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EDITORIAL

We are pleased to present the second issue of Central European Papers in 2025, bringing together a diverse collection of contributions that address contemporary political, social, and governance-related challenges from both Central European and broader comparative perspectives. The four articles included in this issue examine democratic innovation, climate-related political narratives, smart city development, and quality of life in educational settings. Despite their thematic diversity, all contributions share a common interest in how institutions, policies, and social actors respond to the pressures of rapidly changing societies.

This issue once again reflects the interdisciplinary mission of Central European Papers: to provide a platform for critical reflection on political, administrative, and societal transformations affecting Central Europe and beyond. The articles presented here explore both structural and everyday dimensions of governance and public life, highlighting the importance of participation, legitimacy, contextual adaptation, and social well-being in contemporary societies.

The opening article, authored by Joanna Podgórska-Rykała and entitled *Successes and Failures of Citizens' Assemblies According to Decision-Makers: Evidence from Polish Cities*, examines how local political and social actors evaluate citizens' assemblies implemented in major Polish cities between 2016 and 2021. Based on qualitative empirical research and in-depth interviews, the article identifies the factors that shape decision-makers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with deliberative democratic innovations. By focusing on actors directly involved in commissioning and implementing these processes, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the practical challenges and opportunities connected with deliberative democracy at the local level.

The second contribution, *Climate Change – Political Narrative and Disinformation* by Arkadiusz Jan Sójka, addresses the growing politicization of climate change and the spread of disinformation narratives surrounding environmental policies. The article analyses how climate-related issues are selectively interpreted and instrumentalized by political actors, particularly within euroskeptic discourse in the European Union. Through selected examples, the study demonstrates how climate policy increasingly becomes a subject of ideological conflict and political polarization, raising important questions regarding the legitimacy of environmental governance and public trust in democratic institutions.

A comparative and globally oriented perspective is offered in the third article, *Contextualization of Smart City Development: A Comparison of Asian and European Cases*, written by Lukito Edi Nugroho, Sayuri Egaravanda, Dalibor Mikuš, and Richard Brix. The authors explore how smart city strategies are adapted to differing regional and institutional contexts through a comparison of the Yogyakarta Province in Indonesia and the Trnava Region in Slovakia. The article highlights the importance of contextualization in the implementation of innovative public policies and demonstrates that technological modernization is inseparable from local political, social, and economic realities.

The final article, authored by Michaela Mláka Kakašová and entitled *Subjective Perception of the Quality of Life by Students and Teachers at a Vocational School*, focuses on well-being and quality of life in the educational environment. Using the SQUALA questionnaire, the study compares perceptions of students and teachers across several life domains, including health, interpersonal relationships, leisure time, and abstract values. The findings underline the importance of mental well-being, balanced social relations, and supportive school environments, while also contributing to broader discussions on quality of life and educational policy.

In addition to the research articles, this issue features a book review devoted to *Ethics and Méti*s offering readers an additional perspective on current debates within the field. We hope that this issue will inspire further interdisciplinary dialogue and encourage reflection on the ways democratic institutions, public policies, and social environments adapt to current societal challenges. The contributions collected here demonstrate the continued relevance of examining both local experiences and broader global trends in understanding the evolving dynamics of contemporary societies.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and members of the editorial board for their valuable cooperation and commitment. We also thank the Faculty of Public Policies in Opava and its academic community for their long-term support of the journal and its development.

Editorial Team of C.E.P.

ARTICLES

SUCCESSSES AND FAILURES OF CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES ACCORDING TO DECISION-MAKERS: EVIDENCE FROM POLISH CITIES

Joanna Podgórska-Rykała¹

Abstract

This article offers insights into the opinions of Polish decision-makers on citizens' assemblies implemented at the local government level. The author employs interpretive, qualitative empirical research, utilizing in-depth interviews with three groups of local political and social actors, who either commissioned or participated in the implementation of nine citizens' assembly processes in major Polish cities between 2016 and 2021. The study aims to identify the successes and failures attributed to these innovative deliberative processes by respondents directly involved in their commissioning and implementation. This analysis will determine which of the elements or characteristics of the citizens' assembly most strongly affect the decision-makers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the decision to commission and implement it. As they are at the heart of modern representative democracies, their involvement and support are fundamental to the success of any change within democratic systems. Their attitudes and evaluations are therefore also crucial for the success of innovative deliberative projects, and the result of discerning these evaluations and attitudes can be a better conceptualization of future deliberative institutional designs.

Keywords

deliberative democracy, democratic innovation, deliberative mini-publics (DMPs), citizens' assemblies (CAs), local government, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Researchers of deliberative democracy and advocates of its tools perceive significant potential in the integration of deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) into a system governed by elected representative institutions. They can function as a complement to existing forms of representation (Urbinati & Warren, 2008), as well as one possible way to improve the

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epistemic quality of representative decision-making (Setälä, 2017, p. 846). Their ability to improve communication between representative institutions and citizens is also pointed out (Fung, 2006; Fishkin, 2009), and by socializing citizens into deliberative-oriented civic virtues, they perform an educational function, encouraging citizens to become more involved in public affairs. Through this path, they reach out to an increasingly broader public and support the construction of deliberative rather than confrontational conditions for public discourse (Curato & Böker, 2016, p. 178). Deliberative-based democratic innovations are seen as effective tools for (re)integrating underrepresented citizens into the democratic process, with the ultimate goal being deeper interactions between ordinary citizens and political elites (Landwehr et al., 2022).

While it is not yet two decades since citizens' assemblies (CA) have been used in politics, data coming from many corners of the world prove that this method is not only spectacular but also effective and that the recommendations developed by citizens work well in practice (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). Since 2016, these experimental deliberative processes have also been present in the Polish public space (Gerwin, 2018; Rytel-Warzocha, 2018; Podgórska-Rykała, 2020, 2024, 2025; Andrzejewski, 2020; Cichosz & Ufel, 2021; Krawczyk, 2021; Ufel, 2022; Ziętek, 2022; Gąsiorowska, 2023). This is a long enough period that it has come at a good time to summarise the experience with CA so far and identify the problems encountered and the benefits of including the perspective of citizens within this formula. Following this trajectory, the article offers an insight into the opinions of Polish decision-makers on the citizens' assemblies implemented in Poland, at the local government level. I base my analysis on interpretive, qualitative empirical research – in-depth interviews with three groups of local political and social actors (collectively called decision-makers – DMs) who were directly involved in the commissioning and implementation of 9 citizens' assembly processes in major Polish cities between 2016 and 2021. The article aims to identify the successes and failures that the interviewed decision-makers attribute to these innovative deliberative processes. Because they are at the heart of contemporary representative democracies, their involvement and support are fundamental to the success of any change within democratic systems. Their attitudes and assessments are therefore also crucial for the future success of innovative deliberative institutional designs, and their discernment may result in a better and more tailored conceptualization of these designs in the forthcoming years.

The article unfolds as follows. In the next section, I will discuss the results of previous research on decision-makers' views and opinions on this type of deliberative innovation and outline the research gap. Then, given that the article is based on empirical qualitative data, I will present my methodological approach, objectives, and research questions. Later, I will present the results of my empirical research, illustrating individual findings with quotes from in-depth interviews with Polish decision-makers. First, the successes and then the failures attributed to citizens' assemblies will be talked about. On this basis, I will determine which elements/characteristics of a citizens' assembly most affect the decision-makers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the decision to commission and implement it. The conclusions summarise my findings while providing an outlook for future research, and providing useful recommendations for decision-makers.

