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GREEN FOR WHOM? TOURISM-ORIENTED GREEN TRANSITION IN DUBROVNIK

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Abstract

Although the green transition is usually defined as a structural shift in society and the economy toward sustainable models that minimize harmful environmental impacts and ensure long-term climate resilience, in the context of this paper the green transition refers to urban greening as a key aspect of this process, manifesting as a socio-spatial and not only ecological phenomenon. This paper investigates how urban greening policies are framed and implemented in Dubrovnik, Croatia, which is simultaneously characterized by overtourism and active urban greening policies. Drawing on critical discourse analysis of five strategic documents combined with resident perspectives from qualitative interviews, the paper argues that urban greening policies in Dubrovnik predominantly prioritize aesthetic attractiveness and tourism-oriented urban representation, while everyday, resident-oriented green infrastructure remains weakly integrated into policy design and implementation. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a discursive and spatial pattern in which greening investments concentrate in tourist-visible urban areas, while residential zones receive less attention. Thus, in the case of Dubrovnik urban greening appears to enhance destination competitiveness while generating only limited redistributive benefits for permanent residents. The paper contributes to emerging debates on green gentrification, selective sustainability, and the social dimensions of the urban green transition, with implications for policy design in tourism-dependent economies beyond the Croatian context.

***Keywords**: urban greening, historical Mediterranean city, Dubrovnik, tourism, socio-spatial inequalities, selective sustainability*

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban spaces are becoming increasingly anthropogenic over time, with natural components diminishing, physically separated from the urban fabric, or remaining functionally limited to portions of their spaces (Lv et al., 2024). Cities exposed to mass tourism, however, emphasize green spaces and natural attractions as important assets for promoting sustainable tourism. Although green transition encompasses a broad range of decarbonization strategies, this paper focuses specifically

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on urban greening, the planning and implementation of urban green infrastructure, as a site where the socio-spatial effects of green transition policies become visible.

As an example where these processes are observable, the small historical Mediterranean city of Dubrovnik, under UNESCO protection in Croatia, was selected. Croatia is described as "a tourism-driven emerging European economy," (Kožić, 2013) while Dubrovnik is the leading tourist destination, according to official statistics (DZS, 2025). The city's economy is heavily dependent on tourism. Some estimates suggest that tourism contributes 17 to 20% directly to the city's GDP (WTTC, 2023). The city of Dubrovnik represents a critical case because of its simultaneous exposure to overtourism and active green-transition policies.

The existing literature on green areas and urban greening mainly focuses on urban greening in large cities (Godoi et al., 2025; McDonald et al., 2023), the functions of green areas in tourist towns (Terkenli et al., 2020), and green transitions that include climate sustainability goals, technical policies, and infrastructure (Kadić et al., 2025). However, the connection between sustainability policies and tourism development models remains fairly underexplored (Balas and Abson, 2022; Lavaredas et al., 2025). Research shows that green spaces and natural attractions contribute to local tourist economies and income generation (Ijatuyi et al., 2025). Therefore, urban greening and the creation of green spaces in cities that are primarily tourism-oriented can be understood more as creating an effect on the tourist gaze than on improving local residents' quality of life and well-being. The research gap from which this work starts concerns how urban greening policies in tourism-dependent cities prioritize representational and tourism-oriented functions over everyday resident needs, particularly in space-constrained heritage cities.

The aim of this paper is to examine how the current development of the green transition within the urban greening model in Dubrovnik operates, and whether it exhibits selectivity between representational urbanism and everyday urban livability. This objective is pursued through the following research questions: How is urban greening addressed in formal documentation related to urban planning and space management? Which functions of urban greenery are prioritized in official planning and strategic documents, landscape attractiveness and tourism-related representation, or everyday resident-oriented uses? Is spatial selectivity evident between different zones in relation to greening plans as reflected in the documentation? How do residents perceive the role and value of urban green spaces in their daily lives, and to what extent do these perceptions correspond with political priorities?

The paper uses critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) of urban planning and strategic documents, supplemented by qualitative interviews with residents.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since the topic of green transition in this paper is understood as urban greening, and since it is examined within the specific context of Dubrovnik's urban space, the basic theoretical framework is derived from the question of how space is produced. Tourism urbanism connects urban planning and tourism management. Although cities attract large numbers of tourists, urban theories have long ignored tourism, treating it as a secondary phenomenon rather than an important element of spatial organization (Ashworth & Page, 2011; Mullins, 1991). Mullins, among the pioneers of tourist urbanism, describes how tourism becomes a "city-forming element," as cities, under the influence of touristification, strive to make urban spaces more attractive and scenic, as well as to create facilities aimed at providing hospitality and leisure. Following this logic, urban spaces internalize the tourist gaze, resulting in "stylized landscapes that are strategically planned, laid out, and designed" for touristic consumers (O'Dell and Billing, 2005: 16). Urry and Larsen (2011) claim that in tourist cities, space acquires primarily symbolic and aesthetic functions, with greenery becoming a "green signifier," designed to satisfy touristic gazes as pre-structured and socio-culturally framed practices. In other words, the environment is consciously restructured, transformed, and aesthetically arranged

