

Social processes of shaping urban space in times of climate change adaptation

1. Project goals and objectives

Urban growth is driven by both planning processes that foster development and bottom-up processes, e.g. specific market decisions triggering city and urban community advancement. Social structures and local communities shaping the city play a key role in urban development. Reasons for commencing this research are: 1) increasing environmental awareness among various social groups, 2) growing importance of youth movements focused on the climate crisis, 3) the emergence of new instruments and forms of city management, 4) noticing a discrepancy between the declared goals of sustainable development and the practice of spatial planning at local scales.

The main goal of the project is to determine the impact of pro-environmental social movements on the spatial policy of cities in the era of adaptation to climate change.

The project is aimed at both residents and city administrators. As indicated by the Interdisciplinary Advisory Team for the Climate Crisis of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Communication 04/2021) further development of cities and maintaining high standard of living requires immediate and comprehensive actions. Cities must initiate mitigation actions to stop climate change and adaptation actions to quickly prepare for increasing climate extremes. Climate, environmental, social, and economic goals must be integrated in all activities.

Big cities were selected for the analysis as areas integrating high social capital, a likely harbinger of innovative adaptation solutions. The focus is on city activists and young people in big cities, groups that can encourage residents and local urban communities to advocate changes that will later be implemented at local level. Urban activists already engage with local communities, so their impact on urban policy can be studied. Young people in turn, who are becoming more and more environmentally aware, need to adapt and participate in reducing the negative effects of climate change. Both of these groups can exert considerable pressure on policymakers, especially in the context of long-term effects of urban space management, prompting climate change adaptation efforts.

2. Research description

The project will apply quantitative and qualitative research methods from the field of geography, spatial planning, and social sciences. Various data sources will be used including: statistical data, planning documents, questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus interviews. Detailed socio-spatial analysis will be carried out in 4 urban areas: Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław and the Tri-City. Local communities' efforts to maintain green areas will also be analyzed, as these areas play an important role in curbing effects of weather extremes. In selected cities, a study of young people's engagement in climate change adaptation challenges on a local scale is also planned.

3. Expected project outcomes

The project will not only expand knowledge in fields of socio-economic geography and spatial management in the terms of adaptation of urban communities to climate change but also assess these communities' contribution in implementing pro-environmental policies in cities. The topics discussed are part of a wide range of research on environmental justice, social justice, and urban resilience. A detailed analysis of the case studies will determine possibilities of shaping sustainable city development and implementing pro-environmental and social goals.