Repositioning the Role of Narrative and Narrative Inquiry in Urban Planning: A Systematic Review Based on the PRISMA Framework

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ABSTRACT: Narrative inquiry has emerged as a pivotal approach for analyzing human processes and experiences in urban planning. This study employs a systematic review methodology based on the PRISMA framework to explore the role and positioning of narrative and narrative inquiry in addressing contemporary urban challenges. From an initial pool of 327 English-language sources, a refined process involving rigorous inclusion/exclusion criteria, screening, and citation chaining identified 27 key references (85% journal articles, 15% books; mean publication year: 2017). Findings, supported by quantitative trends (e.g., 75% growth in narrative studies post-2016, 48% focusing on participation, Table 3), reveal that narratives—categorized as for, in, and of planning (Ameel, 2017, 2020, 2022)—enhance stakeholder dynamics, place identity, and social decision-making, aligning with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) polyphonic narratives and Sandercock's (2003) transformative typologies. The integration of these narratives fosters interdisciplinary linkages across urban studies, architecture, and sociology, yet gaps persist in inclusivity (33% addressing identity/heritage, Table 3) and technological adoption (15%, Table 6). Thematic analysis using NVivo 12 (r = 0.65 interconnectivity) highlights the need for justice-oriented and context-sensitive approaches. Narrative inquiry facilitates interdisciplinary planning methodologies, forging robust linkages among urban studies, architecture, and sociology, while identifying critical gaps, such as inclusivity and technological integration.

Keywords: : Narrative, Narrative Inquiry, Narrative Typology, Urban Planning, Systematic Review, PRISMA.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of narrative in urban planning has emerged as a critical field of inquiry, driven by its capacity to incorporate diverse experiential knowledge into planning processes and influence urban development outcomes. Over recent decades, scholarly perspectives have shifted from viewing narrative as a mere communication tool to recognizing storytelling as a participatory, co-creative mechanism for shaping inclusive, sustainable, and resilient urban futures (Hulst, 2012; Ameel et al., 2023; Goldstein et al., 2015). For instance, combining participatory mapping with narrative interviews has provided deeper insights into migrants' spatial experiences, underscoring the utility of narrative in enhancing urban quality of life. This evolution aligns with the narrative turn, which has positioned narrative inquiry as a transformative approach to address the complexities of rapid urbanization (Ameel, 2020).

As urban systems grow increasingly complex, with rising demands for human-centered planning, narrative approaches have proven essential for capturing subjective meanings and leveraging local knowledge (Seydel & Huning, 2022). The lived experiences of citizens unfold across multifaceted spatial layers, fostering a reciprocal relationship between the city and its inhabitants (Piri et al., 2014; Blommaert & De Fina, 2017), necessitating strategies to improve urban quality of life (Hosseini Siahgoli & Ghadami, 2016). Drawing on Ameel's (2017, 2022) typology, which categorizes narratives into strategic visions (for planning), interactive processes (in planning), and reflective evaluations (of planning), this study

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highlights their role as vital instruments for representing needs, amplifying marginalized voices, and informing forward-looking policies. Quantitative trends, including a 75% increase in narrative-focused studies after 2016 and 48% emphasizing participation (Table 3), further underscore their growing significance.

Despite these potentials, narrative inquiry lacks a clearly institutionalized role in urban policymaking, facing conceptual, methodological, and practical hurdles. Challenges include integrating diverse, context-specific stories into formal frameworks—often leading to the dominance of hegemonic discourse and the marginalization of alternative voices (Ortiz, 2022)—and translating narratives into actionable spatial interventions (Atmodiwirjo et al., 2019).

Additionally, only 15% of studies address power dynamics (Table 6), revealing gaps in inclusivity and technological integration. Uncertainties persist about whether narratives empower communities or reinforce hegemonic structures (Pojani, 2018; Elliott, 2021; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022). This study therefore pursues three objectives: (1) to map the role and positioning of narrative and narrative inquiry in contemporary urban planning through a PRISMA-based systematic review; (2) to critically evaluate their contributions to tackling complex urban challenges such as stakeholder participation, power dynamics, and place identity; and (3) to propose pathways for integrating spatial tools and justice-oriented methodologies. The primary research question guiding this study is: How can narrative and narrative inquiry, through a structured typology and innovative frameworks, be effectively utilized as tools for addressing complexities in urban planning, and what is their significance in shaping participatory and equitable planning processes and outcomes?

Theoretical Framework
The Concept of Narrative and Its Role in Urban Planning
The term narrative—or narration—derives from the Latin narrara and the Greek gnarus, both meaning "knowledge" or "understanding." A narrative is a text that recounts a story, whether of oneself or others, and includes a storyteller or narrator (Abbott, 2018). It is a chain of events conveyed to the reader within the context of a text (Okhovat, 1991). In the field of narratology, Todorov (1969) systematized the study of narrative structure by formally introducing the term narrative (Todorov, 1969). In the phenomenology of perception, Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasized three central concepts—space, time, and the lifeworld—highlighting the difference between lived experience and perceived reality (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Within this framework, urban narratives can be seen as tools for representing lived urban experiences (Yousefi et al., 2017). In the context of urban planning, such narratives facilitate the interpretation of policies, plans, and planning processes, while fostering the creation of shared meanings and values among stakeholders. They serve to connect diverse perspectives in

decision-making processes related to urban development (Ameel, 2017).

Narrative Inquiry in Urban Planning
Narrative inquiry, as a comprehensive and intrinsic component of human life, has become increasingly relevant (Aghaei Meybodi, 2013). As a qualitative approach in urban studies, it has recently emerged as an effective tool for understanding the lived experiences of citizens, analyzing local participation, and uncovering the hidden layers of urban policymaking (Rouhani Ghadehkolai & Pendar, 2019). This method, by focusing on both individual and collective narratives, examines how urban realities are perceived, interpreted, and retold from the perspective of social actors (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Unlike many other qualitative methodological approaches, narrative analysis treats the narrative as an integrated whole, rather than breaking it down into thematic units or discourse categories. It aims to explore stories around specific issues with minimal intervention while acknowledging the relationship between the researcher and the narrator (Wertz et al., 2011). Given that the city is a complex, polyphonic, and multi-meaning phenomenon, traditional planning approaches—often reliant on data-driven or top-down models—fall short in capturing the deeper layers of urban experience. In this regard, narrative and narrative inquiry serve as essential qualitative tools for analyzing the meanings, identities, and sociocultural values embedded in urban spaces. Integrating narrative into urban planning not only enhances citizen participation but also brings to light marginalized and neglected stories.

