

Perceived Effectiveness and Spatial Policy: Perspectives of SDIOs on Their Impact on Development

Research Thesis

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The Research Thesis Was Done in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning in the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning Under the Supervision of Associate Professor Emil Israel.

The author of this thesis states that the research, including the collection, processing and presentation of data, addressing and comparing to previous research, etc., was done entirely in an honest way, as expected from scientific research that is conducted according to the ethical standards of the academic world. Also, reporting the research and its results in this thesis was done in an honest and complete manner, according to the same standards.

תודות

כתיבת מחקר זה הייתה עבורי מסע ארוך של למידה, התבוננות והתפתחות - מקצועית ואישית כאחד. לאורך הדרך זכיתי לפגוש אנשים שליוו אותי, אתגרו את חשיבתי, עודדו אותי ברגעי הספק, ותרמו כל אחד בדרכו להשלמת המחקר. ברצוני להביע להם את תודתי העמוקה.

ראשית, אני מבקשת להודות לפרופ"ח אמיל ישראל, על סבלנות אין קץ בשנים מורכבות, על ליווי מקצועי וקפדני שאפשר לי להתפתח כחוקרת, על היכולת לראות את התמונה הרחבה לצד תשומת הלב לפרטים.

שנית, תודה לפרופ"ח אפרת אייזנברג, שהיתה שם ברגעי שבר וערעור אמונה ואפשרה לאוויר להיכנס לתהליך.

תודה גדולה לארגונים שהשתתפו במחקר. מעבר לזמן שהקדישו לעבודה, מגיעה להם תודה על האחריות מתוכה הם פועלים יום יום לטובת החברה הישראלית.

תודה להילה מיכוביץ' סיטון, הלוא היא הקרציה מפולניה, על שנים של נדנוד אדיב כדי לוודא שאני משיגה את המטרות שלי.

תודה למשפחה האדירה שלי על היכולת להכיל את סופי השבוע בהם לא הצטרפתי, את ימי ההולדת שפספסתי, את כמות הפעמים שאמרתי שאני נוסעת לעבוד על התזה.

תודה ליפתח, נעמי, הגר ואיתמר על שאתם אתם. זכיתי בפיס בבית שמאמין ותומך בחלומות שלי.

הגשת המחקר הזה היא אחד ההישגים הגדולים בחיי.

לא בשל המורכבות שלו, האימפקט שלו, או גודל האתגר – אלא בשל היקפי העיקשות שהעבודה הזו דרשה. השנים 2020 עד 2026 בישראל היו סוערות, מורכבות, מכאיבות ומציפות. הבחירה להתעקש להתמקד בפיתוח ידע בשביל עתיד המדינה היא בחירה בה אני גאה ודבקה גם בתחומים אחרים בחיים.

מי ייתן והמחקר הזה יהיה עוד כלי לטובת שגשוג החברה,

תלתן.

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Abstract

In the past decade, the presence of non-profit intermediating organizations has increased across a range of fields, from healthcare and welfare services to community advocacy. One such category is Spatial Development Intermediating Organizations (SDIOs), which have emerged as key actors mediating between communities and government within the field of spatial development. The growing role of such organizations is linked to shifts toward more neoliberal economic policies, characterized by privatization of public services and the delegation of responsibilities to non-state actors.

Despite their growing significance, existing literature does not sufficiently explain how SDIOs perceive their own effectiveness in policy advocacy and how they are perceived by their partners. Advocacy, in this context, refers to the efforts of SDIOs to influence public policy in ways that address community needs.

This study aims to contribute to addressing these gaps by examining SDIOs' perceived effectiveness in influencing policy, from both their own perspective and that of their partners. Additionally, the study considers how the broader economic and institutional context - ranging between welfare-state and neoliberal models - shapes perceptions of effectiveness.

The research was conducted in Israel, a context characterized by shifts between welfare-oriented and neoliberal policy frameworks. The study employed a qualitative research design. In the first stage, six SDIOs operating in the community and environmental sectors were selected, all of which engage in advocacy. Twelve semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with senior staff members of these organizations, using a snowball sampling method. In the second stage, four additional interviews were conducted with government representatives working alongside these SDIOs. Three more interviews conducted with community representatives, to capture external perceptions of effectiveness. Data was analyzed using thematic content analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, tensions, and shared practices.

Findings suggest that the perceived effectiveness of SDIOs is shaped by an integrated set of internal and external factors. These include: (1) the definition of advocacy as a core mission; (2) the quality of relationships with decision-makers; (3) the ability to generate both discursive changes (e.g., shared language and framing) and material outcomes (e.g., regulations and budget allocations); and (4) alignment with neoliberal expectations of measurable return on investment. While SDIOs often express a complex view of their own

effectiveness, government partners tend to perceive them as effective and valuable actors in shaping spatial policy with social and environmental dimensions.

This study contributes theoretically to understanding the role of subjective perceptions in evaluating the effectiveness of civil society organizations in policy advocacy. It suggests that effectiveness is not only an outcome measured through external indicators, but also a construct shaped by internal organizational perspectives. Practically, the findings have implications on developing evaluation tools in advocacy, the design of effective partnerships between civil society and government, and the ability of SDIOs to operate within public policy arenas while maintaining their social and environmental commitments.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the role of intermediary organizations in public governance has expanded significantly (Anglin, 2004; Bothello & Mehrpouya, 2019; Brass, 2018). These organizations increasingly operate at the intersection of government, civil society, and local communities, translating knowledge, coordinating actors, and advocating for policy change (McDermott, 2004; Krigman, 2010; Foo, 2018). Within spatial and urban policy processes, such organizations often function as mediating actors that connect different interests, facilitate collaboration, and promote new policy ideas (Nye & Glickman, 2000; Foo, 2018; Bryson, 2013). Intermediary organizations play a growing role in shaping policy agendas and supporting the implementation of complex governance processes that require cooperation between multiple sectors (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Meade, Shaw, & Banks, 2016).

Despite their increasing prominence, evaluating the effectiveness of advocacy conducted by such organizations remains a challenge. Advocacy outcomes are often indirect, long-term, and shaped through networks of actors rather than through single identifiable interventions (Gazley, 2008; Zhang & Guo, 2020). Policy influence may emerge gradually through changes in discourse, coalition building, or shifts in institutional priorities, rather than through clearly measurable outcomes such as formal policy adoption or budget allocations (Von Hoffman, 2012; Tulumello, 2016; Corell, 2008). As a result, traditional frameworks for evaluating organizational performance struggle to capture the full range of advocacy impacts (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Andrews & Bob, 2004).

This challenge becomes even more pronounced in contemporary governance environments shaped by neoliberal policy logics - an approach to governance that emphasizes market mechanisms, efficiency, and measurable performance indicators - where accountability frameworks often prioritize quantifiable outputs and indicators of success (Connell, 2010; Glass, 2014; Stiglitz, 2019). Within such contexts, organizations engaged in advocacy may face pressure to demonstrate effectiveness through rigid indicators, even when much of their influence occurs through relational and process-based mechanisms such as trust-building, coalition formation, and knowledge translation (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Fursova, 2018). Consequently, there is an ongoing tension between the complex and often indirect nature of advocacy work and the institutional demand for clear, measurable outcomes.

In such neoliberal governance contexts, the role of intermediary organizations becomes particularly significant. As states increasingly rely on non-state actors to deliver services and support policy implementation (Abel & Kunz., 2018; Connell, 2010; Glass, 2014; Hendricks, Powell, Katan, & Lowenstein, 2009), these organizations are expected to operate simultaneously as service providers, knowledge brokers, and advocacy actors. This dual positioning creates inherent tensions: while they are required to align with institutional demands for efficiency and measurable outcomes, they also aim to promote long-term, community-oriented change that is not always captured through such indicators (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Fursova, 2018; Galster, Tatian, & Accordino, 2006; Krigman, 2010; Saitgalina, 2022). Despite this growing relevance, limited research has examined how these broader economic logics shape SDIOs' own perceptions of advocacy effectiveness and the ways these are interpreted by their partners.

Against this background, understanding how advocacy effectiveness is perceived and interpreted by different actors becomes particularly important. While existing literature has explored the challenges of measuring advocacy outcomes (Bednarek, Shouse, Hudson, & Goldberg, 2016; Bullock & Lavis., 2019; Hudson, & Goldberg, 2016; Neubeck, Elg, & Schneider., 2014; Williamson, 2014), less attention has been given to how intermediary organizations themselves understand and evaluate their effectiveness, and how these perceptions compare with those of their governmental and community partners. Examining these perceptions can provide deeper insight into how advocacy impact is constructed, recognized, and negotiated within contemporary policy processes.

In many cases, effectiveness in advocacy is treated primarily as an external outcome: a change in policy, a budget allocation, or the adoption of a specific planning instrument (Schmid, Almog-Bar, & Nirel, 2008; Bullock & Lavis, 2019; Finley, He, Huang, & Hon, 2024). However, organizations that operate within complex governance environments often describe their influence through a broader set of processes and relationships that are not always captured by such formal indicators.

This gap becomes particularly relevant in the context of organizations that operate between sectors and actors, such as Spatial Development Intermediary Organizations (SDIOs). These organizations frequently act as mediators between governmental authorities, civil society actors, and local communities. Their work involves not only promoting policy ideas, but also facilitating dialogue, translating knowledge between actors, coordinating partnerships, and supporting the development of shared agendas within communities (Anglin, 2004; McDermott, 2004; Nilsson, 2018; Nye & Glickman, 2000;

Roy, 2012). In such settings, influence may emerge gradually through relational work and long-term engagement rather than through immediate policy outcomes.

As a result, the question of how effectiveness is perceived becomes central. If different actors involved in the same policy processes rely on different criteria to evaluate success, the same advocacy effort may be interpreted in different ways (Awazi, 2024; Bruce, et al., 2016; Dubus & LeBoeuf, 2019). An organization may see its work as effective because it has succeeded in building trust, creating partnerships, or shaping the language through which policy issues are discussed. Governmental actors, on the other hand, may focus more strongly on formal outcomes such as approved policies, implemented programs, or allocated budgets. Community actors may emphasize yet another set of criteria, such as the extent to which community needs were represented or whether local voices were successfully brought into decision-making processes.

Understanding these different perceptions is important for several reasons. First, it sheds light on how advocacy work is interpreted within complex policy environments. Second, it reveals how legitimacy and recognition are constructed between organizations and their partners. Finally, examining these perceptions can help explain why advocacy impact is often difficult to measure or even to agree upon among actors involved in the same policy process. Despite their importance, these dynamics remain underexplored in existing literature, and this study seeks to address this gap.

Against this background, the present study explores how SDIOs perceive their own effectiveness in policy advocacy and how this perception compares with that of their governmental and community partners. Rather than focusing solely on measurable policy outcomes, the study examines how different actors interpret influence, success, and impact within ongoing policy processes.

The study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do SDIOs perceive their impact on policy-making regarding the spatial aspect of the community? (2) Is there a significant difference between how organizations perceive their own effectiveness and how their relevant governmental or community partners perceive it? (3) How do neoliberal attributes manifest in advocacy approach and techniques?

It is hypothesized that SDIOs will perceive themselves as moderately effective, with stronger local impact and limited influence on broader policy due to structural neoliberal constraints. This is expected to reveal gaps between how SDIOs evaluate their own effectiveness and how their partners interpret it, depending on their position.

This study adopts Israel as a case study to examine the research questions and test the hypotheses. Israel provides a relevant context due to its ongoing shift between welfare-state and neoliberal policy frameworks (Auerbach, 2008; Korazim, 1988; Korazim-Körösy, 2000; Zychlinski, 2010; Hendricks, Powell, Katan, & Lowenstein, 2009), alongside the growing role of intermediating organizations in the field of spatial development. This makes it a suitable setting to explore how SDIOs operate and perceive their advocacy effectiveness within a complex and evolving governance environment. To explore these questions, the study adopts a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of SDIOs, government officials, and community actors involved in spatial policy processes. By examining how these different actors describe and interpret advocacy work, the research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how effectiveness is constructed and negotiated within complex governance environments.

The study also aims to contribute to broader discussions on the evaluation of advocacy work. By highlighting the different ways in which effectiveness is perceived and articulated, the research challenges narrow outcome-based definitions of policy influence and suggests a more nuanced understanding that includes relational, procedural, and discursive dimensions of impact.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: the next chapter reviews the literature on intermediary organizations, advocacy effectiveness, and governance environments that shape policy influence. Chapter Three presents the methodological framework and research design. Chapters Four and Five present the empirical findings, focusing on how SDIOs and their partners perceive effectiveness in policy advocacy. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the implications of these findings for understanding advocacy effectiveness and the role of intermediary organizations in spatial governance.

2. Background

2.1 Non-Profit Organizations in the Field of Spatial Development

In recent decades, there has been a steady increase in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs). This type of organization aims to benefit various sectors of society, contributing to the improvement of social wellbeing and advocating for disadvantaged communities (Auerbach, 2008), addressing social challenges such as unemployment, poverty, health, and other consequences of community disadvantage that harm mental and physical health and social mobility (Crubaugh, 2021). Generally, NGOs are seen by governments and communities as co-producers and interdependent partners, and sometimes as a third party involved in developing and administering social programs across different areas of society, such as community development and environmental agendas (Crubaugh, 2021; Agyeman & Evans, 2004). NGOs have risen in number and activity worldwide, to the point that contemporary society (mainly in the developed world) has been referred to as “the organized society” (Sahlin, 2015).

NGOs are at times considered intermediating organizations, positioned within the gap that lies between governments and communities. In mediating, these organizations take upon themselves the role of connecting the community with the state or local municipality, or to provide a service to the said community, thus assisting the government (local or national) in disseminating this need (Talò, 2017; Auerbach, 2008).

Intermediary organizations play a multifaceted role in fostering social causes by acting as catalysts for collaboration and networking among various stakeholders, including local communities, government bodies, and the private sector. These organizations are pivotal in coordinating relationships and establishing networks that enhance the effectiveness of public and social services (Shea, 2011). Intermediaries provide critical emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support that fosters innovation within communities and their leadership, and they also serve as essential conduits for the flow of resources and support, which are crucial for addressing problems and overcoming community-specific challenges (Lee, 2024; Cho, 2006).

Due to their mediating role, NGOs are credited for enhancing and strengthening the democratic representation of diverse social groups (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021), as they often focus on their ability to amplify marginalized voices, advocate for underserved communities, and influence policy through grassroots mobilization and advocacy,

especially with groups that might otherwise be excluded from the policymaking process. As separate entities unaffiliated with governmental agencies, NGOs have certain advantages that allow them to create a significant impact in cities and their communities: first, they are not entirely confined to political boundaries. They can be more flexible, adaptable, and sensitive to community characteristics and opportunities (Auerbach, 2008), although their activities are affected by the state's economic climate, as discussed further below. While functioning as a third party, NGOs are generally funded by governments, and are therefore subject to regulations and administrative requirements typically applied to the public sector (Yemini, 2018).

Second, NGOs allow donor funds to be channeled through integrity-driven and agile solutions to citizens, in contrast to how governments are sometimes perceived by funders (Brass, 2018). Many NGOs are also supported, directly or indirectly, by government funding which recognizes the importance of supporting NGOs to benefit communities and address their diverse social needs (Heil, 2018; Auerbach, 2008). The relationship of NGOs with funding resources is dynamic and responsive to shifts in political and economic conditions, and is largely impacted by the adoption of neoliberal attributes (Meade, Shaw, & Banks, 2016). This can result in a shift away from their declared not-for-profit aims toward a focus on market-based priorities, including the generation of profit and economic capital (Fursova, 2018).

When defining a non-profit organization as an “intermediate” it is first necessary to identify the elements that such an entity finds itself “between”, given that intermediating is relational in nature, mostly between those who aim to govern and those who are governed (Anglin, 2004). Intermediaries practice mediation not just by carrying and adapting information between the different parties, but also through involvement in policy implementation. Besides organizing knowledge and making it accessible to both sides, intermediaries are often involved with promoting the implementation of designed policies and participating with the policy development (Bothello & Mehrpouya, 2019). Intermediating NGOs operate across various fields of knowledge and influence, including spatial development.

2.1.1 Spatial Development and Non-Profit Intermediating Organizations

Humanity's challenges are diverse and are clearly apparent in the playing field of spatial development. Cities are fertile soil for society's aches, including economic inequality, racial segregation, displacement, and climate threats. As in other domains that require non-profit involvement, spatial planning and development is similarly reliant on non-profit engagement (Brandtner, 2020; Kim, Blaž, & Kamvasinou, 2021; Wang, 2023; Anglin, 2004). NGOs are key players in health infrastructures (Awazi, 2024), arts and culture (Chen, 2016), public housing (Brandtner, 2020), advocacy (Bruce, et al., 2016) etc. Some NGOs operate as service providers, and some as intermediaries serving the gap between governance and community.

Brandtner and Dunning (2020) highlight five main pillars to the role of NGOs in designing cities: “(1) forges of civic capacity, (2) participants in urban governance, (3) conveners of economic networks, (4) anchors of belonging, and (5) builders of the physical environment” (p. 295). The research emphasizes how these organizations shape the locality while simultaneously being shaped by urban processes in establishing goals, methods and agendas. In other words, NGOs are reciprocally influenced by and actively influence the environment in which they operate.

Some NGOs in spatial development work directly with the community, delivering services and providing welfare, knowledge and needs to community members (Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015). Other NGOs focus their work on supporting local organizations through funding, training or expert knowledge (Wang, 2023; Anglin, 2004). These organizations engage less directly with community members, instead working with community leadership and service providing organizations.

These organizations play a crucial role in urban development by acting as intermediaries between multiple stakeholders, including local governments, private developers, and community groups. As in other social fields, they help bridge the gap between top-down policy decisions and bottom-up community needs, ensuring that urban planning processes incorporate both sustainability and social equity principles

(Foo, 2018; Xie, 2024; Bryson, 2013; Heald, 2006).

Despite the growing recognition of the necessity of intermediating organizations in spatial development, there is no widely accepted term that fully captures their unique role in bridging governance, spatial planning, and social needs. To address this gap, I introduce the term “Spatial Development Intermediary Organizations” (SDIOs) to describe entities

that facilitate collaborative urban planning, mediate policy implementation, and ensure that spatial development balances environmental, economic, and social priorities.

The function of SDIOs can be categorized into several key roles:

- **Mediation between conflicting interests:** Acting as a neutral party that reconciles the priorities of government agencies, market developers, and relevant affected communities (Xie, 2024; Anglin, 2004; Fursova, 2018).
- **Advocacy for policy integration:** Promoting social and environmental concerns and embedding them in urban policies using lobbying and policy recommendations (Sahlin, 2015; Ostrom, 1990; Andrews & Bob, 2004).
- **Facilitating public participation:** Organizing coalitions, workshops, and other participatory mechanisms to increase community engagement in the planning process (Bryson, 2013; Aimers & Walker, 2016; Bhattacharyya, 2004).
- **Providing technical knowledge:** Supporting local governments and community groups with sustainable development strategies, urban resilience planning, and green infrastructure implementation (Anglin, 2004; Heald, 2006).
- **Monitoring implementation:** Tracking the implementation of urban sustainability initiatives and evaluating their long-term impact (Susskind, 1981; Fursova, 2018; Casey, 2004).

As illustrated in this list, SDIOs occupy a central position between different entities, ensuring that information is effectively transferred among all parties, decisions are made jointly, and changes reflect the interests of the stakeholders involved in the process. These organizations serve as knowledge brokers, translating scientific data, community needs, and policy frameworks into actionable plans to ensure equitable urban development.

SDIOs facilitate resource allocation, encourage collaborative networks, and enhance community engagement. By promoting sustainable and inclusive urban growth, their role is crucial in addressing the multifaceted challenges of urbanization (Wang, 2023). SDIOs effectively function as a bridge, enabling dialogue between parties that use different terminology and procedures; from top-down and bottom-up interactions among citizens, associations, and municipalities to regional and national institutions (Sahlin, 2015; Talò, 2017). These roles are reflected in the various actions and focal areas undertaken by SDIOs around the world.

SDIOs contribute to the development of sustainable, smart, equitable, economically vibrant, and environmentally responsible cities. By acting as bridges in the urban fabric, these organizations enhance policy responsiveness and inclusivity (Saitgalina, 2022). In some contexts, SDIOs act as a catalyst for development when the market is in a slow phase (Kim, Blaž, & Kamvasinou, 2021), and at times as an advocate for community needs (Anglin, 2004; Crubaugh, 2021).

Some organizations focus on fiscal aspects of spatial development and are motivated to revive deteriorating cities and neighborhoods. Social activists recognized the need for investments to support local development, where banks were reluctant to invest. This led to the creation of financial SDIOs, such as social banks, offering high risk loans to low-income residents with the purpose of stimulating the local economy (Von Hoffman, 2012). These SDIOs function as a mediator between local development intermediaries and philanthropy entities. Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) in the U.S. is an example of a financial organization, assisting with funds for low- and medium-income residents that cannot gain access to credit. This enables an increase in property value and improves housing (Anglin, 2004).

In Korea, after a few years of hyper urban development, the market slowed down due to the 2008 global economic crisis, leading to conflicts with citizens from disadvantaged neighborhoods and a demand to improve deteriorating areas. Thus, the Korean government incorporated new mechanisms, and started supporting the creation of SDIOs in 2013. Since then, these organizations have acted as entities that both improve existing built environments and contribute to the creation of sustainable community life. One major outcome of this process has been increased resident involvement and participation, which in turn strengthens community support for development projects (Kim, Blaž, & Kamvasinou, 2021).

In Italy, SDIOs have identified the need to narrow gaps in marginalized communities by fostering collaboration among the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Gaps are growing between the “centers”, which are intense urban areas, and the more distant “periphery”, which offers less opportunity and accessibility to employment, culture and self-development. To approach these challenges, several intermediaries work to accelerate the development process by promoting local volunteering, transportation to employment and advocacy for the specific needs of periphery communities (Salustri & Viganò, 2018).

SDIOs identify several key challenges to address, including narrowing social and economic gaps (Salustri & Viganò, 2018), promoting sustainability and climate resilience in cities

(Soberon, Anchez-Chaparro, & Smith, 2022), and supporting community-oriented development (Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015).