into visually attractive enclaves suitable for generating profitable tourist views. Within Urry and Larsen's (2011) concept of selective visual control, urban green infrastructure in tourist cities often loses its primary ecological and bioclimatic functions and becomes a key instrument of estetization of space. In other words, instead of developing in accordance with the functional needs of the local community, greenery is used as a tool for shaping and controlling the tourist gaze. Through such practices, the strategic planting of tree-lined avenues, manicured hedges, and aesthetically pleasing parks serves not only to beautify city views, but also to conceal, or spatially dislocate elements of everyday, functional, or infrastructural city life that could disrupt the idealized experience of the destination.

In the context of contemporary touristic urbanism, spatial planning processes can no longer be understood through static models and traditional zoning, but must be viewed through the dynamic commodification and transformation of space for tourist consumption. Within this dynamic, a sharp conflict arises between the ever-expanding touristic areas (which redefines the city's purpose through new, aesthetically pleasing and often commercialized projects), and the context territory of the residential areas (Dansero et al., 2015). Although official strategic documents and plans attempt to present urban space as inclusive, this type of zoning actually generates selective sustainability and hidden forms of exclusion, as temporary spatial exceptions eventually become permanent conditions that displace the local community, resulting in so-called green gentrification (Anguelovski et al., 2018; Gould and Lewis, 2016; Page and Duignan, 2023). Investments in green infrastructure, renewable energy, and pedestrian zones raise real estate prices and transform spaces into "luxury landscapes" intended for visitors, tourists, and investors, while displacing local residents. Additionally, the transition to low-carbon models (such as the introduction of Limited Traffic Zones around the historic core of Dubrovnik) can be seen not only as a measure to protect the UNESCO heritage from pressure, but also as an exclusive aesthetic regulation for the tourist experience (Bouzarovski, 2018). Therefore, analyzing the contemporary city requires a deeper understanding of the micrographs of urban tourism, as well as recognition of the fluidity of spatial boundaries within which informal citizen practices emerge as legitimate responses and resistance to dominant strategies of space commodification.

Finally, the latest theoretical turn advocates a "transversal approach." Koens and Milano (2024) explain that urban tourism cannot be understood without analyzing broader processes such as gentrification, housing policies, and the right to the city – that is, without considering how citizens themselves respond to tourism. In other words, in contrast to tourist-oriented and aesthetically commodified greenery, the concept of social sustainability in an urban setting requires stronger integration of resident-oriented greenery (Das et al., 2025). Relying on the classic (Lefebvre, 1996) and radical (Harvey, 2008; 2012) theoretical positions on „the right to the city" concept, this approach emphasizes that citizens must have the primary right to participate in the production and use of the space they inhabit daily. In this sense, the emphasis shifts from representative aesthetics to the everyday functionality of green areas that directly improve the quality of life in residential neighborhoods. When official city strategies, through selective sustainability, ignore these needs, informal resident practices emerge within the local community. The most representative example of such a bottom-up response is the emergence of individual practices and environmental interventions. These can include from landscaping (private or shared) to informal urban gardens on public or neglected land. These interventions in the space indicate the existence of unmet needs within urban neighborhoods, or "a mismatch between practice and theory, between public policies, civil society initiatives and personal plans, between the proclaimed needs of the community and the concrete concerns of individuals" (Biti and Blagaić Bergman, 2014).

3. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Dubrovnik as a Tourism-Dependent City

Dubrovnik is recognized as one of the most prominent examples of overtourism in global contexts and academic literature (Abbasian et al. 2020). Peeters et al. (2018: 22) defined overtourism as "the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds." Psychological capacity here refers to the ability of citizens and visitors to cope with tourism congestion effects, while political capacity indicates the inability of local governments to effectively manage and regulate tourism growth consequences so as not to interfere with the quality of life of local residents.

According to statistics, Dubrovnik has the highest ratio of tourists to local population in Europe. Some analyses report that Dubrovnik had about 27 tourists per permanent resident in 2023, and in the record pre-pandemic year of 2019, as many as 36 tourists per resident, creating unprecedented pressure on local resources and infrastructure (Holidu, 2024). In its study on urban tourism management, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018) described Dubrovnik as a unique case study focused specifically on congestion management and the need to establish more sustainable capacities.

The most significant indicator of overtourism is not only the number of arrivals and overnight stays, but also social injustices and stress on the destination and its residents (Butler, 2018). The excessive focus on tourism in Dubrovnik has led to the conversion of housing stock into apartments for short-term rent, resulting in a significant increase in real estate prices and living costs and consequential gentrification, as well as difficulties in resolving housing issues for young people (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019), emigration outside the city's administrative borders, and long-term negative natural growth (DZS, 2025). These economic tensions, inherent in tourist-historic urban cities, have long been recognized in the literature (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000), but remain inadequately addressed in contemporary green transition policy frameworks.

