Green Transition and Housing Inequalities: Context and Uneven Outcomes

Roberta Cucca – NMBU

Vancouver-Canada-2011

Swiss Habitat Conference 2026

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Green Strategies and Housing Inequalities
Green policies can reinforce inequalities.

By Overlooking Inequalities
- Interventions concentrated in advantaged areas
- Neglect of vulnerable neighbourhoods
- Underestimation of social and climate vulnerability

By Amplifying Inequalities
- Property value escalation
- Displacement and green gentrification
- Socio-spatial segregation

(Anguelovski et Al. 2018)

GREEN STRATEGIES-
Greening and NBS

Sustainable Mobility - Densification

Energy Retrofitting

EMERGING GENTRIFICATION MECHANISMS

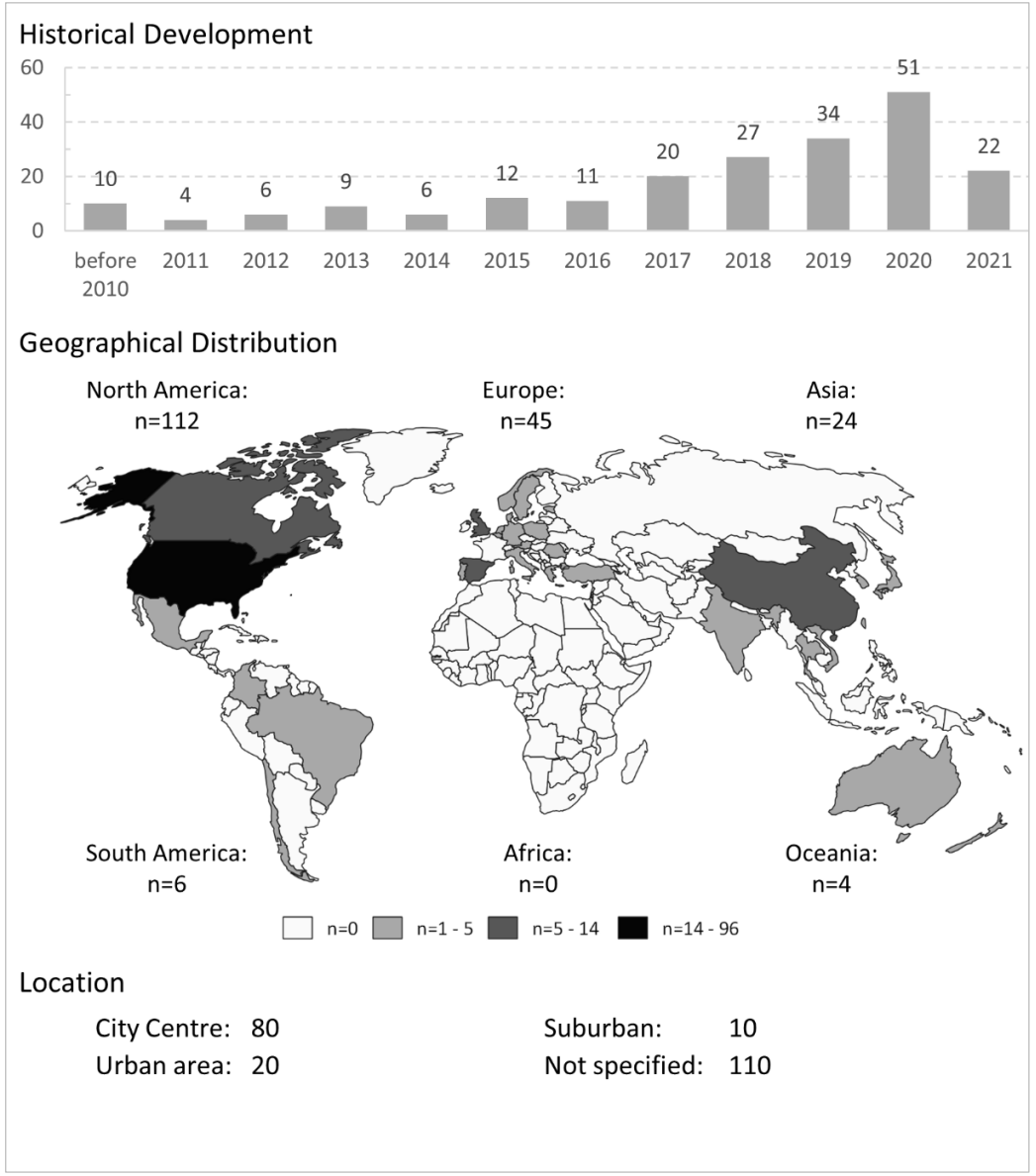
Green Gentrification

Renoviction

Newly-built Gentrification

Transit-induced Gentrification

Cucca R. Friesenecker M. and Thaler T., (2023) *Green Gentrification, Social Justice and Climate Change in the Literature: Conceptual Origins and Future Directions*, in Urban Planning, Volume 8, Issue 1, https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v8i1.6129



But research shows that environmental strategies **do not automatically** produce housing inequalities.

