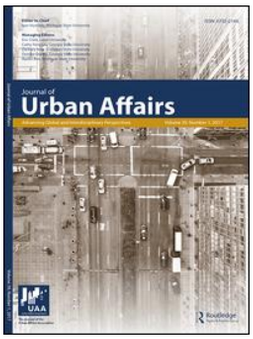

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Examining facilitators and challenges to implementing equitable green space policies: Lessons from Los Angeles County

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ABSTRACT

Many cities and counties in the U.S. have recently passed equity-oriented policies to improve access to green space for disadvantaged communities. However, the implementation of these policies could limit their intended outcomes, and scant research has focused on their implementation. To address these knowledge gaps, we explored the facilitators and challenges to effectively implementing equity-oriented policies that dedicate green space funding to low-income communities of color in Los Angeles County. We conducted interviews with 25 green space practitioners (in public agencies and nonprofits) and participant observation at 28 meetings. We found that facilitators of equitable implementation include nonprofit advocacy and technical assistance programs, while challenges include limited capacity and funding for nonprofits and cities, politics and bureaucracy, and market conditions. Our results align with policy process theories describing actors and streams in policymaking, and call for consideration of how systemic issues such as structural racism hinder equitable implementation.

KEYWORDS

Parks; policy implementation; equity; environmental justice; nonprofits

Introduction

The United States has seen a growing movement for parks and green space equity, fueled in part by the COVID-19 pandemic (Humphrey, 2020; Rigolon & Gibson, 2021; Yañez et al., 2021). As part of this movement, some cities, counties, and states have passed equity-focused policies for green space, such as funding measures that prioritize funds for green space in low-income communities of color over more privileged communities (City Parks Alliance, 2020; Davies et al., 2019; Eldridge et al., 2019). These policies were motivated by widespread racial/ethnic inequities in access to green space rooted in structural racism (Nesbitt et al., 2019; Rigolon, 2016), health disparities (Braveman et al., 2017), and the numerous health benefits of green space (Markevych et al., 2017).

But passing equitable funding measures for green space does not guarantee that the most underserved low-income communities of color will have better access to green space (Christensen, 2019; Davies et al., 2019). Indeed, policy implementation is a messy process wherein nonprofits, public agencies, and other political actors might seek to dilute or reverse the objectives of these measures (Christensen, 2016; Howlett, 2019; Pincetl, 2003). For example, if funding policies for green space do not explicitly define measurable equity criteria, green space investment tends to go disproportionately to high-income and white communities (Christensen, 2016). And as structural racism has contributed to green space inequities in the past by promoting residential segregation and underinvestment in communities of color, the same forces could hinder the implementation of equitable green space policies today by limiting the capacity of such communities to secure green space funding (Boone et al., 2009; Rigolon & Németh, 2021; Yañez et al., 2021).

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Little is known about what it takes to effectively implement equitable funding policies in the urban green space arena so that low-income communities of color actually benefit from such policies (e.g., receive their dedicated funding, have a voice at the decision-making table). Most existing studies have focused on the *outcomes* of the implementation of green space funding policies, describing which demographic groups receive disproportionate funding from a policy (Christensen, 2016, 2019; Davies et al., 2019), rather than examining the mechanisms of implementation and the roles different actors play in these processes, with few exceptions (e.g., Carter et al., 2018; Rigolon, 2019). Further, limited research on green space equity has investigated what can be learned from policy implementation for the design of future policies as well as for broader systems change.

To start addressing these gaps in knowledge and practice, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the facilitators and challenges of implementing equitable green space policies in Los Angeles County, where recent policies for parks and green infrastructure at the county and state levels have been implemented recently. Specifically, using the Five-Stream Framework of the Policy Process (FSFPP) as a framework (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017), we ask three research questions that start to address the aforementioned gaps: (1) What are the facilitators and challenges of implementing equitable policies for urban green space? (2) Why do such facilitators and challenges arise during implementation? (3) What are the relationships between these facilitators and challenges? In this paper, we focus on two parts of the implementation process for green space funding measures: the creation or improvement of policy implementation tools, and the construction of green space projects supported by these funding measures (see further discussions in the section titled "The Los Angeles context"). Answering our research questions can help design future equitable policies, ascertain what systems changes are needed to enable implementation, and shed light on the FSFPP.

Theoretical framework: The Five-Stream Framework of the Policy Process

Howlett and colleagues recently presented the Five-Stream Framework of the Policy Process (FSFPP) that ties together different theoretical approaches to implementation studies and sees implementation in the broader context of the policy cycle (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). Specifically, the FSFPP integrates three well-recognized frameworks that have been used to make sense of policy implementation (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). These theoretical frameworks are the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF; Sabatier & Weible, 2007), the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF; Kingdon, 1984), and policy cycle models (Bridgman & Davis, 2003).

Whereas these previous frameworks had been considered as potentially conflicting and incompatible, the FSFPP highlights their complementarity in understanding policy processes (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). In particular, the FSFPP underscores that implementation needs to be seen in the context of the entire policy process, from agenda-setting to policy evaluation (policy cycle models; Bridgman & Davis, 2003); it highlights that numerous streams of actors and events interact to shape policy agendas (Multiple Streams Framework; Kingdon, 1984); and it describes how actors with shared values create partnerships to influence policy agendas (Advocacy Coalition Framework; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). We chose the FSFPP as a framework for our study over other frameworks (e.g., Moulton & Sandfort, 2017; Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Sanfort & Moulton, 2015) for three reasons. First, Howlett (2019) specifically described how the FSFPP can explain policy implementation. Second, the FSFPP sees implementation in the broader context of the policy process. And third, the FSFPP integrates concepts from other frameworks.

The FSFPP includes five streams (problem, policy, politics, process, and program) that interact in various ways at the different stages of the policy process, including agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017; see, Figure 1). Three of the streams (problem, policy, and politics streams) were also part of the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon, 1984), whereas the FSFPP introduced two additional streams not mentioned in previous frameworks (process and program streams).

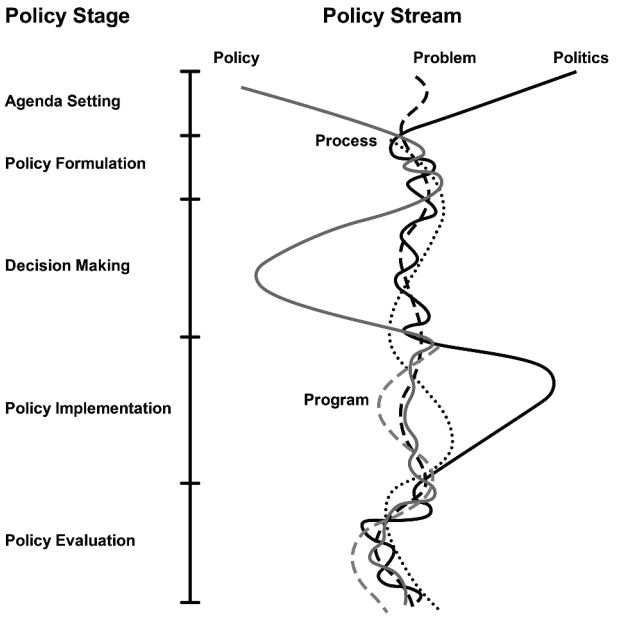

Figure 1. The Five-Stream Framework of the Policy Process. Adapted from the original (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). The five curvilinear lines on the right describe how the five streams interact at several phases of the policy process (depicted on the left).

