that these texts are designed to be politically correct. Comments, on the other hand, are written by individual protesters to communicate their feelings about the issue being disputed. They are not intended to attract a wide readership or even be read by all those who view the petition, but rather as a medium to convey their sentiments. As such, I expect that these documents are better suited to the pursuit of understanding intimate justifications because they are, in comparison to petition bodies, relatively unfiltered.

b. Working with petitions

Now that the relevance of petitions as a data source has been established, the question of which petitions to select to ensure thematic, geographic, and temporal coherence remains. Petitions exist both online and offline, but given the limited public availability of physical petition data I only include petitions that were published on designated websites. I limit my data collection to websites approved by the Conseil Économique Social et Environnemental (CESE)—i.e., by a governmental body. Following CESE classifications is doubly relevant. From a practical standpoint, it guarantees that petition websites comply with the following standards: lack of cost, accessibility, use of the French language, neutrality, and a satisfactory moderation system (CESE, n.d.). For the purposes of my analysis, this ensures that the websites I use are considered ethical and provide a relatively uniform experience that limits bias in my data collection. Furthermore, I assume that organizers who protest policy decisions—such as the urban greening initiatives my thesis explores—are aware of CESE classifications and, to maximize the impact of their mobilization, favor CESE-approved websites to host their petitions. CESE approves three websites: Avaaz, MesOpinions, and Change. My analysis focuses on the latter two, as searching on Avaaz did not yield any results[24].

Given my interest in Parisian greening projects, I restrict the geographic location of contested projects to Paris, not including its suburbs due to differing tutelage. While the logic of urban greening extends beyond the city's walls as part of the Grand Paris metropolitan area's Climate Plan (Métropole du Grand Paris, 2018), projects conducted outside Paris itself

[24] This goes beyond the scope of my analysis but, interestingly, multiple Avaaz petitions demand *more* urban greening projects in Paris. This leads me to speculate that the citizen initiatives' choice of where to publish their petition is somewhat determined by political orientations—with the caveat that Change is the most famous website both in France and internationally and that, for that reason, it is probably less politically marked than MesOpinions.

are not governed by the same actors, which would hinder my analysis of attribution of blame. In the same spirit of political coherence, I only look at petitions that were published in response to an urban greening project undertaken under the leadership of current mayor Anne Hidalgo, i.e., since 2014.

Petition websites are a challenging source of data for researchers because they were not made for the purpose of being harvested. At the most basic level, this difficulty reflects in the lack of available APIs; more complex issues surrounding these websites' interfaces themselves make them hostile to data scraping. For example, neither website makes all comments under a petition immediately available. MesOpinions is organized into a system of pages displaying 10 comments per page. While it is tedious to click through tens of pages, this setup has the advantage of already having all comments available. By contrast, Change only allows users to scrape by time-consumingly manually loading all comments, 10 at a time.

I collected all comments manually and classified them into a dataframe. For each comment, I specified the following covariates: ID (petition ID, in order of collection), type (mobility, greening, or miscellaneous as a control), location (classifying the *arrondissements* of interest into the four cardinal points and a general category when the project being disputed concerned all of Paris), and date. These covariates are called "metadata" in the context of STM, which I detail below.

c. Why STM?

The text-as-data literature offers ample choice in terms of which modeling strategy to select, and researchers' decision is always somewhat arbitrary in that no set method is better-suited to any dataset. For this paper, I rely on STM, a novel text mining method developed by Roberts and colleagues in 2014. To motivate this choice, I explain the differences between the most popular unsupervised[25] text mining methods and explain the advantages of STM below.

The most important division in contemporary, unsupervised text mining methods is between probabilistic models and novel approaches facilitated by the rise of Large Language Models (LLMs). The former, most famously LDA and STM, view topics as a mixture of words, and documents as a mixture of topics. The latter, most famously Top2Vec (Angelov, 2020) and BERTopic (Grootendorst, 2022), contend that "through bag-of-words representations, [probabilistic] models disregard semantic relationships between words" (Grootendorst, 2022, 1). In the Top2Vec vignette, Angelov (2020) thus gives the example of words like "big" and "large", which would be considered different by a bag-of-words topic model despite similar meanings (2). To bypass this, LLM-assisted models aim to uncover the meaning of text prior to suggesting any relationships between its components. Typically, such

[25] As you may recall, I previously addressed why I specifically use an unsupervised topic model in the Methods section of my introduction.

models begin by using pre-trained word embedding models—whereby words are represented as vectors, and the similarity between two words is determined by their vector distance—to gauge semantic similarity, then organize semantically-related keywords into themes. Importantly, such techniques do not allow documents to include multiple topics (Grootendorst, 2022).

In this thesis, I implement two probabilistic models, STM and LDA, respectively in my main analysis and as a robustness check rather than LLM-assisted models for two reasons. First, LLM-assisted models are known to be more difficult to interpret than their probabilistic counterparts, with the latter more closely corresponding to human inference (Xing et al., 2024). Second, LLM-assisted models, while technologically sophisticated, veer away from the key assumption that "documents [are] drawn from a set of induced topics" (Evans & Aceves, 2016, 32) as they are trained to assume that each document is best represented by a single, dominant topic. Indeed, LLM-assisted models have primarily been implemented in the emerging "big qual data" subfield as powerful predictors of relationships within large corpuses—not so much in smaller-scale studies like mine.

With that said, the question of which probabilistic topic model to use remains important. As the most popular topic modeling approach (Hagen, 2018), LDA would have been the obvious choice, and in absolute terms it operates relatively similarly to STM. The main difference between the two methods is that STM controls metadata within the model. Descriptive statistics reveal that my sample is unbalanced across all three covariates of interest (type, geography, and year). Thus, these imbalances could have large impacts on the estimation of topic models—especially given the relatively small size[26] of my sample. The novelty of STM does not hinder the empirical anchoring of my study, as the method has been widely applied to sentiment-heavy, short-form online content, e.g., customer reviews (Gao et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2019). Robustness checks further confirm the suitability of STM over LDA for this analysis[27]. With this justification made explicit, let us move on to the actual implementation of the model.

d. Working with STM

My analysis was run using the programming software R, relying on the original "stm" package for the core STM operations. Before estimating my topic models, I excluded the most common words in the French language from the data, as those would likely make topics too general and uninterpretable. For internal consistency, I also made all words lowercase and removed hyphens and punctuation. After preprocessing, I ran three topic models. Model 1—the main model for analysis—concerned all comments. Yet while my corpus addresses greening overall, it contains two distinct types of projects—mobility only versus those that include a green coverage element. As such, Model 2 subsets comments that relate to

[26] Compared to big qualitative data analyses.

[27] See section 1.3a.

mobility-centric petitions and Model 3 subsets comments that relate to green coverage-centric petitions. No seed was selected before running the models, but the randomized seed selected by the STM command was stored for reproducibility.

In STM, the number of topics (K) pulled by the algorithm is manually defined by the researcher. There is no one "right" K for a corpus, nor is there a "correct" statistical way to determine its value. Numerous methods attempt to systematize this process, but its result is always somewhat arbitrary—it depends on the researcher's informed, yet ultimately personal, reading of preliminary test results. For my analysis, I used two different methods to choose K. In the "stm" package, the "searchK" function plots the following characteristics of prespecified K values: held-out likelihood, semantic coherence, residuals, and lower bound. When choosing between possible K values, I prioritized held-out likelihood to assess model fit, and checked that the other characteristics of that particular value were stable enough not to bias my models. Another popular way to choose K is via the elbow method, which posits that, as K values increase, "the average distortion degree becomes smaller" (Cui, 2020, 4), and then chooses an optimal K based on the point where increasing the K value no longer significantly improves performance. The practical advantage of the elbow method vis-à-vis manual refinement of "searchK" results is that the former only outputs one value. Given the small size of my corpus and my corresponding expectation that a high number of distinct topics was unlikely, I tested all K values from 2 to 20 using both methods. I selected initial K values from both outputs and used them to generate exploratory topic models, which I qualitatively inspected to select my final K value for each of my models. For all three models, the manual approach to choosing K yielded more coherent topics—reflecting the difficulty of relying on an inflexible method to undertake a highly qualitative task.

Another initial task for researchers using STM is choosing between word list outputs. STM outputs the following word lists: highest probability, FREX (FRequent and EXclusive), lift, and score. I selected the FREX output because—as its name suggests—it takes into account both the frequency and the exclusivity of words to the topic of interest, thus better highlighting differences between topics without pulling words that are too rare to hold comparative value. Beyond the algorithmic black box (Christin, 2020), this expectation translated into my results: FREX word lists consistently made the most intuitive sense. These lists of words, along with visualizations of topic/highest probability comment pairings, were used to create thematic labels for each topic. The next section reports the results of these models as well as subsequent operations that honed the analysis.

1.2 Results

STM initially outputs a list of topics, which can be visualized in terms of their predictive power over the entire corpus. However, understanding these topics, their (tentative) predictors, and the (equally tentative) relationships which govern them requires subsequent analyses that the "stm" package explicitly provides for—reflecting the method's epistemology that views topics as interrelated. Therefore, I begin by describing the initial

results of my topic models—explaining and interpreting the topics that emerged from my analysis—before describing the correlations between these topics and briefly touching on their associations with my corpus's metadata. Throughout this analysis, it is important to keep in mind that the results of an STM are always sensitive to external factors such as the size of the corpus, the internal distribution of covariates, or even human interpretation of the topics—plenty of attention will thus be paid to the extent to which my results can be ascertained at all stages of the analysis.

a. Topics and topic distribution

Table 5: Summary of topics across models

Model	*Topic*	*Label*	*FREX*
1	1	Heritage	patrimoin, squar, historiqu, sauver, sauvegard, cathédral, lidentiqu
1	2	Democracy	idéologi, barcelon, dargent, tenir, rambla, tourism, dépensé
1	3	Residents	nimport, chez, handicapé, min, parent, devient, bolivar
1	4	Nature	béton, abattr, climatiqu, darbr, poumon, labattag, réchauffement
1	5	English	parc, the, bol, ras, and, foli, preserv
1	6	Circulation	berg, transport, rive, altern, dembouteillag, périphériqu, saturé
1	7	Politics	hidalgo, mme, madam, conneri, pari, marr, parisien
1	8	Comfort	rue, quartier, pist, résident, cyclabl, voltair, bastill
2	1	Pollution	pollut, non, bouchon, nen, réduir, provoqu, aménag
2	2	Stigmatization	marr, voltair, nimport, musé, dictatur, ridicul, magenta
2	3	Inequality	transport, commun, banlieu, francilien, stupid, banlieusard, voix
2	4	Democracy	décision, mesur, parisienn, unilatéral, décis, arbitrair, élection
2	5	Closure	voi, berg, fermetur, fermer, fluidité, monstr, pont
2	6	Time	temp, trajet, périphériqu, met, gare, min, domicil
2	7	Comfort	parc, sign, besoin, devient, bon, bol, quon
2	8	Residents	rue, quartier, résident, avenu, détour, jean, moulin
3	1	Montmartre	montmartr, gen, cour, argent, résident, travail, coût
3	2	Politics	pari, hidalgo, saccag, capital, veux, massacr, jaim

3	3	Residents	riverain, travaux, ème, nuisanc, arrondiss, boulevard, promenad
3	4	Greenwashing	tour, abattr, bétonner, écolo, bureaux, écologist, fric
3	5	English	jardin, garder, the, bol, and, ras, -dam
3	6	Nature	béton, climatiqu, poumon, labattag, réchauffement, bétonis, abattag
3	7	Heritage	patrimoin, doit, conserv, historiqu, sauver, préservé, sauvegard

To understand the results of the STM, the first step is to interpret the output of topics. Model 1—the overall model—yielded eight distinct topics, summarized in Table 1 (see above).[28] These topics encompass four of Boltanski & Thévenot's (2006) worlds of justification. The domestic world corresponds to four topics: Topic 1, renamed "Heritage", Topic 3, renamed "Residents", Topic 6, renamed "Circulation", and Topic 8, renamed "Comfort". Heritage and locale are both explicitly linked to the domestic order of worth; the embodied experiences of residents regarding their possibilities for circulation and comfort also closely reflect the "personally warranted" (Finch, Geiger, and Harkness, 2017, 76) character of these justifications. The civic world mainly concerns topics 2 and 7—respectively, "Democracy" and "Politics". This is because these topics are associated with a defense of the collective rights of citizens, as well as a criticism of policies deemed unjust or unwarranted and the public figures that push them. Although this topic is difficult to fully interpret, I argue that Topic 5—renamed "English"—represents the world of fame, as it brings the issues being disputed beyond the Parisian context. In other words, it attempts to make these controversies more renowned. Finally, Topic 4, renamed "Nature", corresponds to the more recently theorized ecological world, whereby sustainability constitutes a justification in and of itself.

Within the domestic group, "Residents", "Circulation", and "Comfort" use relatively similar semantic strategies, but ultimately make different claims. "Residents" emphasizes the populations who would be most affected by the changes proposed by the various projects being protested. For example, upon inspecting the documents (i.e., the comments) most closely associated with this topic, various local populations are put forward, most saliently seniors, families, and people who have to commute to work:

> "Don't drive residents away to build a Disneyland. Disabled people, seniors, and sick people need a car even in Montmartre!"

> "My daughters take dance classes at Cercles de la Forme and they are still little so I have to pick them up. It used to take me 6 minutes tops back in the day, now it sometimes takes me 30. They ruined the 19th [*arrondissement*], it's relentless. My husband works in the 20th [*arrondissement*], we live in the 19th, he used to take rue

[28] Table 1 summarizes all three models.

> des Pyrénées straight ahead and boom, in 12 minutes he was at work. It takes him 45 minutes now because of the partial closure of rue des Pyrénées."
>
> "In the meantime, classes are closing (école Brunet). Unsurprising. The mayor is doing everything she can to drive families away…"

"Circulation" refers to changes in circulation, e.g., restriction, or closure, of car access, and discusses how these affect drivers as a social group. "Comfort" also usually addresses circulation changes, but with more regards to impacts on residents' daily life—hence, it emphasizes more local concerns. The following quotes, both one of the 10 top comments associated with each topic, illustrate the difference between the two:

> "The paths created by Pompidou were publicly useful because they allowed [drivers] to cross Paris quickly. Their closure on the right river banks is a catastrophe! The *périph'*[29] is saturated now. This decision was made without consulting Parisians and, more importantly, without any replacement solutions. Covering these banks would have been smarter and would have allowed for a conservation of this path and to create a walkway. Personally I used these paths for personal and professional reasons. I think this decision is a threat to the freedom of the *Francilien*[30] people." - *Circulation*
>
> "Hello, I live in the social housing complex at porte de Châtillon (between rue des Plantes and rue Jean-Moulin), life has become hell due to noise pollution, visual pollution, and pollution itself!" - *Comfort*

Finally, "Heritage", while it relies on similar strategies of domestic justification, is qualitatively different in that it does not appeal to the integrity of residents' quality of life, but rather that of the neighborhood's historical and aesthetic qualities. The association between greening and heritage may not be intuitive, but interestingly, the presence of the word "square" as one of the topics' FREX words indicates a larger trend of urban green spaces being patrimonialized—as illustrated by the following quotes, all among the 10 comments most associated with this topic:

> "We absolutely must preserve the green space around Notre-Dame and conserve them in their current frame, which is magnificent and which forms part of our heritage."
>
> "These gardens are part of Paris's cultural and spiritual heritage, they must be protected and preserved."
>
> "I want the heritage, as it is, to be preserved. Why change what is beautiful? I don't want the vegetation or the street furniture to change."

[29] Short for *périphérique*, the highway that surrounds Paris.

[30] Residents of Île-de-France, the region where Paris and its suburbs are located.

As such, “Heritage” seems to relate to concerns about urban greening processes because the spaces being touched—often existing green spaces in projects which seek to augment green coverage—are, themselves, seen as a form of heritage.

The difference between the two topics that make up the civic order of worth is more straightforward. On one hand, “Politics” mostly consists of attacks against City Hall itself, e.g., “I’m tired of City Hall destroying Paris, not everybody can be Haussmann” or “we need to fire Anne Hidalgo from City Hall”. On the other hand, “Democracy” calls into question the representativeness of the policies being put into place, e.g., “this is a denial of democracy” or “no consultation was organized”.

“English”, as its name suggests, is primarily composed of comments written in English. These comments were likely grouped into a topic because of their semantic uniqueness due to the language barrier, so they are not necessarily cohesive in terms of the actual content. Furthermore, it is not always clear whether they are written by residents eager to share their concerns with the rest of the world or by international onlookers; however, what is evident is that they reflect either a willingness or a propensity to attract international attention to what would otherwise be hyperlocal concerns.

Finally, “Nature” encompasses two pro-environmental discourses. The first corresponds to a flora-based argumentation, based on tangible physical elements of green space that stand to be damaged by the projects being debated. The second regards more general concerns about climate change and its consequences. As demonstrated by the quotes below, these two concerns are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are usually merged. At the very least, among the top comments associated with the “Nature” topic, none solely rely on a climate-change-based argumentation:[31]

> “Cutting down living and healthy trees is criminal! Therefore, we should no longer talk about environmentalism, but rather about assisted suicide![32]”

> “No to the artificialization of soils and to cutting down trees!!!!!! And what about the good intentions of PLU2023[33]???? And what about climate change??????”

> “It’s inadmissible to cut down trees, even if they’re old, to build things for the 2024 Olympic Games. Nature first, the environment first—and we need wooded spaces to fight against planetary warming and CO2.”

---

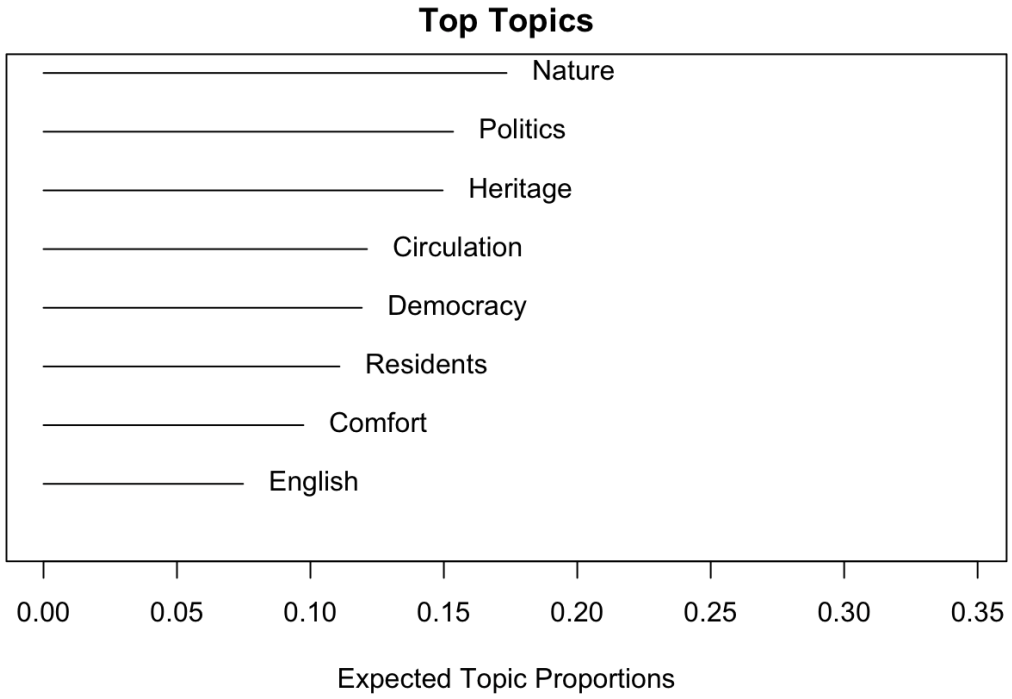
[31] This lack of a sole reliance on more abstract environmental concepts may be due, as illustrated by quotes 2 and 3, to an imprecise understanding of what concepts like “climate change” or “CO2” entail. This intuition is confirmed by my fieldwork, and will be further developed in section 2.1c.

[32] Reading this quote, it might seem counter-intuitive to consider that the project being disputed is a greening project. This comment relates to a project that would indeed have cut down some trees, but planted more overall.

[33] The local urbanism plan, mentioned in the introduction.

This lack of a sole reliance on more abstract environmental concepts may be due, as illustrated by quotes 2 and 3, to an imprecise understanding of what concepts like "climate change" or "CO2" entail. This intuition is confirmed by my fieldwork, and will be further developed in section 2.1c. For now, let us discuss the distribution of Model 1's suggested topics across the corpus, summarized in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Expected topic proportions, Model 1



"Nature" seems to be the most popular topic in the corpus—however, this should not be taken to mean that ecological justifications are the most popular in the Parisian anti-greening landscape, since adding all the topics that constitute other worlds of justification into subgroups would challenge this popularity. This is also further nuanced by the fact that there is only a marginal difference in expected topic proportions (≈ 0.02 percentage points) between the first and second most common topics. In fact, there is no dominant theme in the corpus. This suggests that most worlds of justification present in the corpus—save for the world of fame, given the small expected proportion of the "English" topic overall—can be considered consequential in the discursive construction of opposition to greening. However, expected topic proportions should not be granted too much importance in the interpretation of models, especially given the influence of corpus length on measures of topic prevalence (Shadrova, 2021). Furthermore, relying on expected topic proportions to assume discursive importance wrongly assumes that quantifying prevalence quantifies meaning (ibid). As such, the proportions outlined in Figure 2 should be seen here as nothing more than an exploration, and the rich description of topic content provided above provides the most important overview of the corpus.

Let us now move on to the more narrow analyses of green coverage versus mobility-focused petitions. Strikingly, most of the topics suggested by Model 1 can be found

in the two sub-models; however, they are unequally distributed across different types of petitions. Like Model 1, Model 2—the mobility model—yielded eight topics, most of which have to do with Model 1's "Circulation", "Comfort", and "Residents" topics. This reflects the fact that mobility projects do indeed primarily influence transportation—and, by extension, residents' self-transportation habits and possibilities. On the other hand, Model 3—the greening model—only yielded seven topics (one fewer than Models 1 and 2). This difference in the number of topics is not significant, and should not be taken to signify much about the latter model's topic composition. What is more striking is that, per Model 3, while it also boasts a discussion of residents and politics, green coverage-focused petitions seem to drive most of the conversation around climate change and heritage. Indeed, these considerations are absent from Model 2, yet they are—as shown by Figure 2—very prevalent in the overall corpus. Model 3 also seems responsible for the topic of "English", which could indicate that changes to green coverage are more susceptible to draw international outrage. This is unsurprising for a city like Paris, which is a major hub of international tourism (Capocchi et al., 2019) and is associated with a rich cultural imaginary (Gravari-Barbas, 2017). This reflects the previous observation that the conversation around heritage centers green space; as such, it could signify that changes to green coverage are also more likely to be changes to patrimonialized spaces, thus potentially impacting tourists or, on a more symbolic level, high-cultural capital individuals on the international scene who subscribe to the Parisian imaginary (ibid).

Figure 3: Expected topic proportions - Model 2

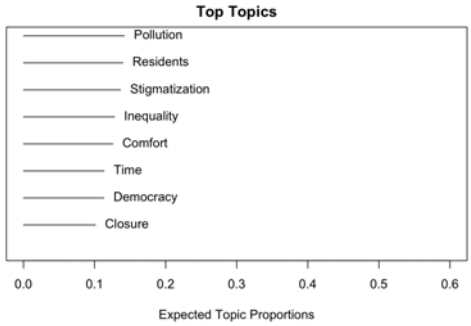
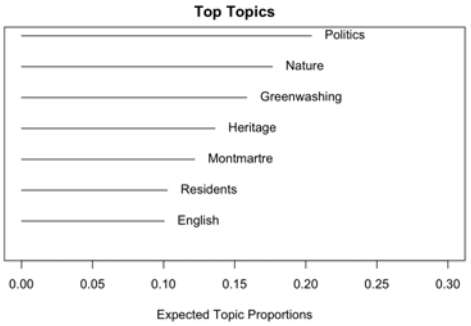


Figure 4: Expected topic proportions - Model 3



Finally, looking at the difference between expected topic proportions between Models 2 and 3 (see Figures 3 and 4 above), it appears that both are highly influenced by political and environmental concerns. Model 2's political content is mostly driven by the perception that drivers are being unfairly stigmatized, while Model 3's corresponding petitions seem to more directly criticize the powers in place rather than the intimate consequences of policies—in line with the fact that "Residents" as a topic, while present in both models, is much more predictive of the mobility corpus than it is of the green coverage corpus. This reflects the (aforementioned) fact that mobility policies impact immediate, day-to-day behaviors much more than the extension of green coverage does, thus predicting a more intimate, personalized form of contestation. Further strengthening this intuition is the fact that the

appeal to a higher, collective concept of "Heritage" is only present in the green coverage corpus. In terms of ecological justification, this personal versus collective cleavage is also observable, with Model 2's "Pollution" being a much more local issue than Model 3's "Nature".

Once again, given my highly interpretive labeling of all these topics, another researcher could very well have inferred different labels from the FREX word lists, leading to other interpretations. As in the previous model, descriptions of topic compositions are a much more interesting—and robust—discussion than that of topic prevalence.

b. Topic correlations

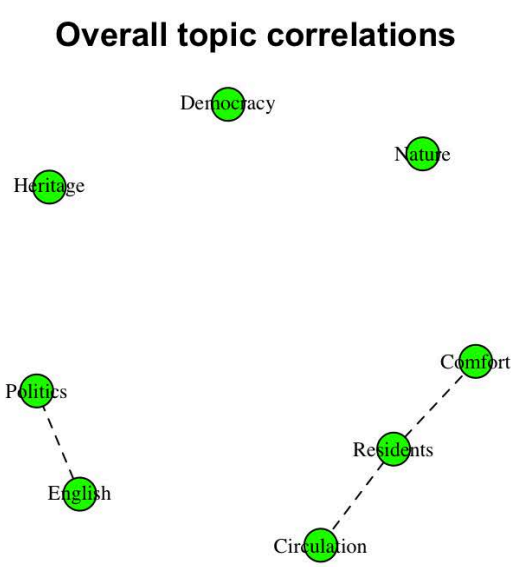
STM allows for the estimation of topic correlations via the "topicCorr" function. A positive correlation between two topics indicates that they are likely to be discussed in the same document (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley, 2019), which is taken to indicate that corresponding themes are used in similar contexts and, by extension, somewhat connected. The following graphs show all correlations between topics above the 0.01 threshold[34]. This means that negative correlations and correlations below 0.01 are truncated to 0. While somewhat limiting, especially using a small sample where there are fewer opportunities for correlation in the first place, this approach ensures that only meaningful correlations are explored and thus avoids extrapolating associations between topics.