2.1.2 Community Development and Community SDIOs

The community development field intends to promote equitable societies and enhance democratic values by collective civic engagement and participation. These disadvantaged communities are supported by empowering residents to participate and lead local grassroots initiatives (Fursova, 2018). Over the past six decades, the field has grown into a significant multidisciplinary force in the ongoing, multifaceted process of urban revitalization (Anglin, 2004). Community development organizations (CDOs) have developed capacities to provide affordable housing, coordinate social services, and advocate for healthier communities (Schnake-Mahl, 2017).

CDOs are a subset of non-profit organizations (NPOs) that have operated worldwide since the 1960s to address community needs, underdeveloped assets and resources, public housing, economic development, and governance advocacy (Anglin, 2004; Heil, 2018; Auerbach, 2008; Opare, 2007). CDOs emerged as a way of revitalizing disadvantaged neighborhoods¹ and helping residents access better opportunities, while also improving their well-being through self-help and community action (Schnake-Mahl, 2017).

Disadvantaged neighborhoods emerge as a result of several structural forces. One such force is institutional discrimination, produced through government policies and regulations - such as mortgage lending practices and access to approved credit - that favor certain populations while leaving other neighborhoods systematically underinvested. Another force is neighborhood labeling effects, shaped by the social order of a city, which stratifies neighborhoods into different levels of priority. Once a neighborhood is socially and spatially positioned, cultural and social mechanisms reinforce these patterns, maintaining the “roles” assigned to different areas of the city (Crubaugh, 2021).

Another contributing force is social isolation, in which neighborhoods become disconnected from the main processes of the city, whether through limited access to employment opportunities or through physical and cultural separation from the city’s identity. These lead to exclusion from governmental processes and institutionalized decision making (Crubaugh, 2021). Once a neighborhood experiences disadvantage, it will

¹ While this study is not limited to the neighborhood scale, much of the relevant literature on CDOs focuses on that level because of their close engagement with local communities.

usually hold over time and be impacted by more than one discriminating force, deepening the neighborhood disadvantage (Vidal, 1995; Crubaugh, 2021).

In their work, Anglin and Montezemolo (2004) define a community as "developed" when it exhibits a set of features that combine both social and physical aspects. Physical elements include defined boundaries and access to social resources and economic services. Social elements include citizen engagement in the neighborhood, the presence of diverse institutions that contribute to quality of life, and community demand for attention and results from formal governance institutions (Anglin, 2004). CDOs aim to improve the quality of life and the ability and freedom to choose the kind of life residents want to live (Talò, 2017). This aim is achieved through both social and physical means, including investment in environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic growth. Community development activities range from resident empowerment and engagement in comprehensive neighborhood planning to the implementation of complex physical needs, such as affordable housing and local businesses (Heil, 2018; Crubaugh, 2021; Roy, 2012). Reducing neighborhood disadvantages is a central goal of CDOs, accomplished by improving individual welfare, fostering collective efficacy, and increasing residents' willingness to act cohesively for the common good- for example, collaborating to address shared challenges such as crime and violence (Crubaugh, 2021).

By positioning themselves "in the middle", between community members and the state or municipality, CDOs are pulled by opposing forces, becoming a crossroads of interests. On one hand, they empower the community and support local leadership; on the other, they work with government officials to secure funding and develop programs (Heil, 2018; Roy, 2012; Talò, 2017; Anglin, 2004). Ideally, these interests would align to create a "developed community," where funding goes hand in hand with community empowerment, but this is not always the case. The community and government often perceive empowerment and capacity building differently, highlighting the crucial role of mediation in revitalizing disadvantaged neighborhoods and fostering community development.

In addition to efforts within the neighborhood and community, CDOs also aim to improve well-being in disadvantaged communities by promoting relevant policies (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Heil, 2018; Krigman, 2010).

Non-profit organizations in the field of community development, like in other social fields, use advocacy to influence public policies and promote community goals and needs (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). As a bridge to communities, CDOs can identify the priorities and goals of residents and work to see those goals realized, in part by serving as a neighborhood

representative that can advocate on behalf of residents with city government and developers (Fursova, 2018). Most CDOs have policymaking ambitions and include policy influence among their organizational priorities (Nilsson, 2018). Examples of these efforts include protecting low-income tax laws, forming government control programs for deteriorating neighborhoods and establishing new tax credits (McDermott, 2004).

As noted, CDOs promote bottom-up resident participation, which often emerges from inequalities and disadvantages, encouraging communities to challenge government policies out of discontent (Fursova, 2018). Given governments' interest in maintaining market and capital stability, CDOs are compelled to align with government funding and minimize conflicts and frictions within communities. While many positive outcomes align with the intentions of CDOs, unintended consequences can also arise, at times harming the community by producing the opposite effect.

CDOs can also exacerbate residents' inequalities and increase neighborhood disadvantages. This can occur when collaborative governance suffers from funding deficits; for example, when a city or state provides a non-profit with full responsibility for delivering development programs to a neighborhood but fails to allocate sufficient resources to cover the costs. As a result, certain residents and neighborhoods do not receive the essential services they require (Crubaugh, 2021).

The tendency of CDOs to be pulled between opposing sides stems not only from their role as mediating entities, but also from the deepening neoliberal mindsets in non-profit organization, such as marketization, professionalization and service provision (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021). As political economies shift toward neoliberal approaches - moving away from the view that governments are responsible for regulating markets, even within capitalist systems - CDOs increasingly align with neoliberal economic strategies. This shift has led many organizations to move away from an emphasis on empowering community control, working closely with residents, and building political capital, toward prioritizing neighborhood revitalization and physical development (Heil, 2018).

As CDOs adopt more neoliberal approaches, their effects on neighborhoods evolve and develop additional layers. Although these organizations often aim to empower communities, their focus on improving neighborhood appearance and encouraging local businesses, thereby making neighborhoods more attractive to new residents, can also contribute to the out-migration of existing and disadvantaged populations (Crubaugh, 2021). CDOs may decrease neighborhood disadvantages, not by improving the welfare of existing residents, but by gentrification and displacement of original residents. They may

also contribute to the exclusion of residents and the replacement of elected leadership with alternative decision-making mechanisms² (Crubaugh, 2021).

CDOs vary in the level of formalization and size. Grassroots or community-based organizations (CBOs) are local CDOs that rely on the talent, skills, and volunteering of community residents (Opare, 2007; Silverman, 2008; Walker, 2010). The CBOs serve as intermediate agents between residents and formal institutions, focused on building a sense of community by empowering local leadership. The mediating attributes are reflected in actions that convey both community culture and institutional language (Talò, 2017). CBOs emerged from the agenda of multisectoral partnerships, integrating local businesses into the process of community development, which was previously dominated solely by social and governmental entities (Von Hoffman, 2012).

CBOs create a range of programs that focus on neighborhood revitalization, including residents' empowerment, economic development, public housing, safety, and social services. CBOs employ many different models to target the physical inefficiencies of neighborhoods, such as public housing, affordable housing, business, and community centers. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston is an example of a CBO that engaged in community changes including building affordable housing, providing jobs and running campaigns to clean up abandoned lots and streets, which motivated residents to take care of the streets and one another, ultimately decreasing local crime rates (Sharkey, 2017).

Another example is the work of local action groups (LAGs), CBOs that support underprivileged communities in Italy (Talò, 2017). The LAG functions as a mediator between active citizens and formal institutions such as the city municipality or region. LAGs, like other local community development mediators, enable the joint creation of a shared narrative of entities bound together by a cultural, political, or geographic identity. By creating a joint table, participation can involve active residents alongside non-profit organizations and entrepreneurs, enabling engagement not only by individuals but also through corporate social responsibility (Talò, 2017). This unique blend of interest and language requires the CBO to mediate and create a common ground.

The organizations practicing community development vary on a spectrum of models and impact, depending on the countries they operate in. Neighborhood development

² While this study examines spatial development across various scales, most of the literature on community development focuses on the neighborhood level. Therefore, this study draws on mechanisms identified at smaller geographic scales and considers their implications for broader, regional levels.

organizations are a type of CBO that operate independently within their focal neighborhood, rather than from a city center or a national association. Most are resident- and volunteer-based but formally organized as non-profit entities, creating official organizations rather than informal groups of neighbors (Crubaugh, 2021).

In Taiwan, one focus of community development was the preservation of old cultural assets to reframe a new Taiwanese identity. The process was top-down, manufactured by the government, and then invited CDO involvement in working with the residents (Chen, 2016). In Israel, established as a welfare state, community development processes were rooted in government delivery. It was only in the 1990s, due to government neighborhood revitalization projects, that the field gained enough knowledge and prestige to have non-governmental CDOs begin operating in the country (Sadan, 2009, pp. 81-82).

Another example is the "lease-purchase" model in the U.S., which involves acquiring and rehabilitating vacant or condemned homes, then leasing them to poor tenants with the option to purchase them after a 15-year residency (Roy, 2012). The "lease-purchase" model exemplifies the long-term financial and developmental point of view of the CDOs in supporting disadvantaged residents.

One of the most researched models of CBOs in the U.S. are the community development corporations (CDCs) (Silverman, 2008). CDCs seek to empower communities in disadvantaged neighborhoods to take control over governance and economic distress (Heil, 2018; Anglin, 2004; Schnake-Mahl, 2017; Roy, 2012). They are considered neighborhood advocates, ensuring that community members are involved in decision making, especially in planning and redevelopment of the neighborhood. For that reason, one CDC role is to identify the goals and priorities of residents, and advocate for those with city officials and businesses (Heil, 2018). This role exists worldwide across different approaches to community development (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Auerbach, 2008; Chen, 2016).

On the other end of the scope of community development, there are regional or national CDOs that are set up to support and increase the impact of CBOs. Those are usually bigger, formalized, well-funded and are national or even international on their scale of activity (Opare, 2007). Like CBOs, the national community development organizations also perform as intermediaries, though the mediation occurs between government entities and community-based organizations (Anglin, 2004).

These types of organizations, which operate across multiple governance levels and facilitate both local implementation and national policy engagement, are defined in this study as Spatial Development Intermediary Organizations (SDIOs). They are characterized

by their role in bridging between grassroots needs and institutional decision-making in the spatial and community development arena.

An example of a community SDIO is All Sweden Shall Live (ASSL), a rural development organization operating on a national scope (www.helasverige.se, 2022). ASSL combines efforts to influence policymaking with support for local or regional community development projects (Nilsson, 2018). Since its establishment in 1989 with the objective to provide knowledge to local development groups and provide tools for impactful community work, ASSL has assisted over 5,000 grassroots CBOs in Sweden. Besides the local aspects, the ASSL is considered a direct link for rural communities to the government and is also funded by the government (Nilsson, 2018).

Another community SDIO is Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), an organization in the U.S. that works on a national level to offer funding to local CDO in equity investments, loans, and grants (Krigman, 2010; <https://www.lisc.org/>, 2022). LISC supports revitalization projects with construction, development, rehabilitation, and financial aids as assisting down-payments and mortgage financing (Galster, Tatian, & Accordino, 2006).

Though all relationships are complex and rarely one-directional, Figure 1 shows a useful way to structure the community development field.

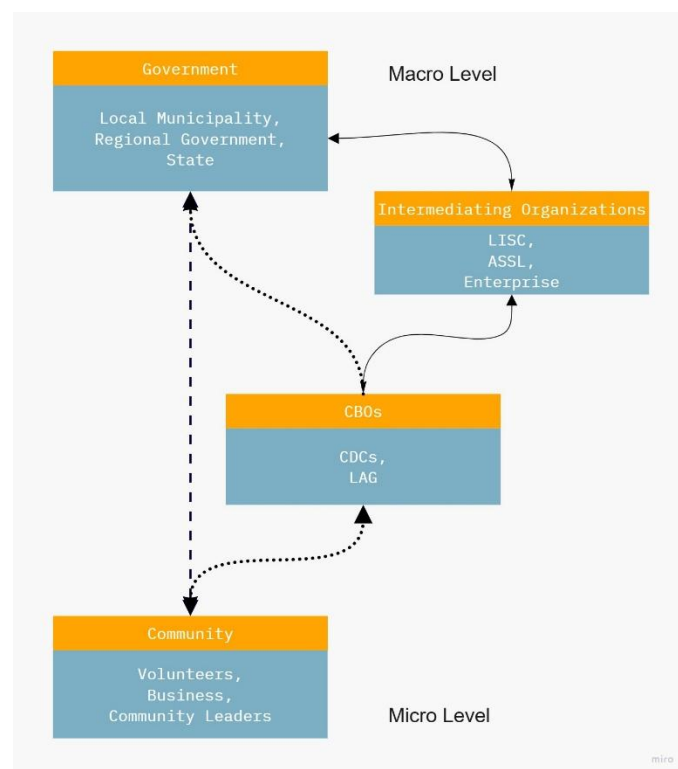


Figure 1: Micro and Macro Levels in the Community Development Field

At the bottom level, there are micro-level entities, such as special interest groups, neighborhoods, villages, towns, etc. (Bhattacharyya, 2004). CBOs work mainly with micro-communities, mediating between them and local formal leadership, municipalities and decision-makers. At the top of the hierarchy are the macro entities, such as cities, regions, states, nations, and international alliances (Bhattacharyya, 2004). The SDIOs, such as LISC, ASSL and Enterprise represent the layer that mediates between the CBOs and the macro entities (Figure 1). Though CBOs can have direct work with governmental entities, SDIOs occupy a mediating role between the CBO level and governmental level. As shown, SDIOs usually do not work directly with residents and micro communities.

While the structure appears hierarchical, SDIOs also translate bottom-up needs into policy discourse and mediate top-down decisions to align with local contexts. For example, ASSL may collect data and needs from hundreds of rural CBOs and present them in aggregated form to influence national rural development policies. At the same time, ASSL can also play a crucial role in translating national policies into localized action by supporting their implementation across a broad network of grassroots organizations. In doing so, it leverages its critical mass to both refine policy design based on insights from the field and to enhance the scale of policy implementation, ensuring that national strategies are adapted to diverse community contexts (Nilsson, 2018).

Since SDIOs have no official formal regulatory authority, their power lies in mediating. They perform as an additional party in the field, depending on their ability to create meaningful partnerships and raise funds. Hence, it makes sense that a significant percent of their efforts should be devoted to government and industrial entities, as they depend on those funds (Talò, 2017).

CDOs have been considered important and effective in the last six decades (Crubaugh, 2021; Heil, 2018; Roy, 2012; Schnake-Mahl, 2017). Studies exploring the impact of CDOs found a range of positive and desired changes in the community of focus. The impact of CDOs range from strengthening residents, forming networks of community activists, improving neighborhood quality, and supporting local economic growth (Crubaugh, 2021; Anglin, 2004; Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015).

Studies dedicated to the impact of community SDIOs (organizations at the regional or national level) identify them as key players in motivating CBO effectiveness, whether by developing professionalism, supporting fundraising, and offering fiscal sponsorship

(McDermott, 2004). Community SDIOs engage in training and technical assistance for grants to help CBOs develop managerial and technical capabilities among their staff and boards. Detroit's community SDIOs supported upgrading financial management tools. In Washington, DC, a community SDIO provides tailored technical assistance and guidance (Nye & Glickman, 2000). Spera, a community SDIO in Denmark, supports hundreds of local development project in rural communities and leads a collective forum of key stakeholders engaged in rural development (Hedström & Littke, 2011).

Community SDIOs spotlight opportunities and provide funds for organizational assessments and consultants for CBO planning, while also encouraging CBOs to network with local non-profits and for-profit organizations to increase their political support (Nye & Glickman, 2000). In Cleveland, for example, Enterprise, as of 2004, supported CBOs in securing over \$4.4 billion in grants, loans, and equity to build or renovate over 144,000 affordable homes, and also helped tens of thousands of hard-to-employ community members find jobs (McDermott, 2004).

By the numbers, Sharkey (2017) found that an additional 10 community non-profits per 100,000 residents is associated with a six percent decrease in the murder rate, a six percent decrease in the violent crime rate, and a five percent decrease in the property crime rate.

2.1.3 Environmental Urban Development and SDIOs

Besides community challenges addressed by non-profit intermediating organizations, environmental issues are another focal area in spatial development. Environmental challenges commonly associated with urbanization are diverse and include urban sprawl and loss of biodiversity (Soga & Gaston, 2016), air pollution (Xie et al., 2020), water pollution and water management (McDonald et al., 2014), heat islands with extreme temperatures (Stone, 2005), waste management (Hoornweg & Bhada-Tata, 2012), and resource depletion (Seto, Parnell, & Elmqvist, 2013).

Spatial planning systems have been in transition over the past decade, with environmental policies increasingly integrated as a central theme. Spatial development is vital for addressing complex environmental challenges such as climate change, energy security, and sustainable communities (Nadin, Dąbrowski, & Fernandez-Maldonado, 2021; Stead & Evert, 2009), and more policies are now incorporating ecological issues to enable coordinated solutions. As cities experience increasingly visible impacts from climate change, population growth, and social inequalities, incorporating sustainability principles

has become a global priority in urban development. However, traditional approaches to urban development often prioritize economic growth and infrastructure efficiency, sometimes at the expense of community needs and environmental sustainability (Bryson, 2013). To address these gaps, non-profit organizations (NPOs) have emerged as key intermediaries, promoting sustainable policies, community-oriented planning, and inclusive decision-making processes.

As in other social fields, the environmental sector also includes non-profit organizations that assume mediating roles, primarily to enhance public participation with planning sustainable cities and communities (Nadin, D., Dąbrowski, & Fernandez-Maldonado, 2021; Bryson, 2013), ensuring that solutions are both effective and contextually appropriate. Unlike governmental entities, which are often constrained by political considerations, or private developers, whose primary focus is economic returns, NGOs serve as relatively independent actors capable of mediating between interests, ensuring that environmental policies align with community priorities (Foo, 2018). As noted in Chapter 3.3.1 on community development and community SDIOs, in environmental contexts these organizations operate at the intersection of governance, activism, and research, translating sustainability goals into practical urban policies while empowering local communities to engage in planning processes.

Environmental SDIOs play a crucial role in fostering environmentally sustainable spatial development. They serve as vital links between diverse stakeholders, including governmental bodies, private sector entities, and local communities, ensuring that sustainable practices are effectively integrated into spatial planning and development projects (Soberon, Anchez-Chaparro, & Smith, 2022; Bryson, 2013). Non-profits in the field of environmental development act as intermediaries between communities, governments, and private developers to ensure that environmental sustainability and community needs are integrated into necessary policies (Bryson, 2013). Mediating for environmental community needs employs practices similar to those used in community development, with some distinctions. While mediating for community needs aims to empower residents through equality, community assets and capacity building, mediating for environmental causes focuses on highlighting the importance of climate readiness, equal access to natural green spaces, and encouraging community engagement in planning processes (Bryson, 2013; Nadin, Dąbrowski, & Fernandez-Maldonado, 2021).

Environmental SDIOs address the gap between local community needs and broader environmental agendas by ensuring that sustainability goals do not come at the expense of

social objectives. In rapidly expanding cities, these organizations advocate for climate resilience, green infrastructure, and environmentally sound urban policies, while simultaneously working to protect vulnerable communities from displacement and environmental hazards (Heald, 2006; Xie, 2024). Unlike advocacy groups that primarily focus on lobbying, environmental SDIOs take an active role in shaping urban development. They achieve this by engaging communities in planning, sharing knowledge, facilitating policy implementation, and building partnerships among diverse stakeholders. Their goal is to ensure that urban development meets sustainability objectives, balancing environmental protection with social and economic needs (Bryson, 2013; Foo, 2018).

The main functions of environmental SDIOs in urban development include translating environmental science into policy through research, interpretation, and impact assessments (Ostrom, 1990); mediating between stakeholders to identify sustainable solutions that address social and economic needs (Susskind, 1981); supporting environmental activism with financial and technical resources (Bryson, 2013); and monitoring policymakers' commitments and ensuring transparency in development planning (Heald, 2006). Environmental SDIOs translate and adapt high-level sustainability goals, such as net-zero emissions or circular economy principles, into practical policies that directly benefit urban communities (Foo, 2018). This is accomplished, for example, through collaboration with local businesses and municipal authorities to implement energy-efficient housing that reduces the carbon footprint while lowering energy costs for low-income households.

These organizations differ from traditional environmental organizations in their approach to balancing social justice and environmental needs, whereas traditional organizations primarily focus on conservation and the protection of natural ecosystems (Foo, 2018; Xie, 2024). The purpose of environmental SDIOs is to promote environmental policies that benefit all urban residents, especially marginalized communities most affected by climate risks and pollution (Xie, 2024). This is also promoted with the aim of enhancing and strengthening participation of disadvantaged communities, increasing trust and their capacity to advocate for their needs (Bryson, 2013). One strategy that environmental SDIOs employ to enhance participatory urban governance is the formation of sustainability councils to increase community engagement in planning process. These local, multi-sectoral entities bring together residents, urban planners, and private developers to negotiate solutions to environmental challenges that address both sustainability and community needs (Bryson, 2013). Research indicates that environmental SDIOs influence policy outcomes through a variety of tools, including agenda-setting, legislative advocacy,

multi-stakeholder partnerships, and judicial interventions, such as filing lawsuits against environmentally harmful projects (Corell, 2008; Newig & Fritsch, 2009; Corburn, 2005; Soberon, Anchez-Chaparro, & Smith, 2022).

While navigating the balance between environmental sustainability and social justice is a defining attribute of environmental SDIOs, it is also one of their greatest challenges. As observed in community development (Chapter 3.3.1.3), interventions can sometimes produce unintended negative outcomes on the original community, and environmental development can yield similar effects. For instance, urban greening, climate-resilient infrastructure, and the development of parks and natural spaces are often associated with gentrification, commonly referred to as “green gentrification,” potentially leading to a rise in housing costs and the displacement of residents (Heald, 2006; Susskind, 1981). To mitigate this risk, environmental SDIOs, like their community-oriented counterparts, advocate for affordable housing, community financing models, and equitable access to urban resources.

To prevent green gentrification, some environmental SDIOs in the U.S. implement anti-displacement strategies. One strategy, similar to that of CDOs, is the promotion of rent control and affordable housing protections for low-income households as property values rise as a result of the improvement of the environment (Foo, 2018). Another way to balance a spike in value through green development is to ensure the equitable distribution of green spaces, promoting both fair access and balanced urban growth (Ostrom, 1990; Bryson, 2013).