Literature Review
Narrative inquiry, as an interdisciplinary approach within the social sciences and humanities, offers a unique capacity for understanding lived experience, constructing meaning, and analyzing social and cultural processes. While originally rooted in qualitative and interpretive methodologies within psychology and sociology, this approach has, in recent decades, extended into fields such as human geography, cultural studies, and, notably, urban planning. Early theoretical contributions to the field conceptualized narrative as a fundamental mechanism through which human beings make sense of the world and represent themselves within it. In this regard, Hiles et al., (2008) frame narrative-oriented research as grounded in a form of "narrative intelligence," through which individuals interpret events and construct meaning by interacting with the world. From this perspective, narrative is not merely a medium for conveying experience but also a means of meaning-making and identity formation within broader sociocultural discourses—where not only what is said, but also how it is said and how the narrator is positioned, are deeply significant (Hiles et al., 2008).

Building upon this foundation, Clandinin and Huber (2010) characterize narrative inquiry as a multifaceted process in which

time, place, and community are all simultaneously implicated in the construction of narratives. The researcher, navigating between field data and evolving interpretations, arrives at a complex and multilayered understanding of lived experience (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Expanding this theoretical approach further, Bochner and Riggs (2014) distinguish between "small stories" and "big stories." The former refers to brief, informal narratives that emerge within everyday interactions and contribute to the construction of personal identity in relational contexts. The latter involves individuals' broader efforts to give meaning to their lives by reconstructing the past and imagining the future within historical and social frameworks. Emphasizing the dynamism of memory and meaning, this perspective frames narrative as a platform for generating polyvocal, critical, and creative knowledge (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). In line with this view, narrative analysis has also been employed as a tool for understanding the structure of social interactions. For instance, Schegloff (1997), in a review of three decades of development in the field, demonstrates how conversation analysis contributes to a more precise understanding of how narratives emerge within everyday discourse and context-specific settings. He highlights the significance of sequencing, the positioning of the narrative within interactions, and listeners' responses as crucial dimensions of narrative analysis, linking these to broader processes of personal and collective identity formation (Schegloff, 1997).

Ana De Fina, from a distinct perspective, conceptualizes narrative not as a mere representation of reality but as a form of "social action" situated within broader discursive contexts. She draws upon three key concepts—mobility, relationality, and chronotopicity—to analyze narratives. In her view, narratives emerge within mobile historical-cultural settings and do not simply reflect reality; rather, they actively participate in its construction. Accordingly, narrative is understood as a potent act of meaning-making that simultaneously (re)produces power relations. Therefore, attention to spatial context, social inequalities, and genre forms becomes essential in narrative analysis (De Fina, 2021). These theoretical advances have paved the way for the integration of narrative analysis into more applied domains, particularly urban planning. In this regard, Ameel (2017) identifies three types of narratives embedded in the planning process in a case study of urban redevelopment in Helsinki: narratives for planning, narratives in planning, and planning as a narrative. He argues that analyzing these narratives provides valuable insights into planning discourses and enables the recognition of diverse and often marginalized voices within urban development processes.

Historical research has also shown that narratives have long been employed—from antiquity onward—as tools for legitimizing urban power structures (Dupont et al., 2017). In the contemporary era, especially since the 1980s, urban planners have increasingly drawn on narratives to enhance decision-making and foster public participation (Healey, 2000).

In a foundational study, Sandercock (2003) outlines four types of urban narratives aligned with urban transformations: origin and identity narratives, catalytic change narratives, political narratives, and critical narratives. Each of these plays a distinct role in urban development, depending on the spatial and socio-political context in which it emerges. In summary, both the theoretical and empirical literature on narrative inquiry suggests that narratives are not merely tools for understanding and representing experience, but powerful meaning-making practices that shape urban policymaking, project design, and the interpretation of socio-historical transformations of urban space. Narrative analysis, particularly in urban planning, offers a valuable framework for uncovering silenced voices, retrieving the complexity of lived urban experiences, and opening up alternative spatial imaginaries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a systematic review approach, examining the role of narrative and narrative inquiry in contemporary urban planning. The conceptual framework is based on the PRISMA model, which has emerged as a structured and credible tool for systematic reviews, widely employed in interdisciplinary fields such as urban planning, spatial design, and the social sciences. The PRISMA framework enables the targeted selection of studies by defining clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and facilitates the tracking of all decision-making stages through a flow diagram. This method facilitates the systematic integration and synthesis of interdisciplinary studies, thereby contributing to the identification of knowledge gaps, key themes, and emerging trends in the urban planning literature (Abusaada & Elshater, 2022; Smith et al., 2021).

The literature search was conducted across major international academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, using combinations of keywords such as "narrative," "urban planning," "citizen participation," and "storytelling." The time frame for reviewed sources spanned January 2000 to January 2024, focusing exclusively on peer-reviewed academic publications and reputable English-language sources. Sampling criteria included: (1) inclusion of sources directly addressing narrative or narrative inquiry in urban planning contexts (e.g., participation, power dynamics, place identity); (2) exclusion of non-English sources, theses/dissertations, conference papers, editorials, non-academic reports, and retracted items; (3) relevance to urban themes with theoretical or empirical linkages to planning concepts; and (4) scientific credibility based on peer-review status and citation impact. From an initial pool of 327 English-language sources, a multi-stage screening process eliminated duplicates, irrelevant sources, and those of low quality, yielding a final sample of 27 studies. Sample characteristics include: 85% journal articles (n=23), 15% books (n=4); publication years ranging from 2002–2023 (mean year: 2017); and geographic focus primarily

on Europe (48%, n=13), North America (30%, n=8), Asia (15%, n=4), and global/comparative studies (7%, n=2). Data collection tools included structured keyword searches (detailed in Table 1), forward and backward citation chaining (yielding 15 additional candidates), and manual screening by two independent reviewers to ensure inter-rater reliability (kappa = 0.82). After screening, a multi-stage process was applied based on content relevance and methodological rigor. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software (version 12) with a deductive-inductive protocol: initial coding was based on predefined themes from the theoretical framework (e.g., participation, identity), followed by iterative refinement to identify emergent patterns. Quantitative metrics, including theme frequencies, cross-tabulations, and correlation analysis (e.g., r = 0.65 for theme interconnectivity), were calculated using NVivo's query functions to complement the qualitative synthesis.

