sustainability

MDPI

Article

Strategic Prioritization of Sustainable Development Goal 11 Targets to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19: Insights from Cuenca's Urban Future

Felipe Quesada-Molina [1,*], Sebastian Astudillo-Cordero [1], Manuel Lema [1,2], Jessica Ortiz-Fernández [1] and María Teresa Baquero Larriva [1,3]

[1] ECOS Research Group, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Cuenca, Cuenca 010203, Ecuador; sebastian.astudillo@ucuenca.edu.ec (S.A.-C.); manuel.lemat@ucuenca.edu.ec (M.L.); jessicam.ortizf@ucuenca.edu.ec (J.O.-F.); mt.baquero.larriva@upm.es (M.T.B.L.)
[2] Interdisciplinary Space and Population Department, University of Cuenca, Cuenca 010203, Ecuador
[3] Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Av. Juan de Herrera, 2, 28040 Madrid, Spain
* Correspondence: felipe.quesada@ucuenca.edu.ec

Abstract

Cities play a vital role in creating wealth and ensuring the well-being of all their inhabitants. However, major international efforts aimed at fostering fairer, healthier, and a more sustainable world have been compromised by the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of this research is to determine key priorities for addressing the pandemic's impact in both the present and in a future urban context. Therefore, this study applies the Delphi method to a panel of 24 experts in order to identify the most and least important targets from Sustainable Development Goal 11 for post-COVID-19 sustainable urban planning in Cuenca, Ecuador. Out of the twelve targets, only five were prioritized, including "Target 11.1 Affordable housing", Target 11.3 Sustainable Urbanization", "Target 11.9 Implement policies for inclusion and property rights", and "Target 6.3 Improve water quality". These findings can serve as a foundation for future public policies and strategies for sustainable urban planning of the city.

Keywords: urban sustainability; sustainable development goal 11; sustainable cities; COVID-19; post-pandemic; Delphi method

Academic Editor: Cristina Raluca Gh. Popescu

Received: 31 July 2025
Accepted: 19 August 2025
Published: 23 August 2025

Citation: Quesada-Molina, F.; Astudillo-Cordero, S.; Lema, M.; Ortiz-Fernández, J.; Baquero Larriva, M.T. Strategic Prioritization of Sustainable Development Goal 11 Targets to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19: Insights from Cuenca's Urban Future. *Sustainability* **2025**, *17*, 7623. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17177623

1. Introduction

Cities have always been attractive places for people to live, due to the continuous development of social and technological novelties [1]. This has been, in the past, due to strong processes of urbanization of territories worldwide in order to accommodate large human populations. Overall, 56% of the world's population currently lives in cities [2], and this is expected to increase to 68% by 2050 [3]. These urbanization processes comprise 75% of global resource consumption and 70% of greenhouse gas emissions [4–6]. With regard to this problem, in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each with a set of targets, to be achieved by 2030 [7], as guidelines for a more sustainable future for all [8]. According to the United Nations, on one hand, the SDGs target the root causes of poverty and promise to leave no one behind, especially the most vulnerable. On the other hand, they promote a more sustainable planet by addressing climate change and environmental protection [9]. To achieve these objectives

in urban areas, Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG-11) has been proposed, which aims to build more equitable, resilient and sustainable cities [10].

These major international efforts for a fairer and more sustainable world have been compromised by the large chain of impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people worldwide [11–14]. The impact has been more severe in countries that already had a welfare deficit [15], and there has been a widening of the poverty gap between nations. In developing countries, research on the impact of the pandemic on the SDGs has found that the development of critical socio-economic issues such as education, infrastructure, and employment, has deteriorated, and could lead to greater poverty through increased unemployment rates and difficulties in making payments [16,17]. This is true in the case of Ecuador, where the COVID-19 health emergency reduced the economy by 7.8% [18], causing 46.9% of the population to live below the poverty line [19]. In major cities in Ecuador, like Cuenca, this has led to an increase in the following: cost of living, unemployment rate, income inequality, saturation of public services, lack of affordable housing, deteriorating public safety, health conditions, and other socio-economic problems that further aggravate urban poverty and community well-being [20,21].

UN-Habitat has published the "Response Plan to mitigate COVID-19 based externalities for the cities of the world", in order to provide a solution to the aforementioned problem. The plan establishes actions regarding the provision of information which are fundamental for decision-making in cities. Academics have contributed to this plan by studying the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in isolated and specific subjects such as the following: energy [22], environmental pollution [23], disposal management [24], climate change [25], food industry [26], and others. It has not been possible to carry out comprehensive analyses of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on global urban sustainability, which has fragmented the literature and left a gap in scientific knowledge on the subject [21]. Hence, it is fundamentally important to present new studies about urban sustainability in order to overcome the effects of the pandemic, as stated by Sharifi and Khavarian-Garmsir [27], who raised the need for new urban planning that considers and proposes solutions to the urgent urban problems arising from the pandemic and, at the same time, generates new opportunities for a transition towards post-COVID-19 urban sustainability, in which the Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved [21,28].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Development Goal 11

The importance of urban areas in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs is reflected in SDG-11 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which highlights the need for cities and human settlements to be inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. SDG 11 seeks to integrate environmental resilience, social equity, and economic viability through 12 specific targets, which require continuous monitoring and coordinated actions to advance urban sustainability [10]. This concept goes beyond ecological considerations and is understood as the capacity of a community to maintain and enhance the provision of resources, services, and opportunities for both present and future residents [29].

The topic of sustainable urban development has been the focus of extensive research, as local governments can implement more agile and innovative administrative structures and policies than national governments. This enables them to learn and design tailored policies to address local challenges and advance towards SDG compliance [30,31]. However, the SDGs are designed to be applied at a global scale, which presents challenges for their implementation at local level, given the existing diversity of urban agendas across cities worldwide. These agendas typically prioritize issues such as housing, transportation, urban expansion, water use, energy, climate change, and related topics [32].

In this context, several studies have demonstrated the limitations of implementing the SDGs at the urban scale. This underscores the need for comprehensive research to develop strategies that adapt SDG 11 to the specific context of each city [33]. Furthermore, the convergence of multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly undermined progress towards achieving the SDGs and introduced new challenges that must be addressed to accelerate SDG 11 advancement [34].

2.2. Challenges of COVID-19 in Cities

The SARS-CoV-2 virus—later named COVID-19—spread rapidly after its emergence, eventually developing into a global pandemic. In the following months, numerous governments implemented home confinement measures and restrictions on the use of public spaces [35]. The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of urban systems, raising debates about the priorities of urban planning regarding population density, housing, urban sprawl, public transportation, and public space, among others. This prompted a re-evaluation of the effectiveness of conventional urban models [17,36,37] and encouraged initiatives aimed at urban transforming cities towards more sustainable development [21,28,38].

In the post-pandemic era, urban areas faced significant challenges related to climate change, poverty, and political instability, all of which threaten progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030 [39,40]. Therefore, as the World Health Organization [41] has declared the end of the pandemic, it is crucial to reassess development policies and urban planning principles to establish more sustainable cities [36].

2.3. Research on the Impacts of COVID-19 in Urban Environments

Studies examining the impacts of COVID-19 on urban environments have shown that vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected. This underscores the need to incorporate these groups into local planning contexts. For instance, Escorcia Hernández, Torabi Moghadam, Sharifi and Lombardi [17] conducted a systematic bibliometric review that identified key issues influenced by the pandemic for urban sustainability. These included resilient urban planning, sustainable mobility, healthy urban environments, social equity, and circular economy. The authors suggest that future research should explore post-pandemic resilience within the broader dimensions of urban sustainability.

