

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE URGENCY IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN CITIES

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



EU-URGE

Competing Urgencies: Translating Climate
Neutrality Policy in the European Union



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University of Warsaw



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ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE URGENCY IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN CITIES

EU-URGE Midterm Conference 2025

September 11-12, 2025

Ljubljana, Institute of the Contemporary History and ZRC SAZU

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EUROPEAN CITIES

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The conference is a part of the trilateral project EU-URGE: Competing Urgencies:
Translating Climate Neutrality Policy in the European Union, funded by the
National Science Centre Poland (NCN OPUS LAP, UMO-2022/47/I/HS3/01292),
Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (N6-0329, co-financed by P6-0088),
and Austrian Science Fund (Grant-DOI: 10.55776/I6607).

Ljubljana, 2025

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE URGENCY IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN CITIES

The conference stems from the trilateral project *EU-URGE: Competing Urgencies: Translating Climate Neutrality Policy in the European Union*, dedicated to follow implementation of the EU mission "100 Climate-neutral and Smart Cities by 2030" in three Central European cities: Warsaw, Klagenfurt and Ljubljana. The conference highlights key insights from the first eighteen months of research and delineates prospective trajectories toward the project's broader analytical and comparative objectives.

Every year, the effects of anthropogenic climate change become increasingly tangible worldwide, threatening livelihoods, exacerbating conflicts, and forcing populations and politicians to rethink their ways of living. Climate change requires urgent action worldwide. Given the urgency of the climate crisis, the EU mission "100 Climate-neutral and Smart Cities by 2030" (EU Cities Mission) aims to initiate a "Just Transition" to climate neutrality as an integral part of the European Green Deal. Such a transition to climate neutrality is supposed to be led by principles of social justice that "leave no one behind". The EU Mission 100 aims to mitigate climate change by supporting 100 European cities in pursuing climate neutrality by 2030.

The Polish capital, Warsaw, the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, and the Carinthian capital, Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, are among the 100 cities that act as experimentation and innovation hubs and role models for all European cities. The three cities differ significantly in size, administrative and political position, budget, climate impact, and past engagement with climate issues. Warsaw stands out as the largest city with outstanding environmental governance (5th in the European Green City Index); Ljubljana gained several green awards (e.g., European Green Capital 2016) but lacks a comprehensive strategic approach to climate change, and the provincial capital Klagenfurt as the only Austrian participant in the cities in EU-Cities-Mission has invested considerable amounts of funds into mobility, buildings and renewable energy but already faces claims that climate neutrality is "not financially feasible".

Ambitious and expensive projects are part of the plans to reach climate targets, from decarbonising bus fleets to expanding sustainable and renewable energies. Yet, the path from fossil fuels to a climate-neutral city is not just a technological and infrastructural challenge but needs to reconcile and take into account highly diverse living conditions, social, cultural and economic asymmetries, as well as the visions and experiences of different social groups, each with their specific knowledge, to find viable, fair, and sustainable solutions for the city of the future.

Investigating the three participating cities of Warsaw, Ljubljana, and Klagenfurt in the EU Cities Mission offers the extraordinary opportunity to conduct comparative ethnographic research *in actu* to examine how EU policy is translated to the local level under different conditions. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, the conference inquires: How is climate justice prioritised in the three cities? What other urgencies claim priority in each case? What do urgencies tell us about social hierarchies, power relations, and inequalities? And finally, how can the EU Cities Mission achieve its goals while ensuring that no one is left behind?

EU-URGE is a WEAVE project funded by the Narodowe Centrum Nauki NCN (lead), the Austrian Science Fund FWF, and the Slovenian Research Agency ARIS. You can follow it at www.eu-urge.zrc-sazu.si.