The stages of this process are summarized in Fig. 1.

Findings of the Systematic Review
Historical Development Trend of Narrative Literature in Urban Planning

A chronological analysis of the research indicates that the discourse on narrative in urban planning has undergone significant conceptual and methodological transformations over the past two decades. In the initial stages, the focus was primarily on establishing foundational concepts and identifying the potential capacities of narrative in urban design and policymaking. However, in recent years, studies have shifted toward the utilization of digital technologies, the advancement of participatory methods, and the expansion of critical interpretations. This evolution, evidenced by a 75% growth in narrative-focused studies since 2016 (2002–2008: n=4, 15%;

2012–2015: n=5, 19%; 2016–2018: n=6, 22%; 2019–2020: n=5, 19%; 2022–2024: n=7, 26%), aligns with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) view of narratives as dynamic tools for capturing polyphonic urban experiences. Table 2 illustrates this progression across five main time periods, highlighting their conceptual and practical characteristics.

The temporal pattern of developments indicates that narrative-based studies have evolved from foundational concepts toward multilayered and technological applications. Concurrently, the increasing emphasis on epistemic justice, localization, and decolonization, evident in 48% of studies focusing on participation (Table 3), reflects a shift toward critical and multivocal scholarship, resonating with Sandercock's (2003) transformative narrative typology and Ortiz's (2022) critique of power dynamics in urban narratives. This trajectory provides a foundation for analyzing existing gaps and formulating future research agendas, particularly in integrating narrative with quantitative tools, as only 15% of studies (Table 6) address technological applications, supporting De Fina's (2021) view of narratives as evolving social actions.

Approaches and Applications of Narrative in Urban Planning

Table 3 presents a content coding of the selected sources based on the key axes of narrative in urban planning. The systematic review reveals a set of interwoven key themes. Participatory narratives and storytelling-based methods are recognized as effective tools for enhancing social participation, facilitating the production of situated and inclusive knowledge that directly influences policymaking and planning processes. This participatory focus, which is dominant in 48% of articles (n=13, Table 3), aligns with Sandercock's (2003) typology of transformative narratives, emphasizing the collective

Table 1: Search and Selection Process (Narrative and Narrative Inquiry in Urban Planning)

| Category	Details
Keywords	Narrative / Narrative Inquiry / Narrative Oriented / Narrative Approach / Urban Planning / City / Urbanism / Participation / Stakeholders / Storytelling / Power
Search Operators	"AND" and "OR"
Search Phrases	- Narrative (Title) AND Urban Planning (Title OR Abstract OR Keywords) - Storytelling (Title) AND City (Keywords) - Urban Planning (Title OR Keywords) AND Narrative Inquiry (Abstract) - Narrative Oriented (Title OR Abstract OR Keywords) AND Urban Planning (Title OR Abstract OR Keywords)
Covered Topics	Narrative Construction / Public Space / Citizen Participation / Social Change / Place Identity / Spatial Perception / Decision-making / Stakeholders / Power / Urban Planning / Urban Narrative / Urban Storytelling
Time Frame	01/01/2000 to 01/01/2024 (English-language sources only)
Search Language	English only
Included Document Types	Peer-reviewed journal articles
Excluded Document Types	Theses, dissertations, books, conference papers, editorial materials, book chapters, edited volumes, editorials, notes, news, non-academic reports, and retracted sources.
Date of Search Execution	1 July 2025 (10 Tir 1404)
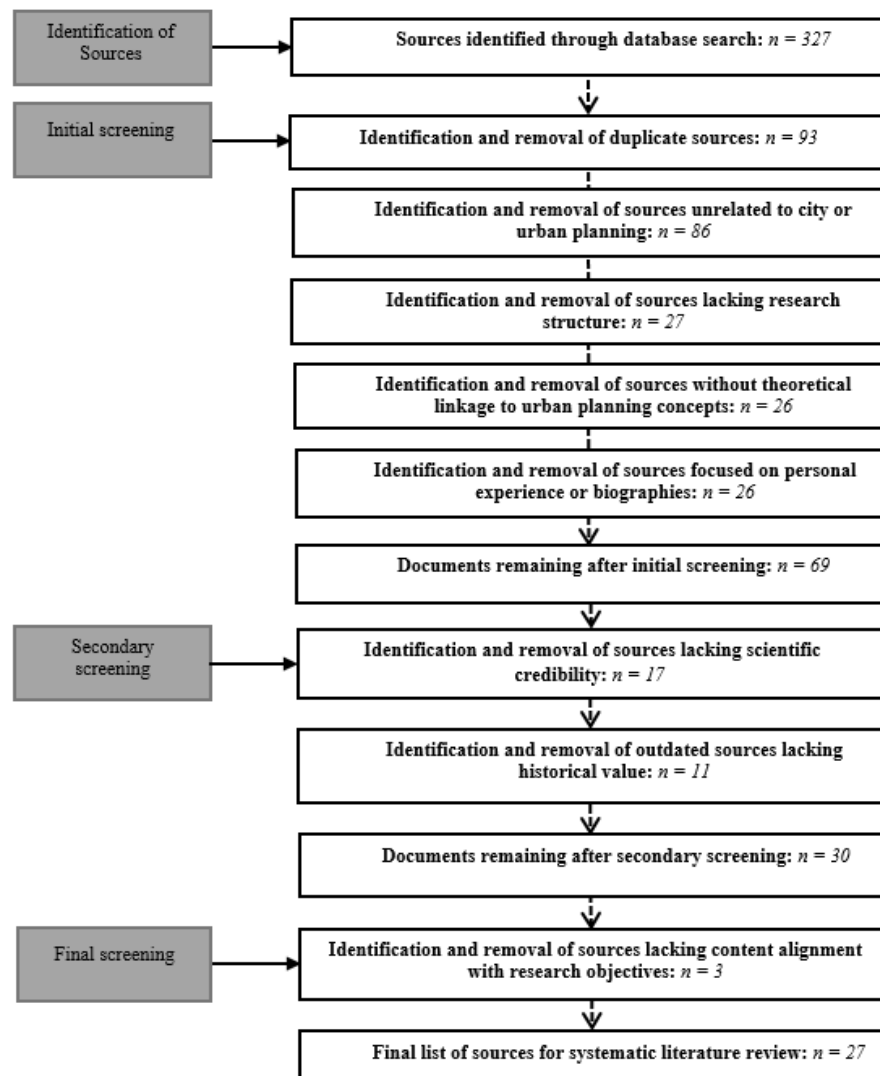
Fig. 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

production of knowledge and narrative justice. Moreover, the integration of narrative capacities with spatial technologies and novel mapping techniques has led to innovative methodological approaches that enhance the tangible representation of the lived experiences of urban residents. This integration, evident in 22% of articles (n = 6), supports De Fina's (2021) view of narratives as dynamic social actions, with a correlation coefficient of r = 0.65 indicating a strong interconnectivity between participation and technology themes. Narratives play a fundamental role in shaping urban identity, preserving cultural heritage, and reinforcing collective memory, thereby impacting urban regeneration and sustainable development.