The challenge of preventing resident displacement also stems from neoliberal attitudes, which view environmental development and the creation of green spaces as a tool for financial growth and economic gain, rather than as long-term instruments for community well-being (Xie, 2024). To manage this tension, environmental SDIOs employ advocacy and policy-making strategies that address market needs while maintaining a focus on environmental and community objectives.

Environmental NGOs play an important role in shaping policy design, community engagement and sustainability. Generally, they are considered impactful on conservation efforts, public awareness campaigns, legal activism, policy transformation, and community empowerment and participation (Corell, 2008; Newig & Fritsch, 2009; Agyeman & Evans, 2004). Unlike the field of community development, where traditional community organizations work directly with residents and mediating organizations practice advocacy, the environmental field operates largely in the opposite manner. Traditional environmental

NGOs focus primarily on policy and direct conservation, while intermediating NGOs also engage the community aspect, promoting participation, democracy and equality for disadvantaged communities (Foo, 2018; Bryson, 2013).

An example of an environmental SDIO is Friends of the Earth (FoE), an international organization active in over 70 countries that engages primarily in advocacy and activism (Agyeman & Evans, 2004). FoE utilizes written reports, campaigns around industrial pollution, and legal advocacy to maximize environmental justice and sustainability. These efforts successfully influenced stricter air quality laws, raised awareness of the link between poverty and environmental hazards, and shaped governmental initiatives (Agyeman & Evans, 2004).

Another example of an environmental SDIO is James River Association (JRA) in Virginia, USA (Roller, 2021), which seeks to implement green infrastructure projects and wetland restoration in urban areas while combining advocacy with direct community engagement. Through different projects involving hundreds of volunteers, JRA has reduced stormwater runoff by 30%, enabling more water infiltration into the soil in urban areas.

Recent studies indicate that environmental civil society organizations can have a measurable impact on urban development outcomes. Rousseau, Berrone, and Gelabert (2019) found that cities with more environmental non-profits exhibited lower levels of air and water pollution and a higher number of buildings certified for sustainable construction (e.g., LEED). In another study, Corburn (2005) demonstrated how local organizations in New York City collaborated with communities to improve environmental health conditions, which subsequently influenced municipal zoning and public health policies. These findings suggest that civil society actors do not only raise awareness but also help shape physical and regulatory changes in the urban environment.

A key contribution of environmental SDIOs is their ability to empower local communities by ensuring meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. Research highlights that these organizations provide technical knowledge, legal advocacy, and participatory frameworks that allow marginalized groups to engage in urban and environmental governance effectively (Newig & Fritsch, 2009).

Newig and Fritsch (2009) analyzed over 30 environmental governance cases in Europe and found that SDIO-led participatory planning improved policy compliance by up to 25%. Similarly, the network “El Día Después” in Spain supported the integration of sustainability measures into the strategic plans of five major cities by connecting academic institutions, local governments, and grassroots actors (Soberón, et al., 2022). These examples illustrate

that SDIOs contribute to urban development not only by providing solutions, but also by making planning processes more inclusive and effective.

A profound impact of environmental SDIOs is their ability to introduce environmental justice principles into mainstream policy discourse. Concepts such as “Just Sustainability,” which integrate social equity into environmental planning, have gained prominence due to the advocacy of these organizations (Agyeman & Evans, 2004).

The ability to measure the impact of civil society organizations working in the environmental field has become a significant topic in urban planning research. These organizations are increasingly recognized for their contributions to environmental improvement, citizen participation, and justice-oriented planning (Corburn, 2005; Rousseau, 2019). However, academic literature continues to face challenges in developing clear and consistent tools for evaluating the outcomes of their advocacy efforts. Many studies rely on qualitative descriptions or assume influence based on presence or activity without providing conclusive data on changes in policy, governance, or environmental quality (Corell, 2008; Agyeman & Evans, 2004).

A key knowledge gap concerns the specific role of environmental SDIOs, as compared with other types of SDIOs. While their mediating function is often acknowledged, their concrete impact on urban policy and planning outcomes remains under-researched and seldom measured systematically (Newig & Fritsch, 2009). This lack of empirical data makes it difficult to understand the effectiveness of intermediary strategies in achieving long-term policy change or structural improvements in urban development.

Environmental SDIOs are considered critical actors in bridging the gap between communities, policymakers, and sustainability objectives. Their impact is evident in empowering communities, promoting environmental conservation, and raising awareness of policy frameworks. However, their effectiveness depends on institutional support, political will, and the capacity to navigate conflicts between economic and environmental interests. A continuing challenge is to ensure that these organizations can operate independently and effectively, strengthening environmental governance while promoting social equity across diverse economic contexts.

In recent decades, civil society organizations have assumed an increasingly prominent role in shaping spatial development. Among these, a specific type of organization stands out: the Spatial Development Intermediary Organization (SDIO). These organizations act as bridges between local community-based organizations and government bodies, supporting local initiatives while also influencing policy and funding on a broader scale.

This chapter reviewed the main types of SDIOs operating in two major fields: community development and environmental development. In both areas, SDIOs facilitate connections between community-based organizations and public and private systems, while advocating for more inclusive and sustainable urban development. These functions position SDIOs as key actors in complex planning systems, often filling the gap between top-down policies and bottom-up realities.

However, the ability of SDIOs to operate effectively and independently is shaped by the broader political and economic climate in which they operate. As many countries have shifted toward neoliberal governance models, the role and strategies of these organizations have changed. The following chapter will explore how neoliberalism influences the function, legitimacy, and advocacy of SDIOs in the field of spatial development.

2.2 Intermediating Non-Profits and Neoliberalism

"We are in the business of community development" (Fursova, 2018).

The economic order refers to the institutional and cultural logic that shapes how society organizes its economy and social services (Ågotnes, 2022), including the institutional and ideological structures that guide how economic decisions are made, who holds power, and which values are prioritized. It encompasses welfare policies, public investment patterns, tax structures, and the degree of governmental intervention in service provision. The economic order influences how resources are distributed and who can access them. For example, when public investment in social services is in decline, the ability of communities to access housing, infrastructure or social welfare becomes significantly limited, creating inequalities across regions and populations (Heil, 2018; Fursova, 2018).

In the recent decades, the growing concept of neoliberalism has transformed the economic climate in many Western countries. Neoliberalism is an economic order that emerged as a process to reconstruct international capitalism and enable conditions for capital growth (Meade, Shaw, & Banks, 2016), and promotes privatization, personal responsibility, deregulation, and shrinking public investments (Abel & Kunz, 2018; Connell, 2010). Neoliberalism applies market logics, such as privatization, commodification, managerialist rationalities, competitiveness and financialization, to social behaviors and public services (Meade, Shaw, & Banks, 2016).

One critique of neoliberalism relates to its extensions, namely the depoliticization of governance, neglect of political and conflictual dimensions, and the reliance on scientific,

technical evidence-based tools for policy making (Tulumello, 2016; Meade, Shaw, & Banks, 2016). As welfare states embrace more neoliberalism attributes, they privatize social services, and adopt a funder role rather than that of a provider, shifting the responsibility of implementation to NGOs (Crubaugh, 2021; Fursova, 2018). While this process increases the funds and budgets of NGOs (Crubaugh, 2021), it also imposes greater limitations on their ability to represent communities. Neoliberalism is framed as an order of reason, embedding market reasoning into all dimensions of society and human life (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021), which creates challenges in achieving positive, sustainable social and environmental goals in spatial development in the 21st century (Fisher & DeFilippis, 2015; Aimers & Walker, 2016; Meade, Shaw, & Banks, 2016).

The rise of neoliberal urban policies has profoundly impacted civil society organizations engaged in spatial development. As state welfare decreased, non-profit organizations absorbed greater responsibilities, resulting in higher demand for service provision without corresponding increases in resources, political power, or organizational autonomy (Fursova, 2018). This shift constrains the advocacy role of such organizations, narrowing their activities to managerial tasks and output measurement in line with market logic, rather than focusing on community empowerment or systemic change (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021).

Within the framing of spatial development, neoliberalism can be seen as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it increases the burden of underprivileged communities as governments restrict their involvement in improving welfare; on the other hand, it creates more "room" in the social-economic landscape for additional players, generating opportunities for communities to collaborate and participate in the growing market (Chen, 2016). In other words, neoliberalism presents the potential for local communities to reshape their role in society. Another challenge of neoliberal ideology is that it does not recognize or legitimize the collective good, since it focuses on self-interest as the road for common good for all. This inherently makes it harder to establish neighborhood coalitions and joint action initiatives (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021).

Not all shifts of the welfare state toward neoliberal mechanisms are considered disruptive by the social field; some are viewed as significant improvements. One such improvement is increased satisfaction among social service recipients, as state-provided services are often of lower quality than those provided privately. Additionally, state services are politically influenced, highly concentrated, bureaucratically complex, and slow to adapt to public needs. Privatization allows consumers to choose between providers, which

incentivizes NGOs to respond quickly, enhancing service efficiency, quality, and flexibility to meet recipients' changing needs (Hendricks, Powell, Katan, & Lowenstein, 2009).

Governmental and social adoptions of neoliberal ideology in different countries has had a significant impact on spatial development. The process of embedding neoliberal approaches occurred at different times in different countries. In the United States, a capitalist state, CDOs began competing more effectively for funds in the 1980s, prioritizing complex building projects instead of community-led process, while also aligning with federal and private financial interests (Heil, 2018). In Portugal, neoliberalism became more prominent in the 1990s, introducing a layer of neighborhood marketing to community organizing and empowerment (Tulumello, 2016). New Zealand only began adopting neoliberal models in the last decade, with different regions responding differently to the emerging socio-economic climate (Aimers & Walker, 2016). While New Zealand embraced neoliberal concepts, it also experienced distancing from the CBO approach to neighborhood revitalization, including decreased financial support and limited political reach for SDIOs.

The embodiment of neoliberal practices in day-to-day organizational operations leads NGOs to adopt more of a market-based strategy, striving for alignment with formal and financial institutions rather than advocating for the interest of residents in marginalized neighborhoods (Heil, 2018; Korazim-Körösy, 2000). One claim is that the non-profit sector has essentially shifted toward producing neoliberal subjects, rather than fostering civil society vibrancy and environmental equity (Fursova, 2018).

Although originally grounded in community empowerment through local leadership and collective organization, CDOs are gradually shifting toward a focus on physical development and affordable housing. This shift is attributed to the adoption of neoliberal concepts and their influence on community development principles (Heil, 2018). This shift is also linked to increasing pressure on organizations to demonstrate measurable outputs, adopt performance-based language, and avoid direct political critique in order to maintain access to public funding and institutional legitimacy (Uyuni & Muhibudin, 2020). Similarly, environmental NGOs have been affected by reduced public support, pushing them toward entrepreneurial models and partnerships that often replace political activism with local capacity-building. This framing expects communities to “take responsibility” for managing their environment while limiting structural critique of the state (Corell, 2008).

As noted previously, the global wake of neoliberal ideas has most significantly undermined advocacy potential. NGOs operating in this economic order face an ideological trap: while

driven by values of social equity, they are integrated into neoliberal governance regimes that prioritize privatization, efficiency and the responsibilities of the poor (Fursova, 2018; Glass, 2014). Consequently, their role as agents of systemic critique is weakened, as their work is depoliticized, stripped of its political and ideological aspects, and redirected toward compensating for market failures rather than addressing their underlying societal causes (Fursova, 2018; Glass, 2014).

Restrictions on advocacy output are part of a broader restructuring process associated with neoliberal governance, in which non-profit community development organizations are increasingly positioned as service providers, and are not encouraged by funders to engage in political advocacy (Fursova, 2018; Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Korazim-Körösy, 2000). Although non-profits continue to play a vital role in providing services to communities, they no longer simply fill gaps where the state fails to provide; rather, they often act on behalf of formal institutions using public funds and are therefore directly shaped by institutional decision-making processes (Crubaugh, 2021).

These dynamics also reshape the capacity of non-profits to perform political roles, as organizations shift from community engagement toward maintaining organizational legitimacy with government and business funders (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021). At times, these shifts drive residents to abandon the limitations of formal organizations in order to engage more freely in policy development in their neighborhoods (Laskey & Nicholls, 2019).

To sustain their original social and environmental goals, SDIOs must remain aware of neoliberalization as an ongoing process in the non-profit sector, as well as the strategic significance of civil society practices as both a tool and counter-tool in the implementation of neoliberalism (Fursova, 2018).

The neoliberal economic order has reshaped the relationship between the state and civil society. Through reduced public responsibility, market-based logic, and shifts in funding structures, this framework impacts how community and environmental organizations define their goals and strategies. Rather than challenging policy or mobilizing protest, many organizations are increasingly positioned as service providers or local implementers of governmental priorities. This shift affects their independence, voice, and ability to represent social and environmental needs.

Within this context, the next chapter examines how SDIOs engage in advocacy. It explores the tools, tactics, and partnerships they use to influence policy and promote change while operating within a neoliberal order that often constrains oppositional action.

2.2.1 Advocacy in Intermediating Organizations

As discussed, SDIOs, as part of the non-profit sector, use advocacy as a tool to advance social and environmental causes, despite challenges arising from the limitations of the economic order (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Andrews & Bob, 2004). SDIOs function as intermediating organizations within the specific arena of spatial development and are part of the broader phenomenon of mediating organizations, which share similar characteristics in bridging between sectors and actors beyond social and environmental action.

In recent years, mediating organizations have become more numerous and diverse, developing policies and services by mediating between decision-makers and implementers in the quality control of health systems (Neubeck, Elg, & Schneider, 2014), education reforms (Williamson, 2014), and mental health services (Bullock & Lavis, 2019). One example of this is the academic and scientific arena, where mediating organizations use advocacy to promote change. Bednarek et al. (2016) examined the involvement and impact of science-policy intermediaries on policy design, as they function as a bridge between the academic and governmental spheres. Their findings suggest that scientists often struggle to translate their acquired knowledge into relevant policies, highlighting the need for advocacy intermediators to embed new knowledge to "real world" action and funding processes (Bednarek et al. 2016).

In the academic sphere, intermediaries facilitate exchange between researchers and policy makers in both directions: translating research findings into clear, accessible formats for policymakers, while conversely making political dynamics (priorities, institutional structures and key parties) more transparent to the researchers (Bednarek et al. 2016).

Two main approaches are commonly used for advocating policy changes across fields such as community development, environmental awareness, and equitable spatial and economic development. The first, **integrationist advocacy**, seeks to promote policy change from within the system by positioning NGO professionals inside government task forces, committees, or cross-sector partnerships. This model involves relationship-building with institutional actors, translating community needs into policy-relevant language, and working through formal channels (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Fursova, 2018; Neubeck, Elg, & Schneider, 2014).

The second approach is **oppositional advocacy**, which aims to empower residents to challenge dominant policy paradigms or state-driven agendas and engages the public in self-advocacy through grassroots mobilization, collective protest, and efforts to reclaim

political influence in the face of marginalization (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Fursova, 2018).

Considering the distinction between these two approaches, it can be understood that each shapes how effectiveness is perceived. Integrationist strategies may define success in terms of access to policy arenas, professional recognition, or contributions to legislative drafts. In contrast, oppositional actors may value visibility, public mobilization, or discursive shifts as indicators of effective engagement.

In recent years, advocacy has increasingly shifted toward the integrationist model. This transition reflects broader neoliberal pressures that reward policy fluency, institutional professionalism, and technical knowledge over grassroots representation or resistance. As a result, the source of organizational legitimacy has moved from direct community engagement to the level of credibility NGOs hold within formal systems (Gliedt, Hoicka, & Jackson, 2018; Schmid, Almog-Bar, & Nirel, 2008).

As advocacy becomes more institutionalized and increasingly reliant on government and market funding, non-profit organizations may become reluctant to “shake the boat” and, at times, refrain from promoting policy changes that could risk relationships with funders (Schmid, Almog-Bar, & Nirel, 2008). These restrictions have become more pronounced with the global transition to neoliberal governance, such that social service groups tend to flourish only when aligning themselves with government policies (Aimers & Walker, 2016). Consequently, many organizations have reduced or abandoned oppositional advocacy, and in some cases advocacy altogether, focusing instead on the delivery of direct services while avoiding engagement in policy change processes (Fursova, 2018).

2.2.2 Advocacy Efficiency and Perceived Effectiveness

Unlike programs that provide services to the community, which are relatively easier to measure, though still complex, the effectiveness of advocacy efforts is more difficult to assess, as it involves long-term political, social, and financial dimensions (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). Although advocacy impact cannot always be directly measured, organizations are still expected to define their own understanding of success. This internal framing of effectiveness becomes important both internally for strategic goal setting and externally for communicating legitimacy to funders, policy partners, and community stakeholders.

Several frameworks have been suggested to assess advocacy effectiveness. Casey (2004) suggests a four-dimensional model for assessment that includes the socioeconomic and

political environment, the nature of the political conflict, the NGO's structure and ideology, and its network with other relevant actors in the field. Another framework focuses on the political process of advocacy and suggests a six-dimensional assessment: the resources of political institutions, long-term planning, agenda setting, access to decisions-making arenas, achieving desired policy outcomes, and designing their implementation (Andrews & Bob, 2004).

SDIOs and other intermediaries increasingly rely on broader perceptions of effectiveness to communicate their value. These include access to policy networks, visibility in key decision-making arenas, credibility among institutional actors, and their capacity to translate knowledge into actionable recommendations (Gliedt, Hoicka, & Jackson, 2018; Williamson, 2014).

Assessing the impact of intermediaries in the policy design process is challenging due to its ambiguous, long-term, and multidimensional nature, making it difficult to evaluate outcomes in the absence of mediation. However, some argue that intermediaries have more tools to assess their impact, as they are involved in a broader range of processes simultaneously and can evaluate success through comparison (Bednarek et al., 2016).

Another common approach to assessing advocacy effectiveness focuses on organizational resources, such as funds directed to advocacy, and efforts or training dedicated to policy change (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014), rather than on the actual impact of policy actions and decisions. In other words, this approach emphasizes organizational participation in advocacy, while giving less attention to the concrete outcomes of advocacy efforts (Zhang & Guo, 2020).

Yet another common approach to measuring advocacy effectiveness is perception-based, relying on the self-reported opinions of organization managers and assessing advocacy through **perceived effectiveness** (Zhang & Guo, 2020).

In the context of government-non-profit partnerships, Gazley (2008) defines effectiveness through several dimensions: degree of formality, shared decision-making, and the extent of control within the partnership. Effectiveness is commonly perceived in terms of three dimensions: (1) how well the partnership achieves public service delivery goals, (2) how well it maintains public accountability, and (3) how well it adapts to the varying needs of different service sectors. Perceptions of effectiveness are further influenced by trust, reputation, and the ability to manage relationships and resources effectively across partnerships (Gazley, 2008; Witesman & Fernandez, 2013).

Perceived effectiveness is an approach used across multiple fields, not only in advocacy. Several studies have examined how perceived effectiveness correlates with objective measures of effectiveness in arenas where outcomes are more measurable than advocacy. These studies aim to assess the reliability of perceived effectiveness as an indicator of how impactful a process or a service is. Several factors were found to correlate with levels of perceived effectiveness for online social work studies (Levin, Fulginiti, & Moore, 2018), among them being years of experience, tenure status, technological preparedness, and exposure to online education. These findings can be adapted to the field of perceived effectiveness in advocacy, as each factor symbolizes a wider mechanism. Years of experience refers to the provider's experience level in executing the specific service, whether it's teaching social work or impacting policy change. Tenure status reflects the rank or seniority of the individual delivering the service, with higher positions generally associated with higher perceived effectiveness. Technological preparedness and exposure to online education puts the focus onto the recipient and emphasizes that the "customer" assimilates its own experiences when evaluating the effectiveness of the provider (Levin, Fulginiti, & Moore, 2018). In spatial development and policy making, the effectiveness of SDIOs is similarly shaped by the perspectives and experiences of those they serve.

Xu and Maitland (2019) studied the perceived effectiveness of data analysis and management in refugee communities in Rwanda as a tool for informed decision making and community empowerment. They examined the use and design of data collection tools created by community participants to map local needs and perspectives. In the study, community members were trained in a data collection system and then led data-gathering efforts within their own communities. Xu and Maitland found a positive correlation between the perceived effectiveness of the process and its level of usability. In other words, the more useful the participants perceived the tool to be, the more they perceived the data collection process to be effective. Additionally, participatory self-data collection by community members strengthened local leaders' ability to make informed decisions and to build the community based on members' assets and knowledge (Xu & Maitland, 2019). Few studies have been dedicated to the relation between perceived effectiveness of advocacy and the pursuit of policy change (Bruce et al., 2016; Hornsey et al., 2006), yielding inconclusive results as to whether perceived effectiveness has a positive or negative correlation with advocacy engagement or collective action. Perceived impact is often disconnected from actual engagement, and that internal framing of success is shaped

by organizational context and motivation (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). In addition, researchers point to the lack of clear frameworks for evaluating perceived influence, and the difficulty of developing reliable tools for doing so (Demissie, 2017; Zhang & Guo, 2020). This gap highlights the need to deepen our understanding of the subject. The perception that advocacy efforts do not impact policy change can both motivate and discourage engagement (Bruce, et al., 2016). Accordingly, it is essential to investigate this understudied component of organizational impact, particularly the variations in perceived effectiveness across different market economy systems.

To explore gaps in perceived effectiveness, Dubus & LeBoeuf (2019) examined differences in the perception of cultural effectiveness between service providers, customers, and interpreters regarding services provided for refugees in the U.S. Cultural effectiveness refers to a service provider's knowledge and expertise regarding the community's cultural identity, characteristics, and needs. The research surveyed the perceived cultural effectiveness of both service providers and recipients in the delivery of health and social services for refugees in the U.S. using interviews and questionnaires. All three groups (refugees, healthcare providers and interpreters) described low effectiveness in providing culturally appropriate services, resulting in limited collaboration and gaps in necessary knowledge. Interestingly, the study found that efficiency was higher in communities that had established internal leadership, as these individuals functioned as cultural bridges between refugees and service providers. This finding illustrates the importance of intermediation with local communities in delivering well-suited services (Dubus & LeBoeuf, 2019).