Saša Poljak Istenič, Anna Horolets and Alexandra Schwell, project leaders

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

September 11-12, 2025

Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana

September 11, 2025

9.30	Conference registration		
10.00	Keynote lecture	Franchise Governance: Community Energy and the Redistributive Politics of Climate Change	Hannah Knox
12.30	Lunch @ Druga violina		
14.00	Urgency & legitimacy Moderator: Anna Horolets Discussant: Hannah Knox	Unwriting Urgencies: On the Production of Legitimacy on the Path to Climate Justice	Alexandra Schwell
		Urgency as Temporal Governance: Rhythms of EU Climate Policy	Tatiana Bajuk Senčar
		The Mainstreaming of Climate Policy in Warsaw	Renata Putkowska-Smoter
15.30	Break		
15.45	Climate justice Moderator: Nina Vodopivec	Swamped by Net-Zero? Navigating Water Politics and Climate Justice	Johannes Kröger

	Discussant: Hannah Knox	Between Carbon Metrics and Housing Rights: Energy Poverty and Legal Contestation in Warsaw	Maja Wróblewska
17.00	Break		
17.15	Moderator: Tatiana Bajuk Senčar Discussant: Hannah Knox	Earth Lamentation: Village Music Heritage as a Means of Expressing and Experiencing Ecological Grief	Maria Małanicz-Przybylska
		Mission 100 in Ljubljana: Contested Visions of Climate Governance	Nina Vodopivec & Saša Poljak Istenič
18.30	Closing remarks		

September 12, 2025

10.00	Walking Tour	Ljubljana's Path towards Climate Neutrality	Gaja Breclj, Umanotera NGO
13.30	Lunch @ Gaudi&Naan		
16.00	On our way to project's goals: Feedback and Closing discussion		
18.00	Conference wrap-up		

ABSTRACTS

Keynote lecture

Hannah Knox

Franchise Governance: Community Energy and the Redistributive Politics of Climate Change

In this talk, I reflect on the challenges and redistributions of climate change governance through an exploration of the practices and activities of community energy organisations in England. As climate change has emerged as a matter of concern for cities, regions, and neighbourhoods, this has opened up questions about who or what the appropriate forms and sites are for the governance of place-based responses to climate change. In England, community energy has appeared as one answer to these questions, offering an experimental space in which people are exploring solutions to the intertwined problems of social and environmental change. In this paper, I reflect on the practical work of community energy practitioners as they seek to redistribute governance through the everyday work of creating just energy infrastructures. I explore what kinds of commitments and alliances this work entails, framing this process as an example of what I call 'franchise governance'. Reflecting on franchise governance, I ask what we might learn about the relationship between governing and contemporary forms of environmental change.

Conference presentations (in alphabetical order)

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar

Urgency as Temporal Governance: Rhythms of EU Climate Policy

This paper presents ongoing research into the culture of climate urgency at the level of EU climate policy, which operates as the broader referential framework for the European Missions initiatives. It centers on lines of inquiry into the temporal rhythms of policy practice as a way of exploring how urgency is defined and operates at the level of policy within the EU institutions, the aim of which is to examine the temporal or processual dimension of policy-making within a complex network of institutions with different roles, competencies, and jurisdictions. Examining the temporality of policymaking in the EU serves to situate the European Mission into the broader framework of EU-level climate policy and examine how climate urgency is shaped by diverse policy rhythms that actors need to negotiate to realize specific goals.

Johannes Kroeger

Swamped by Net-Zero? Navigating Water Politics and Climate Justice

This paper investigates how Klagenfurt's pursuit of climate neutrality illuminates the limits of contemporary urban sustainability policies. Drawing on ethnographic research, it shows how floods, low water levels, and infrastructural interventions simultaneously privilege certain urban flows and leave both residents and non-human life vulnerable. By tracing water across the city and its surrounding landscapes, the study highlights how ecological, social, and infrastructural entanglements exceed municipal boundaries, challenging narrow metrics of urban sustainability. While the EU's Mission 100 principle of "leaving no one behind" is central to policy discourse, local implementation often prioritizes technical interventions over relational, multispecies, and justice-oriented considerations. The paper argues that unwriting entrenched infrastructural legacies can open pathways toward more just, inclusive, and ecologically attuned urban futures.