Literature review and research gap

Research conducted around the world indicates that there is a huge gap between the academic vision of DMPs, which focuses strongly on the characteristics of the process itself and the quality of deliberation (Fishkin, 1996, 1997; Fung, 2003; Smith, 2009; Warren, 2009; Dryzek, 2010; Grönlund et al., 2014; Curato et al., 2021; Farrell et al., 2019; Roberts & Escobar, 2015; Jacquet, 2017; Jacquet et al., 2020; Escobar & Elstub, 2017; Landemore, 2015; Giraudet et al., 2022), and the views of political actors on innovative deliberative processes, whose actual motivations, concerns and evaluations differ from officially declared ones (Nabatchi & Farrar, 2011; Hendriks & Lees-Marshment, 2019; Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2020; Podgórska-Rykała, 2024).

As previous studies demonstrate, on the one hand, DMs are the initiators of innovations (Parkinson, 2006; Podgórska-Rykała, 2025) and reach for them to solve specific public policy problems. On the other hand, they may have good reason to avoid or block them (Macq & Jacquet, 2023). The reluctance of DMs translates into the limited powers of DMPs, their insufficient integration into existing democratic practices and institutions (Ercan et al., 2017, p. 203), and an unclear role in the decision-making system (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006; Parkinson, 2012; Hendriks, 2006). There are concerns that the involvement of lay people in decision-making processes has the potential to limit the autonomy of political leaders by forcing them to make certain decisions or explaining why they do not (Macq & Jacquet, 2023, p. 158); the inclusion of assemblies based on random selection may also undermine the legitimacy of representative institutions based on elections (Vandamme et al., 2018; Jacquet et al., 2020). DMs highly value abstract deliberative norms, but when accepting practical solutions, they tend to avoid and be suspicious of more inclusive public debate (Parkinson, 2004; Nabatchi & Farrar, 2011; Baber & Bartlett, 2007). Only when opening up the decision-making process to actors outside the formal system would result in, for example, publicity, prestige, or political success, are elite representatives more sympathetic to it (Hendriks, 2011). Experiments show that DMPs can fail when DMs insufficiently engage with or ignore them (Fournier et al., 2011). Often DMs undervalue citizens' input (Hendriks, 2013) and deliberately diminish their role by delegating insignificant issues to DMPs for consideration (Parkinson, 2006), as they doubt citizens' ability to debate complex policy issues (Nabatchi & Farrar, 2011) of strategic scope (Newman et al., 2004, p. 210). On the other hand, DMs are more sympathetic to DMPs when they can observe them in person (Hendriks, 2013) or are involved in these processes (Farrell, 2014; Suiter et al., 2016; Setälä, 2017). DMs unreflectively combine DMPs with other participatory tools treating them as spectacular ad hoc innovations. This approach leads to their placement, unpremeditated by deeper reflection, on the 'emerged at the fringes of the political system' (Macq & Jacquet, 2023, p. 157) between the important but rare referendum and the frequent but irrelevant public consultation. In turn, the limited and unclear decision-making powers of DMPs are linked to subsequent failures in implementing their recommendations (Setälä, 2017).

A data review on decision-makers' motivations for reaching out to DMPs shows that they often do so for instrumental reasons, rather than to give citizens a voice. The initiators

of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform were motivated to minimize the impact of selfish and short-sighted calculations by political parties and individual politicians (Warren, 2008). In the Netherlands and British Columbia, an additional motivation for political parties to hold citizen assemblies on electoral reforms was to show themselves to be more democratic and progressive than their competitors (Fournier et al., 2011). In Ireland, the reasons for launching deliberative experiments can be traced to the country's dire economic situation and the desire to break out of the impasse caused by it (Suiter et al., 2016). When political leaders created the Belgian *Ostelbelgien* model, which is unique in the world, they hoped it would help increase the legitimacy of the German-speaking Community's current political institutions (Macq & Jacquet, 2023, p. 169; Jacquet et al., 2020). Data from Poland indicate that most of the DMPs implemented there at city levels were motivated by the need to respond to demands from NGOs (Podgórska-Rykała, 2024, 2025).

According to Macq and Jacquet (2023, pp. 158–159), one potential reason for reaching DMPs is programmatic issues and the profiles of party leaders. Comparative studies conducted in Europe show that traditional ruling parties are less favorable to initiatives that increase civic participation (referendums, deliberations, or non-election participation) than anti-establishment parties, parties of the radical left, and parties with limited access to power. This favorability depends not only on party ideology but also on factors such as the age of the political party and the period of government. The indicated variables are not without influence on the institutional inertia perceived by the researchers (Núñez et al., 2016). Similar conclusions are also drawn by other researchers (Rangoni et al., 2021; Sintomer et al., 2016; Jacquet et al., 2020; Heinelt, 2012; Junius et al., 2020). As an aside, it should only be added that all political parties voted together in favor of the Belgian solution, which was related to the specific local context. However, Rangoni et al. (2021) survey of Belgian French-speaking MPs shows that the discourses and positions of MPs are far from common belief in the many advantages of deliberation, even in a region where DMPs have become part of the political landscape. As indicated above, support for DMPs is also partly related to the level of access to political power. Members who have more individual resources and longer political experience develop a stronger commitment to the existing system and the status quo (Rangoni et al., 2021). Research also suggests people who have previously held a representative seat are less critical of electoral mechanisms (Niessen et al., 2019). At the same time, the impact of the level of marginalization in the political field can be observed in the context of support for citizen participation. However, it is more significant than gender, for example. Comparative studies of city councilors in Europe that focus on the desirability of citizen participation beyond elections show that women are more supportive of participatory reforms than men (Heinelt, 2012). Still, this result does not apply to female mayors, and there are huge regional differences (Vetter et al., 2018). Another motivation of decision-makers to run DMPs is the desire to improve communication between representative institutions and citizens (Fishkin, 2009; Fung, 2006). Research conducted in the UK by Beswick and Elstub (2019) shows that political leaders are open to organizing DMPs for the instrumental purpose of gathering more diverse information, but only under special circumstances. Political leaders thus value public participation from the standpoint of gathering information and keeping in touch with 'real people'

(Hendriks & Lees-Marshment, 2019). They are looking for feedback, and want to see how their policies are received. However, they are never sure if it is being received well, so they prefer informal channels rather than formal participatory tools. This is because they can effectively achieve their goals in both ways, with the former being less dangerous and less conflictual, and not exposing them to having to explain themselves to disgruntled voters. The skeptical attitude of senior government officials toward the new formal participatory channels was also revealed in an earlier qualitative study by Hendriks and Lees-Marshment (2019). Data from in-depth interviews conducted in 5 countries showed that officials consider the new formal participatory channels too mechanistic and antagonistic and prefer more informal interactions instead. This is because they value interactions with citizens from the point of view of enabling them to go beyond political 'bubbles' through it. This approach clearly indicates that they look at participation in an instrumental way, treating it as their own tool for acquiring knowledge and information, rather than a two-way process. They are the beneficiaries of participation, not citizens. One can conclude that elites legitimize DMPs when they are a convenient tool for them "that raise, discuss and order citizens' general concerns on topical matters" (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2020, p. 649). Research conducted systematically by Hendriks in Germany and the Netherlands (2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011) shows that elected representatives tend to support deliberative processes only to the extent that citizens' recommendations support their own policy positions. The findings of Koskimaa and Rapeli (2020, p. 649), on the other hand, suggest that elites are more likely to support new forms of citizen involvement in politics when they address issues 'on a general level and in a nonbinding fashion'.