Public officials tend to have greater trust in non-profits, largely due to the perceived alignment of goals between public and non-profit organizations, particularly their shared mission to serve the public interest. This alignment reduces expectations of opportunistic behavior typically associated with for-profit entities. Non-profits are therefore regarded as more dependable, predictable, and mission-driven partners, acting in the public interest rather than prioritizing profit maximization. Building on this trust, less rigorous monitoring and greater discretion are granted to non-profit contractors, reducing transaction costs and enhancing the adaptability and resilience of public-non-profit partnerships (Witesman & Fernandez, 2013).

Considering the complex, long-term and often indirect nature of advocacy outcomes, perceived effectiveness becomes a central mechanism through which organizations define, assess, and communicate their success. While frameworks for advocacy evaluation do

exist, they are rarely applied in practice, and most measurements rely on internal, subjective indicators such as continued funding, participation in policy networks, and visibility. Perceived effectiveness thus serves both strategic and symbolic purposes, internally for guiding action and externally for maintaining legitimacy. However, the literature also points to a weak or inconclusive correlation between perceived impact and actual engagement in advocacy. This ambiguity reinforces the need to further examine how organizations construct their own understanding of effectiveness, particularly under different policies and economic orders.

This literature review has outlined the evolving role of SDIOs as civil society intermediaries operating in complex economic and political environments. It examined how their advocacy functions are shaped by economic orders such as the rise of neoliberal governance structures, which promote the adoption of professionalization and funding logics. A key theme emerging from the review is the reliance on perceived effectiveness as a substitute for more objective or measurable indicators of advocacy success. While this concept is referenced, the mechanisms through which it is constructed remain underexplored.

Notably, little attention has been paid to how perceived effectiveness is shaped by specific economic orders or governance contexts, nor how it guides strategic decision-making within advocacy organizations. This gap is especially relevant in the case of SDIOs, whose hybrid structure positions them between grassroots needs and institutional demands. To address this gap, the present study examines how SDIOs engaged in community and environmental development understand and define their effectiveness in relation to policy influence. Through a qualitative, case-based approach, the research explores how perceived effectiveness is constructed within organizational discourse and everyday practice, and how this framing shapes advocacy work. The following chapter presents the methodology used to investigate these processes.

3. The Study's Design

3.1 Knowledge Gaps and Research Motivation

As discussed, spatial development holds a central role for SDIOs, encompassing community, environmental and economic development (Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Anglin, 2004; Bothello & Mehrpouya, 2019; Heil, 2018; Zychlinski, 2010). These organizations operate in diverse ways, and many of them aspire to advocate for different ideologies and influence policy design and reform (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Aimers & Walker, 2016; Crubaugh, 2021; Krigman, 2010).

There is substantial knowledge about the impact of these organizations from an implementation perspective, reflecting the “on the ground” aspects. Yet, there is limited understanding of their capacity to effect change at the level of governmental decision-making and policies.

In addition to the knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of advocacy, there is also a need for deeper understanding of the role of neoliberalism in the process. The literature indicates that intermediating organizations aiming to impact policy-making are gradually distancing themselves from government funding and partnerships, with the expansion of neoliberal regimes identified as a key factor in this process (Sahlin, 2015; Saitgalina, 2022; Alexander & Kandyce, 2021; Aimers & Walker, 2016). These changes necessitate a deeper understanding of how the expansion of neoliberalism shapes perceptions of policy-making impact.

There is a substantial body of research examining how SDIOs adapt their toolkit for on-the-ground work after incorporating neoliberal approaches. However, little literature addresses how these adaptations are reflected in advocacy methods.

The two knowledge gaps – first, the effectiveness of SDIOs in influencing policy, and second, the presence of neoliberal attributes in these processes – warrant deeper investigation and understanding.

3.1.1 Gaps in Defining Policy and Policy Change

Policy outcomes are shaped by the broader regulatory culture and political environments in which these organizations operate. Therefore, to understand the perceived effectiveness of policy change, it is necessary first to examine the forms of policy influence and the processes through which it occurs.

Policy is often defined as a deliberate system of guidelines intended to guide decisions and achieve desired outcomes. Policy and policy change are interpreted differently depending on cultural, political, and institutional frameworks, highlighting the importance of context in understanding these phenomena and their characteristics. Policy change refers to the process by which national, regional and local governments adjust existing policies to better align with societal goals, realities, or emerging trends. Such changes can be minor, consisting of micro-adjustments, or radical, involving a complete shift in existing policies (Hendricks et al., 2009; Korazim, 1988; Salustri & Viganò, 2018).

Differences in approaches to policy across countries often reflect variations in governance structures and broader societal contexts. For example: while Western democracies tend to emphasize participatory and decentralized models of policy development, many Asian countries follow more centralized and technocratic planning processes (Finley et al., 2024). Scandinavian countries with welfare-oriented economies are characterized by higher levels of social trust, motivating public participation and transparency in policy design process (Salonen & Koivisto, 2024). In contrast, countries with authoritarian regimes might adjust policies primarily to meet centralized goals (Awazi, 2024). The U.S., as a neoliberal economic state, tends to modify policies through lobbying, bipartisan negotiations, or official actions (Hardt, 2024), whereas Finland, a welfare social state, relies more on participatory tools, with higher levels of public engagement in policy adaptations (Karini, 2024).

These differences illustrate the wide variation in the meaning and practice of policy, highlighting the importance of cultural, institutional, economical, and political contexts. They underscore the necessity of examining the effectiveness of advocacy and policy change through a local lens.

3.1.2 Gaps in Perceptions of Effectiveness

When exploring perceived effectiveness within organizations and between organizations and their recipients, it is important to take into account that providers and recipients usually perceive effectiveness differently due to differences in focus, experience, and priorities (Alkhamra et al., 2023; Xu & Maitland, 2019; Levin et al., 2018). There is limited research on how civil society organizations perceive their own effectiveness, particularly in the field of spatial development. Most studies examine the perspectives of the public or decision-makers, while less attention is given to how the organizations themselves view their impact. This gap is especially pronounced for organizations operating between the community and the government. The present study seeks to investigate how these organizations understand and interpret their influence on policy.

Research indicates that gaps often exist between how organizations view their own effectiveness and how service recipients experience it. For example, Dubus & LeBoeuf (2019) found that refugees in the U.S. rated cultural services as less effective than the providers themselves believed. These differences underscore the need to better understand how effectiveness is perceived by multiple perspectives in service systems. This thesis extends that inquiry to SDIOs working with communities in the context of spatial development.

The goal is not to measure actual outcomes, but to understand how both organizations and community actors interpret success.

3.2 Research Aims and Assumptions

In the context of spatial development, policy influence and neoliberal attributes, two main questions require further investigation:

- 1). How do SDIOs perceive their impact on policy-making in regards to the spatial development of communities? Is there a difference between how these organizations perceive their effectiveness and how it is perceived by their government and community partners?
- 2). How do neoliberal attributes manifest in advocacy approach?

On one hand, the emergence of neoliberalism has driven a rift between advocacy organizations and governments. On the other hand, because states are the implementors

and providers of services in welfare economies, it can be assumed that policy shifts will be implemented more efficiently.

This research aims to expand the understanding of policy-making in the field of spatial development from several perspectives. First, it explores the perceptions of effectiveness within SDIOs in influencing policy. Second, it examines the potential gap between SDIOs and their partners in the perception of SDIOs' effectiveness in advocacy. Finally, the study considers the influence of neoliberal attributes on advocacy and the ability to efficiently impact policy. The underlying assumptions reflect these lines of inquiry.

While the use of hypotheses in qualitative research is often considered problematic due to its emphasis on openness and emergent findings (Walters, 2001), a set of broad and flexible hypotheses was formulated, grounded in the theoretical framework. These served as initial guiding assumptions without constraining the interpretive process (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020).

3.2.1 Perception of Effectiveness in Advocacy

The literature suggests an intricate combination of factors shaping the perceived effectiveness of NGOs involved in policy change. In economic contexts transitioning from a welfare-state foundation to a neoliberal economic climate, this shift introduces challenges in aligning social goals with market-driven approaches (Hendricks, Powell, Katan, & Lowenstein, 2009). In addition, this transition causes policy-making to be characterized by limited public participation and top-down approaches, which constrains the perceived effectiveness of SDIOs in advocating for policy change (Korazim-Körösy, 2000; Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). Although transitioning to a market-driven system, many intermediating organizations still rely on government funds, which restricts their ability to engage in active advocacy (Crubaugh, 2021; Schmid & Almog-Bar, 2008).

Given this context, it is assumed that SDIOs operating in economic systems transitioning toward neoliberalism will perceive themselves as moderately effective advocates. While they may be effective in advocating at the local level, they are likely to face challenges in influencing broader policy due to structural, economic, and political constraints. Their perceived effectiveness is hypothesized to be limited by organizational dependence on government funding, the growing influence of neoliberal economics, and limited participation in policy-making processes. This ecosystem creates a complex perception of advocacy effectiveness and constrains overall levels of effectiveness.

3.2.2 Gaps in Perceptions of Effectiveness

The literature highlights how intermediating organizations, governmental entities and communities measure different aspects in assessing the effectiveness of mediating organizations. Intermediating organizations focus on advocacy and resource mobilization, while governments prioritize administration and structure, and communities seek direct impact on members and collective well-being (Dubus & LeBoeuf, 2019; Xu & Maitland, 2019). Therefore, it is hypothesized that there is a divergence between how intermediating organizations perceive their effectiveness in policy advocacy and how governmental and community entities perceive that effectiveness.

3.2.3 Resource Allocation

Increased investment in advocacy enhances the capacity for policy influence, as demonstrated in previous studies on NGO advocacy dynamics (Schmid, Almog-Bar, & Nirel, 2008). Therefore, it is hypothesized that organizations who allocate major resources to advocacy, such as funding, training, and staff will perceived themselves as effective in policy change.

3.3 Research Sampling and Area

3.3.1 Research Sampling

The population relevant to this study includes spatial development intermediary organizations (SDIOs) of various types and fields, along with key actors within them. These organizations operate between grassroots communities and formal governmental institutions and play a growing role in shaping and implementing public policy. The SDIOs selected for this study operate in domains such as economic justice, urban development, environmental protection, and civic engagement, each representing different entry points into the policymaking arena. Their common mission is to influence public agendas and translate the spatial development needs of communities into structural change.

This study focuses on perceived effectiveness in advocacy, as understood from three perspectives: the internal perspective of the organization (how staff and leadership define their impact), the institutional or "top-down" perspective (how governmental actors perceive the organization's role and legitimacy), and the "bottom-up" community perspective (how local grassroot actors assess the organization's effectiveness in representing their needs). These three standpoints enable a broader understanding of how organizational influence is constructed both internally and externally. This framing is

essential for capturing the nuances of advocacy in complex policy environments, where success is not easily quantifiable.

Sampling was conducted in two phases. First, SDIOs were identified through a review of the literature and the researcher's personal knowledge of the field of spatial development. Additional organizations were identified using a snowball technique, whereby the initial participating organizations suggested other potential candidates. All selected organizations are non-profit, engage in spatial development, pursue social and environmental agendas, operate at a national scale, and demonstrate some form of advocacy aspiration. They vary in size, funding, goals and relationships with government institutions. Though this a sampling of the phenomenon in Israel, the SDIO participating in the research represents almost the entire field of SDIO.

Each organization was represented by several staff members with in-depth knowledge of the organization's goals, funding allocations and priorities; for example, the CEO, Vice President for Policy, or program manager. Participants were recruited using a snowball technique: after the initial participants were sampled, they nominated other potential participants (Nicola J. Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012).

In addition, we asked participating organizations to suggest governmental and community partners they collaborate with who could provide an additional perspective on their work and impact, particularly regarding the organizations' effectiveness in advocacy and policy change. For this round, the initial outreach was conducted by the SDIO participants, who contacted their partners to seek approval to join the research. Once the officials and community nominees agreed to participate, we reached out to explain the study and formally invited them to take part.

Based on SDIOs members interviews and statements regarding policies and partners that the SDIO focuses on, additional interviews were conducted for relevant community members and government officials.

3.3.2 Research Area: The State of Israel

As discussed, different economic climates create different mechanisms for NGOs mediating and advocating in the field of spatial development. When selecting the research area, several options were considered. The United States, a classically free-market state founded on capitalist and liberal principles (such as low taxation, limited regulation, and minimal involvement in social programs) was one option (Grewal & Purdy, n.d.; Stiglitz, 2019; Erling et al., 2014). Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, and Denmark) were another, known for leading developed economies with their welfare-oriented socio-

economic approach, characterized by high taxation, extensive market regulation, and deep involvement in social programs (Erling et al., 2014).

This research examines the SDIO phenomenon through the research area of Israel, positioned along a continuum between neoliberal and welfare models, highlighting the tension between these two concepts. Israel initially established its economy within a welfare-oriented socio-economic framework, but has gradually shifted toward a more neoliberal approach marked by increasing privatization and the adoption of business-like practices within non-profit organizations (Zychlinski, 2010; Schmid & Almog-Bar, 2008). Consequently, policies in Israel, particularly in the field of spatial development, often prioritize market-driven solutions over comprehensive social considerations, and have been criticized for insufficient public participation and transparency in the design process (Trop, 2017).

The country's transition toward neoliberalism included the privatization of public services, led primarily by Israel's Ministry of Finance. The goal of privatization was to align Israel's economy with global trends, including participation in international agreements that promote market-oriented policies. However, some scholars argue that this process was also aimed at undermining the state's responsibility for citizens' welfare (Hendricks et al., 2009).

Shaped by local needs and cultural context, Israeli SDIOs developed different models of spatial development practice, aiming at revitalizing underprivileged neighborhoods and advancing environmental initiatives. Since its early days, the Israeli government, operating within a welfare-state framework, focused on creating programs and solutions to support low-income populations through housing and social services (Korazim-Körösy, 2000). One example is the Neighborhood Renewal Program, initiated in the late 1970s, with goals similar to those of CDOs: improving the physical and social well-being of the community, enhancing opportunities for social mobility, strengthening community involvement at the neighborhood level, and preventing urban and neighborhood decline (Korazim, 1988). As the field of neighborhood renewal was historically led by the state, non-profit organizations have only begun to operate within it more extensively in the past decade. As a result of their relatively recent emergence as actors in spatial development, there is limited, if any, research examining their activities and impact.

While there is extensive research on the impact of Israeli governmental programs on neighborhood revitalization and community and environmental aspects of spatial

development, knowledge regarding SDIOs' work models and impact remains limited (Schmid, 2015; First, 2016).

3.4 Methodology Design

3.4.1 Research Process

This research examines the perceived effectiveness of intermediaries in influencing policy within the field of spatial development, using qualitative methods. By assessing the perceptions of both SDIO officials and other stakeholders, the study identifies gaps between how SDIOs view their own effectiveness and how they are perceived by communities and government entities. This approach provides a broader understanding of intermediaries' effectiveness in advocating for policy change.

This study adopts an interpretive case study approach, which is well-suited to exploring complex social phenomena through the perspectives and meanings constructed by research participants (Walsham, 1995; Merriam, 1998). The interpretive approach focuses on understanding processes, meanings, and context-bound experiences. This methodology aligns with the study's goal of examining how intermediary organizations within civil societies perceive their influence on policy across different institutional relationships and local realities. Interpretive case studies are grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed and best understood through situated interpretations (Walsham, 1995; Merriam, 1998). This approach allows researchers to explore deeper contextual insights and capture the complexity and contradictions inherent in human interaction and organizational behavior (Klein & Myers, 1999). It provides a flexible yet robust framework for analyzing how advocacy and effectiveness are understood internally within organizations and in relation to their external policy and community environments. Since there is no consensus on the structure and content of these tools (Xu & Maitland, 2019), a customized process was designed specifically for this research.

The research process was divided into two sections:

1. Interviews with key personnel within SDIOs
2. Interviews with key partners from two sectors that collaborate with these organizations:
 - Community-based organizations (CBOs)
 - Local, regional or national government entities

Semi-structured interviews in Hebrew were designed for each study group defined earlier (Dubus & LeBoeuf, 2019). Each interview was developed based on research-specific parameters and included questions addressing perceived effectiveness, resources dedicated to policy-making (time, funding, and training), involvement in coalitions, changes in community quality of life and environmental protection, and recognition for the organization's contributions (Schmid, Almog-Bar, & Nirel, 2008).

Advocacy effectiveness for each intermediary was assessed through:

- Key personnel within the organization that participate in the organization's advocacy efforts and represent its internal perspectives. They possess a macro-level understanding of the organization's activities and potential influence on policy-making. They also provide information on resources allocated to advocacy, such as personnel and training aimed at enhancing capacity for effective policy work.
- Members of CBOs affected by the SDIO. Since intermediating organizations typically do not directly implement programs in the communities they target, but rather support CBOs in program delivery (Anglin, 2004), CBO members can offer insight into how communities perceive the effectiveness of policies that originate from a given intermediary.
- Government officials engaged in spatial development and policy-making, including those in national and regional roles responsible for designing and implementing policies within government entities (Mara S., 2017).

The interviews were recorded using Zoom and subsequently transcribed using digital tools (Microsoft Word and the Ivrit transcription app). The transcripts were then manually reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy in capturing participants' responses. All text files were uploaded to ATLAS.ti for coding and thematic analysis.

3.4.2 Chronological Overview of the Research Process

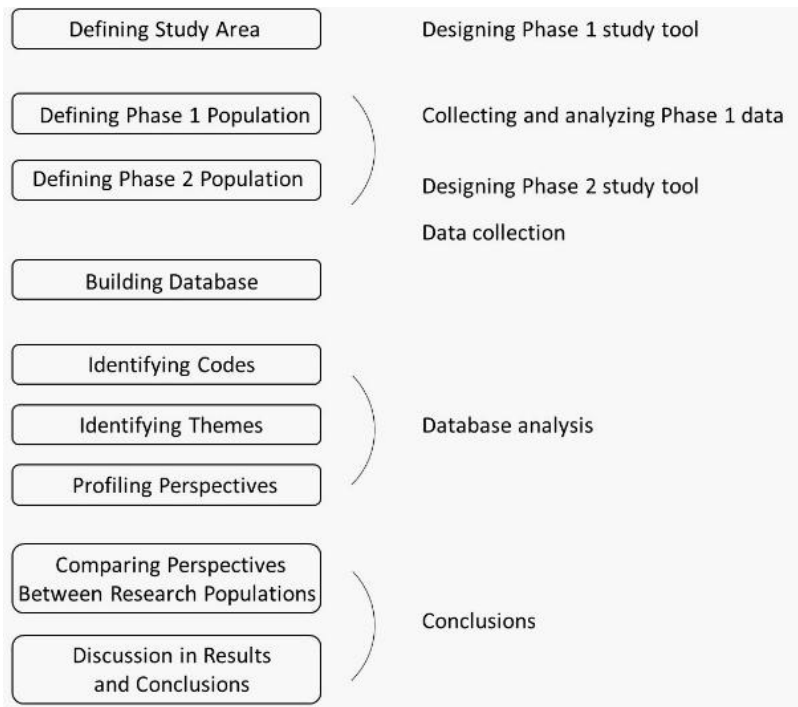


Figure 2: Chronological Overview of the Research Process

3.5 Data Collection

Participants were contacted through the researcher's professional network, drawing on a decade of experience in the field of spatial development in Israel. Interviews across the three defined levels were scheduled at times convenient for the participants and conducted using digital platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using digital transcription applications.

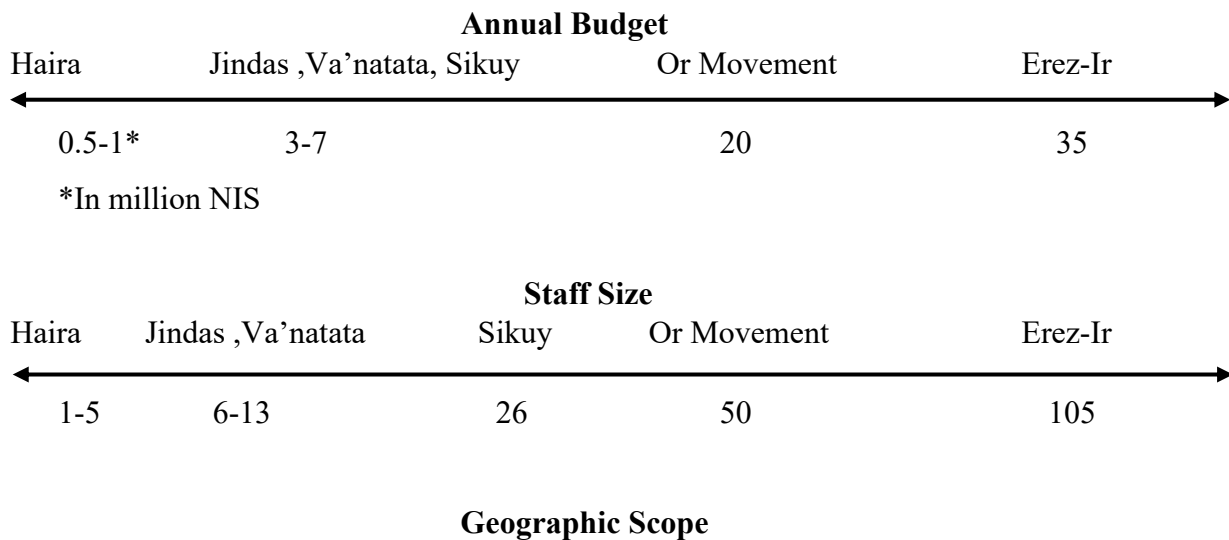
Interviews were conducted with the following organizations, representing different aspects of spatial development in Israel. All organizations operate on a national level, serving as a mediator between community organizations and governmental entities. General information about each SDIO was obtained from Guidestar.org.il, a public database of all registered non-profit organizations in Israel.