The problem of overtourism is recognized by the city administration in both professional and development documents, including integrated action plans within European networks such as the URBACT project for sustainable tourist destinations. Additionally, some Dubrovnik strategic documents (like the UNESCO World Heritage Site Management Plan and the Green Urban Renewal Plan) explicitly recognize the issue of overtourism in their introductory analyses and seek to redefine the destination's tourism management practices through projects like "Respect the City."

3.2. Methods

The paper combines several methodological approaches. Strategic documents related to the spatial management of the City of Dubrovnik were analyzed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) and policy analysis, with a spatial dimension incorporated through comparative analysis of urban zones. This methodological approach was chosen to identify how urban greening is discursively constructed in official documents and how policy priorities are operationalized in identified urban zones.

Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) is used to identify patterns in discourse and linguistic constructions related to urban greening in the selected documents. This approach is based on the idea that policy documents are not neutral administrative texts, but sites for the creation of meaning and means of reproducing or challenging certain values, priorities, and social relations (Fairclough, 1992; Hastings, 2000). The analysis focuses on collocational patterns, aiming to determine which concepts and terms systematically appear or do not appear in references to green space and urban greening. Specifically, the analysis, based on an interpretative qualitative assessment of discourse intensity, examines the extent to which greening is framed within predefined categories (aesthetics/landscape, tourism, green infrastructure, well-being of residents,

climate adaptation, participation). The intensity of each discursive category is assigned a value on a five-point scale (very high, high, medium, low, and very low) depending on the frequency of association. The categorization of discourse intensity was conducted through iterative qualitative coding. Categories were assigned based on the relative frequency and contextual prominence of relevant terms and narratives within each document, not on formal quantitative content analysis. Beyond assigning intensity scores to each category, terms were also coded by orientation as tourism-oriented or resident-oriented (Das et al., 2015). Greenery was coded as tourism-oriented when the terms and formulations used linked green areas with visual attractiveness, destination identity, the tourist offer, or visitors (e.g., landscape, ambient attractiveness, tourist facilities). Greenery was coded as resident-oriented when the terms and formulations used related to daily functionality, health, shade, availability, or residents' social use of space (e.g., cooling, accessibility, residential needs, social function). Documents and measures that did not clearly refer to any of these dimensions were coded as neutral and were not taken into account. Furthermore, it is important to note that the analysis in this paper refers to the text of the documents and planned priorities, not to their actual implementation.

In addition to the discursive analysis, a policy analysis was conducted by examining the distribution of strategic priorities and planned interventions in the corpus of individual documents. This involved mapping measures and activities within the documents and assessing the spatial targeting of planned green investments in urban zones with varying tourism intensity. The spatial dimension of the analysis uses the tripartite zonal model of Dubrovnik's urban structure – distinguishing the historic core (Old Town within the walls, Pile, Ploče, and the buffer zone), the transitional zone (Gruž, Lapad), and the predominantly residential periphery (Mokošica)—as an analytical framework for examining whether green investment patterns correspond to tourism intensity rather than resident need.

CDA and policy analysis were conducted on five selected documents that seek to regulate urban space: the Spatial Development Plan of the City of Dubrovnik, the Green Urban Renewal Strategy of the City of Dubrovnik 2025–2030, the Urban Area Development Strategy of Dubrovnik until 2027, the UNESCO Management Plan for the Old Town of Dubrovnik, and the Environmental Protection Program of the City of Dubrovnik 2023–2026.

The final method used in the paper consists of semi-structured interviews with Dubrovnik residents and selected stakeholders. A combined approach was used to form the sample: some interviewees were deliberately chosen because of their direct experience with urban gardening, including those who have illegally appropriated public spaces and those who cultivate small gardens or green areas next to their homes. The sample also intentionally included professional perspectives, such as a city service employee and a local tourist guide. The remaining participants are citizens chosen through convenience sampling. In total, nine interviews were conducted with participants of different ages (ranging from 29 to 73 years) and genders (five women and four men). The interviews followed a very loose and informal format, focusing on residents' everyday perceptions and experiences of urban green space, with particular attention to their functional needs such as shade, cooling, accessible public spaces for children and socializing purposes. The interviews took place in informal settings. All participants were informed of the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation and the purpose of the interview, and they agreed to audio recording. Pseudonyms were assigned to respondents in the presentation of results. After transcribing the audio material, a thematic analysis was conducted in two stages, from inductive coding to grouping into thematic units. This part of the research aims to assess how citizens experience urban greening and green areas, their needs and ideas, and what they find problematic. Given the exploratory nature of the interview component and the small number of participants, findings are treated as illustrative of resident perspectives rather than statistically representative, and are used to contextualize and triangulate the documentary analysis.