Throughout this section, readers should keep in mind that two features of my corpus could negatively influence the strength of topic correlations. First, petition comments are generally short-form documents, meaning that there are fewer words in each document than other sources, e.g., administrative documents like those used by Farrell (2016), might allow for. This restricted space reduces opportunities for different topics to appear in the same document. Second, this study has a relatively small N[35] compared to other uses of STM, which also limits occasions for topics to correlate. To address this issue, I supplement my analysis of topic correlations with sustained engagement with the written sources—i.e., the comments, especially those most highly associated with topics of interest. With these caveats in mind, this measure, while still inviting prudence, remains a helpful tool to make sense of relationships between topics.

Figure 5: Topic correlations for Model 1

[34] Automatically set by the algorithm.

[35] For the reader's information, in terms of the number of documents, Model 1 > Model 3 > Model 2.



The topic correlation graph for Model 1 shows three isolated topics—"Nature, "Heritage", and "Democracy". Intuitively, the fact that "Democracy" is not highly correlated with "Politics" is puzzling. Upon closer inspection, it appears that "Politics" emphasizes *ad hominem* attacks against Anne Hidalgo and vague claims that her administration is "destroying" Paris, while "Democracy" relates to more procedural complaints about a (perceived) lack of consultation. As such, these two topics, while conceptually related, operate on different semantic strategies.

The other two isolated topics are "Nature" and "Heritage". I attribute their isolation to their specialized vocabulary, especially in a relatively small sample. More interesting for this analysis (and more stable) are the relationships between the topics which constitute the two clusters. "Residents" correlates with both "Comfort" and "Circulation", which makes intuitive sense because changes in circulation impact residents insofar as they must take alternative routes to regain their neighborhood, and because comfort is a highly domestic concern. Further inspection of the top comments that are strongly associated with the all three topics confirm this intuition, e.g.:

> "Intolerable. We can't circulate anymore. I have lived in the 19th *arrondissement* since birth, it's shameful to treat us this way. We need to work, do groceries, and see our family, and it takes 25 minutes to drive 10 kilometers. Not everyone can walk and bike!"

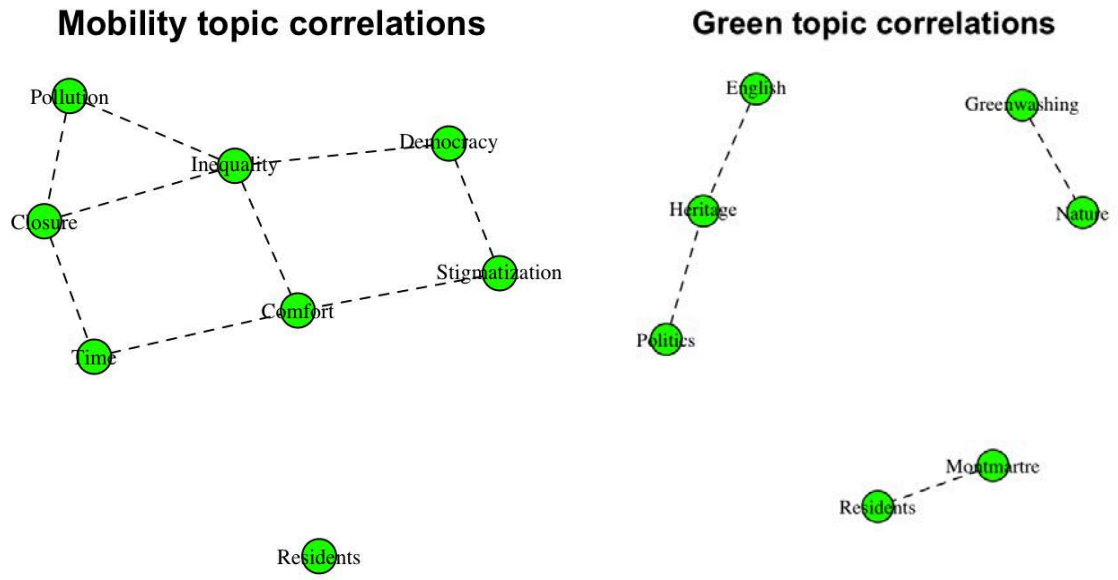
> "I'm tired of all this construction, these deviations, all this time wasted waiting for the bus, for seniors and disabled people. [...] All this is becoming unbearable."

> "I'm against increasing green coverage, getting rid of all the parking spots (cars and two-wheels), pedestrianization, and the restriction of circulation, which will bring in more noise and complicate daily life. Our neighborhood is calm."

The strong correlation between "Politics" and "English" is more surprising. However, inquiry into the top 50 comments associated with the "English" topic reveal some language corresponds to a criticism of the powers in place, e.g., "greenwashing" or "unilateral decision"—language which is also found in the "Politics" topic. As such, the correlation between these two topics could point to international outrage toward City Hall's policies or, perhaps, efforts from locals to write in English to democratize their struggle beyond Paris or even France. However, this interpretation invites caution for two reasons. First, the "English"

topic is—as previously mentioned—the least prominent topic in the corpus, and the least internally cohesive. Further adding to this instability is the fact that the corpus is primarily composed of French words, making semantic connections between French and English comments shaky at best.

Figures 6 and 7: Topic correlations for Models 2 and 3



The topic correlation graph for Model 2 shows clustering around the concept of "Inequality", which is linked to "Closure", "Pollution", "Democracy", and "Comfort"—reflecting wider mobilizations about just transportation. This is best illustrated through examples from the text, which show residents' concerns about who is impacted by changes in circulation and how these impacts translate into day-to-day lives:

> "I'm signing because we can't forget that Paris is not a simple city or a grouping of *arrondissements*, it's a capital with a distribution of work in the west and housing in the east. Transportation offers are saturated and cannot evade car use, unlike Paris *intramuros* which benefits from other transportation offers. [...] Paris should get the opinions of neighboring cities, the residents of which are users of Paris."

> "Repression viewed using the angle of the closure of Paris's essential axes will create congestion which will only further hurt the local economy, and pollute Parisians even more—but the problem especially stems from suburban cars! They should create real solutions to accommodate and transport day workers, like affordable and clean parking solutions around the end of subway lines.[36]"

> "Wanting to give more space to pedestrians can be commendable *per se*, but you need to create public transportation and infrastructure to allow people and the commercial actors who don't have another choice, for work, than to use their car. [...] But this

[36] Save for a few exceptions, Paris's subway lines usually terminate in the suburbs.

problem doesn't apply to Ms. Hidalgo, who lives in Paris and thus doesn't know the preoccupations of suburbans—the working French!"

The topic of "Residents" is isolated—a stark difference from the other two models. Keeping in mind that this may be due to the fact that the Model 2 has the smallest N of all and that, therefore, it is the most unstable, we could hypothesize that this isolation is due to the fact that other topics use more general language. Indeed, these may pertain to petitions that are not confined to one locale, which may be difficult to pair with domestic-oriented words like "neighborhood", "street", or "residents", as well as the specific geographic names well-represented in the "Residents" topic. However, this explanation is relatively unconvincing due to the fact that the "Residents" topic correlates with "Comfort" in Model 1, making the instability hypothesis more prudent.

Model 3's topics correlate in three mutually exclusive clusters. Each cluster could be assigned to a wider theme, with topics corresponding to different iterations of that theme. The "Nature"/"Greenwashing" dyad thus regroups environmental justifications, the "Montmartre"/"Residents" dyad relates to residents' concerns about their immediate neighborhood and daily practices, while the "Heritage"/"English"/"Politics" cluster connects different facets of more general arguments about how Paris—and its patrimonialized green spaces—should be managed. The fact that these clusters do not communicate speaks to the thematic separation between these topics, but can also be traced back to the smaller-N issue whereby topics have fewer opportunities to correlate. Confirming this limitation is the fact that, once again, some results contradict with what was found in Model 1—consistent with the increased instability of the model as N decreases. For example, in Model 3, "Politics" and "English" do not directly correlate with one another but rather through a shared correlation with "Heritage".

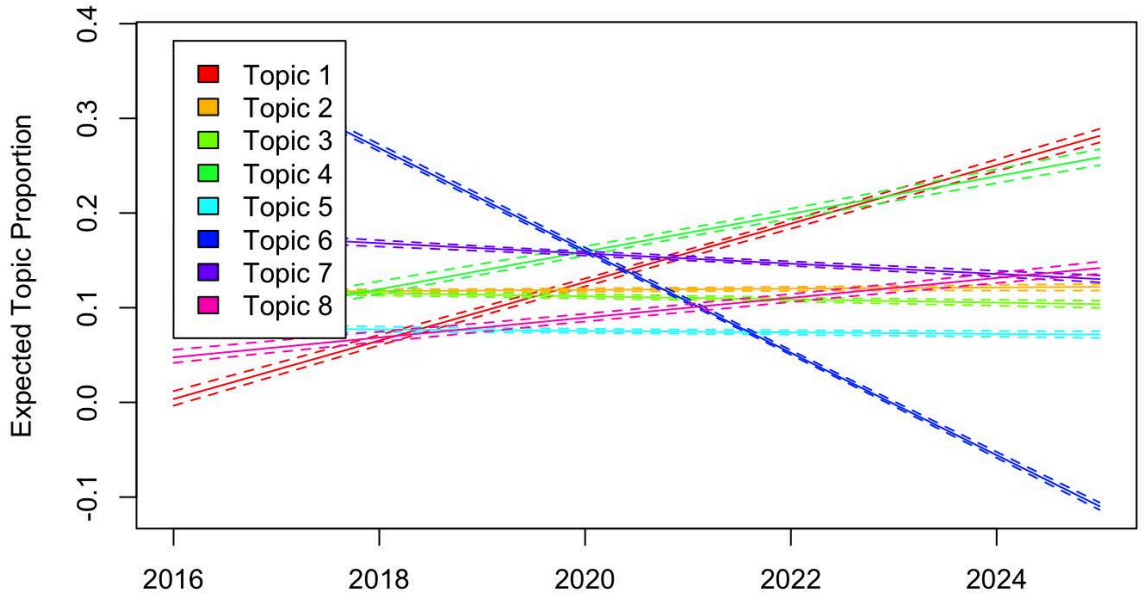
c. Additional covariates

My STM metadata includes time and geography as control variables. Importantly, time refers to the year in which the petition was published, not the year corresponding comments were published. This ensures that comments relating to the same petition are similarly weighted—this is especially relevant for petitions published toward the end of the year, where many comments date from the beginning of the following year. MesOpinions does not provide the year of publication for petitions, so the date of the first comment serves as a proxy for this measure. The following section shows tentative results, for Model 1,[37] regarding the prevalence of topics over time and geography.

[37] Similar analyses were produced for Models 2 and 3, but are not discussed here. As explained below, exploring the influence of covariates in a smaller-N dataset is relatively unreliable, as this approach is sensitive to contextual variations in the distribution of documents regarding the covariates of interest. This issue would only have been exacerbated in an analysis of the green coverage and mobility subsets of my data. Besides, as previously discussed, the overall topic model is driven by a mix of topics from Models 1 and 2, so discussing the overall model also indirectly discusses these more narrow specifications.

Figure 8 (see below) shows the distribution of topics over time for Model 1.

Figure 8: Distribution of topics over time (Model 1)



The impact of these covariates is less discursive than it is contextual. For example, looking at Figure 8, one could contend that, since 2016, Parisians have been gradually less concerned with circulation (corresponds to Topic 6, in dark blue). However, this trend is largely due to the distribution, over time, of projects related to changes in circulation—i.e., the mobility subset of the data. Indeed, over 77% of all mobility comments are from the year 2016, mostly due to two popular petitions published that year, accounting for, respectively, 231 and 1,674 comments. The former denounces restrictions on automobile circulation on a major axis of eastern Paris, while the latter protests the closure of the Seine's banks to cars. This example shows how, without a complementary contextualization, the model's sensitivity to the distribution of comments can lead to an incorrect interpretation of time/topic trends.

More reliable, then, is the measure of which topics stay stable over time—i.e., which topics are likely not as influenced by the popularity of context-dependent petitions. This stability most pertains to the following topics, for which the fit is almost horizontal: "Politics" (Topic 2, in yellow), "Residents" (Topic 3, in neon green[38]), and "English" (Topic 5, in cyan). The persistence of "English" over time checks with the fact that, over the years, multiple projects attracted international attention; however, because the "English" topic is marginal in the overall distribution of topics, there might simply not be enough observations to observe a trend. "Residents" and "Politics", on the other hand, are both larger drivers of the overall composition of the corpus; their persistence over time indicates that domestic justifications and dissatisfaction with mayor Anne Hidalgo's government are a stable motif.

[38] Caution: not to be confused with "Nature" (Topic 4, mint green), the prevalence of which seems to increase over time.

Concerning the geographic determinants of topic content, conclusions are equally prudent.[39] While some topics emerged as particularly associated with one location, this often has more to do with the popularity of petitions in these locations. For example, "Nature" is highly correlated with petitions in the west of Paris, but we can largely trace this back to a controversial project which would have cut down some trees in the process of re-vegetating part of a famous park, while "Heritage" is strongly associated with the center of the city, where the gardens close to another landmark were projected to be opened up. However, two outliers are interesting to mention. First, "Comfort" strongly correlates with the south of Paris, the least represented portion of the city in the sample—perhaps because it is highly residential—and correlates least with the west and center of Paris, which are more impacted by tourism. Second, "Residents" is similarly distributed, with low correlations with the east and center of Paris but a high correlation with the more residential north of the city; however, this finding is less convincing because it is likely biased by a popular petition protesting the pedestrianization of some parts of Montmartre. Again, these conclusions are tentative, not definitive. However, they could point to a difference in discourse between highly residential and highly touristic neighborhoods, with the former relying on lifestyle-focused domestic justifications and the latter drawing from more global, ideological registers.

1.3 Discussion

The preceding section has thus given an overview of what can and cannot be ascertained from the results of my three STMs. This attention to interpretability will be deepened here through a series of robustness checks, notably through an alternative LDA specification to see whether including metadata actually influences the coherence and predictive power of topic models in my case. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the limitations of my method, motivating my decision to concentrate, for the remainder of my thesis, on a case study of one particular greening controversy using face-to-face methods.

a. Robustness checks

To fine-tune my qualitative intuition that the "Heritage" topic sometimes patrimonializes nature, I run additional analysis to see when the "Nature" and "Heritage" topics would correlate to the same topic. Excluding outputs where two or more topics contained the same words—which indicate a poor model fit—this "split model" corresponds to K = 19. Topic correlations for the split model[40] exhibit that "Nature" and "Heritage" both correlate with "Destruction". As such, "Nature" and "Heritage" seem to relate to each other through the perception that they are both being destroyed. A close reading of the comments associated with the "Nature" and "Heritage" topics seems to confirm this hypothesis:

[39] Figures are available in the appendix.

[40] Figure available in the appendix.

> "These sites are exceptional and form part of France's identity and heritage—not that of the Republic which negates the judeo-Christian origin of our eternal FRANCE. Let's not let these low-cost politicians destroy everything." - *Only heritage*

> "Stop cutting down trees!!! Stop concreting over natural spaces!!! Leave the trees alone, trees are essential to life, to the environment, to the wellbeing of all the living, without trees, without vegetation, we can't breathe anymore, we suffocate, we must stop this rampage, this chainsaw massacre!" - *Only nature*

> "It's indecent to waste money to destroy a garden which is very pretty and well-appreciated for what it is today, to establish a free 'zone' [...] with no soul, and suppressing what makes the Parisian charm." - *Both*

To check whether my findings were robust to other methods of computational text analysis, I replicated Models 1, 2, and 3 using LDA.[41] Like STM, it performs a probabilistic, unsupervised topic model; the main difference between the two algorithms is that LDA operates under an assumption of independence, i.e., documents are assumed to share no pre-existing characteristics that would influence topic correlations and prevalence. This means that, unlike STM, the model is not fed any metadata about the documents. Furthermore, it remains the most popular approach to estimate topic models in sociology (Hagen, 2018); if no differences between my LDA and STM results are found, the added value of STM over LDA is thus null.

To maximize comparability with my STM findings, I set the same seed as my STM models for the LDA models. To best replicate how the number of topics was chosen in the original analysis, I also manually chose my K values rather than using a set method. For Model 1, my interpretation of the LDA algorithm suggested a different K value than that which was used for STM. I checked that the STM K value did not particularly misbehave and ran two models: one for the LDA-specific K, and one for the original STM K. Because both approaches yielded similar topics, I report the results of the model with the original STM K for ease of comparison. Finally, because LDA does not allow the researcher to estimate FREX words, I report both highest probability and FREX words for the STM specification when comparing the two models.[42]

For all three models, the LDA output relatively similar topics as STM, especially when comparing the LDA output with STM's highest probability words. This confirms the robustness of the topics estimated in STM. However, the expected distribution of these topics slightly varied. These differences in distribution can reasonably be attributed to the absence of weighting. For example, as previously discussed, the topic of "Circulation" is primarily associated with two petitions published in 2016; interestingly, in Model 1, it ranks second, in

[41] Previously defined in section 1.1c.

[42] A comparative table summarizing topic composition and prevalence for LDA and STM specifications of all three models is available in the appendix.

terms of predicted prevalence in the corpus, according to LDA, and fourth according to STM. Similarly, for Model 2, some domestic concerns, e.g., "Comfort", are underrepresented compared to the original STM model—perhaps due to the fact that hyperlocal petitions tend to garner less support than petitions that concern large Parisian arteries. Finally, in Model 3, the most prevalent topic per STM—"Politics"—only ranks fourth per LDA. Meanwhile, the fourth most pervasive topic per STM, "Heritage", ranks first per LDA, which could perhaps be explained by the popularity of a few petitions concerning changes to famous landmarks in Paris. These switches in prevalence could, once again, be explained by the fact that LDA does not control for the number of comments associated with specific petitions, and tends to overestimate the importance of topics most present in popular petitions while underestimating those that are more stable across the corpus, but perhaps present in fewer comments overall.

Overall, these checks confirm two advantages of STM over LDA, in terms of fit and intelligibility for this study. First, the fact that STM outputs FREX word lists makes topics more interpretable. Indeed, in LDA, words tend to repeat across topics—this repetition usually concerns uninformative words, e.g., "Paris" (as all petitions studied concern Paris, this word gives little information about the content of topics), thus adding unnecessary noise to the output. FREX's promise of exclusivity solves this issue. Second, and perhaps more importantly, LDA's assumption of independence slightly biased my results in favor of more popular petitions. This is not to say, however, that LDA is a less suitable method overall; in larger-N studies where single documents are less likely to bias the sample, pre-existing inequalities in document distribution may have a minimal impact on topic distributions. Thus, the advantage of STM over LDA cannot be generalized beyond my specific case, where the corpus is small and comments are unequally distributed across all covariates.

b. Limitations

The above analysis can help contextualize opposition to various greening measures in Paris. However, alone, it suffers from multiple limitations. First, STM is probabilistic and sensitive to changes in the programming environment, limiting its reproducibility even when the seed is specified. In other words, even with little change to the documents, environment, or formulas, other analyses could amount to different, but equally valid, results. This is why the text-as-data literature stresses that computational text analysis must be supplemented by a close reading of the text (Nelson, 2020)—as I have done here. This approach ensures that the researcher does not blindly follow the classifications suggested by topic modelling strategies, but rather aims to understand whether these suggestions translate into a human analysis.

It thus remains important to note that STM is not causal, and that its results cannot be extrapolated beyond my specific case and models. This lack of generalizability is due to the relative instability of STM, but also to the typically smaller size of the data it is fed, especially in comparison to more traditional quantitative samples. Even where weights are applied, STM predictions can be influenced by documents' length (Ulstein, 2024)—which is clear in all my models, since geographic location words from the most commented petitions appear in some FREX lists (e.g., cathédral, voltair, and bastill in different Model 1 topics).

Beyond the limitations of STM as a method, my data is, arguably, partial as well. Petitions attract sentiment polarity, meaning that they are likely to over-represent vehement opinions. While this allows me to gauge the aspects of urban greening that spark the most outrage, it can undermine nuance; as such, this analysis should not be taken to represent the full range of complaints against Parisian urban greening policies. Most glaringly, the choice of petition comments as a data source risks underestimating the contributions of populations left behind by the digital divide. Studies on inequalities in digital production processes emphasize the influence of both material access to Internet-equipped devices (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2019) and skills, support, and types of use (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001). Socio-economic characteristics determine these digital inequalities, with youth, education, skill level (Shaw & Hargittai, 2018), and—most saliently—class power (Schradie, 2020) all positively correlating with online content production. I can therefore expect that my corpus underrepresents older, unskilled, lesser-educated, and working-class protesters. This unequal distribution of digital production influences the type of people who leave comments under petitions, which petitions are able to draw the most comments, and which controversies translate to petitions in the first place. As an illustration, descriptive statistics of my sample show that comments are mostly concentrated around the center and the west of Paris (56.67% of all comments)—i.e., the most long-standing privileged areas of the City (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 1989). While STM is a weighted approach that limits the biases of this imbalance in the modeling phase, the data I collected remains partial, and, for example, likely does not address the full scope of opposition to greening in deprived neighborhoods. This intuition is supported by the fact that none of my topic models center issues such as fears of displacement or economic changes, despite their centrality to the green gentrification literature (Anguelovski et al., 2019).

The rest of this thesis thus builds on the context provided by the preceding analysis through an extended case study of the Canal Walkway—which, as mentioned in the introduction, encompasses both green coverage and restrictions to automotivity. Therefore, it can help extend and hone the general trends laid out above—with the caveat that I am only exploring the grammar of justifications in one neighborhood at one point in time. Interviews also allow me to reach some of the populations left behind by digital inequality dynamics—most saliently, here, older seniors (Friemel, 2014). Finally, it provides avenues to deepen the static results of STM through face-to-face interactions and the possibility of probing.

1.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has shown that protesters of Parisian greening projects primarily draw from the domestic, civic, and green worlds of justification to motivate their opposition. Domestic concerns encompass changes to tradition, aesthetics, and lifestyle; civic concerns are related to both City Hall's character and methods; and green concerns stress potential harm to nature or failure to mitigate climate change. These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive. For example, protesters' patrimonialization of nature

articulates domestic and green justifications, while the occasional appearance of comments written entirely in English suggests either a willingness or an ability to appeal to international audiences, hence hinting at the world of fame. Overall, domestic concerns seem to drive justifications, especially in mobility-related petitions, while civic and green concerns are more closely associated with changes to green coverage. These results indicate that no single reason explains the entirety of opposition to Paris's urban greening agenda, and the diversity of justifications—including concerns about the sustainability of these projects—confirms that this opposition cannot be dismissed as climate backlash.

The next chapter will interrogate the reasons for opposing the Canal Walkway put forward by residents in publicly-available online documents and during our interviews, thus extending this chapter's automated topic model with a manual thematic coding approach.

Chapter 2. Proposing a counter-frame: What's behind urban greening?

The objective of this chapter is to analyze the discursive construction of the Walkway and its associated problems by the project's counter-movement (Mottl, 1980), speaking to the sociology of public problems (see Becker, 2024; Gusfield, 1986). This strand of the literature focuses on how claims-makers bring problems to public arenas. How the construction of social problems should be investigated by researchers is the subject of a longstanding debate between social constructionists and critical realists. On one hand, social constructionists view claims-makers as "signifying agents" (Benford & Snow, 2000, 613) who define the meaning of problems as they protest them. The extent of this focus on claims-making and interpretation depends on the strictness of the constructionist ontology mobilized (Best, 1997). On the other hand, critical realists see problems as rooted in objective reality, whereby "social facts, like problems, exist within the same reality as the ones governed by the laws of physics" (De Moor, 2025, 6).

I am interested in gauging the diagnostic frames, i.e., "problem identification and attributions" (Benford & Snow, 2000, 615), mobilized by protesters. Importantly, the anti-Walkway movement performs two framing operations. One is putting forward problems associated with urban greening outside the institutional framing of the concept, i.e., by emphasizing adverse effects outside the sustainable discursive sphere. Another is directly questioning the sustainability of the project, i.e., proposing a counter-frame (Benford & Hunt, 2001) to the institutional framing of urban greening. By following Benford & Snow's (2000) framework, I thus take the social constructionist approach, considering, like Burningham & Cooper (1999), that "the politics of environmentalism involves, crucially, the construction and deconstruction of claims" (311). This further echoes the aforementioned need for academics to "denaturalize the good" (Angelo, 2019, 1) of urban greening, which the case of the Walkway exemplifies.

2.1 *Is* it greening? Challenging the Walkway's construction of greening

As she was reading my consent form (available in the appendix), Catherine, one of the most active members of Il faut sauver le Grand Boulevard (IGB), suddenly scoffed. When I asked her what prompted that reaction, she pointed to a sentence in the first paragraph: "the objective of this research is to understand the reasons which motivate rejection of this municipal initiative, and, more broadly, *the social acceptability of urban greening projects*" (emphasis added). "Greening project? This isn't a greening project!" she then asserted.

Catherine was one of my first interviewees; as my research progressed, it became clear that her contestation of the Walkway's purported environmental benefits was not isolated. Protesters routinely emphasize the limitations of the City's approach to urban greening, thus employing the aforementioned ecological world of justification whereby "environmental friendliness" (Finch, Geiger, and Harkness, 2017, 76) is the standard by which judgments are made. Lafaye & Thévenot (1993) define this new(er) world as follows: "in this world, what is ecological is worthy, and the person who, by their actions, proves their

care for the environment and strives for its protection is ecological. More and more frequently, the use of the adjective 'green' is used to signify worth. [...] The act of polluting is associated with the state of being small" (512).

The ensuing discussion surrounding how the anti-Walkway movement deconstructs the City's claims to greening follows from the larger trend of protest leaders emphasizing environmentalism as a key driver of opposition. This is further reinforced by the fact that IGB relied on Paris Conservation, the Parisian chapter of France's largest federation of environmental organizations, for legal representation. As such, the way the anti-Walkway movement has presented itself and been publicized makes concerns about the environmental integrity of the space the City's project would change a prominent avenue of justification to investigate. I begin by exploring the content of these arguments, then question their prominence in protesters' aggregate discourse.

a. Threats to flora and fauna

The most obvious strategy to challenge the idea that the Walkway is a greening project consists in emphasizing how it will take away from, rather than add to, existing non-human life, starting with vegetation. One particular point of contention relates to the hedges that currently rest against the squares' gates. Protesters argue that removing the squares' gates—required to open the space up and create the infamous "walkway"—will necessarily harm these hedges, despite City Hall's claims: "[they said] they have the right skills, but they never explained them or showed them to us—how can you get rid of these gates without hurting the vegetation?" (Gilles, IGB facilitator and landscaper). Protesters also argue that these hedges are home to a rich animal life, most notably birds, whose natural habitat would thus be physically degraded by the removal of the gates. One protester identifies another, more indirect threat to animals. Alain, a retired doctor who specializes in the effects of noise pollution, warns against the project's (perceived) potential to further increase noise levels in the neighborhood not only because it disturbs residents,[43] but also because it makes animal life impossible:

> "Critical [noise levels] means that it affects all the living. It's not only the health and sleep of *bobo* residents. It means there cannot be a single living being [...] that can endure those levels. Why? Because all living beings are organized according to the day-night rhythm—that's what we call the nycthemeral cycle. And nighttime has to be silent. Otherwise, you disturb living beings. How can we say that we preserve biodiversity on the canal when, every night, until 3 AM, you have 70 decibels?"