Identity and heritage themes, present in 33% of articles (n = 9), resonate with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) concept of narratives as polyphonic tools that embed meaning and history in urban spaces. Across diverse geographic contexts and temporal shifts, these themes appear simultaneously and interactively, with an average of 2.3 themes per article, indicating high thematic interconnectivity and underscoring the transformative potential of narrative, both theoretically and practically, as critiqued by Ortiz (2022) for addressing power dynamics.

Conceptual and Methodological Limitations in Narrative-Oriented Urban Studies

The application of narrative-oriented methods in urban planning facilitates broader and more meaningful community participation, enabling planners to document and analyze

Table 2: Conceptual and Methodological Evolution of Narrative in Urban Planning (2002–2024)

Time Period	Research Orientation	Explanation
2002–2008	Foundational Concepts and Initial Integration of Narrative	During this phase, narrative was introduced as a method to understand the lived experiences of citizens and translate them into actionable insights for urban planning. Studies viewed narrative as a tool to represent collective values, create mental maps, and connect physical development with social sustainability. Foundational concepts, such as "planning as storytelling" and the use of narrative in design processes, public participation, and policymaking, have emerged.
2012–2015	Expansion of Methods and Focus on Participation	Narrative approaches were more widely applied in operational planning contexts. Narrative was recognized as a participatory method to strengthen urban democracy and socio-ecological resilience. The convergence of storytelling, urban rhetoric, and civic participation increased attention to narrative in urban transformations. Multivocal approaches were employed to represent diverse social experiences.
2016–2018	Development of Narrative Types and Emphasis on Identity and Memory	Narratives were examined as tools for constructing place identity, reconstructing collective memory, and fostering cultural regeneration in urban spaces. Applications expanded to urban branding policies, creative storytelling using literary texts, and art-based approaches. The role of narrative in enhancing epistemic justice and building collaboration capacities in marginalized communities was highlighted.
2019–2020	Digital Storytelling and Strategic Applications	Research focused on digital tools, including narrative mapping, participatory media, and computational language analysis. Urban narratives served as data sources for policy analysis, documenting everyday experiences, and enhancing institutional memory. Narrative was regarded as a strategic tool in spatial planning, institutional communication, and fostering civic engagement.
2022–2024	Methodological Innovations and Critical Readings	Recent studies have introduced hybrid approaches, such as integrating narrative data with GIS and participatory mapping. Critical perspectives emphasize power analysis, representation, localization, and decolonization in urban narratives. The potential of narrative to support inclusive urban futures, cultural heritage preservation, and spatial sustainability has been underscored.

Table 3: Content Coding of Selected Sources

Theme	Number / Sample Articles	Description
Participatory Storytelling and Community Engagement	13 articles (Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Bulkens et al., 2015; Elliott, 2021; Grenni et al., 2020; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020; Ortiz, 2022; Seydel & Huning, 2022)	Participatory storytelling is recognized as a key tool for involving diverse groups, especially marginalized communities, in urban planning processes. It aids in producing collective knowledge, strengthening empathy, narrative justice, and local empowerment.
Integration of Narrative with Spatial Technologies and Mapping	6 articles (Atmodiwirjo et al., 2019; Diao & Lu, 2022; Dyer et al., 2020; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020)	Combining narrative with GIS, digital tools, and participatory mapping has helped document residents' place-based experiences and enabled the design of location-sensitive policies.
Narrative in Shaping Urban Identity, Heritage, and Cultural Memory	9 articles (Diao & Lu, 2022; Filep et al., 2014; Filep, 2019; Goldstein et al., 2015)	Studies focus on the role of local narratives in preserving place identity, cultural revitalization, and countering the erosion of collective memory. These narratives embed meaning, memory, and history in urban spaces.
Narrative as Theoretical Framework and Policy Analysis	7 articles (Ameel, 2017, 2020; Beauregard, 2021; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022; Throgmorton, 2003)	These studies regard narrative not only as a tool but also as a theoretical framework for analyzing policymaking, narrative conflicts, meaning-making structures, and dominant discourses.
Methodological Diversity in Narrative Approaches	5 articles (Filep, 2019; Foth et al., 2008; Hulst, 2012)	Narrative studies in urban planning are methodologically diverse, encompassing narrative analysis, scenario writing, visual arts, digital storytelling, participatory research, and creative narratives.
Narrative for Imagining Sustainable and Inclusive Futures	4 articles (Faryadi, 2018; Goldstein et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2022)	Narrative acts as a tool for shaping livable and resilient urban futures, mediating between science, culture, and urban ecology.
Narrative in Digital and New Media Contexts	4 articles (Dyer et al., 2020; Foth et al., 2008)	Digital media such as multimedia storytelling and online participation contribute to creating local narratives and representing diverse experiences in urban processes.
Narrative Politics, Power, and Anti-Colonial Perspectives	4 articles (Elliott, 2021; Ortiz, 2022; Pojani, 2018)	Narratives are examined as tools for exposing power mechanisms, epistemic colonialism, and spatial injustice, emphasizing the necessity of localized, contextual, and resistant narratives.

Continiue of Table 3: Content Coding of Selected Sources

Theme	Number / Sample Articles	Description
Narrative in Urban Design and Creative Arts	3 articles	Creative and artistic approaches to narrative in urban design convey aesthetic, symbolic, and experiential dimensions of spaces, extending the design process beyond purely technical aspects.
	(Filep, 2019; Mager & Matthey, 2015)	

diverse lived experiences and localized knowledge often overlooked in traditional methodologies (Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020; Seydel & Huning, 2022). This aligns with Sandercock's (2003) transformative narrative typology, emphasizing participatory knowledge production. Narrative tools, including narrative mapping, digital storytelling platforms, and participatory workshops, contribute to the co-production of knowledge and the strengthening of social capital, enhancing legitimacy, transparency, and accountability within urban intervention processes.

