

Old town markets of the UNESCO cities: Idiomaticity and adaptation to climate change

The dynamic development of urban areas and the rapidly growing urban population is one of the key topics in the debate about the near future. Simultaneously, there is rapid climate change posing many risks. Urbanised areas with sealed surfaces are particularly vulnerable to these phenomena, as exemplified by the urban heat island effect (UHI) or short and heavy rainfalls that can lead to localised waterlogging or flooding. Old town markets located in cities on the World Heritage List are particularly at risk. Old town markets are outstanding examples of public spaces in towns and cities – they used to be the heart of the city where social life was concentrated. Although urbanisation has marginalised their role in the city's structure, today they are important elements that strengthen the residents' attachment to the city and are urban landmarks that attract tourists.

The main objective of the project is to address the issue on how to shape the space of old town markets in cities on the UNESCO World Heritage List (e.g. La Grand-Place in Brussels, Staroměstské náměstí in Prague, Marktplatz in Lübeck), taking into account their idiomaticity, i.e. unique architectural and urban features, historical trade functions, social and symbolic aspects, and their contemporary role as elements of urban identity and tourist attractions – in order to preserve their outstanding universal value (OUV), while implementing effective climate change adaptation measures, such as combating the urban heat island effect (UHI) and heavy rainfall.

During the project, I will answer the following questions:

1. How can adaptations to climate change in old town markets in UNESCO cities affect their idiomaticity?
2. What impact does the geographical location of old town markets in different regions of Europe have on the choice of climate change adaptation measures?
3. Why might adaptation measures be interpreted as a threat to the outstanding universal value (OUV) of old town markets?
4. What idiomatic features of old town markets in UNESCO cities can be used to design climate adaptations that enhance their OUV?

Three old town markets will be studied: La Grand-Place in Brussels (Belgium), Staroměstské náměstí in Prague (Czech Republic) and Marktplatz in Lübeck (Germany), which allows for examining the idiomaticity of old town markets and climate change adaptation in different European contexts. The research was divided into three stages. Stage I (preliminary research) includes data collection and processing, spatial analysis, document analysis (including on urban adaptation to climate change or UNESCO heritage protection), and development of an observation form. Stage II (field research) includes visits to cities. Then observations will be made and photographs and videos will be taken. Information will also be obtained from local archives and libraries. Stage III (analytical and concluding) is concerned with compiling the results of the obtained observations and other information received during the research. As a result, idiomatic features of old town markets will be presented to support their OUV for designing adaptive solutions.

The research has the potential to contribute to the development of research on the transformation of cultural heritage sites under the pressure of global climate change. It also offers a new approach to climate adaptation research that takes into account the idiomaticity of the studied spaces. The results have the potential to influence global policies for heritage conservation and sustainable development, particularly in the context of UNESCO priorities.