Maria Małanicz-Przybylska

Earth Lamentation: Village Music Heritage as a Means of Expressing and Experiencing Ecological Grief

'Earth Lamentation' is an artistic and activist initiative whose participants undertook the practice of group singing of old village funeral songs. However, rather than mourning a deceased person, they were mourning a dying planet, thereby transforming the context of traditional funerals into that of the climate crisis and ecological protests. The initiative links climate activism with a unique interpretation of musical heritage. The practices undertaken by the participants can be interpreted as both ecological grief and a shift towards the past. It is an active process of breathing new life into old traditions. Lamentation has a deep meaning: it builds a supportive community that shares a common worldview and image of an ideal world.

Renata Putkowska-Smoter

The Mainstreaming of Climate Policy in Warsaw

Warsaw's municipal government is experimenting with a mainstreaming approach to climate governance, designed to embed climate change considerations across diverse sectors and policy domains. This strategy necessitates shifts in policy priorities and institutional behaviours, while simultaneously testing the legitimacy of the actors advancing the mainstreaming agenda. Assessing the direction and the intensity of these efforts in Warsaw can offer valuable insights into how the urgency of climate policy is perceived and operationalised. My initial collaborators are civil servants who are engaged in the mainstreaming of climate-related concerns on a daily basis.

Alexandra Schwell

Unwriting Urgencies: On the Production of Legitimacy on the Path to Climate Justice

The EU Mission 100 is motivated by a sense of urgency regarding the need to tackle the climate crisis, thereby prioritising the climate action agenda. The urgency of climate action, however, coexists with other urgencies on various political levels, which compete and need to be negotiated in the struggle for recognition and, first and foremost, resources. Against the backdrop of policy translation and travelling urgency in the field of climate action, this paper raises the question of legitimacy in the process of competing urgencies. Legitimacy and processes of legitimation are deeply entrenched in political culture. Focusing on legitimacy through the prism of urgency enhances our understanding of the social life of policy-making and how competing urgencies potentially unwrite, rewrite, and underline legitimacy.

Nina Vodopivec and Saša Poljak Istenič

Mission 100 in Ljubljana: Contested Visions of Climate Governance

The paper examines the social and political dynamics of climate governance in Ljubljana, focusing on the EU-funded Mission 100 initiative. It analyzes how climate neutrality - and the measures and imagined pathways to achieving it - are framed and enacted through the work of the city administration, NGOs, civil initiatives, and media and document analysis, with particular attention to participation - a contested concept differently understood by citizens, institutions, and experts. The study highlights tensions between official declarations, strategies, and public expectations: the city prioritizes technologically optimistic solutions and large-scale infrastructural projects, often excluding critical NGOs and limiting communication with citizens. This reinforces perceptions of climate governance as urban branding. At the same time, civil initiatives and organizations emphasize the need for systemic change, a just transition, and meaningful political participation. The paper also points to the interplay of knowledge, politics, and everyday practices in shaping Ljubljana's visions of climate-neutral futures.

Maja Wróblewska

Between Carbon Metrics and Housing Rights: Energy Poverty and Legal Contestation in Warsaw

The preliminary subject is a case study of energy poverty and the self-organisation of tenants against it, in a social rental building at 2 Antala Street in Warsaw. The paper findings are based on IDIs with social housing tenants and city officials, as well as an analysis of legal acts through the lens of legal & environmental anthropology. The author is interested in how residents and authorities use critical/hegemonic legal engineering in the context of energy poverty and housing rights. How can the law be used to manage what is considered 'urgent' in the context of climate justice? Framing the inquiry within Joanna Kusiak's concepts of 'judicial robbery' and 'rule-lawyering', the research highlights how legal technicalities shape urban politics and urgency in housing struggles. The case further illustrates the contradictions between EU climate funding frameworks and local housing practices: while energy transition policies emphasize carbon reduction and efficiency, they often neglect systemic inequality, risking displacement through rent hikes and redevelopment.