Table 4.1 SDIOs Interviewed

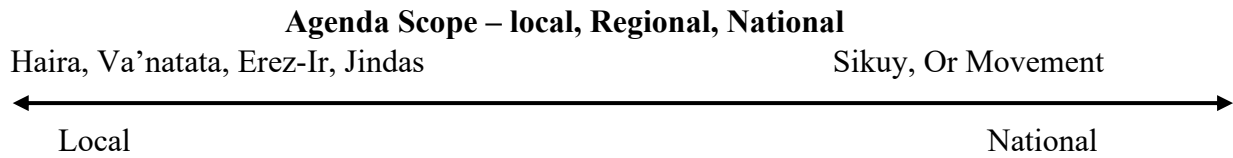
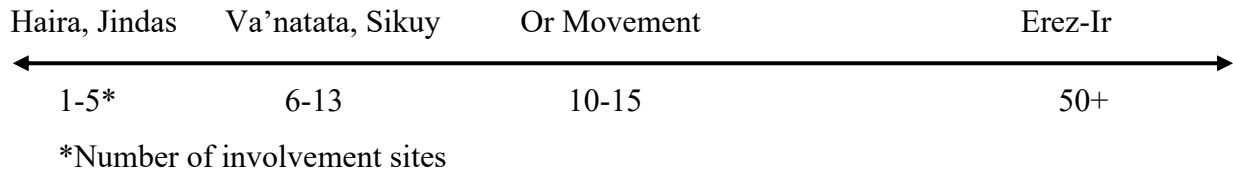
Field	SDIO	Annual Budget in NIS ³	Team Size	Year Established
Environmental organizations	Va'Natata	3,700,000 ₪	6	2019
	Ha'Ira	860,000 ₪	4	2024
Community organizations	Erez-Ir	32,000,000 ₪	105	2006
	Or Movement	23,500,000 ₪	50	2013
	Jindas	5,000,000 ₪	13	2013
	Sikoy	6,700,000 ₪	26	1991

Source: Guidestar.org.il

To contextualize the findings, the participating SDIOs are presented across several organizational dimensions, including annual budget, staff size, geographic scope and Agenda Scope – local, Regional, National. These dimensions illustrate the diversity of the sample and provide a clearer understanding of the different organizational contexts represented in the study, rather than serving as a basis for comparison.



³ At the time of writing, 1 Israeli New Shekel (NIS) is approximately equal to 0.30 USD.



For some SDIOs, additional partners from governmental entities, the community or both were interviewed (as detailed in table 4.2).

Table 4.2. SDIO Partner Interviews

Field	SDIO	SDIO Interviews	Government Interviews	Partner Interviews
Environmental organizations	Va'Natata	1	0	0
	Ha'Ira	2	2	1
Community organizations	Erez-Ir	2	0	2
	Or Movement	4	2	0
	Jindas	1	0	0
	Sikoy	1	0	0

Interviews with key SDIO officials included questions regarding the organizations' involvement in advocacy (e.g., how many employees are involved in advocacy? What is the training for employees that engage in policymaking?) as well as questions regarding advocacy effectiveness (e.g., how would you describe the organization's relationship with government officials? Are organization members invited to policy discussions?).

Besides assessing the organization's perceived effectiveness in advocacy, the interviews also included questions regarding the economic climate and the influence of socio-economic structures on the organization's work (e.g., how would you assess the level of government responsibility for promoting social and environmental causes? Where does your organization operate, who plays the leading role in empowering communities? Can

active advocacy jeopardize your organization's relationships?) (Aimers & Walker, 2016; see Appendix A for SDIO member interviews).

Follow-up interviews were conducted with governmental and community partners of each organization (per their request, we did not conduct additional interviews with Sikoy NGO, due to the sensitivity of their partner relationships).

To assess the relevant community's perception of effectiveness of SDIO-led advocacy, members of CBOs were asked about policy shifts and SDIO involvement in the process.

A sense of policy change was assessed through the development of new programs or the discontinuation of intervention programs (e.g., how does the mediating organization ensure continuity of governmental assistance?) and by evaluating SDIOs' involvement in mobilizing government funding (e.g., what role does the organization play in securing funds for the community?) (see Appendix B for CBO interviews).

Government officials were asked about the SDIO's role and participation in policy design that serves, for example, underprivileged communities. The interviews at this level were developed based on analysis from interviews with key SDIO representatives, so that government officials could be asked about specific policies in which the organizations reported involvement (e.g., what role did organization members play in designing a policy, if any? Did the SDIOs contribute to adapting the policy to community needs?). Questions for government officials also addressed the local socio-economic context, assessing the influence of the neoliberal environment on SDIO advocacy for community needs and aspirations (e.g., are there circumstances that could jeopardize SDIO funding? How would you describe working relations with key SDIO officials?) (Fursova, 2018; see Appendix C for governmental official interviews).

All names reported in the study are pseudonyms (see Appendix D for List of Interviewees).

3.6 Data Analysis

Using the thematic method (Petty, Thomson, & Stewart, 2012), interviews were analyzed by identifying recurring codes and clustering them into main domains based on participants' statements. Further analysis was conducted to identify relationships between domains, as outlined in the research procedure in Figure 2.

For coding, the ATLAS.ti AI-assisted system was used to analyze the transcripts of 16 interviews. Based on the system's identification of recurring codes, the main themes were defined.

Coding combined deductive and inductive approaches. Deductively, the analysis was guided by the research framework (perceived effectiveness, mediation, advocacy and policy influence, neoliberal attributes). Inductively, the coding process remained open to codes grounded in participants' wording. The units of analysis were meaning units (one to two sentences or a short paragraph), and segments could receive multiple codes.

All 16 interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy. The researcher read each transcript and produced analytic memos to capture initial impressions and themes related to the research questions.

First-cycle coding was conducted by importing the transcripts into ATLAS.ti and processing them using an AI-assisted workflow to identify recurring codes in the interviews. The researcher reserved the right to accept, reject, or modify the AI's suggestions. Each coded segment included basic metadata (interviewee's organization; sector: SDIO/Government/Community; field: community/environment).

Following initial coding, semantically overlapping codes were merged. The codes were then grouped into broad domains (perceived effectiveness, mediation, advocacy) and subsequently organized into themes and sub-themes. Finally, relationships between domains (as outlined in Figure 2) were examined to articulate how mediation processes, advocacy strategies, and institutional conditions interact to promote policy change.

Coded data was compared across sectors (SDIO/Government/Community) using Theme $\times$ Sector matrices⁴ to address the research aims. This analysis revealed patterns in how

⁴ The term *Theme $\times$ Sector matrices* refers to tables used to compare how each sector (SDIOs, government, and community representatives) addressed each major theme in the coding. This approach facilitated the identification of similarities, differences, and patterns of emphasis across the groups.

effectiveness, mediation, and advocacy were articulated and described, as well as how different sectors represented perspectives on the same organization's efficiency.

Quotes were translated from Hebrew to English using an online translation platform, with edits made by researcher as needed. The absence of intercoder reliability statistics is acknowledged as a limitation; this was partially mitigated through transparency, consistency checks and documentation of analytic memos. Data was managed in accordance with institutional ethics guidelines.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

The findings from the interviews illustrate how SDIOs understand their own effectiveness in influencing policy in spatial development. The interviews reveal multiple ways organizations define effectiveness in advocacy, ranging from shifting mindsets and building trust to influencing procedures, budgets, and long-term planning. The interviews also illustrate the complex role that neoliberal attributes play in shaping how both SDIOs and their partners perceive what constitutes effective advocacy. Overall, the findings underscore the complexity of the process of policy change, intertwined with parallel efforts that are often difficult to capture and measure.

Following the research hypotheses (Chapter 4.2), four themes emerged: **perception of effectiveness in advocacy; gaps in perceived effectiveness; economic climate and neoliberal attributes; and resource allocation**. Together, these themes illustrate aspects of the multilayered phenomenon of SDIOs' perceived effectiveness in influencing spatial policy change.

4.2 Themes and Coding

The coding analysis conducted using ATLAS.ti AI yielded 1,842 individual codes across 520 quotations from 16 semi-structured interviews. To enhance analytical clarity, similar codes were clustered into broader categories. For example, the codes "Organizations' Resource Allocation," "Resource Investment," "Organizations' Resource Sharing," and "Under-allocation" were merged into the broader category titled "Organizational Resource Allocation." Table 2 presents the coding clusters of repeated terms.

Although this research is qualitative, the coding process also recorded the frequency of each code across the interviews. The purpose of counting codes was not to present quantitative findings, but to help identify recurring patterns and topics in the data. Examining the number of quotations linked to each code highlighted issues discussed by multiple participants and supported the grouping of codes into broader themes. In this way, code frequency was used solely to support the qualitative interpretation of the interviews. To maintain focus on qualitative analysis in the results chapter, detailed tables presenting the grouped codes and their frequencies are included in Appendix E.

The three most frequently occurring categories were "Organizational Resources", "Gaps", and "Collaborations and Partnerships". These dominant themes reflect the internal and

relational orientations through which SDIOs perceive their advocacy effectiveness. They emphasize resource distribution within organizations, the structural and perceptual gaps between stakeholders, and the role of collaboration as a key mechanism of influence and legitimacy in the policy arena.

While codes relating directly to “Effectiveness” appeared in the data, they were less dominant compared to others, suggesting that organizations may not define or discuss advocacy success in explicit terms. Instead, notions of effectiveness seem to be embedded in broader organizational processes, such as resource allocation or partnerships. Additionally, codes related to “Economic climate” and “Neoliberal mindset” indicate that participants are aware of structural and ideological influences shaping their work, even if these are not always the focus of their narratives.

“Miscommunication” and lack of shared understanding also emerged as relevant factors that can affect advocacy outcomes, especially in cross-sector collaborations. Interestingly, while “Community Engagement” and “Government Resource Allocation” were present in the data, they were not as prominent as expected, possibly reflecting an internal and partnership-oriented perspective rather than a strong government or community orientation. This may point to the way SDIOs frame their advocacy role, more as relational bridge and organizational actors, and less as direct agents of change at the grassroots or policy level.

Table 5.1 Group Code Clusters

Group Code	Included Codes
Organizational Resource Allocation	Organizations’ Resource Allocation, Resource Investment, Organizations’ Resource Sharing, Under-allocation
Gaps	Gaps, Lack of Gaps, Gap, Gaps of Understanding, Communication Gaps
Collaborations and Partnerships	Collaboration, Cooperation, Partnership, Partnership and Connections
Effectiveness	Effectiveness, Efficiency, Low Effectiveness, Ineffectiveness
Economic Climate	Economic Impact, Economic Climate, Economic Context
Influence	Impact, Positive Impact, Influence, Local Impact

Neoliberal Mindset and Approach	Neoliberalism, Neoliberal Influences, Neoliberal Approach, Neoliberal Characteristics
Collaborations	Collaboration, Partnerships, Coalitions
Misunderstanding and Miscommunication	Understanding, Lack of Clarity, Lack of Information, Uncertainty, Lack of Understanding, Poor Understanding, Lack of Knowledge, Lack of Communication
Limitations and Challenges	Challenges, Barriers, Limitations, Difficulty
Governmental Resource and Budget Allocation	Financing, Resources, Governmental Budgets, Resource Mobilization, Policy Budget Allocation
Financial Status	Economic Situation, Economic Impacts

To identify recurring patterns and deepen analytical insight, the group codes extracted from the interviews were clustered into broader themes that reflect participants' perceptions. The clustering was guided by both the research questions and the conceptual framing developed in the literature review, aiming to interpret how SDIOs perceive their effectiveness in influencing spatial policy. This refined coding process allowed for the emergence of four major themes: **(1) Effectiveness Is Not Just “The What,” but Also “The How”;** **(2) Partners' Broad Perception of Effectiveness;** **(3) The Organization's Resources and Clarity Contribute to Effectiveness;** and **(4) Hybrid Strategies to Cope with the Effects of Neoliberalism** (as shown in Table 5.2). These themes provide a structured framework for organizing and analyzing the data while remaining grounded in participants' language and context.

Table 5.2 Themes Presented Based on Coding

Themes	Group Code
Effectiveness Is Not Just “The What,” but Also “The How”	Collaborations and Partnerships (Collaboration, Cooperation, Partnership, Partnership and Connections) Effectiveness (Effectiveness, Efficiency, Low Effectiveness, Ineffectiveness) Influence (Impact, Positive Impact, Influence and Local Impact) Community Engagement
Partners’ Broad Perceptions of Effectiveness	Gaps (Gaps, Lack of Gaps, Gaps of Understanding and Communication Gaps) Misunderstanding and Miscommunication (Understanding, Lack of Clarity, Lack of Information, Uncertainty, Lack of Understanding, Poor Understanding, Lack of Knowledge and Lack of Communication) Limitations and Challenges (Challenges, Barriers, Limitations, Difficulty)
The Organization’s Resources and Clarity Contribute to Effectiveness	Resource Allocation (Resource Allocation, Resource Investment, Resource Sharing and Under-allocation) Collaborations (Collaboration, Partnerships and Coalitions)
Hybrid Strategies to Cope with the Effects of Neoliberalism	Economic Climate (Economic Impact, Impact, Economic Climate and Economic Context) Resource and Budget Allocation (Financing, Resources, Budgets, Resource Mobilization and Budget Allocation) Financial Status (Economic Situation and Economic Impacts) Neoliberal Mindset and Approach (Neoliberalism, Neoliberal Influences, Neoliberal Approach, Neoliberal Influences and Neoliberal Characteristics) Neoliberal Policies (Influence and Effects)

The themes “**Effectiveness Is Not Just ‘The What,’ but Also ‘The How’**” and “**The Organization’s Resources and Clarity Contribute to Effectiveness**” both emphasize how organizations evaluate their own strategic role and impact. The theme of “**Partners’ Broad Perception of Effectiveness**” suggests tensions between different actors or levels regarding how influence is defined and measured. Lastly, the theme “**Hybrid Strategies to Cope with the Effects of Neoliberalism**” points to the structural and ideological

contexts in which these organizations operate and their coping mechanisms. Together, these themes offer a multi-dimensional lens to examine how advocacy work is experienced, understood, and valued within spatial policy processes.

The following chapters take a closer look at each of the four themes by analyzing how different types of organizations - SDIOs, government partners, and community representatives - talk about them. Using direct quotes from the interviews, the analysis aims to give a broad and grounded view of how SDIOs understand their effectiveness in influencing policy within the economic context shaped by neoliberal values.

4.3 Effectiveness is Not Just “The What,” but Also “The How”

This chapter will analyze the perception of SDIOs when advocating for community needs and aspirations, following the literature review that highlighted the complexity of assessing advocacy success, due to its hard-to-define and slow-to-observe nature. As noted in the literature, outcomes are often indirect and collective, so it is necessary to consider mixed indicators: soft and relational (awareness, trust, access, coordination) along with hard and institutional (procedures, tender criteria, budget lines). Effectiveness is also perspective-dependent: SDIOs, government, and community actors interpret the same work differently, as will be demonstrated through interviewees’ perspectives.

4.3.1 The Defined Intention

The results of this chapter demonstrate multiple facets of perceived effectiveness, alongside how SDIOs define success, their goals in pursuing policy change, and their active participation in the policy design process. SDIOs sit on a spectrum. Some name policy change as an explicit mission; others present themselves mainly as project implementers and only later recognize policy-level effects in their work.

SDIOs A, B and C explicitly aim for policy change implementation to influence rules and routines⁵ and describing policy as embedded in all activities. These SDIOs see their role as providing an infrastructure for the national government to implement new policies, hence being the “on the ground” actor. This role includes pushing new operation models that create proof of concepts for the government to be able to adopt and implement⁶. Other SDIOs, such as D, a community SDIO, and E and F, both environmental SDIOs⁷ avoid the

⁵ Interviews with Avi, Idan, Netanel, Yosef, Ben and Omer

⁶ Interview with Avi and Netanel

⁷ Interviews with Guy, Sara, Roni, Lior and Dan

labels of policy change and advocacy and speak in project terms, taking government policies out of the equation. They focus on maintaining their efforts in areas where national and local policies can't interfere with their activities within the community, emphasizing the "freedom" of project-based work, unrestrained by set policies. These SDIOs are not blind to the importance of policy shifts but rather frame their influence as shaping discourse rather than formal government policy. They aim at softer changes in the way governmental entities operate to create the wanted change.

An interview with Netanel⁸ from community SDIO B outlines the strategic organizational focus on policy change by using a leading national accounting firm to design measurables to assess policy impact.

"Because we measure our impact, we issue a KPMG⁹ report, and we measure ourselves every year...this is an economic impact report, so if there is a government decision, to what extent did we influence the government decision, in which sections, and what budgets were added or diverted for the benefit of our cause."

This example supports the claim made in the literature that advocacy organizations are expected to define and communicate their own frameworks of success (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014), especially when conventional policy outcomes are delayed or indirect. Perceived effectiveness is not only internal but strategically externalized to gain legitimacy through measurable tools.

Even when policy change is not explicitly identified as a mission, some SDIOs engage in the practice of planning pilot projects for proofs of concept, so that successful initiatives can subsequently be institutionalized into rules and budgets - for example, by embedding clauses or threshold conditions within tenders¹⁰. The strategy of tender design was also observed in Environmental SDIO E and Community SDIO D¹¹ which intentionally avoid positioning their projects as policy interventions, while still designing them with institutionalization in mind. These practices illustrate the intricate nature of advocacy and policy change: the concept is often ambiguously defined, and organizations that actively engage in policy-shaping activities may not perceive themselves as policy-oriented. This mindset is illustrated in an interview with Lior from Environmental SDIO E, who describes

⁸ As mentioned earlier in the study, all the names of the interviewees are pseudonyms. See Appendix D – List of Interviewees.

⁹ An Israeli accounting firm

¹⁰ Environmental E SDIO, Community D SDIO

¹¹ Interviews with Sara, Roni and Lior

how the organization seeks to limit direct governmental involvement while simultaneously acknowledging its role and significance.

“The government right now is not a barrier or a catalyst. Our mandate is the public space; it is statutory under the local authority. We have some kind of discussion with the government. Let's say at the “Nahal City”¹² meeting there was an opportunity for two government ministries to collaborate, so two government ministries were actually added to this specific project as funding partners - not for the city's infrastructure, but for a specific project within the city.”

Lior's reflection aligns with Fursova's (2018) notion of “integrationist” versus “oppositional” strategies. Even when SDIOs avoid direct policy confrontation, their work as mediators still positions them as subtle influencers of institutional behavior. SDIOs combine explicitly declared agenda-setting with more tacit, practice-led changes, which makes assessing success more complex and limits the ability to identify patterns of efficiency. In addition to the variability in how SDIOs define their policy-change mission, there is considerable diversity in what is considered a successful advocacy outcome, which in turn shapes how they perceive their own efficiency.

4.3.2 A Mix of Soft and Rigid Components

When describing organizational success, all SDIO interviewees incorporated “soft” aspects: mindsets, language, approach, process, and relationships; while only some SDIO interviewees used “rigid” aspects, like budget allocation and new legislation, to define success. Another soft dimension of influence involves shaping the professional perspectives of government officials, encouraging them to internalize SDIOs' positions on social and environmental issues. This influence is reflected in shifts in officials' understanding of community needs, the adoption of new approaches to processes affecting communities, and the use of language and terminology that align with SDIOs' change-oriented aspirations.

Recognizing changes in terminology is itself a marker of perceived efficiency, reflecting the holistic nature of efforts to influence community life. This understanding highlights that efficiency is not determined solely by budgets, but also by less tangible dynamics, such as relationships with decision-makers, as well as shifts in awareness and mindsets. Lior from Environmental SDIO E, which does not explicitly define policy change as part of its

¹² A spatial development project the organization is involved with

mission, described a subtle transformation in a municipal CEO, who began adopting environmental terminology and vision as a result of the SDIO's involvement.

“The municipality CEO said that he had learned about the concept of ‘walkability’ and that they are now integrating it into all of their projects. It has become something truly important to him. He even developed a project on walkability inspired by what he had been exposed to in our work together.”

This quote reinforces how language and the adoption of discourse serve as soft indicators of advocacy success, echoing the literature that highlights terminology shifts as key relational outcomes (Zhang & Guo, 2020).

Alongside influencing language and mentality, SDIO representatives also referred to changes in “how things get done” as a soft marker of success. They viewed alterations in how government entities conduct decision-making and implementation processes, the formation of partnerships, and the strengthening of collaborations to be a success. All senior SDIO representatives interviewed emphasized a goal of expanding stakeholder participation and promoting decision-making processes that are less top-down and more co-designed. Notably, this emphasis extends beyond the SDIOs' own involvement, reflecting a broader commitment to increasing the participation of governmental officials, NGOs, and residents in these processes.

Yosef, a senior at a community SDIO, describes this orientation of expanding partnerships as a “must have” to create change, and an essential working method that defines how the organization approaches advocacy and policy influence.

“No single authority - not a local authority, and not any other actor, whether in the public, private, or third sector - can generate inclusive economic growth on its own. We live today in a world that depends on collaboration and synergy across disciplines. To fully realize economic potential and foster inclusive prosperity, cooperation is essential... The reality is far more complex, and therefore regional collaboration among all relevant actors is required to identify regional assets and maximize their potential.”

The goal of SDIOs to strengthen relationships and improve processes includes changes in how governmental officials approach working with partners, focusing on increasing trust, transparency, and ongoing dialogue with different partners. Here, some SDIOs recognize success by the quality and consistency of their dialogue with governmental entities, indicating “having a seat at the table” as proof of their relevance and importance. Netanel,

from Community SDIO B, described the organization's team as a source of vision and optimism, along with an additional point of view.

"They value our perspective and they like to listen. When they want a, let's call it, a shot of vision or optimism, you know they come talk to us."

Along with changes to mindset, process, and approach, some SDIOs also define success through more traditionally "rigid", or measurable outcomes. These include adopting SDIO recommendations into policy design, changing criteria or terms in governmental tenders to better meet community needs, and allocating budgets to promote social and environmental goals. Interviewees described examples of this type of impact: government decisions altered based on SDIO feedback; budgets reallocated according to more community-based criteria; terminology changes among implementers that emphasize community development; the promotion of governmental projects aligned with SDIO aspirations; and the creation of government decisions that allocate specific funds for SDIO goals and desired change. Omer, from Community SDIO C, refers to policy alterations adopted by the Ministry of Transportation directly resulting from advocacy efforts made by his organization. Omer demonstrates how the strategy of using proofs of concept and suggesting practical solutions enables policy changes, while also showing how processes are altered to encourage greater public participation.

"At the policy level, the solution we proposed was to allocate a budget for a designated position within the local authority...a 'Public Transportation Coordinator'. This person would lead public participation processes, map community needs, and maintain direct contact with the Ministry...Eventually, the Ministry adopted our recommendation and created this position. But even before that happened, we developed a model for how such coordination should be done, including hands-on implementation of participatory processes in a small number of towns."