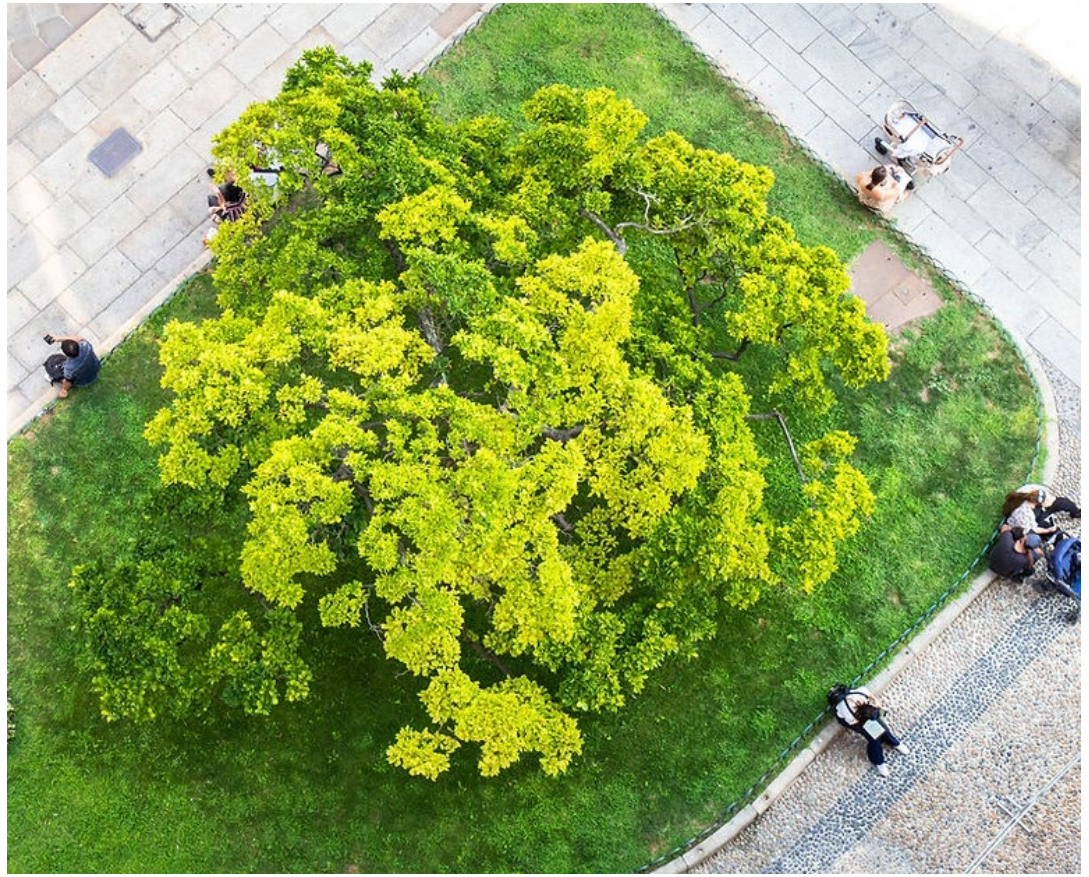
- New parks do not always lead to green gentrification
  - Retrofitting does not inevitably produce renovictions
  - Densification does not necessarily generate luxury housing only….

Conversely, they can **reduce** housing inequalities

- Energy-efficient retrofits lower bills and improve comfort.
- Densification can expand affordable housing and support equitable energy transitions.
- Greener, walkable areas improve health, well-being and climate resilience

A context-sensitive institutional approach to green housing transitions and housing inequalities

- Green strategies do not produce uniform housing outcomes.
- Context matters because it shapes how green transition strategies are filtered through different social, institutional, political, and spatial mechanisms.