The data shows that even a positive assessment of public participation by elites does not necessarily mean that they are willing to share power with ordinary people. Núñez et al. (2016) point out that institutional inertia seems to be winning out over change, as established political elites show little willingness to share power. However, the data cited above from earlier surveys does not include city-level politicians in the vast majority at all, and this gap needs to be filled.

The little existing evidence on the attitudes of political elites suggests that they are not enthusiastic about increasing citizen participation, despite the optimism of some deliberative scholars (Hendriks & Lees-Marshment, 2019). Although we are witnessing an increase in the quantitative use of DMPs, in many cases elected representatives merely tolerate them and see them as a necessary evil. Negative attitudes among them can very realistically destroy their potential and lead to them becoming "powerless facades" (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2020, p. 649). To ensure that this does not happen and that DMPs, which are only in the development phase, are not pushed aside from the mainstream and become a 'separate table' only to formally satisfy the expectations and hopes for greater involvement of more active people, research efforts should be made to seek effective ways to strengthen institutions in political processes coordinated by institutions of representative democracy.

The need to seek a deeper understanding of the motives, expectations, and evaluations of decision-makers who reach for democratic innovations, as well as to explain their concerns and reasons for resistance to power-sharing and the implementation of inclusive decision-making procedures (Hendriks, 2013; Hendriks & Lees-Marshment, 2019;

Macq & Jacquet, 2023; Podgórska-Rykała, 2024) should be reflected in the research carried out in this area. The pressing necessity to complement research on decision-makers' views on deliberative innovation emerges especially in countries and regions where deliberative mini-publics are not sufficiently institutionalized (Rangoni et al., 2021), and Poland is one such country (Podgórska-Rykała, 2024). To fill with empirical input the research gap thus outlined revealed in the well-established theory of deliberative democracy, the paper adopts the optics of decision-makers, on whom it depends whether deliberative innovations are implemented in the public sphere and how. Research in this direction is justified, as a more complete understanding of the views of decision-making elites helps to more effectively conceptualize current and future institutional designs within deliberative democracy, with a particular focus on finding effective ways of integrating DMPs into the contemporary system of representative institutions.

Methodological approach, aims, and research questions

The paper offers insights into the opinions of Polish decision-makers on citizens' assemblies. It is characterized by a political research approach. The empirical data used comes from qualitative interpretative research conducted in 2022, in which the tool was an in-depth interview. Nine deliberative processes (citizens' assemblies), carried out in the 7 largest Polish regional cities (Gdańsk², Lublin³, Łódź⁴, Warszawa⁵, Wrocław⁶, Kraków⁷ and Poznań⁸) between 2016 and 2021⁹, were studied. This provided an overview of the unique opinions of 3 different groups of respondents representing – from the point of view of the tool under study – 3 key groups of decision-making actors in cities. These were: (1) as representatives of elected representative bodies – the chairpersons of the city councils who were in office at the time the CA took place in the city (in two cases they were councilors delegated by the chairpersons); (2) as representatives of the executive administration in the cities – high-level officials who, on the orders of the city mayors, were responsible for commissioning the organization of the CA and cooperating with the organizations carrying out this task; (3) as representatives of civil society – representatives of NGOs

2 Gdansk, 2016, Heavy rains in the city and proposals to address climate change; Gdansk, 2017, Ways to improve air quality in the city; Gdansk, 2018, Ways to support civic participation in the city.

3 Lubin, 2028, What can be done to breathe clean air in Lublin?

4 Łódź, 2020, Greenery in the city.

5 Warsaw, 2020, How to increase the energy efficiency of Warsaw and the share of renewable energy sources in the city's energy mix?

6 Wrocław, 2020, How to improve mobility in Wrocław to enhance quality of life and climate protection?

7 Poznań, 2021, How can Poznań authorities act to address and adapt to climate change and the climate crisis?

8 Krakow, 2021, How can the City of Krakow and citizens reduce energy consumption and increase the use of renewable energy?

9 A detailed characterization of the studied cities and CA processes was included in the author's earlier work (Podgórska-Rykała, 2024, pp. 34–40), which also partly uses other excerpts from the survey results, and it seems that it would not be appropriate to repeat here the already published information in this section.

coordinating the CA process that took place in the city.¹⁰ The respondents included a total of 22¹¹ people deliberately selected and individually invited to give interviews, given that they were the ones who played a key role in the process of planning and implementing the CAs. For this article, they are collectively referred to as 'decision-makers' (DMs).

Using empirical data from individual in-depth interviews, the article aims to identify the successes and failures that decision-makers attribute to citizens' assemblies. Their identification will make it possible to determine which elements/characteristics of deliberative processes most affect satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the decision to reach for the decision-making deliberation method under study. To achieve the objectives set out in the article, three research questions were asked: (1) What do decision-makers consider to have been the greatest success in relation to the implementation of a citizens' assembly in the city? (2) What do decision-makers think was the biggest failure in relation to the implementation of a citizens' assembly in the city? By answering these two questions, it was possible to determine (3) Which elements/characteristics of the citizens' assembly most affected the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the decision to implement it.

As the interviews were very extensive and the respondents were asked – depending on the category of interviewees – almost 40 questions, only extracts from the data were used in this article, representing the respondents' answers to two of the questions asked (corresponding to the research questions of the paper) – about the successes and failures of the assembly as perceived by the respondents. Insofar as this was justified by concern for the reliability of the research results, statements from respondents answering other questions, but relating directly to the research questions posed in this text, were also used. The data extracted in this way is analyzed and discussed in the following sections of this article, and quotes from the interviews are provided to illustrate the argument. To ensure anonymity, respondents were labeled with serial numbers and an abbreviation revealing only the category of the respondent: CC stands for city council presidents/councilors delegated by them, NGO stands for NGO representatives and O refer to officials. In most of the topics covered, the respondents' narration forms a coherent whole, and where the respondents' statements differ significantly from each other – this was clearly indicated.

Successes of CAs in Polish cities as assessed by decision-makers

This section will present data on the successes that respondents attribute to the citizens' assemblies held in their cities.

It should not go unnoticed that the vast majority of respondents to the question about the greatest success of CAs answer that they consider the very fact that a CA took place in

10 An exhaustive explanation of further methodological issues, including the procedure for collecting empirical data, is discussed in the author's earlier work (Podgórska-Rykała, 2024, pp. 29–34), which also partly draws on other extracts from the results of this study.

11 In one case, the NGOs jointly implementing the CA asked for the partner organization perspective to be included in the research as well – as a result, the participation of NGO representatives was one more than for the other two categories of interviewees.

their city to be its greatest success. This assessment is somewhat related to the fact that the organization of as many as 5 of the 9 CAs studied coincided with the occurrence of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, some of the processes investigated took place online, which was not only new but also a difficult challenge for their organizers. This is evidenced by the sample statements quoted below:

- *'The success was definitely that the CA (...) took place in a sanitary regime, in a remote form, with such a great sense of teamwork.'* (2-NGO).
- *'(...) CA took place in our city despite the raging pandemic and that can be considered a success.'* (11-CC).
- *'It was certainly a success to meet a gigantic challenge, as this was the first CA in Poland organized in a remote, online form.'* (8-NGO).
- *'I would consider it the biggest success that the CA took place despite the pandemic because it certainly took a lot of organizational effort.'* (12-CC).
- *'In my opinion, the biggest success is that this CA took place at all because let's not forget the pandemic.'* (13-CC).
- *'The success is that for the first time ever we did the first citizen CA in (...). That sounds very cool. When you look at it from the side of the organizer of the process, well it is a historical event.'* (22-O).
- *'I would consider as a success the smooth running of the CA during the pandemic period, in a stationary rather than remote mode.'* (20-O).