The achievements described of improvements in concrete budgets and criteria are referred to by some SDIOs as the most noticeable evidence there is for their efficiency in advocacy and policy design. They consider these outcomes as proof of their relevancy, professionalism, perseverance and solid connections built and maintained over time with government partners. Ben, from Community SDIO B, describes how his organization influences public budget allocations and policy adjustments:

"We assess our impact in several ways; first, through our influence on government decisions. We are involved at the advisory level and

can see that certain budgets are redirected toward projects we identify as relevant...You can literally see budget lines that were reallocated and incorporated into government resolutions following our recommendations... Secondly, in other government resolutions, we manage to express our position and often see it being adopted...where we engage with ministers or senior officials to suggest adjustments aligned with our goals, some of which are eventually accepted."

This example illustrates how perceived effectiveness is often rooted in the ability to create functional models that precede formal adoption. As discussed in the literature, advocacy outcomes are not always immediate, but evolve through processes of framing, piloting, and relational engagement (Bednarek et al., 2016; Zhang & Guo, 2020). In this case, the SDIO framed its impact not only through the final government decision, but also through its proactive development of tools and practices that eventually became institutionalized. This reflects a layered advocacy strategy, where early-stage actions such as piloting and stakeholder coordination are integral parts of what later counts as success. This perception of success is prevalent in SDIOs that define policy change as a declared organizational mission, showing the possible correlation between setting goals, defining measurable outcomes and achieving them.

Interviews with senior SDIO representatives present a wide range of definitions of efficiency, ranging from the implementation of new language styles on alternative procedures to the reallocation of funds or changes in criteria. Another multifaceted picture of efficiency and success also emerges in interviews with government officials, who have different perspectives on what is considered an efficient effort of an SDIO to impact policy design. Government officials use terms similar to those used by SDIOs when describing success, mostly including soft indicators, such as the level of trust the SDIO has formed, its ability to create and maintain partnerships and the professional knowledge it brings to decision making. Tomer, a government official from a local municipality, described how Environmental SDIO E was a key factor in strengthening collaborations within the municipality, even describing its work as “couple’s therapy”, while still acknowledging the SDIO’s underlying agenda:

"They helped us connect the different departments and units within the municipality. They organized a series of meetings between us...they managed to identify internal tensions, gaps, and disagreements, and offered what you might call a kind of 'couples therapy', something that helped us mediate, clarify, overcome crises,

and bridge different views and interests. Of course, all of this was under a certain agenda, they weren't just neutral facilitators. Their goal was not just mediation for the sake of it, but promoting a clear agenda around sustainability, environmental development, and so on."

Like the SDIOs, government entities also acknowledge rigid indicators alongside soft indicators as markers of success, such as creating successful proof of concept projects to demonstrate community needs and possibilities, raising matching funds from philanthropies for joint ventures and partnering in policy co-design. Gadi, a government representative, described outcomes that rose from working with Community SDIO B. He emphasized the mobilization of funds and resources, demonstrating the major position organization B has with its partners:

"They sit with us at the crossroads of thinking and also mobilizing resources. We provide our resources, they mobilize additional resources; the city supports them and embraces them...because of their capabilities."

In some cases, this perception of effectiveness extended beyond formal partnerships, where the SDIOs' ongoing presence and relationships allowed additional voices, especially of marginalized or less organized groups, to be indirectly heard in decision-making spaces. Ann, a community member partnering with Community SDIO D addressed this side of efficiency:

"There's a very broad network of partnerships that they've created. And I think that in the end, their very presence and involvement here brings our voice as well. So when they go to meetings with real estate developers, partners, or decision-makers, our voice is also being represented somehow, even though we're not part of the official forum."

This quote also illustrates how success is not solely measured by formal policy shifts or direct outcomes, but also by the ability of SDIOs to act as bridges, amplifying voices, fostering inclusion, and creating informal influence channels that shape the decision-making landscape.

In summary, interviewees conceptualize "success" along a range: from soft and relational shifts (mindset, trust, agenda, language) to rigid and institutional shifts (procedures, tender criteria, and budget lines). Importantly, both ends of this continuum often co-exist within the same organization and even within the same person. For example, Netanel from Organization B blended terms of success that described both influencing government

officials to adopt the SDIO agenda as well as concrete measurable indicators of budgetary allocations aligned with the SDIO's interests. These two quotes are drawn from an interview with Netanel and address changes in vocabulary alongside budgetary issues, reflecting a view of success as a range of outcomes:

“A minister who adopts the policy we presented to him, whether through language he uses in his speeches, could be...also important, at the level of awareness....”

“We ask: to what extent did we influence the government's decision, in which sections, and what budgets were added or diverted to benefit the Negev and the Galilee as a result of the activity?”

The coexistence of “soft” and “rigid” dimensions suggests that relational change often precedes institutional change, forming a pathway through which advocacy translates into tangible policy outcomes. This is demonstrated through the multiple dimensions of success that shape the perceived effectiveness of SDIO efforts. Meaning, if an organization considers policy change as merely new legislation or fund allocation, it might not recognize a mindset shift as an advocacy outcome and therefore may not perceive itself as effective. In contrast, another SDIO might view the adoption of its terms and definitions by other organizations as a significant achievement, seeing itself as an efficient advocate.

This interplay between relational and institutional measures mirrors the complexity discussed in the literature around assessing advocacy impact, especially in fields where policy is multi-actor and long-term (Casey, 2004; Andrews & Bob, 2004). It also illustrates the adaptive framing SDIOs use to construct meaning and legitimacy around their actions.

4.3.3 Local vs. National Scope

In describing their efficiency, interviewees echoed the repeating theme of geographic scope of advocacy efforts. Some SDIOs explicitly outlined the challenges in affecting national policy change as unstable political climates, complexities of process and a detachment from “on the ground” needs. Guy, from Community SDIO D, referred to government instability:

“I’ve been in this role for four years, and during these four years, the political instability has been incredibly dramatic. The lack of continuity in government policy is extremely significant.”¹³

¹³ During 2019–2022, Israel held five national elections within less than four years, leading to repeated coalition changes and short-lived governments (Knesset, 2022). This period coincided first with the COVID-19 pandemic and later with the outbreak of the October 2023 war, both of which further strained governmental continuity and long-term policy planning (OECD, 2024). Political and administrative instability continued to shape national governance structures through 2026.

The long-term aspect of policy shifts requires stability and continuity in order to create and sustain change. Avi, from Community SDIO A, describes this challenge, especially when involving more than one government ministry in the formation of new policies:

"With the state, especially if more than one government ministry is involved, it's like parting the Red Sea. There are only a handful of cases where such a process actually managed to happen."

In contrast to the low efficiency described on the national scale, Avi shared significant impact on local governing entities:

"There is a dramatic difference between the national and the local level. When it comes to the local, I'd say I'm 90% optimistic in the ability to impact... It always starts with skepticism, then comes a beginning, followed by a crisis from which we learn, and so on. Persistence, trust, and building partnerships; those are the secret ingredients. In the end, our relevance is reflected in the people who show up...that's their way of voting for us."

As SDIOs are less optimistic about their ability to influence policy change at the national level, they also tailor their advocacy strategies accordingly; for example, avoiding oppositional approaches out of concern that they might inadvertently foster antagonism toward themselves. Netanel from SDIO B addressed that tactical approach when working on the national scale:

"If you challenge too much, you won't get anything, and that's already a tactical matter."

The aspect of national versus local scope adds an additional layer to the multidimensional attributes of perceptions of effectiveness. The geographic scale highlights an internal range of perceived effectiveness within the SDIO, distinguishing their limited influence on national policy from their greater impact on local policies.

4.3.4 Conclusions

This chapter illustrates the wide spectrum through which SDIOs define and assess their perceived effectiveness in advocacy and policy change. Findings show that effectiveness is rarely limited to rigid or measurable indicators alone, such as budget allocation or policy adoption. Rather, many SDIOs also highlight relational and process-based aspects, such as trust-building, mindset shifts among decision-makers, and expanded stakeholder engagement as core indicators of successful advocacy.

This layered perception of effectiveness, balancing between intention, relational influence, and measurable change, appears even more complex when looking at the gap between national and local advocacy. While SDIOs often express low perceived impact on national policy due to instability and structural barriers, they describe higher confidence and practical success on the local level, where proximity, trust, and long-term relationships allow more tangible influence. These findings support the theoretical claim that advocacy effectiveness is not a fixed or linear outcome, but rather a flexible and agile perception shaped by actors' goals, relationships, and organizational positioning. Consistent with previous research, this reinforces the need to consider soft dimensions like language, recognition, and access to influence, alongside harder indicators. Moreover, the coexistence of both dimensions within the same organizations shows that even project-based SDIOs who avoid explicit advocacy may still engage in policy influence through embedded practice. This perspective challenges narrow assumptions of advocacy and calls for a broader understanding of what effective intermediation looks like in a neoliberal spatial development context.

4.4 Partners' Broad Perceptions of Effectiveness

Literature highlights how intermediating organizations, governmental entities and communities account for different aspects in assessing the effectiveness of mediating organizations, as each body focuses on different aspects when perceiving success (Dubus & LeBoeuf, 2019; Xu & Maitland, 2019). To identify potential gaps in perception regarding the same advocacy efforts, specifically the SDIOs' view of their own effectiveness versus the government's perception of that SDIO, we analyzed interviews with SDIOs alongside interviews with their partnering government officials. The aim was to uncover areas of either divergence or alignment in how success in the policy design process is defined, how each side perceives the partnership, and how effective advocacy for policy change is considered.

4.4.1 Perception Gaps and Alignment Between SDIOs and Their Partners

One of the central questions this study seeks to answer is whether the same perception of effectiveness is shared between SDIOs and their key partners. This chapter highlights notable discrepancies and alignments in those perceptions, revealing how mission clarity and strategic framing shape these dynamics. Throughout all interviews, a mix of cohesion and gaps emerged.

In general, public officials described the SDIOs as more effective than the organizations described themselves. For example, Environmental SDIO E was portrayed by a partnering governmental official as highly effective and a close collaborator, supporting complex, long-term processes and influencing local government positions and policies in various domains. This quote from an interview with Tomer, a local municipality director that works with SDIO E, demonstrates this approach:

“...they (SDIO E) accompanied me very closely through the whole process. I don’t know how I would have done it without them. The municipality then received over half a million shekels.”

SDIO E’s effectiveness was also addressed by Roni, a community member who partners with the organization. She described E’s efficiency in promoting environmental and community needs in relevant local policies:

“I think they did a very, very good job with this, because they managed to get many different actors to adopt a certain concept, to use it as if it were their own and in a positive way, and to go out and develop various programs around it together.”

SDIO E officials, however, perceived their own effectiveness differently, emphasizing project-based outcomes and relations with partners, while avoiding the declared goal of policy change. An interview with Lior from the organization shows a more restrained approach, viewing budget allocation and policy change as a potential outcome, yet not the mission:

“We don’t come and say we’re going to change policy; policy change might happen from our successes, but I won’t go and check policy documents later.”

This contrast illustrates how the perception of effectiveness is not only shaped internally but also negotiated through relationships with partnering actors. The following example presents a case in which the SDIO and public officials share a mutual perception of policy

influence, pointing to a higher level of alignment and trust. In contrast to the case of SDIO E, in which a gap existed, SDIO B offers an example of alignment. Both the organization and its government partners consistently described its policy influence as effective and strategic.

For organization B, a community SDIO, there was less of a notable gap between organizational views and those of partnering interviewees. Self-declaration and partner views both described the organization's success in affecting policy change. This included a self-perception of effectively impacting government decisions and creating collaboration¹⁴ that government partners echoed, describing the SDIO as effectively involved in the policy design process, creating a joint vision with elected officials and supporting execution. Gadi, a local government official, described SDIO B's contribution to economic growth through working side by side with elected officials:

"They succeeded greatly...it is reflected in the fact that we wrote a vision and approved it with the mayor, we defined tasks and the mayor adopted them. We work according to a plan that is agreed upon by both of us. There is a tremendous mutual commitment from all parties."

4.4.2 How Advocacy Effectiveness is Defined by Different Actors

Across the interviews, gaps often appeared between how SDIOs perceived their own effectiveness and how external stakeholders evaluated them. However, when an SDIO had an explicit and measurable policy goal, the perceptions tended to align. Both the organization and its governmental partners viewed its performance as effective. This alignment suggests that when objectives are clearly defined and linked to tangible policy outcomes, the meaning of "effectiveness" becomes shared, reducing interpretive ambiguity. In such cases, success is not only easier to demonstrate but also mutually recognized, reinforcing the organization's sense of legitimacy and relevance. An example emerges from an interview with Idan from SDIO B, the same organization referenced by Gadi above in describing its effectiveness. Similar to Gadi, Idan also perceives the SDIO as effective and relies on the CEO's perspective in defining success.

"In recent weeks, he (the SDIO's CEO) says, there's been more and more talk within the government organization about our organization's vision...as if it's some kind of manifesto, a government work plan, a target we need to reach. It's probably not a coincidence that we're suddenly hearing about trains from Kiryat Shmona to

¹⁴ Community SDIO B

Eilat, and other talk like that. Maybe, little by little, it's starting to sink in."

The findings echo the literature on the difficulty of defining and assessing advocacy success. The most prevalent discussion focuses on how SDIOs and their partners identify and demonstrate policy change in both policy design and implementation, including in relation to the stated aim of achieving such change. The multidimensional definition of effectiveness presented by the SDIOs also comes across in interviews with government officials and community members, and ranges from the retrieval of funds (as described by Gadi) to the formation of collaborations and support for inner organizational processes. Tomer, from a local government organization who partners with SDIO E, focused on E's successful role in forming collaborations with the municipality, while also describing their efficiency in changing inner organizational mechanisms:

"... there is a lot of collaboration, the mayor really likes their work, and we are moving quite a few things forward...They managed to identify all kinds of intrigues, gaps, and disagreements within us, and they also offered all kind of support."

This range is also apparent in interviews with community members, who combined the aspect of representation (referring to the organization's role in advocating for community needs) along with softer aspects such as strengthening bonds and community building. Ann, a community member that partners with SDIO D, describes the organization's effectiveness in this manner:

"I think that creating a sense of community and building platforms...are very meaningful assets in disadvantaged or less organized communities, and I believe that (SDIO D) knows how to do that. Once the community was able to organize itself and develop a shared identity and common needs, it became easier to bring this forward to decision-makers, who then responded to them in one way or another."

Ann addresses the organization's role in supporting the community's voice, and then presenting community needs to decision-makers. This demonstrates how partnering entities see effectiveness as a range of action: a combination of forming relationships and active advocating.

These findings strengthen the understanding that perceptions of advocacy effectiveness are shaped by actors' positions, goals, and relationships, not necessarily by concrete outcomes. However, while some SDIOs did not consider themselves effective in influencing policy,

they described effectiveness internally in other terms, mainly through building trust, engaging residents, and creating long-term partnerships. Tomer, representing a local government organization that partners with SDIO E, also describes the SDIO's effectiveness in fostering resident engagement as demonstration of success in their mediating role; that is, working closely with government officials while also building trust with the community:

"They met with groups of residents, did a lot of backstage work, and presented to us: 'In this neighborhood, the needs are X and Y.'"

These participatory processes of building trust and forming coalitions position SDIOs as mediating bridges that create a collective voice by convening forums, translating local knowledge into briefs, and developing a shared language across units. By bringing people and organizations to the same table, some SDIOs view themselves as effective in laying the groundwork to advance residents' needs, while maintaining a strong long-term "eye on the prize" approach.

Interestingly, government partners perceived these SDIOs as effective in influencing policy, despite the SDIOs' lower self-assessment of their own effectiveness. This may suggest that governmental actors understand policy effectiveness in a broader way, one that also includes these softer elements of collaboration and participation. One example came from Tal, an official from a regional government organization partnering with SDIO E, who referred to the SDIOs' unimaginable success in forming strategic partnerships, while the SDIO itself does not consider itself policy efficient:

"They've established a committee here, with partnerships from a million different entities - KKL, the Drainage Authority, local municipalities. I don't think anyone ever imagined something like this could happen...what they've been able to accomplish."

4.4.3 Conclusions

This chapter illustrates how SDIOs, government officials and community members often define advocacy effectiveness differently. These differences are not always in conflict, and reflect the unique role and expectations of each actor. For example, the way SDIOs define success, such as through building trust or changing processes, may not be perceived in the same way by others.

Some gaps are structural and reflect a lack of shared language or goals. Others are narrower and based on different, but not opposing, perspectives. These findings suggest

that understanding advocacy impact depends not only on outcomes, but also on relationships, communication and the ability to align perspectives across actors.

4.5 Economic Climate and Neoliberal Attributes

Literature shows how privatization and market-driven changes impact policy advocacy and community development differently than the welfare climate (Hendricks et al., 2009; Aimers & Walker, 2016). Exploring advocacy effectiveness of SDIOs through the research area of Israel highlights the tension between the state's neoliberalism and its historical and current egalitarian ideology (i.e., welfare state), as Israel's economic climate evolves (Zychlinski, 2010; Schmid & Almog-Bar, 2008).

This tension came across in both SDIO interviews and with government officials, demonstrating neoliberal attributes while still maintaining welfare state of mind. As a neoliberal example, we can see how long-term planning is often constrained by political and budgetary limitations. Several SDIOs noted that complex investments in transportation, employment hubs, or infrastructure require decades, while decision-makers tend to prioritize initiatives that can demonstrate visible results within a three-to-four-year horizon. This restriction shapes advocacy strategies so that SDIOs must adapt their messaging to match governmental expectations for rapid and proven budgetary returns, even when their own goals relate to broader social or spatial change requiring long-term commitments.

As Idan from SDIO B explained, the allocation of large national budgets is tied to questions about “where the billions go” and how soon investments will “show results,” while policymakers remain focused on achievements that can be counted within their term. These dynamics illustrate how SDIOs operate within an economic climate led by short-term incentives, requiring them to translate long-range community needs to fit the logistics of immediate impact and fiscal justification. Idan elaborates on the mindset of policymakers when allocating funds, highlighting term duration as a guiding principle in decision-making:

“...these are tens of billions - yes, a railway is 150 billion, the new lines and the metro are 150 billion. So, the question is where you place those 150 billion....These are also investments that will yield results in the long term, not tomorrow morning. And this is also a policy question, because most politicians ask themselves what they can achieve in the next three to four years. What we don't count now, with the cash in hand on the stairs, will not happen.”

This example illustrates how the advocacy efforts of SDIOs are shaped not only by their internal agendas, but also by the economic logistics and political rhythms of the state and local authorities. This aligns with literature that highlights how neoliberal conditions reframe what is considered effective civic engagement (Aimers & Walker, 2016).

Alongside these short-term, market-driven mindsets, the interviews also reflected more traditional welfare-oriented aspirations, expressing a desire for a shift back toward greater governmental responsibility and increased awareness of social and environmental concerns. Participants described a sense of neglect of community needs in favor of prioritizing “Excel sheets” and budget balancing. Avi, from SDIO A, refers to a lack of governmental responsibility in developing essential services for disadvantaged communities, highlighting how policies tend to focus on market behavior rather than reducing inequality or addressing gaps where the market does not invest:

“The role of the state is not to strengthen high-demand areas, the market knows how to do that...In my view, the state should be measured in the places where it is needed most, and there we see a complete public failure. No one is taking responsibility for it, and it is not even considered a goal.”

While still maintaining welfare-oriented aspirations, the literature notes that SDIOs have learned to adopt market-relevant mindsets to demonstrate their efficiency; for example, by showcasing success in community development through rising land costs or the number of housing units (Fursova, 2018). While criticizing the short-term framework of government officials, some SDIOs also exhibited a similar double standard. They adopted the same market-oriented mindset, adapting to current economic climate measurables, even while opposing it, rather than maintaining their stance on governmental responsibility - even at the risk of being seen as less effective. This, in turn, reinforces the cycle of incorporating neoliberal attributes into the NGO and SDIO field. Yosef, from Community SDIO B, described his organization’s efficiency in leading change in Israel’s periphery, citing land value as an indicator of success.

“In demographic growth, there are places that need help. Some places are hard to attract people to, because they are very remote. Today Karmit is considered a success; once no one believed people would live there, and now lots there cost 3 million shekels. It has become a highly sought-after place, everyone wants to live there, and so on.”

The complex tension between neoliberalism and welfare is reflected not only in perceptions of the government's role and responsibility, but also in the growing reliance on SDIOs to perform functions that traditionally belonged to the state. This positions SDIOs not only as advocates for community needs, but also as implementers operating within policy frameworks. In this sense, privatization and outsourcing are not merely background structures; they actively shape how SDIOs understand their role, articulate their influence, and describe their effectiveness. Sara, from Community SDIO D, describes the organization's lobbying efforts for the development of Israel's periphery as balancing both the role of advocate as well as service provider:

"The decision that we're managing the Ministry of Health's initiative is the result of a great deal of lobbying work around the issue of strengthening the local workforce and quality employment in the periphery...it evolved through both relationships and the creation of a shared language within government ministries, and one of its outcomes is this initiative. The Ministry of Health leads it, it's their project, not ours. We're just the operating organization...there's definitely complexity here, because we are still a grassroots organization that provides services to all these entities, and at the same time, we're also serving as a coordinating body for a broader policy change initiative."

The same environment that limits long-term public investment also creates opportunities for operational and budgetary growth for SDIOs, making them reliant on governmental entities not as partners, but as financing clients. Within these privatized shifts in relationships, it becomes clear why SDIOs may frame their advocacy cooperatively rather than resist the system more openly. Netanel, from Community SDIO B, described how the organization navigates these challenges, explaining the need to be strategic when advocating to avoid jeopardizing relationships:

"...overall, I think as an organization we are respected, have an open door, a long-term reputation and know how to challenge systems. All systems. Because when you challenge systems, you need to do it in moderation. In the end, we are an organization that operates through consensus. We are non-partisan, and we know how to build effective relationships across the entire political spectrum in Israel. I'm saying this as the context, and within these definitions, overall, we have no problem creating an effective dialogue, including a challenging dialogue, with government actors. If you challenge too much, you won't get anything - and that's already a tactical matter."

While most SDIOs work with residents, none of the interviewees described oppositional advocacy that works to engage the public to strengthen their voice opposing governing structures. The only advocacy tool that might be considered adjacent to oppositional advocacy was described as taking part in or leading organizational coalition platforms that at times may find themselves employing more confrontational tactics. Guy, from SDIO D, describes this approach of coalition work, aiming to create modest tension with the government to promote policy change:

"There's a growing understanding that only by acting together as civil society organizations can we approach the state in a much stronger way and influence policy. And indeed, the coalition has had several achievements over the years, including in the policy arena, despite the government turnovers and the general instability we've been facing for the past few years...In terms of how we engage with the government, I believe there is value in taking a more assertive stance, not confrontational or aggressive, but one that does introduce a certain level of constructive tension."