The *problem stream* focuses on the definition of problems that a policy will address and includes "epistemic communities," describing individuals and organizations that define such problems often by translating scientific evidence into discrete policy problems (e.g., scientists, advocacy groups). The *policy stream* involves work on policy alternatives and solutions to address policy problems, which is often carried out by "instrument constituencies" (e.g., think tanks). These actors provide elected officials with information about various policy tools, including their technicalities and pros and cons. The *politics stream* describes a milieu where "advocacy coalitions" (e.g., elected officials, lobbyists, advocacy organizations) operate to ensure that their values are predominant in the policy process. The *process stream* establishes the different steps that are part of the policy process. Lastly, the *program stream* is central to policy implementation and involves the entry of "program actors" in the policy process, including bureaucrats and nonprofit advocacy organizations that deliver or consume goods and services provided by public agencies. Bureaucratic agencies are key actors of the *program stream*, bringing specific agency traditions, values, and interests to policy implementation. Yet, Howlett (2019) acknowledged that actors involved in the *problem, policy*, and *politics streams* (e.g., instrument constituency) can also be part of the *program stream* by exerting pressure on the actors designing and carrying out implementation programs.

Considering how these five streams interact, especially during the implementation phase, can help better understand the facilitators and challenges to implementing equitable funding policies for green space, as well as why such facilitators and challenges arise. The *program stream*, which enters the policy process at the beginning of policy implementation (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017), is particularly relevant to the framing and design of our study. In that regard, Howlett (2019) notes that the *program stream* mostly relies on bureaucrats and their public agencies, which often embed political agendas and deeply rooted ways of operating, but also on nonprofit organizations, some of which might have also been involved in the *policy stream*. Further, advocacy coalitions, instrument constituencies, and epistemic communities can also shape implementation initiatives (e.g., competitive grants for infrastructure funding), especially in jurisdictions characterized by corruption or clientelism (Howlett, 2019).

One key takeaway of the FSFPP for the framing and design of our study is the recognition that policy implementation is a messy process where all five streams are intertwined, and where priorities defined at previous stages of the policy process can be modified, blocked, or overturned (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). Indeed, government-led implementation of policies is generally a lengthy and expensive enterprise, involving multiple cycles of funding or support and continuous negotiations among stakeholders. As Howlett notes, "[t]his creates opportunities for politicians, agencies and other members of policy subsystems to use the implementation process as another opportunity for continuing the conflicts they may have lost at earlier stages of the policy process" (Howlett, 2019, p. 423). These conflicts might create facilitators and challenges to the implementation of equitable green space policies.

When introducing the FSFPP, Howlett and colleagues mentioned "policy subsystems," a concept introduced by the Advocacy Coalition Framework, which might also create facilitators and constraints to the implementation of equitable green space policies (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Policy subsystems include a specific topical area (e.g., green space), a defined geographic area for policymaking (e.g., a county), and the policy actors working on that topic in that geography (e.g., government, interest groups, residents, researchers; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Further, in the Advocacy Coalition Framework, policy subsystems are shaped by external factors, including some relatively stable factors (e.g., political systems, bureaucracy, nature of the policy problem) and some more dynamic ones (e.g., economic shifts, changes in political attitudes; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). For example, a sudden economic recession might create substantial barriers to implementing a policy that involves the distribution of public funding.

Literature review: Equity and policy implementation

The FSFPP (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017) situates implementation in a broader policymaking context but does not focus on equity issues in policy implementation. In this section, we provide an overview of studies and frameworks that shed light on policy implementation in relation to equity, especially policies focusing on green space.

The literature on equitable policy implementation can be categorized into studies that focused on implementation *processes* (i.e., how policies are implemented, the focus of the FSFPP) and on implementation *outcomes* (i.e., what are the effects of implementation). This literature can be seen in the context of the different components of environmental justice (Nesbitt et al., 2018; Rigolon et al., 2022; Schlosberg, 2004). Studies on processes mostly shed light on procedural justice, describing fair and inclusive decision-making activities that deliberately engage the most disenfranchised groups in a society, such as low-income people of color (Nesbitt et al., 2018; Rigolon, Fernandez, et al., 2022). Studies on implementation outcomes shed light on distributional justice, describing fair or unfair distribution of environmental hazards and environmental amenities, such as green space (Nesbitt et al., 2018; Rigolon et al., 2022).

Among the studies on implementation processes, some have focused on power (and power imbalances) at the implementation stage of the policy process (Erasmus & Gilson, 2008; Pincetl, 2003; Rigolon, 2019). Power imbalances between dominant and historically disenfranchised groups, a procedural injustice, are one of the outcomes of structural racism, and they often result in less equitable distributions of amenities than those envisioned in the adopted policies, a distributional injustice (see, Carter et al., 2018). Here, we define structural racism as "a system of interconnected institutions that operates with a set of racialized rules that maintain White supremacy" (Gee & Hicken, 2021, p. 293). In this context, studies about Los Angeles suggest that procedural injustices in implementation due to power imbalances can aggravate distributional injustices in access to green spaces (Pincetl, 2003) and that when community-based organizations (CBOs) manage to gain power, they can help write policy implementation guidelines that prioritize low-income communities of color (Rigolon, 2019). This research sheds light on the *politics stream*, as power is tied to the political clout of

different organizations, and the *problem stream*, as power can reshape the policy problem during the implementation phase.

Other studies on equity in implementation processes have centered on a lack of transparency, showing political interferences in the implementation of policies that had equitable goals (Dewar, 2006; Rigolon et al., 2020). Local elected officials might have made decisions about the implementation of vacant land greening policies behind closed doors for political expediency, creating procedural injustices (Dewar, 2006; Rigolon et al., 2020). These studies show that the *politics stream* can shape the implementation of policies intended to achieve equitable outcomes.

Research on the outcomes of equitable policy implementation shows the need for measurable equity criteria when distributing funding from these policies, highlighting the positive role that the *policy stream* can play (Christensen, 2016, 2019; Davies et al., 2019; Wolch et al., 2005). Without such clear criteria, low-income communities of color are less likely to adequately benefit from equity-oriented policies and move toward distributional justice (Christensen, 2016), as power imbalances in the *politics stream* (see above) might bias policy implementation. Also, because many green space funding policies use competitive grant processes to distribute funds to cities, funding agencies could consider the limited capacity of low-income cities in their criteria *(policy stream)* and provide them with technical assistance *(program stream*; Carter et al., 2018; Christensen, 2019; Lowe et al., 2016; Mandarano & Meenar, 2017). Indeed, studies show that low-resource cities had limited ability to implement climate policy or secure competitive funding for transit (Lowe et al., 2016; Sharp et al., 2011).

Despite their numerous merits, the studies reviewed above do not provide much insight into the facilitators and challenges to advancing distributional justice in green space access through implementation, and they do not explicitly recognize the streams involved in policy implementation. We start to address these gaps through a study of equitable green space policy implementation in Los Angeles County.

Data and methods

We used a multi-method qualitative research design including semi-structured interviews with practitioners involved in green space equity and participant observation of public and private meetings. We focused on Los Angeles County and several equitable green space policies that have been implemented in recent years.

Study setting: The Los Angeles context

Los Angeles County, located in the state of California, makes for a compelling case study for this research because of the recent adoption of several equitable policies focused on green space in the county and state. Los Angeles County is home to more than 10 million people and is widely regarded as a leader in the green space equity movement in the United States (Carter et al., 2018; Rigolon, 2019). Los Angeles is also a place with significant socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic inequities in access to parks, which have in part motivated the policies passed in the county and state (Sister et al., 2010; Wolch et al., 2005).