Sharifi and Khavarian-Garmsir [27], through a literature review on the relationship between COVID-19 and cities, analyzed its effects on urban environments. Their findings highlighted critical themes for urban planning and design in a post-pandemic context, with environmental quality—particularly air quality, meteorological parameters, and water quality—emerging as the main concern. Other areas, including socioeconomic conditions, governance, transit, and urban design, were considered less central. The authors emphasize that impacts vary significantly across cities, calling for context-specific approaches to ensure effective strategies for sustainable urban planning.

Finally, Bandarin et al. [42] investigated the links between economy and territory, questioning whether COVID-19 represents a temporary setback or a transformative shift in globalization trends. Using a Delphi survey conducted in 20 cities, they found that the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing problems, highlighting the need for local solutions framed within global strategies to harness positive externalities. The study advocates a bottom-up approach, where local stakeholders play a central role in identifying and quantifying challenges, while planning serves as a guide toward sustainable development.

3. Purpose of the Study

To mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, UN-Habitat [43] has urged cities worldwide to design actions that address both priority and emerging needs. However, urban envi-

ronments are inherently diverse and heterogeneous, encompassing distinct administrative areas, infrastructure networks, and socioeconomic dynamics [44,45]. Therefore, advancing urban sustainability requires the establishment of context-specific targets that respond to the particular challenges of each city [46–48].

Such an approach fosters a deeper understanding of urban complexities and offers an opportunity to strengthen decision-making process while improving the communication of sustainability conditions to diverse stakeholders. It also enables the prioritization of interventions in areas where they are most urgently needed [49]. In the case of Cuenca, Ecuador, a critical question arises: What are the key objectives for achieving urban sustainability, taking SDG 11 targets as the foundation for a renewed planning agenda? [50]. This agenda must be adapted to local needs and support the implementation of effective policies to address the most pressing issues exacerbated by the pandemic [51].

In this context, the present research examines the 12 targets of SDG 11 to identify those most relevant for mitigating the effects of COVID-19 and guiding the city of Cuenca toward a more sustainable future. The study further ranks these targets, highlighting the most and least critical priorities for achieving this goal.

Case Study

The city of Cuenca, Ecuador, was selected as a case study due to its distinctive characteristics, which led to its designation as an Intermediate City by the United Nations. This classification reflects a city with a strong social fabric, marked by direct interpersonal relationships at both neighborhood and urban scales. In addition, Cuenca demonstrates a balanced and sustainable governance system aligned with its population size [52].

According to the declaration document, Cuenca is recognized as one of the few cities in Ecuador that exemplifies successful urban planning processes. Significant progress has been achieved in infrastructure provision, essential services delivery, and the preservation of cultural and architectural heritage [53]. As a result, the city is regarded as one of the most attractive locations in Ecuador, drawing a considerable number of international visitors. However, Cuenca also faces challenges associated with unplanned urban growth, social exclusion, territorial fragmentation, and increasing pressure on vulnerable and agro-productive land. These issues stem from rapid urban population growth and are exacerbated by limited access to affordable housing, rising land prices, and the phenomenon of peri-urbanization. Furthermore, these dynamics have been aggravated by the pandemic, with increasingly evident repercussions in areas such as mobility, vehicle fleet expansion, and deteriorating traffic conditions [54].

Cuenca is located at 2°53′51″ S and 79°00′16″ W, with an average altitude of 2550 m.a.s.l. (Figure 1). It is the third most populated city in Ecuador, with approximately 637,000 inhabitants [55]. By 2050, its population is projected to reach 901,499 [53].

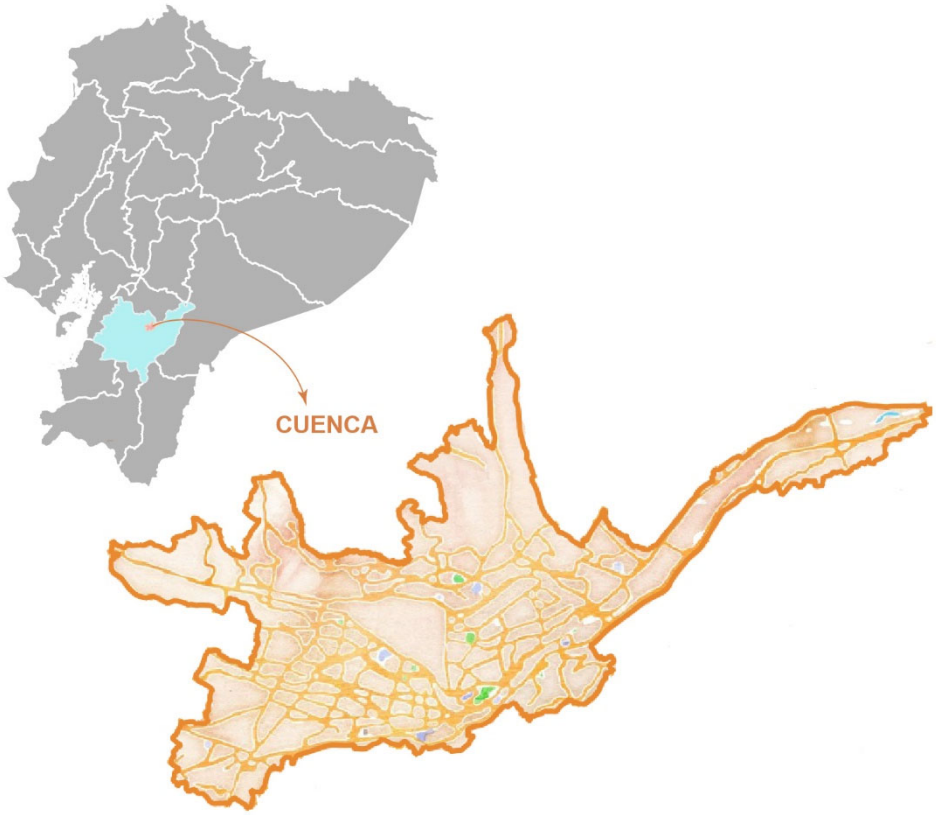

Figure 1. Location of Cuenca, Ecuador.

4. Materials and Methods

Current research on identifying and prioritizing aspects of urban sustainability suggests that consensus can be achieved through the Delphi method [42,56,57]. The Delphi method is a social research technique that gathers the formal opinions of a panel of experts through an iterative process with feedback, enabling the collection of information in contexts characterized by subjectivity and high uncertainty [58,59]. Using this approach, the present study aims to generate a convergent set of opinions and build a possible consensus from a panel of local experts with expertise in urban sustainability.

4.1. Application of the Delphi Method

The study employed a structured framework divided into three main phases (Figure 2) to assess the 12 targets of SDG 11, which promotes inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements. In line with the requirements of the Delphi method, the process began with the development of a questionnaire and the selection of experts for the panel [57,60]. Online questionnaires, written in Spanish, were prepared using QuestionPro [61] and administered between March and April 2022 in two consultation rounds, during which responses and feedback were collected [62]. After the second round, the process was concluded. To minimize participant dropout, panel members were contacted by telephone to emphasize the importance of the study findings and to encourage their active participation in both rounds.

