



CITY OF SUPERBLOCKS - An Ideal Four-Phase Implementation Process

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Implementing Superblocks

Despite the fact that Superblocks have received loads of attention and have often been cited as potential levers for systemic sustainability transformations, and despite the existence of Superblocks projects in numerous cities around the world, the concept has never been fully implemented.

As we've seen in TuneOurBlock, actual attempts to implement Superblocks tend to consist of two broad phases: **initiating** and **piloting**. A third phase, **institutionalizing**, is assumed to be necessary to implement more than stand-alone pilot projects, but no city has yet reached that phase.

The **initiation** phase brings the concept of Superblocks into local discourse. Before this phase, no one in a particular city speaks of Superblocks and no plans to implement them exist. Then, some individuals or organizations or departments begin to speak of the need for local implementation of Superblocks. This initiates a process of discussion and planning that seeks to create a pilot project to be implemented.

The **piloting** phase implements some aspects of the Superblocks concept in specific places, whether permanently or just temporarily. This is an essential phase for proof of concept, learning through experimentation, and building public support. However, pilot projects rarely simulate the full scope and scale of changes that implementation would bring. At best, individual pilot projects such as a single Superblock neighborhood cell are made permanent. So far, none have actually functioned as levers for systemic change or fostered the large-scale transformations they are meant to help bring about.

Why is this? Why are there no Cities of Superblocks?

An Ideal Implementation Process

There are two questions that cities hoping to fully implement the Superblocks concept – and thereby maximize its impact and benefits – must answer. Why have previous implementation attempts failed, and how can the pitfalls that impede implementation be avoided? **In other words, how would an “ideal” implementation process unfold?**

The transformative capacity of Superblocks is lost when the scale of implementation is too small. Compromising the vision by, for example, seeking to implement fragmented Superblock cells without an accompanying traffic reorganization, or by failing to challenge the supremacy of automobility, hinders the ability of the concept to function properly. A lack of either political will or public support risks abandoning implementation prematurely, or else realization of a compromised vision.

An implementation process designed to avoid the risks noted above would seek to envision a future state in which systemic deficiencies are resolved, overcome resistance to change, institutionalize transformation, and co-create sustainable, livable, and equitable urban futures.

The details of such a process would be heavily influenced by contextual determinants and thus vary from one city to another, but we propose here an "ideal" implementation process that makes room for local variation while adhering to four universally applicable phases.

These are: (1) Futuring, (2) Planning, (3) Piloting, and (4) Institutionalizing.

01 Futuring

What it is about

The futuring phase is concerned with diagnosing the root causes of problems, identifying actions capable of resolving them, and envisioning the societal changes likely to accompany such actions. It answers the question "what are we trying to accomplish here, and what changes will that entail?"

What it includes

This phase consists mostly of discussions and workshops with the broadest possible range of stakeholders from all sectors of society to assess systemic problems and imagine a future state in which they have been resolved. It produces narratives and visualizations that serve as a foundation for communication and planning.

Why it is necessary

Without rigorous futuring, there is a high risk that plans will not reach the necessary scale and scope for systemic change and that support coalitions essential for such an endeavor will not be assembled.

02 Planning

What it is about

The planning phase identifies the steps necessary for achieving the future envisioned in the first phase. It determines which actions have to be taken to move from vision to reality, and how, when, and by whom they should be taken.

What it includes

The planning process figures out how to work with and around existing laws, policies, practices, and funding mechanisms, and how to change those that cannot be made compatible. It is usually led by planning professionals, but politicians and members of the public play active roles. The planning phase produces a comprehensive implementation roadmap that begins with the current situation and leads to the desired future state.

Why it is necessary

Without a thorough planning phase, it is unlikely that any vision of systemic change will come to fruition. Planning unites goals, actions, processes, and people. It identifies obstacles and how to overcome them.

03 Piloting

What it is about

The piloting phase is a combination of implementation and experimentation. The purpose of it is to test elements of the plan to learn how they function in practice (as opposed to on paper) and to discover things that may not have arisen in the planning process.

What it includes

A systematic piloting phase tests every major aspect of the plan, from changes in the built environment to public co-creation strategies to new policies and regulations. It identifies flaws in the plan and ways of improving it, and it allows stakeholders to find the most effective and efficient ways of working together.

Why it is necessary

Without pilot projects, small omissions or mistakes in the implementation plan can lead to large and costly failures. Piloting is the final check of the plan before implementation begins in full.

04 Institutionalizing

What it is about

The institutionalizing phase consists of the "re-normalization" of all relevant systems, structures, and organizations around the concept of a City of Superblocks. Instead of Superblocks being an exception to the rule, as they are now, in this phase they become the rule.

What it includes

All the ways in which the Superblocks concept challenges current standards (of planning, of funding, of design, etc.) become guideposts for change. Most prominently, this includes regulatory adaptation and organizational restructuring.

Why it is necessary

Full implementation of the Superblocks concept is unlikely to occur if it is constantly fighting against policies and procedures designed for the system it seeks to replace. A City of Superblocks seeks to establish a new normal, and institutionalizing is the phase that helps ensure that change.

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Co-create systemic vision
of sustainable future

Chart a path from
present to future

Test and refine
the plan

Make Superblocks
the new normal



- Engage** stakeholders
- Diagnose** problems
- Identify** solutions
- Envision** systemic change
- Articulate** desired future
- Establish** support coalition

- Arrange** steps
- Determine** actions
- Assign** roles
- Identify** obstacles
- Develop** workarounds
- Exploit** synergies

- Test** assumptions
- Empower** stakeholders
- Simulate** future conditions
- Experiment** strategically
- Dispel** concerns
- Incorporate** lessons

- Rewrite** regulations
- Redesign** space
- Implement** widely
- Nurture** novelty
- Adapt** organizational structures
- Normalize** new conditions

For transformational change, emphasis should be placed on first and fourth phases