REDUCING HOUSING INEQUALITIES

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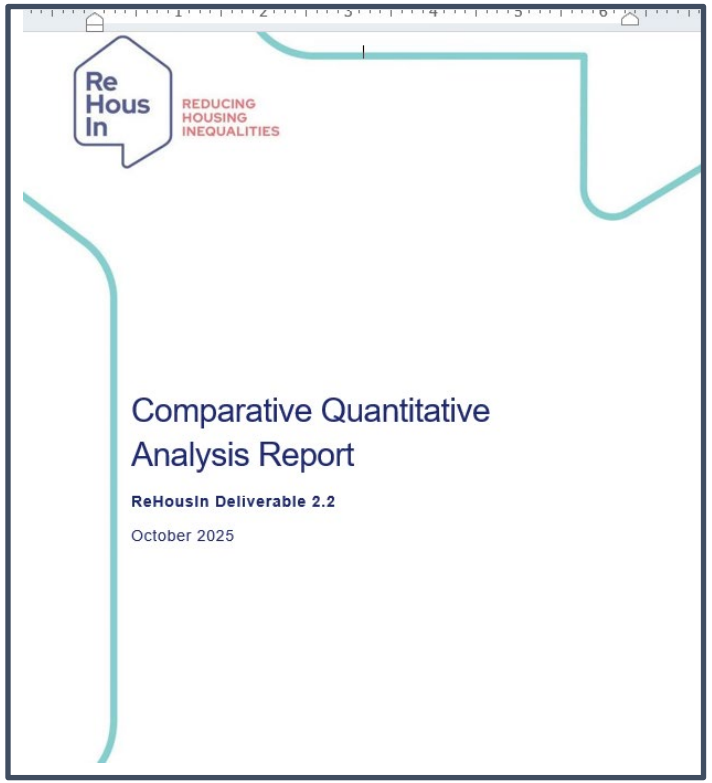
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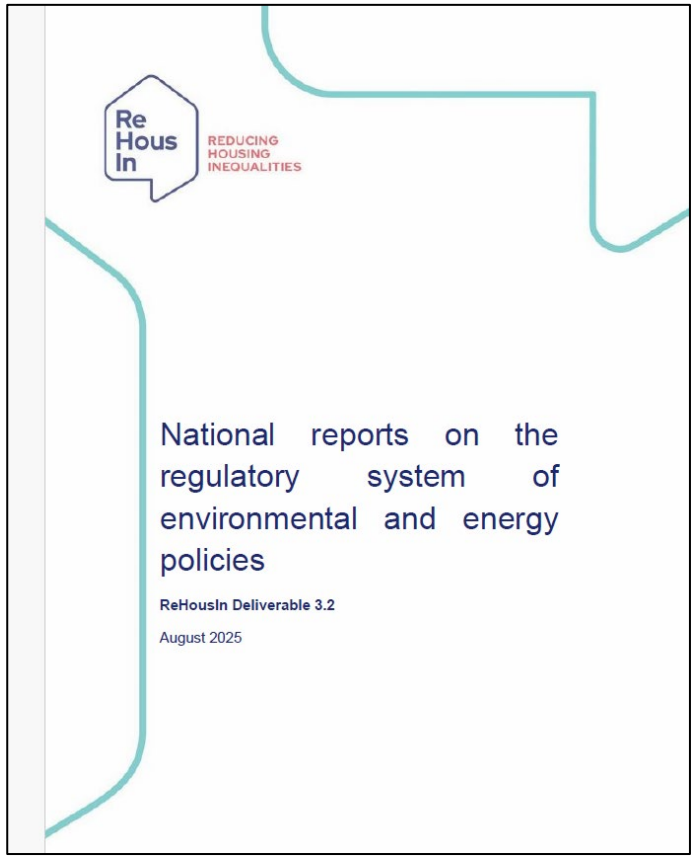
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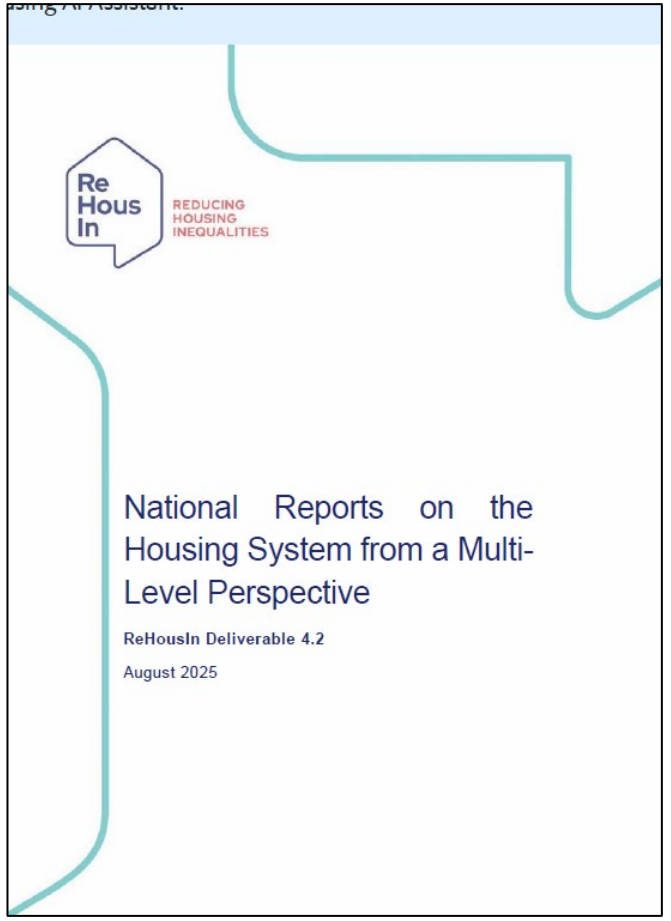
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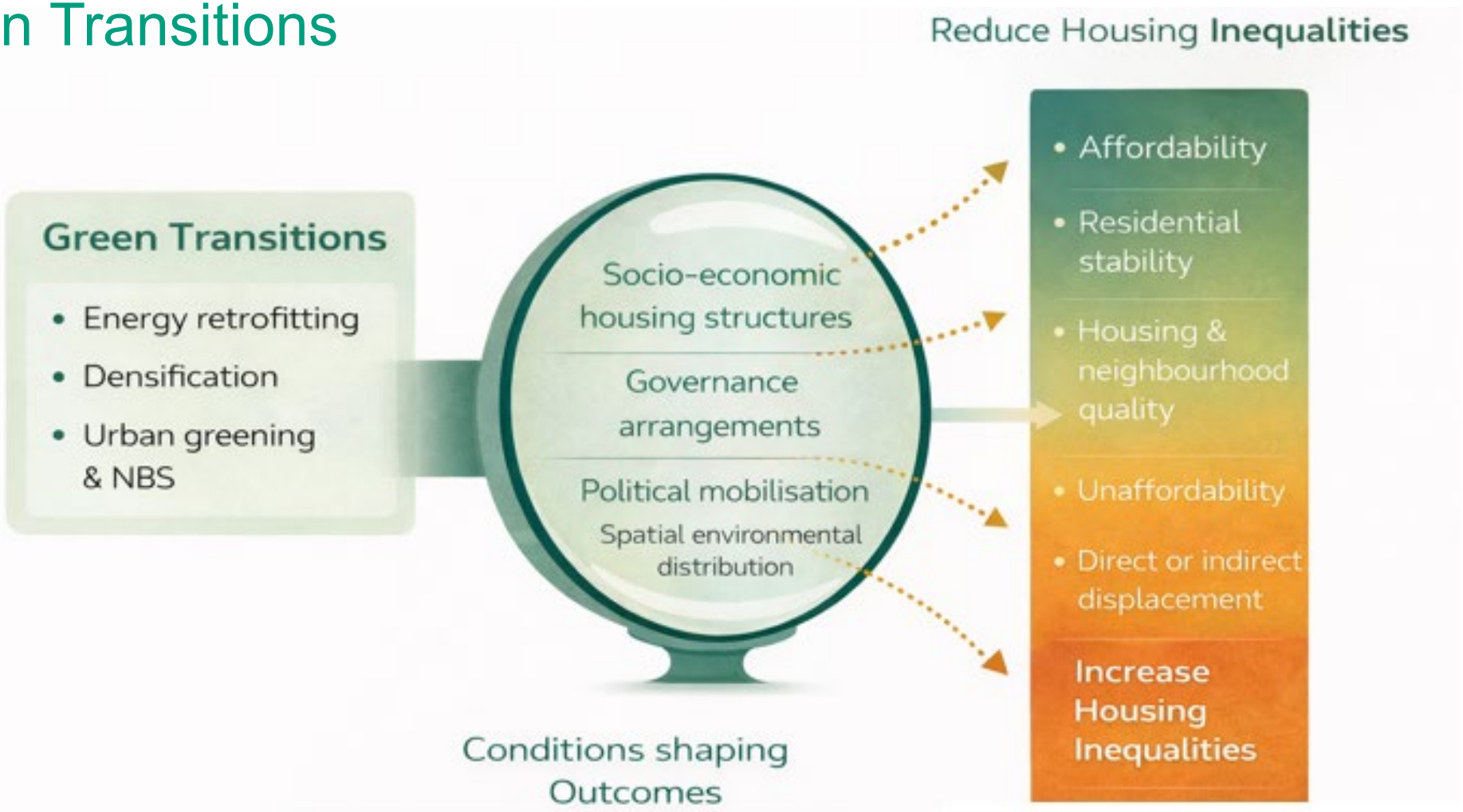
Unpacking the Conditions Shaping Housing Inequalities in Green Transitions