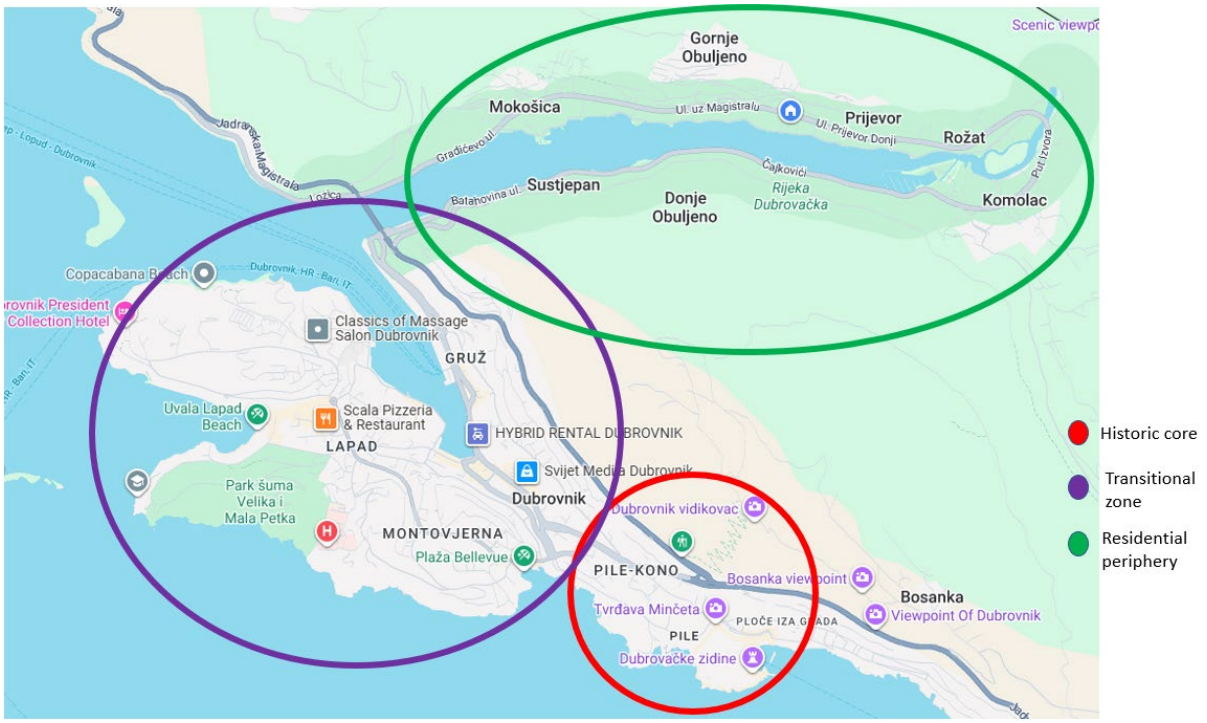


Figure 1 Analytical zoning of Dubrovnik used in the study

Source: Authors' creation

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Discursive Construction of Urban Greening in Selected Documents

The Spatial Plan of the City of Dubrovnik is a normative document that defines the management of urban space. The Critical Discourse Analysis of the Spatial Plan of the City of Dubrovnik shows that urban greening is primarily constructed through the discourse of landscape protection and the preservation of the cultural and historical identity of the area. The terms green, green areas, and greening are most often associated with landscape, parks, park architecture, and protective forests, while their functions for the benefit of residents or adaptation to climate change appear much less frequently or are entirely absent. Specific collocation patterns in the document show a dominant connection with terms such as landscape, vista, horticultural design, landscape values, landscape areas, protective greenery, ambient attractiveness, and cultivated landscape terms that reflect what O'Dell and Billing (2005) describe as strategically planned and designed "stylized landscapes." This also corresponds to the concept of selective sustainability (Anguelovski et al., 2018) and the "green signifier" function of greenness by Urry and Larsen (2011). Terms that rarely appear include public green areas (which appear in the classification of uses but without elaboration of their function), cooling, health, accessibility, residential needs, social function, urban gardening, distribution, and equality. Thus, urban greening, as a visible site of the socio-spatial effects of the green transition, is discursively framed and legitimized primarily through the preservation of spatial quality, but mainly in a visual or aesthetic sense and in terms of tourist attractiveness. At the same time, the analysis shows an almost complete absence of references to climate resilience, public health, and citizen participation. In accordance with Fairclough's approach, urban greening in the context of this spatial planning document is primarily seen as a matter of landscape protection, not as a resource focused on the practical needs and use of citizens, since residents rarely appear as users of green spaces, and citizen participation in planning processes is not recognized as a relevant topic. The actors mentioned in the document are the City of Dubrovnik, planners, nature protection institutions, and the tourism and economic sectors.

