ASSESSING URBAN FOREST GOVERNANCE CAPACITY IN PERI-URBAN WOODLANDS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY (49)

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Successfully planning and managing urban forest initiatives requires governance arrangements able to establish inclusive and informed decision-making, develop sound policies, allocate adequate resources and, therefore, ensure the delivery of a wide range of tangible and intangible ecosystem services to dependent communities (Randrup and Jansson, 2020). Despite its significant contribution to sustainable and resilient urbanization, limited research attention has been paid to urban forest governance (UFG) and, in particular, to the investigation of those factors influencing its success and how to assess them, especially at local level (Wirtz et al., 2021; Ordóñez et al. 2019; Ostoić et al., 2018; Secco et al., 2014). To fill this knowledge gap, this study aims to assess the capacity of actors involved in UFG to interact and cooperate for achieving targeted goals, delivering expected benefits and addressing societal issues (Dang et al., 2016; Arts and Goverde, 2006) as a relevant approach for understanding how decisions are made and what their performance are in urban forestry as a precondition for their improvement in changing urban environments.

For comprehensively assessing UFG in the peri-urban woodlands selected as case studies – *BoscoInCittà*, Milan, Italy; *Amsterdamse Bos*, Amsterdam, Netherlands - this study uses the governance capacity assessment framework (Fig.1) for investigating both institutional capacity and governance performance and, therefore, identify success factors.
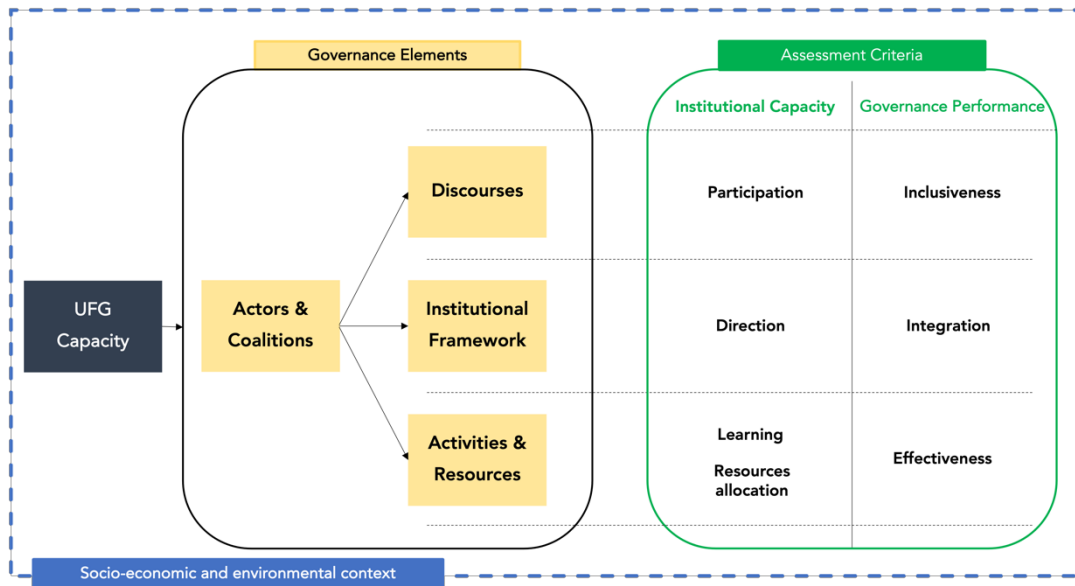
Fig.1 Urban Forest Governance Capacity Assessment Framework (adapted from Dang et al., 2016)

Through a mixed-methods research approach including desk research, semi-structured interviews and web-based surveys, a set of intertwined criteria - i.e. participation, inclusiveness, integration, direction, resources allocated, learning, and effectiveness - linked with the Policy Arrangement Approach's analytical dimensions (Arts and van Tatenhove, 2004) - i.e. actors, discourses, rules, resources - to which an activities-dimension was added (Mattijssen et al., 2017), were assessed taking into account also socio-economic and environmental contextual factors.

Study's findings confirm the importance of establishing collaborative and multi-level UFG arrangements as a key factor to carry out activities finalized at achieving expected benefits. Collaboration, however, should not be limited to the operational level, since external actors may represent an added value also in co-producing knowledge and creating shared urban forest strategies. In line with this, horizontal and vertical integration is another critical factor for the success of UFG, both for gaining political and local support, and developing holistic management plans aligned with municipal and supra-municipal planning tools and citizens' demands. Finally, this research suggests that the allocation of adequate economic resources, for which state actors still play a vital role, and the development of specific skills to attract diverse funding streams, are crucial factors to achieve UFG effectiveness, even in absence of comprehensive and formal management, implementation and monitoring plans.

Keywords: urban environmental governance; nature-based solutions; urban green infrastructure; collaborative governance;

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