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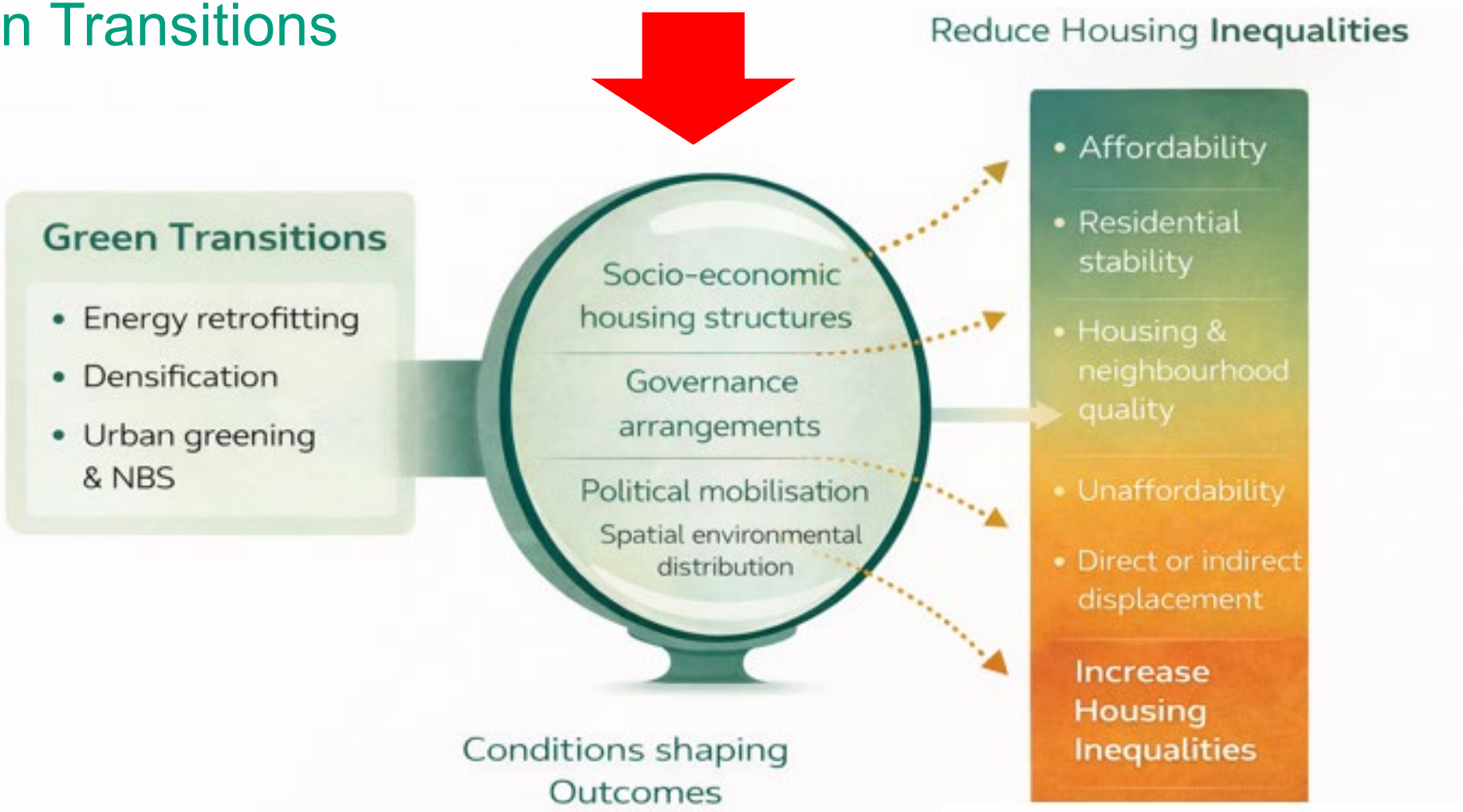
Unpacking the Conditions Shaping Housing Inequalities in Green Transitions



