

LAURA SOBRAL

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Urban Governance Expert · Researcher · Evaluator · Facilitator

Urban governance researcher and practitioner with 15+ years of experience connecting participatory governance, democratic innovation and urban policy across Europe and Latin America. Independent expert for European programmes, with a portfolio spanning policy transfer, institutional capacity building and programme assessment. Her work bridges public institutions, civil society and research, combining applied practice with research on co-governance and the institutionalisation of participatory processes.

EXPERT ROLES

URBACT

Lead Expert, CITI4UD Transfer Network | 2025–2028

Leads transnational learning and capacity building for a seven-city network on citizen-initiated urban development, supporting cities in adapting participatory governance practices to local contexts.

Ad-hoc Expert, 2NITE Transfer Network | 2026

Supported implementation-plan review, network learning and final reporting.

Hub Manager, URBACT University | 2026

Designed and facilitated a learning journey for European urban practitioners on integrated and participatory urban development.

EIT Culture & Creativity

External Expert, Transformation & New European Bauhaus | 2026–present

Selected for the external expert pool in participatory urban transformation, governance and New European Bauhaus.

EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT

European Urban Initiative (EUI) — Assessor | 2026

Assesses urban innovation proposals against programme criteria and contributes to technical review, harmonisation and consensus processes.

European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) —

Accredited External Expert | 2025–present

Accredited to the external expert pool for evaluator and rapporteur assignments.

National School of Public Administration (ENAP), Brazil —

Public Sector Innovation Prize Committee | 2022–2024

Committee member for three editions of Brazil's national award for innovation in public administration.

RESEARCH

Doctoral Researcher — Iscte & TU Wien | 2020–present

Researches the mobility and institutionalisation of participatory urban policies through the international transfer of Lisbon's BIP/ZIP Strategy, with a focus on co-governance, power distribution and temporalities. Cumulative dissertation comprising three peer-reviewed articles; thesis completion in progress.

FCT-funded doctoral researcher

CORE EXPERTISE

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE & CO-GOVERNANCE

DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

URBAN POLICY & POLICY MOBILITY

EUROPEAN PROGRAMME EVALUATION

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

SPATIAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SPACE

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

RESEARCH–PRACTICE–POLICY BRIDGING

TRANSNATIONAL LEARNING

CIVIL SOCIETY–GOVERNMENT COOPERATION

FACILITATION & CAPACITY BUILDING

EDUCATION

PhD in Urban Studies / Spatial Planning — Cotutelle

Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa & TU Wien | 2020–present

Thesis completion in progress

MSc in Social Foundations of Urbanism

University of São Paulo | 2016–2018

BA in Architecture and Urban Planning

University of São Paulo | 2004–2010

Exchange: ETSAM, Madrid | 2007–2008

LANGUAGES

PORTUGUESE — Native

ENGLISH — Fluent (CPE)

SPANISH — Fluent (DELE Superior)

GERMAN — B2 / TestDaF TDN 3

FRENCH — Good comprehension (DELFI A4)

TEACHING

Fontys University of Applied Sciences — Lecturer & External Assessor

| 2020–present

Teaching and assessment in interdisciplinary, practice-oriented programmes.

Invited Lecturer & Speaker — International

Universities and professional programmes across Europe, the Americas and Africa.

URBAN PRACTICE & PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Urban Researcher, Strategist & Facilitator — Independent Practice | 2014–present

Designs participatory governance, research, capacity-building and knowledge-exchange processes linking municipalities, civil society and communities across Europe and Latin America. Selected programmes include URBiNAT (Horizon 2020), Com.Unity.Lab (URBACT), NBRACER, SeaLabHaus (Interreg) and ECOCIDADE, among others.

A GRUPA, Portugal — Co-Founder

Feminist urban practice working across participatory planning, collaborative governance and research–practice experimentation.

A Cidade Precisa de Você / The City Needs You, Brazil — Co-Founder

Civil-society organisation advancing citizen participation, collaborative urbanism and public-space co-governance.

SELECTED FACILITATION & ADVISORY ROLES

Actors of Urban Change / MitOst — Facilitator | 2024

Co-facilitated an advocacy sprint for civic actors from across Europe.

Programa de Inovadores Locales / RIL — Mentor | 2023

Mentored urban innovators and emerging municipal leaders.

City Space Architecture — Council Board Member | 2019–2022

Contributed to the strategic direction of an international nonprofit focused on public space.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

Global Innovation Gathering (GIG) — Member

International community connecting grassroots innovators, makers and social innovators.

COST Action CA19129 — Decolonising Development — Member | 2020–2024

European research network on decolonial and transdisciplinary approaches to development.

SELECTED FELLOWSHIPS & RECOGNITION

German Chancellor Fellowship — Alexander von Humboldt Foundation | 2017–2018

IJURR Foundation Studentship | 2022–2023

Dutch Visitors Programme — Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs | 2019

German Federal Visitors Programme | 2016

UN Sustainable Development Goals Summit — New York | 2015

SELECTED ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

The Mobility of Urban Policies: How Lisbon's BIP/ZIP Initiatives Travelled to Other European Urban Contexts

Sobral, L. (2025). European Journal of Spatial Development, 22(4), 1–30.
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17119411

Temporal Dynamics of Power Distribution in Mobile Urban Co-Policies

Sobral, L., Milić, P., & Ateş, B. (2025). Urban Planning, 10.
DOI: 10.17645/up.9070

Orphan Policies: Assessing What Happens When Co-Policies Travel Elsewhere

Sobral, L., & Ferreira Montuori, B. (2026). Planning Practice & Research. Accepted for publication.
DOI: 10.1080/02697459.2026.2729333

The Art and Practice of Participatory Research at the Science–Policy Interface

Wingfield, T., Sobral, L., & Montuori, B. (2021). RGS-IBG / University of Liverpool.

BOOKS

Doing it Together – Cooperative Tools for City Co-Governance ZKU Press, 2019.

Portuguese/Spanish updated edition: Fazer Juntos / Haciendo Juntos – Instrumentos de Cooperação para Cidades Cocriadas A Cidade Press, 2022.