Officials and NGO coordinators surveyed emphasized in this context the smooth running of the CA from an organizational point of view:

- *'From my perspective, the success is the very smooth running of the CA process.'* (18-O).
- *'(...) it was a very big organizational challenge, which we managed.'* (22-O).
- *'(...) we managed to organize it efficiently, and it was nevertheless quite a big logistical undertaking (...) and I dare say on a very good level from the organizational side'* (6-NGO).

Another of the successes indicated by all respondents, from the three categories of respondents, was the high quality of the recommendations:

- *'The success (...) is certainly the very good quality of the recommendations that the participants produced. Because they are concrete, they are substantive, they are bold, they are far-reaching, they respond well to the challenges that we currently have.'* (15-CC).
- *'The big success of the CA was the content and, above all, the quality of the recommendations.'* (3-NGO).
- *'The success is the good recommendations.'* (7-NGO).
- *'(...) certainly the quality of the recommendations, that is this final product of the CA. It was possible to develop very good recommendations that were not controversial among the participants themselves. And I think that this is also a very important thing and one that can be put down as a plus for CA because practically everyone agreed with these recommendations.'* (22-O).

- *'It is a success that the CA has developed some material, some recommendations, which in many cases will help to solve problems, will help the city. (...). So, a lot of such small but cool things were worked out during the CA and in my opinion that is its value. Definitely!'* (9-CC).
- *'(...) certainly the success of the CA is precise that this direction has indeed been set and, in my opinion, this is the greatest value of the CA.'* (10-CC).
- *'Very good recommendations have been developed, and that was the main point.'* (18-O).

Some of the officials and NGO representatives recognized and were equally positive about the involvement of the participants in the CA process and their satisfaction that they were able to participate in such a project:

- *'I think the success is the very high involvement of the CA participants.'* (4-NGO).
- *'I definitely think the success was the very high involvement of the participants.'* (17-O).
- *'We managed to activate very strongly the CA participants themselves, to this probably also the circle of people from their closest environment – that is, family, acquaintances, friends (...) some of the CA participants, who had previously remained passive in this social sphere, became very active after the CA, and I would consider this to be the success of the CA'* (19-O).
- *'I think also the success was the very high involvement of the participants – from the beginning of the process until the end.'* (5-NGO).
- *'For me, the success of the CA was that at the end the participants came to us, thanked us that they could participate in something so cool, declared that they loved the city, and that the last meeting, especially in its final part, was extremely emotional. To tell you the truth I didn't expect such positive emotions.'* (18-O).
- *'Satisfaction with the participation of the CA participants themselves. Indeed, one got the impression that they were very happy to take part in the process.'* (21-O).
- *'The success was that the whole process was very friendly, making it very satisfying for all participants.'* (3-NGO).

Some of the respondents from the group of officials and NGOs also regarded as a success the strengthening of the sense of empowerment among citizens – participants in CA (interestingly, as in the case of the previous observation, councilors did not draw their attention to this success):

- *'(...) for me it was very pleasant when I heard that someone after many years of hopelessness in their life – thanks to the participation in CA – felt that they had some empowerment. For me, it was a fantastic experience. The biggest success of CA is that some of the people taking part in CA were able to feel a real sense of empowerment in their city.'* (3-NGO).
- *'The benefit was also to give people a sense of greater self-efficacy.'* (16-O).

It was not only the CA participants who became heavily involved in the ongoing process, but also city officials. According to the respondents, thanks to the CA, more units of the

city authority became involved in the dialogue with the residents. The open attitude of the officials was evaluated very positively, especially because they were the ones who feared the organization of the CA the most:

- *'For me, it is also a success that I was able to involve the vice president and the individual department heads very strongly in the CA process, even though they were initially not enthusiastic about CA.'* (18-O).
- *'It was also beneficial for the city officials because it was such a nice impetus for us to take different types of actions. (...). Although the implementation of the CA recommendations is not going smoothly, it is apparent that more and more units and cells in the city hall are reckoning with the CA recommendations.'* (16-O).
- *'I would also consider as a success the cooperation with the city, which was very good, and open. They did a tremendous amount of work during the CA (...). Also, the city staff were very much involved in the CA process, you could see that they cared about it.'* (2-NGO).
- *'What also turned out to be a success – which I was a bit afraid of – was the very mature approach of the city hall to the process itself (...) I was afraid of whether the city would want to impose some solutions on us, but absolutely nothing like that happened. It was just that the cooperation with the city was very good, the city got involved in the process, which should be counted as a positive. (...). So, this cooperation with the city council and its units worked out great in my opinion.'* (7-NGO).
- *'Personally, I am glad that we managed to approach the CA process responsibly, that we did not do it for the sake of the process only now both the mayor and the units and cells are very serious about implementing the recommendations. You can see that the CA was not used to consult the residents but has a real, real translation in the area of binding decisions and what is happening now.'* (22-O).

The activation of residents and the good reception of CA by residents were also counted by respondents as successes of CA, although only two respondents considered them to be the greatest success, while for the others they were only additional benefits, supplementing the above achievements. It is also worth mentioning that the success of CA was mainly attributed to the activation of residents by officials and NGO activists, while councilors did not pay much attention to it:

- *'CA's biggest success was the activation of some of the residents.'* (19-O).
- *'The biggest success of CA was to build up quite a broad awareness of a significant part of the residents of our city around CA and what deliberation can be and that it is worth working on. Even after the CA we also worked on it (...) in educational workshops (...). And this was always met with a very positive reception.'* (5-NGO).
- *'In terms of benefits, I would point to the activation of some of the residents.'* (16-O).
- *'It has been a success to generate a lot of interest in this form of participation in the community.'* (3-NGO).
- *'The success of CA in (...) is its good reception by our residents, by different communities.'* (21-O).

The councilors surveyed particularly noted that one of the successes of the CA was the education (not only civic) of residents and the strengthening of the flow of information. The educational value was also recognized by respondents from the other survey groups:

- *'You could benefit from very useful information, given in a condensed form by experts. I think this is a very good and important thing. (...) this educational aspect in my opinion is very important. This is exactly the very positive effect of organizing the CA.'* (14-CC).
- *'The success of CA (...) has been the knowledge-building element and this is always the good side of any consultation process. (...) CA provides an excellent opportunity for information exchange.'* (11-CC).
- *'(...) the success is this educational value of the CA, a powerful dose of objective knowledge from experts on climate change.'* (4-NGO).
- *'The success of the CA is precisely the educational aspect, i.e. that both participants, as well as parties, observers, activists, and residents who observed the CA, were able to learn about the mechanisms of governance and decision-making in the city, the functioning of the city, some new trends in this regard.'* (6-NGO).
- *'Also, civic education, because I know that quite a lot of people followed this CA of ours, there were online broadcasts and indeed our CA had a very big educational value'* (16-O).