For this paper, we focused on equitable policies created by either Los Angeles County or the State of California that have been used to fund parks or multi-benefit green infrastructure (i.e., stormwater management facilities also used for recreation) in Los Angeles County (see, Table 1). These policies, which were approved by voters through referenda, include dedicated funding for disadvantaged communities (i.e., median household income lower than 80% of the statewide median without considering racial/ethnic composition). Funding for these policies comes from bonds (state measures) or parcel taxes (county measures).

Many of these policies have resulted from decades of policy advocacy by coalitions of nonprofit organizations operating in Los Angeles and California (García, 2013; Rigolon, 2019). These coalitions

Table 1. Policies to promote green space equity that affect Los Angeles County.

Policy name	Agency and year	Description
Proposition 84	State of California (2006)	Funding for water supply and quality, flood control, state and local parks, and water conservation.
Proposition 1	State of California (2014)	Funding for watershed and ecosystem restoration and protection, and water supply. Grants can cover parks, especially if they include green infrastructure.
Measure A	Los Angeles County (2016)	Funding for parks, open space, water conservation, beaches, and river protection.
Measure W	Los Angeles County (2018)	Funding for water projects to increase water supply, improve water quality, and improve public health. Grants can cover green infrastructure (e.g., green streets, stormwater infrastructure in parks).
Proposition 68	State of California (2018)	Funding for drought preparedness, water supply, parks, climate, coastal protection, and outdoor recreation programs.

built power in low-income communities of color and mobilized individuals to vote in favor of these funding policies (Carter et al., 2018; Rigolon, 2019). Given these community-driven policy wins, Los Angeles's progressive political climate, and nonprofit successes in other sectors such as transportation (Woldeamanuel et al., 2022), one might expect that equitable implementation would be a smooth process. Yet research in California shows that equity-oriented green space policies do not always result in equitable implementation (Davies et al., 2019).

For the green space policies covered in this paper (see, Table 1), implementation is a complex process that involves two phases. The first includes building policy implementation tools such as competitive grant guidelines, which often generate debates among public agencies, cities, and nonprofits (see, Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District, 2021). The second involves distributing funds to build green space projects such as parks and green infrastructure. As part of this second phase, public agencies (e.g., cities, counties) and nonprofits (acting on behalf of public agencies) apply for competitive grants by developing proposals for specific projects (e.g., new parks). The first phase often influences the second one, as policy implementation tools, which are part of Howlett's (2019) *program stream*, influence how funds are distributed for projects.

Data collection

As noted, our data collection included semi-structured interviews with participant observation of meetings about policy implementation. We obtained Institutional Review Board approval for our study procedures including interviews and participant observation. We obtained verbal informed consent from the interviewees and people participating in private meetings where we conducted participant observations.

Interviews

We conducted interviews with 25 practitioners engaged in implementing green space equity policies. These practitioners represented the diversity of the field and the Los Angeles region. They were 60% female and 40% male; 40% non-Hispanic White, 32% Latino, 20% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 8% Black. They worked in public agencies (28%), nonprofits and community-based organizations (60%), and philanthropies supporting equitable funding policies (12%). These key informants have been involved in projects that have implemented equitable green space policies. A sample size of 25 interviewees, combined with our participant observation data, enabled us to reach theoretical saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021).

We conducted interviews in the context of two related projects. The first round of interviews focused on practitioners working across Los Angeles County (18 interviewees) and was part of a broader research project focused on narratives, metrics, and implementation of equitable funding policies. To recruit participants for this round, we used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Interviewees had to be practitioners active in green space equity efforts, including

implementation, in Los Angeles County in the organization types described above. We started with professionals whom we knew through our professional contacts and then added further interviewees through referrals from our contacts.

The second round of interviewees focused on three small cities in Los Angeles County that received philanthropic support to achieve equitable implementation of green space policies (seven interviewees). We studied these three cities because the philanthropic support enabled concentrated efforts to implement these equitable green space policies in communities with low bureaucratic capacity, where challenges to implementation would likely be exposed. This research was part of an ongoing participatory evaluation process in Los Angeles County designed to identify the factors necessary for the successful implementation of equitable green space policies.

Interview questions focused primarily on the implementation stage of equitable green space policies, but some interviewees also covered other stages of the policymaking process. As a result, many questions focused on the *program stream* of the FSFPP, while others focused on the remaining four streams. Additionally, the interview questions were relatively similar between the two rounds, except that the second round included questions specific to the three cities. Specifically, our questions covered topics such as strategies and conditions needed to implement effective environmental equity policies in California; the ingredients needed for successful park projects in low-income communities; the capacity of city agencies, nonprofits, and CBOs; lessons learned from park projects built using equitable funding policies, concerns about gentrification and displacement related to park projects, and technical assistance needed for competitive grant applications. We developed the interview questions based on content reported in the limited literature about the implementation of green space equity policies (e.g., Carter et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2019; Rigolon, 2019), and the three research questions guiding our study.

All interview questions helped generate information to address research questions 1 and 3 (which facilitators and challenges arise, and what are their relationships); interview questions on the conditions facilitating implementation helped address research question 2 (why facilitators and challengers exist). Further, the interview protocols we used varied based on the professional we interviewed; for example, questions for a CBO staffer slightly differed from those for a public agency staffer to take into account the diverse role of their organizations in policy implementation.

We conducted the interviews between November 2019 and March 2021; some of the interviews were in person (before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic), and some were via Zoom or via phone (after the start of the pandemic). Two members of our research team were present at each interview meeting, which lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. We audio-recorded all interviews, we transcribed them through an artificial intelligence program, and one researcher corrected the few errors in the transcript that the program generated.

Participant observation

We conducted participant observation of public and private meetings with organizations working in the three small cities mentioned above between June 2020 and August 2021. This part of the research involved engagement with five CBOs and nonprofits and with three philanthropic grant-makers. Data collection included observing and participating in a total of 28 public and private meetings. During these meetings, members of our research team introduced themselves, made other participants aware of the goal of our study, and sought to build rapport with other participants. Building rapport helps increase the likelihood that other meeting participants behave spontaneously, as if the researchers were not present (Guest et al., 2013), enhancing the credibility of our findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Meetings focused on park projects funded through some of the policies we cover in this study (e.g., Measure A), and meeting participants often shared their perspectives about these policies and their implementation.

For the participant observations, we primarily collected data by taking notes of the conversation happening during those meetings. Specifically, two researchers attended each meeting, and both

sought to take notes reflecting participants' words verbatim. After meetings, the two researchers compared notes and created a consolidated account of the conversations.

Data analysis

Two researchers analyzed interview transcripts and meeting notes through constant comparative analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). We first coded chunks of text describing facilitators and challenges to equitable implementation, using deductive and inductive codes. Deductive codes described content from the literature (e.g., technical assistance, funding criteria), the five streams in the FSFPP (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017), and constructs in related theories (e.g., the policy subsystem in the Advocacy Coalition Framework; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). In other words, during the coding process, we looked for content describing the *politics stream* and the *program stream*, among others. To identify inductive codes, we looked for recurring content about facilitators and challenges to equitable implementation not described in the literature or the FSFPP. Through this process, we identified inductive codes such as advocacy, municipal capacity, and green space maintenance. After coding all interview transcripts and meeting notes, we compared codes and consolidated some of them. We used taguette, an open-access qualitative data analysis program, to code data (Rampin & Rampin, 2021).