Evidently, one could claim that Alain is pushing highly personalized concerns regarding unwelcome noise under the guise of defending animal welfare. This uncertainty is part of the qualitative research process, and while it is impossible to know whether Alain really holds the Walkway's creatures at heart, it is of great importance that he criticizes the

[43] I detail this further in section 2.2a.

project through the prism of the City's failure of going against its intention to "preserve biodiversity on the canal". His testimony, along with similar concerns regarding the hedges, show that protesters present environmental damage as a continuum, affecting existing vegetation and animals.

In addition to concerns about existing natural features of the Walkway, protesters sometimes concede that the City's project will increase the space's green cover but call into question the longevity of these changes—i.e., they emphasize threats to future/envisioned vegetation. Schematics shown by City Hall during public meetings notably display lawns, an element which raised eyebrows. Indeed, during our interviews, protesters argue that "these lawns will immediately be damaged" due to an increased stress in usage if the squares are not protected by gates. This logic is applied to the squares' natural elements as a whole:

> "Getting rid of a large number of gates will create crossings in every direction. Right now, [...] to cross you need to take a certain detour, use a specific circuit. In Paris, whenever we create possible crossings [...], people spontaneously take the quickest [path]. So people cross anywhere, anyhow. And that prevents vegetation from existing, so there will be less vegetation."

Discursively, protesters draw a parallel between the gates and the hedges, not only because the two are physically linked, but because they are argued to serve similar purposes. While the gates are what "protects" the squares, hedges are conceptualized as "barriers" (or, sometimes, "green barriers"). This conceptualizes the vegetation inside the squares, notably flowerbeds and small trees, as an object to be protected, or even sanctuarized—corresponding to a preservationist view of environmentalism. Protesters seem to embrace this description, even using the word "to save" in the title of the residents' representative organization, and admitting to engaging in (failed) attempts to legally sanctuarize the squares along the Walkway. Jean, who facilitates Paris Conservation's involvement in the anti-Walkway movement, notably explored the possibility of inscribing the space into the "classified woodland" framework, which would have made any further construction on the Walkway almost impossible (DRIAAF, n.d.). Thus, these language elements and practical attempts to patrimonialize the Walkway's natural elements call back to the aforementioned discursive association between nature and heritage.

b. Deconstructing the environmental benefits of "soft mobilities"

The argument that the Walkway would do more environmental harm than good extends beyond the space's four squares to encompass proposed changes in mobility. In this sense, environmental justifications address both "greening" components of the project, namely extending green coverage and decentering automotivity along the Grand Boulevard. In its official communication about the Walkway project, City Hall provides three objectives regarding reduced car access to the Grand Boulevard: soothing bicycle/pedestrian conflicts, soothing car circulation, and reinforcing the fluidity of bicycle circulation. Behind these descriptions of everyday circulation lies a wider political project that centers decarbonized

transport in Paris' urban green transition—something the City refers to as "soft mobilities", for a new, climate-adapted city.

The perceived risk of traffic congestion is central to the diagnostic construction of the Walkway as a problem. The argument is essentially that, by restricting automobile circulation on the Grand Boulevard, the City increases strain on neighboring axes. Protesters highlight two ways in which this would favor air pollution. First, restricting access to large streets like the Grand Boulevard would concentrate the bulk of car circulation on a few axes, which would provoke significant traffic congestion. As such, the problem of car-induced air pollution would not be solved, but rather moved. This underlies the increasing involvement of Too Much Traffic, a neighborhood organization based in another portion of the focal *arrondissement* which has been hit hard by traffic congestion following previous restrictions on car circulation. Stéphanie, the organization's facilitator, indicates that "[greening projects] are acceptable if [impacts] are equally distributed", lamenting her street's status as a "sacrificed" axis. Thus, Stéphanie and her organization not only denounce traffic congestion, but also emphasize injustice regarding which streets have the luxury of boasting "soothed" traffic, therefore providing an environmental justice critique to the City's selective decentering of automotivity.

Second, cutting "too many" streets off for car circulation would increase total driving time, thus not only inconveniencing drivers but also leading their trips to pollute more than they originally would have. Solange, one of my few interviewees who is still working, works in the suburbs and drives to her workplace most days, asserts that, due to recent changes in circulation elsewhere in the *arrondissement*, her everyday driving time has increased in the past few years—"and then you tell me I'm polluting with my car? You're the ones who are adding four or five kilometers [to my journey]!" Her defense of individual practices and criticism of institutional decisions echoes a strand of environmentalism that refuses the individualization of collective problems (Comby, 2014).

Finally, many protesters emphasize that the environmentality of bicycles is largely hypocritical, as they perceive bicycle traffic as mostly driven by new electric models—which they denounce not only in terms of speed (as will be further discussed in section 2.2) but also in terms of energy consumption and environmental impact in the production phase. Once again, protesters' discourse ties back to environmental justice:

> "I would have liked to buy a Toyota Crossair, a hybrid [car] model that I find very pretty, so at least the few kilometers I'd drive [...] would be electric. But don't tell me that the conception of electric vehicles isn't polluting, that's not true. The construction and destruction of electric vehicles pollute a lot. We don't know what to do with the batteries [...] so we send them to African countries because, well, they're public landfills for Europeans." - *Solange, Conseil de Quartier member*

> "— PL: Coming back to my African [expertise], I'm sorry, but talking about 'soft mobilities' is called fucking with people, from an environmental point of view.

— Author: Are you talking about batteries?

— PL: Of course. And there's slavery behind that. I know that because I worked on the Congo, the DRC, etc. [...] All these people who strut around on their [electric] scooters, etc., they don't realize that they're exactly like those 18th-century people who feasted on sugar without really asking themselves who produced the sugar. It's exactly the same thing. So from an environmental point of view, the only credible form of greening is adding vegetation." - *Pierre-Louis, IGB member and retired sociologist*

In these two cases, concerns about environmental justice reach beyond the Parisian context to encompass non-European contexts—perhaps reflecting protesters' overwhelmingly progressive beliefs. Solange and Pierre-Louis in particular have strong ties to left-wing partisan politics. This reflects the larger trend of justice-based opposition to green transition policies in urban areas, beyond the aforementioned unequally distributed impacts of restrictions on car traffic[44].

c. The relatively marginal reliance on "eco-friendly" discourse

Thus far, this section has shown that protesters mobilize the ecological order of worth to criticize the City's environmental policy. However, it is important to note that—despite appearances, i.e., being represented in court by a potent environmental NGO—this discourse is not, proportionately, central to the controversy.[45] Online, environmental justifications account for only 13% of all anti-Walkway arguments. In terms of prevalence, environmental justifications thus rank fourth out of 5 grandparent codes, behind aversion to change, dissatisfaction with City Hall's planning, and desire for more consideration of residents. In my interviews, environmental justifications represent a similar proportion of the wider discussion of motivations for opposition. In this sense, it appears that these justifications do not actually underlie the majority of protesters' decision to oppose the Walkway project.

Furthermore, when environmental justifications are in fact mobilized, they often refer to vague concepts or objects, thus lacking the precision with which other discourses, e.g., concerns about changes in the focal *arrondissement*'s commercial makeup[46], are mobilized. For example, online documents often refer to catch-all terms like "green space", "biodiversity", or "greenscapes"; within slightly more precise concerns like "trees", specific species are never named. This also reflects in my interviews—although locals do express more familiarity with the local fauna, e.g., referring to specific bird species like "sparrows" or

[44] See for example our previous discussion on green gentrification.

[45] The present chapter aims to describe how protesters justify their opposition to the Walkway overall, without regards to representativity. The question of why there is such a discrepancy between appearances and actual discourse will be tackled in Chapter 3.

[46] See section 2 of this chapter.

"chickadees". Yet general descriptions of urban environmental issues remain vague even among protest leaders, e.g., Jean, who describes his organization like so:

> "We touch on a lot of themes, like heritage, obviously environmental health questions, the environment in a stricter sense, green space, biodiversity, flora, fauna, etc., mobility… well, all themes related to the environment in the context of a city. [...] That's our strength."

This vagueness could signify that protesters are only superficially interested in the environmentality of the Walkway, or it could reflect the urban setting of my research, which has previously been associated with a more shallow understanding of natural flows (Beery et al., 2023). In any case, because this imprecision is found in both lay protesters and leaders' discourses, the way the anti-Walkway movement mobilizes vague terminology to defend the natural elements of the square conveys, at best, unfamiliarity with and, at worst, disinterest in this topic.

Importantly, the marginality of environmental justifications refers to the discursive questioning of the City's promise of the Walkway being an urban greening project, not greening as part—or as representative—of larger structural transformations. The fact that the Walkway project is a greening project remains central to how it is being protested, as the larger conceptualization of urban greening as a vector of numerous unwanted consequences is what generally drives opposition to the Walkway project. The next section will thus concentrate on the problems protesters believe urban greening favors.

2.2 It *is* greening, but: Emphasizing the pitfalls of the Canal Walkway project

If ecological justifications are not the most common in the anti-Walkway landscape, then what do protesters put forward? Online, reluctance to change the neighborhood is the most common family of concerns cited by protesters, accounting for almost a third (31%) of all coded complaints. Following this line of reasoning, potential changes to residents' daily environment foreshadow potential changes to residents' daily *lives*. As such, this section explores how protesters move beyond the question of whether the Walkway is a greening project to emphasize greening's adverse effects on neighborhood life, pertaining to domestic justifications whereby "generation [and] tradition" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 165) and more broadly "all the qualities that manifest permanence" (ibid, 166) are prioritized.

a. A threat to comfort

Current descriptions of the Walkway center tranquillity in residents' valuation of the space. My interviewees alternatively represent the space as "a place of rest and breathing", "very calm", or even "extremely peaceful". Online, the body of the focal petition and its comments alike are lush with the even more hyperbolic expression "peaceful haven". Protesters directly associate this tranquillity with the current layout of the space:

> "Because we have trees, we have shade. Well, this year, the weather sucked. But last summer, we were really happy to take walks here. So we have the shade [...], we have the hedges that shield us from the noise. It makes a huge difference in terms of noise. [...] This project would completely open the median strip and thus take away this tranquil and protected aspect, which is exactly what is pleasant [about the space]." - *Sophie, resident and casual member of IGB*

As such, proportionately central to the contestation is the fear that the proposed remodeling will threaten the tranquillity inherent to the Walkway's present-day form. The idea of a "free zone", brought up by multiple interviewees to describe a stress in uses due to a lack of policing, crystallizes those concerns. At the center of "free zone"-related fears lies anxiety tied to an increased human presence in the squares, without physical and time restrictions, which protesters link to future nuisances along multiple themes. First, an influx of people is considered a nuisance, as protesters complain about the space being too crowded—a crowdedness which would lead to "usage conflicts" (Jean, Paris Conservation facilitator). A military lexicon is sometimes used to refer to this influx, e.g., "taken by storm" or "[invasion]" , which suggests that the prospect of the Walkway as a space of mass attraction is violently lived by nearby residents.

Generally, though, it is not crowdedness in and of itself which attracts the most attention, but rather its foreseen consequences, the first of which is noise—which protesters explicitly tie to the aforementioned central theme of tranquillity. As Sylvain, who lives on the Walkway, anticipates: "if you have an open space, that means you can be there 24/24. If you're here [...] with a group of friends, you arrive at 10 PM, with six-packs of beer, a transistor, and speakers on full volume". As such, concerns about noise are closely related to concerns about an increased nightlife marked by alcohol consumption. Marie, a resident of a nearby street, believes that this influx of party-goers will extend beyond the Walkway to inconvenience the entire neighborhood: "automatically, it risks overflowing on [my street] [...] because [they] will take the small streets. [...] [I'm talking about] the circulation of pedestrians, party-goers". Pierre-Louis, who, like Sylvain, lives directly on the Walkway, nuances the NIMBY connotations of these concerns by appealing to the adverse health effects of noise pollution: "it can seem like a quote-unquote 'rich people' problem but if you look at the science, there's a growing understanding that noise nuisances are a public health problem". Élisabeth and Alain, two retired doctors who specialize, respectively, in sleep pathologies and noise pollution, confirm those claims, alerting that noise levels are already exceptionally high in the Walkway's immediate vicinity. Through these scientific arguments, protesters are thus able to add adverse health effects, e.g., cardiovascular disease or auditory problems, to the list of nuisances raised by the City's project.

One final adverse (foreseen) consequence of an influx of people to the Walkway's squares raised by protesters has to do with hygiene. Currently, protesters already characterize the space as unclean, e.g., "it's dirty and it stinks [...] in some places it's more like a garbage can than a green space". They worry that, by opening the squares to unrestricted frequentation, the Walkway project will only exacerbate this existing problem. All the

aforementioned concerns about nuisances are, at times, linked to underprivileged populations by protesters. In my interviews, people experiencing homelessness are often brought forth as the reason why the squares are noisy or unclean. The online discourse surrounding who is responsible for these nuisances often has racist undertones, though this is downplayed in interviews. The body of the focal petition displays pictures, taken by residents from their window, of people who occupy the square, usually to denounce them on suspicion of drug trafficking or because of the noise they allegedly make. Without fail, these pictures exclusively show Black individuals. From these elements, I infer that these populations' very presence in the squares is seen as a nuisance in and of itself. Online, one expression, used sparingly but by multiple commenters, particularly crystallizes this dehumanization: "human fauna", referring to the public that residents deem unwelcome.

As such, the nuisances that resident protesters anticipate will threaten their comfort are defined not only by embodied experiences of previous problems associated with the space (mobilized to argue that the Walkway project will exacerbate them), but also by discriminatory, primarily racial biases[47]—tying into the nativist strand of environmentalism whereby immigrants threaten the "quality-of-life" and "culture" of "native" populations, i.e., longtime, usually white residents (Park & Pellow, 2011, 127). This is further confirmed by interviewees' discursive emphasis on the threat of drug dealing should the Walkway be opened at all times, reflecting the "association between immigrants, people of color, and drug dealing [...] nurtured by news media and film [...] which push these images daily" (ibid, 157). Dave, an immigrant himself, laments that "these people who came by boat [...] are there smoking joints, eating everything and nothing, throwing things everywhere [...] my mission when I came here was that if I love this country [...] I need to integrate, I need to respect it." In defensively distinguishing himself from "these people", Dave thus plays into a common schema in nativist movements whereby immigrants who thrive on "patriotism, a desire to be law abiding and to assimilate" (ibid, 148[48]) contribute to vilifying those that do not.

Outside the squares, the mobility component of the Walkway project also raises concerns about future nuisances. When describing the current space, protesters emphasize the comfort of being detached from circulation as embedded in the aforementioned feeling of tranquillity. Strikingly, they tie this absence of cars back to the nature/culture dualization—e.g., "you transit from the street to the countryside". However, the conversation about changes in mobility being a source of nuisance extends beyond the question of noise to encompass more practical concerns about residents' own transportation habits. As previously explained when discussing the (perceived) environmental impact of circulation restrictions,

[47] It could be argued that the concerns about homelessness are only social, but protesters themselves emphasize the fact that the Walkway's current homeless population is primarily composed of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

[48] As Park & Pellow emphasize, this is also due to a number of other factors, including generational and class differences. However, this goes beyond the scope of this thesis, and what is important here is that Dave distances himself from "these people" by emphasizing his obedience to local rules and reverence toward local lifestyles and culture.

protesters anticipate that their automotivity will be severely impeded by the Walkway project: they expect that traffic will be congested, that they will have to take significant detours, etc.

While, as explained in section 2.1b, these expectations are sometimes used to warn against a rebound pollution effect, the majority of them are tied to protesters' frustration with what they perceive to be a stigmatization of drivers. Multiple protesters use words like "suffer", or "victim", to emphasize the descending, unjust character of the City's increasing restrictions on car circulation—akin to the "Stigmatization" topic present in the mobility-specific topic model. Many are unwilling to give up their car use, e.g., Alain, who lives on the Walkway and complains about the "bicycle lobby": "I don't believe in only bicycles. I *need* my car. (Emphasis added). [...] I already got four 150€ fines because I park my car despite the warning signs in front of my building. They got rid of all the parking spots to load and unload my car". Interestingly, some of the (few) cyclists in my sample also follow this line of thought. Isabelle, one of Paris Conservation's facilitators who frequently commutes by bicycle, expresses a desire to keep the space open to multiple modes of transportation: "what [people ask] for is [...] to take away some space to the car and give some more space to the bicycle, but that can totally be done on existing roads. [...] I don't find swimming lanes interesting [...] I prefer encounters." As such, she challenges City Hall's claim that limiting car circulation would "[smooth]" the Grand Boulevard by arguing that this smoothing could take the form of peaceful coexistence between cyclists and drivers on the roads.

Overall, protesters' most vocal frustration does not have to do with cars themselves, but with bicycles, as they would be given priority on the Grand Boulevard should the Walkway eventually be built. Outside the squares, the incivility associated with immigrants inside the squares is transferred to another population—that of cyclists:

> "You have to tell cyclists that they're not allowed on the sidewalk. While coming here, I gave another cyclist a slap on the butt. He looked at me and I said 'yeah, this is the sidewalk'. They keep riding on the sidewalk [...] [we should] fine [them], because that's the only way people understand. It's sad to say. [...] And on top of that, [cyclists] scold us! I got scolded once again because [...] I nicely told a lady 'hey Mrs, I think you're riding on the sidewalk'. And she called me a bitch. [...] Even among themselves, they're dangerous. Sometimes I think they're going to ram into each other. Sometimes, in the corridors, they yell at each other because one of them isn't going fast enough." - *Marie, Conseil de Quartier facilitator*

> "I've never seen more uncivil people than cyclists. [...] And when I make a small remark, they stop with the desire to hit me! [...] And sometimes it's parents with their children and I think to myself, what a shame! You're showing that to your kids, what kind of education is that?" - *Dave, Conseil de Quartier member*

> "The bicycle has become king. One time, I had to get an operation and when I came out, I was more scared of bicycles [...] than I was of cars, because people will do anything. [...] One time I was [walking near a famous square in the neighborhood],

> and a guy on a bicycle cut in front of me on the sidewalk. And I'm the one who got scolded. I got yelled at, he was telling me that I was just an old bitch and that he was paying for my retirement. It happened to me multiple times. [...] There's a certain arrogance of the bicycle that doesn't sit well with me." - *Laure, IGB sympathizer*

Residents' opposition to cycling infrastructure in urban planning has already been established to be emotionally charged (Wild et al., 2018), as preceding excerpts further confirm. My interviews suggest that this emotional charge is reinforced by protesters' higher moral standard for cyclists as opposed to drivers. As Laure, a resident who is particularly critical of cyclists, explains: "the bicycle [...] is supposed to be more calm, more peaceful, less aggressive. It's not true. That's what's really a shame." Where this expectation comes from is unclear. Perhaps it originates in my interviewees' (primarily) progressive politics, or perhaps it stems from the fact that, according to my interviewees, the City presents cycling as a "soft" or even "virtuous" mode of transportation. The latter option would make the contrast between institutional constructions and protesters' perception of reality even more intolerable—especially as some residents feel penalized for driving while thinking it is essential to their daily life—and feed into the aforementioned feelings of unjust stigmatization.

b. Protesting changes in the neighborhood fabric

Changes in the squares themselves are feared mainly because they challenge what protesters think the squares—and the neighborhood—should be. The integrity of the space is tied to the characterization of what a "square" is, and the importance of this characterization reflects the moralizing character of classification (see Bowker & Star, 1999). Protesters' definition of what constitutes a square varies in technicity, but always ties into visual and, most importantly, ambiental qualities of the space:

> "[It's not a] park, because that's not exactly the same thing from a semantically rigorous standpoint—the square has a particular definition that's completely different from that of the park. The square is closed. [...] Its vocation, actually, is to protect the people inside to keep a certain tranquillity [...] it can't be a place of transit. [...] The squares won't exist anymore because there won't be gates." - *Catherine, IGB facilitator*

> "I saw an image [circulated by] City Hall, where you only saw people walking. I didn't see squares, I didn't see closed spaces." - *Stéphanie, Too Much Traffic facilitator*

> "[They want to] destroy the squares to say that they're no longer squares, but rather just a greened walkway. [...] A square, on principle, is an enclosed space. That's going to change the nature [of the space] and, evidently, its uses. [...] It surprised me—[...] *denying that those are squares by saying that that's not important* (emphasis added). [...] A square can't be a source of tension, in principle it should be the opposite." - *Jean, Paris Conservation facilitator*

Some confusion remains within this defensive classification. Joël, who warned me at the beginning of our interview that he would be "very attentive to vocabulary", refers to the Walkway as a series of squares, but also as a series of gardens—the latter of which he also defines as a green space "with barriers" where one can "be tranquil". When asked about the difference between squares and gardens, he replies that "a garden is a place you can access without having to cross a public road, and a square can only be accessed if you cross a public road". While they brandish a semantic argument about the nature of the space concerned by the Walkway project, protesters are seemingly unable to fully agree on the actual concept to defend.

Regardless of whether the Walkway is composed of squares or gardens, what seems most important are the visual qualities of squares that protesters find important to retain the space's integrity. The fabric of the squares is thus hailed as a standard to be protected. Indeed, protesters, who describe the space as "beautiful", "magnificent", or even "magical", anticipate that the Walkway project would threaten the squares' aesthetic appeal. Relatedly, this appeal is paired with an acknowledgement of the patrimonial aspect of the space, e.g., "it's very beautiful… it's historic, you know" (Michelle, Conseil de Quartier member). Emmanuelle, a Conseil de Quartier facilitator who works in a cultural field, was particularly drawn to the anti-Walkway movement by what she perceived to be a threat to the squares' heritage—even if, in her eyes, their patrimonial aspect has not yet found political support:

> "If we demolish all this [...] heritage—which was so well designed, it's not as if it was an ugly thing—it's as if we demolished the Guimard[49] subway entrances 30 years after their construction, you know. Because now we see them with a vision, it forms part of a Parisian heritage, but the Parisian heritage had to be there. It was contemporary at some point, you know. […] A modern building is contemporary now, but in a hundred years it will be Parisian heritage. [...] Well, it's difficult to decide whether a piece of heritage is remarkable. But I think some things merit conservation."

Relatedly, Gilles, a landscaper and IGB facilitator, goes further to assert that the City of Paris is intentionally trying to impede the preservation of what—piecing Emmanuelle's argument together—one could call a "future remarkable heritage":

> "If you look at the [...] quality of the work that has been done, [...] the beauty of the gates with regards to the subway entrances, well they want to throw it all away because it's over thirty years old. That's it. Those gates were [...] thought out, they have an intelligence, they play with a thickness, well I don't know how to explain it, you'd have to ask the architects. I feel like we [...] try to think [projects through], and that for [City Hall] it has no value. It's a shame."

[49] Paris's now-iconic art nouveau subway entrances.

Importantly, beauty and the construction of heritage feed into the more abstract notion of charm, or *cachet*, which protesters emphasize during our interviews, but more viscerally online. As exemplified by Emmanuelle and Gilles's discussion of unnecessary modernization, charm is intrinsically linked to nostalgia in Parisian planning controversies (Sellier & Lagadec, 2022). In the case of the Walkway, protesters' emotional geographies do hinge on their own memories of the space. When I tell them that I only recently moved near the Walkway, my interviewees who grew up in the neighborhood take pride in explaining how the neighborhood has changed since their childhood, often providing detailed accounts of activities they used to partake in on the space or of their recollection of previous urban planning efforts. Catherine, a founding member of IGB who grew up directly on the Walkway, shares that over the years, the Walkway has been a central setting of her life, and that her biggest fear concerning the proposed renovation is "the loss of something I love. I don't know how to find an adequate term for that, but when you love a place and then it's destroyed… how can you possibly react to that? That's the consequence. It's the loss of a well-loved space." Thus, for longtime residents like Catherine, the Walkway has become a memoryscape, and local aversion to changes on this "well-loved space" echoes the larger scholarship on how spatial experiences (or romanticization) of nostalgia shape local identities and, more broadly, place attachment (see Colin, 2018; 2021).

Aversion to change extends beyond the Walkway itself—what happens in the squares is widely thought to spread to the surrounding area. Protesters anticipate that the City's project would significantly change the neighborhood's current economic makeup, characterized by residents and professionals alike as marked by the construction industry. Julie, the main representative for artisans, mentions that, in her professional network, the Grand Boulevard is colloquially known as "the artisan boulevard". Claudie, a local politician, further details:

> "The Grand Boulevard is famous in all of Paris—and beyond, even in the suburbs. It's wholesale artisans who are present on the Grand Boulevard, and who supply all the small artisans: plumbers, painters, carpenters, what have you. They supply them with all the materials and tools they might need. So in the east of Paris, that's the Grand Boulevard's function."

Protesters argue that if the Walkway becomes a "free zone" attracting new visitors, new stores will establish themselves on or near the Grand Boulevard to accommodate these crowds. These concerns are mostly tied to the food and drink industry—"restaurants [...] will profit from this", "there will be coffee shops everywhere", and, most saliently, "bistro mono-activity"—and go beyond a simple change in the neighborhood fabric to the perception of a threat. That is to say, protesters anticipate that new economic actors will not add to, but rather replace, current establishments. This stems from the belief that changes in circulation will drive the construction industry away from the neighborhood. Julie, who works in a coordination role at a B2B company that provides construction products to artisans through showrooms and an on-site delivery service, provides a market-based critique of restrictions on cars:

> "Artisans can't bike to their construction site. They can't carry 25kg powder bags if they don't have their car that they can leave in front of the site. [...] And if by chance they forgot that powder bag, if they don't have stores in Paris that can offer that to them, they have to go back, drive 10 kilometers to go get it from a large site and so [...] getting stuck in traffic for two hours. [...] Artisans want to be able to shop in the neighborhood, so there's a destination. But they have to be able to access it. We need to be able to deliver them. [...] Will my client be able to access the site? Will my client be able to park? Will I be able to deliver my client in good conditions?"