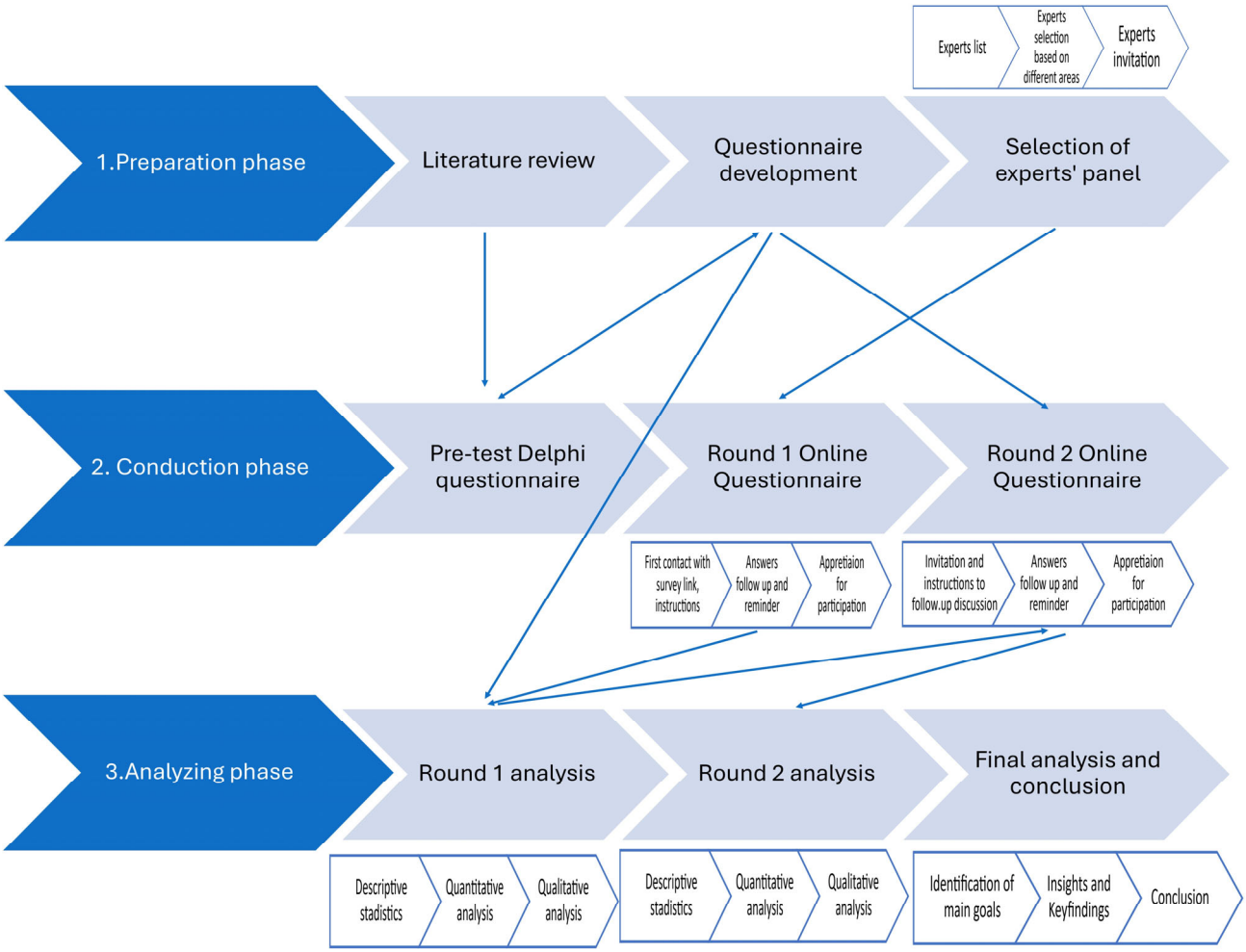

Figure 2. Research methodological approach.

In the first round, a questionnaire was used to gather ratings and opinions on the study's topics of interest. In the second round, feedback was provided to the experts in a controlled manner, as the research team analyzed the ratings and summarized the open responses for re-evaluation. In each round, the tasks were clearly explained to the experts, and a two-week period was given for responses. Throughout the consultations, participant anonymity was maintained to prevent bias from reputation or the influence of dominant or charismatic individuals [63]. After the final round, the results were presented, including the level of consensus, the reasons for agreement or disagreement, and the relative importance of the goals, following the statistical requirements of the Delphi method [60].

4.2. Questionnaire Development

The first-round questionnaire was developed based on the 12 targets of SDG 11, with terminology adapted for clarity and contextual understanding (see Table 1) and their potential contributions to addressing the impacts of the pandemic. Each target was also classified according to the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic) and by theme (e.g., Affordable housing, sustainable transport, among others), which facilitated their labeling. Based on this classification, the questionnaire included two types of questions: (a) closed-ended questions using a rating scale for estimates, and (b) open-ended questions allowing experts to provide reasons and arguments for their ratings.

Table 1. The 12 targets of SDG 11 are classified by the three sustainability pillars.

Nr.	Thematic	Target	Sustainability Pillars		
			Environmental	Social	Economic
11.1	Affordable housing.	Ensure secure housing with essential services and enhance outlying areas.		X	X
11.2	Sustainable transport.	Guarantee safe access to public transportation for everyone, particularly addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.	X	X	X
11.3	Sustainable Urbanization.	Promote sustainable urban development and participatory governance in Cuenca.	X	X	
11.4	Cultural and natural heritage.	Strengthen the protection of cultural and natural heritage in the city of Cuenca.	X	X	
11.5	Natural disasters.	Decrease the number of fatalities, affected populations, and economic damages caused by disasters, prioritizing the protection of the most vulnerable.	X	X	
11.6	Environmental impact of cities.	Reduce negative environmental impact by focusing on reducing air pollution, municipal waste, and other pollutants.	X		
11.7	Universal access to public and green spaces.	Ensure universal access to public and green spaces for all citizens.	X	X	
11.8	Development planning.	Foster links between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas through sustainable planning practices.	X	X	X
11.9	Implement policies for inclusion and disaster risk reduction.	Adopt inclusive policies that promote resource efficiency, and disaster risk management.	X	X	
11.a	Sustainable building.	Encourage the construction of environmentally sustainable buildings using locally sourced materials.	X		X
1.4	Equal access to economic resources, services, and property rights.	Guarantee that all individuals, especially the vulnerable, have access to financial resources, essential services, and different forms of ownership.		X	X

Table 1. *Cont.*

Nr.	Thematic	Target	Sustainability Pillars		
			Environmental	Social	Economic
6.3	Improve water quality.	Eliminate the discharge of chemicals and hazardous substances into water sources and reduce the production of untreated wastewater by increasing water recycling and reuse in Cuenca.	X		

The initial version of the questionnaire was pilot-tested with nine university academics specializing in urban sustainability. Following the recommendations of Frewer, Fischer, Wentholt, Marvin, Ooms, Coles and Rowe [59], the questionnaire was refined based on expert feedback and suggestions.

In the first round, experts were first asked to rank the themed targets—presented randomly—from most to least important, as a training exercise before completing the questionnaire. They were then asked to rate the importance of each of the 12 targets on a five-point Likert scale (not at all important, not very important, more or less important, quite important and very important). Participants were also invited to justify their assessment and to suggest additional urban sustainability issues relevant to the city. A model of the questionnaire used in the first round is provided in Supplementary File S1.

For the second and final rounds, a questionnaire was developed with a different configuration from the first. For each target, a summary of the first-round results was presented, including the median rating, a summary of the experts' arguments, and the percentage distribution of responses across the Likert scale. Experts were then asked to either 'confirm or modify' their previous rating for each of the 12 targets, with their initial responses provided as a reference. This allowed participants to reassess their evaluations with knowledge of the overall panel's ratings and arguments. The questionnaire concluded with a consultation in which experts assessed the quality of the Delphi survey application (Supplementary File S1).

4.3. Selection of Experts

Experts were selected from a list of potential candidates generated through personal contacts and publicly available institutions staff lists. An individual was considered an expert in urban sustainability in Cuenca if their professional activities were related to the field and they had more than five years of experience [57], with priority given to those with over ten years [63]. Given that the recommended range for heterogeneous groups is between 20 and 60 participants [64], 35 experts were initially selected. They represented academia (universities, research institutes), governmental (city councils, municipalities, ministries) and professional practice (urban planners, civil engineers, psychologists, anthropologists, lawyers, sociologists, and biologists).