Once coding was completed, we regrouped consolidated codes into broader themes, which describe facilitators and challenges to the equitable implementation of green space policies (research question 1), as well as the explanations for such facilitators and challenges (research question 2). At this stage, we also analyzed whether there were relationships among themes (research question 3), specifically looking at how some themes shaped the relationship between the implementation program and where and how green space projects were built. To do so, we reviewed quotes describing each theme to identify potential descriptions of such relationships. As for the coding, the process of developing and refining the final themes, as well as identifying their connections, involved two researchers, enhancing the dependability of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, we triangulated data between the interview transcripts and participant observation notes, which increased the credibility of our findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). We used direct quotes from interviews and participant observation to illustrate our findings, and in the Results section, we did not mention the names of participants to protect their confidentiality.

Results

We found that the implementation of equitable green space policies in Los Angeles County faces significant challenges but also facilitators. Specifically, Table 2 summarizes what we learned about the facilitators and challenges to the implementation of such policies, organized based on the five streams in FSFPP (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). As shown in Table 2, these five streams and other constructs borrowed from previous frameworks (e.g., Advocacy Coalition Framework) were helpful to categorize the themes that emerged from our analysis. For example, *nonprofit and CBO advocacy* can be part of the *politics stream*, whereas *technical assistance programs* are closely aligned with the *program stream* (see, Table 2).

A key finding in relation to the FSFPP is that the three challenges we identified are not tied to the five streams, but they are instead part of the *policy subsystem* of green space in Los Angeles County (see the Advocacy Coalition Framework). Specifically, limited *municipal funding and capacity*, limited *nonprofit and CBO funding and capacity*, and unfavorable *market conditions* (see, Table 2) are elements of this policy subsystem that make it harder to implement equitable green space policies. Actors involved in policy formulation for green space do not seem to adequately recognize these challenges as parts of the *problem stream* early in the policy process, which leads to substantial issues in the policy implementation phase.

Table 2. Facilitators and challenges to the implementation of equitable green space policy categorized based on the five streams in the Five-Stream Framework of the Policy Process and other factors in the Advocacy Coalition Framework.

Facilitators or challenges	Type	Stream or other	Description
Equity goals	Facilitator	Problem	Equity is a widely shared goal in the Los Angeles County green space policy subsystem
Current inequities in access to green space	Challenge	Problem	Policy actors recognize that substantial inequities in access to green space exist
Municipal funding and capacity	Challenge	Policy subsystem	Medium size and especially small cities face significant limitations in funding and capacity (e.g., lack of staff)
Nonprofit and CBO funding and capacity	Challenge and Facilitator	Policy subsystem	Nonprofits and CBOs lack funding and capacity
Market conditions	Challenge	Policy subsystem	Land for new parks is rare and expensive; high housing costs raise fears of green gentrification (rising housing prices associated with new or improved parks)
Definition and operationalization of equity	Challenge	Politics	Different policy actors see equity differently; some mistake equity for equality
Jurisdictional complexity	Challenge	Politics	The state, the county, and 88 cities are involved
Politics and bureaucracy	Challenge and Facilitator	Politics and program	Political influence and interference in policy implementation, and bureaucratic barriers to implementation
Nonprofit and CBO advocacy	Facilitator	Politics	Nonprofits and CBOs conduct advocacy for both policy creation and implementation (e.g., funding schemes)
Definition and operationalization of equity	Challenge	Policy	Some think equity means giving more funds to high-need areas; others think equity means sharing funds equally
Eligibility criteria, scoring, prioritization, and set-asides	Facilitator	Policy	These criteria define who is eligible, how to score applications, and how much to set aside for high-need areas
Displacement avoidance	Facilitator and Challenge	Policy	Policies to limit displacement due to green gentrification
Processes in policy creation and implementation	Challenge and Facilitator	Process	Processes describing how ongoing problems, politics, and policy interact, including feedback loops
Funding schemes	Facilitator	Program	Distributing funds by area, population, need, or competitively
Grant guidelines	Challenge and Facilitator	Program	Define which expenses are reimbursable, whether overhead costs are covered, and other criteria
Technical assistance programs	Facilitator	Program	These programs are intended to help small and low-capacity cities to apply for green space funding
Implementation, construction, and opening to the public	Facilitator and Challenge	Program	Actions needed to build green space projects funded through equitable policies
Evaluation	Facilitator	Program	Research undertaken to assess implementation

Notes: See the FSFPP (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017) for a description of each stream. For the policy subsystem, see the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier & Weible, 2007).

Our subsequent description of the results is organized as follows. We first describe in more detail some of the items listed in Table 2, focusing on those that are more salient to the implementation of equitable green space policies. Then, we discuss some of the complex relationships between policy actors, initiatives, and constraints that shape policy implementation processes.

Key facilitators and challenges shaping implementation (research questions 1 and 2)

Our analysis highlighted key themes, representing a subset of those in Table 2, that mostly describe facilitators and challenges associated with policy actors, their actions and initiatives, and some systemic constraints to equitable implementation. The main facilitators include advocacy by nonprofits and CBOs and to some extent implementation programs (e.g., technical assistance programs),

whereas challenges mostly involve limited funding and capacity among cities and nonprofits, market conditions, and politics and bureaucracy. In each subsection below, we first describe the facilitator or challenge (research question 1) and then explain why such facilitators or challenges exist (research question 2).

Nonprofit and CBO advocacy (facilitator)

We found that nonprofits and CBOs conducted several advocacy campaigns at the policy implementation phase to ensure that implementation is equitable. These advocacy efforts include two main areas. First, nonprofits and CBOs have advocated with public park agencies and elected officials to shape implementation guidelines and programs that define how green space funds are distributed (e.g., grant guidelines and technical assistance). Specifically, these guidelines and programs determine which expenses can be covered by program funds (e.g., community engagement, maintenance), whether any displacement avoidance initiatives are required or incentivized by grants, whether community engagement is conducted equitably, and the content and delivery of technical assistance programs. For example, a CBO staffer noted that coalitions conducted advocacy "to make sure there was a policy shift to bake in equity provisions in the Measure A distribution, ensuring community engagement, anti-displacement language, and technical assistance support" (CBO staffer, interview, July 7, 2020). Another CBO staffer stated that coalition efforts reversed changes in grant guidelines that would have removed allowable expenses for community engagement such as "transportation, foods, and materials," and that enabled small CBOs to have a role in implementation (CBO staffer, interview, July 7, 2020).

Second, nonprofit CBOs work to ensure that project design and construction follow equity principles. For instance, participants described cases of CBOs and community members engaging actively in the process of design of new parks to make sure that the needs of their communities of color are reflected in these parks. A CBO staffer noted that many "community members were directly involved in the advocacy for the park and then followed the process all the way through development" (CBO staffer, interview, November 7, 2019).

This advocacy work by nonprofits and CBOs facilitates equitable implementation because the messy policy implementation process requires equity "watchdogs" to ensure that implementation programs reflect the justice-oriented spirit of policies. As we show below, political pressures, bureaucracy, and economic interests might lead to implementation programs that make it difficult for small cities and CBOs to apply for green space funding. In such circumstances, equity-oriented advocacy helps facilitate applications from cities and neighborhoods that need green space investment the most.

Municipal funding and capacity (challenge)

The limited funding and capacity (e.g., a small staff) of some cities, and parks departments specifically, creates barriers to the equitable implementation of green space equity policies. Limited funding and capacity is a particularly severe issue for low-income, majority-minority cities, which in Los Angeles County also tend to have low access to green space and small populations. Importantly, such challenges de facto prevent many low-income, majority-minority cities from applying for competitive grants and building green space projects, which limits the on-the-ground impact of equitable green space funding policies. As a nonprofit staffer noted, "cities [that have limited funding and capacity], probably those are the communities that need parks the most" (nonprofit staffer, interview, November 7, 2019).