Thus, the link between circulation and the construction industry's presence (or lack thereof) is twofold. Unlike what previous work has reported on commercial actors' opposition to bicycle lanes (Wild et al., 2018), the construction industry's concerns has to do with accessibility for suppliers, not clients[50]. First, it rests on the fact that its actors handle heavy material that is best transported via vans or large cars, hence the need for available parking space. Second, having the material available within Paris is contingent on sellers' ability to have the material delivered—also via automotive transportation. According to Julie, some service providers are already planning to move due to the threat posed by the Walkway project: "[a large franchise] already went through that [...] in the 8th [*arrondissement*] or something and it didn't work out, so they were already like, 'we're gonna go'. We don't want to leave, and we don't want everybody to leave". Residents and professionals alike thus characterize the construction industry as an identitarian asset under threat, urging the City to preserve neighborhood culture by preserving its commercial fabric.

c. For whom is the Walkway?

These concerns about changes to the neighborhood—including aesthetic and economic changes—echo wider concerns about a change in population, i.e., the risk of social exclusion. Indeed, my interviewees describe a process whereby current residents would leave the neighborhood and be replaced by populations with no previous roots to the neighborhood and with a lifestyle that is incompatible with protesters' view of what the Walkway should be.

Why would the former population leave in the first place? Protesters allege that—should the Walkway be built, and should it bring the foreseen consequences—the neighborhood would become unlivable. The first culprits are previously discussed nuisances, which echo (discursively) similar transformations in other parts of Paris—most saliently the Marais, not far from eastern Paris. The Marais' gentrification has been largely documented by urban social researchers (Giraud, 2009; Gravari-Barbas, 2017); protesters specifically emphasize overconsumption, the noise and hygiene nuisances, and mass tourism as central aspects of what makes the Marais "unlivable". Sylvain, who works in the Marais but lives on the Grand Boulevard, asserts that he is already seeing some of these changes at play in the focal neighborhood:

[50] To avoid confusion: the "client" in Julie's quote refers to artisans or construction workers who occasionally need to buy something from hardware stores—not "clients" in the retail sense.

> "When I see what's happening in the Marais on Saturdays, for example, when you walk [...] down rue des Francs-Bourgeois or rue des Archives, [...] people are stacked on top of each other, they queue to enter coffee shops and restaurants. That's not possible. [...] What I see is that it's overflowing a bit. [...] New hotels have opened. For example, on [a street close to the Grand Boulevard], there's a small 5-star hotel. That's completely new."

While Sylvain's observations cannot be traced back to the Walkway as the changes he describes took place before the City had a chance to execute the proposed project on the Grand Boulevard, many protesters believe that the Walkway would exacerbate what are, currently, small-scale changes. In other words, what is happening in the Marais would "overflow" into the focal *neighborhood* beyond the status quo, described by Sylvain as "a bit". Catherine, one of IGB's facilitators, explicitly explains that "in [the] organization there are people who left the Marais because it became hellish, who came to the Grand Boulevard, and who are realizing that the Grand Boulevard is going to become like the Marais, where you can't drive [...] [and where] there is noise all night long". Pierre-Louis is one such example; he credits being filmed by tourists without his consent and being "unable to walk" as the final straws that made him decide to leave the Marais.

Beyond the power of nuisances to drive away current residents, protesters emphasize security concerns regarding vulnerable populations in the context of the Walkway. These populations primarily include children and seniors, who are portrayed as vulnerable to oncoming bicycle traffic in the absence of gates—a discourse which feeds into protesters' argument that the Walkway, rather than providing a pleasant space for families to stroll, will actually drive them away. Stereotypically, much like coffee shops and bistros are expected to replace artisans, the populations thought to frequent these new establishments are expected to replace the populations that would be driven away. Two threatening figures are put forward: the tourist and the *bobo*. Concerns about the former are tied to a loss in authenticity—e.g., "they want to build a Disneyland" (Mickaël, IGB member)—but also to the lack of permanence of tourist-oriented spaces: "it's going to be just like the coastal towns on the seaside, people will come and go when it's sunny and then it'll be dead" (Dominique, Conseil de Quartier member), "all-out tourism is all fine and good, but when you have a crisis like COVID, we know that this mass tourism isn't viable, [...] it's absolutely catastrophic (Pierre-Louis, IGB member). Paris's touristification has been widely documented, with gentrified neighborhoods—such as the Walkway—increasingly falling victim to this phenomenon (Freytag & Bauder, 2017). Protesters also use examples from other hyper-touristic cities, e.g., Barcelona, where a similar boulevard-turned-walkway became a symbol of mass tourism and drew much local resistance (see for example Espinosa Zepeda, 2019; Hughes, 2017). Overall, residents' animosity toward tourists stems from feelings of dispossession or othering (Devine & Ojeda, 2017), as well as alienation from the "right to the city" (Gravari-Barbas & Jacquot, 2016, 1975).

Thus, much like the homeless person and the immigrant, the tourist embodies the idea of a transient population that worsens residents' quality of life, but unlike the former two this figure is rich enough to indirectly push businesses to cater to its desires. Concurrently, the *bobo* would become a permanent resident of the Walkway's surrounding neighborhood. Previous work in French cultural and urban sociology has disproved the academic viability of the *bobo* as a concept, for two primary reasons. First, the colloquial use of *boboïsation* as a descriptor of neighborhood shifts oversimplifies complex gentrification processes: "*boboïsation* would be an urban change simultaneously and uniformly affecting populations, ambiance, color, activities, and lifestyle [...] but the scholarship on gentrification processes is much more prudent and rigorous" (Authier et al., 2018, 12). Second, the supposedly shared characteristics of the *bobo* group stem from outside inference, not actual practices: "in an often normative and psychological language, *bobos* are accused of being great 'hypocrites'. Anti-sociological by excellence, this reading is both native and superficial. It rests on a psychology of intentions that does not explain anything and attributes to an entire group individual characteristics" (ibid, 13). There is, thus, no academic case for the *bobo*; however it remains a very real character—albeit a loosely defined one—in protesters' shared imaginary:

> "I don't want to live in a *bobo* ghetto, in a rich ghetto, in a bicycle ghetto. [...] *Bobos* [are people who] bike with their children, and who have beautiful apartments." - *Laure, IGB sympathizer*

> "*Bobos* are relatively young and have a lot of money to spend on fashion. [...] *Bobos* are [20-something] hipsters—20-something or 30-something or 40-something—who drink." - *Pierre-Louis, IGB member*

> "I'm not against *bobos per se*, it's just that their way of experiencing public space is [...] light, virtual, etc. [...] Conseils de Quartier mostly have aging and retired people, and *bobos* are 30-somethings who aren't invested at all. They use the City to its fullest, just like us, but how do they *live* it (emphasis added)?" - *Gilles, IGB facilitator*

To the question "what is a *bobo*?", my interviewees thus reply with a rich, albeit loosely connected, definition. *Bobos* are allegedly characterized by their relative affluence, their affinity for bicycles, fashion, and alcohol, and their disinterest in neighborhood life. In this sense, protesters' characterization of the *bobo* calls back to the figure of the 1980s yuppie, as defined by Neil Smith in his work on gentrification: "apart from age, upward mobility and an urban domicile, yuppies are supposed to be distinguished by a life-style devoted to personal careers and individualistic consumption" (Smith, 1986, 151). The main difference, at first glance, is that *bobos* seem to also be associated with progressive political beliefs—albeit, per my interviewees, performatively so, reflecting accusations of hypocrisy identified by Authier and his colleagues (2018). Élisabeth, a longtime resident involved in various organizations, completes this synthesis of social and economic characteristics with a political critique and clarifies the distinction between the western Paris *chic* and the eastern Paris *bobo*:

> "— E: *Bobos* are a population that doesn't care about rising prices. They're actually used to eating expensive food, because organic stuff is expensive. I don't think everyone can afford it. So this is a population with means, that lives in a world without lots of social mixing. [...] I mean, it's not the 7th *arrondissement* either.
>
> — Author: I mean, if you're talking about people with means… and I don't know if you'd say that people who live in the 7th or the 16th *arrondissements* are *bobos*. So what sets them apart?
>
> — E: It's a lifestyle. [...] These are people who [...] have a sort of ideology, and traditionally they voted for the Socialists or the Greens in Paris. And we know that these votes are those of eastern Paris. Because it's not families [...] with a low economic level—I don't know how you'd classify them sociologically, but whatever—who vote for the Greens and the Socialists."

In this explanation, *bobos* are explicitly described as spreaders of social injustice. Importantly, Élisabeth implies a connection between *bobos*' political proximity to "the Greens and the Socialists" and their economic and social situation, free of "social mixing" and full of luxury green goods such as "expensive [organic] food". In this sense, despite the fact that the focal *arrondissement* has already been largely gentrified and the City's ambitious goals regarding social housing quotas (Chocron, 2022), protesters explicitly warn against the danger of neoliberal green gentrification. Subscribing to the idea that "green urban planning [...] is [...] increasingly used as an apolitical tool for urban redevelopment and for addressing 'green gaps' while benefiting local and global elites" (Anguelovski, Connolly, and Brand, 2018, 432), my interviewees thus posit that the prospect of a neighborhood with fewer cars and more green amenities is marketed toward *bobos* who can afford an elite green lifestyle while driving away—or, in a second temporality, pricing out—vulnerable populations.

This passionate defense of social mixing is puzzling at first glance, as Élisabeth, a doctor who moved to the neighborhood in 1982, was likely one of its first gentrifiers (Clerval, 2010), when the neighboring Marais was becoming trendy due to a thriving gay scene (Giraud, 2009). Similarly, recounting the joy with which he discovered the focal neighborhood when he "escaped" from the Marais in 2023, Pierre-Louis, a professor, places a mythologized authenticity at the center of his discourse:

> "When we started living here, [on the Grand Boulevard], we fell in love with the neighborhood, because unlike the Marais which became a monosocial neighborhood, dedicated to partying and consumption, etc., [...] I felt like I was living in Paris again. It's a very mixed neighborhood, you have bourgeois people, *bobos*, people who… well, workers and migrants. It's also a pretty Jewish neighborhood. You have stores that are… well let's call them multi-ethnic to be concise. [...] Some artisans remain. There are stores, like these bathroom stores, these hardware stores, these locksmiths, etc. And you're in a *real* neighborhood (emphasis added)."

The dissonance between some protesters' attachment to a commodified "very mixed neighborhood" and their privileged social situation speaks to the wider trend of performative neighborhood selection among the middle and upper classes (see for example Blokland & Van Eijk, 2010; Butler, 2003; Zukin, 2008). Is this performativity of diversity-seeking conscious or unconscious among my interviewees? This cannot be ascertained through interviews, and it does not change the substance of the opposition. The fact that green gentrification is used as a counter-argument to the City's assertion that urban greening is of utmost priority remains analytically relevant regardless of who puts that justification forward. Recognizing the social situation of this discourse in the context of the Walkway—i.e., the fact that it is mobilized by (probable) gentrifiers rather than populations who are actually under threat—is, however, a first step toward recognizing the privileged characteristics of the anti-Walkway movement.[51]

2.3 Beyond greening: Challenging City Hall's methods

When asked about how the project made them feel, my interviewees emphasize the contempt with which they think the City treated them and the anger with which they welcomed the news. As such, complaints about the content of the Walkway project explain one side of the opposition, but the (perceived) brutality with which it was proposed is also central to understanding the controversy. In other words, protesters diagnose problems with both the substance and the form of the project. Indeed, the governance of the Walkway is at the (discursive) heart of the controversy, corresponding to the most prominent category of arguments in my interviews, and the second-most cited parent code online (accounting for 25% of coded concerns). This section shows how protesters criticize City Hall's actions at different stages of the project, but also its character and the mistreatment they felt it subjected them to over the course of the project. As such, it mainly discusses justifications that draw on the civic world, which thrives on the defense of collective interest and denounces "appetite for personal power" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 193).

a. A "brutal" planning process

I have previously discussed physical planning elements, e.g., circulation restriction or removing the squares' gates, but beyond the content of the project, protesters lament its conception process. At the heart of any denunciation of planning flaws in the context of the Walkway project is the perception that it was too much, too fast. Indeed, protesters believe that City Hall ran head-first into a "large" project without so much as a concern for its (aforementioned) long-term effects on either the Grand Boulevard, the *arrondissement*, or even eastern Paris as a whole in terms of circulation, industry, or even population. Echoing previous concerns about change and place attachment, the size of the project itself seems to upset protesters on a personal level. However, this sense of disruption is also tied to the symbolism of such projects. Isabelle, a Paris Conservation facilitator who spent many years advocating for various conservation organizations, explains: "what I find problematic about

[51] This will be further developed in section 3.3.

these ‘large projects’ is the word ‘large’. And I think this is part of the harmful system we find ourselves in—things always need to be big, people need to be seen as ‘doing great things’”. As such, the sheer scale of the project makes it difficult for protesters to digest. This is in line with the previous finding that drastic, descending procedural elements were a significant barrier to climate infrastructure implementation (Petrova, 2016).

Isabelle further argues that, where such “large” projects are implemented, “they need to be implemented with lots of sobriety, of parsimony, of regulation, of verification—it needs to be very progressive”. Proving that point, Solange, who follows the mobilization from a distance but is active in her Conseil de Quartier, thus asserts that “you can’t create 4,000 meters in one go”—referring to the dramatic increase in green coverage planned by the City—while Julie, who is affiliated with the construction industry, laments the fact that “it was very brutal [...] [and] super drastic, we’re taking away all the parking places with construction starting in November 2024”. Clearly, the perceived brutality of the project also regards the (alleged) haste with which it was originally meant to be carried out. This extends to the (alleged) haste with which it was developed: Jean, who facilitates the Paris Conservation-led working group, indicates that he “[does] not think that the conceptual work was deep enough”. What could have caused this haste? To protesters, the answer clearly lies in the political calendar. Per Julie, the construction industry representative: “I think there was an issue of precipitation, because it was a very political project—it would have marked a political term.” Indeed, the prevailing theory among my interviewees is that, as the end of Anne Hidalgo’s term approached, she wanted to “leave her mark”.

This perception of a rushed conception, under the pressure of a political deadline, underlies protesters’ assertion that City Hall intentionally modified the project to fall under the 10 hectare threshold so as to avoid conducting impact studies and, therefore, illegally accelerate the construction process. Ultimately, it was this illegality that allowed them to stop the project; it also impacted protesters’ view of the City. For example, Sophie, an IGB member who was not particularly invested in local politics prior to the project, admits having felt “shocked” that local authorities were breaking the law. As such, the illegality of the City’s methods constituted both grounds on which it could be challenged and a violent realization for protesters.

b. A “brutal” communication process

Further to the planning phase, protesters also express dissatisfaction with the communication phase of the project. Indeed, across all methods, I find that the anti-Walkway movement largely hinges on the assertion that residents are, at best, ignored and, at worst, intentionally kept from protesting the project. In this regard, the most common accusation directed at the City is that of not consulting with residents at all. This perceived lack of consultation was clearly the sticking point for many interviewees, including among those whose participation I was unable to secure. In response to my email solicitation, one protester told me that he would not talk about the project until “our politicians [themselves] have the politeness to exchange and not impose”. This perceived lack of consultation is violently

experienced by many residents. For example, Jocelyne, a longtime participant in her Conseil de Quartier, uses military vocabulary to describe the way the project was imposed on her: "it was thrown at us *manu militari*". Isabelle, one of Paris Conservation's facilitators, takes this critique a step further and suggests that this unwillingness to take residents' voices into account is a calculated choice, on the part of the City, to avoid answering legitimate concerns—and that it reflects a more general attachment to hierarchical structures:

> "[The City's] principle isn't to listen to people or take into account… they don't have a device [for that]. Actually, the City has a project that it attempts to unroll against all odds and it considers that we want to throw a wrench in the works, and that citizens only have a say in the color of the bench on which they will be made to sit."

Even in cases where protesters admit to having been consulted, they are quick to note that this consultation was inadequate. The perception of what constitutes inadequacy varies—with some protesters considering that all consultations proposed by the City using its instruments are "terrible", while others celebrate "even the smallest consultation" (Emmanuelle, Conseil de Quartier facilitator), as long as some consultation takes place—but some elements of the Walkway consultation process are, consensually, deemed inadequate. These unanimous complaints concern the City's two flagship operations: public meetings—marketed as consultation meetings—and a questionnaire for residents created with a consulting firm.

Public meetings are viewed by my interviewees as problematic for reasons related to both organization and content. First, they highlight the difficulty of hearing about these meetings in the first place. For example, Julie, who represents commercial actors in the anti-Walkway movement, describes communications around these meetings as "random, [...] we felt like it was like 'we're telling you, but not too much so you don't come', you know". Second, protesters argue that the meetings are poorly run by the City. Mickaël, a member of IGB, provides a detailed account of what he deems to be managerial issues:

> "[This] series of public meetings was absolutely ridiculous. [...] The one you went to—how can anyone, today, prepare a presentation with such lame slides? That's not possible! We couldn't hear anything, we couldn't see anything, it went too fast—they're really fucking with us [...] Also, there's no discipline at these meetings."

Similarly, complaints about the questionnaire centered on the way in which it was carried out as well as the wording of questions. Luc, a resident involved in many anti-Walkway organizations, explains why he believes the questionnaire was inadequately distributed: "that made a lot of noise because it was released in November 2023 and it needed to be completed by January 2024. But in the meantime, there were holidays, so nobody cared". In addition to having been circulated—perhaps intentionally—during a period where many residents were unavailable, according to protesters, the questionnaire only superficially inquired about local desires regarding change on the Walkway, not about whether any change was warranted. As such, the questionnaire was seen as limiting protesters' agency to call the

project into question. Annie, one of IGB's facilitators, concludes: "that questionnaire was lame. Do you want more play spaces for children? Of what age? Do you want more workout equipment for young people, for children? Do you want the vegetation to be low, high? Nothing about the project as a whole".

Some local politicians agree with these criticisms. Claudie, a deputy mayor in the focal *arrondissement*, shares her dissatisfaction with the direction taken by her colleagues with regards to local democratic processes:

> "It's true that people—and even myself—felt held in contempt. You know, you feel held in contempt when you are asked whether you'd prefer this [playground] game or that [playground] game. [...] When you can't find any information and you're given a questionnaire as if… [...] well the project had already been validated and you're only asked about anecdotal stuff. That's not possible, you can't validate something like that, not anymore. [...] This isn't taking the democratic process seriously, the process of starting a process of decision [with] real participation."

Protesters further argue that the lack of preliminary information contributed to making these (allegedly rare) efforts inefficient as a form of consultation. This preliminary information refers to tangible elements—e.g., one protester says that "[he] would like to receive the documents that will be presented [at the meeting] 48 hours in advance, [...] so as to analyze them and prepare questions"—as well as the larger impression of having been presented with an unclear project. Joël, a Conseil de Quartier member who takes consultation processes especially to heart, refers to this as an intentional "scrambling". The feeling that they do not know—and were kept from knowing—what the project entails is a major source of frustration for protesters. Elena, a Conseil de Quartier member-turned-facilitator, thus concluded our interview with the following admission: "everything I expressed [today] is without any information, knowing neither the project's objectives nor anything in its globality—and not much in its base either. So my expression is completely null."

c. A brutal government?

Both processual complaints reflect negative qualities protesters associate with City Hall. First, the breach of legal obligations is seen as a wider reflection of the institution's overall untrustworthiness, with the most common accusations put forward by protesters being that of dishonesty and self-interest, e.g.:

> "What they want is to win the [upcoming mayoral] campaign, they want to stay in power because they are happy about their monopoly and their comfort." - *Dave, Conseil de Quartier member*

> "[It's] the [Socialist] Party above everything else, environmentalism above everything else, the Socialist Party above everything else, the Communist Party above all else. And not the interest of people." - *Luc, Conseil de Quartier, IGB, and Too Much Traffic member*

> "Their elements of language, their lies, oh my God. [...] I'm very naive. I didn't think people could lie so much." - *Jocelyne, Conseil de Quartier and IGB member*

Dishonesty refers to the perception that City Hall only tells partial truths or, at times, lies, while self-interest questions the institution's good will. Protesters thus speculate that mayor Anne Hidalgo and her *arrondissement* allies have ulterior, political motives for pushing such a symbolic, transformative project—calling back to the aforementioned perception that the administration rushed the project to "leave a mark".

Second, inadequate consultation processes are seen as a wider reflection of the contempt City Hall is said to harbor for residents and organizations—perhaps linked to the aforementioned perception that this institution does not stop at anything to advance its own projects. As such, protesters frequently report, at best, feeling looked down on, and, at worst, feeling like elected officials are manipulating them. Isabelle, a prominent figure of Paris Conservation, extends these complaints to the City's treatment of organizations:

> "There's a huge contempt on the part of City Hall toward organizations, especially toward heritage defenders. [...] And that's what I find extremely deplorable in our system. I talked to you about contempt, but it's very, very strong, this contempt toward residents. And they would like to do democracy, but without the citizens! [...] With decisions by *fait du prince*, it's for your own good, good people."

Many protesters stop at criticizing City Hall's policy practices and, perhaps, the intentions they feel these practices mask. However, many protesters also thrive on *ad hominem* attacks—i.e., accusations regarding political figures themselves. The most popular target of these attacks is Anne Hidalgo. Online, residents even develop a specialized vocabulary to denigrate her style of governance, e.g., "a hid…eous project" or "Hidalgesque damages". In interviews, these criticisms are less unfettered, with one notable exception being Dominique, a Conseil de Quartier member who calls Anne Hidalgo "Madam the Duchess". While the vocabulary used to describe her person is more tame, her character remains central to protesters' wider critiques of City Hall. In the context of the Walkway, these targeted criticisms are tied to the perception that the project was almost unilaterally decided by Anne Hidalgo. Luc, a Conseil de Quartier member who engages with Too Much Traffic and IGB, thus posits that "it was a work of courtesans for the mayor of Paris. Madam the mayor wanted her [Walkway]. Her team worked on the [Walkway]. The mayor of the [focal] *arrondissement* said 'amen'".

Thus, while protesters recognize that the central mayor's office is responsible for the Walkway project, they also heavily criticize political leaders at the *arrondissement* level, most notably the local mayor and the deputy mayor in charge of public space. Beyond frequent *ad hominem* attacks, protesters challenge these figures' representativity, describing them as disconnected from the local reality. Marie, a longtime resident and Conseil de Quartier facilitator, offhandedly mentions that the *arrondissement* mayor does not reside in

the *arrondissement* and that, while he promotes cycling, "he left in a car with his chauffeur [after the meeting]. [...] He should have taken a bike, since he always says we should be biking". Relatedly, Julie, the construction industry's main representative in the anti-Walkway movement, describes a "disconnect between elected officials and the commercial makeup of the [Grand Boulevard]. [...] This is an anecdote—[the mayor] said 'we're all for artisans, we [work with] somebody who makes knives'. We're not talking about the same thing, we're talking about people who renovate homes. [...] Don't tell us 'oh yeah, artisans, we have someone who makes knives', it sounds offshore." Often, protesters disparage specific figures to channel their distrust of politicians in general. Indeed, the dishonesty and contempt they perceive in figures like Anne Hidalgo or hyperlocal politicians are qualities that many interviewees associate with the political world—sometimes even presenting them as required to succeed in what they view as a corrupt field. For example, Mickaël, an IGB member who is particularly critical of City Hall, asserts:

> "[Local mayor]... maybe this is a caricature, but to me he represents political schemers who aren't super high up but who still… he's two-faced. [...] He's a thug, he's a truant. [...] But to lead a group, you can't obtain everyone's consent, so you have to lie, you have to treat people like idiots, you have to hold them in contempt, I think that's the foundation of politics. Not having morals. [...] Maybe it's necessary."

Interestingly, protesters' expectations regarding how the Walkway project should have been conducted is at least somewhat mediated by their political beliefs. Indeed, multiple protesters indicate that they hold left-wing politicians to a higher moral standard because of the values they publicly purport to hold, notably in terms of equality:

> "They don't consult with anyone and they impose their stuff. That's not what a socialist, left-wing City Hall stands for." - *Laure, IGB sympathizer*

> "There were 120 people [at the meeting], and lots of people asked questions. [...] Why do you want to destroy everything? What's your coherence? Lots of questions in that vein, nothing in the restitution. Nothing. It's sad. It's sad for a left-wing Town Hall to do that, you know." - *Annie, IGB facilitator*

> "I've never voted for anything other than the left. Because I thought that the left was egalitarian. But I'm realizing that some people are more equal than others. [...] In terms of ecology, sometimes I bike to the National Library. [...] There are large avenues with nobody, so over there they are much happier than us." - *Stéphanie, Too Much Traffic facilitator*

As such, the fact that the anti-Walkway movement takes place in a socialist neighborhood and is led by local organizers who subscribe to these ideals heavily influences the attribution of blame. Much like bicycles are expected to be more civil than cars, progressive politicians are expected to be more approachable and egalitarian than their conservative counterparts. This variation in moral standards extends my argument that

protesters' claims-making is mediated by their socio-economic position to include a second mediation by political beliefs.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

Through the lens of the Canal Walkway project, this chapter confirms Chapter 1's findings regarding the dominant role of green, domestic, and civic justifications for opposing urban greening projects in Paris. However, it extends these results through a more fine-grained analysis of nuances in a single project; for example, my findings on the way the perceived brutality of conception and communication phases inform criticisms of politicians themselves bridges the gap between the "Politics" and "Democracy" topics that emerged in Chapter 1. Purposive sampling of interviewees also highlights new actors who are not represented in online petitions, such as construction industry professionals, showcasing (marginal) market-based justifications that were absent from my topic models. Finally, my analysis hints at contextual explanations for discourse-building, e.g., the role of the focal neighborhood's—and protesters'—progressive,[52] middle and upper-class[53] identities.

This chapter has thus provided an overview of diagnostic frames used by the anti-Walkway movement. Importantly, these diverse diagnoses are not deemed equally credible, and their use in publicizing the anti-Walkway movement is the object of internal negotiation. The next chapter unpacks the valuation of discursive strategies in crafting motivational frames, and completes this discourse-based analysis with attention to the social and political determinants of prognostic frame-building.

[52] See for example the discussion of higher moral standards with regard to left-wing politicians and cyclists, and discussions of justice-based opposition to urban greening.

[53] See for example section 2.2c on gentrifiers' perspectives on gentrification.