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1. Socio-economic demand structures

- Degree of **Housing Commodification**
- **Housing Pressure**
- **Tenure Structure**

Shape who can access green housing benefits, with **highly commodified housing systems and high-demand urban markets amplifying unequal access** to environmental benefits and affordable housing

2. **Spatial environmental configuration**

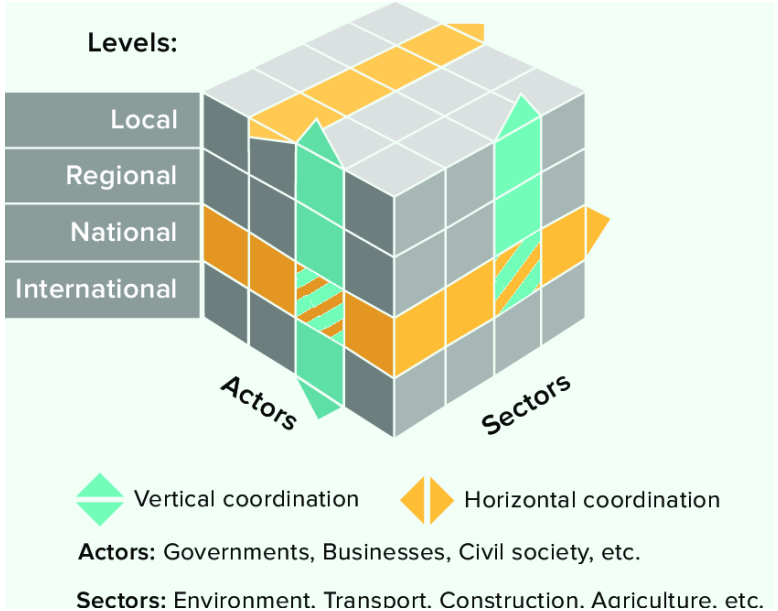
- Green Infrastructure Distribution
- Geography of Climate Adaptation Investments
- Pre-existing Environmental Inequalities

Unevenly distributed green infrastructures or green upgrading across urban areas often **reinforce** existing socio-spatial **inequalities or drives gentrification dynamics**

Oslo

3. **Policy and Multilevel governance**

- **Policy Integration** Across Sectors
- Redistributive **Housing Strategies**
- **Multi-level** Governance Capacity