Summarizing this section, respondents primarily pointed to successes such as (1) the smooth conduct of the CA from the organizational side, particularly highlighting the challenges of the remote form which was related to the implementation of the process during the pandemic, and (2) the very good quality of the recommendations. Only in second place were the benefits seen in the form of activating residents, as well as the strong involvement of all parties, including participants and the city hall in the CA process, and the strengthening of the sense of empowerment among residents, although (particularly surprisingly) these "social" aspects were not noted at all by councilors. In addition, the importance of the educational value of the deliberative process was highlighted, noting that it is not only about civic education but also about increasing knowledge of the decision-making process, as well as the specific topic of the CA deliberations (e.g., the climate crisis). What is striking is that respondents first enjoyed organizational successes, secondly appreciated benefits such as the quality of outcomes (recommendations), and only last (and not all) referred to achievements in terms of strengthening cooperation, participation, and citizen empowerment in the city.

Failures of CA in Polish cities as assessed by decision-makers

Regarding failures, the majority of respondents unhesitatingly enumerated elements of the processes that could be improved in the future and which, in their opinion, projected not only the perception of CA but also its effects. The data shows that it was easier for respondents to point out failures than successes and that they quantitatively indicated more of them.

The failure of the city authorities to implement the recommendations adopted by the CA was the most frequently identified failure by respondents. At this point, it should be noted, that because great recommendations were considered one of the main successes, the greater failure was their systematic non-implementation. This was pointed out by respondents from all three categories of interviewees:

- *'Failure (...) in terms of implementation of recommendations. (...) I think that this implementation of CA recommendations should be better organized, here there must be a person in charge of this in the office, who would only deal with the coordination of the implementation of these tasks between the various cells of the office.'* (16-O).
- *'would consider it the biggest failure (...) that the opportunity to create CA among residents as an excellent participatory tool was wasted by not implementing the voted recommendations. And this opportunity was missed by both the mayor, city councilors, and the magistrate. Well – this CA effect is starting to fizzle out. (...) in my opinion, this is the biggest minus and loss.'* (5-NGO).
- *'As for the failures, unfortunately, it should be pointed out that very many recommendations have not been implemented.'* (4-NGO).
- *'Failure to implement recommendations that were accepted as binding.'* (12-CC).
- *'There is a lot of dissatisfaction that you don't see results when it comes to the implementation of recommendations, there is a very serious concern that these recommendations will never be implemented and this can be frustrating, especially for the Participants themselves.'* (6-NGO).
- *'(...) we were able to implement all the recommendations.'* (18-O).

However, respondents noted that the failure to implement the recommendations is actually a failure of the city authorities, not of the CA process itself:

- *'Failure can only refer to either slow implementation of the recommendations, or not implementing them at all, because this projects very strongly on the perception of CA in the public space, but it is not really CA anymore. Because, after all, the CA ends when a decision is made on the recommendations, and then the implementation stage begins, which is already the responsibility of the city council. And certainly, this stage of implementation of recommendations is the thing that is limping along, but it is absolutely not related to CA.'* (1-NGO).
- *'The lack of implementation by the city of the recommendations that have been developed, but if you think about it so deeply – is this really a failure of the CA? Well, no! This is not a failure of the CA but a failure of the mayor. After all, it is the mayor who pledged to implement CA's very specific recommendations. And the CA is in no way to blame for the fact that the mayor is ignoring the recommendations, even though he had previously committed to implementing them.'* (15-CC).

Some respondents regretted that the CA process was a one-time event and that no follow-up to the actions taken was planned. In their view, this somewhat wasted the energy that was generated in the CA, and above all prevented effective monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations:

- *'I would see as a failure of the CA the fact that the function of a coordinator or presidential plenipotentiary for the implementation of the CA's recommendations, who would be highly empowered and have more clout than an ordinary official, was not created.'* (16-O).
- *'It seems to me that there was a lack of such a moment during the CA, an idea of what to do after the CA. I think this problem applies to most cities where CA has taken place. That is, we have an idea to do CA, CA is done, while the idea is already missing – what next? (...) the city office is left alone with these recommendations, they are often inconsistent, imprecise, and it seems to me that this is the stage that needs to be corrected. Teams should be set up in earnest to deal with the implementation of recommendations, perhaps meetings should be held with participants at this stage of the implementation of recommendations to inform them of the status of the implementation of the recommendations, so that they don't feel instrumental (...) now this stage of the implementation of recommendations causes me a sense of malaise, that there is no further continuation of this cool process.'* (4-NGO).
- *'(...) the failure is that the CAs stopped being organized, (...) that they took place and the end, period, that it's history.'* (14-CC).

According to some respondents, another failure of the CA was the ill-chosen topics. First and foremost, respondents point out that it was too broad to be covered in several CA meetings. This problem is somewhat related to the one discussed earlier, that is, ineffective implementation of recommendations. Mainly, officials noted that the overly broad subject matter of the CA resulted in a lot of multi-topic recommendations, which were then difficult to implement efficiently, but this was also stressed by other interviewees:

- *'In my opinion, the failure was the subject matter (...), it was wasted energy, (...) The subject matter (...) of the CA was monstrously extensive, there calmly could be separated from three separate topics on the CA. There were simply too many things considered in one CA, and this was a mistake because in a CA a specific topic should be specified. It largely determines whether a CA is successful or not.'* (17-O).
- *'(...) it can be considered a failure that, under some pressure from NGOs, we added a second thread (...) to the main topic. And this very much broadened the theme of the CA. (...). So I think it can be considered a failure that the CA topic was too broad.'* (20-O).
- *'The biggest failure is undoubtedly CA's too broadly chosen theme! This is without question, because from such an innocent issue a whole lot of problems arose. That is, a small stream turned into a rushing, unregulated river at some point. Yes – too broadly chosen topic, imprecisely worded – this is an obvious failure.'* (19-O).
- *'(...) in retrospect you can see that the thematic scope could have been narrower, but at the time we thought we could calmly handle this scope. Today we know that this was not the case, well, but at the time we thought it was a great idea, and this is in a sense my failure.'* (1-NGO).
- *'Too many topics discussed during the CA. There was simply too much of it! And this is also one of the reasons that a large number of recommendations are not being implemented.'* (12-CC).

Another failure of CA indicated by respondents was time pressure resulting from an unrealistic work schedule. Too little time was planned in relation to what was to be done:

- *'(...) we had to rush with this CA, time was scarce, this time was lacking for the experts, the stakeholders and the participants, who could not ask for everything – precisely because of the lack of time.'* (20-O).
- *'In general, CA is such a very time-consuming tool. If you want to carry it out very well, you have to prepare very well for it and organize a whole bunch of meetings even before the CA starts. We did not have that time, we were operating under a lot of pressure precisely because of this time pressure.'* (4-NGO).
- *'(...) we had too much money to spend in one year and we couldn't spread some of the work over the next year, and so we had to chase very hard, it was not a quiet job.'* (2-NGO).

A further failure was identified by respondents as the difficulty of collaboration between the city hall, organizations, stakeholders, and internal experts, which was partly due to the lack of previous experience and established patterns of such broad cross-sectoral partnerships. In particular, the attitudes of NGOs, who were supposed to be involved in the process in various ways, were criticized:

- *'A certain failure of the CA was that it was very difficult for us to work out a common position with some of the NGOs, with the stakeholders. There was always someone who thought that something should be done completely differently. (...). the failure of CA is that with this project some of the NGOs were not able to cooperate, by the way they were heavily hectoring each other, which was not good for the CA process itself.'* (18-O).
- *'The involvement of the stakeholders – mainly NGOs – I thought it would be much higher than it actually was. And I think it would have been worthwhile to put more work, to spend more time, to be able to reach more of these NGOs and institutions that deal with the issues that were raised at the CA.'* (NGO-3).
- *'(...) I think that in general in Poland we have a problem with public dialogue (...) some people and entities think that they have some special rights to something. They don't seem to understand that the city is a whole after all, that an expert, a party, or an official has no special rights to anything and we all have to work together and not play individually. And we, as the operator, had to keep a very close eye on this cooperation, this collaboration, to make sure that someone didn't take over this CA for their own purposes. Such attempts appeared – surprisingly – not from the city, but from activists. (...). So here it is really not the CA itself that is a failure – but the state of dialogue in Poland in general.'* (7-NGO).