The research team sent an email inviting voluntary participation in the survey on SDG 11 goal prioritization. Those who chose not to participate simply did not respond. Of the 35 experts invited, 24 voluntarily agreed and completed both rounds of consultations. As the study did not involve human subject interventions or clinical procedures, approval from a bioethics committee was not required.

The final panel consisted of 24 experts: 38% from academia, 37% from the government, and 25% from professional practice. In terms of gender distribution, the panel was nearly

balanced (54.2% male and 45.8% female) (Figure 3). Response rates were 74.2% in the first round and 92.2% in the second round, both above the 70% threshold recommended to ensure the rigor of Delphi study [65].

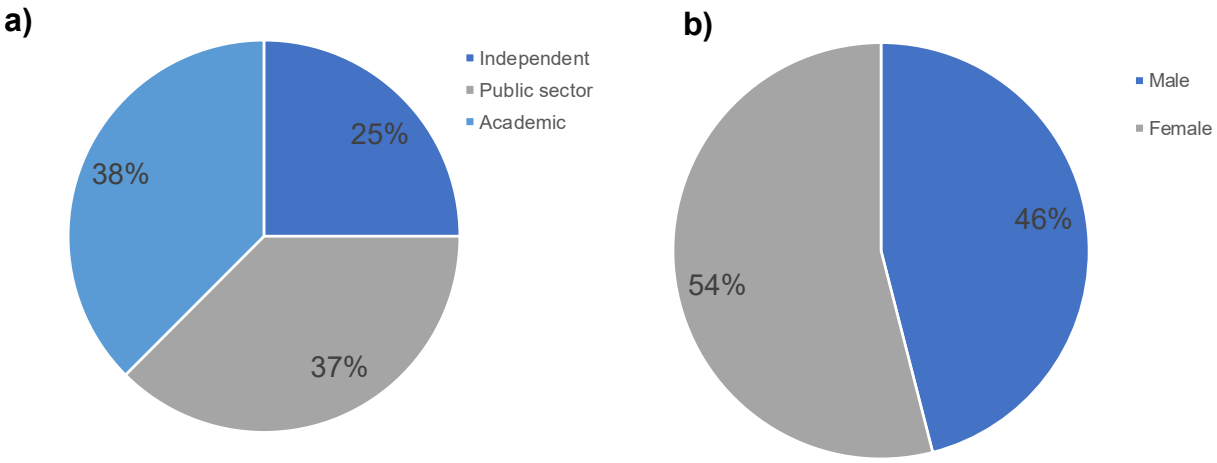

Figure 3. Characteristics of expert's panel: (**a**) profession; (**b**) gender.

4.4. Criteria for Determining Consensus and Stability

For the quantitative analysis of the responses, descriptive statistics were applied to calculate the mean (M), median (Mdn), standard deviation (SD) and interquartile range (IQR). The median was selected as the most representative measure of the group's central opinion, as it is less influenced by extreme values that could distort the mean. IQR (Q3-Q1) was used as a measure of group consensus, since it is commonly applied in Delphi studies [58,62]. This measure represents the 50% of the ratings that fall between the lower quartile (Q1) and the upper quartile (Q3). For ranking questions based on the five-point Likert scale, consensus was defined as IQR $\leq$ 1, while unanimity was reached when IQR = 0 [66,67]. In the first round, consensus was considered stable when IQR1 $\leq$ 1. In the second round, stability was assessed using the relative interquartile range (RIQR), calculated as IQR divided by the median value (RIQR = IQR/Mdn). A variation (RIQR1–RIQR2) of less than 0.5 was considered satisfactory stability [68], in addition to the evaluation of consensus through the interquartile range.

For the qualitative analysis of expert justifications, all arguments were reviewed and those corresponding to the median ratings were grouped into a separate subset [69]. Within this subset of 170 arguments, a content analysis was performed to extract the central statements most frequently expressed by the experts [70]. These statements were then incorporated into the statistical results and provided as feedback to the experts in the second round.

5. Results

5.1. Round 1

The results of the first round (Table 2) show that among the 12 targets assessed by the experts, the highest-ranked reached a median score of 5 points (very important) on the five-point Likert scale. These are as follows: 11.1 Affordable housing, 11.3 Sustainable urbanization, and 11.9 Implement policies for inclusion and disaster risk reduction. The analysis of expert justifications for these three targets highlighted the central importance of housing, urban planning, and public policies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Round 1 result of the statistics and central statements for the 12 goals.

Thematic Nr.	Mdn	M	SD	Q1	Q3	IQR = $Q_3 - Q_1$	Consensus IQR $\leq$ 1	Value
11.1	5	4.38	0.85	4	5	1	Acceptable	Very important
	* Housing became the permanent shelter for the population, and access to basic services guaranteed sanitation and defense against COVID-19; without these two factors, the most disadvantaged population suffered the worst part of the pandemic.							
11.2	4	4.19	0.69	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important
	* Adequate mobility and accessibility, facilitate social and economic development and exchange. The implementation of this target could reduce environmental pollution as well as people's well-being and health.							
11.3	4.5	4.31	0.79	4	5	1	Acceptable	Very important
	* Participatory planning and management are the starting point for overcoming any challenge that arises, as it will foresee and propose the main guidelines and policies for the short and medium term in which the collective good is more important.							
11.4	4	4.19	0.69	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important
	* Care and preservation of cultural and natural heritage must be conducted permanently, but its strategies have a long-term impact, whilst post-pandemic effects are not directly affected by said strategies.							
11.5	4	4.19	0.69	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important
	* We are in a city with a variety of hazards rising from the misuse and management of land, water and natural resources. Proper management of these variables would reduce the associated risks.							
11.6	4	3.73	0.92	3	4	1	Acceptable	Quite important
	* The reduction in environmental impacts is directly related to the achievement of sustainable development and an appropriate management plan.							
11.7	4	4.12	0.77	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important
	* Public spaces and green spaces that are accessible to all people, including the elderly and disabled, constitute a right and are essential to help with the confinement and psychological effects of the pandemic.							
11.8	4	4.08	0.69	4	4.75	0.75	Acceptable	Quite important
	* The link between peri-urban and rural areas must be valued as a supplier to the city and overcome the logic of urban power over rural areas.							
11.9	5	4.65	0.56	4	5	1	Acceptable	Very important
	* To overcome the impacts of the pandemic, clear policies and resilient plans are necessary; additionally, improvements in the population can be promoted to adapt to this new environment.							
11.a	3	3.34	0.98	3	4	1	Acceptable	More or less important
	* The creation of sustainable buildings is not a priority. In the second phase, when the current crisis has been overcome, the importance to this aspect can be given.							
1.4	4	4.26	0.72	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important
	* Social inequality is the most critical part of all urban planning, so strategies must be proposed to reduce inequality in terms of access to employment, goods and services.							
6.3	4	4.23	0.76	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important
	* Water shortage, pollution and environmental impacts are the causes of other problems, so we must work on these aspects and not only focus our efforts on mitigating or being resilient.							

* Central statements that resulted from the content analysis of the justification arguments issued by the experts.

Conversely, the lowest-rated target, with an average score of 3 points (more or less important), was 11.a Sustainable building. The level of consensus among experts across all targets was high, classified as "acceptable" (IQR $\leq$ 1).

Figure 4 presents the histograms of the highest-rated targets, showing both frequency distributions and normal distribution curves, which confirm that the statistical values are representative of each target.