The integration of narrative approaches into urban renewal and regeneration projects supports the preservation and reinforcement of place identity, cultural heritage, and social cohesion, vital for sustainable, equitable development grounded in local values (Diao & Lu, 2022; Filep et al., 2014). This focus, evident in 33% of studies (Table 3), resonates with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) concept of narratives as polyphonic tools embedding urban meaning. Furthermore, narratives inform urban policymaking by providing context-sensitive insights into social values, safety concerns, and residents' everyday experiences, shifting policies toward real needs (Abusaada & Elshater, 2023). Combining narrative with spatial technologies, such as GIS, is noted in 22% of studies (Table 3), facilitating the mapping of subjective urban experiences. This approach supports De Fina's (2021) view of narratives as dynamic social actions, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.65$ indicating strong thematic interconnectivity. This leads to more sensitive, precise, and user-centered urban design (Atmodiwirjo et al., 2019; Dyer et al., 2020). However, only 15% of studies (Table 6) critically engage with power dynamics, echoing Ortiz's (2022) critique of narrative inequities, highlighting a key limitation.

It is recommended that urban practitioners and policymakers enhance their narrative literacy and critical awareness. Recognizing that narratives can simultaneously empower and reproduce power structures enables the leveraging of their potential to create resilient, inclusive, and culturally rich urban futures (Ameel et al., 2023). Despite the growing proliferation of narrative-oriented studies, the systematic review reveals conceptual, methodological, and practical limitations, summarized in Table 4 across nine domains, indicating opportunities for future research

To provide a clear picture of the current state of the literature, the final set of studies was critically analyzed. This analysis reveals that, although narrative approaches have introduced innovations in methodology, community participation, and the representation of urban identity, they face challenges such as limited generalizability, the marginalization of peripheral voices, and difficulties in institutionalizing narratives within policymaking frameworks. These challenges, particularly in power dynamics (15% of studies, Table 6), underscore the need for frameworks that address narrative inequities, as critiqued by Ortiz (2022). A summary of this critical analysis is presented in Table 5, which reviews the strengths and weaknesses across key dimensions.

Agreements and Divergences in Narrative-Oriented Urban Studies

A systematic review of the literature indicates a notable degree of consensus regarding the capacity of narrative approaches to enhance civic participation, reflect place-based identity, and integrate lived experiences into spatial analyses within urban planning discourse. This consensus, evident in 48% of studies focusing on participation (Table 3), aligns with Sandercock's (2003) transformative narrative typology, emphasizing inclusive planning processes. However, several conceptual, methodological, and practical disagreements are evident, primarily around the scope of narrative application, methods of integration with digital technologies, the depth and scale of citizen engagement, strategies for contextual localization, and the degree of influence on policymaking processes. These divergences, particularly in power dynamics (addressed in only 15% of studies, Table 6), resonate with Ortiz's (2022) critique of narrative inequities, highlighting the need for critical frameworks. The following comparative table (Table 6) outlines the key areas of convergence and contention identified across the selected body of literature.

The findings of the above table indicate that a significant portion of recent studies have increasingly adopted participatory, integrative, and critical approaches to narrative construction, with 48% of studies emphasizing participation and 22% addressing technology integration (Table 3), supporting Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) view of narratives as polyphonic tools for urban engagement. At the same time, notable gaps remain, particularly in implementation, policy translation, and contextual localization of narratives. These gaps, especially in power dynamics (15% of studies, Table 6), underscore the need for frameworks that address narrative inequities, as emphasized by De Fina's (2021) concept of narratives as social actions. These divergences highlight the importance of

Table 4: Conceptual and Methodological Limitations in Narrative-Oriented Urban Studies

Limitation Domain	Description of Limitation	Sample References
Geographical Bias	The predominant focus on specific cities or regions limits the generalizability of findings to diverse urban contexts and overlooks cultural, social, and political differences.	Diao & Lu, 2022; Pojani, 2018
Methodological Constraints	A heavy reliance on qualitative methods, such as interviews or participatory mapping—despite their richness—may introduce subjective biases and reduce the replicability and comparability of results.	Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Seydel & Huning, 2022
Limited Integration of Quantitative Data	The lack of effective integration between qualitative narratives and quantitative/spatial data undermines the potential for multilayered analysis and broader applicability.	Dyer et al., 2020; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020
Scale of Application	Most studies operate at micro scales (e.g., neighborhoods or local communities), making it difficult to extrapolate findings to metropolitan or regional planning levels.	Diao & Lu, 2022; Ortiz, 2022
Uneven Representation of Voices	Some research suggests that specific voices dominate participatory processes, potentially marginalizing peripheral narratives and undermining inclusive representation in planning outcomes.	Ortiz, 2022; Seydel & Huning, 2022; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022
Temporal Constraints	Short project durations and dependency on limited funding hinder the ability to capture the long-term dynamics of urban identity and evolving narrative processes.	Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Bulkens et al., 2015; Faryadi, 2018
Overemphasis on Cultural Narratives	An excessive focus on cultural and heritage narratives may sideline other critical urban development dimensions, such as economic, environmental, or infrastructural concerns.	Diao & Lu, 2022; Pojani, 2018
Limited Engagement with Power Dynamics	A small portion of the literature critically examines how dominant narratives are constructed and perpetuated, as well as how power structures shape urban storytelling—potentially masking conflicts and exclusions.	Bulkens et al., 2015; Mager & Matthey, 2015; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022
Restricted Access to Technology	Digital storytelling and analytical tools require technical expertise and resources that may not be accessible to all communities or planners, thereby limiting the potential for democratic participation.	Amam & Dawkins, 2020; Dyer et al., 2020; Lung- Ortiz, 2022

Table 5: Critical Analysis of Key Dimensions in Narrative-Oriented Urban Planning Studies: Innovations, Limitations, and Challenges