A lack of cooperation and involvement was also perceived by respondents on the part of the city authorities, including the mayor, whose role was often reduced to mere representational activities. However, councilors failed to recognize problems of this kind:

- *'A lack of interest on the part of the mayor in the citizens' assembly should perhaps be regarded as a certain failure. I mean up until a certain time this interest on his part was quite high. He even promoted CA nicely, but at some point, he lost his*

heart for it. Perhaps under the influence of the recommendations that were being worked out, which did not suit him very well, he withdrew from the process. He didn't even thank the participants directly for their participation and work in CA, although he had promised to do so. And it was so sad because by doing so the stature of the event fell.' (6-NGO).

- *'The mayor was at the opening and his role was limited to that.'* (20-O).
- *'The mayor was somehow not particularly involved substantively in the process. And there was not even a moment when we as organizers met with the mayor (...) there was no meeting of the CA participants with the mayor at the end. And I think that was a very big loss.'* (5-NGO).

The remote form that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic conditions was considered a failure of CA by some interviewees:

- *'Certainly, this process would have had more public resonance if it had been carried out in a stationary format, and that was certainly one of the downsides of our CA, that it was carried out remotely. We know that this interaction works better when we have direct contact with local people.'* (22-O).
- *'(...) I am now thinking about conducting the CA in a remote form, it costs us a lot of effort. Probably the public debate in a wide range of experts and participants would have taken place much more efficiently, would have been qualitatively better if it could have taken place stationary.'* (13-CC).

In addition, as discussed above, individual respondents also raised technical problems, related to the not-very fortuitous arrangement of the budget allocated for the implementation of the CA, the too-late summing up of the effects of the CA, unresolved issues regarding the procedures for the implementation of the whole process of the citizens' assembly (faulty rules of procedure), the inadequate preparation of the initial phase of the organization of the CA on the part of the city hall, personal data protection regulations (RODO) in the context of obtaining an operative to draw a representative sample of residents, low willingness of residents to participate in the second draw of participants to work in the CA, failure to ensure the participation of all potential stakeholders in the CA (especially in the environmental context no willing advocacy organizations were supporting politically incorrect positions).

In summary, the list of failures that the respondents most frequently linked to the CA processes implemented in their cities includes, above all, problems related to the non-implementation of recommendations by the city authorities. However, as several respondents correctly concluded, this problem is not strictly related to CA as a tool, but rather to what decision-makers do later with the recommendations received. For it is not the CA that implements the recommendations, but the politicians, and it is up to them to decide how and when this happens. As the data show, some of the problems with the recommendations had their origin in the lack of sufficient involvement in the CA process of the city authorities, including above all the mayor, and in the overly broad setting of the subject matter of the deliberations, which also caused other problems – e.g. related to time pressure or the imperfect formulation of the recommendations themselves. Also

with regard to these problems, however, it should be emphasized that it was the city authorities who commissioned the organization of the CA and in all cases had the decision-making power in the selection of the topic for the CA, as well as the design of other elements (e.g. duration, how the process would be managed, etc.). The lack of sufficient and effectively planned follow-up after the CA was seen as another major failure of the CA. Some respondents regretted that the CA process was a one-off and that no follow-up was planned for the activities undertaken. In their view, this somewhat wasted the energy that had been generated in the CA and, above all, prevented effective monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations. Other failures included difficulties in cooperation between the office and NGOs, or the need to organise the CA remotely.

CONCLUSIONS

The research results discussed in the article have provided valuable information on the opinions of decision-makers about the CAs processes implemented in their cities. First of all, the data prove that respondents quantitatively identify more failures of various kinds than successes. There is therefore also a greater consensus on establishing a common list of successes and, consequently, a coherent catalogue of successes relating to the Polish experience is easier to construct. Although the list of failures is also partly shared by the decision-makers from the studied cities, slight discrepancies also appear.

In the category of success, the respondents perceived above all the very decision to organize CA in a city, explaining this optic by the fact that CA is a demanding (organizational and costly) innovation that only the most determined cities are willing or able to opt for. Respondents thus felt pride and satisfaction that it was their cities that had adopted CA, and what is more (referring to 5 of the 9 processes) managed to carry out CAs fairly smoothly, despite the COVID-19 pandemic raging around them. Secondly, all respondents focused on recommendations, pointing to the development of high-quality solutions as a considerable success of the processes carried out. This is in line with the essence and purpose of CAs, as they are supposed to result in concrete recommendations for public authorities. In all cases studied, the respondents equally emphasized the two successes outlined above, i.e. the efficient organization of the CAs and the high quality of recommendations. Other successes, mainly perceived by officials and NGOs, included the activation of residents and the strengthening of their sense of efficacy, as well as the openness and high involvement of all parties, including participants and the city hall. It is also worth pointing out the importance of the educational value of the deliberative process, which was highlighted by respondents from all three categories.

Summarising this brief and fairly consistent catalog of successes, it is striking that respondents first enjoyed organizational successes, secondly valued benefits such as the quality of outcomes (recommendations), and only finally referred to achievements in the form of strengthening cooperation, participation, and citizen empowerment in the city. These observations are partly in line with the research findings cited earlier as to the instrumental motives of decision-makers in reaching for deliberative innovations and the

expectations they attach to them. What is worth noting, however, is that respondents representing representative bodies did not perceive as a success greater involvement of residents, strengthening participation and cross-sector cooperation. Although it would seem that from their perspective – as representatives of the local community – this aspect should be particularly important, in reality, it was completely ignored by them. The councilors focused exclusively on the recommendations developed and possibly on the educational aspect of the process in the broadest sense, and they were decidedly stricter in their assessment of the CA process than the other respondents. Their more critical attitude can be linked primarily to the fact that they were not personally involved in the project, and were only “guests” observing the processes from the outside. On the other hand, the empowerment of residents and their greater activation were pointed out by almost all surveyed officials and some NGO activists, while the latter emphasized both technical and organizational issues, and appreciated the improvement of inter-sectoral cooperation in the city.