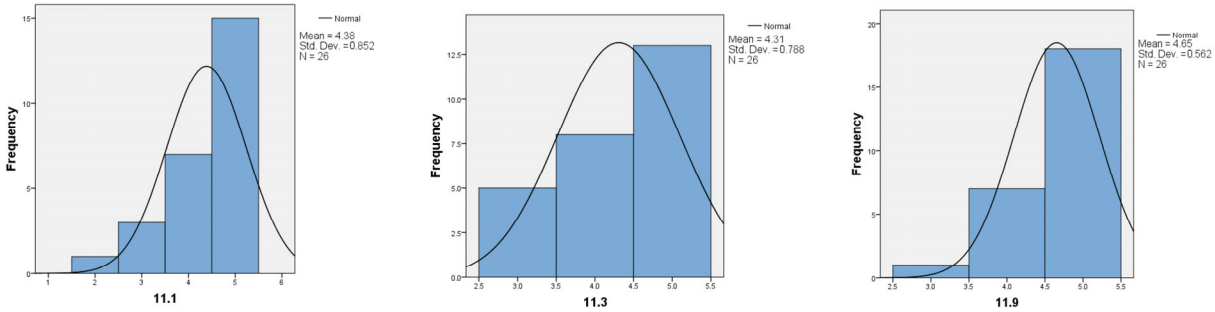

Figure 4. Histograms of the highest-rated targets by experts in round 1.

5.2. Round 2

Based on the feedback from the first-round results, the modifications made by the experts to the 12 targets confirmed the highest-rated priorities, all with a median score of 5 (very important) on the Likert scale. These were 11.1 Affordable housing, 11.3 Sustainable urbanization, 11.9 Implement policies for inclusion, and disaster risk reduction, 1.4 Equal access to economic resources, services, and property rights, and 6.3 Improve water quality. Conversely, the lowest-rated target, with a median of 3 (more or less important), was 11.4 Cultural and natural heritage.

The statistical results, presented in Table 3, include both consensus and stability calculations. Consensus values were ≤ 1, indicating acceptable agreement for all targets except 11.6 Environmental impact of cities, which showed unacceptable consensus. Stability values were < 0.5 for all 12 targets, demonstrating acceptable stability across the panel and justifying the conclusion of the consultation rounds.

Table 3. Statistics results from round 2 for each target.

Thematic Nr.	Mdn	M	SD	Q1	Q3	IQR = $Q_3 - Q_1$	Consensus IQR ≤ 1	Value	(RIQR1–RIQR2)	Stability
11.1	5	4.63	0.71	4	5	1	Acceptable	Very important	−0.05	Acceptable
11.2	4	4.33	0.48	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important	0.03	Acceptable
11.3	5	4.63	0.58	4	5	1	Acceptable	Very important	−0.05	Acceptable
11.4	3	3.42	1.02	3	4	1	Acceptable	More or less important	0.08	Acceptable
11.5	4	4.21	0.59	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important	0.00	Acceptable
11.6	4	3.88	0.8	3	4.25	1.25	Unacceptable	Quite important	0.06	Acceptable
11.7	4	4.21	0.59	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important	0.06	Acceptable
11.8	4	4.20	0.59	4	5	1	Acceptable	Quite important	0.05	Acceptable
11.9	5	4.75	0.53	5	5	0	Acceptable	Very important	−0.33	Acceptable
11.a	4	3.42	0.88	3	4	1	Acceptable	Quite important	0.00	Acceptable
1.4	5	4.58	0.58	4	5	1	Acceptable	Very important	−0.05	Acceptable
6.3	5	4.63	0.65	4	5	1	Acceptable	Very important	0.20	Acceptable

Figure 5 displays the histograms of the ratings, confirming that the frequency distributions are statistically significant.

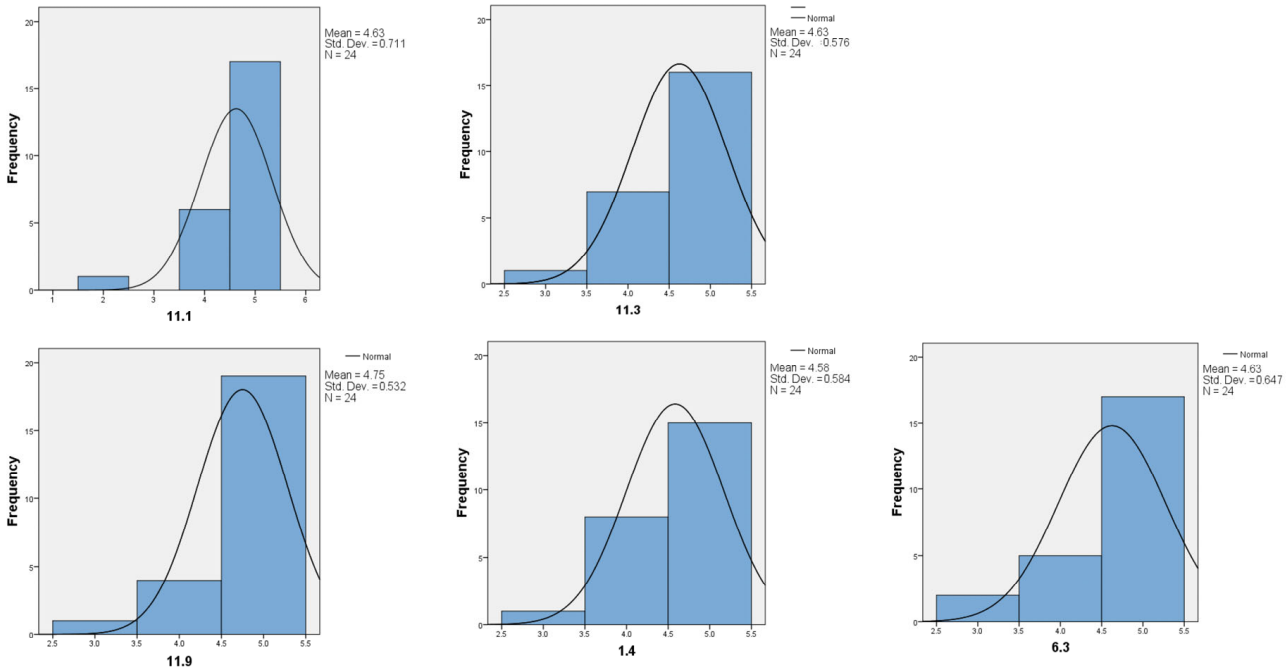

Figure 5. Histograms of the highest-rated targets by experts in round 2.

6. Discussion

This study was based on the premise that cities play a crucial role in generating benefits and safeguarding the well-being of all citizens, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. In line with this premise and the study's objectives, the most and least important SDG 11 targets were identified to help address the effects of COVID-19 in both the present and post-pandemic future of Cuenca [42]. Among the 12 targets, the expert panel considered five as highly significant (level 5 on the Likert scale), making them fundamental for tackling the aforementioned challenges. These selected targets selected are analyzed below.

Target 11.1 Affordable housing underscores the importance of adequate housing and sanitation as primary defenses against the pandemic. Populations lacking these services were disproportionately affected, highlighting access to decent housing as both essential for individual well-being and a safeguard for families in post-pandemic cities in developing countries [49].

The prioritization of **target 11.3 Sustainable Urbanization** emphasizes the critical role of urban planning in establishing both short- and long-term pathways to mitigate pandemic impacts [17]. The characteristics of the immediate environment directly influence people's well-being; thus, effective planning and governance provide mechanisms to align the priorities of multiple stakeholders in pursuit of sustainable urban development [57].