Low-income cities have limited funding for green space besides what is provided by equitable funding policies. One nonprofit staffer noted, "In smaller cities, it's even more of a struggle. There are competing issues [e.g., police, public works], so I think parks and open space fall at the bottom" (nonprofit staffer, interview, November 6, 2019). Limited funding for green space is problematic because grant applications from equitable funding measures either require or incentivize having completed community engagement and plans for projects. In other words, some policies prioritize

"shovel-ready" green space projects. As noted by a CBO staffer, "the fact that you need to do the feasibility study before the funding creates huge barriers" (CBO staffer, interview, July 7, 2020).

Low-income cities also have limited capacity to apply for grants and manage projects like new parks and renovations, as they have few staff members, and those members have limited grant writing experience. For example, one nonprofit staffer noted, "one challenge is the limited bandwidth and capacity of smaller cities. [City name] Parks and Rec has a staff of three to four people so they don't have the technical expertise around proposals" (nonprofit staffer, interview, August 13, 2020). Another participant noted that some small cities have "one and a half staff" who work on parks (public agency staffer, interview, February 22, 2021).

Due to these challenges, many low-income, park-poor cities rarely apply for funding from equitable green space policies, which goes against the intent of equitable green space policies. As a result, high-income and park-rich cities end up applying more often and getting funded. As noted by a CBO staffer, "A lot of submitted applications come from more affluent communities" (CBO staffer, interview, July 7, 2020). These funding and capacity limitations among small low-income cities are equity issues themselves. As noted by a nonprofit staffer, "this is where it [limited funding and capacity] becomes an equity and justice issue, too. The reason that [low-income cities are] operating in these huge constraints is because of systemic inequalities" (nonprofit staffer, interview, December 4, 2021). In other words, systemic issues such as structural racism and deep inequalities can help explain the limited funding and capacity of low-income, majority-minority cities, a key challenge they experience.

Nonprofit and CBO funding and capacity (challenge and facilitator)

Like cities, nonprofits and CBOs have funding and capacity issues that limit their involvement in the implementation of equitable green space funding policies. A specific challenge is that Los Angeles County does not have enough high-capacity nonprofits and CBOs that can help low-income cities with implementation. In other words, the implementation model used in the county overly relies on nonprofits and CBOs to assist low-income cities with grant applications, community engagement, planning, and project management. A philanthropic organization staffer noted,

> How does that model scale? The [nonprofit name] can only say yes to a certain number of projects in a certain number of cities. They're doing heroic work. . . . there's a kind of bottleneck of organizations that are capable of doing this work . . . Organizations that understand land use planning, parks, contracting with engineers, and have a whole set of institutional skills. (Philanthropic organization staffer, interview, February 4, 2021)

Another challenge is that, at times, CBOs cannot take on projects or advocacy initiatives because they do not have enough staff members. A CBO staffer stated, "many nonprofits, especially grassroots groups, don't have that kind of capacity [as the largest ones]. Don't have that kind of energy" (CBO staffer, interview, February 4, 2021). Even when CBOs engage in projects or advocacy, they face differentials in power and expertise compared to large cities and developers, as they often rely on volunteers. A nonprofit staffer noted, "it's not fair for a single teacher from Southeast LA to be in the same advisor group as an engineer, who's getting paid to be at that table" (nonprofit staffer, interview, February 4, 2021).

Yet, the capacity of larger nonprofits (some of which are national organizations) can facilitate equitable implementation. Specifically, these larger nonprofits can act as mentors to smaller CBOs and share information about grant applications and other processes. As explained by a nonprofit staffer, "[Nonprofit 1] at the time had just finished their urban greening plan. We saw them as an organization that had a little more capacity, a little more know-how . . . we thought that they could be a good mentor to [CBO 1]" (nonprofit staffer, interview, March 24, 2021).

Systemic issues—such as structural racism and the devolution of public service provision to the private sector—can help explain the reliance on nonprofits and CBOs for green space equity and implementation. Specifically, structural racism can help explain the limited capacity of people of color-led CBOs to take on this task. If low-income majority-minority cities had enough resources,

nonprofits and CBOs would not have to assume this role in policy implementation and become overburdened as a result.

Politics and bureaucracy (challenge and facilitator)

We found that a city's political environment and the bureaucratic system of cities and funding agencies can create challenges to the implementation of equitable green space policy, even though some elected officials can also facilitate equitable implementation.

Regarding politics, many equitable green space funding policies have set-asides for low-income communities, and some city council members have pushed back against such an approach, seeking instead to distribute funding equally (including to well-resourced communities). As noted by a public agency staffer, when facing conversations about equity, "the folks on [city] council argue that investment should be for everybody. Everybody should get something, not the people who need it most should get the most; they don't like that" (public agency staffer, interview, December 6, 2019). These findings show that politics can lead to the re-negotiation of values embedded in green space equity policy during implementation. Yet, on the facilitator side, several participants noted that having a person championing a given project among elected officials or city staff (e.g., city manager) can improve the chances of success. As noted by a nonprofit staffer, "The most important thing would be having a champion within whatever is the jurisdictional agency" (nonprofit staffer, interview, November 21, 2019).

Bureaucracy can create several challenges to implementing equitable green space policy by hindering processes needed to build green space projects and by influencing the design of implementation programs. Regarding green space projects, bureaucratic issues mentioned by participants include long wait times for approvals, excessive paperwork overburdening nonprofits and CBOs, and the challenges of assembling multiple grants from different sources with different requirements, all of which make it difficult to build multi-benefit projects (e.g., parks with storm water management infrastructure). A CBO staffer noted, "the number of steps and the number of plans and approvals could be overwhelming" (CBO staffer, interview, February 12, 2021). Another nonprofit staffer stated, "What departments are we going to have to go to? Is it going to be three months? Is it going to be nine months? Is it just going to be a black hole and never come back?" (nonprofit staffer, interview, November 21, 2019).

Bureaucracy also contributes to shaping the implementation programs of equitable green space policies, and their influence often results in programs that create challenges to supporting cities, nonprofits, and CBOs with limited capacity. For instance, if cities are out of compliance with any previous grant from the county, regardless of which city agency and county programs were involved, they can be disqualified from applying for park funding (Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District, 2021). And with limited staff capacity, it can be so difficult and time-consuming to cure previous compliance issues, that cities decide they are unable to apply for park funding.

As for other factors, the challenges to equitable implementation created by politics and bureaucracy can be seen through the lens of structural racism. As reported above, participants noted that elected officials prefer a colorblind approach to distributing park funding to an approach that prioritized underserved communities of color. Yet colorblind policies and narratives, often favored by elected officials and bureaucrats, are a manifestation of structural racism that seek to reproduce current inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Gee & Hicken, 2021).

Market conditions (challenge)

Cities, nonprofits, and CBOs seeking to build green space projects funded through equitable green space policies face major market-related challenges, including limited, expensive, and often contaminated land for new green spaces and community concerns about green gentrification. Several participants lamented that lack of land and high land prices make it difficult to build new green spaces, specifically large parks. For example, a CBO staffer noted, "A big challenge is finding new spaces for parks since the region is so dense and built out" (CBO staffer, interview, August 13, 2020).

Another CBO staffer pointed out that available land in low-income areas tends to be contaminated, formerly industrial sites: "It is hard to find land in South LA that is suitable for park space and not contaminated" (CBO staffer, interview, February 18, 2021). As such, these market-related challenges in low-income majority-minority cities can also be seen through the lens of structural racism.