Chapter 3. Strategies and tensions in building a credible counter-power

> "It's true that it's odd to call this an opposition movement, because actually [...] it is a citizen expression that [...] aims to compensate for the global absence of consultation since the beginning of the project. [...] I wouldn't say it's an opposition, because [...] people all agree that something needs to be done. The status quo is not conceivable, which means that we need to restore or renovate the space, whatever you want to call it. What people don't want is screwing everything up and then restarting." - *Emmanuelle, my first interviewee*

Multiple interviewees corrected me when I used the lexicon of opposition to refer to their movement. Instead, they see themselves as purveyors of alternative solutions—and, by extension, active participants in the conception of desirable urban futures. This chapter analyzes the move from obstructive opposition to constructive opposition, i.e., how the anti-Walkway movement positions itself as a force of change. I begin by analyzing which justifications are selected to propose a dominant motivational frame—a "rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive" (Benford & Snow, 2000, 617). I then investigate the ways in which protesters make their critique actionable, exploring their search for external sources of support and their internal tensions about which prognostic frames—"the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan" (ibid, 616) to adopt. Finally, I reflect on the social determinants of this constructive opposition.

3.1 The politics of framing

Diagnostic frames carry connotations with varying strategic liability. The concept of "frames of relevance" (Cefaï, 1996, 47) directly addresses the determinants of actionable discourse. Frames of relevance are defined by the overall context in which a mobilization takes place, which encompasses both the geographical, cultural, and social location of controversy and the intended recipients of complaints. As such, "to [search for] frames of relevance is to anticipate mediatic or institutional forums or arenas where a problem will be debated, submitted to decisional processes" (Neveu, 2017, 13)—it requires a certain "flair" (ibid, 12) for what is deemed locally acceptable, and thus presupposes that non-relevant justifications for mobilization be dropped or obscured. These frames of relevance underlie the choice of dominant frames, i.e., those emphasized by the most influential figures of the opposition[54]; that is to say, facilitators of IGB and Paris Conservation who lead and publicize the anti-Walkway movement.

This section describes how prominent domestic justifications were dropped to favor ecological justifications, bringing highly local concerns to a much wider policy agenda. As such, protest leaders decided to prioritize politically actionable frames over accurate

[54] Assessed through interviews and investigation into public documents.

representation of the anti-Walkway landscape. I further examine this decision's consequences for the unity of the movement.

a. Place attachment: A double-edged sword?

As my fieldwork progressed, it became clear that opposition to the Canal Walkway was primarily local—i.e., concentrated within the jurisdictions that the Walkway would impact. Of my 31 interviewees, 27 live in close proximity to the proposed project. To some, the Walkway project would have such a local impact that resonance of the controversy beyond neighborhood or municipal boundaries is inconceivable. When I remarked to Jocelyne, an active Conseil de Quartier member and loosely involved IGB member, that some people who did not live in eastern Paris—or even in the city itself—had signed the focal petition, she was incredulous, and replied: "why would these people… then they must be doing that to be systematically opposed, because [...] this is very specific." This could be read as an admission that hyperlocal mobilizations are not considered to be appealing to outsiders unless they were previously angry about more global processes, or it could also point to a form of gatekeeping whereby local protesters believe that they are the only legitimate voices of opposition. In any case, it points to the primarily local appeal of the movement, both real in terms of membership and (perhaps) desired by some protesters.

As its name suggests, Il faut sauver le Grand Boulevard is also a purely local organization, created to protest the City's plans to significantly redevelop a single street: the Grand Boulevard. The organization's grassroots anchoring is reflected in the fact that all board members reside in the focal neighborhood. Additionally, most IGB interviewees mention being part of other neighborhood organizations. For example, Emmanuelle, a Conseil de Quartier facilitator, jokes that she is "involved in practically every organization in the neighborhood in some way or another". While her case could be perceived as exceptional, she is far from being an outlier. Many interviewees admit that this local network allowed faster mobilization against the Walkway through working with acquaintances. Gilles, a prominent member of IGB, says of the neighborhood's associative fabric: "in this field, people know each other". Nicole, a protester who leads a community garden close to the Walkway, remarks that "many people, for example, from [the community garden] [...] are also part of IGB—it's the logical continuation"—showing one manifestation of this nested character. These trends show that the anti-Walkway movement is characterized by preexisting organizational involvements and that the mobilization was strengthened by the prominence of neighborhood structures in these preexisting organizational involvements. This only strengthens the local character of the opposition, as there was a limited number of organizations to recruit from and these organizations were (seemingly) inbred.

Organizational involvement is a consequence, rather than a cause, of interviewees' close identification with the Walkway's surrounding area. Indeed, when asked about their relationship to the neighborhood, most interviewees talk about their memories and

experiences[55] but also their appreciation for it, e.g., "I know I live in an extraordinary neighborhood" or even "I prefer my neighborhood to all others". This emphasis on appreciation extends to the space of the Walkway itself. Online and offline, protesters are strong advocates for its charm, in terms of architecture, aesthetics, and authenticity. Elena, a Conseil de Quartier facilitator, links outward beauty with place attachment and well-being, echoing literature on the mental health benefits of urban green spaces (Maas et al., 2006; Stigsdotter et al., 2010):

> "Why does this project affect us so much? Some will say, it's just some green space, it's just some soil [...]. No. Because when you step outside and you see beautiful things in the morning, it makes you happy, it gives you strength, it gives you confidence for the day. When you step outside and you see trash, rats, only villainy, if you're feeling blue, what do you hold on to?"

Online and offline, these emotional and experiential dimensions of place attachment are leveraged to legitimate residents' involvement in the project. Interviewees often argue that residents have the most knowledge regarding the life of the neighborhood and its central spaces[56]. Online, a salient trend is commenters' propensity to lead their criticism with a description of how they are connected to the neighborhood, e.g., "I have been living in this neighborhood for 20 years and I really want these squares to be preserved". Sometimes, no justification follows these claims; some comments are one-liners that only mention the location of the author's apartment or how long they have lived there. The prominence of such appeals to personal connections suggests that this line of justification is an internally legitimized reason to criticize the Walkway project.

In this context of strong local loyalty, protesters feel at liberty to define, or perhaps even decide, the acceptability of changes in aesthetics or uses on the Walkway because, in a sense, they believe that the Walkway belongs to them. This is strengthened by the prominence of first-person possessive pronouns online as a discursive strategy to appear more credible, e.g., "our Walkway", "my neighborhood", and, most explicitly, "my favorite park in my favorite *arrondissement*, [focal *arrondissement*] which is mine, does not deserve to look any different". The latter comment is particularly illustrative as it shows the thought process through which some residents link their appreciation of—and experience with—the Walkway's neighborhood to the changes that they accept to see. They have a strong connection to the place, they develop a sense of ownership, and therefore they deem that changes should reflect their own imagination of the space. This, in turn, continues to define the terms of their strong connection to it.

With its appeals to intimate concerns, the centrality of place attachment has already been argued to pertain to the domestic world of justification (Debenedetti, Oppewal and Arsel, 2014) whereby beliefs or actions are justified on the basis of loyalty and belonging to a

[55] As seen in Section 2.2a.

[56] See how they discuss politicians' disconnect in section 2.3c.

specific group—or, here, a specific space. Using the familial analogy of the domestic order of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), the intensity of personal bonds to the neighborhood through organizational, spatial, and emotional ties that unite protesters to the Walkway and its surrounding neighborhood could be interpreted as kin-like. This is supported by the fact that many of my interviewees are senior citizens who live alone and whose main opportunities for socialization stem from their involvement in neighborhood life.

However, using domesticity as a primary world of justification is a double-edged sword. Defending personal connections to the neighborhood, though a shared marker of legitimacy among residents, could impede their credibility before the City by situating them as NIMBYs or, more broadly, conservative reactionaries. The weaponization of NIMBY accusations, both explicit and implicit, by planners has been documented in case of wind farm controversies (Burningham et al., 2015) in predominantly rural areas, and also features in my fieldwork. Claudie is one of few local politicians who outwardly express their support for IGB and its allies. Of her interactions with her colleagues regarding Walkway protesters, she recalls that, before the controversy gained significant traction—i.e., before the legal disputes—the *arrondissement* mayor told her: "[Claudie], these are right-wing and far-right people". Claudie remarks that she did not want to play into this "caricature", arguing that "we share this *arrondissement*" and that opponents' perception of the space was as valid as City Hall's. While her personal opinion shows that the primacy of place attachment can at times be externally validated, her account of City Hall's perception of such complaints confirms the limited credibility of domestic justifications before decision-makers.

To avoid being dismissed, then, protesters attempt to link place attachment to more consensual concerns, beyond personal appreciation and experience. This political opportunity window is defined by progressive local politics and the aforementioned stigma associated with right-wing political opinions and NIMBYism. The challenge of countering NIMBY accusations while putting forward domestic concerns, e.g., landscape and aesthetics, has indeed emerged from critical discourse analyses of anti-wind farm protesters (Haggett & Toke, 2006). Anecdotally, these efforts can be obvious. Isabelle, one of Paris Conservation's facilitators, explicitly distances herself from NIMBYs: when I ask her whether she agrees with all justifications put forward by the opposition, she replies "well, there are always criticisms that are a bit NIMBY, like I, a resident, do not want foreigners… things like that". Usually, though, such disavowal is not as direct. Interviewees typically use two strategies to distance themselves from accusations of conservatism or NIMBYism in two ways.

One is to explicitly distance their stance from classic NIMBY preoccupations—the most salient example concerns the appropriate reaction to a (potentially increased) homeless presence in the Canal Walkway, e.g.:

> "There are lots of homeless people in the squares. At least, for us residents, the fact that they can be calmly there at a given moment proves that there is currently the possibility to be in a calm, tranquil space." - *Gilles, IGB facilitator*

> "There are two places on the Walkway where there is a group of homeless people that is almost always there. So people say that if there is more… if it is more open, there will be even more [homeless] people. That's completely unrelated. It's because there are amenities not very far and… there you go. And so that pertains to something else. It pertains to social policy regarding assistance to homeless people. [...] But that's something else. So it has nothing to do with the renovation." - *Jean, Paris Conservation facilitator*

> "One line of disagreement that might come up is that [...] not everybody would agree with my take on homelessness. My take is that homeless people form part of the space, of course we can regret it. But the nature of public space is that it belongs to everyone. We live in a society where unfortunately you have an increasing number of people of all ages, of all origins, of all types, who are constrained. To me, it's not a good policy to say that we're going to push them out, that we're going to send them further away. I think that, at the very least, some people who are against the project might say that there should be more police and fewer homeless people. This isn't my take. My take is: there are homeless people, and they also have a right to the squares." - *Pierre-Louis, IGB attendee*

Yet, discrediting anti-homeless discourse at the individual level has not translated into a dominant discursive element, as protest leaders find themselves on different sides of what Pierre-Louis calls the "line of disagreement" regarding this topic. Building on this first strategy, the second is to link domestic concerns with ideals typically associated with progressive ideology, notably aforementioned[57] criticisms regarding social exclusion. Yet, coming back to Neveu's (2017) discussions of frames of relevance as embedded in intended recipients' beliefs, this strategy appears limited when protesters' beliefs contradict with those of the city by protesters' own admission.

For example, much of my interview with Gilles, an urban planner and founding member of IGB, focused on his belief that City Hall's urban planning favored previously discussed *bobos* and, in doing so, eclipsed senior citizens. As proof of his perception, he extensively describes what he deems to be exclusionary communications on the part of the City regarding the Walkway project: "in the presentation materials, the visual—which is a normal visual in the modern form of a comic, etc.—there are only *bobos*, moustached thirty-somethings on their bikes and everything, and not a single little old man on the horizon or an artisan or anything like that, no no." In providing these descriptions, Gilles admits that the City markets itself to a particular type of person—what he calls the *bobos*—in the specific case of the Walkway and beyond: "I feel like the City markets itself as a smart city, which resonates well with the… with the profile of the *bobo*." In admitting this, however, he highlights the limitations of his efforts to advocate for other populations: if the goal of the City really is to attract *bobos*, then relying on the criticism of pro-*bobo* urban planning does not highlight any incoherence within what the City deems to be policy priorities. As such, while favoring *bobos* over vulnerable populations is a timely critique that echoes scholarly

[57] See sections 2.2c and 2.3c.

interest in green gentrification,[58] this discourse is not adapted to its intended recipients (Neveu, 2017). In other words, relating domestic concerns to broader claims to social justice—a leap which may find a receptive audience in wider debates—does not rehabilitate domestic justifications in that it does not correspond to the City's frames of relevance.

b. Surfing the green wave

The premier strategic decision in choosing a dominant frame to oppose the Canal Walkway is the prioritization of pro-environmental arguments. This is most visible through the decision to make an alliance with Paris Conservation, the Parisian chapter of France's largest federation of environmental organizations, even though, as previously mentioned, aggregate individual complaints only marginally rely on ecological concerns.[59]

Beyond these organizational dynamics, the language used in lay explanations of the controversy available online clearly centers ecological justifications. Notably, news coverage of the controversy, including opinion pieces and reports, portrays "hedges" as a major concern for residents despite this word barely appearing in the comments under the focal petition, which represents the largest repository of anti-Walkway arguments. Similarly, the body of the central petition puts deliberate emphasis—through a bold font—on the "verdant hedges", "beautiful green spaces", and "narrow green bands" of the current space. It further reads (also with deliberate emphasis): "the destruction of the gates will [...] destroy a beautiful ensemble of biodiversity, which currently hosts numerous bird species and constitutes a pleasant green space in the winter." The undue precedence given to such concerns is further confirmed by the fact that some of my interviewees outwardly paint themselves as unconcerned, or even annoyed, with environmentalism, through statements like "[City Hall] annoys us with ecology", "I'm not a tree-hugger", or even "I'm not really into green spaces".

By the admission of its central figures, the protest movement at the center of the Walkway controversy relies on ecological justifications because its leaders believe that the City will take their concerns more seriously. Isabelle, a founding member of Paris Conservation, explains her personal belief that "we cannot dissociate [...] the defense of heritage and the environment. It's a continuity, it's defending what already exists. It's damage control." Thus, she asserts that heritage preservation is as central as environmentalism to her organization. Further to this assertion, she admits that the decision to classify Paris Conservation as an environmental organization was made strategically, "because we weren't audible from the point of view of heritage preservation, and that the environment was becoming a bit more prominent, environmental questions were becoming more prominent." As Paris Conservation was founded in 2015, it can reasonably be inferred that the increase in prominence of "environmental questions" that Isabelle refers to in her explanation

[58] See introduction.

[59] See section 2.1c.

corresponds to the influence of the Paris Summit (COP21), which took place in the same year and publicized net-zero targets to such an extent that scholars separate the pre-Paris and post-Paris periods in environmental policy and activism (De Moor et al., 2020; Gordon & Johnson, 2017; Kuyper, Linnér and Schroeder, 2017). As such, my interview with Isabelle strikingly suggests that a political calculation lies at the genesis of the Parisian chapter of France's largest federation of environmental organizations.

The original calculation operated by Paris Conservation plausibly echoes that of IGB in its decision to be legally represented by an environmental organization. Catherine, who played a founding role in IGB, admits that "you need to be strategic when you have an organization like this [...] you need to find the right people"—pertaining to an engineered proximity to Paris Conservation. Élisabeth, a facilitator of Too Much Traffic and frequent collaborator of both Paris Conservation and IGB, explicitly alludes to a strategic alliance between the latter two organizations: "the fact that IGB leaned on Paris Conservation [is] not a coincidence. Completely. They could have leaned on Saccage Paris, for example. They didn't do that. So…" Saccage Paris, Élisabeth's proposed foil to Paris Conservation, could be argued to closely represent the overall opposition landscape as it emphasizes "the image of a city of the past that, in their eyes, would have done more qualitative work than all modern productions, and, as such, would deserve not only preservation but also erection as a model for modern architecture" (Sellier & Lagadec, 2022, 62). Therefore, Saccage Paris shares protesters' defense of the site's architectural and historical integrity, the nostalgia with which they view the space, and their criticism of the City's planning approach. Yet, when asked why she believes IGB decided to associate with Paris Conservation rather than Saccage Paris, Élisabeth explains:

> "Because Saccage Paris is really the reactionary right. At the beginning, we didn't really know them, but we hear them less and less. I've left X, so I don't have all these things anymore, the hate. But Saccage Paris is really… there's a municipal website where you can file complaints. They completely saturated the website. And I mean, it goes against the current of everything because nobody listens to them anymore."

Élisabeth's intuition points to two key levers of Paris Conservation *vis-à-vis* Saccage Paris. Firstly, Paris Conservation's methods are deemed more politically respectable than those of Saccage Paris. According to Élisabeth, the latter organization floods social media and governmental websites, which leads to its complaints not being taken seriously. Yet more interestingly, Élisabeth also seems to draw links between Saccage Paris' reputation as "the reactionary right" and the fact that "nobody listens to them anymore". In doing so, she both confirms the aforementioned willingness to distance the anti-Walkway movement from conservative circles and highlights the importance of not "going against the current". Like Isabelle, she seems to hold the belief that, to be "audible" by the City, protesters need to adopt a conventional frame, preferably one that is gaining traction, *alongside* "the current"—i.e., policy priorities like climate adaptation.

The literature surrounding the construction of public problems gives credence to protesters' belief that structuring controversial discourse around current policy priorities can help make their complaints more acceptable—alternatively, in the words of Isabelle, "audible". The previously defined frames of relevance derive from "common sense knowledge" (Cefaï, 1996, 47), i.e., what actors *understand* to be dominant discourse. In the case of the Walkway, the way in which the project was presented by the City of Paris clearly places environmental benefits at the center of this "common sense knowledge". Most notably, the web page dedicated to the Walkway project on the City's website reads: "this will be one of the most important projects in the coming years for the [focal *arrondissement*]. It's also one of the most anchored in its time, integrating current climate challenges for future generations." Further to this introduction, which already establishes climate change as the urgent—"anchored in its time"—policy problem, the website includes a section titled "Why this project?", providing the following precisions:

> "The [focal *arrondissement*] [...] has a very small surface of vegetation compared to the rest of Paris, with only 14.8% of its surface dedicated to green space and a very high urban density. It thus appears urgent, given climate challenges punctuated by a succession of more and more recurrent heat wave phenomena, to increasingly green the *arrondissement*, by reinforcing urban cool islands and creating new ones. It is therefore to respond to these objectives that we decided to renovate [Grand Boulevard], to create a true green and tranquil walkway."

It is thus argued that, beyond being a pressing generational imperative, greening the city is particularly urgent in the case of the focal *arrondissement*, shown in attached documents through spatial data analysis to be both one of the densest and least green areas of the city.

Thus, by explicitly providing a dominant frame to justify its proposed renovation, the City of Paris effectively provided the main frame of relevance for protesters to be able to justify their position. Conversely, by proposing environmentalism as the dominant framework to publicize their criticisms of the Walkway project, the opposition movement is able to criticize the City *according to their own terms*, thus moving the controversy from an opposition between differing priorities to the problem of incoherence *within* claims to environmental action. Adding to this approach's potential for legitimacy is the fact that, beyond the constrained field of Parisian communications, sustainability as a construct—alternatively defined by City Hall and the opposition movement—is now recognized as the ideal toward which urban policy should strive (Bulkeley, 2013). In this sense, it constitutes a "meta-consensual policy term" used by cities to "position themselves advantageously on the global scene" (Rosol et al., 2017, 1710). Calling into question the City of Paris's sustainable planning practices thus constitutes a strong political claim that legitimates the opposition's *raison d'être* beyond purely local concerns.

Coming back to our Boltanskian heuristic, the Walkway's opposition movement breaks away from attempts to alternatively legitimate or nuance appeals to the domestic

world of justification. Instead, it leverages the ecological world of justification, which has "a demonstrated capacity for transitions between the particular and the general" (Lafaye & Thévenot, 1993, 14) through its response to both the private interests of a locale (in this case, the Walkway neighborhood) and more general concerns about societal well-being shared by policymakers. It is also legitimized by the green lexical field's meliorative—"worthy" (ibid, 24)—connotation. As such, it inscribes protesters' concerns in a relevant, contemporary policy debate, and confers them a (perceived) moral higher ground—both effects strengthen the receivability of their complaints.

c. Tensions in choosing dominant discourse

While deliberately favoring a more consensual framework to publicly present their motivations may have conferred more discursive power to the anti-Walkway movement by inscribing its action into frames of relevance, it has had mixed consequences regarding internal cohesion. IGB's decision to unite with Paris Conservation rather than other organizations that could have represented them in court was made by the leading figures of the movement; as such, all members do not approve of it. Overall, both IGB and Paris Conservation are criticized for tensions between the leadership and other members, often attributed to a lack of coordination or efforts to include less active protesters. In terms of framing, some protesters believe that the plurality of opinions within IGB will eventually lead to its dissolution, or, at least, impede the organization's capacity for sustained action. When describing the organization, Joël, one of its founding members, describes it as a constellation of unrelated actors: "with a bit of hindsight, there are the architects, and then, in a pointillist fashion, [...] there are those who are in favor of greening, there are those who are scared of the effects on traffic, and who are less interested in having a global vision."

This diversity of opinion could have, at the start of the movement, favored its fast growth. Indeed, it bridged frames (Snow et al., 1986) between actors in the absence of a uniting line of argument besides being against the Walkway and, in most cases, residing in the neighborhood. In fact, judging by the fact that, among my IGB interviewees, the only universal characteristic of protesters was the fact that they lived in the Walkway neighborhood and were attached to it, the domestic polity seemed to be their *raison d'être*. Yet as the movement gained in popularity and began to explore opportunities for real policy impact, their decision to emphasize an under-represented but politically audible frame of sustainability alienated them from residents who shared their defense of place attachment but did not want to counter conservative allegations of NIMBYism. This is the case of Mickaël, a member of IGB who leans more right-wing than the organization's leaders and resents their decision to emphasize pro-environmental justifications:

> "I feel like I'm a lone puzzle piece among lone puzzle pieces. [...] I mean there are lots of Greens [party members], lots of Greens, who are more interested in the preservation of plants, birds… humanists who say no, you can't get rid of them, you can't get rid of illegal immigrants, all that. Humanitarians. So there are so many different ideals… [...] Some are a little bit pro-Hidalgo, a little bit pro-mayor."

Mickaël also openly admits to being disinterested in environmentalism. His disappointment with the direction taken by the organization's leadership in its communication is, therefore, understandable. Yet his account of his dissatisfaction with the hierarchy within the movement is perhaps more revealing: "there's a core with the president, the treasurer, the institutional people but… these people, yes, they have information, they have contacts with journalists, they know what to do. The others, the pawns like me…" By referring to himself as a "pawn", Mickaël indicates that he feels undermined, or perhaps even used, by IGB's leadership—not unlike the way he feels undermined by the City.

Thibault, a younger member of Paris Conservation who joined the movement despite being originally in favor of the Walkway project, also resents the fact that IGB imposed one political viewpoint in its public framing of the opposition. His position differs from Mickaël's in that he agrees that demand for more greening should be at the forefront of the mobilization, but he regrets the way pro-environmental concerns were presented, arguing that the view of public space that was put forward was too "conservative, unilateral, and very closed-off". A longtime environmental activist, he would have liked the City to present a more ambitious greening project. He thus champions a more locally-aware increase in vegetation, rather than questioning the environmentality of the increase in vegetation itself—a desire at the root of his decision to found For a Neighborhood Walkway, another organization that proposes to rethink the Walkway project.

Opposition leaders' decision to emphasize ecological justifications while IGB was able to recruit many members in the first place because of their shared valuation of domesticity led to a questioning of its representativity of the full mobilization landscape. This highlights the operational challenge of prioritizing frames of relevance, in line with previous studies on performative frame selection in middle-class movements (Anantharaman, 2022; Anjaria, 2009). In this case, leaders had to decide between accurately representing their public and allowing their movement to credibly present itself as a counter-power to the City by relying on a frame that has been constructed as "good" (Angelo, 2021).

3.2 The politics of legitimation

Becoming a legitimate actor in the eyes of City Hall—e.g., gaining power—does not rest solely on crafting convincing dominant discourse. Legitimacy is also acquired through external support from authoritative actors and by proposing actionable solutions, i.e., by moving from a purely obstructive movement to a constructive force of change. Yet for these alternative solutions to be taken into account, they need to be legitimated first. In this section, I describe how protesters conceptualize themselves as potent actors thanks to both external and internal sources of legitimation.

a. External validation

To build institutional credibility as a counter-power to City Hall, protesters first emphasize institutional support. Invoking relationships with key figures of the Walkway is the most common of these appeals to authority—starting with relationships with elected officials. To protesters, regular engagement, or even negotiation, with the people in charge of the project proves two (related) victories: first, that they are seen as essential intermediaries by the City; second—and most importantly—that their demands regarding more consultation were met. Protesters thus frequently emphasize activities undertaken with City employees, such as on-site visits to talk about the project or private meetings with elected officials.

However, the extent to which these relationships are a direct result of sustained protesting is unclear, given how invested many opposition leaders were in neighborhood life prior to the Walkway controversy. For example, one protest leader explains that, as a key player in a previous neighborhood struggle—this time against the uniformization of businesses—she became well-known by City officials. Preexisting relationships are sometimes more intimate. Dave, a longtime Socialist Party activist who recently pivoted to the right, recounts the many times he traveled with his former political collaborators—including current members of both City Hall and the focal *arrondissement*'s Town Hall—to meet with socialists from other countries. At worst, preexisting relationships can inform current animosity. This is particularly true for longtime local activists, who have opposed previous projects put forward by the City and who are, thus disliked by institutional actors. Therefore, while in some cases previous interactions with City officials can establish good rapport, protesters' reputation makes renewing dialogue very difficult in others.

Interacting with the elected officials who are in charge of the Walkway project is thus limited in terms of building a credible counter-power. As such, some more conservative protesters emphasize their relationship with (conservative) municipal opposition leaders as a way to position themselves as a threat to current power blocs. However, this conservatism clashes with most of my interviewees' strong left-wing political identity. At the individual level, some protesters emphasize their simultaneous distaste for Anne Hidalgo's governance and right-wing politics by making a distinction between their political beliefs and their ambitions for their *arrondissement*. For example, Pierre-Louis, who lives on the Grand Boulevard, asserts:

> "Personally, my municipal vote in the [focal *arrondissement*] will depend on the [Walkway]. And I won't vote for the Socialists if they don't make promises regarding that. Of course, if they go through with the project, too bad for them. I'm done with them. And, for example, if Mrs Dati's[60] list takes a stance against the [Walkway], I'll vote for her in the mayoral election, while thinking all the bad things you can imagine about her national politics."