Another highly valued priority is **target 11.9 Implement policies for inclusion and disaster risk reduction**. This target stresses the need for cities to adapt to emerging challenges by adopting resilient strategies that address both the causes and effects of climate change. Achieving this requires reducing disaster risk and urban CO_2 emissions while promoting infrastructure strategies such as digitalization, energy transition, and the integration of citizens' needs in alignment with SDG-11 [42,56].

The experts also prioritized **target 1.4 Equal access to economic resources, services, and property rights**. Social inequality is a critical challenge for development and must be addressed by expanding access to decent employment, goods, and basic services. Access to urban services that provide comfort and functionality contributes directly to citizens' subjective well-being [57]. Moreover, ensuring that all individuals—particularly the poor

and vulnerable—enjoy equal rights to economic resources and diverse forms of property ownership is essential for the future of developing countries. A transition toward a green economy focused on energy efficiency, water conservation, and the reduction in wage gaps, alongside supporting for microfinance [9], will be pivotal in advancing progress toward the SDGs.

Another key outcome was the selection of **target 6.3 Improve water quality**, based on the recognition that water pollution generates a range of environmental, social, and economic impacts that demand mitigate and resilience strategies. Improving water quality thus provides direct health benefits for citizens while strengthening local sustainability.

From this analysis, it is evident that three targets are linked to the environmental pillar, one to the economic pillar, and one to the social pillar of sustainability. This strong emphasis on environmental dimensions of urban sustainability has also been reported in similar studies [56]. Notably, all five targets were rated at the highest level of importance (5 on the Likert scale), despite addressing distinct issues. These findings highlight the persistent ambiguity surrounding the definition of urban sustainability, a challenge previously discussed by other authors [71].

The results of this study are also consistent with research conducted in other developing countries. In Malaysia, a study on well-being indicators for sustainable urban planning identified "water quality" and "the right of citizens to access basic services" as priority issues, with over 95% expert agreement-findings aligned with the present research [57]. Similarly, in India, Chopra, Singh, Gupta, Aggarwal, Gupta and Colace [9] highlighted that key elements contributing to a green economy include energy efficiency, water harvesting, support for microfinance, and reducing wage inequalities. In Colombia, a study on sustainability indicators of residential areas in post-pandemic cities also emphasized, in line with this research, the importance of protecting life from natural hazards such as floods, fires, and landslides, as well as ensuring access to housing with basic services [17].

Consistency is also evident in two studies of broader international scope. The first study, a survey conducted in 20 cities to define the post-pandemic outlook, concluded that cities should act as key drivers of development focused on sustainability and social inclusion. It further stressed that, alongside infrastructure policies such as digitalization and energy transition, cities must take responsibility for integrated territorial policies that address citizens' needs in accordance with SDG-11 [42]. The second study, focused on European cities, identified the most relevant components of urban sustainability as the consumption of renewable energy, the reduction in social inequality, and the mitigation of CO_2 emissions contributing to climate change [56].

Examining the lowest-rates targets, only **target 11.4 Cultural and natural heritage** was considered "more or less important" (level 3 on the Likert scale). This tendency may be explained by the fact that heritage protection was not perceived as an urgent priority during the most critical months of the pandemic. Nevertheless, this target should not be overlooked, as social and cultural interaction is essential for cities, and its absence exacerbates precariousness and inequality within the urban cultural economy [72]. Moreover, Cuenca's designation as a World Heritage Site [73] and the recognition of its natural areas as a Biosphere Reserve [74] provide further contextual justification for not neglecting this target.

The expert panel also expressed disagreement regarding **target 11.6 Environmental impact of cities**, likely due to the perception that environmental impacts diminished during the pandemic and were therefore less pressing compared to social and economic issues. However, studies demonstrate that while temporary environmental benefits were achieved through the reduction of CO_2-emitting production activities [75], the significant

rise in plastic consumption—particularly packaging and protective masks—led to increased plastic pollution in water bodies [76,77].

7. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the Delphi method can effectively be used to define priorities for operationalizing urban sustainability goals in the post-pandemic context of Cuenca, Ecuador. Consistent with the research objectives, the results identified five targets considered very important for addressing the impact of the pandemic, reflecting the consensus of the expert panel. These findings reveal a stronger preference for targets related to social issues, followed by environmental and, to a lesser extent, economic dimensions.

Overall, the results provide a foundation for the formulation of future public policies and sustainable urban planning strategies in the city. Nevertheless, the targets that were not prioritized in this study should not be disregarded, as neglecting certain sustainability pillars may generate new challenges for Cuenca's future development.

Future research should further investigate the 17 Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 11—in cities with varying levels of development and diverse local contexts, in order to generate evidence that supports the prioritization of targets and indicators aligned with the most pressing needs of each locality. Moreover, studies should focus on the co-design and implementation of public policies aimed at addressing the long-term urban impacts of COVID-19, some of which will persist in both the short and long term.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su17177623/s1, Survey From S1: Form On Prioritisation of Sustainable Development Goals For The City Of Cuenca-Ecuador For Urban Sustainability Experts.

Author Contributions: F.Q.-M.: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing—Original draft, Writing—review, editing. S.A.-C.: Funding acquisition, Project administration, Investigation. M.L.: Investigation. J.O.-F.: Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Visualization. M.T.B.L.: Data curation, Investigation and Writing—Original draft. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by University of Cuenca grant number A300.384.01.00. The APC was funded by the University of Cuenca.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: The authors wish to express their gratitude to the University of Cuenca and its Research Vice-rectorate (VIUC) and Directorate of Community Engagement for providing the necessary funds. The project "Urban Dashboard: Development of a support system for decision making in the city of Cuenca".

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

1. FEEM. Which Future for Cities After COVID-19. An International Survey 2020. Available online: https://www.feem.it/en/news/feem-presents-which-future-for-cities-after-covid-19-an-international-survey/ (accessed on 30 July 2025).
2. The World Bank. Urban Population (% of Total Population). Available online: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS (accessed on 28 May 2023).
3. United Nations. *The World's Cities in 2018 Data Booklet*; United Nations: New York, NY, USA, 2018.
4. The World Bank. Urban Development. Available online: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview (accessed on 20 October 2022).