Concerns about green gentrification among residents can also hinder green space projects that would implement equitable policies. Specifically, green gentrification describes the influx of higher-income residents and capital to previously disadvantaged areas due in part to the creation of a new green space, which can lead to the displacement of low-income renters (Anguelovski et al., 2018). In our interviews and participant observations, we noted many respondents reporting serious green gentrification concerns in the communities they work with, and others with limited to no concerns. Among the first, a CBO staffer reported, "Residents understand that if there are more parks, then it's going to be more expensive to live here, and they're not going to be able to afford it" (CBO staffer, interview, November 8, 2019).

Implementation programs: Grant guidelines (challenge and facilitator)

Participants noted that many grant guidelines for equitable policies – clarifying eligibility criteria, reimbursable expenses, coverage of overhead costs, and other funding items – create some challenges to implementation. Yet many also believed that these challenges could be turned into facilitators if changes to grant guidelines were made.

First, many participants suggested simplifying the application process for the programs stemming from green space funding policies, which is currently burdensome and puts low-income cities and small CBOs at a disadvantage. A nonprofit staffer stated, "The procuring process for local entities makes it so hard for smaller CBOs and cities to be competitive" (nonprofit staffer, interview, August 13, 2020).

Second, most participants suggested that green space equity policies should include money for maintenance as, currently, only a few such policies cover park maintenance expenses and just focus on capital improvements (e.g., new parks). This is crucial because no-to-limited maintenance funding in such policies can limit a city's interest in building new parks, especially in low-income cities where maintenance is a particularly pressing issue. For example, a nonprofit staffer noted,

> We heard stories of cities that said, "No, we're not even going to apply for this money to build the park because we don't have enough money to maintain it. We don't have enough money to maintain the parks we already have." The operation and maintenance costs are a real impediment or barrier to constructing more park space in high-need areas. (Nonprofit staffer, interview, February 16, 2021)

Third, some funding agencies have a shortlist of reimbursable expenses for their grants, including green space construction, and some community engagement, but often no overhead costs for cities and nonprofits. Because these limitations severely limit the capacity of small cities and CBOs to apply for grants, many participants suggested that the number of reimbursable expenses should be broadened significantly (including maintenance). A CBO staffer noted, "[funding agency] changed policies about what was reimbursable or not. . . . The changes are going to impact cities' and CBOs' ability to support projects because they can't recoup overhead costs. And it will be harder for organizations and cities to afford to take on these projects" (CBO staffer, interview, March 15, 2021).

As for previous challenges, the issues created by grant guidelines can be in part explained by structural racism. Specifically, grant guidelines that fail to recognize deep inequalities in the capacity of cities and nongovernmental organizations, and that do not consider the conditions of parks in low-income majority-minority cities, are another example of colorblind actions that reinforce current inequalities (see, Rigolon, Aboelata, et al., 2022).

Implementation programs: Technical assistance programs (facilitator)

Many participants reported that well-designed technical assistance programs can help address some of the challenges mentioned above, namely, capacity issues for low-income cities and small CBOs. In

other words, technical assistance, an element of the *program stream*, can help address broader issues that are part of the *policy subsystem*. Numerous interviewees have noted that technical assistance is an essential aspect to ensure equitable implementation, as it helps funnel the money to the places that need it the most. Technical assistance providers include green space funders (e.g., Los Angeles County), and nonprofits and consultants contracted by funders. Based on our interviews and participant observation, we found that technical assistance could cover numerous areas, including planning, design, community engagement, legal services, grant writing, online application portal assistance, and research.

Participants noted that low-income cities often do not know about funding opportunities and specific outreach needs to be made. For example, a nonprofit staffer indicated that technical assistance can inform "small cities that there are opportunities where their work can be greatly expanded, especially by partnering with nonprofit organizations" (nonprofit staffer, interview, November 21, 2019).

Participants also shared best practices for effective technical assistance. The first suggestion is to tailor technical assistance to the needs and situations of each city. As noted by a public agency staffer, "the ideal TA [technical assistance] program would be very tailored to an individual city because the barriers in city A can be very different than the barriers in city B, city C, or city D" (public agency staffer, interview, December 4, 2019). Second, participants proposed that there should be a mutual agreement between the city and the technical assistance provider before technical assistance is delivered. This agreement would help ensure buy-in in the project from the city. A public agency staffer who provides technical assistance stated,

> We first meet with the city. We talk through what we can do together. . . . what's your responsibility? What's our responsibility? We have a framework for rules and responsibilities. And so there's a document that . . . we present to city council. And we ask them to pass a resolution that explains that we're going to partner. (Public agency staffer, interview, December 4, 2019)

Third, technical assistance should deliberately seek to improve the capacity of low-income cities and address systemic inequities in the green space policy subsystem. This can involve providing staffers to low-income cities, as noted by a public agency staffer, "We started talking to these lower-income jurisdictions that weren't applying [for grants]" (public agency staffer, interview, December 6, 2019). They added, "Rather than giving them money, we just give them a staff person" (public agency staffer, interview, December 6, 2019). As such, by increasing capacity in low-income communities of color, well-crafted technical assistance programs could chip away at one of the manifestations of structural racism.

Relationships among key elements shaping implementation (research question 3)

To address research question 3, we explored the relationships among the facilitators and challenges to equitable implementation. Figure 2 summarizes these relationships and represents our interpretation of how different streams interact during the implementation phase for equitable green space policies (see, Figure 1 for the FSFPP). Overall, Figure 2 shows how implementation programs, such as grant guidelines and technical assistance programs, contribute to where and how green space projects are built, and with which displacement avoidance policies (arrow A in Figure 2). The implementation program shapes guidelines that determine whether and how cities apply for grants generated through equitable funding policies, whether nonprofits and CBOs help cities in their application and project management, whether cities find land for new green spaces or resort to renovating existing ones, and whether cities implement initiatives to limit displacement near green space projects. The figure also shows how other factors (e.g., cities' capacity and funding, market conditions) shape the relationships between implementation programs and green space projects (other arrows in Figure 2).

Advocacy from nonprofits and CBOs can influence both implementation programs and specific green space projects (arrows B and C in Figure 2, respectively). As noted previously, nonprofits and