Turning to the failures identified by the respondents, the first point to be made is the failure to implement, or too slow, and ineffective implementation by the city authorities of the recommendations adopted by the CA. At this point, it should be noted, that given that great recommendations were considered one of the main successes, the greater failure became their unjustified non-implementation. This was highlighted by respondents from all three categories of interviewees. This problem is not typical of Polish CAs processes, as it has been recognized in many previous deliberative experiments around the world (Setälä, 2017; Smith, 2009, p. 93). Previous evidence suggests that it can have the effect of making these innovations merely spectacular and expensive discussion forums with no real impact on policy. However, this is not a weakness of CAs, but largely a failure on the part of decision-makers to live up to their commitments. Practice (not only in Poland) shows that many of the approved recommendations are either intentionally not implemented or are stuck (tucked away in a drawer ‘for the future’). This problem, referred to in the literature rather figuratively as “cherry picking” (Font et al., 2018), also arises in relation to traditional, better-established participatory processes such as public consultations. As the results of my research proved, respondents realize that the problem lies with decision-makers, but they defend themselves by arguing that in the case of innovations such as CAs, decision-makers who first face such an overwhelming amount of quality recommendations coming from laypeople may be surprised. The data proves that decision-makers generally don’t expect such significant results, and that’s partly where the problem with implementing recommendations from residents comes from later. This stays in line with my observations. For the councilors, it was the good quality recommendations that were the biggest success, and they primarily based their evaluations of the CA on this. Although the other respondents also appreciated the recommendations, it is likely that when they embarked on CA implementation, they expected these kinds of results and were not as surprised by them as elected representatives, who are at the center of decision-making processes on a daily basis. In the case of one-off, experimental CAs, it is not the CA that implements the recommendations, but the politicians, and it is up to them to decide how and when this happens. As the data shows, some of the problems with the recommendations were rooted in the overly broad subject matter of the CA’s deliberations, as well as in the lack of sufficient

involvement in the CA process by the city government, most notably the mayor. Elites were interested in the process until participants made assumptions in line with their expectations, while when the CA's recommendations went in a different direction, politicians backed off and ignored the ongoing processes. This observation is in line with the results of earlier studies. Related to the failure outlined above is another, equally frequently cited by respondents, namely the lack of thoughtful follow-up. Respondents regretted that the CA process was a one-time event and that no follow-up was planned for the activities undertaken. In their view, this somewhat wasted the energy that had been generated in CA, and above all prevented effective monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations, as it was generally unclear who was to keep an eye on the follow-up and with what tools. Some troubles with the recommendations were also attributed to the overly broad setting of the subject matter of the CA's deliberations and the time pressure caused by this, which resulted in the imperfect formulation of the recommendations themselves. Again, it should be emphasized that it was the city authorities who commissioned the organization of the CA and in all cases had the decision-making power in selecting the topic for the CA, as well as designing other elements (e.g., duration, how the process would be managed, etc.). As the data indicate, respondents identified a number of failures, some of which could have been avoided by better grounding CA in the decision-making system and more effective follow-up planning.

To sum up and try to answer the third research question, it should be recognized that the final recommendations of the CA determine to the greatest extent the positive or negative evaluation of the implemented deliberative processes. Their high quality is indicated as the greatest success, and their non-implementation as the greatest failure. Meanwhile, among other significant failures, the overly broad topic of the CA and the lack of follow-up planning were also identified, and both problems are closely related to the recommendations.

Therefore, in order for deliberative processes of this type to have a stronger presence in the political space and for decision-makers to want to use them, effective paths for implementing good and valuable recommendations should be secured first. The problem observed in Poland with the insufficient establishment of specific paths for dealing with accepted recommendations appears in many deliberative processes around the world. It is directly related to the unclear establishment of the place of CAs in the decision-making system already in place. As data from previous studies show, such mini-publications can be both isolated from the system and integrated into it (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Hendriks, 2016; Setälä, 2017). More often, however, they are isolated. The classic argument for the 'isolation' of DMPs is to create a space for them where conditions are conducive to respectful and inclusive debate. This configuration undoubtedly provides an empirical basis for the claim that deliberative democracy is a credible alternative to practicing politics under certain institutional conditions. The downside of excluding them from the system, however, is marginalized and unclear decision-making powers. Polish cases were typical examples of DMPs isolated from the decision-making system, functioning as one-off add-ons. Evidence suggests that DMPs are most successful when they are not isolated from the system and are 'designed as one of many nodes of discourse formation that shape public policy' (Curato & Böker, 2016, p. 185). This is because deliberative

processes, despite their lack of significant technical and organizational differences among themselves, can differ significantly in their impact on decision-making. These differences are due to political will as well as other contextual factors.

In Poland, the organization of deliberative mini-publics is optional, and their design features are not tied to any legal provisions. Therefore, their organization is generally carried out on the basis of general regulations on public consultations. However, individual cities are reinforced by the experience of previous processes that took place in neighboring units. Therefore, despite specific differences, it is possible to speak of a kind of 'Polish model' of CAs, according to which, (1) CAs are one-time forms of debate focused on resolving a problem defined by the city authorities; (2) based on a gentleman's agreement with the mayor of the city, if a given recommendation receives a minimum of 80% support from the participants, it is agreed that it will be implemented; (3) so far in none of the Polish cities has a model been developed in which CA would be integrated with the decision-making process in a specific way, and thus no transparent procedures have been developed for implementing recommendations and monitoring the process.

Based on the results of the research presented in this article, two proposals for actions to strengthen deliberative innovation in public space should be recommended. The first, basic (minimal), is to include in the design of the deliberative forum also follow-up procedures, that is, a transparent and binding path according to which the recommendations developed by residents will be systematically integrated into the decision-making process. In this context, we can talk, for example, about a resolution of the city council obliging the mayor to implement a list of agreed recommendations with the definition of deadlines, the establishment of a cross-sectoral committee to monitor the implementation of recommendations, or the assignment of a task related to tracking the implementation processes of recommendations to a specific person in the structure of the office (e.g., the mayor's representative for CA follow-up, etc.). An effective path in this regard has been developed, for example, in Ireland (Podgórska-Rykała, 2023a; Farrell & Suiter, 2019; Farrell, 2014; Suiter et al., 2016; Farrell et al., 2020). The second option, advanced (maximum), on the other hand, would be to integrate the CA into the local decision-making process on a cyclical or even permanent basis, while at the same time strengthening its decision-making powers, as is the case, for example, in Belgium (Macq & Jacquet, 2023; Jacquet et al., 2020). It is not without reason that the unique model of permanent civil dialogue developed and implemented in the German-speaking Community of Belgium in 2019 is cited as the greatest success story of the institutionalization of deliberative processes. Belgium has already been followed by other countries, and models of permanent citizen assemblies have been implemented in many cities around the world, such as Paris, Aachen, and Newham (Podgórska-Rykała, 2023b). This trend must be considered very promising.

Deliberative mini-publics have enough potential to be not only valuable tools complementing other participatory initiatives but even – in the long run – to be able to reform and transform the whole institutional set-up in a more deliberative direction. Whether this potential will be realized, however, will depend to a large extent on the favor of decision-makers, for whom, as the research has shown, CA recommendations and their subsequent fate are extremely important, and therefore it is on them that the efforts of

both those commissioning deliberative processes and the organizers and coordinators of individual processes should be focused. A well-designed process must not end with a vote of support for a recommendation, because then we condemn it to failure.

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CLIMATE CHANGE – POLITICAL NARRATIVE AND DISINFORMATION

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Abstract

This article presents how climate change is becoming a subject of political narratives and disinformation, turning into a tool of political struggle. Scientifically proven climate change is often presented selectively, serving specific political, ideological, or economic interests. A key element of this narrative is to discredit environmental organizations and activists. The article discusses selected cases of denialist rhetoric and disinformation being used by political parties in the European Union. Particular attention is given to euroskeptic narratives that portray the European Union's climate policy as a threat by attributing a slew of pejorative meanings to it. The European Union is the primary area of research here, whereas the United States provides a supplementary, comparative context to facilitate better understanding of the mechanisms of political polarization and the instrumentalization of climate issues. The aim of the article is to present the mechanisms through which disinformation narratives emerge and operate, as well as their consequences for the legitimacy of climate policy in Europe.