[60] Rachida Dati is the current Minister of Culture and a long-time mayor of the 7th *arrondissement*. She leans conservative and is the favored candidate for the right in Paris's upcoming mayoral elections.

Leaders tend to take a less explicit approach, claiming to be apolitical and open to all ideas—in line with previous findings on the strategic viability of small-p politics (Kennedy, Johnston, and Parkins, 2018). Catherine, a founding member of IGB, thus explains: "we don't forbid ourselves from talking with different elected officials". This prudent self-categorization allows protester leaders to reject current policies without explicitly supporting concurrent right-wing politicians, thus eluding aforementioned accusations of conservatism. Important to this strategy is the fact that the next municipal elections will be held in 2026; during our interviews, in organization meetings, or even online, some protesters explicitly allude to leveraging this period of intense political competition to further their cause. Notably, Jean, who leads a Walkway-focused working group for Paris Conservation, asserts that the proposals thus created will be "presented to all candidates for the municipal elections"—thus foreshadowing negotiations that would make electoral support conditional on championing a new, opposition-approved Walkway project.

Other key figures of the Walkway that frequently feature in protesters' appeals to authority include those who conceived the initial layout of the space and those who work to maintain it—i.e., those who arguably know the space best. These planners include workers from the City's technical departments—administrative workers, but also gardeners or other maintenance agents—and architects/landscapers. Some of these professionals are part of the main protest organizations, while others more casually showcase support for the opposition.

Emphasizing relationships with key figures of the Walkway thus confers a certain credibility to protesters, in that, to them, it proves that they are seen, heard, and recognized as important players in the field. Further strengthening their sense of importance is protesters' reliance on markers of support, or even success, that they present as quasi-objective. Numbers largely contribute to that rhetoric. Indeed, protesters often orally measure support for their cause (or their organization) to prove their popularity—and, by extension, their relevance. Catherine, a founding member of IGB, adopts this exact train of thought:

> "The more we are, the better it gets. The fact that we are an organization with, still, many people, we are over 200—maybe not in terms of members, but if you add members and sympathizers we are close to 250. That's a lot of people. Plus the petition. And with that, we become credible vis-à-vis journalists."

Similarly, Paris Conservation's size is brought up both by its members—"it is the largest environmental organization in France by far" (Jean, facilitator)—and adjacent actors—"Paris Conservation is an enormous organization" (Nicole, sympathizer). This is in line with previous findings on how numbers give legitimacy to social movements (Dechézelles, 2023). One of the most cited markers of support is the number of signatures received on IGB's key petition: over 7,000. This number is hailed by protesters with pride, and comes to signify not only widespread public approval of this opposition movement, but also proof of its political respectability. Solange, who does not explicitly adhere to any organization, explains: "if there are 7,000 people, it's not only to be against [the local mayor]. I think there is still reflection."

The most telling manifestation of this size rhetoric appears when *relative* size is discussed. In other words, it is not enough for protesters to demonstrate that they are able to garner widespread support; they want to prove that they do so at higher levels than their opponents, e.g., other citizen-led initiatives that could have also influenced City Hall. For example, one leading figure of IGB dismisses For a Neighborhood Walkway, an organization that initially supported the Walkway project before joining the opposition, like so: "I don't know if [the City] went to see Thibault's organization. There are 3 people in there. We, on the other hand, are over 100.[61]" In this instance, size is implicitly equated not with political power, as relationships with City Hall are still mentioned, but with representativeness and, in turn, credibility.

More commonly, though, discussions of relative size are used to discredit City Hall—because it is the most powerful actor involved, but perhaps also because it holds democratic legitimacy through elections and, as such, is expected to be reasonably representative of residents' interests.[62] Protesters tie this back to what they perceive to be inadequate consultation processes, describing how their meetings are more popular than those facilitated by City Hall and therefore, perhaps, more evocative—e.g., "many people participate. Our meetings attract a lot of people. At the first public meeting we organized, there were more people than when the City organized its own public meeting" (Jean, Paris Conservation facilitator). One point of particular interest in this regard is the rhetorical use of the questionnaire sent out by a City-mandated consultation agency which aimed at assessing residents' preferences regarding street furniture on the Walkway. Interestingly, protesters put forward different values to undermine its mathematical representativeness, alternatively arguing that there were "only" 600, 500, or even as low as 80 responses. As one protester puts it, in comparison to "over 7,000 [petition] signatures [...] what is this study? [...] Answer: it's nothing!" In other words, by demonstrating how it is the opposition which garners the most support from residents, organizations challenge the City's representativity and attempt to establish themselves as the true democratic actors.

Overall, the opposition's legal victory remains their most authoritative claim to legitimacy. This is unsurprising given the reliance on the civic world of justification to criticize City Hall, as legality is "a form of worth that is particularly appreciated in this world" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 186). Protest leaders stress the reassurance this victory has brought, notably because it promises to further delay the project's completion by forcing the City to take—previously ignored—preliminary measures, e.g., "we are relaxed now. The recourse brought before the Council of State made it so that [the City's] recourse was refused,

[61] Strikingly, this member does not provide the same number as Catherine (see quote on page 12), who boasted 200-250 members. This might denote a large number of inactive members, or simply reflect the difficulty of accurately assessing the magnitude of support.

[62] This is especially true of this particular movement, as most protesters voted for the current local government.

the administrative court's decisions[63] are still there so the necessity of impact studies is imposed on them" (Gilles, IGB facilitator). More importantly, it shifts the power balance—at least according to protesters' perception of the events—between the controversy's two main institutional actors: City Hall and the organizational alliance between Paris Conservation and IGB. Throughout our interview, one founding member of IGB repeats "we won", while another asserts that now, "we matter", "we are in a position of power".

By sanctioning the City for its unlawful planning of the Walkway, this legal victory also reassures lay protesters that they are on the so-called "right side" of the conflict. Indeed, my interviewees showcase a (seemingly) deep respect for legal institutions, e.g., "we must wait for justice to be done", "we'll ask the law to say what can or cannot be done", etc. Joël, a protester with a law degree, interprets favorable legal decisions as proof that his intuitions regarding lackluster work on the part of the City were correct: "now that we have a decision of judges and summary proceedings, we know that there weren't any documents". Solange, a loosely involved protester, admits that while she at times feels like she is not particularly knowledgeable about the technicalities of the project, she feels reassured by the fact that protesters' concerns were legally validated: "if the administrative court and the Council of State halted the project, it means that the project was flawed. [...] And honestly if the administrative court and then the Council of State said no, let's stop the project and wait [...] that means there's something that was badly done, that didn't work."

As such, winning a legal battle is seen by protesters as a seal of approval from a higher authority—one to which the City itself is subjected, no less. In their eyes, this fact justifies that their struggle was "worth it"—thus, in practice, it minimizes self-doubt on the part of protesters and brings cohesion to the movement by vindicating its overall goal, internal tensions aside.

b. Proposing alternatives

Prognostic frames are fraught with tension, challenging the viability of the movement as a united entity. Whether appealing to authoritative figures—e.g., politicians, experts and, most saliently, legal actors—is enough to build credibility before the City and other (higher) institutional actors is one of those tensions. This rift took place within Paris Conservation, as this was the only organization involved that had the seniority to take legal action. Discord between leaders led to a reshuffle at the head of the organization. Isabelle, who was heavily involved in what she calls "profound disagreements", explains:

> "Sometimes it's hard to communicate the need to take action—and to take *legal* action (emphasis added). Many people think legal action is dangerous and expensive, and there's a kind of dishonor that springs back on the self. And it's considered bad—I mean, the City of Paris has stopped giving us funding, and maybe that's because we took legal action. Because it obstructs them. As if you were guilty of

[63] Previously addressed in the introduction.

> taking legal action! And so in the public imagination this fear is very important—the fear of being the guilty one in the issue you bring before court."

Upon being interviewed, Jean, her main opponent within Paris Conservation only briefly touched on this rift—perhaps for fear of weakening the powerful image associated with the organization following its legal victory—but made it clear that he did not want to be seen as, per Isabelle, "[obstructing]" the City. For example, he admits that "the objectives are not necessarily stupid" and asserts that "we do not want to stay at 'we don't want it'". Implicitly, Jean and other Paris Conservation members' reluctance to take legal action feeds into the larger trend, emanating from protesters across organizations and hierarchies, of not wanting to be perceived as an obstructive opposition movement. For example, protesters often attempt to make themselves seem moderate, e.g., "I am open to all good ideas", "we are pragmatic", or "I am in favor of a project overall, but…". To further distance themselves from pure opposition, protesters make frequent appeals to being in favor of greening itself, reducing automotivity, or both[64]:

> "Everybody wants more trees in Paris. [...] I'm not against planning for green space, on the contrary I want more of it." - *Stéphanie, Too Much Traffic facilitator*

> "I think those who want to maintain automotive circulation are not being reasonable. [...] [It's] a lack of realism, refusing to accept or to understand the trend of the last 20 years and how it's evolving. [...] I think that we're at a crossroads and that certain struggles are in the past. I mean, we see it with climate change, cities also need to transform." - *Sylvain, Too Much Traffic member*

> "If we take both objectives of the project—more greening and calmer circulation—we are in favor, but not this way." - *Annie, IGB facilitator*

This posture of "I'm not against X, but…" has already been established by the wind farms literature (Devine-Wright, 2009). Using such disclaimers allows protesters to "claim support for [X] generally, but not that particular development" (Devine-Wright, 2009, 431), which ties back to the aforementioned strategy of anticipating and balancing NIMBY accusations (Anjaria, 2009). However, the sufficiency of these discursive strategies is challenged. Instead, multiple protesters suggest that becoming a constructive opposition movement also requires putting forward what Jean refuses to call counter-proposals—a term he rejects for the same reason he rejects any word that starts with "counter", "anti", or any other opposition-coded construction—and instead refers to as simply "proposals". This echoes a common criticism of the focal organizations, even among protesters: not being "active" enough—something that Dave, an unaffiliated protester, perceives as an (initial) reluctance to propose alternatives to City-led planning. He explains that this is partly why he did not join Paris Conservation, IGB, or any affiliated organizations:

[64] Notable here is the fact that protesters make claims to being in favor of reducing automotivity much more often than being in favor of greening. This is probably because greening is seen as something that is inherently good—e.g., "we cannot be against greening"—while developing "soft" mobilities is a much hotter debate in Parisian politics.

> "These people are cute. But apparently, it's their pleasure to fight against the current. [...] I tell them sincerely, sometimes they have an idea but they don't think and I think they perceive it casually. And I think for everything you have to see the pros and cons and instead of criticizing and censoring, you need to give options and propose things."

The importance of alternative proposals ties back into the centrality of prognostic framing to social movement literature: Benford & Snow (2000) suggest that it is this type of framing which most clearly sets apart different groups advocating for the same cause (617). For now, it is difficult to gauge which prognostic frame is dominant within the anti-Walkway movement. At this stage, proponents of alternative planning proposals have not reached a consensus, and diverse solutions, with varying levels of concreteness, are put forward.

Some protesters—who would perhaps be characterized by Dave and other skeptical protesters as "cute" actors who like to "fight against the current"—do not want to see any changes to the current space, e.g.: "[let's] touch nothing. We keep the gates, the trees, the current bike lanes… well maybe we enlarge the bike lanes a little bit, it's true that they're a bit narrow. The counter-project is that we touch nothing, it's heritage, that's all" (Dominique, Conseil de Quartier member). Others do not want to see major changes, but emphasize that the current space should be more properly maintained. Online and offline, protesters accuse the City of not properly taking care of the Walkway and contributing to its loss of attractiveness; therefore, they argue, the priority should be to reestablish the squares' potential by cleaning them more often and hiring security to surveil the square and sanction degradation.[65] Overall, the lexical field of conservation is central to these two iterations of the same idea: minimizing changes to the space.

However, conservation is not always described as opposed to change. In fact, many protesters agree that the space needs a renovation. Sometimes, proposals are relatively vague, e.g., broad suggestions to keep the gates but provide more openings so visitors can transit between squares more easily. Other times, they are planning projects in their own right. For example, Luc, an active Conseil de Quartier member who loosely engages with IGB and Too Much Traffic, proposes to reclaim the existing cycling lane to create a "three meters [wide]" running path, while allowing the passage of all vehicles—including bicycles—on the Grand Boulevard, "about four to five meters large". Parallelly, Jean and Gilles, who respectively facilitate Paris Conservation and IGB, both suggest planting a line of trees outside the squares' gates to fulfill the City's objective of a "green continuity" without the need to open the Walkway. These alternative proposals are not created in a vacuum; rather than simply outlining aesthetic or practical changes to the Walkway space, they reflect protesters' willingness to suggest deep, ideological changes to the City's view of what green—or even public—space should be, e.g.:

[65] In line with our previous discussion of policing in Chapter 2.

> "The City's vision of public space is—in my view—a vision of circulation and mobility. [...] What annoys me is that it's a bit ideological about how public space should be fluid, fast, open. So no gates, only flows. But we can also want emptiness in cities—empty spaces where we can linger, and where there is no flow." - *Gilles, landscaper and IGB facilitator*

> "[The City is] desperately trying to find green spaces that aren't really green spaces. Because what they're going to create is not parks. It's places where we can walk and that are a bit greened. But that's not what a park is. A park is a place where there is a lot of vegetation and alleyways where we can [...] wander." - *Isabelle, Paris Conservation facilitator*

> "This conversation brings us back to the idea that [...] when we work in urban planning, we should not predetermine uses. Firstly, because users have their own desire for uses that does not necessarily correspond to that of the person who imagined [the space]. And so we need to imagine spaces [...] which recognize that users will determine the uses. And to be open to changes. [...] I've always said [parks] should be spaces to experience. They should become spaces to experience rather than spaces to see." - *Jean, Paris Conservation facilitator*

Here, while Gilles and Isabelle challenge the City's (alleged) ideals regarding what urban space should aim to provide—respectively, calm and greenery—Jean champions an alternative view whereby space should be defined by its users, without planning for pre-determined uses. Other appeals to a reimagined city emphasize particular uses to encourage to create an ideal—perhaps even, per some protesters, "utopian"—Walkway. For example, Alain, a member of the Paris Conservation working group, proposes to reestablish fluvial commerce along the canal in keeping with the space's history, while Thibault, the leader of For a Neighborhood Walkway, emphasizes creating spaces that foster sociability, e.g., community gardens, to address the fact that "people in this neighborhood don't know each other". In this sense, protesters' prognostic framing of what a Walkway project should address responds to different scales of change, from the neighborhood to the city itself, and ultimately makes larger arguments about desirable urban futures—i.e., it constitutes a form of futuring, echoing trends in both academic orientations (White & Timmons Roberts, 2020) and environmental organizing (Lajarthe & Laigle, 2024; Sénac, 2024).

How these proposals should be defended gives way to a new division between protesters who are attached to local democracy and who believe that any new project should be co-constructed with City Hall (mostly Conseil de Quartier members who are already embedded in institutional frameworks) and those whose aim is to become a powerful enough actor to champion their proposals (mostly organizations). As such, these two factions are involved in frame bridging efforts to recruit "ideologically congruent but structurally disconnected" (Snow et al., 1986, 467) actors. For example, Conseils de Quartier members in the focal *arrondissement* are actively trying to mobilize their counterparts in neighboring areas, to little avail—a failure which protesters attribute to deliberate City-led efforts to isolate different Conseils de Quartier so as to best suppress collective action. Overall, though,

alternative proposals themselves are timid at this stage, and this new division is overshadowed by the need to agree on which project to defend in the first place.

3.3 Who can build constructive opposition?

At all stages of championing alternatives, the anti-Walkway movement relies on its supporters' ability to produce expertise, a key marker of legitimacy in environmental social movements (Dechézelles, 2023). This expertise is as diverse as supporters themselves. I begin by outlining the knowledges leveraged by the movement, then examine how the mobilization of expertise reflects capabilities that are socially situated.

a. Harnessing capacities

Lay expertise and the production of counter-knowledge have been largely addressed by the social movements literature. I go beyond the definition of lay expertise as scientific boundary-work (Eden, Donaldson and Walker, 2006) to also encompass familiarity with the neighborhood. In doing so, I draw from Di Chiro's (1997) critique of the distinction between "ordinary" and "expert" actors, and her definition of a new "ordinary expert": "in grassroots environmental movements a new species of 'expert' has emerged—one that is constructed from the everyday struggles of people striving to understand and negotiate their needs and desires in efforts to live a decent life" (p. 210). I thus address how residents who are neither scientific nor professional actors, and who do not strive to become either, use their domestic knowledge to further the anti-Walkway movement.

Indeed, residents undertake much of the on-the-ground work. By far the most widely cited activity across interviews is conducting explorations, whereby residents, alone or in groups, leverage their on-site presence to frequently visit the Walkway. During these visits, they observe the squares' state, but also their uses. Close to the planned construction date, IGB also put together a surveillance team, organized via WhatsApp, whereby residents took turns going to the Walkway in the early morning to check whether the squares' gates were still intact. As one protester explains: "we are the ones who live the neighborhood. We are the ones who feel it. It's not enough to have your ass on a chair behind a desk. When you say that for car circulation, it's a software that takes care of it [...] that means elected officials didn't go on the ground? We went on the ground."[66]

"Going on the ground" means conducting explorations and surveilling the Walkway, but also producing evidence to strengthen reports made to City Hall. Protesters thus describe different ways in which they produce and utilize evidence, such as pictures and videos. The first use of these materials is to characterize the advantages and areas for improvement of the space. For example, two central figures of IGB told me that they had filmed children playing

[66] This reflects our previous discussion of domestic orders of worth, i.e., how resident protesters view their presence in the neighborhood as a marker of legitimacy, and the associated rhetoric that City officials are disconnected from local reality.

in the squares and used it to emphasize the Walkway's centrality to neighborhood family life. Through the lexicon she uses to describe her activities, one resident strikingly draws a parallel between her monitoring activities and research—confirming her own perception that she is producing expertise: "I'm always with my camera, making my little remarks, my little individual notes *from the field* (emphasis added)."

Another practice which ties into this content-driven expertise is archiving, whereby protesters hold on to materials produced by a variety of actors in the context of the Walkway project, from local council meeting notes to flyers circulated by the City. During our conversation, Luc, an active member of his Conseil de Quartier who closely follows the controversy, boasts about his extensive collection of material relating to past and present remodeling projects on the Walkway space. He believes that holding on to these materials gives power to protesters, as they can defend themselves against attempts to occult, or even, rewrite, narratives. Referring to an episode in which the City attempted to go back on its initial communications about the space, Luc gloats: "all these documents that were made for the municipal campaign—the last one—can no longer be found on Google websites. Everything was taken away. Nevertheless, we are file people. So we have all the different documents in our possession. I was able to retrieve documents from that era." This ties into protesters' second major use of physical evidence: denouncing City Hall. In the example outlined above, Luc uses archival material to denounce what he believes to be dishonest behavior; another protester remembers filming City-employed maintenance workers cutting down a square's gates *before* the administrative court's judgment regarding the (un)lawful nature of the project.

Strategically, residents can also count on the embodied and lived expertise conferred by their in-depth knowledge of their neighborhood to support both their claims that the Walkway will have a negative impact on eastern Paris and the changes they hope to see instead. This discourse is the most central among resident actors, who for example applaud the Coulée Verte as a calm and separated space that is, structurally, similar to the Walkway, and warn against the consequences of other projects, e.g., Tour Saint-Jacques, where removing gates made a neighborhood square worse[67]. This knowledge about other contexts comes from prolonged lived experience, but is also facilitated by explorations, undertaken per protesters' own initiative or facilitated by organizations. Conseils de Quartier distinguish between two types of explorations: "observation walks", which aim to describe what could be improved in a within-district space, and "inspiration walks", which take place outside district borders to observe aspirational neighborhoods. Thus, residents' expertise regarding features of Parisian public space is not only embodied through their (usually longstanding) presence—it is also mediated or even orchestrated by organizations.

Through my relationships with focal Conseils de Quartier, I was invited to participate in an inspiration walk in a neighboring *arrondissement*. During this activity, council members—many of whom are part of the anti-Walkway movement—emphasized the desire

[67] Interestingly, in the context of Tour Saint-Jacques, protesters emphasize that gates were eventually reinstalled.

for “protective” plants and flower pots (not unlike their championing of “protective” gates for the squares on the Walkway), the importance of maintaining existing spaces (expressed almost identically in our conversations), and the cleanliness of the space compared to their own *arrondissement* (akin to their emphasis on nuisances in the diagnostic step of the framing process).

While this lay expertise builds on hyperlocal knowledge and, as such, the domestic world of justification, protesters also rely on more conventional, authoritative sources—i.e., in Boltanskian terms, the orders of industry and fame. The most traditional of these sources is academia. Multiple interviewees hold some form of doctorate, whether MD or PhD; these protesters’ cultural educational capital is often mobilized to further the cause. Strikingly, two of my interviewees, Alain and Élisabeth—explicitly mentioned as key figures of the Paris Conservation-led working group—are retired medical doctors who specialize in noise pollution and sleep disorders[68]. These actors are able to mobilize peer-reviewed scientific work with what they perceive to be direct links to the Walkway, e.g.:

> “The WHO shows it in studies. [...] These are facts. We look at noise pollution levels, we look at what happens in affected populations. Anyway, [noise pollution] favors metabolic illnesses, obesity, diabetes, [...] chronic stress. It also increases cardiovascular incidents, hypertension, strokes, all the big metabolic illnesses. And at night, it severely impacts the structure of the brain’s cognitive functions.” - *Alain*

One could argue that while these studies are (presumably) correct in their claims, there is no evidence that these medical consequences can be tied to the Walkway. In a bid to back up his claims, Alain installed citizen sensing material on his balcony to measure current noise pollution levels on the northernmost end of the Walkway, where previous projects have already restricted car use—in this sense, he simultaneously holds the positions of both embodied expert and medical expert. His findings are formal: noise pollution levels are already high (and on the rise)—especially at night due to party-goers: “this isn’t subjective, it’s perfectly factual. Yes, during the day, there are fewer cars and noise pollution levels slightly decrease. But at night, year on year [...] they do not stop increasing.” It is based on these empirical results that Alain argues that any project that provides more opportunities for people to stay in the squares at all hours of the day without proper policing would only add to the problem. This allows him to present his analysis not as speculative, but as “objective”.

Among my interviewees, there are also two retired social scientists. One of them, Pierre-Louis, a sociologist, describes his research background as central to his involvement in IGB: “I mean, I’m a founding member of the organization, but I’m not part of the board, and they are really the kingpins. My primary role—well, it’s not an official role, but it’s true that I’m mainly involved through my papers. So I write, and sometimes I send them literature references that seem interesting to me.” Here, he therefore portrays himself as a creator and

[68] See Epstein (1995) for a more in-depth discussion of how medicine in particular is mobilized by social movements.

diffuser of scientific knowledge within the movement. The "papers" he refers to are critical blog posts about City policies in the Marais, his former neighborhood, and, more recently, on the Walkway:

> "— P-L: I think I started this blog maybe in 2006 or something like that. [...] My goal was to provide a social science approach to public debate. So these are very polemical papers, but they are research papers, when most people who read it thought they were grumpy papers. And my goal was [...] to produce a critical ethnology of the Marais' neoliberal transformation.
>
> — Author: And were these papers read outside academic circles?
>
> — P-L: Oh yes. Well, in the academic world, I think there are many people—even among my colleagues—who didn't understand. Others understood very well. The reception was mixed. I think the general feeling was to say 'but why is [Pierre-Louis] [...], who is very famous as the former director of [lab] and for his historical sociology work, wasting his time writing about his neighborhood?' I think many people didn't really understand the political aspect. [...] I acted like what Michel Foucault called a specific intellectual, who is not an activist so to speak, but who serves public debate with his professional competence."

This activist involvement of some social scientists led to expectations that I, too, would use my writing to further the anti-Walkway cause. Some interviewees were under the impression that my thesis would criticize the project and congratulated me on my "bravery" for choosing this topic. Others directly asked how I would communicate my findings, or what "role" I thought writing this thesis gave me. I explained that my interest in this topic was purely academic and that this would reflect in my writing. Strikingly, while most protesters accepted my boundaries, one expert who used his own work to fuel the opposition movement challenged my assertion that my research should remain academic: "you are wrong [to not send this to City Hall]. I think you should write a summary of your thesis and send it to the *Parisien*, to the *Monde*, [...] to City Hall. [...] Send it to journalists: 'a study about what people think, etc.'. On the contrary. It's really interesting, it shouldn't stay in a drawer". As such, while from the outside Pierre-Louis' self-characterization as a Foucauldian "specific intellectual" may seem self-important, it responds to an expectation—albeit less intellectualized—within the movement that social research should be used to denounce the Walkway project and, by extension, the City's action.

Another way in which expert voices are mobilized in the Walkway controversy is through the inclusion of various industry actors. Most prominently, any City-led greening project requires collaboration between urban planners and politicians; both groups are represented among protesters, and specifically protest leaders. As such, protesters are proud to assert that their proposals were vetted by experts in terms of both technical feasibility and political relevance. This category of "industry actors" could be extended to include those who work on the square and whose activity would be threatened, should the Walkway be completed. The Grand Boulevard is a major commercial hub of eastern Paris, with two major

attractions: multiple markets, which are not included in this analysis because the City's planning proposal would not significantly modify their current habits, and a particularly high concentration of commercial establishments catering to the construction industry. Interestingly, appeals to commercial activity are common in the protest movement, but actual commercial actors report little involvement with the focal organizations. Julie, the main point of contact between City Hall and shopkeepers, was surprised to hear that protesters even mentioned commercial actors, as she felt that their experience was "not represented" in public meetings she attended. On the contrary, when I asked a protest leader whether she knew any commercial actors I could contact, she replied that while she did not know any personally, she remembered them being upset during public meetings. In this sense, organizational actors may be trying to leverage commercial actors' expertise even if shopkeepers are largely absent from their supporters.

Instead, representatives of the construction industry explicitly paint themselves as "rational" expert actors, drawing from the worlds of industry and market, and deal directly with the City: "we are simply professionals who have jobs and a *clientele*, and who bear a risk because there is this project" (Julie, commercial representative for the construction industry). As such, while the expertise of different professionals is emphasized in the broad anti-Walkway movement, it is not all concentrated in organizations. This both weakens organizations' claims to representativity and strengthens the overall impact of lay expertise, as it is mobilized in contexts City Hall is more likely to take seriously, e.g., through direct contact with industry actors.

b. Who can protest the Walkway?