Across countries:

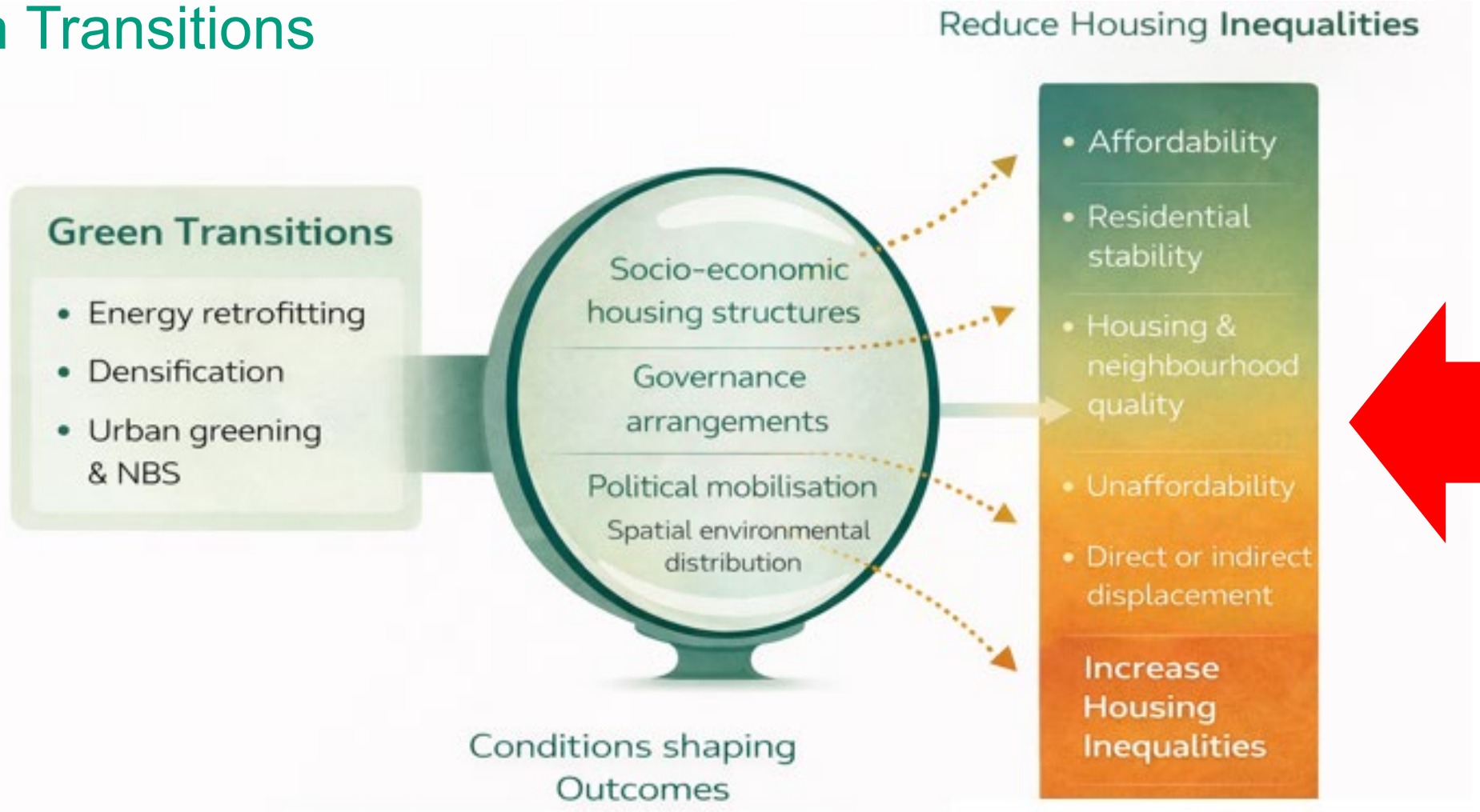
- climate and environmental policies tend to be designed at national or supra-national level, while housing governance remains strongly segmented and often locally implemented
- **coordination** between **levels** of governance is **uneven** (**Silos**)
- **green targets** are rarely translated into redistributive housing strategies.

4. Local Politics– awareness and decision-making process

- Strength of Civil Society Mobilisation
- Local Policy Innovation Capacity
- Participatory Governance Mechanisms

Across cases, the social effects of green housing policies are **shaped by** the degree of political mobilization, awarness and **civic engagement** surrounding housing and environmental justice

Unpacking the Conditions Shaping Housing Inequalities in Green Transitions



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Housing Inequality - Dimensions

Displacement (Direct and indirect)

⭐ Opportunities	⚠ Challenges
•**Environmental upgrading** can improve living conditions and housing **stability** in vulnerable neighbourhoods • Inclusive densification (social housing) can expand **access to central locations** • **Anti-displacement** policies linked to green strategies can protect existing residents	• **Renovictions** and retrofit-induced rent increases • **Green gentrification** linked to urban greening and NBS • **Indirect displacement** through neighbourhood revalorization through densification