The second document analyzed is the Green Urban Renewal Strategy 2025–2030. This is the most analytically fruitful document, as it is explicitly focused on the green transition. The strategy outlines four strategic priorities and 22 measures. Strategic priority 2 includes the measure "Food production on public areas owned by the city" (M 2.2.1.), which is the only measure concerning functional greenery for residents and includes three activities. In comparison, the measure "Development and improvement of the quality of existing open spaces" (M 2.1.1.) has 29 activities. Although this document declaratively links green infrastructure and urban greening with ecological, economic, and social benefits, and sustainable development, even in the sentence describing the vision of the Strategy:

"The City of Dubrovnik – a world heritage city of strong international and national historical and cultural identity with a widespread, accessible, and maintained network of green infrastructure that provides a wide range of services for a pleasant and quality life for its residents and visitors"

it is clear that identity and heritage take precedence over green infrastructure, and residents and visitors are positioned as equal users. The analysis of collocation patterns shows that greening is strongly linked to aesthetics and tourism (landscape, identity, heritage, visual experience, garden tradition, attractiveness, visitors, tourist facilities, decorative vegetation, ambient appeal). The connection with green infrastructure and climate adaptation is moderate throughout the text (present but secondary to the aesthetic discourse), while the connection with residents' well-being and participation is not very pronounced (nominally present in the vision and in the section on neighborhood parks, but without specific measures for residential areas outside the center). Concepts that are sporadically included are cooling, residents' well-being, food production, neighborhood accessibility, residential needs, and social equality. At the same time concepts like distribution of green spaces, residential periphery, and urban gardening are completely absent. Precisely the disproportion between declarative inclusivity and concrete measures within the same document reflects the mechanism that Anguelovski et al. (2018) describe as “hidden forms of exclusion.” The document also refers to a survey conducted with 365 respondents, who claim there are too few green areas, and the most popular green areas are the beaches of Lokrum (9.6%) and Banje (7.7%). Mentioned localities are the most frequent tourist sites. This suggests that the participation process in an over-touristified city may lead residents to internalize the tourist perspective rather than express their own authentic everyday needs (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Furthermore, other survey results are used selectively and do not shape any strategic priority. At the declarative level, however, this document points to a more progressive and resident-oriented approach. The actors mentioned in the document are the City of Dubrovnik, citizens, administrative bodies and city services, experts in spatial planning and the environment, and institutions of nature and environmental protection.

Analysis of the Strategy for the Development of the Urban Area of Dubrovnik until 2027 shows that urban greening is defined primarily as part of a broader sustainable urban development strategy. Unlike the previous two documents, the negative consequences of tourism, gentrification, and overtourism, as well as their impact on residents' quality of life, are explicitly addressed. The document notes that the area of public green spaces per inhabitant in Dubrovnik is less than half the WHO recommended standard. The structure of these areas is also notable: parks make up 42%, and green areas along roads account for 40%, indicating a predominantly aesthetic and infrastructural character. The only strategic green project with a concrete implementation plan in the document is the "Network of Green Infrastructure: Parks Gradac, Pile, and Platana." These three parks are located in the most frequented tourist zone, right next to the old town, and the tourist function of this project is specified as one of its goals: "to expand the tourist offer in the wider area of urban area." Collocation patterns show that the terms greenery and greening are closely linked to green city vision, infrastructure, transition, and urban renewal. They occasionally appear next to road surfaces, circular management, and quality living environment. Very rarely (in one sentence) are they linked to rest, recreation, microclimate, health, or residents. The CDA of this document shows that it is predominately based on the EU administrative vocabulary of green transition (using terms such as

infrastructure, transition, circular management, and European policy), while at the implementation level it does not move beyond the aesthetic-tourist vocabulary (vision, landscaping, tourist offer, summer stage), not articulating adequately the social-functional dimension.

The UNESCO World Heritage Site Management Plan for the Old Town of Dubrovnik exemplifies heritage discourse and demonstrates the significant influence of the World Heritage Protection Regime on shaping urban spaces within Dubrovnik's historic core. Collocation patterns show a strong association of the analyzed terms with visual identity and landscape; a moderate association with the European Green Plan, cultural landscape, natural environment, and climate adaptation; and a weak association with participation, quality of life, and residents. In this document, greenery is primarily framed in terms of aesthetics, landscape, and tourism. The main actors identified are UNESCO, heritage protection institutions, and management bodies.

The final document analyzed is the Environmental Protection Program of the City of Dubrovnik 2023–2026. This document focuses on environmental management, climate adaptation, and technical resilience measures. Greenery is framed as a tool for environmental protection and climate change adaptation. The terms most frequently associated with greenery and the environment are visual impression, infrastructure, roofs, and facades; moderate associations include climate change, resilience, adaptation, public spaces, population well-being, and health. The weakest associations are with tourism and urban gardening. The dominant actors mentioned are the City of Dubrovnik, administrative bodies and city services, professional institutions, utility companies, and climate adaptation experts. Although the document is primarily focused on climate resilience, adaptive practices, participatory citizen action, and their overall well-being, at the same time it explicitly states: "Introducing elements of the natural landscape through the implementation of green infrastructure accelerates the process of its recognition, which improves the quality of the visual and experiential characteristics of the settlement," once again reproducing the logic found in other documents of prioritizing urban greenery for aesthetics and visual identity.