Integrating different forms of expertise thus helps diversify the grounds on which the anti-Walkway movement can make claims to credibility. Yet, this production of counter-expertise is unequally distributed—and unequally valued. While all protesters, whether residents or experts in a relevant field, can contribute to the production of alternative knowledge, the power these productions hold differ according to the level of specialization. Indeed, the division of labor in terms of knowledge production reflects a wider internal hierarchy of expertise within the movement, whereby the level of expertise mobilized increases with the scale of influence reached. Jean, who coordinates the working group brought together by Paris Conservation, says that he contacted members based on their respective expertise. While he also mentions "numerous residents", experts are far more central to his description of how proposals that are deemed relevant enough to put forward are made:

> "We work with [...] former City workers from different departments, like the DEVE[69], the DU[70], etc. Among our supporters, we have people who are real professionals. Of course, we worked with [...] the landscaper who created the original layout, who is

[69] Department of green space and the environment.

[70] Department of urbanism.

> really a green space professional, who knows all the networks and everything, who told us this is doable, this isn't doable. [...] And residents also think and make suggestions, you know. I mean, they're not always unanimous. Typically, someone told us 'putting trees along the façades will obstruct the view', and we said 'okay, but at the same time it'll provide shade if you are facing the south or the west, the southwest, and so you get a lot of sun with global warming, you won't be able to stand it anymore'. [...] So, of course, we'll prioritize that instead of maintaining the façades with a view in the middle of summer."

Here, Jean clearly indicates that, in the proceedings of his working group—which aims to put forward proposals to be discussed with political figures—residents' concerns regarding their own environment are heard, but dismissed when confronted with the suggestions of "real professionals".

Hierarchies in the valuation of counter-expertise are only one facet of larger barriers to participation. While this chapter has, so far, argued that all protesters—and particularly protest leaders—put forth strategies to legitimize their arguments and, by extension, their struggle, the anti-Walkway movement owes a non-negligible part of its success to structural resources that *already* made it legitimate. These resources are both material and immaterial.

Firstly—and this (partly) explains the advanced age of most protesters—the movement was led by people who had significant time to invest in local politics. Indeed, under a third of my interviewees are not retired—I attempted to diversify the age of my sample, but as my research progressed it became clear that the anti-Walkway movement was characterized by old age. This lack of age diversity actually drew criticism from (marginally) younger protesters, who on multiple occasions shared that their old age made protest leaders difficult to work with. For example, Dave, who is in his 60s, explains: "maybe you'll find me rude [...] but it's not because you are old [...] that your word is always the last word, you also need to let other people express themselves". Regardless, this is not uncommon. Old age largely structures neighborhood collective action in France (Carrel & Talpin, 2012; Chignier-Riboulon, 2001).

Furthermore, ample funds were needed to take legal action against the City of Paris. Damien,[71] a member of Anne Hidalgo's cabinet and a prominent proponent of the Walkway project, revealed that he viewed economic capital as a powerful predictor of planning protests and, by extension, legal recourse across the city:

> "I think the more affluent territories [...] have much stronger resistance capabilities. [...] The local residents in these neighborhoods are all very rich people who have access to networks of journalists and above all to networks of lawyers, and who know how to organize themselves to run press campaigns, to take legal action, to reach out to elected officials. They have the reflex to send emails, to pick up the phone, which

[71] He does not feature in my formal list of interviewees, as I interviewed him for a separate paper prior to this thesis.

> is not at all the case for people from working-class neighborhoods, who have a much more fatalistic attitude, or in any case, don't have the same cultural capital and therefore don't have access to all these pathways of recourse, to all these pathways of expression. And so, we should do a geography of recourse."

What Damien describes as the "local residents"—"very rich people"—does not exactly pertain to the focal neighborhood of this thesis. Currently, property values per square meter in the *Conseils de Quartier* around the Walkway are under the Parisian median value (Le Figaro Immobilier, 2025), suggesting that—while unaffordable in absolute terms—this neighborhood is not particularly expensive relative to the rest of Paris[72]. Relatedly, few of my interviewees, save perhaps for the doctors, could be described as "very rich" in a Parisian context. With these caveats, the anti-Walkway landscape does carry privileges that fit into Damien's description. This hinges on two primary characteristics of my sample.

First, while characterizing them as "very rich" at the Parisian scale would be unfair, protesters do possess sufficient funds, in absolute terms, to support their movement. Only one interviewee admitted to not being able to financially help leading organizations; most others explicitly indicated that they had donated to them, often on multiple occasions (both annual membership fees and occasional calls for contributions). These donations were central to covering legal fees: Isabelle, who impulsed legal action within Paris Conservation, explains that the organization receives no public funding and pays their lawyer with "membership fees, donations, and [...] [organized] kitties". Thus, the ability to self-fund the anti-Walkway movement was a prerequisite for collective action—one that would perhaps not have been met in more deprived neighborhoods.

The second characteristic of my sample that fits into Damien's description of privilege is the aforementioned high levels of education observable among my interviewees. The fact that the anti-Walkway movement is fueled by protesters with above-average levels of cultural and symbolic capital is even celebrated by some of my interviewees. As previously discussed, this allows protesters to make appeals to authority; per some interviewees, it also facilitates the organizing process. Sophie, a resident and IGB member, emphasizes the benefits associated with an expert-led movement:

> "Given the way they express themselves, there are a lot of intellectuals in the organization, and I think that's logical. [...] It's great that [...] [there] are apparently retired intellectuals who are available and who know how to format, and who are reasonable. We needed that, otherwise it wouldn't have… so the fact that the neighborhood is a bit *bobo*, it's great. Because the same thing [...] in [poorer *arrondissements*], it would be more complicated… they would have more trouble organizing."

[72] Whether Paris should be the point of comparison is debatable. Given Paris's lack of affordability relative to most cities, it could be argued that most movements that take place within it are made up of privileged protesters. These considerations go beyond the scope of my thesis, where mobilization is discussed at a local level and where a reliance on Parisian standards is, therefore, congruent.

By the own admission of protesters, privilege occupies a central role in local interest groups' ability to self-organize and present their struggle in a way that is acceptable according to powerful, legitimate audiences. This is both an explanatory factor regarding the Walkway movement's success and a testament to the outdated nature of grassroots versus grasstops organizing: in privileged environments, these two strategies intersect, with lay organizers leveraging their capabilities to become quasi-technocratic actors.[73] This discussion of privilege constitutes another opportunity for progressive organizers to attempt to make their mobilization ideologically congruent[74]. Anti-Walkway protesters display a "ponderating ethos" (Comby, 2022) to justify how they reconcile postures that are, *prima facie*, opposed. Here, they are able to articulate their left-leaning political beliefs with their reliance on profoundly unequal structures because of the practical advantages their privilege conferred.

3.4 Chapter conclusion

Overall, this chapter sheds light on how the anti-Walkway movement was able to bring its struggle from a local planning controversy to a larger contestation of trends in Parisian development. The discursive strategy to follow the larger political trend of climate change bandwagoning (Jinnah, 2011) and emphasize green justifications over domestic justifications leverages the former world's "demonstrated capacity for transitions between the particular and the general" (Lafaye & Thévenot, 1993, 14) and makes protesters' motivational framing audible. Actionable complaints through a civic-world-backed legal victory and support from insider actors, as well as the internal legitimation of being able to produce alternative proposals (despite a lack of consensus on prognostic frames), further build this credibility. Nevertheless, the anti-Walkway movement's success relied first and foremost on privileged protesters' ability to produce the conditions for this credibility.

[73] This has been widely discussed in the literature on Indian cities (see for example Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Anantharaman, 2024). To the best of my knowledge, it is not as established in related scholarships on Western European contexts.

[74] This was notably expressed when protesters attempted to discursively detach themselves from non-progressive justifications, e.g., anti-homeless discourse, or non-constructive postures, e.g., the lexicon of opposition.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated protests against urban greening in Paris, with attention to the contestation of both specific local changes and the construction of "green" as "good" (Angelo, 2021). Below, I further detail my findings in light of my guiding RQs.

C.1 Diverse justifications

RQ1: What registers do protesters use to motivate their opposition to urban greening?

Regardless of the scope of the analysis, protesters against greening projects in Paris primarily rely on domestic, civic, and green registers. Domestic justifications reflect protesters' place attachment and their worries regarding (perceived) threats to tradition or daily life, e.g., nuisances (noise, traffic, etc.) or changes to patrimonialized spaces. Civic justifications show dissatisfaction with the way City Hall manages urban greening, primarily emphasizing the idea that the institution is acting against collective interests by refusing to engage in consultation or by proposing stigmatizing policies. Finally, green justifications denounce inconsistencies within the City's own sustainable framing, e.g., potential harm to the flora and fauna or the questionable environmental benefits of electric bicycles. Specific groups use more specialized worlds of justification; for example, international commenters—or local commenters who aim to bring their struggle to a more international audience—rely on the world of fame, while industry professionals with a stake in urban change, e.g., the construction industry allegedly threatened by the Walkway, occasionally use market-based justifications.

As such, the landscape of urban greening controversies at the city and neighborhood levels is diverse; no one critique emerges as most predictive of such protests. Of course, the justifications analyzed in this thesis are self-reported; commenters perform being commenters, and interviewees perform being interviewees. Consequently, more skeptical readers may call into question the sincerity of arguments put forward by protesters. This goes beyond the scope of my study; furthermore, it violates my key principle of not assuming protesters' intent and taking their justifications seriously[75]. Thus, such doubts are best answered by the growing body of literature on the attitude-behavior gap across social science disciplines (see for example Claudy, Peterson, and O'Driscoll, 2013; Coulangeon et al., 2023; Grandin, Boon-Falleur, and Chevallier, 2021).

C.2 Beyond green backlash

RQ2: How do they reconcile these justifications with the public construction of urban greening as a social and environmental benefit?

Protesters do not think they are impeding urban greening, nor do they intend to; instead, they view themselves as defenders of alternative forms of urban greening. As such,

[75] Discussed in the introduction.

their contestation does not address urban greening itself, but rather what the City's iteration of this policy priority misses, along two lines of critique. First, protesters often challenge whether the projects proposed by the City really do constitute greening. My computational text analysis reveals that protesters pay special attention to greenwashing as a concept; furthermore, concerns about harm to the flora of the environments subject to change is a major vector of tension. This challenge to dominant constructions of greening is even more obvious in my focal case study, where the City was taken to court by one of France's premier environmental organizations. Second, where protesters are willing to admit that the City's proposed project carries environmental benefits, they emphasize how it can worsen quality of life. Frame bridging efforts between different activist traditions make this critique possible. For example, domestic-focused protesters emphasize their comfort and traditional idea of their neighborhood, but also, occasionally, the risk of gentrification and the associated economic threat it poses to underprivileged populations they themselves may not be a part of.

C.3 Strategizing opposition

RQ3: What strategies do protesters put into place to build a credible counter-movement?

In the case of the Canal Walkway, protest leaders attempt to maximize the impact of their movement through discursive, associative, and prognostic strategies. Discursively, while the hyperlocal anti-Walkway movement is united through a shared adherence to domestic justifications, leaders choose to "surf the green wave" and emphasize comparatively marginal green justifications as their key motivational frame, which provide a more advantageous political opportunity window—even if it leads to internal tensions regarding representativity. This also reflects in IGB's decision to associate with Paris Conservation, a prominent environmental organization. Further association of the movement with legal institutions and key figures of the Walkway, e.g., architects and politicians, strengthens its credibility. Finally, protest leaders center alternative proposals in their move from obstructive opposition to constructive opposition—although no dominant prognostic frame has emerged yet.

C.4 Leveraging class privilege

RQ4: How does protesters' positionality impact their opposition?

My computational text analysis points in the direction of residential neighborhoods relying on more domestic concerns; however, these results are tentative at best and positionality was mostly assessed in my case study of the Canal Walkway project. My sample of interviewees was primarily comprised of senior citizens with progressive beliefs; these characteristics influenced, respectively, their tendency to emphasize vulnerable populations (such as their own) and the higher moral standards they ascribed to left-wing local politicians and cyclists, whom they expected to be congruent with their own ideals. Furthermore, the fact that the anti-Walkway movement is primarily progressive likely influenced protesters' tendency to distance themselves from arguments viewed as conservative, e.g., anti-homeless discourse, and their reliance on justice-based arguments against urban greening.

Beyond the discursive dimension, protesters' retiree status conferred them considerable time to invest in neighborhood politics. More consequentially, from a socio-economic standpoint, the anti-Walkway movement largely owes its capacity to successfully halt construction to the privilege of its organizers. Indeed, the movement was able to capitalize on its members' funds, networks, and expertise not only to support itself through expensive court proceedings, but also to leverage powerful connections as allies and produce credible alternative proposals.

C.5 General conclusions

Overall, this thesis has shed light on an understudied iteration of opposition to urban greening. Its results confirm that protesting climate action is not always tied to animosity toward the green transition. On the contrary, protesters frequently emphasize their desire for an alternative transition—one they deem more respectful toward local cultural, economic, and more-than-human contexts. It thus inscribes this study in the wider literature that encourages researchers to move beyond climate backlash as a framework[76]. More broadly, my results challenge the stereotype whereby these protests are embedded in conservative ideology, as the vast majority of my interview sample subscribes to progressive ideals, both in partisan and small-p politics.

My research thus has implications for the ways in which protesters should be considered, in academia and beyond, but also for pathways toward a greater acceptability of urban greening projects. First, my research emphasizes the importance of consultation—processes deemed inadequate or absent draw procedural complaints from protesters and strain relationships between City Hall and residents. Second, change seems more acceptable if it is gradual—c.f. complaints about the very concept of "large projects" and rapid modifications of residents' transportation habits. Reconciling the desire for incremental change with the climate urgency is a difficult task, but it may help limit the risk of citizen obstruction. Finally, results concerning (potential) adverse effects of urban greening emphasized by protesters follow wider calls to consider sustainability holistically, beyond the construction of "green" as "good" (Angelo, 2021).

C.6 Recommendations for future research

Empirically, this study is limited in scope in that it is confined to the Parisian context. A comparative perspective would thus be stimulating for researchers. For example, within France, Nantes could be one interesting point of comparison, because it has similarly pushed an ambitious urban greening agenda but has explicitly used municipal interventions to articulate social and environmental sustainability (Garcia-Lamarca et al., 2019). As such, seeing whether directly addressing concerns about socio-economic equality changes or even

[76] Discussed in the introduction.

mitigates protest could further discussions regarding the acceptability of urban greening projects.

Theoretically, the results of this thesis regarding protesters' positionality encourage further inquiry into the social determinants of barriers to climate action. I provide two suggestions. First, per a City employee's suggestion, investigating the "geography of recourse" through spatial regression analysis could confirm how (and whether) socio-economic variables predict ability to protest. Taken literally, the invitation to look at recourse could pertain to solely legal recourse; however, an analysis of where protest tends to take place would be equally interesting given the lack of studies—to the best of my knowledge—on the topic. Second, I propose to extend the emerging literature on class and environmentalism (see for example Comby, 2024; Coulangeon et al., 2023) to include barriers to climate action, especially in the middle and upper classes. Indeed, the eco-habitus literature focuses on how pro-environmental attitudes are used as a means of distinction for these strata of society (Anantharaman, 2016; Carfagna et al., 2014; Horton, 2003). Thus, the results of my thesis warrant further investigation into how privileged class identities can define—or even facilitate—opposition to various implementations of sustainability.

Appendix

Methodological appendix

Ethics

Engaging with critical forms of sociology warrants special attention to ethical issues. Beyond its academic objectives—laid out in I.1c—this thesis aims to minimize all potential harm to its participants. This goal underlies all methods used, reflecting the fact that discussions of ethics in computational social science are an active area of methods research (Edelmann et al., 2020; Lazer et al., 2020; Macanovic, 2022).

Let us begin with the ethical foundations of interviews, starting with the importance of securing informed consent. I provided a consent form[77] to all interviewees to ensure they understood the terms on which the interviews were to be conducted. All my interviewees consented to participate in my research, and all but one agreed to be recorded. During this unrecorded interview, I took detailed notes, then—per her request—revised them jointly with my interviewee. Further to the issue of consent, confidentiality is also paramount to harm minimization. All interviewees' names were anonymized[78], as well as those of some local political figures. Indeed, naming the politicians protesters criticized may have put them in a difficult position—the intimate relationship they at times share with politicians would have made some interviewees recognizable. Furthermore, revealing these local figures' names would have revealed the *arrondissement* in which the controversy of interest takes place—further narrowing down the possible identities of my interviewees and increasing their vulnerability. As such, the only recurring non-anonymized name in this thesis is that of Anne Hidalgo, as backlash against her administration is generalized enough that it cannot be traced back to one protester or one group of protesters.

Moving on to ethical practices in the computational portion, it is important to note that the practice of harvesting online content has been argued to encourage extractivist research practices. In his (2018) handbook *Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age*, Salganik thus warns researchers about the difficulty of obtaining informed consent, while also arguing that the extent to which robust forms of consent are necessary depends on the risk associated with the research. He then defines risk as "potential for harm from the disclosure of information" (307). For privacy, I did not record the names of commenters and only analyzed the content of their comments.[79] Computational social science can also

[77] Available below (in French).

[78] Extending this anonymization to data storage, names were anonymized on paper and any subsequent files containing details about the interviews, e.g., transcripts or my interview tracking sheet, contained the anonymized names.

[79] Full anonymization is difficult to ensure (Salganik, 2018) and, theoretically, one could translate the comments I cite back into French and find the original publication with the commenter's name. However, this possibility arguably poses little risk to the protesters who produced the content I analyzed, especially seeing as the data I

reinforce digital inequalities by increasing the number of studies that rely on inherently biased samples which reflect the digital divide (Blank, 2017; Haight, Quan-Haase, and Corbett, 2014; Schradie, 2011), excluding marginalized groups from analysis. This is one obvious limitation of my computational sample and there is not much I can do within the data collection or analysis process to address it; however, this inequity is mitigated by my fieldwork, during which I primarily engaged with older seniors (70+) who were not necessarily represented in my computational sample, in keeping with wider trends of who participates in online production (Friemel, 2014).

A note on researcher positionality

On the ground, being a young, white woman studying at Sciences Po facilitated my fieldwork. My credentials were immediately taken seriously; I also suspect that my youthful and traditionally female-presenting appearance made me appear more ignorant than I otherwise would have (Flanigan, 2023), and that this partly explained the extent to which my interviewees, particularly the male ones (ibid), explained their arguments—to the benefit of my research (ibid).

The fact that I had been residing in the neighborhood for almost a year when I began my fieldwork also benefited both my data collection and subsequent analysis. Knowing that I was a resident made interviewees warm up to me and provided for richer conversations.[80] Furthermore, the fact that I only recently moved to the area granted me a mixed insider-outsider perspective. Breen argues that such in-between positions on the insider/outsider continuum "[maximizes] the advantages of each while [minimizing] the potential for disadvantages" (Breen, 2007, 171). I will refrain from making normative statements about the maximization of advantages; however, I follow her assertion that holding both positions to a certain degree helps compensate for each position's drawbacks. For example, one classic disadvantage of being an insider is that "the insider's view of reality is situated within a cultural relativist perspective, recognizing behavior and actions as being relative to the person's culture and the context in which that behavior or action is both rational and meaningful within that culture" (Darwin Holmes, 2020, 5). While my medium-term presence in the neighborhood made me familiar with the specificities of local life and some aspects of residents' cultural references, the fact that I had no connection to the neighborhood or even the *arrondissement* before 2022 means that the "cultural relativism" (ibid) I intuitively draw judgment from was not based on the setting of my study.

One important detail regarding how my positionality affected my interviewees is that I was involved with the City of Paris for 6 months in 2023, first as a policy officer for Green

use is already public (commenters who presumably did not want their identities known usually provided only their initials or a nickname).

[80] Often, interviewees went into great detail about which streets, landmarks, or even businesses stood to change the most following the Walkway project, assuming—because I was familiar with the neighborhood—that I understood exactly what they were referring to.

Party representatives at the Town Hall of the 19th *arrondissement*, then as an intern at the central Mayor's Office. The latter position is particularly of note, as I interned for Damien Barbeau,[81] Anne Hidalgo's former advisor regarding, among other things, green space and mobility—thus, someone who was directly involved in the Walkway controversy. In fact, it was through attending meetings between anti-Walkway activists and City officials with M. Barbeau that I was inspired to choose the Canal Walkway as my case study. I anticipated that this would complicate my access to the field; instead, my choice to be transparent about my previous experience working at the City of Paris made many interviewees warm up to me. Whether this was because they appreciated my honesty or because they believed I could serve as a messenger between their organization(s) and the City, I do not know.

One final challenge on my part was reconciling my personal beliefs with the imperative of impartiality in research. Much of my life revolves around environmental advocacy. Since joining Fridays For Future in 2019, I have held various positions in activist organizations and acquired professional experience at multiple levels of green policymaking. On a deep, personal level, I am convinced that decentering automotivity in urban transportation and increasing green coverage is essential to ensuring that our cities can adapt to the looming threat of climate change. The ideological foundations of Parisian greening projects thus positively resonate with my background and my perception of desirable urban futures. However, my ability to suspend judgment—central to the analysis of controversies (Cefaï, 1996)—is facilitated by my involvement in intersectional environmental organizations, which informed previous knowledge of the potential for climate action to eclipse socio-economic divisions. Academically, I had also questioned the moral value of green policy by devoting my undergraduate capstone thesis to analyzing how the upper-class construction of eco-citizenship as it is presented in governmental communications dispossesses (Comby, 2015) the working class. As such, this baggage limited the (inevitable) preconceptions with which I approach my data. As a final measure, I abstained from forming a set opinion on the Canal Walkway project to avoid biasing my interview questions and the course of my interviews themselves.

Consent form

Dans le cadre de mon mémoire de master en sociologie à l'École de la recherche de Sciences Po, je réalise une étude sur la mobilisation contre le projet de réaménagement du [Grand Boulevard]. L'objectif de cette recherche est de comprendre les raisons motivant le rejet de cette initiative municipale, et, plus largement, l'acceptabilité sociale des projets de verdissement urbain.

En participant à cette étude, vous serez amené.e à participer à un ou plusieurs entretiens d'une durée variant entre 40 et 90 minutes. Celui-ci sera enregistré et retranscrit. Votre participation est volontaire et vous pouvez, à tout moment, exercer votre droit de retrait de l'enquête. Vous pouvez également choisir de ne pas répondre à toutes les questions. Votre

[81] Anonymized.

décision quant à votre participation à cette étude et vos réponses à mes questions n'auront aucun impact sur ma relation avec vous.

Participer à cette étude ne comporte pas de risque particulier. Cependant, il est possible qu'au cours de la conversation, des souvenirs désagréables puissent être ravivés. Ainsi, il vous est rappelé que vous pouvez à tout moment mettre fin à l'entretien ou refuser de répondre à une question. Si vous ressentez le besoin de demander un soutien psychologique à l'issue de l'entretien, Psycom recense les principales lignes d'écoute nationales à l'adresse suivante : https://www.psycom.org/sorienter/les-lignes-decoute/.

Si vous décidez de participer, vos réponses orales et/ou écrites resteront strictement anonymes et seront traitées de façon à garantir la confidentialité de vos données personnelles. Chaque participant.e verra son identité codée à travers un prénom d'emprunt. Les données de l'enquête seront conservées dans un fichier respectant la loi Informatique et Libertés du 6 janvier 1978. Les enregistrements seront conservés, après retranscription, jusqu'à la fin de l'enquête ; ils seront donc détruits à l'issue de celle-ci.

Les données récoltées à travers mes entretiens seront analysées en collaboration avec les encadrant.e.s de mon mémoire, Manisha Anantharaman et Philipp Brandt. Les résultats seront présentés par écrit au sein de mon mémoire, ainsi que par oral dans le cadre de colloques académiques. Ils pourront en outre faire l'objet de publications scientifiques. Dans tous les cas, l'identité des participant.e.s ne sera pas révélée, et aucun renseignement pouvant révéler votre identité ne sera dévoilé. Si vous le souhaitez, je serais ravie de vous fournir un exemplaire de mon mémoire lorsqu'il sera finalisé.

Si vous avez des questions ou des préoccupations à tout moment pendant l'enquête, vous pouvez me contacter par mail à l'adresse suivante : josephine.bertoux@sciencespo.fr. Merci d'avance pour votre aide dans ma recherche.

Sincèrement,

Josephine Bertoux.

Déclaration participant.e

J'affirme que j'ai pris connaissance du présent formulaire d'information et de consentement, que j'ai eu l'opportunité de poser des questions à l'étudiante-chercheuse, et que j'accepte de participer au projet de recherche.

Signature participant.e :

Date :

Autorisation de captation audio

J'accepte que l'entretien soit enregistré sur support audio et traité selon les modalités exposées dans le présent formulaire d'information et de consentement.

Signature participant.e :

Date :

Interview guide

Methodological note
Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner; therefore, the guide was non-binding. Typically, the conversation veered away from the guide's structure and many questions were asked in a different order than what is shown below. In most interviews, I also supplanted it by probing my interlocutors. Finally, I sometimes skipped some questions when interviewees had time constraints.

1. Introduction

Introduce self, research project, address conditions (anonymity, consent, can refuse to answer questions, can stop the interview at any time), ask for permission to record.

- Tell me about your education.
- What is your professional background?
- How did you end up working in that field?

2. Getting to know the Walkway

- Tell me about the first time you came to the Walkway.
- Do you come often?
- What do you do when you come?
- Who else comes?
    - With them

    - In the squares while they are there
    - In the squares while they are not there
- Can you think of any places that are similar to the Walkway?
- Tell me about your living situation.
    - Where do you live?
    - How long have you lived there?
    - Who else is in the household?
- Tell me about your relationship to the neighborhood.

3. Protesting the Walkway

- Tell me about the Walkway project.
- How did you hear about it?
- How did this news make you feel?
- Who did you originally talk about the project with?
- What do you think will change if City Hall is able to fully realize its project?
    - In the park
    - In the neighborhood
- What are you most worried about?
- Can you imagine any positive effects of the project?

4. Getting involved

- Have you joined an organization that protests the project?
- What do most of your peers say makes the project problematic?
- Is that the way you feel too?/Do you agree with all justifications they put forward?
- Tell me about your activities in the opposition.
- Are you involved in any other civil society organizations?
- What are your political activities/orientations?

5. Transitioning out of the interview

- Is there anything else you feel I should know about the movement?
- Is there anything else you feel I should know about the project?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank them for their time and ask them if we can stay in contact.