Housing Inequality - Dimensions

Affordability

⭐ Opportunities	⚠ Challenges
• **Energy-efficient** housing reduces **long-term housing costs** • **Publicly subsidised retrofitting** can support **low-income** households • **Non-market housing provision in densified areas** can **buffer** housing cost increases • Densification can reduce **mobility poverty**	• Upfront **retrofit costs transferred** to tenants or buyers • **Increased property values** following environmental upgrading • Densification driven by **high-end development** • **Unequal access** to subsidies and green incentives for energy retrofitting • **Decrease social housing** following densification or energy retrofitting

Different Housing Inequality Vulnerability

Neighbourhood and Housing Quality

⭐ Opportunities	⚠ Challenges
• Improved **housing comfort** and **energy performance** • Enhanced environmental quality and **climate resilience** • Increased **access to green and blue** infrastructure • Better urban liveability, accessibility and **health outcomes** • **Upgrading** of ageing housing stock	• **Uneven spatial distribution** of environmental improvements • New **quality gaps** between renovated and non-renovated housing • **Small apartments, overcrowded conditions and loss of green** in densified areas • **Low –quality** energy retrofitting

The “**Vancouver paradox**” is extreme, but not exceptional — it is a warning sign for many cities.

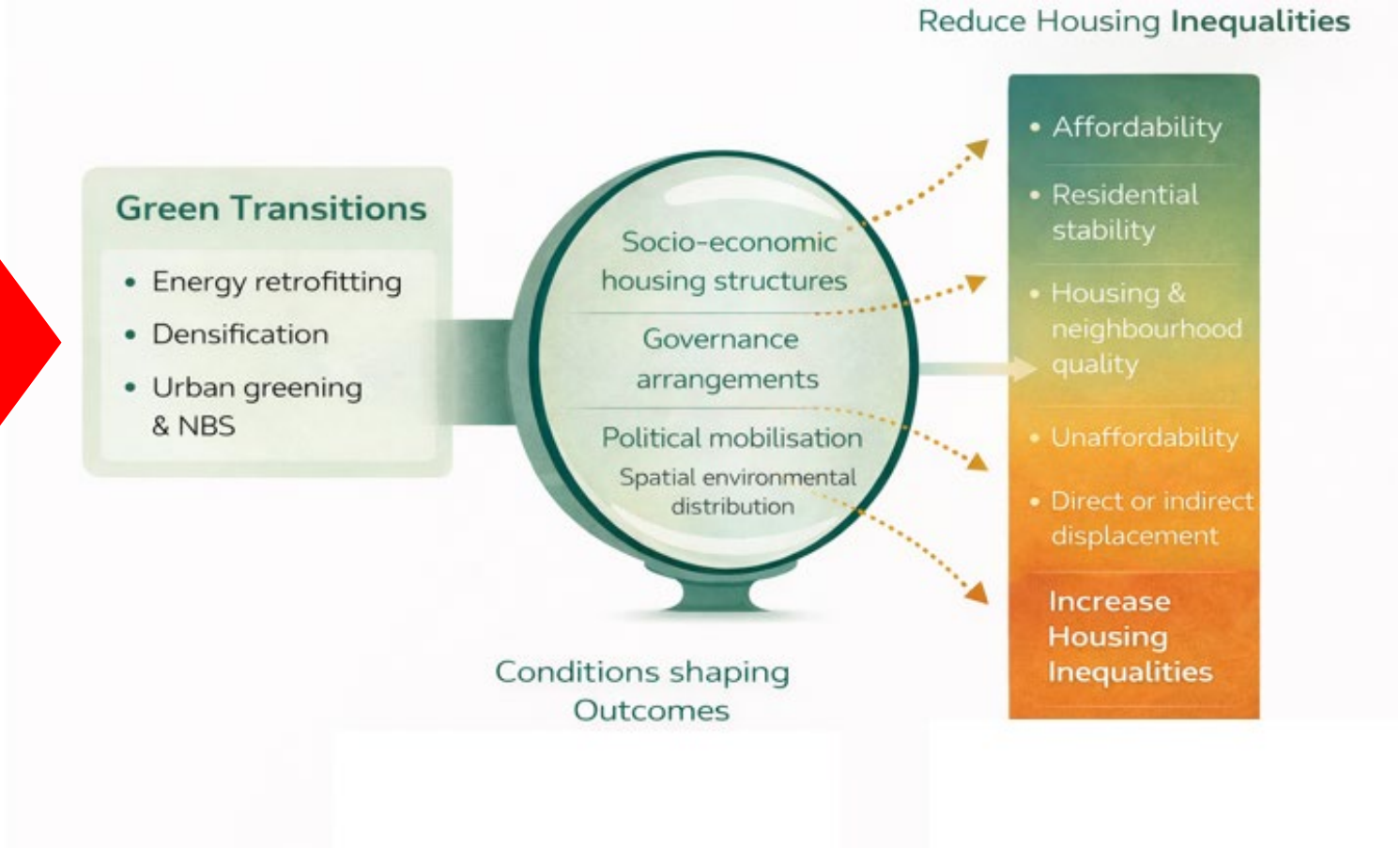
Green strategies can **drive, accelerate or amplify different dimensions of** housing inequalities, without

- ❖ awareness and participation
- ❖integrating housing and climate governance
- ❖promoting decommodification of (green) housing provision
- ❖protecting residential stability (anti-displacement measures)
- ❖reducing spatial environmental inequalities.