Overall, the interviews show that SDIOs in Israel live in a kind of double reality. They describe how governments are driven by short timelines and limited budgets, and they criticize this approach, while at the same time adjusting to it. SDIO's have adopted the language of numbers, "quick wins", and "show me the results", because otherwise their work won't be seen or supported. This in turn creates a loop: the more SDIOs use these market-oriented ideas to prove they are "effective," the more they help keep this mindset alive. Even when they want long-term social change, they end up playing by short-term rules. This tension between what they believe in and what the system demands makes advocacy much more complicated. In the end, how "effective" they seem is not only about their work, but also about how they manage to move inside an economic system that pushes everyone to speak the same language.

4.5.1 Conclusions

The findings demonstrate how SDIOs operate within a complex economic and political environment, marked by a strong tension between neoliberal logics and welfare aspirations. Interviewees described how short-term political and budgetary cycles constrain long-term community planning, requiring SDIOs to align their advocacy strategies with governmental expectations for measurable, immediate outcomes. At the same time, organizations still hold onto welfare values, calling for broader state responsibility in addressing inequality

and underinvestment in peripheral regions. This duality reflects a shift in how effectiveness is framed, balancing social goals with the need to deliver market-oriented “proof” of impact.

Alongside this tension, the blurred roles between civil society and government become apparent, as SDIOs not only advocate but also implement state initiatives. This dual positioning creates a paradox: while critical of privatization, many SDIOs function as service providers, adapting to governmental language and funding structures. Most interviewees emphasized constructive collaboration rather than confrontational advocacy, showing how the demand to maintain legitimacy and access often prevents direct opposition. As a result, SDIOs navigate a system that both limits and enables them, adapting to survive while reinforcing the very dynamics they seek to challenge.

4.6 Resource Allocation

Increased investment in advocacy tools and resources enhances capacity for policy influence, as shown in studies on NGO advocacy dynamics (Schmid & Almog-Bar, 2008; Fursova, 2018; Alexander & Kandyce, 2021).

Interviews revealed that SDIOs invest varying amounts of organizational resources into policy work, even while acknowledging that results often unfold slowly or may only materialize under future administrations. These resources include staff time, budgets, and attention to long-term policy processes, despite the uncertainty of outcomes. Some SDIO interviewees provided clear, concrete accounts of resource allocation, while others offered more vague responses and struggled to quantify their organizational input.

Across the interviews, two patterns became clear. First, organizations that reported investing more resources in policy work tended to perceive themselves as effective in influencing policy. The investment itself - whether staff time, attention, or dedicated roles – essentially formed how they understood their impact. Omer, from Community SDIO C, highlights the deep investment his organization makes in driving policy change:

"You could say that 100% of the organization's resources are dedicated to policy, because that's the core of what we do. We are involved in implementation as well, but for us, even that involvement serves the purpose of influencing policy."

Omer also describes his organization as extremely efficient in promoting policy change:

"In terms of effectiveness, I think that in most areas we manage to create change where we operate. I believe these changes are quite significant."

This demonstrates that the allocation of organizational resources, combined with a clearly stated mission to influence policy, can lead to a higher perception of effective advocacy. The second clear pattern was that SDIOs that were able to give a clear and straightforward answer about how much they allocate to policy work also described themselves as more effective. Their ability to name the resources, rather than speak in general terms, seemed to reflect a stronger sense of direction and confidence in their policy efforts. For example, this is how Avi from Community SDIO A described organizational efficiency and resource allocation:

"Everything we do includes a policy component, because we cannot achieve our goals without the state being a partner...you could say that we're investing around 15% of the organization's resources in this at the moment. Next year, I believe it will grow to almost 20%, because we will bring someone in-house to work on it with me."

Along with describing his SDIO's effectiveness in promoting policies at the local governmental level, Avi also illustrated their self-perception of success as a mediating entity:

"There is definitely policy work at the local level. With the local authority, we do very meaningful work to ensure that we are not just avoiding being a barrier, but actually serving as a force multiplier for what they are already able to deliver...Sometimes residents place more trust in us than in the local welfare system, and part of our role is to build trust between them and the welfare system. That, too, is a significant component."

Organizations that had a clear picture of their resource allocation also tended to define distinct policy goals. In cases where more than one employee was interviewed, their goals aligned with each other and with the statements of their governmental partners. This suggests that clarity in resource allocation and goals may help shape a shared understanding among partners, which supports policy work in practical ways.

This cohesion between interviewees about organizational goals and the use of identical terms and purpose was illustrated in the case of Community SDIO B:

- Yosef from SDIO B: *"We work to ensure that the Negev and the Galilee become new centers in the state of Israel. Everyone wants to live in the center, but we aim to establish*

two additional centers, one in the Negev and one in the Galilee."

- Netanel from SDIO B: *"The establishment of the new centers in the Negev and the Galilee is planned for the state's centennial year, 2048."*
- Dan from SDIO B: *"Our mission is to strengthen the state of Israel by establishing two additional centers in the Negev and the Galilee."*

These mission statements also aligned with Gadi, local government official that partners with the organization:

"They (SDIO B) has its own agenda, which is perfectly legitimate, and it happens to align very well with our goals around Negev development."

These examples highlight how clarity around resource allocation and organizational goals reinforces SDIOs' sense of effectiveness and alignment with their partners. This level of coherence was not universal, however. Unlike SDIOs A and C, Sara from Community SDIO D and Roni from Environmental SDIO E had more vague and uncertain statements regarding the extent of organizational resources dedicated to advocacy:

- Sara from SDIO D: *"I don't think the inputs are very significant, they're certainly not distributed across the entire organization. You could maybe attribute a portion of it mainly to senior management's time. I can't say exactly, but I'd estimate it's somewhere between 10 to 20% of what the CEO deals with."*
- Roni from SDIO E: *"I'd say that we don't actually do advocacy in the formal sense of what advocacy means. We're not going to enter a situation where the mayor isn't committed, where there's no municipal team willing to advance urban issues, or where the public space has no potential for change. In other words, we don't fight windmills, we're not going to run long campaigns."*

These examples point to a more fragmented or less strategically defined engagement with policy change that aligns with these SDIOs low perception of effectiveness, as presented before.

Although all SDIOs described allocating some resources to policy work, none mentioned any formal advocacy or policy training. Interviewees referred instead to "learning by doing", describing policy skills as something gained through practice rather than through organizational preparation.

4.6.1 Conclusions

In sum, the interviews show that resource allocation and perceived effectiveness go hand in hand. Organizations that invest more and can state clearly how much they invest tend to perceive themselves effectively in their policy work. The clarity itself signals direction and confidence.

These findings support existing literature that highlights the critical role of internal investment in shaping organizational influence on policy. As Alexander & Kandyce (2021) and Fursova (2018) point out, advocacy is not only about strategies but also about the capacity, people, time, and attention an organization is willing to commit. In the case of SDIOs, this connection between resource clarity and perceived effectiveness becomes especially relevant within the complex policy environment in which they operate.

The coherence between stated goals and resource allocation signals intentionality and positions SDIOs as reliable actors in the policy arena. On the other hand, when resources are described vaguely or without measurable indicators, it becomes harder to evaluate success or coordinate with external partners. This gap suggests that building internal capacity alongside clearer organizational strategy can support both stronger advocacy and more consistent collaboration.

5. Discussion

This chapter examines the key findings and interprets them in relation to the study's theoretical framework and research questions. The goal is to interpret how Spatial Development Intermediary Organizations (SDIOs) perceive their effectiveness in influencing spatial policy, and how these perceptions are shaped by internal logistics, external relationships, and broader economic contexts.

The discussion is organized around several thematic focal points. First, it explores how SDIOs define and evaluate effectiveness through both institutional outcomes (such as budget allocations and regulatory changes) and relational or discursive shifts (such as trust-building, changes in terminology, and collaborative processes). Second, it demonstrates the unique intermediary role of SDIOs, who operate between government and civil society while being evaluated for their effectiveness by external actors.

Third, it examines how neoliberal logics of efficiency and measurability influence how organizations plan, act, and report on their advocacy efforts. Lastly, the study demonstrates internal operational processes and perceptions about advocacy, organizational mission statement and budget allocation as a projector of effectiveness in policy change.

Each section brings together empirical findings, insights from interviews, and theoretical concepts to offer an understanding of advocacy effectiveness as a dynamic, agile, and context-oriented framework. The chapter highlights how SDIOs navigate a complex policy ecosystem, reframe success, and pursue change in ways that align with and challenge dominant policy paradigms.

5.1 Reframing Effectiveness: Between Soft and Rigid Outcomes

The findings suggest that SDIOs do not adopt a single, fixed definition of effectiveness in advocacy, but rather construct a fluid and multi-layered view. This reframing moves away from considering only outcome-based definitions, such as tender criteria or budgetary reallocation, and instead incorporates both soft and rigid indicators that reflect the relational and procedural nature of influencing policy (see section 5.3).

As presented in the literature, assessing advocacy success is difficult due to its long-term and ambiguous outcomes (Schmid & Almog-Bar, 2008; Zhang & Guo, 2020). Advocacy efforts often use indirect channels and multiple actors, making impact measurement a complex task. This complexity is shown in interview data, where SDIOs describe success

through a range of expressions, from shaping decision-makers' language, to forming trust-based partnerships, to embedding community aspirations into tender criteria.

For example, one SDIO senior described how “walkability”, a concept introduced through the organization's work as part of an environmental approach, became a guiding principle for the municipality's planning efforts. This shift reflects what Gazley (2008) and Gliedt et al. (2018) identify as soft indicators of effectiveness: changing institutional language, norms, and perceptions.

Other interviewees emphasized rigid markers of success, such as influencing governmental resolutions, reallocating budgets, or inserting specific clauses into tenders (refer to interviews with Ben, SDIO B, and Omer, SDIO C). These reflect the institutional or formal indicators referenced in the literature (Andrews & Bob, 2004). But even these testimonies are often the result of longer processes of dialogue, trust-building, and knowledge translation.

Rather than seeing soft and rigid indicators as opposites, SDIOs often hold them together. In some cases, changes in mindset and language are perceived as a step towards formal change. In others, formal achievements are seen as evidence that relational work has paid off. Advocacy effectiveness is often shaped by internal organizational framing and strategic positioning, not only by observable policy change.

This suggests that effectiveness, as perceived by SDIOs themselves, is not just about “what changed”, but also “how” and “through whom”. Organizations make sense of their role and success through the networks they build, the processes they influence, and the trust they create, all of which expand the traditional policy impact framework.

The reframing of effectiveness also reflects a desire to maintain legitimacy in a system that values measurable outputs while still containing the complexity of advocacy. As one SDIO official mentioned, effectiveness is a combination of economic reports and budgetary increases, while also emphasizing mindset changes (see section 5.3). This balancing act is especially relevant in neoliberal policy orders, where accountability and return-on-investment logic often dominate (see section 5.5). In response, SDIOs use layered narratives of success to satisfy both funders' expectations and their own values-driven missions.

Taken together, these findings help explain why evaluating advocacy effectiveness remains inherently challenging. Advocacy outcomes are often indirect, long-term, and shaped through multiple actors and processes, making them difficult to assess through a single measurable outcome (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Corburn, 2005; Zhang & Guo, 2020).

The interviews demonstrate that effectiveness is therefore understood through a combination of both rigid and soft indicators; however, this multi-layered understanding exists within a broader neoliberal policy environment that tends to prioritize measurable outputs and quantitative indicators of success. As a result, the softer dimensions of advocacy work, which are central to the actual process of influence, may remain under-recognized or insufficiently captured by dominant evaluation frameworks. This tension suggests that the perceived effectiveness of advocacy may appear more limited than the influence that actually takes place, as prevailing measurement logics tend to reflect only the more formal and visible aspects of policy change.

5.2 Navigating Neoliberal Logics: Efficiency, Output, and Legitimacy

The findings indicate that SDIOs operate under significant pressure to align with neoliberal expectations of efficiency, accountability, and measurable impact. Many of the organizations interviewed expressed a strong commitment to values of inclusion, equity, and community empowerment, though their strategies and language often reflect an adaptation to a policy environment shaped by market logics. This tension was evident across multiple interviews (see section 5.4), where organizational seniors described the need to “speak the language” of effectiveness in order to gain legitimacy, funding, and access to decision-making arenas.

This complexity echoes the literature about the influence of neoliberal orders on non-profit and civil society actors. Almog-Bar & Schmid (2014) highlight how organizations are increasingly required to demonstrate effectiveness using terms borrowed from the private sector, even when these do not fully capture the relational and long-term nature of advocacy work. Similarly, Gliedt et al. (2018) describe how intermediaries must balance their role as community advocates with the demand to present themselves as data-driven and results-oriented.

Several SDIOs described this balancing act explicitly. Netanel from SDIO B emphasized the importance of producing a formal impact report by KPMG¹⁵ to quantify influence on government decisions. While this may seem like a purely strategic move, it also illustrates how neoliberal assumptions about outcome and impact have become embedded in how effectiveness is framed and communicated, even by organizations whose missions are rooted in social and environmental justice.

¹⁵ As mentioned in chapter 5.3, An Israeli accounting firm that formed an economic impact analysis

SDIOs demonstrated some proactivity in how they navigated this need to adjust to neoliberal mindsets. Rather than passively adopting neoliberal logics, some interviewees described using them as a “bridge” to reach policymakers while maintaining their own goals. For instance, some SDIOs adopt tactics from the private sector, such as “proof-of-concept projects”, as some officials described, to bridge the gap (see section 5.5). Presenting effectiveness in this language both meets the government need for proved successes while demonstrating the relevance of community knowledge.

This dual-purpose strategy suggests a form of **"strategic hybridity"**, in which SDIOs negotiate between different value systems to advance their goals. While applying effort to promote social and environmental needs, they learn the tools and language required to stay relevant. Demonstrating a hybrid approach is how SDIOs deal with the tension described in literature as the limiting force that neoliberalism has on advocacy for different causes (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Fursova, 2018).

This hybridity also appeared in the way SDIOs defined success. Some organizations highlighted rigid, quantifiable outputs such as policy adoption and budget lines, while others emphasized softer indicators like changes in discourse, trust-building, or public participation (see section 5.3). These blended frameworks of evaluation can be seen as a response to the limitations of a purely neoliberal definition of impact, reflecting instead a more grounded understanding of how change happens in complex political and social systems.

SDIOs do not reject the logic of efficiency, but rather seek to broaden it. In doing so, they attempt to retain their legitimacy in institutional arenas while remaining faithful to their community-oriented missions. This adaptive behavior suggests that rather than being designed by neoliberalism, SDIOs are also actively reshaping what “effectiveness” can mean, embedding it in values of collaboration, justice, and equality.

5.3 Multiple Viewpoints and Perceptions

One of the findings in the data relates to the gaps in perspectives between SDIOs and their governmental and community partners. These gaps are not just operational or logistical, but represent a deeper difference in worldview, language, and institutional mindset (see section 5.4.1). The coding analysis revealed that the theme of "gaps" appeared frequently and was one of the most dominant patterns in the dataset, indicating its central role in how SDIOs understand both their challenges and their effectiveness. These findings also relate

to the mediating role of intermediary work, as SDIOs view themselves as bridges between the approaches, attributes, perceptions and goals of different entities.

As noted in the literature, SDIOs are required where different actors within the field are not aligned and their interests require mediation (Anglin, 2004; Bhattacharyya, 2004; Kim et al., 2021). The tension around gaps is also recognized by Witesman & Fernandez (2013), who emphasize that partnerships between public institutions and non-profits often rest on fragile assumptions of shared goals, while in reality, power dynamics and institutional constraints create asymmetries in how effectiveness is interpreted. Almog-Bar & Schmid (2014) similarly point to the challenge of aligning internal organizational values with the external demands of funders or policy actors, particularly in advocacy work that is difficult to measure or quantify.

Interview data shows how SDIOs navigate this gap in several ways. Some organizations adopt bridging roles, investing time in relationship-building and translation work between communities and policymakers. As a local government official described, the role of the partnering SDIO was to bring the voices of the community to the table and to enable a wider discussion of needs (see section 5.4). Others create a hybrid of evaluation to maintain legitimacy both to community and government actors, using managerial metrics for funders while also incorporating community feedback to maintain relevance on the ground. One SDIO described creating internal reports focused on community trust and participation alongside formal policy impact assessments (see section 5.3).

Another example came from a municipality staff member who described the SDIO's role as a kind of "couples therapy" between city departments, mediating between different professional cultures. These narratives highlight the work of SDIOs not only in delivering projects but in managing the meaning-making processes that hold partnerships together.

Another important aspect emerging from these gaps is that effectiveness is not evaluated through a single shared framework. Each group of actors approaches advocacy from a different institutional position and therefore emphasizes different indicators of success. As Dubus & LeBoeuf (2019) found, effectiveness is perceived differently between recipients and services providers, emphasizing the role of position as a designer of perceived effectiveness.

The results indicate that as SDIOs often focus on their ability to generate formal policy outcomes or measurable change, partners from government or community settings frequently highlight relational and process-oriented contributions, such as building partnerships, creating shared language, or enabling coordination between actors (see

section 5.4). These differences suggest that perceived effectiveness is not only a reflection of outcomes, but also of the roles each actor occupies within the policy process.

Importantly, gaps were not always framed negatively. Some interviewees described the very existence of perceptual gaps as evidence of the need for SDIOs' involvement, filling blind spots in policy design, surfacing unspoken tensions, or translating between institutional logics. This perspective reframes the gap not as failure, but as space for contribution, positioning SDIOs as interpreters and brokers of knowledge between actors with different forms of authority.

In this way, perceived gaps become part of the terms of intermediation: not obstacles to be eliminated, but part of the complexity that effective advocacy must navigate. Acknowledging these interpretive differences and the organizational work required to bridge them is central to understanding the nuanced role SDIOs play in policy change processes.

Perception gaps reflect the intermediary position of SDIOs within the governance system. As organizations operating between community actors and governmental institutions, they participate in multiple arenas simultaneously and therefore generate different kinds of value for different partners. Government actors may evaluate SDIO effectiveness through their ability to facilitate coordination or provide professional expertise, while community actors may emphasize representation and voice. SDIOs themselves, however, may assess their success more cautiously, focusing on formal policy shifts that are often slow and uncertain. As a result, the same advocacy process can be interpreted differently depending on the observer's institutional standpoint.

This highlights that advocacy effectiveness in the context of SDIOs is not a fixed outcome but a negotiated interpretation that emerges across relationships between actors.

5.4 Strategic Positioning Through Resources and Legitimacy

The role of resources, both financial and relational, emerged as a critical dimension in how SDIOs perceive and construct their effectiveness. As shown in section 5.6, references to resource allocation appeared frequently, with quotations coded under "Organizational Resource Allocation". This high frequency signals how central resources are, not only for operational reasons, but for building organizational legitimacy and influencing policy arenas.

Many SDIOs address resources as a multi-layered concept. On one hand, they are seen as an allocated means toward achieving goals, and on the other, as an indicator of success. For example, one SDIO described the understanding that the more organizational resources allocated to advocacy, the more effective the outcome will be, showing the linkage between the organization's funds and attention to perceived effectiveness. On the other hand, resources were also viewed as a desired outcome, with funds allocated by the government serving as an indicator of advocacy effectiveness.

Government interviewees often referred to the professional capacity and funding models of partnering SDIOs as signals of trustworthiness. As one government official stated: "they mobilize additional resources...the city supports them because of their capabilities."¹⁶ This quote demonstrates the dual perception of SDIOs both as advocates and service providers, judged by their ability to perform efficiently within institutional limitations.

These findings align with literature that relates to advocacy-oriented NGOs in general, and SDIOs specifically, and their need to often justify activities through strategic narratives about effectiveness and impact (Aimers & Walker, 2016; Fursova, 2018; Glass, 2014). In neoliberal contexts, where measurable outcomes are often prioritized, SDIOs may need to "translate" their social goals into financial or performance indicators to gain legitimacy in the eyes of government actors or funders. This echoes the hybrid strategy noted before: inward, to maintain the organization's values and causes, and outward, to demonstrate alignment with institutional mindset.

The strategic use of resources is often linked to long-term positioning. By investing in partnerships, maintaining financial transparency, or hiring professional advocacy staff, SDIOs seek to "earn a seat at the table," shaping the very procedures and criteria by which their work is evaluated. This creates a loop where resources build legitimacy, and legitimacy secures more resources. This loop can either reinforce SDIOs' influence or, conversely, stretch their values as they adapt to institutional neoliberal mindset.

Beyond external legitimacy, resource allocation also functions as a mechanism of internal prioritization. Organizations that assigned clear portions of budget, staff roles, or managerial time to policy advocacy reflected stronger external positioning, along with greater internal coherence. As seen in section 5.6, SDIOs that described an expanded range of resources and a clear image of them also reported effectiveness in advocacy. Resource allocation and clarity regarding resources signal what the organization considers core to its

¹⁶ Gadi, Governmental official, partners of SDIO B

mission, shaping where attention is placed and how agendas are manifested. In this sense, resources do not just enable action; they direct it. The interviews showed that SDIOs with internal clarity about their policy goals also reported alignment across staff members and departments, reinforcing strategic consistency.

Another layer that emerged relates to how resource allocation goes hand in hand with internal alignment. In SDIOs that allocated significant funds to advocacy, and where more than one staff member was interviewed, strong coherence was visible, with different people using the same terminology and expressing similar goals. SDIO B was a strong example of that, with four different organization members citing the same advocacy goal, aligned with high coherence of organization resources allocated for the cause (see section 5.4). This suggests that deliberate investment in policy advocacy fosters a shared language and collective purpose, making policy work more than just the CEO's initiative. Where resource investment was limited or informal, interviews reflected a more fragmented picture, with uncertainty about the organization's role in advocacy and its intended outcomes. SDIO D demonstrated this: in addition to lacking a clear picture of funds allocated, there were differences between interviewees from the organization about advocacy goals and achievements. Thus, resources serve not only external legitimacy but also as an internal orientation.