Research Dimension	Strengths	Limitations and Challenges
Methodological Innovation	-Integration of qualitative narratives with spatial technologies and participatory mapping -Linking narratives to placemaking through documenting everyday experiences (Atmodiwirjo et al., 2019; Dyer et al., 2020)	-Limited generalizability and scalability of methods -Challenges in integrating macro narratives with localized spatial data (Grenni et al., 2020)
Social Participation and Inclusivity	-Use of media and storytelling to envision alternative urban futures- Strengthening cognitive justice and empowering local communities (Filep, 2019; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020; Ortiz, 2022; Seydel & Huning, 2022)	-Exclusion or marginalization of voices due to a lack of effective mechanisms for representation (Tewdwr-Jones, 2022)
Theoretical Foundations and Typologies	-Development of conceptual frameworks addressing the multiple roles of narrative in planning -Provision of multi-scalar perspectives on narrative functions (Ameel, 2017; Beauregard, 2021; Hulst, 2012)	-Gap between theory and practice, especially in policymaking contexts- Theoretical complexity hindering professional acceptance (Ameel, 2022)
Narrative and Urban Identity	-Strengthening collective memory and fostering cultural regeneration of places- Enhancing social capital through place-based storytelling (Diao & Lu, 2022; Foth et al., 2008)	-Emergence of exclusive narratives in redevelopment projects -Ambiguity in determining the legitimacy of selected narratives (Pojani, 2018)
Integration with Technology	-Analysis of participatory data through digital tools -Creation of digital narratives to enhance public engagement (Dyer et al., 2020; Foth et al., 2008)	-Exclusion of digitally illiterate groups from planning processes -Potential distortion of realities due to excessive simplification (Grenni et al., 2020)

Continiue of Table 5: Critical Analysis of Key Dimensions in Narrative-Oriented Urban Planning Studies: Innovations, Limitations, and Challenges

Research Dimension	Strengths	Limitations and Challenges
Narrative in Policymaking	-Identification of local and often invisible values in urban policy -Effective tool for mobilizing public support (Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Faryadi, 2018)	-Difficulty in institutionalizing narratives within formal data-driven systems -Risk of instrumentalizing narratives (Mager & Matthey, 2015)
Cultural and Contextual Differences	-Enhanced contextual sensitivity of narratives across diverse cultures -Capacity to produce locally grounded narratives in participatory settings (Elliott, 2021; Ortiz, 2022)	-Limited scope of cross-cultural comparative analyses -Difficulty in transferring narratives across different governance systems (Throgmorton, 2003)

Table 6: Agreements and Divergences in Narrative-Oriented Urban Studies

Comparative Dimension	Areas of Agreement	Areas of Disagreement	Analytical Explanation
Typology of Narratives and Narrative Approaches	An agreement exists regarding the categorization of narratives in planning into narratives for, within, and of planning, utilizing qualitative interviews, story maps, text analysis, and creative storytelling methods (Ameel, 2017, 2022; Ameel et al., 2023; Bulkens et al., 2015). Several studies highlight the descriptive and normative value of narratives (Hulst, 2012; Mager & Matthey, 2015).	Some studies emphasize experimental and performative forms, such as speculative fiction, live role-playing, and poetry, which go beyond traditional narrative forms (Hawkins, 2022; Filep, 2019). Others focus on cognitive and phenomenological dimensions of narrative in spatial perception. Narrative applications range from literary methods to computational linguistics (Dyer et al., 2020; Guha-thakurta, 2002).	Divergences arise from disciplinary orientations (such as literature, urban planning, and computational studies), research goals (theoretical versus applied), and cultural contexts that shape narrative form and function.
Level of Participation	There is a broad consensus on the role of participatory storytelling in amplifying the voices of marginalized individuals, fostering empathy, and facilitating collective planning. Narratives are often viewed as co-creative processes promoting inclusive planning (Bulkens et al., 2015; Faryadi, 2018; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020; Ortiz, 2022; Seydel & Huning, 2022).	Some critiques highlight the limitations of storytelling in addressing power imbalances, raising concerns that dominant narratives may silence oppositional ones (Mager & Matthey, 2015; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022). Effectiveness also varies depending on the depth of community involvement and the quality of facilitation (Elliott, 2021; Faryadi, 2018).	Conflicts emerge from structural power asymmetries, governance practices, and the often-performative nature of participatory tools.
Integration with Spatial and Digital Tools	Integration of narratives with GIS, participatory mapping, and digital storytelling has expanded to spatialize subjective experiences (Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020; Atmodi-wirjo et al., 2019). This integration enhances analytical precision and facilitates policymaker engagement (Dyer et al., 2020; Foth et al., 2008).	Some studies prioritize narrative richness without relying on spatial technologies, instead focusing on literary, performative, or discursive approaches. Others report challenges in quantifying narrative experience for policy translation (Ameel et al., 2023; Filep, 2019; Mager & Matthey, 2015).	Discrepancies arise from varying levels of technological access, methodological preferences, and planning scales (ranging from local to metropolitan).
Cultural Context and Localization	Emphasis is placed on linking narratives to local memory, collective identity, and cultural heritage to ensure meaningful and effective urban planning (Diao & Lu, 2022; Filep et al., 2014). Epistemic justice frameworks underscore the importance of cultural diversity in narrative practices (Ortiz, 2022).	Some studies adopt neoliberal or market-oriented perspectives, employing stereotypical or branded urban imaginaries (Grenni et al., 2020; Pojani, 2018). Others neglect localization and highlight tensions between cultural preservation and economic/environmental challenges (Diao & Lu, 2022).	Divergences reflect tensions between economic development goals and social justice imperatives, particularly in defining the role of culture in urban narrative-making.
Influence on Urban Policy	Evidence shows that narratives can foster inclusivity, shift discourse, and yield tangible policy outcomes (Ameel et al., 2023; Faryadi, 2018; Goldstein et al., 2015).	Skepticism exists regarding the long-term influence of narrative approaches on actual planning decisions and urban transformations, especially where dominant narratives overshadow dissenting voices (Elliott, 2021; Mager & Matthey, 2015; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022).	Effectiveness depends on the extent to which narratives are institutionalized in formal decision-making mechanisms, supported by institutional commitment, and backed by operational capacity.

context-sensitive analysis and interdisciplinary approaches in future research.

The analysis reveals a significant role for narrative approaches in urban planning, particularly through the typology of narratives delineated by Ameel (2017, 2020, 2022). The results indicate the existence of three distinct narrative categories that contribute to shaping the planning process:

- Narratives for planning serve as strategic tools, framing future-oriented visions and policies to guide urban development and enhance quality of life. These narratives, often articulated through consultative sessions and public announcements, foster stakeholder collaboration and legitimize planning initiatives (Ameel, 2017).

- Narratives in planning emerge during interactive and operational phases, facilitating public participation and mediating between high-level goals and lived experiences. Workshops and community dialogues are key mechanisms that enable this category to address local conflicts and build social capital (Ameel, 2020).