5. Ferrari, G.F. *La Prossima Città*; Mimesis: Sesto San Giovanni, Italy, 2017.
6. Ruggieri, R.; Ruggeri, M.; Vinci, G. Efficient energy and electric transport in a Smart City: Evaluation of sustainability and competitivness. In Proceedings of the 2020 IEEE International Conference on Environment and Electrical Engineering and 2020 IEEE Industrial and Commercial Power Systems Europe (EEEIC/I&CPS Europe), Madrid, Spain, 9–12 June 2020; pp. 1–4.
7. United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals. Available online: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ (accessed on 1 September 2024).
8. Friedman, J.; York, H.; Graetz, N.; Woyczynski, L.; Whisnant, J.; Hay, S.I.; Gakidou, E. Measuring and forecasting progress towards the education-related SDG targets. *Nature* **2020**, *580*, 636–639. [CrossRef]
9. Chopra, M.; Singh, D.S.K.; Gupta, A.; Aggarwal, K.; Gupta, B.B.; Colace, F. Analysis & prognosis of sustainable development goals using big data-based approach during COVID-19 pandemic. *Sustain. Technol. Entrep.* **2022**, *1*, 100012. [CrossRef]
10. UN-Habitat. *SDG Goal 11 Monitoring Framework: Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable*; UNHabitat: Nairobi, Kenya, 2016.
11. Barbier, E.B.; Burgess, J.C. Sustainability and development after COVID-19. *World Dev.* **2020**, *135*, 105082. [CrossRef]
12. Leal Filho, W.; Brandli, L.L.; Lange Salvia, A.; Rayman-Bacchus, L.; Platje, J. COVID-19 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Threat to Solidarity or an Opportunity? *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 5343. [CrossRef]
13. Leal Filho, W.; Viera Trevisan, L.; Simon Rampasso, I.; Anholon, R.; Pimenta Dinis, M.A.; Londero Brandli, L.; Sierra, J.; Lange Salvia, A.; Pretorius, R.; Nicolau, M.; et al. When the alarm bells ring: Why the UN sustainable development goals may not be achieved by 2030. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2023**, *407*, 137108. [CrossRef]
14. Nicola, M.; Alsafi, Z.; Sohrabi, C.; Kerwan, A.; Al-Jabir, A.; Iosifidis, C.; Agha, M.; Agha, R. The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): A review. *Int. J. Surg.* **2020**, *78*, 185–193. [CrossRef]
15. Thore, S. Sustainable development goal deficits and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change* **2022**, *174*, 121204. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
16. Fagbemi, F. COVID-19 and sustainable development goals (SDGs): An appraisal of the emanating effects in Nigeria. *Res. Glob.* **2021**, *3*, 100047. [CrossRef]
17. Escorcia Hernández, J.R.; Torabi Moghadam, S.; Sharifi, A.; Lombardi, P. Cities in the times of COVID-19: Trends, impacts, and challenges for urban sustainability and resilience. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2023**, *432*, 139735. [CrossRef]
18. BCE. The Pandemic Affected Growth in 2020: The Ecuadorian Economy Decreased 7.8%. Available online: https://www.bce.fin.ec/la-pandemia-incidio-en-el-crecimiento-2020-la-economia-ecuatoriana-decrecio-7-8/ (accessed on 15 June 2022).
19. INEC. *National Survey of Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment 2021 (ENEMDU), Poverty and Inequality Indicators*; INEC: Abuja, Nigeria, 2021.
20. Mishra, S.V.; Gayen, A.; Haque, S.M. COVID-19 and urban vulnerability in India. *Habitat Int.* **2020**, *103*, 102230. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
21. Ranjbari, M.; Shams Esfandabadi, Z.; Zanetti, M.C.; Scagnelli, S.D.; Siebers, P.-O.; Aghbashlo, M.; Peng, W.; Quatraro, F.; Tabatabaei, M. Three pillars of sustainability in the wake of COVID-19: A systematic review and future research agenda for sustainable development. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2021**, *297*, 126660. [CrossRef]
22. Kanda, W.; Kivimaa, P. What opportunities could the COVID-19 outbreak offer for sustainability transitions research on electricity and mobility? *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* **2020**, *68*, 101666. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
23. Somani, M.; Srivastava, A.N.; Gummadivalli, S.K.; Sharma, A. Indirect implications of COVID-19 towards sustainable environment: An investigation in Indian context. *Bioresour. Technol. Rep.* **2020**, *11*, 100491. [CrossRef]
24. Kulkarni, B.N.; Anantharama, V. Repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic on municipal solid waste management: Challenges and opportunities. *Sci. Total Environ.* **2020**, *743*, 140693. [CrossRef]
25. Markard, J.; Rosenbloom, D. A tale of two crises: COVID-19 and climate. *Sustain. Sci. Pract. Policy* **2020**, *16*, 53–60. [CrossRef]
26. Fleetwood, J. Social Justice, Food Loss, and the Sustainable Development Goals in the Era of COVID-19. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 5027. [CrossRef]
27. Sharifi, A.; Khavarian-Garmsir, A.R. The COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on cities and major lessons for urban planning, design, and management. *Sci. Total Environ.* **2020**, *749*, 142391. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
28. Madurai Elavarasan, R.; Pugazhendhi, R.; Jamal, T.; Dyduch, J.; Arif, M.T.; Manoj Kumar, N.; Shafiullah, G.M.; Chopra, S.S.; Nadarajah, M. Envisioning the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the lens of energy sustainability (SDG 7) in the post-COVID-19 world. *Appl. Energy* **2021**, *292*, 116665. [CrossRef]
29. Swann, W.L.; Deslatte, A. What do we know about urban sustainability? A research synthesis and nonparametric assessment. *Urban Stud.* **2018**, *56*, 1729–1747. [CrossRef]
30. Leavesley, A.; Trundle, A.; Oke, C. Cities and the SDGs: Realities and possibilities of local engagement in global frameworks. *Ambio* **2022**, *51*, 1416–1432. [CrossRef]
31. Masuda, H.; Kawakubo, S.; Okitasari, M.; Morita, K. Exploring the role of local governments as intermediaries to facilitate partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustain. Cities Soc.* **2022**, *82*, 103883. [CrossRef]