Internal organizational coherence also mirrored the external alignment between SDIOs and their partners, as illustrated by SDIO B. The organization demonstrated clear internal clarity, and the same perception of effectiveness was reflected by governmental partners. In other words, as the SDIO conveyed a consistent understanding of resource allocation and advocacy goals, it was perceived by partners as effective and purpose-driven. This alignment was evident in interviews with Ron, a partner of SDIO B, who described the organization's effectiveness using almost the exact terms employed by the SDIO's own officials.

Overall, the findings illustrate that resource allocation plays a dual role in the advocacy work of SDIOs: externally, as a tool for legitimacy and recognition within policy arenas, and internally, as a tool for prioritization, focus, and organizational alignment. Far from being just technical or budgetary, resource decisions reflect deeper strategic choices about identity, direction, and influence. SDIOs that invest deliberately in advocacy not only gain trust and visibility in the eyes of governmental partners, but also build internal clarity, cohesion, and a shared language around their policy goals. This use of resources becomes

especially vital in a neoliberal context, where demonstrating impact is essential for maintaining both legitimacy and sustainability.

The results echo and support the research hypothesis regarding resource allocation, as we expected that the perceived effectiveness of SDIOs on policy change would be higher in organizations that allocate greater resources to advocacy, such as funding, training, and staff. This also support literature that emphasizes the role of budget allocation to the effectiveness of advocacy efforts (Schmid & Almog-Bar, 2008).

5.5 Theoretical Contributions and Study Limitations

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of advocacy, intermediation, and spatial policy by offering a multilayered perspective on how SDIOs conceptualize and evaluate their own effectiveness. While prior literature has emphasized the challenges in measuring advocacy outcomes due to their complex, long-term, and relational nature (Gliedt et al., 2018; Bruce et al., 2016), this research expands the discussion by focusing on perceived effectiveness as a valid lens for understanding organizational impact.

Findings highlight that effectiveness in advocacy is not a fixed, external measurement, but rather a negotiated interpretation shaped by internal strategies, organizational goals, and relational dynamics with both government and communities. By analyzing the SDIOs' narratives, the research illustrates that effectiveness is defined not only through rigid indicators like policy shifts, budget allocations, or legislative inclusion, but also through soft dimensions such as trust-building, language adoption, and collaborative culture. These findings support existing frameworks (Andrews & Bob, 2004; Gazley, 2008; Aimers & Walker, 2016; Kim, Blaž, & Kamvasinou, 2021), while also revealing their limitations in capturing context-dependent organizational logic under neoliberal influence.

Furthermore, the study advances theoretical understanding of intermediation by showing that SDIOs act as translators, connectors, and framers of meaning, balancing between institutional approach and community aspirations. Their position is not neutral or technical but is politically and economically shaped, especially within neoliberal regimes that prioritize measurable outputs and short-term returns. This raises questions about how intermediation is practiced under conditions of constrained resources and legitimacy-seeking behavior (Bednarek et al., 2016; Zhang & Guo, 2020).

Finally, the study enriches the conceptualization of perceived advocacy success by showing how internal framing and external context affects organizational motivation and the way

actors report claims of success. The findings point to the need for frameworks that go beyond outcome-based evaluations, integrating both strategic intent and interpretative dimensions.

This research offers in-depth insights into how SDIOs perceive their effectiveness in influencing spatial policy, yet several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is based on a single case study within one national context. While the selected SDIOs operate in diverse domains, the analysis remains grounded in the Israeli context, on the scope of welfare to neoliberalism (Yemini, 2018; Korazim, 1988), which may limit the generalizing of the findings to other governance systems or market regimes.

Second, the study relies on self-reported narratives from key actors within SDIOs, government, and communities. These perspectives are valuable in understanding internal framings of effectiveness but limited to organizations' position and success. While interpretive case studies can allow for the exploration of deep contextual insights and capture the complexity and contradictions embedded in human and organizational behavior (Klein & Myers, 1999), it is limited to the subjective experience of the specific sampling interpreted (Walsham, 1995; Merriam, 1998). The study did not include direct observation of advocacy processes or policy negotiations, which could offer another layer of validation. Third, the use of AI-assisted coding tools provided a broad thematic structure, but this also required significant manual review and interpretative refinement. While the analysis allowed for pattern recognition across interviews, the subjective nature of thematic clustering may have influenced the grouping and emphasis of findings.

Finally, the focus on the perception of effectiveness, rather than measurable policy outcomes, limits the ability to correlate narratives with long-term systemic change. The study aimed to explore how effectiveness is defined and communicated by actors themselves, yet this comes at the cost of analyzing concrete policy shifts or implementation results over time.

Acknowledging these limitations highlights the scope and boundaries of the research, while also suggesting potential directions for future studies in diverse geographical and policy contexts.

6. Conclusion

The study explored how Spatial Development Intermediary Organizations (SDIOs) perceive their own effectiveness in influencing spatial policy under the dynamic conditions of a welfare state shifting into a more neoliberal order of governance. Through a qualitative case study of six SDIOs and interviews with 18 stakeholders from civil society, government, and communities, the research illustrates the multi-layered nature of how advocacy effectiveness is perceived.

The findings reveal that SDIOs define effectiveness through both "soft" and "rigid" indicators. Soft indicators include shifts in discourse, building trust, promoting collaboration, and shaping decision-making culture, while rigid indicators involve formal changes such as policy adoption, budget reallocation, and procedural reforms. The study shows that these dimensions often co-exist and reinforce each other. Moreover, the perception of effectiveness is deeply shaped by each actor's position: SDIOs, governmental entities, and communities all frame success differently, according to their institutional roles, expectations, and values.

The research contributes to theoretical understandings of advocacy, mediation, and civic influence in policy processes by offering a grounded conceptualization of effectiveness. Rather than measuring impact solely by policy outputs, the study emphasizes the importance of understanding how advocacy efforts are perceived, framed, and legitimized in practice.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of examining perceived effectiveness across multiple points: internal, top-down, and bottom-up. This enables a richer understanding of how SDIOs navigate complex governance landscapes and how they are interpreted by others.

In policy and practice, the findings call attention to the need for evaluation frameworks that incorporate both relational and institutional markers of success. Especially in the context of urban and environmental planning, where change is slow, collaborative, and politically contested, acknowledging the layered pathways to influence is crucial.

Finally, the study highlights the tensions SDIOs face in defining and demonstrating effectiveness within neoliberal regimes that prioritize measurable returns and performance. It underscores the importance of continued exploration of civic influence through both strategic positioning and authentic community engagement, as part of a broader understanding of how change happens in complex spatial systems.

6.1 Practical Recommendations

The findings of this study offer several implications for practitioners, policymakers, and funders working with or alongside SDIOs. First, they necessitate the adoption of a broader understanding of what defines success in advocacy. Rather than limiting evaluation to rigid outputs such as legislation or budget allocations, stakeholders are encouraged to acknowledge “soft” dimensions of change, including shifts in language, professional mindsets, trust-building, and the institutionalization of collaborative processes. These elements often form the foundation upon which more measurable change later emerges.

Another important insight relates to internal clarity. SDIOs appear to benefit from a more explicit articulation of their aspirations and advocacy goals. Supporting reflective practices, documentation of soft and hard milestones, and alignment with partners’ expectations can enhance strategic focus and public legitimacy.

Furthermore, evaluation frameworks should evolve to better capture the complex nature of advocacy efforts. Funders and policymakers are encouraged to develop hybrid tools that combine narrative-based indicators with quantitative measures, enabling a more accurate and just assessment of impact that is not constrained by short-term outputs alone.

6.2 Directions for Future Research

Building on these findings, future research could explore several paths to deepen understanding of SDIO advocacy and effectiveness. One direction is to examine SDIOs operating in other policy domains, such as healthcare, education, or digital infrastructure, to test whether different advocacy fields generate different perceptions of efficiency. Longitudinal research is also needed to trace how strategies, relationships, and outcomes evolve over time and how organizations adapt their approach to shifting policy environments.

Another fruitful direction lies in comparative research across countries or governance regimes. As this study took place in a specific economic context, investigating similar organizations in other economic or political systems may reveal how institutional arrangements influence perceived effectiveness. In addition, while this research incorporated voices from community partners, future work may place greater emphasis on how residents themselves understand advocacy efforts and define successful outcomes. This may contribute to a more grounded and inclusive picture of SDIO legitimacy and responsiveness.

Lastly, integrating quantitative approaches, such as surveys or statistical analysis of impact metrics, may complement qualitative insights and help identify broader patterns. Combining methodological lenses could contribute to developing a deeper framework for evaluating civic advocacy in complex and dynamic policy arenas.

7. References

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: Interviews with SDIO Members

8.2 Appendix B: Interviews with CBO Members

8.3 Appendix C: Interviews with Government Officials

8.4 Appendix D: List of Interviewees

8.5 Appendix E: Code Frequency Table

8.1 Appendix A: Interviews with SDIO Members

Can you please state your full name and role in the organization?

What is your main responsibility?

Do you have any secondary responsibilities?

What are your organization's goals and aspirations?

How do you promote the achievement of these goals?

Non-profits often engage in efforts to influence or change governmental policies.

How is your organization involved in advocacy or policy design?

What proportion of your organization's resources (time, budget, etc.) is allocated to this?

How many employees are involved in advocacy in your organization? How are they trained for this role?

Do you set measurable goals for advocacy? If so, how?

How effective would you say these efforts have been?

What is this assessment based on?

Do you think others within the organization would agree?

Do you think officials in partner organizations would agree?

I would like to reach out to other colleagues of yours within the organization to interview them as well.

As a mediating organization in contact with local communities, would you say your organization is considered a significant source of information on community needs and aspirations? Are you invited to official governmental or regional discussions to provide input in the policy design process?

With which government organizations have you or your colleagues worked to contribute local knowledge?

5. When working to promote policy changes for local communities, how optimistic do you feel about your chances of success?

What is the basis for this perception?

6. Over the past decade, which policies has the organization had the most impact on?

What role did the organization play in the policy process?

Can you describe the impact the organization had?

Were you personally involved in the process?

7. How would you describe the organization's relationships with governmental or regional bodies?

How would you describe its relationships with government officials?

Are members of the organization invited to policy discussions?

Can active advocacy endanger the organization's relationships?

8. Do you feel that you and your organization are encouraged by governmental entities to promote policy changes and advocate for local communities?

In what ways are you encouraged?

9. How would you assess the level of responsibility the government has for developing underprivileged communities?

In the areas where your organization operates, who plays the leading role in empowering communities?

8.2 Appendix B: Interviews with CBO Members

Can you please state your full name and role in the organization/community?

What is your main responsibility?

Do you have any secondary responsibilities?

What are your organization's or community's goals and aspirations?

How do you promote the achievement of these goals?

Do you engage in advocacy?

If so, in what ways?

Who are your organization's main partner organizations (e.g., other NGOs, regional or national government bodies, or others)?

How would you describe your relationships with these organizations?

Would you describe them as mutual, symmetrical, one-directional, or stable?

National organizations such as (FILL IN LATER) aim to support organizations like yours in securing funding and promoting relevant policies.

Do you feel their involvement in day-to-day activities?

How would you describe their support?

How does the organization support the continuity of government support?

What role does the organization play in securing funding for the community?

Do you feel encouraged by this organization (relevant to the interview) to engage the local community in public action?

In what ways?

Are there any unspoken boundaries regarding the types of engagement?

Do you feel encouraged by government officials—regional or national (as relevant to the interview)—to engage the local community in public action?

In what ways?

Are there any unspoken boundaries regarding the types of engagement?

Would you say the organization effectively represents community needs and perspectives?

8.3 Appendix C: Interviews with Government Officials

Can you please state your full name and role in the organization?

What is your main responsibility?

Do you have any secondary responsibilities?

What are your organization's goals and aspirations?

How do you promote the achievement of these goals?

Do you engage in policy design or in the allocation of funds?

If so, in what ways?

Who are your organization's main partner organizations (e.g., other national NGOs, communities, or local non-profits)?

How would you describe your relationships with these organizations?

Would you describe them as mutual, symmetrical, one-directional, or stable?

National organizations such as (FILL IN LATER) also aim to advocate for community needs and promote relevant policies.

Do you feel their involvement in day-to-day activities?

How would you describe their involvement?

How does the organization bring forward community needs and perspectives?

Do you feel encouraged by this organization (relevant to the interview) to engage the local community in public action?

In what ways?

Are there any unspoken boundaries regarding the types of engagement?

Do you see the organization as a necessary partner in adjusting programs to better suit on-the-ground needs?

Would you say the organization is effective in providing the necessary input?

Would you say the organization is an effective advocate?

8.4 Appendix D: List of Interviewees

SDIO Interviews

SDIO Type	Organization Code	Name of Interviewee (Pseudonyms)	#
Community SDIO	A	Avi	1
	B	Idan	2
	B	Netanel	3
	B	Yosef	4
	B	Ben	5
	C	Omer	6
	D	Guy	7
	D	Sara	8
Environmental SDIO	E	Roni	9
	E	Lior	10
	F	Dan	11

Partner Interviews

Type of Partner	SDIO	Name of Interviewee (Pseudonyms)	#
Government Officials	B	Gadi	12
	B	Ron	13
	E	Tal	14
	E	Tomer	15
Community Representative	E	Roni	16
	D	Ann	17
	D	Sheli	18

8.5 Appendix E: Code Frequency Table

Group Code	Number of Quotations
Organizational Resource Allocation (Organizations' Resource Allocation, Resource Investment, Organizations' Resource Sharing, Under-allocation)	201
Gaps (Gaps, Lack of Gaps, Gap, Gaps of Understanding, Communication Gaps)	166
Collaborations and Partnerships (Collaboration, Cooperation, Partnership, Partnership, Connections)	102
Effectiveness (Effectiveness, Efficiency, Low-Effectiveness, Ineffectiveness)	81
Economic Climate (Economic Impact, Economic Climate, Economic Context)	65
Influence (Impact, Positive Impact, Influence, Local Impact)	62
Neoliberal Mindset and Approach (Neoliberalism, Neoliberal Influences, Neoliberal Approach, Neoliberal Influences, Neoliberal Characteristics)	43
Collaborations (Collaboration, Partnerships, Coalitions)	42
Misunderstanding and Miscommunication (Understanding, Lack of Clarity, Lack of Information, Uncertainty, Lack of Understanding, Poor Understanding, Lack of Knowledge and Lack of Communication)	28
Limitations and Challenges (Challenges, Barriers, Limitations, Difficulty)	25
Government Resources and Budget Allocation (Financing, Resources, Government Budgets, Resource Mobilization, Policy Budget Allocation)	25
Financial Status (Economic Situation and Economic Impacts)	21
Neoliberal Policies (Influence, Effects)	14
Total Quotations for Most Frequent Codes	886

תפיסת יעילות ומדיניות מרחבית

תפיסת ארגונים חברתיים-מתווכים את

יעילותם בהשפעה על פיתוח

חיבור על מחקר

לשם מילוי חלקי של הדרישות לקבלת תואר

מגיסטר למדעים בתכנון ערים ואזורים

תלתן קציר

הוגש לסנט הטכניון - מכון טכנולוגי לישראל

אייר תשפ"ו, חיפה, אפריל 2026

המחקר נעשה בהנחיית פרופ"ח אמיל ישראל, במסגרת המסלול לתכנון ערים ואזורים בפקולטה לארכיטקטורה ובינוי ערים.

מחברת חיבור זה מצהירה כי המחקר, כולל איסוף הנתונים, עיבודם והצגתם, התייחסות והשוואה למחקרים קודמים וכו', נעשה כולו בצורה ישרה, כמצופה ממחקר מדעי המבוצע לפי אמות המידה האתיות של העולם האקדמי. כמו כן, הדיווח על המחקר ותוצאותיו בחיבור זה נעשה בצורה ישרה ומלאה, לפי אותן אמות מידה.

תקציר

בעשור האחרון, גוברת הנוכחות של ארגוני תיווך ללא מטרות רווח. פעילותם משתרעת בתחומים מגוונים, החל משירותי רפואה ועד לשירותי רווחה, כולל פעולות סנגור על צרכי הקהילה. דוגמה לכך הם ארגונים מתווכים הפועלים בתחום הפיתוח המרחבי (SDIO – Spatial Development Intermediating Organizations). אלו כוללים ארגוני פיתוח קהילתי, הפועלים להעצמת תושבים וחיזוק הון חברתי בקרבם. אך כאלו גם הם ארגוני סביבה, הפועלים לשוויון בנגישות למשאבי טבע וצמצום פגיעה סביבתית באוכלוסיות פגיעות. פעילותם של ארגונים אלו נעשית יותר נוכחת ככל שהמדיניות הכלכלית של מדינה הופכת ליותר ניאו-ליברליות, וגדל היקף ההפרטה של שירותים לאזרח, אל גופי תמך שמעניקים את השירות. אלא שהידע הקיים בנושא אינו מספק הסבר מספק על הדרכים שבהן ארגונים אלה מעריכים את יעילות השפעתם (תפיסה עצמית), האופן בו הם נתפסים על ידי שותפים (תפיסה חיצונית), וכן על האופן בו תפיסת היעילות שלהם (הם עצמם, והאחרים אותם) משפיעה על תהליכי הסנגור שהם מנהלים. סנגור, דהיינו הניסיון של ה-SDIOs להבטיח שינויי מדיניות נדרשים לטובת צרכי הקהילה.

הפער המחקרי הוא תיאורטי, במובן זה שאין מסגרות ברורות להבנת תפיסת יעילות עצמית וחיצונית בסנגור של ארגונים מהסוג הנדון כאן. הפער הוא גם אמפירי, במובן זה שמחקר מועט עוסק בסוגיה, הן מתוך נקודת מבטם של הארגונים עצמם, והן מתוך נקודת המבט של לקוחותיהם, למשל בדרג הארצי או הקהילתי. מחקר זה בא לענות על חלק מהפערים דנן. הוא עוסק במעמדם ובפעולתם של ארגוני SDIOs, ובתפיסת היעילות שלהם (עצמית וחיצונית) בהשפעה על מדיניות. המחקר חשוב משום שהוא מציע נקודת מבט על יחסי הגומלין בין ידע ארגוני ותודעה ארגונית, אסטרטגיית פעולה, והשפעה פוליטית, תוך התמקדות בארגונים שהלכה למעשה לא זוכים לתשומת לב מספקת בספרות.

מטרת המחקר היא אם כן לבחון כיצד SDIOs תופסים את מידת היעילות שלהם בפעולות סנגור שנועדו להשפיע על מדיניות ציבורית, יחד עם תפיסה חיצונית של שותפים. המחקר גם בוחן את המצאי עליו הארגונים מתבססים כדי לתמוך בתחושת האפקטיביות הזו. מטרת המשנה של המחקר מתמודדת עם האופן בו מבנה כלכלי-תרבותי של המסגרת המוסדית במדינה בה SDIOs פועלים, בין אם מדובר במודל של מדינת רווחה או בזה שהוא ניאו-ליברלי, מעצב את תפיסת היעילות של הסנגור האמור.

המחקר נערך במדינת ישראל, ובסדרה של ארגוני SDIOs בה. ישראל נעה על הציר שבין מדיניות רווחה למדיניות ניאו-ליברלית, כאשר בשדה של הפיתוח המרחבי ארגונים מתווכים הם שחקנים חדשים, מעטים ולא מספיק נחקרים. בשלב הראשון של המחקר, נבחרו שישה SDIOs הפועלים בשדה הקהילתי או הסביבתי, ופעילותם כוללת סנגור קהילתי וסביבתי, מול גורמי מדיניות בישראל, מקומיים וארציים. הארגונים שנבחרו משקפים גיוון בסוגי ההתארגנות, בתחומי הפעולה וביחסי הגומלין עם מוסדות המדינה. בשלב זה גויסו בשיטת כדור שלג מספר אינפורמנטים (בכירים ב-SDIOs), ונערכו עמם 12 ראיונות עומק חצי-מובנים בסוגיות האמורות. בשלב השני, נבחרו גופי ממשל הפועלים עם אותם SDIOs ומכירים את פועלם מול מקבלי החלטות, על מנת לקבל זוויות שונות של תפיסת היעילות. כאן נערכו 4 ראיונות עומק-מובנים. אופן עריכת הראיונות התבסס על המידע שנאסף מהשיחות

שבוצעו קודם עם נציגי ה-SDIOs. כלי הניתוח שנעשה בו שימוש היה ניתוח תוכן תמטי שאפשר לזהות איכותנית, דפוסים חוזרים, קונפליקטים, ושפות פעולה בארגונים שנבדקו.

הממצאים מצביעים על כך שתפיסת היעילות של SDIOs מורכבת ממערכת שיקולים אינטגרטיבית, הנשענת על מספר היבטים פנימיים וחיצוניים, ביניהם (1) הגדרת המשימה של סגור כמטרה ארגונית (2) טיב מערכות היחסים של הארגון עם גופי ממשל ומקבלי החלטות (3) יצירת שינוי בעמדות ושפה יחד עם שינוי בתקנות והקצאת תקציבים (4) עמידה במערכת שיקולים של ניאו-ליברליזם, המתעדפת "תשואה מדידה להשקעה". על אף תפיסת יעילות מורכבת של הארגונים את עצמם, שותפי הממשל תופסים את SDIOs כיעילים וכשחקנים בעלי ערך בעיצוב מדיניות מרחבים התומכת בהיבטים קהילתיים וסביבתיים. ניתוח הממצאים מצביע על יעילותם וחשיבותם של SDIOs כמקדמי מדיניות של פיתוח מרחבי, ומרחיב את ההבנה על התפקידים השונים בשדה.

למחקר תרומה תאורטית בהבנת התפקיד של תפיסות סובייקטיביות בהערכת היעילות של ארגוני חברה אזרחית, בהשפעתם על מדיניות ארצית ומקומית. המחקר מציע כי תפיסת יעילות אינה רק תוצאה של מדדים חיצוניים, אלא גם של עמדות פנים ארגוניות. ברמה המעשית, יש לממצאים השלכות על עיצוב כלי הערכה לעולם הסגור, על בניית שותפויות אפקטיביות בין מגזר שלישי לרשויות שלטוניות, ועל חיזוק היכולת של SDIOs לפעול בזירה הציבורית, מבלי להתנתק מההיבטים החברתיים-סביבתיים בתכנון ופיתוח מרחבי ועירוני.