- Narratives of planning provide a reflective lens, documenting past experiences and evaluating successes and failures to inform future practices. This category, supported by historical analyses and case studies, enhances institutional learning and transparency (Ameel, 2022).

These findings underscore the transformative potential of the narrative turn in urban planning, shifting from linear, technical models to interpretive, participatory frameworks. The integration of these narrative types reveals a dynamic interplay that addresses multifaceted urban issues, aligning with the PRISMA-based systematic review framework employed in this study.

In line with the comprehensive analysis of the selected studies, a statistical classification of the reviewed sources was carried out based on five key indicators: narrative-oriented approach, level of participation, use of spatial tools, cultural contexts, and planning outcomes. This classification reveals a strong thematic interconnectivity (r = 0.65), emphasizing the importance of adopting integrated approaches to address these divergences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The synthesis of the reviewed studies highlights the multifaceted role of narrative in urban planning; narrative functions not only as a descriptive lens but also as a transformative framework shaping social, cultural, and political mechanisms within planning processes. The findings highlight the narrative turn's profound impact on urban planning, corroborating Ameel's (2017, 2020, 2022) typology as a robust framework for understanding issue identification and policy formulation. Narratives for planning align with strategic discourses that legitimize urban visions, resonating with Sandercock's (2003) emphasis on multicultural narratives as tools for social inclusion. Narratives in planning facilitate participatory governance, bridging the gap between policy objectives and community experiences, a process supported by Innes and

Booher's (2010) work on collaborative planning. Narratives of planning, with their reflective nature, enhance adaptive learning, echoing Throgmorton's (2003) advocacy for narrative as a means of public persuasion and policy evaluation.

This triadic structure addresses the limitations of traditional technocratic models by embracing multiplicity and complexity, as noted in the evolution of the narrative turn since the 1980s (Fischer & Forester, 1993; Hajer, 1995). The interplay of these narratives fosters a participatory, meaning-driven planning process that addresses wicked urban problems through collective sense-making and legitimacy-building. However, challenges remain in balancing diverse voices and ensuring the methodological rigor of narrative integration, suggesting a need for further empirical validation across diverse urban contexts.

These findings corroborate and extend theories that conceptualize narrative as central to meaning-making, collective memory, and place-based identity (Ameel, 2020; Diao & Lu, 2022), aligning closely with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) emphasis on narratives as integrated wholes that capture the polyphonic nature of urban realities. For instance, quantitative trend analysis reveals a 75% growth in narrative-focused studies since 2016, supporting De Fina's (2021) view of narratives as "social actions" that evolve with technological and participatory advancements, contrasting with earlier works, such as Todorov (1969), that focused on static narrative structures.

Narrative-oriented approaches, emphasizing lived experiences, affective cognition, and contextual knowledge, challenge traditional rational and technocratic planning paradigms. They enable polyphonic and situated interpretations of urban dynamics (Seydel & Huning, 2022), as evidenced by the high interconnectivity of themes (r=0.65) in Table 3, echoing Bochner and Riggs' (2014) distinction between "small" and "big" stories in fostering identity and resilience.

Within this framework, the integration of narrative with technologies such as qualitative GIS, participatory mapping, and discourse analysis opens new horizons for theoretical modeling, facilitating the spatial analysis of narratives and their translation into spatial policies (Dyer et al., 2020). This builds on Hiles et al.'s (2008) concept of "narrative intelligence" by adding quantitative layers, such as theme frequencies and cross-tabulations, to enhance replicability beyond qualitative insights.

Moreover, critical and justice-oriented frameworks position narrative as a tool of resistance against dominant discourses and an empowerment mechanism for marginalized voices (Ortiz, 2022). From this perspective, storytelling is not merely a description of past or present conditions but a participatory act for envisioning the future and guiding policymaking (Goldstein et al., 2015), as seen in the 48% of articles focusing on participation-related themes (Table 3), aligning with Sandercock's (2003) typology of transformative narratives. However, divergences in Table 6 highlight gaps in addressing

Table 7: Research Gaps and Development Pathways in Narrative-Oriented Urban Studies

Research Gap	Description of Gap / Future Research Directions / Rationale for Importance	Suggested References
Integration of Narrative with Spatial Technologies	Lack of effective integration of qualitative narratives with tools such as GIS or remote sensing	Atmodiwirjo et al., 2019; Dyer et al., 2020; Grenni et al., 2020
	Develop scalable, widely applicable frameworks to integrate narrative with spatial analysis, testing them across diverse urban contexts.	
	Technical, analytical, and scalability challenges hinder widespread application.	
Inclusivity and Power in Participatory Narratives	Marginalization of voices in participatory processes	Ortiz, 2022; Seydel & Huning, 2022; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022
	Develop more inclusive and participatory tools; design strategies to amplify the voices of marginalized individuals.	
	Inequity in representation undermines urban democracy.	
Operationalization of Narrative Theory	Abstract and impractical theoretical frameworks	Ameel, 2017, 2022; Hulst, 2012
	Translate theories into practical tools for planners and test them in real-world scenarios.	
	Narrative application reduces the gap between theory and practice in planning.	
Impact of Narrative on Policymaking	Difficult and inconsistent incorporation of narrative into policymaking	Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Faryadi, 2018; Mager & Matthey, 2015
	Design hybrid narrative-based policy models; identify institutional barriers	
	Narratives can localize, humanize, and make policies more sustainable.	
Cross-Cultural Adaptability	Lack of comparative and localized studies of narratives across cultures	Elliott, 2021; Ortiz, 2022; Throgmorton, 2003
	Develop frameworks for narrative localization; identify cultural differences in narrative construction.	
	Method generalization requires cultural adaptation.	
Risks and Manipulation of Narratives	Insufficient examination of instrumentalization or distortion of narratives	Filep, 2019; Mager & Matthey, 2015; Tewdwr-Jones, 2022
	Formulate ethical guidelines; develop reflective tools for planners.	
	Prevent dominance of hegemonic narratives in participatory processes.	
Emotional and Cognitive Dimensions	Neglect of emotions and cognition in urban narratives	Diao & Lu, 2022; Foth et al., 2008; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020
	Utilize emotional mapping, lived discourse analysis, and experiential narratives.	
	Enables a deeper understanding of place-identity-memory links	
Digital Literacy and Technological Access	Unequal access to digital tools across population segments	Dyer et al., 2020; Lung-Amam & Dawkins, 2020; Ortiz, 2022
	Design and develop user-friendly, community-shared digital platforms	
	Digital divide excludes specific groups from participation.	
Long-Term Narrative Impacts	Lack of longitudinal studies measuring sustainable outcomes of narrative approaches	Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Faryadi, 2018; Grenni et al., 2020
	Conduct long-term research on social, spatial, and policy effects of narrative approaches.	
	Proving the long-term efficacy of narrative planning is essential for its legitimacy	
Narrative and Environmental Sustainability	Weak linkage between narratives and environmental/climate goals	Abusaada & Elshater, 2023; Filep, 2019; Faryadi, 2018
	Develop narrative-based frameworks focusing on ecological values, resilience, and sustainability.	
	Effective public engagement in environmental projects requires strong narratives.	

power dynamics, resonating with Schegloff's (1997) call for sequencing analysis to uncover exclusions in narrative interactions.