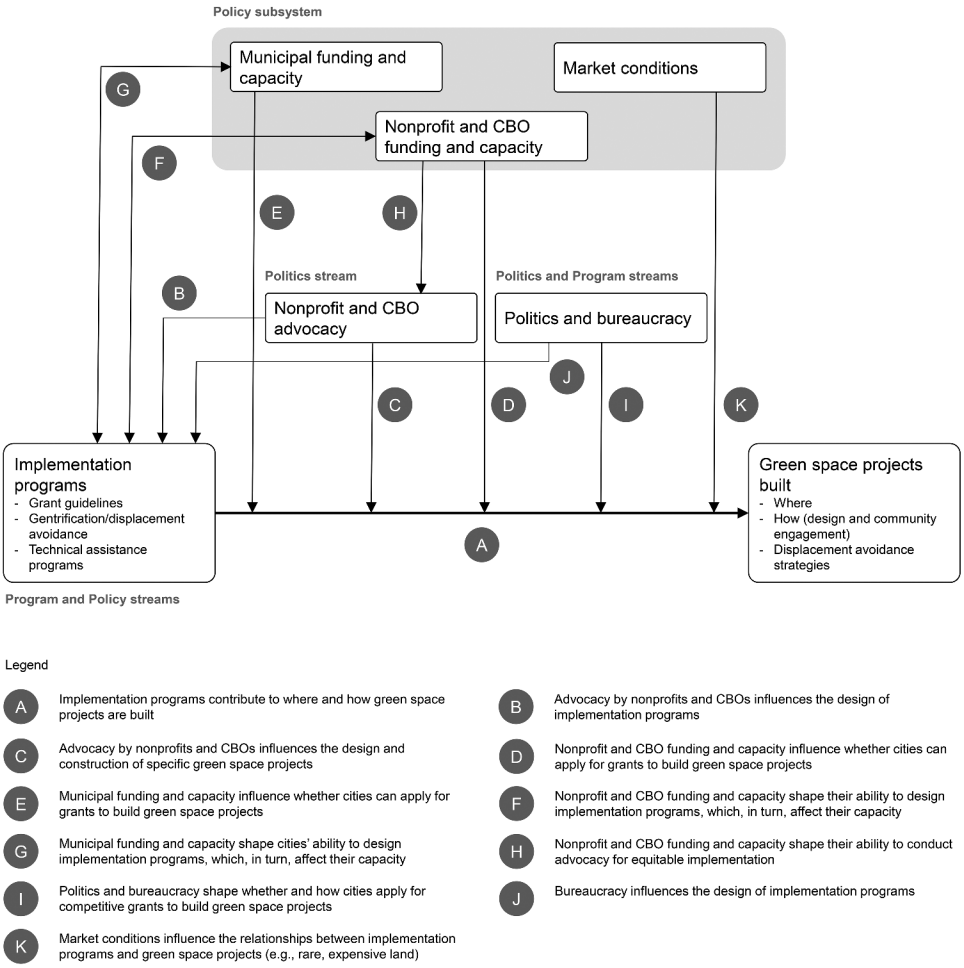

Figure 2. Relationships among facilitators and challenges to equitable implementation at the policy implementation phase. Notes: Each box represents a facilitator or challenge. Each facilitator and challenge is categorized based on one or more streams of the FSFPP (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017) or as part of the policy subsystem (see the Advocacy Coalition Framework; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). The arrows indicate relationships among facilitators and challenges.

CBOs have conducted effective advocacy to ensure that implementation programs reflected the equity values inscribed in several green space policies. Further, nonprofits and CBOs have served different roles to carry out green space projects (e.g., community engagement, design, project management).

Capacity and funding among cities, nonprofits, and CBOs influence whether cities can apply for grants (arrows D and E in Figure 2). As noted earlier, many low-income cities do not have the capacity or funding needed to apply for competitive grants for green space monies, and nonprofits or CBOs could help address that capacity issue. Capacity also shapes the ability of nonprofits, CBOs, and cities to design the implementation program; and that program, in turn, can increase the capacity of such organizations by providing technical assistance or increasing the types of reimbursable expenses covered by competitive grants (bidirectional arrows F and G in Figure 2). And having more funding and capacity also contributes to the extent to which nonprofits and CBOs are able to conduct advocacy (arrow H in Figure 2).

Politics and bureaucracy can also influence whether and how a city applies for competitive grants (arrow I in Figure 2). As noted, some politicians might not want to apply for funding sources that can only be used in low-income areas and therefore prioritize equity. Additionally, we also found that bureaucracy influences the design of implementation programs (arrow J in Figure 2).

Further, market conditions influence the relationships between implementation programs and green space projects by limiting the amount of viable land for new parks and by contributing to green gentrification concerns (arrow K in Figure 2). Because some competitive grants only focus on new parks, the lack of available land or the excessive cost of land might prevent a city from applying. And green gentrification concerns might give a city pause before applying for green space funding if no displacement avoidance initiatives are in place.

Each box in Figure 2 has a label linking elements shaping implementation to one or more of the streams in the FSFPP and the policy subsystem mentioned in the Advocacy Coalition Framework. These labels confirm the utility of Howlett et al.'s (2017) model by showing that several streams are closely intertwined in the implementation phase of equitable green space policies. For example, we find that the *politics stream* (represented by politics and bureaucracy and nonprofit and CBO advocacy) seeks to influence the *program stream* (represented mainly by implementation programs). Also, several elements of the *policy subsystem* of green space in Los Angeles County (e.g., low capacity and market conditions) that were not adequately considered by the *policy stream* (i.e., policy solution) create significant challenges to equitable implementation, even though the *program stream* seeks to address some of them (e.g., technical assistance programs).

Discussion and conclusion

Summary of key findings

In this paper, we analyzed the facilitators and challenges for the equitable implementation of equity-oriented funding policies for urban green space in Los Angeles County, a region that has seen substantial progress in green space equity. This work was motivated by limited evidence on what it takes to ensure that equity-oriented green space policies achieve distributional justice goals, as well as by a recognition that behind-the-scenes and overt actions during policy implementation can change some of the intended effects of policies (Howlett, 2019). We used the FSFPP, which describes how five streams interact at various phases of the policy process, to frame our paper and guide our empirical analysis (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017). We applied the FSFPP to the study of equity-oriented policies, highlighting how procedural and distributional justice intersect in policy implementation.

The findings for research question 1 show a complex landscape of facilitators and challenges to implementing equitable green space policies. The main facilitators include advocacy efforts from CBOs and nonprofits to ensure that implementation programs help address distributional justice in access to green space, technical assistance programs that help low-income cities apply successfully for green space funding, and changes to implementation programs that broaden the number of items covered by funding policies (e.g., green space maintenance, community engagement). These facilitators constitute procedural justice initiatives, as they seek to empower low-income communities of color. The most significant challenges include limited funding and capacity for CBOs and nonprofits, similar limitations for small low-income, majority-minority cities, politics and bureaucracies that might seek to reverse or limit equity provisions in the policies, and market conditions such as limited land availability and threats of green gentrification.

Our results reflect some patterns in the literature on equitable policy implementation. Specifically, other studies also highlighted the limited capacity and funding of low-income majority-minority cities, as for example, cities with stronger civic capacity are more likely to secure competitive funding for public transit (Lowe et al., 2016). Besides capacity, our findings on the positive role of advocacy by CBOs and nonprofits align with work showing that equity advocates have helped disadvantaged communities reap the benefits of equitable policies (C. R. Collins, 2020; Lowe et al., 2016).

For research question 2, we find that structural racism, which can be seen as an external factor affecting the policy process in the Advocacy Coalition Framework (see, Sabatier & Weible, 2007), can help explain most of the challenges to implementing equitable green space policies, including limited funding and capacity among cities, nonprofits, and CBOs, and market conditions. In particular, low-

income, majority-minority cities are under-resourced due to decades of under-investment by the federal and state governments and have a lower tax base. And even though state and county funds for green space are available, these cities lack the capacity to apply for such funding. Similarly, were low-income majority-minority cities more resourced, CBOs and nonprofits would not be asked to work beyond their capacity. To this extent, research has shown that nonprofits are often called to fill green space service gaps left by the public sector in the context of neoliberal governance (Pincetl, 2003; Rigolon, 2019). Further, Perkins (2010) argued that the increasing role of nonprofits in green space governance has generally not resulted in ameliorating the inequitable impacts of structural racism on green space provision.

Challenges related to market conditions, such as the limited availability of land and green gentrification risks, can also be explained by structural racism. Environmental justice research has shown distributional injustices such as the disproportionate siting of hazardous sites in low-income communities of color (Pulido, 2000), leaving contaminated sites as the few options for new parks. And such communities of color have low homeownership rates due to racist housing policies and practices, such as redlining and racially restrictive covenants (Ray et al., 2021), putting them at a higher risk of displacement.