Table 1 shows the discourse intensity of linking greenery or urban greening with predefined categories (aesthetics/landscape, tourism, green infrastructure, well-being of residents, climate adaptation, participation) for each individual document. The results indicate significant differences in how the analyzed documents discursively construct urban greening. The table clearly shows that the category of aesthetics and landscape is very highly or highly related to urban greening in all documents. The intensity of the other categories varies depending on the document. If we assign numbers from 5 (very high) to 0 (absent) to the values (solely for heuristic and comparative purposes and not to conduct a quantitative content analysis), we obtain the following ranking of discursive categories: aesthetics/landscape (28), tourism (21), green infrastructure (19), climate adaptation (13), well-being of residents (11), participation (10). These results suggest that urban greening in the strategic documents of the City of Dubrovnik is most often associated with aesthetic and landscape values, followed by tourism, while residents' well-being and participation are the least represented discursive categories.

Table 1 The intensity of discursive categories related to urban greening in the analyzed documents

Category	The Spatial Plan of the City of Dubrovnik	Green Urban Renewal Strategy 2025–2030.	Strategy for the Development of the Urban Area of Dubrovnik until 2027	The UNESCO World Heritage Site Management Plan for the Old Town of Dubrovnik	Environmental Protection Program of the City of Dubrovnik 2023–2026.
Aesthetics/landscape	Very high	Very high	High	Very high	High
Tourism	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Green infrastructure	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very high
Well-being of residents	Very low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium
Climate adaptation	Absent	Low	Medium	Medium	Very high
Participation	Absent	Very low	Medium	Low	High

4.2. Policy Priorities and Spatial Selectivity

Beyond the discursive framing of urban greening, policy analysis explores where planned interventions are located and what functions they serve, distinguishing between ornamental and tourist-visible greening measures and interventions aimed at improving environmental performance and residents' quality of life. Dubrovnik urban space is divided into three zones: the historic core (Old Town within the walls, Pile, Ploče, and the buffer zone), the transitional zone (Gruž, Lapad), and the residential periphery (Mokošica).

In this context, The Spatial Plan of the City of Dubrovnik is not analyzed because it is a regulatory spatial document, not an operational investment document.

Policy analysis of the Urban Renewal of the City of Dubrovnik Strategy 2025–2030 shows that, at the level of objectives, the document focuses on green infrastructure, climate resilience, residents' quality of life, equal access to green areas, biodiversity protection, and urban renewal of existing urban spaces. However, the spatial distribution of investments varies by zone. Interventions in the historic core focus on heritage, historic gardens, representative public spaces, the area's visual character and identity, and its tourist value. Most interventions are concentrated in the transitional zone, primarily addressing urban transformation such as promenades, tree-lined avenues, and public spaces, with an emphasis on visual improvements and citizen satisfaction. Although the document recognizes residential periphery as the most densely populated part of the city, the guidelines are very general, with no major green infrastructure projects; interventions are limited to maintenance and minor infrastructure improvements.

The Urban Development Strategy of Dubrovnik until 2027 demonstrates a strong commitment to territorial cohesion and social development at the declarative level. It prioritizes improving residents' quality of life, climate resilience, and participatory governance. However, policy analysis based on the tripartite division of Dubrovnik's urban area reveals that planned interventions are mainly concentrated in the transitional zone, while in the historic core, the focus is on managing tourist pressures and protecting heritage and space identity. The document addressing the residential peripheral zone emphasizes the need for more balanced development and improved service availability. This document also identifies Mokošica as the most densely populated part of the urban area of Dubrovnik, but at the same time predicts the lowest number of planned green interventions.

The UNESCO Management Plan for the World Heritage Site Old Town of Dubrovnik can only be partially analyzed from a policy perspective, as its spatial focus is limited to the old city core. Nearly all measures target this area, where intervention intensity is very high. The nature of these interventions is focused on the preservation and conservation of space. Transitional zones are addressed only insofar as they affect the visual integrity of the core, traffic flows to the City, and tourist pressures, with a low intensity of interventions. The residential periphery is not covered by the document.

The Environmental Protection Program of the City of Dubrovnik 2023–2026 includes a detailed demographic analysis by settlement and a spatial analysis of the landscape. The document lists specific measures such as addressing heat islands, implementing green roofs, and climate adaptation. However, none of these measures are linked to a concrete spatial context. The specific needs for urban greening by zone are not identified; instead, the measures are formulated generically for the entire city. Although the policies are modern and reflect contemporary residents' needs, they remain general possibilities rather than concrete priorities tailored to the different urban zones of Dubrovnik.