32. OECD. *A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: 5-Year Stocktake*; OECD: Paris, France, 2023.
33. Sharifi, A.; Allam, Z.; Bibri, S.E.; Khavarian-Garmsir, A.R. Smart cities and sustainable development goals (SDGs): A systematic literature review of co-benefits and trade-offs. *Cities* **2024**, *146*, 104659. [CrossRef]
34. Allahyari, M.S.; Marzban, S.; El Bilali, H.; Ben Hassen, T. Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on household food waste behaviour in Iran. *Heliyon* **2022**, *8*, e11337. [CrossRef]
35. PAHO. WHO Characterizes COVID-19 as a Pandemic. Available online: https://www.paho.org/en/news/11-3-2020-who-characterizes-covid-19-pandemic (accessed on 10 August 2024).
36. Alidadi, M.; Sharifi, A. Beyond the blame game: Unraveling the complex relationship between density and COVID-19 through a systematic literature review. *Cities* **2023**, *141*, 104519. [CrossRef]
37. Kyriakidis, C.; Chatziioannou, I.; Iliadis, F.; Nikitas, A.; Bakogiannis, E. Evaluating the public acceptance of sustainable mobility interventions responding to COVID-19: The case of the Great Walk of Athens and the importance of citizen engagement. *Cities* **2023**, *132*, 103966. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
38. Pradhan, P.; Subedi, D.R.; Khatiwada, D.; Joshi, K.K.; Kafle, S.; Chhetri, R.P.; Dhakal, S.; Gautam, A.P.; Khatiwada, P.P.; Mainaly, J.; et al. The COVID-19 Pandemic Not Only Poses Challenges, but Also Opens Opportunities for Sustainable Transformation. *Earth's Future* **2021**, *9*, e2021EF001996. [CrossRef]
39. Nilashi, M.; Ali Abumalloh, R.; Mohd, S.; Nurlaili Farhana Syed Azhar, S.; Samad, S.; Hang Thi, H.; Alghamdi, O.A.; Alghamdi, A. COVID-19 and sustainable development goals: A bibliometric analysis and SWOT analysis in Malaysian context. *Telemat. Inform.* **2023**, *76*, 101923. [CrossRef]
40. Wang, Q.; Huang, R. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable development goals—A survey. *Environ. Res.* **2021**, *202*, 111637. [CrossRef]
41. World Health Organization. Statement on the Fifteenth Meeting of the IHR (2005) Emergency Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic. Available online: https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic (accessed on 5 May 2023).
42. Bandarin, F.; Ciciotti, E.; Cremaschi, M.; Madera, G.; Perulli, P.; Shendrikova, D. After Covid-19: A survey on the prospects for cities. *City Cult. Soc.* **2021**, *25*, 100400. [CrossRef]
43. UN-Habitat. *UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan*; UN-Habitat: Nairobi, Kenya, 2020.
44. Hananel, R.; Fishman, R.; Malovicki-Yaffe, N. Urban diversity and epidemic resilience: The case of the COVID-19. *Cities* **2022**, *122*, 103526. [CrossRef]
45. Pazhuhan, M.; Moradpour, N.; Hesarakizad, A.; Sharifi, A. District-based Baseline Resilience Indicators for Communities (DBRIC) for assessment of a Global South city. *Sustain. Cities Soc.* **2023**, *96*, 104563. [CrossRef]
46. Ameli, M.; Shams Esfandabadi, Z.; Sadeghi, S.; Ranjbari, M.; Zanetti, M.C. COVID-19 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Scenario analysis through fuzzy cognitive map modeling. *Gondwana Res.* **2022**, *114*, 138–155. [CrossRef]
47. Angelidou, M.; Politis, C.; Panori, A.; Bakratsas, T.; Fellnhofer, K. Emerging smart city, transport and energy trends in urban settings: Results of a pan-European foresight exercise with 120 experts. *Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change* **2022**, *183*, 121915. [CrossRef]
48. Dawodu, A.; Cheshmehzangi, A.; Sharifi, A.; Oladejo, J. Neighborhood sustainability assessment tools: Research trends and forecast for the built environment. *Sustain. Futures* **2022**, *4*, 100064. [CrossRef]
49. Escorcia, J.R.; Torabi, S.; Lombardi, P. Sustainability Assessment in Social Housing Environments: An Inclusive Indicators Selection in Colombian Post-Pandemic Cities. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 2830. [CrossRef]
50. Merino-Saum, A.; Halla, P.; Superti, V.; Boesch, A.; Binder, C.R. Indicators for urban sustainability: Key lessons from a systematic analysis of 67 measurement initiatives. *Ecol. Indic.* **2020**, *119*, 106879. [CrossRef]
51. Nimavat, N.; Patel, D.; Hasan, M.M.; Mandala, G.; Singh, S.; Bhangu, R. Is it time to re-evaluate SDGs in the light of COVID-19 pandemic? *Clin. Epidemiol. Glob. Health* **2022**, *15*, 101046. [CrossRef]
52. Habitat III. The UN Declared Cuenca as an Intermediate City. Available online: https://habitat3.org/documents-and-archive/media-archive/media-clippings/la-onu-declaro-a-cuenca-como-ciudad-intermedia-2/ (accessed on 10 April 2024).
53. Habitat III. Intermediate Cities: Urban Renewal & Growth. In Proceedings of the Thematic Meeting on Intermediate Cities: Urban Growth and Renewal, Cuenca, Ecuador, 9–11 November 2015.
54. Municipality of Cuenca. *Mobility and Public Spaces Plan*; Municipality of Cuenca: Cuenca, Equador, 2019.
55. INEC. Let's Get to Know Cuenca Through Its Figures. Available online: https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/conozcamos-cuenca-a-traves-de-sus-cifras/#:~:text=Cuenca%2C%20tambi%C3%A9n%20conocida%20como%20la,de%2015%25%20en%20siete%20a%C3%B1os (accessed on 16 March 2021).
56. Meijering, J.V.; Tobi, H.; Kern, K. Defining and measuring urban sustainability in Europe: A Delphi study on identifying its most relevant components. *Ecol. Indic.* **2018**, *90*, 38–46. [CrossRef]
57. Musa, H.D.; Yacob, M.R.; Abdullah, A.M. Delphi exploration of subjective well-being indicators for strategic urban planning towards sustainable development in Malaysia. *J. Urban Manag.* **2019**, *8*, 28–41. [CrossRef]

58. Beiderbeck, D.; Frevel, N.; von der Gracht, H.A.; Schmidt, S.L.; Schweitzer, V.M. Preparing, conducting, and analyzing Delphi surveys: Cross-disciplinary practices, new directions, and advancements. *MethodsX* **2021**, *8*, 101401. [CrossRef]
59. Frewer, L.J.; Fischer, A.R.H.; Wentholt, M.T.A.; Marvin, H.J.P.; Ooms, B.W.; Coles, D.; Rowe, G. The use of Delphi methodology in agrifood policy development: Some lessons learned. *Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change* **2011**, *78*, 1514–1525. [CrossRef]
60. Drumm, S.; Bradley, C.; Moriarty, F. 'More of an art than a science'? The development, design and mechanics of the Delphi Technique. *Res. Soc. Adm. Pharm.* **2022**, *18*, 2230–2236. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
61. QuestionPro, I. QuestionPro. Available online: https://www.questionpro.com/ (accessed on 1 March 2022).
62. Campos Climent, V.; Melián Navarro, A.; Sanchis Palacio, J.R. El método Delphi como técnica de diagnóstico estratégico. Estudio empírico aplicado a las empresas de inserción en España. *Rev. Eur. Dir. Econ. Empresa* **2014**, *23*, 72–81. [CrossRef]
63. Antonelli, M.; Basile, L.; Gagliardi, F.; Isernia, P. The future of the Mediterranean agri-food systems: Trends and perspectives from a Delphi survey. *Land Use Policy* **2022**, *120*, 106263. [CrossRef]
64. Jeste, D.V.; Ardelt, M.; Blazer, D.; Kraemer, H.C.; Vaillant, G.; Meeks, T.W. Expert Consensus on Characteristics of Wisdom: A Delphi Method Study. *Gerontologist* **2010**, *50*, 668–680. [CrossRef]
65. Sumsion, T. The Delphi Technique: An Adaptive Research Tool. *Br. J. Occup. Ther.* **1998**, *61*, 153–156. [CrossRef]
66. Raskin, M.S. The Delphi Study in Field Instruction Revisited: Expert Consensus on Issues and Research Priorities. *J. Soc. Work. Educ.* **1994**, *30*, 75–89. [CrossRef]
67. Rayens, M.K.; Hahn, E.J. Building Consensus Using the Policy Delphi Method. *Policy Politics Nurs. Pract.* **2000**, *1*, 308–315. [CrossRef]
68. Zinn, J.; Zalokowski, A.; Hunter, L. Identifying indicators of laboratory management performance: A multiple constituency approach. *Health Care Manag. Rev.* **2001**, *26*, 40–53. [CrossRef]
69. Schuckmann, S.W.; Gnatzy, T.; Darkow, I.-L.; von der Gracht, H.A. Analysis of factors influencing the development of transport infrastructure until the year 2030—A Delphi based scenario study. *Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change* **2012**, *79*, 1373–1387. [CrossRef]
70. von Briel, F. The future of omnichannel retail: A four-stage Delphi study. *Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change* **2018**, *132*, 217–229. [CrossRef]
71. Ameen, R.F.M.; Mourshed, M. Urban sustainability assessment framework development: The ranking and weighting of sustainability indicators using analytic hierarchy process. *Sustain. Cities Soc.* **2019**, *44*, 356–366. [CrossRef]
72. Pratt, A.C. COVID—19 impacts cities, cultures and societies. *City Cult. Soc.* **2020**, *21*, 100341. [CrossRef]
73. UNESCO. Historic Centre of Santa Ana de los Ríos de Cuenca. Available online: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/863/lother=es (accessed on 12 April 2023).
74. UNESCO. Macizo del Cajas Biosphere Reserve, Ecuador. Available online: https://www.unesco.org/en/mab/macizo-del-cajas (accessed on 12 April 2023).
75. Bi, M. Impact of COVID-19 on environmental regulation and economic growth in China: A Way forward for green economic recovery. *Econ. Anal. Policy* **2023**, *77*, 1001–1015. [CrossRef]
76. de Sousa, F.D.B. The impact of plastic during the COVID-19 pandemic: The point of view of the environmental science literature. *Mater. Today Proc.* **2023**, *80*, 1448–1455. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
77. Idowu, G.A.; Olalemi, A.O.; Aiyesanmi, A.F. Environmental impacts of COVID-19 pandemic: Release of microplastics, organic contaminants and trace metals from face masks under ambient environmental conditions. *Environ. Res.* **2023**, *217*, 114956. [CrossRef] [PubMed]