Other research has also shown that structural racism has contributed to procedural and distributional injustices related to green space (Boone et al., 2009; Nardone et al., 2021; Rigolon & Németh, 2021; Schell et al., 2020). Such research has found that manifestations of structural racism, such as redlining and racially restrictive covenants, have contributed to distributional injustices in green space access, and that elected officials and planners have often excluded communities of color from decision-making about green space (Boone et al., 2009; Nardone et al., 2021; Rigolon & Németh, 2021; Schell et al., 2020). Our current study extends this work on structural racism and green space inequities for policy implementation, an area not covered by the above studies. Even in the context of equity-oriented policies, we show that structural racism plays a substantial role in creating challenges to equitable outcomes.

For research question 3, we find that the facilitators and challenges to the equitable implementation of green space policies have several connections, which we represent in Figure 2. For example, low-income majority-minority cities face several challenges to apply for green space funding, such as limited capacity and lack of available land, but technical assistance might help address some of those challenges. Further, advocacy by nonprofits and CBOs influences the design of implementation programs, which in turn might help increase the resources available for low-income majority-minority cities (e.g., by broadening the types of reimbursable expenses). These results highlight links between procedural and distributional justice (e.g., Schlosberg, 2004): Because CBOs and nonprofits represent the voices of disadvantaged communities in the design of implementation programs (procedural justice), low-income majority-minority cities might have better odds to secure green space funding (distributional justice).

Limitations

This study has a few limitations. First, although Los Angeles County is an interesting study setting for our research, it has unique characteristics, such as the presence of numerous nonprofits and CBOs working on green space equity, that limit the transferability of some of our findings. In places with few nonprofits and CBOs, advocacy to create more equitable implementation programs might not be as effective as we found in Los Angeles County. Second, we did not have the opportunity to conduct member checking due to time limitations at the end of the interviews, even though we used other strategies to ensure the credibility of our findings, such as triangulation between interviews and participant observations (see, Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Third, due in part to our qualitative design, we could not identify which challenges are likely to create the greatest impediment to equitable implementation, as we did not ask respondents to rate the severity of the challenges they mentioned. This information would be useful for funders interested in creating initiatives to eliminate the most significant challenges.

Implications for the Five-Stream Framework of the Policy Process

Our analysis also shows that the FSFPP (Howlett, 2019; Howlett et al., 2017) can serve as a useful framework to understand the implementation of equitable green space policies. Specifically, the facilitators and challenges we identified align quite well with the five streams described in the FSFPP and the broader policy subsystem and external factors that the FSFPP somewhat acknowledges. For example, advocacy efforts by CBOs and nonprofits can be seen as part of the *politics stream*, and implementation programs such as technical assistance programs closely align with the *program stream* (see, Table 2). The connection between our results and theory on policy implementation enhances the transferability of our findings (Kuper et al., 2008).

Yet our findings raise some challenges for the FSFPP, and such challenges build on other policy process frameworks (e.g., Advocacy Coalition Framework). The first challenge involves explicitly recognizing the presence of a policy subsystem and external factors that influence such subsystem, as described in the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Specifically, we identify several challenges to equitable implementation (i.e., limited resources for cities, nonprofits, and CBOs, and market conditions) that were not considered adequately by most green space policies and that created significant issues for the *program stream*. These challenges are part of the policy subsystem, as they influence multiple policy processes related to green space in Los Angeles County. Without recognizing this policy subsystem and the external factors that shape that subsystem, including structural racism as noted by some respondents, one would not have a complete understanding of the challenges hindering equitable implementation. However, technical assistance programs (part of the *program stream*) sought to address some of these challenges in the *policy subsystem* by boosting the capacity of cities, nonprofits, and NGOs.

The second challenge is the need to clearly intertwine the *politics stream* with other streams at the implementation phase. We find that politics play a major role in the implementation of equitable green space policies. Specifically, politics seek to shape the *program stream* and by doing so continue to affect some of the values, priorities, and goals embedded in the *policy stream*. To be fair, Howlett et al. (2017) did not discuss whether the *policy stream* veered away from other streams during implementation, but their figure representing the FSFPP showed just that (see, Figure 1). We believe it is imperative to explicitly call out the strong connections between the *politics stream* and other streams during policy implementation because we find that the *politics stream* continues to shape the equity provisions included in green space policies during implementation.

The third challenge is the presence of feedback loops between different phases of the policy process, which are not shown in the FSFPP. We find that policy implementation can lead to reopening discussions about the policy problem, which is generally defined in the agenda-setting phase. Specifically, concerns about green gentrification led to incorporating displacement avoidance provisions in the implementation programs for two equitable funding policies (Los Angeles County's Measures A and W). Gentrification concerns, part of the market conditions (*policy subsystem*), were not at the forefront of the agenda-setting phase of the two measures. Further, lessons learned during the policy implementation phase can shed light on the changes to the policy subsystem that are needed for the policies to succeed (i.e., to move toward distributional justice).

Implications for policy and future research

Our findings offer actionable insights on what it might take to ensure that the implementation of equitable funding measures for green space results in real benefits for low-income communities of color. The facilitators and challenges we identified provide elected officials, advocates, and professionals working in green space-related fields with possible directions to improve the chances of equitable implementation. We also present those facilitators and challenges through the lenses of a few types of organizations involved in policy implementation, which provides more specific implications for different organizations. Our

empirical findings, together with our discussion of the FSFPP, can also be useful for researchers and practitioners working on the implementation of equitable policy beyond green spaces, such as affordable housing and transportation.

Our results also shed light on some of the policy and systems changes that can help facilitate the implementation of equity-oriented green space policies. These findings suggest that future equity-oriented policies to fund green space and other public services (e.g., transit) could be preceded by an in-depth analysis of structural issues that could hinder implementation, including the many manifestations of structural racism. For example, such analysis could investigate the capacity of cities by interviewing staffers of parks and recreation departments and community councils (see, B. Collins & Del Rey, 2020). Also, funding agencies could analyze which types of cities and counties (e.g., based on population size, wealth, and racial/ethnic composition) would be affected by certain requirements to apply for competitive funding (e.g., having shovel-ready projects).

These analyses could be part of ongoing evaluations carried out between multiple funding cycles of the same policy or between similar policies (e.g., different bonds to fund green space). In this sense, policy creation and implementation could be seen as a learning cycle wherein each previous implementation phase can be a learning model for the subsequent policy being designed and implemented. In this process, these learning cycles could document the impacts of structural racism on the elements of the *policy subsystem* in a given location and design policies that consider those impacts. Relatedly, our findings show that it is important to understand implementation as a phase of policy that is generative and influences all other phases of policy. The implementation phase of the policymaking process is understudied in the environmental justice research on green space despite calls for a better understanding of such phase (Carter et al., 2018).

Future research in this area could seek to learn from case studies that have implemented successful equity-oriented policies to fund public services. Research could specifically focus on cases wherein structural issues to equitable implementation existed, such as limited capacity among municipalities and the nonprofit sector. Similar to a study on transportation (Lowe et al., 2016), future work on green space could use quantitative methods to model how municipal capacity levels and local advocacy are associated with the odds of receiving funding from competitive grants. Further, subsequent work could expand the geographic scope of our study, examining the facilitators and challenges to equitable implementation through a statewide or nationwide survey with professionals involved in green space development. Additionally, future research could examine how philanthropic support to nonprofits and CBOs contributes to the successful implementation of equity-oriented policies to fund public services. Conducting future studies in partnership with advocacy groups and public agencies, possibly using participatory action research, could help maximize the positive impact of research on equitable implementation.

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