Table 2 shows that the three identified urban zones are not equally addressed in terms of urban greening interventions across the analyzed documents. Quantifying the intensity of planned interventions (very high 5, high 4, medium 3, medium-low 2, low 1, very low 0), again only for comparative purposes, yields the following results: historic core 15, transitional zone 15, and

residential periphery 6. This clearly demonstrates significant spatial selectivity in the planning of urban greening in the analyzed documents, with priorities and interventions much more intensively directed toward touristic and developmentally relevant parts of the city than toward the most densely populated residential areas.

Table 2 Spatial distribution of urban greening policy priorities in the analyzed documents

Document	Historic core	Transitional zone	Residential periphery	Dominant policy focus
Green Urban Renewal Strategy 2025–2030.	High	Very high	Low	Green infrastructure
Strategy for the Development of the Urban Area of Dubrovnik until 2027	Medium	Very high	Medium-low	Sustainable urban development
The UNESCO World Heritage Site Management Plan for the Old Town of Dubrovnik	Very high	Low	Very low	Heritage protection and tourism management
Environmental Protection Program of the City of Dubrovnik 2023–2026.	Medium	High	Medium-high	Climate adaptation and environmental protection

It should be noted that although this paper does not measure real estate prices directly, the discursively planned spatial concentration of green investments in the historic core and transition zone corresponds to a spatial pattern that precedes or even enables the gentrification processes (Bouzarovski et al., 2018; Gould and Lewis, 2016).

4.3. Everyday Green Needs and Informal Practices

The interview findings indicate that citizens observe differences in the intensity of planned interventions by spatial zone, as well as differences between their actual use of space and what is described in official documents. The thematic analysis of the collected data is organized around three themes: distancing from tourist-oriented green spaces, perceptions of spatial inequality in the availability of green facilities, and individualized participation with limited interest in formal participation.

"Well, I do not know, city greenery and parks… Gradac, I cannot remember the last time I was there. I know it is under reconstruction now, but I have not been there for years. I have no reason to go; it is crowded during the season, and even when it is not, it is impractical for me. The city greenery is beautiful, the city looks amazing, I like that they planted trees along the roads, but I do not see that it has any particular impact on us as residents of this city." (Marija, 56)

This quote illustrates how local residents recognize city green spaces as valuable and aesthetically pleasing, but do not perceive them as intended for their own everyday use. From this and other interviews, it is evident that interviewees use expressions of awe when talking about aesthetic value of space, which may indicate an internalization of the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Interlocutors also talk about patterns of avoiding or limiting the use of certain spaces perceived as "for tourists" rather than the local community, which feels excluded or faces practical difficulties accessing these spaces. A young mother from Mokošica states:

"I avoid the city in the summer. Going there with two small children during the season is tantamount to suicide […]. I feel that some of these spaces have been taken away from us citizens and given over to tourism. We are foreigners there in the summer." (Ana, 35)

Respondents state that they lack functional greenery with shaded parks where they could spend time with children or socialize. Green spaces are especially lacking in the residential periphery:

"Walking with a stroller through Mokošica in the summer is hell; there is no shade, no trees." (Ana, 35),

but also in transitional zones:

"What used to be green is now covered by apartments and private villas." (Ivo, 72)

These quotes highlight another theme: a general impression of spatial inequality regarding green spaces. In this context transitional zones (especially areas not directly along visible roads) and the residential periphery in particular, are seen as neglected:

"Mokošica only gets basic grass mowing, with no significant initiatives to benefit the citizens who live here," says Mario, 46.

Tourist guide Sandra, 44, observes

"As someone who lives outside the city walls, I notice a significant imbalance. The old town and the area adjacent to it are being developed in great detail. The part where tourists walk is carefully maintained. In other parts of the city, greenery is often reduced to roadside lawns, unless it is aesthetically enhanced again along the tourist routes. Residential areas lack functional, well-maintained parks, and the lack of green spaces and the overdevelopment of the area is painfully evident when it rains."

The third theme that emerged in the interviews is a lack of interest in creating participatory forms and interventions in urban planning. Although citizens recognize problems related to space, selective greening, and the loss of green areas, and oppose excessive construction and tourism, they are not inclined to engage actively in finding solutions. This may be due to distrust of political processes and awareness of ongoing privatization and questions of space ownership. In any case, green participation is experienced on an individual level, such as cultivating a personal garden next to the house, beautifying the area with ornamental plants, or appropriating a small plot of common space for cultivation:

"I notice and take my hat off to everyone who does this. They are isolated islands of normality in this concrete madness. People bring the soil themselves, plant [...]. This is some kind of resistance from the citizens." (Miho, 55).

On the other hand, they express distrust and resistance toward participatory forms:

"No matter what kind of public debates and polls, my son, it's all a show. Today, every foot of land in Dubrovnik is someone's private property or is reserved for some kind of investor. It is known in advance who paid and who is building. We citizens have no chance against private capital. You can shout as much as you want at the debate, but the law of the stronger and the thickness of the wallet ultimately decide where the concrete will be and where the apartment will be. That's why people do not even try anymore" (Ivo, 72).