Limitations and research agenda

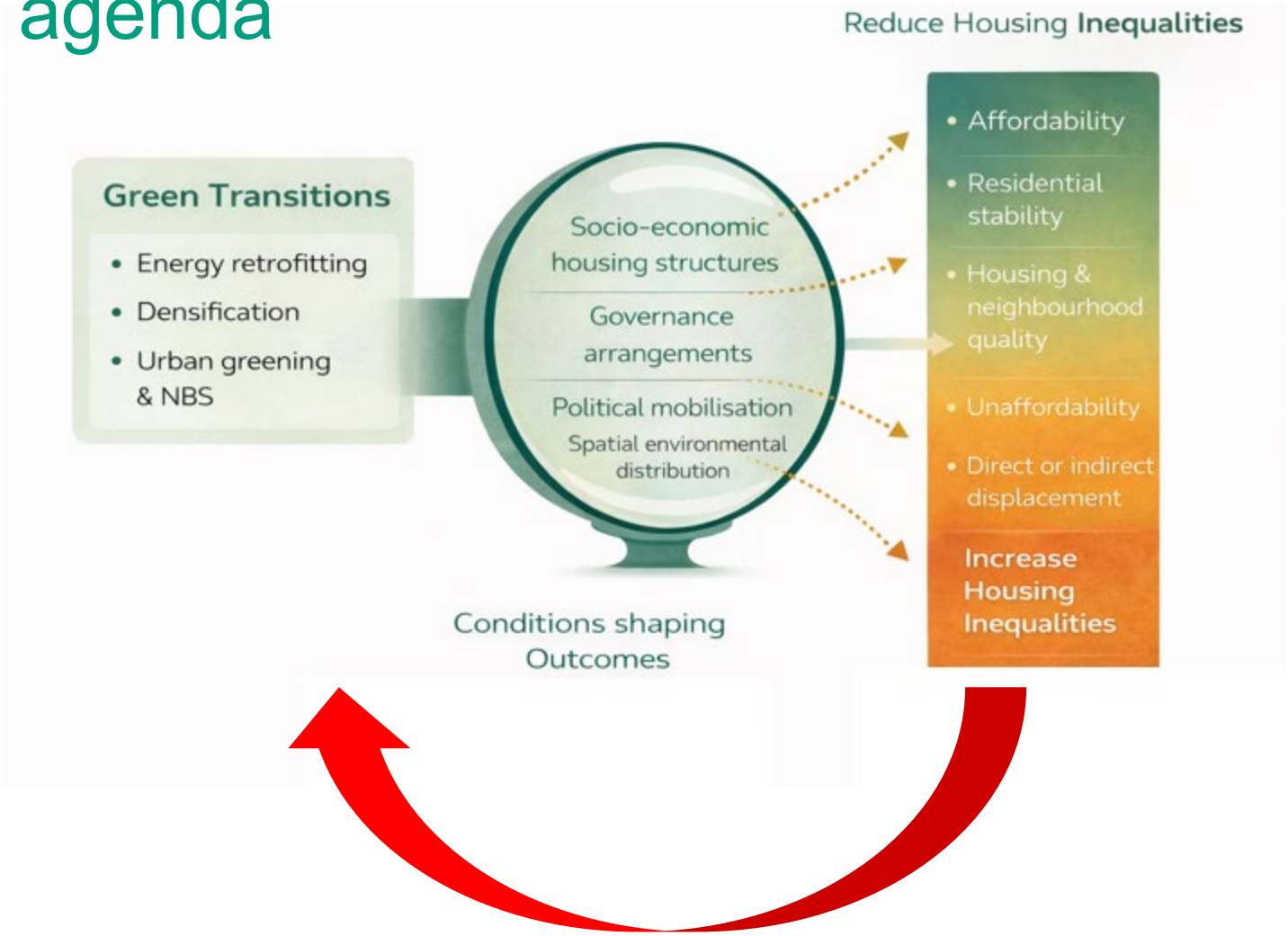
Better understanding of **economic governance of green policies and strategies** — who finances them, who implements them, and who ultimately benefits from them.

“The devil is in the details”



Limitations and research agenda

Housing policies that focus **only on affordability** may unintentionally **hinder or slow-down climate** adaptation and mitigation



Limitations and research agenda

Beyond Housing Consumption

What green housing transitions also involve is **production:** Building materials, Pollution, Construction supply chains, Land take =
Global environmental and social impacts

Thank you for your attention!!