Tables

Summary of interviewees

Name	**Duration**	**Occupation**	**Organization**

Emmanuelle	01:01:27	Journalist	Conseil de Quartier
Annie	01:13:49	Retired sociologist	Conseil de Quartier, IGB, Paris Conservation and affiliates
Jocelyne	01:28:10	Retired pharmacist	Conseil de Quartier, IGB, Paris Conservation and affiliates
Catherine	01:18:28	Retired administrative worker (held multiple occupations)	IGB, Paris Conservations and affiliates
Nicole	00:47:37	Retired English teacher	Conseil de Quartier, IGB
Bernard	01:46:46	Retired florist (held multiple occupations)	Conseil de Quartier
Sophie	01:17:40	Journalist	IGB
Joël	01:21:37	Retired HR	Conseil de Quartier, IGB
Michelle	01:24:13	Retired caretaker (held multiple occupations)	Conseil de Quartier, IGB
Laure	00:48:13	Retired costume designer	IGB
Matthieu	01:28:03	Tour guide	Conseil de Quartier
Dominique	01:04:37	Retired Math teacher	Conseil de Quartier
Mickaël	01:09:06	Retired engineer	IGB
Dave	02:46:34	Retired beautician (held multiple occupations)	Conseil de Quartier
Marcel	01:52:00	Retired engineer	/
Gilles	01:50:33	Retired architect	Conseil de Quartier,

			IGB
Marie	01:38:19	Retired hostess (held multiple occupations)	Conseil de Quartier
Solange	02:02:07	Administrative worker	Conseil de Quartier
Cécile	//////	Retired, undisclosed position	Conseil de Quartier
Elena	01:15:18	Retired, undisclosed position	Conseil de Quartier
Jean	00:58:28	Politician	Paris Conservation and affiliates
Thibault	00:41:18	City Hall employee (suburban city)	For a Neighborhood Walkway, Paris Conservation and affiliates
Alain	01:30:27	Retired surgeon	Paris Conservation and affiliates
Luc	01:52:36	Retired, undisclosed white-collar position (held multiple occupations)	Conseil de Quartier, IGB, Too Much Traffic
Claudie	00:59:15	Town hall employee (focal *arrondissement*)	/
Stéphanie	00:49:51	College professor (English literature)	IGB, Too Much Traffic
Sylvain	01:24:34	Retired communications specialist	IGB, Too Much Traffic
Pierre-Louis	01:36:58	Retired sociologist	IGB
Isabelle	01:26:45	Nonprofit president	Paris Conservation and affiliates
Julie	00:58:15	Commercial representative	Construction industry
Élisabeth	01:48:08	Retired doctor	IGB, Paris Conservation and

			affiliates, Too Much Traffic

In chronological order of interviews.

*Summary of AI use**

Type of use	Description	Prompts
2	Asked ChatGPT for help calling a specific, pre-identified list of stopwords.	processed <- textProcessor(data$documents, metadata = data, language = "fr", customstopwords = TBC) how can i import snowball's list of french stopwords
2	Used ChatGPT to explain some error messages.	Erreur dans if (ncol(xmat) <= 2) stop("Cannot use L1 penalization in prevalence model with 2 or fewer covariates.") : l'argument est de longueur nulle
2	Used ChatGPT to check whether one of my interpretations of a graph was correct.	If you look to the right of the plot, you can see topics 2, 8, and 19. Topic 2 is "nature", topic 8 is "heritage", and topic 19 is "destroying". Topics 2 and 8 are not directly related to each other, but they are both correlated with topic 19. I'm a bit confused about how to interpret this. Would it be fair to say that "nature" and "heritage" relate to each other through the perception that they're both being destroyed, or is that too much of a reach?

*I report the operations that helped me produce or analyze content inside this thesis.

Table: Topics sorted by prevalence using LDA and STM

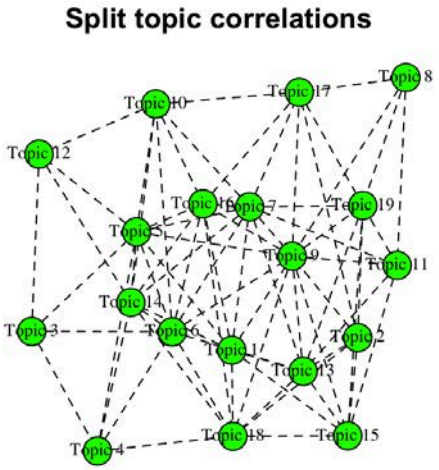
Model	LDA	STM-Highest Prob	STM-FREX
1	arbr, natur, vert, plus, a, béton, centenair	arbr, natur, c'est, béton, centenair, vert,	béton, abattr, climatiqu, darbr,

		non	poumon, labattag, réchauffement
1	plus, pari, pollut, circul, voitur, voi, a	pari, vill, parisien, hidalgo, encor, mairi, non	hidalgo, mme, conneri, pari, marr, parisien
1	pari, parc, sign, hidalgo, non, vill, mairi	patrimoin, squar, faut, jardin, plac, lieu, détruir	patrimoin, quar, historiqu, sauver, sauvegard, cathédral, lidentiqu
1	c’est, faut, qu’il, projet, contr, marr	pollut, circul, c’est, voi, berg, voitur, transport	berg, transport, rive, altern, dembouteillag, périphériqu, saturé
1	patrimoin, pari, doit, jardin, squar, êtr, tout	tout, projet, bien, être, aussi, doit, fair	idéologi, barcelon, dargent, tenir, rambla, tourism, dépensé
1	rue, quartier, place, sen, circul, projet, plus	plus, fair, tout, tous, peut, grand, temp	nimport, chez, handicapé, min, parent, devient, bolivar
1	plus, vie, vill, pari, ça, fair, tous	rue, quartier, circul, sens, place, habit, sen, riverain	rue, quartier, pist, résident, cyclabl, voltair, bastill
1	c’est, veux, a, enfant, quartier, scandaleux	parc, sign, the, bol, ras, and, foli	parc, the, bol, ras, and, foli, preserv
2	parc, c’est, sign, pollut, berg, plus, voi	plus, circul, pollut, non, encor, bouchon, trop	pollut, non, bouchon, nen, réduir, provoqu, aménag
2	rue, plus, quartier, sen, circul, voltair, fair	rue, quartier, sen, circul, habit, tout, plac	rue, quartier, résident, avenu, détour, jean, moulin
2	pari, travail, temp, a, c’est, trajet, tous	vill, projet, contr, politiqu, mair, mairi, marr	marr, voltaire, nimport, musé, dictatur, ridicul, magenta
2	pari, transport, voitur, vill, commun, plus, a	voitur, parc, sign, tout, besoin, tous, prendr	parc, sign, besoin, devient, bon, bol, quand
2	circul, décision, pari, plus, a, solut, mesur	paris, c’est, transport, parisien, hidalgo, commun, mme	transport, commun, banlieu, francilien, stupid, banlieusard, voix
2	contr, hidalgo, pari, être, tout, plus, sign	travail, temp, trajet, imposs, jour, aller, tous	temp, trajet, périphériqu, met, gare, min, domicil

2	pari, quai, plus, circul, déjà, berg, voi	décision, fair, mesur, aucun, vie, bien, fait	décision, mesur, parisienn, unilatéral, decis, arbitrair, élection
2	trop, projet, plus, boulevard, nuisanc, place, sonor	voi, berg, fermetur, quai, embouteillag, fermer, rive	voi, berg, fermetur, fermer, fluidité, monstr, pont
3	pari, patrimoin, faut, doit, respect, stop, tour	pari, tout, vill, hidalgo, parisien, fait, mairi	pari, hidalgo, saccag, capital, veux, massacr, jardin
3	arbr, plus, vill, non, centenair, béton, vie	arbr, cest, plus, non, vert, béton, contr	béton, climatiqu, poumon, labattag, réchauffement, bétonis, abattag
3	c'est, parc, sign, tout, qu'il, place, veux	natur, projet, centenair, tour, eiffel, encor, fair	tour, abattr, bétonner, écolo, bureaux, écologist, fric
3	pari, vill, plus, a, mairi, comm, fair	parc, faut, patrimoin, doit, être, sign, quil	patrimoin, doit, conserv, historiqu, sauver, préservé, sauvegard
3	projet, vert, espac, contr, quartier, place, plus	tout, plus, fair, enfant, tous, rien, personn	montmartr, gen, cour, argent, résident, travail, coût
3	natur, bien, encor, a, plus, besoin, toujour	place, projet, quartier, mairi, rue, habit, circul	riverain, travaux, ème, nuisanc, arrondiss, boulevard, promenad
3	c'est, the, a, suffit, pari, import, honteux	jardin, respect, préserver, squar, garder, the, dame	jardin, garder, the, bol, and, ras, -dam

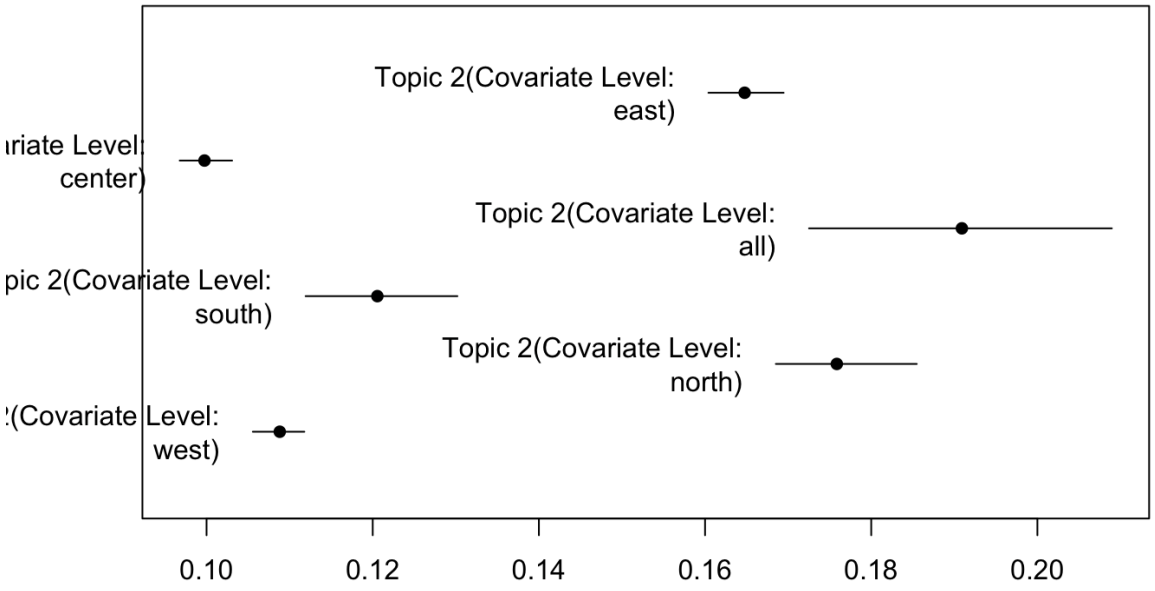
Figures

Topic correlations graph for K = 19



The topics referenced in the analysis are Topics 2 ("Nature"), 8 ("Heritage"), and 19 ("Destruction"). "Nature" and "Heritage" are not correlated despite the discursive association found through a deep reading of the documents; however, they both correlate to the topic of "Destruction". This underlies my interpretation that these topics relate to each other through the perception that they are both being destroyed through urban greening projects.

Topic prevalence per geographic location, Model 1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Topic 2(Covariate Level:
south)
Topic 2(Covariate Level:
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Topic 2(Covariate Level:
west)
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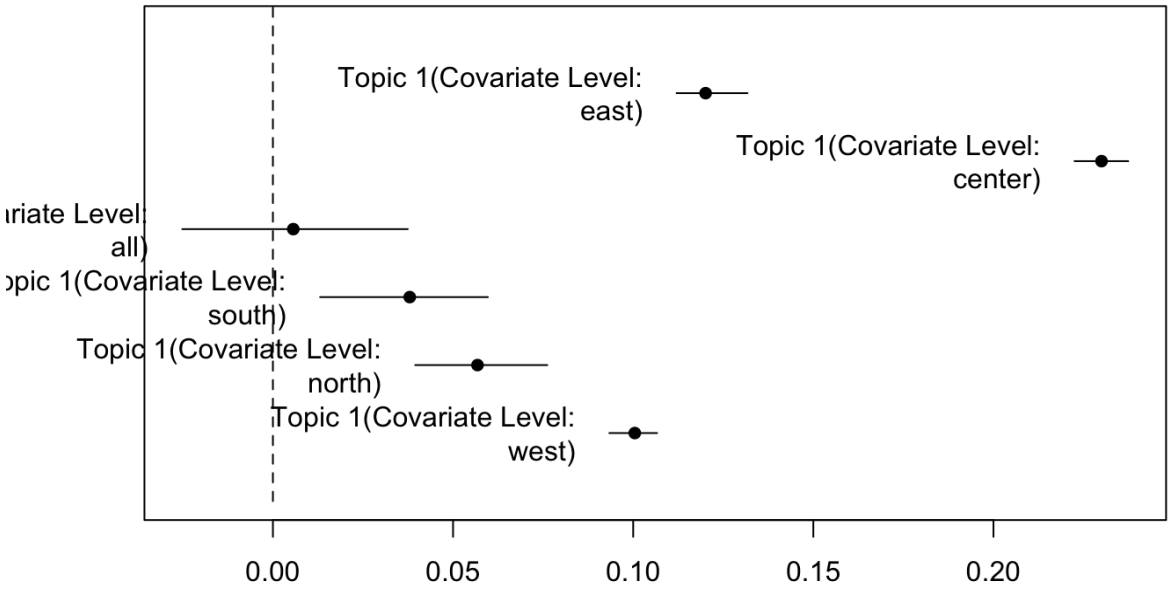
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Topic 1(Covariate Level:
center)
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all)
Topic 1(Covariate Level:
south)
Topic 1(Covariate Level:
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Topic 1(Covariate Level:
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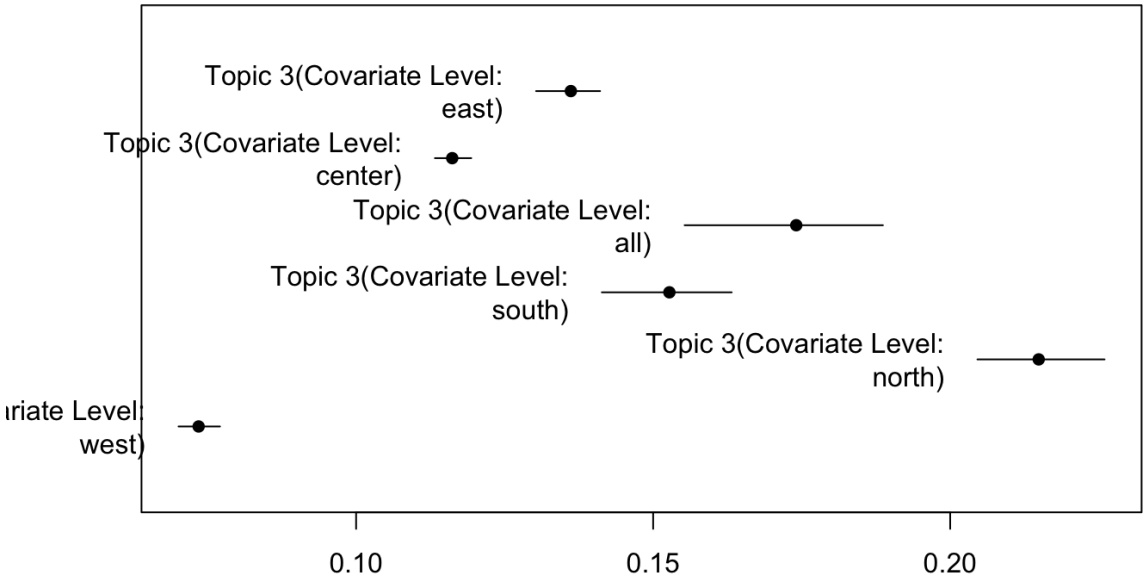
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Topic 3(Covariate Level: south)
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west)
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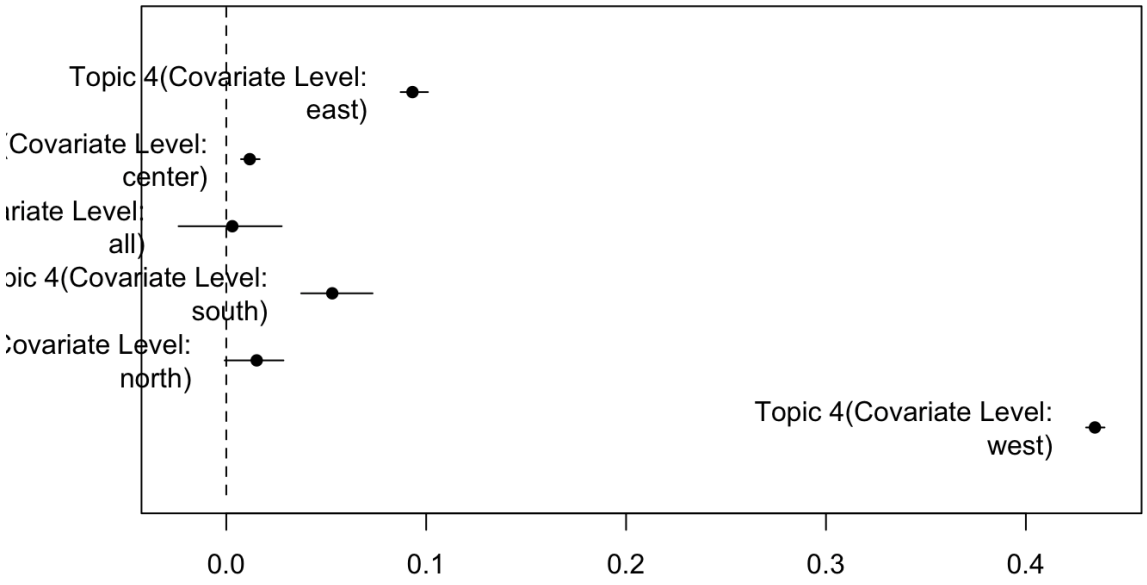
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north)
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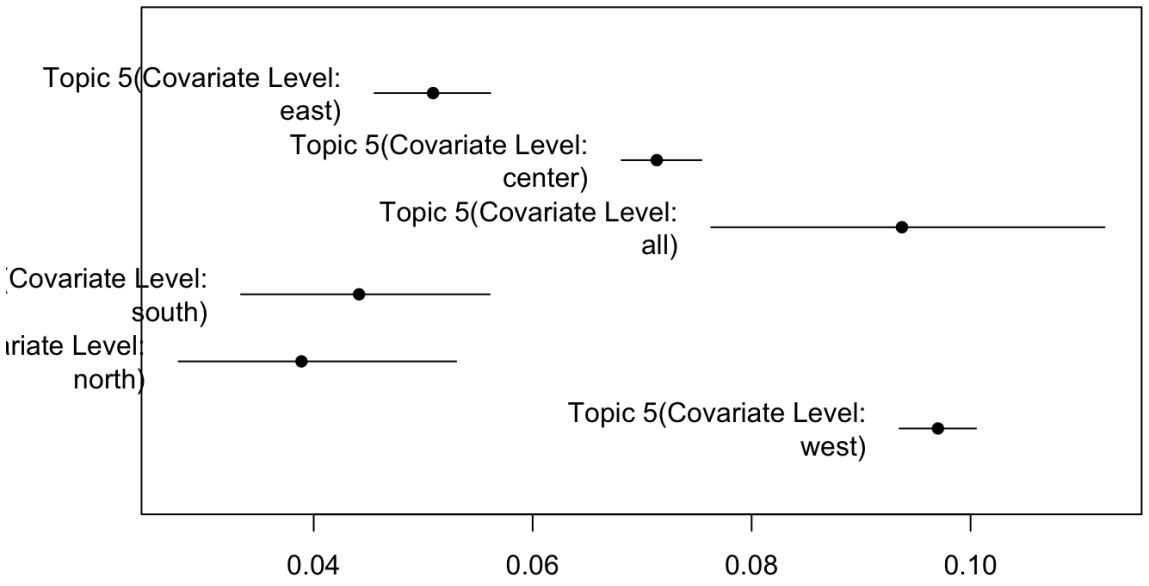
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(Covariate Level:
south)
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north)
Topic 5(Covariate Level:
west)
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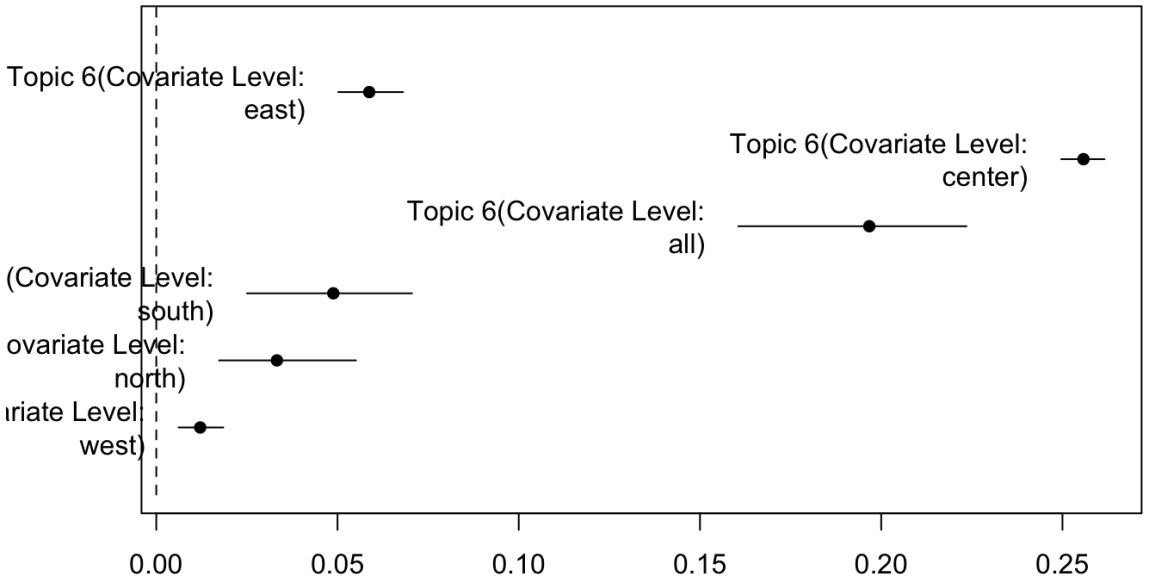
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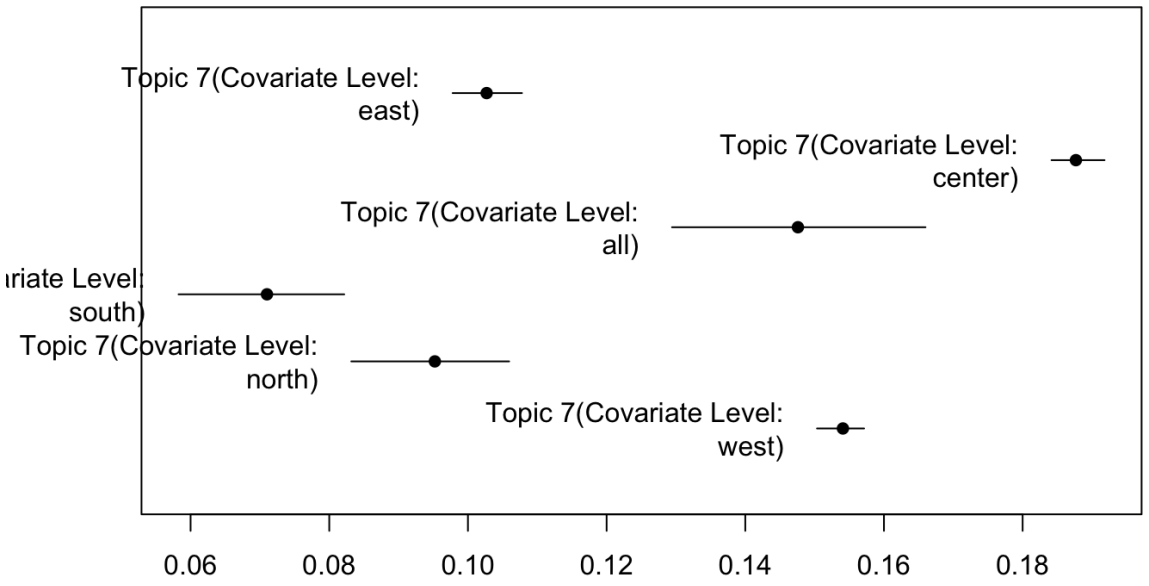
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Topic 7(Covariate Level: north)
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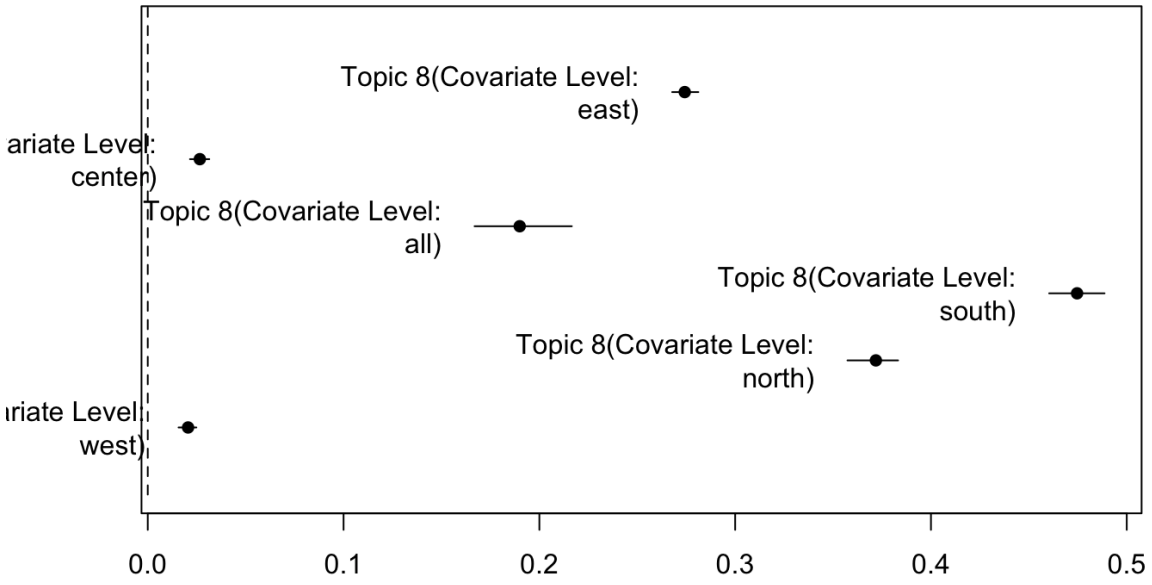
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Topic 8(Covariate Level: north)
ıriate Level: west)
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0.5

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