These examples illustrate how citizens perceive urban greening and their specific needs related to this issue, and they highlight a gap between policy ideas and what citizens observe in their spatial environment, particularly the uneven distribution of resources and care across different city zones. While there is evident passivity and defeatism in the quotes, as citizens show no interest in participating in formal procedures, their narratives also reveal a strong orientation and sympathy toward micro-activities, whether legal or illegal. Within the framework of "right to the city" theory (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008, 2012), these bottom-up, (in)formal actions indicate a tangible need to reclaim urban space.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the green transition is usually defined as a structural shift in society and the economy toward sustainable models that minimize harmful environmental impacts and ensure long-term climate resilience, in the context of this paper, the green transition refers to urban greening as a key aspect of this process, manifesting as a socio-spatial and not only ecological phenomenon. It is important to emphasize here that the findings of this paper refer to the discursive shaping of policies, planned priorities in strategic documents and residents' perceptions, and not to the actual implementation of green transition measures, since the analysis of implementation and actual investments is beyond the scope of this research. Analysis of the City of Dubrovnik's strategic

documents shows that urban greening is not a neutral environmental policy. In the analyzed documents, urban greening is primarily associated with an aesthetic-symbolic discourse, emphasizing categories such as aesthetics, landscape, and tourism. The functional-socio-ecological discourse, which addresses green infrastructure, residents' well-being, climate adaptation, and participation, is less prominent.

Policy analysis also shows that, in the context of urban zoning, where the urban area is divided into three units (the city core – the old town and its immediate surroundings; the transitional area – Lapad and Gruž; and the residential periphery – Mokošica), there are differences in how these zones are addressed. Although all parts of the city are mentioned, spatial selectivity is evident. Priorities and interventions are more intensively directed toward touristic and developmentally significant areas than toward the most densely populated residential zones.

Although the qualitative research based on interviews is only illustrative here, the data confirm that citizens perceive spatial selectivity in the implementation of urban greening measures. The data suggest that interviewees simultaneously admire the beauty and aestheticization of the space, while also feeling that these spaces are intended for visitors rather than residents. The interviews further indicate that Dubrovnik residents do not trust official participatory channels for space management and they do not intend to participate in them. Instead, they tend to rely on individualized micro-activities and the arrangement of small areas, whether these are their own properties or shared or appropriated spaces adjacent to or between residential units.

Ultimately, the paper demonstrates how the green transition, as seen through urban greening in a small Mediterranean historical town, can reinforce existing tourism-oriented urban development patterns when social sustainability is weakly integrated into policy implementation.

The main theoretical contribution of the paper lies in its integration of the literature on green gentrification, overtourism, and selective sustainability, alongside its analysis of the mechanisms through which the green transition reproduces existing patterns of touristic urbanization. The paper's findings build on the literature on green gentrification (Anguelovski et al., 2018; Gould and Lewis, 2016). In this case, the context is a tourism-dependent city, where selectivity is examined through a mechanism that precedes or accompanies the material effects of gentrification and is mutually reinforced by them. The concentration of green investments in the historic core and transition zone, combined with neglect of the periphery, corresponds to the pattern described by Bouzarovski et al. (2018), which identifies how green transition measures that are declaratively intended for all residents reproduce existing spatial inequalities in practice. In this sense, the paper draws on the literature on overtourism (Peeters et al., 2018; Butler, 2018), showing that the pressure of excessive tourism is reflected not only in physical overcrowding, but also in which functions of greenery are recognized as relevant in planning documents and which are sidelined. Interview findings, in which residents on the one hand internalize the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011) and on the other hand express distrust toward formal participatory channels, indicate that the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008, 2012) in this context is realized primarily through individual, informal practices rather than through participation in institutional decision-making processes. In this way, the paper also expands the concept of selective sustainability, showing that it is not exclusively a spatial category, but can also be understood as a discursive one, as the difference between what documents declaratively advocate and what they actually conceive as concrete measures. In conclusion, this paper shows once again that tourism cannot be seen without its wider socio-spatial context (Koens and Milano, 2024), through the intertwined processes of urban planning and greening, as well as different forms of citizens' responses.

The main limitations of the paper are its focus on a single city, its analysis of development document texts rather than their implementation, and the limited number of interviews, which in the context of this paper served as supplementary findings and indicators of citizens' views on urban greening. Given these limitations, future research should include comparisons with other similar cities and, if possible, an analysis of actual budget investments and the implementation of urban

greening projects. Furthermore, future research should analyze the alignment between the objectives declared in strategic documents and the measures actually implemented. Such analysis could show whether the tourism-oriented pattern established at the policy and planning level is maintained in the actual allocation of budgetary resources and in implemented urban greening projects, thereby testing whether the selectivity observed in discourse and planning is merely declarative or is also transferred to the implementation level.

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