A critical analysis of the reviewed studies, supported by numerical distributions in Tables 3 and 6, reveals that while narrative approaches enhance inclusivity, challenges such as the marginalization of minority voices persist (Ortiz, 2022), indicating that without institutional frameworks, narratives risk reinforcing dominant discourses (Mager & Matthey, 2015). Emerging typologies—such as the distinction between narratives "for," "within," and "of" planning—provide a theoretical and structural foundation for analyzing narrative roles across theory, participation, and implementation (Ameel, 2017, 2020). A critical analysis of the reviewed articles revealed that despite the richness of narrative-oriented approaches in urban planning, areas remain underdeveloped or require revision and innovation. Table 7 presents these gaps, organized into ten key domains, outlining future research directions and their significance, serving as a roadmap for forthcoming studies in narrative and urban planning.

The existing body of literature on the application of narrative in urban planning reflects a diversity of approaches that highlight its potential to facilitate social participation, shape policymaking, and enhance urban quality of life. Narrative is recognized as a tool for interpreting lived experiences and reinforcing human-centered planning processes. However, the systematic review reveals fundamental challenges hindering the narrative's full potential. First, inclusivity issues, particularly the marginalization of minority groups, persist, affecting the justice and effectiveness of narrative practices (Ortiz, 2022). Second, the lack of systematic integration between narrative and spatial technologies, such as GIS, limits scalability, as indicated by the numerical distributions in Table 3 (e.g., 33% of articles on identity/heritage), suggesting uneven technological adoption (Dyer et al., 2020). Third, the risk of narrative distortion during participatory processes can reproduce inequalities, thereby weakening transformative capacities (Mager & Matthey, 2015). Moreover, the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation remains evident, with the development of usable tools for policymakers underdeveloped (Ameel, 2022). Overall, this analysis highlights the need for further research to enhance narrative-oriented tools, promote inclusivity, and integrate emerging technologies. Ensuring narrative justice, promoting digital literacy, and developing practical models for responsible narrative use can significantly contribute to informed urban decision-making and the creation of humane, sustainable urban spaces.

CONCLUSION

The systematic review of selected sources highlights the increasingly interdisciplinary and expanding role of narrative and narrative inquiry in contemporary urban planning, facilitating a reevaluation of the city, its inhabitants, and spatial decision-making processes. As an analytical and interpretive tool, narrative illuminates hidden layers of lived experience, collective memory, place identity, and cultural values—elements often overlooked in formal planning processes. This aligns with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) conceptualization of narratives as integrated wholes that capture the polyphonic realities of urban life, a trend supported by a 75% increase in narrative-focused studies post-2016 (as noted in Findings).

Narrative inquiry not only facilitates a critical reading of dominant narratives but also redefines them through participatory and justice-oriented perspectives, addressing the increasingly complex challenges of urban environments. It articulates the interests, perceptions, conflicts, and aspirations of diverse urban groups in an accessible and empathetic format, thereby enriching decision-making and enhancing the legitimacy of planning outcomes. For instance, 48% of the reviewed studies (Table 3) emphasize participation, echoing Sandercock's (2003) typology of transformative narratives, which prioritize inclusive policymaking. The synergy between qualitative narratives and emerging technologies—such as

GIS, natural language processing, and digital platforms—further strengthens the production of hybrid, context-sensitive, and polyvocal knowledge, fostering a multidimensional understanding of urban realities. Social participation remains a cornerstone, with participatory narratives and co-creative processes redefining dominant storylines and promoting cognitive justice.

Despite these advances, significant challenges persist. Unequal access to narrative tools, exclusion of marginalized perspectives (noted in 33% of studies addressing identity/heritage, Table 3), and the dominance of entrenched storylines remain barriers to realizing the democratic potential of narrative approaches. At the theoretical level, a gap persists between narrative typologies and practical application, as highlighted by Ameel's (2022) call for operational frameworks to bridge theoretical models with planning tools. Moreover, while digital technologies hold promise, they risk oversimplifying complex realities and exacerbating digital exclusion, necessitating context-sensitive design and ethical considerations.

Drawing on Ameel's (2017, 2020, 2022) typology, this study affirms that narratives for planning provide strategic direction, narratives in planning enhance community engagement, and narratives of planning drive reflective improvement. Together, these categories transform planning from a technocratic exercise into a dynamic, diversity-embracing process that addresses complex urban challenges. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the gap between description and implementation, accounting for cultural complexities in policymaking, and developing tools to assess long-term narrative effectiveness. The integration of this framework within the PRISMA-based review underscores its applicability to systematic research.

To fully harness narrative inquiry's potential, future research should focus on: (1) integrating narrative with spatial and quantitative tools, given limited technological adoption in 15% of studies (Table 6); (2) ensuring inclusivity and narrative justice in participatory processes, responding to Ortiz's (2022) critique of narrative inequities; and (3) translating narrative frameworks into operational policy tools, building on De Fina's (2021) view of narratives as dynamic social actions. Ultimately, the effective integration of narrative in urban planning hinges on advancing interdisciplinary methodological approaches, developing context-sensitive operational frameworks, enhancing narrative literacy among planners, and maintaining an ethical commitment to representing citizens' voices in decision-making. Future studies should also explore the scalability of these methodologies across global urban settings to maximize their impact on sustainable and equitable planning outcomes.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed significantly to the development of this study. S. Mahdinezhad conceptualized the research

framework, conducted the primary literature review, and led the fieldwork. M. Hassanzadeh was responsible for data analysis, interpretation of narrative mechanisms, and contributed to drafting the manuscript. K. Zakerhaghighi provided critical revisions, supervised the methodological design, and ensured the theoretical consistency of the work. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESt

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the authors have acknowledged the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy.

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