Keywords

ecology, climate change, political narrative, disinformation

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how climate change has become a subject of political narratives and disinformation within the European Union. The main research focus is on the EU and particularly the disputes surrounding the European Green Deal, as well as the communication strategies of populist and euroskeptic groups. For comparison, the example of the United States has been included to highlight the similarities and differences in the mechanisms of polarization, the role of political elites, and the relationship between disinformation and voter mobilization.

The research problem addressed in this article concerns climate change from the perspective of political narrative-building. Capital, pressure groups, and think tanks

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associated with political parties constitute a significant source of climate-related disinformation. The main research questions focus on how populist parties use climate policy to mobilize their electorates and what disinformation strategies are employed in relation to the European Green Deal. Further questions explore the place and role of environmental organizations within this discourse, as well as potential measures to counter disinformation.

The research hypothesis adopted is that political climate narration which simplifies and polarizes has become a tool of political struggle and ideological identification. The scientific analysis of climate change in the context of narratives and disinformation is complex and multidimensional. The article relies on methodological approaches typical of political science. The research methodology is based on the analysis and critical interpretation of documents and academic literature (desk research). It also draws on theories from political communication, such as post-truth politics, highlighting the primacy of emotions over facts and narrative conflict theory, which examines how different political groups construct competing stories about climate issues. A limited case study approach is also used, with examples drawn from the United States, Poland, and selected political parties within the European Union.

The article is structured following the logic of analytical reasoning. The first part introduces the concept of climate disinformation and how it functions in public discourse thereby providing the theoretical basis for the analysis that follows. Next, the ideologization of ecology and the role of populist narratives in the EU are discussed. Further sections address the radicalization of the message, the economic interests of disinformation actors, and the use of climate narratives in the context of hybrid warfare. This structure facilitates a transition from the general level to specific topics and ultimately to synthetic conclusions about the legitimacy of climate policy and European integration.

The English-language literature analyzes climate disinformation primarily in terms of political science, communication, and social psychology combined. Studies by Lewandowsky are essential, pointing to a strong link between climate skepticism and ideological orientation, as well as the role of political elites in shaping social attitudes. Southwell et al. propose precise definitions of scientific disinformation, emphasizing it contradicts expert consensus.

Reports by the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) reveal transnational networks of disinformation actors whose activities result in systemic delays in climate policy. Studies by Hsu and Myers on the one hand and Winter et al. on the other highlight the role of emotions, conspiracy theories, and social media in perpetuating false narratives.

Unlike previous works, this article focuses on the political function of climate disinformation in the European Union as a tool for delegitimizing climate policy and, indirectly, the project of European integration.

In the field of social sciences, numerous studies have been published on climate change. The claim that the climate is warming is not disputed. Analyses of communication strategies and rhetoric as factors of social mobilization and demobilization have also been conducted within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Opposing the

dominant research trend, some analyses indicate that environmental protection initiatives reflect the emergence of new forms of power relations (Stachowiak, 2014).

Disinformation – the Climate Discourse

Disinformation is facilitated by the complexity of the world and the information overload² such that people have neither the time nor the capacity to verify, check sources, or assess credibility. The absorption of disinformation is linked to a tendency to accept simple explanations. People are far more likely to accept information consistent with their pre-existing beliefs or worldview.

Climate change presents challenges on multiple levels: it is difficult to understand cognitively because its consequences are hard to fully grasp, and it poses a challenge to many individuals' worldviews, as actions aimed at limiting climate change produce economic and political consequences. These political implications have created an environment of confrontation and climate disinformation (Lewandowsky, 2021).

Treen et al. (2020) points out that disinformation is a particular subset of incorrect information that is created and disseminated intentionally to mislead audiences. This distinction is crucial for analyzing political narratives around climate change. The systemic threat posed by disinformation has also been recognized at the institutional level, shifting the issue from social communication to political security.

"Disinformation (in all areas, not only regarding climate issues) was identified in the Global Risks Report 2024 as one of the greatest short-term threats to the international community. The threat posed by disinformation continues to grow, and it intensifies both toward the EU and NATO and their member states. Disinformation is often used as a tool of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), a pattern of actions that have, or may potentially have, a negative impact on political values, procedures, or processes" (Dzięgiel & Pawlik, 2025).

Studies show that media practices of presenting scientific consensus and marginal, contrarian positions as equivalent lead to public confusion and contribute to the delegitimization of expert knowledge in the climate debate (Björnberg et al., 2017). Anti-climate narratives shape ecological awareness and individual attitudes, but they also influence political party activity and the functioning of governments. Here, climate disinformation serves not only a cognitive function, but above all a political one, becoming an instrument of mobilization, delegitimization, and polarization.

Manipulating information is not a new phenomenon. Persuasion disguised as information has always existed. No medium had a worse reputation in this respect than the 19th-century tabloid press. The specificity of online disinformation lies in the speed of

² Information overload is a disruption in the communication process that occurs when recipients are overwhelmed by too much information, often of varying degrees of reliability, cf. Eppler, M. J., & Mengis, J. (2004). The Concept of Information Overload: A Review of Literature from Organization Science, Accounting, Marketing, MIS, and Related Disciplines. *The Information Society*, 20(5), 325–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240490507974>.

its dissemination and the systemic difficulty of debunking the lies generated there (Karwowski, 2022).

What is an anti-climate narrative? It is a way of presenting climate change by the denial of or skepticism toward the scientific consensus. Such narratives downplay the importance of the problem, its impacts on people, and the possibility of mitigating or preventing these impacts. Delay narratives accept the fact of climate change but simultaneously question the scope, type, and timing of the actions proposed (Fundacja Pole Dialogu, 2023).

Disinformation that invokes the language of science is particularly destructive because it uses the authority of expert knowledge to undermine itself. “We define scientific misinformation as publicly available information that is misleading or deceptive relative to the best available scientific evidence” (Southwell et al., 2022, p. 98).

“Defining misinformation as contrarian claims³ allows for the possibility that there may be grains of truth in some of the claims, that in a philosophical sense objective truth is often unknowable, and that some claims are not falsifiable” (Winter et al., 2024).

Empirical studies indicate that susceptibility to such narratives is strongly linked to ideological orientation and low levels of trust in scientific institutions, which gives climate disputes a clear identity dimension (Stockemer & Bordeleau, 2024).

The popularity and sources of such narratives have changed depending on global events. At one point, disinformation stemmed from ExxonMobil, which funded more than 50 organizations publishing tweets suggesting that climate change is not dangerous and that U.S. climate policy harms economic growth (Bąkiewicz, 2024).

Climate disinformation is part of a larger political discourse where language becomes an instrument of power and a tool for shaping meaning. “Discourse as a communication event is linked to the use of language, the transmission of ideas, and interactions within social situations. In the discourse on climate change, political actors actively participate. These issues have therefore become present in public discourse, shaping awareness of the role of climate change as a factor conditioning human existence” (Ranke, 2020, p. 139). Climate denialism comes in many forms, ranging from outright rejection of scientific data to obscuring the issue under the guise of methodological skepticism. These strategies have one thing in common: they undermine cognitive certainty and amplify the audience’s emotional reactions. Łaszczycza (2021) argues that denialism is fostered by the abstract nature of the threats, a lack of understanding of scientific language, and the Dunning-Kruger effect.

In public debate, which belongs to the domain of persuasion and emotions, global warming functions both as a carrier of alarmist messages intended to mobilize action, and as a symbol of global propaganda used for political or economic purposes (Makuchowska, 2013).

The commercial need of the media to attract the attention of its audience shifts the boundaries of acceptable content. A system of repetitive communication patterns emerges, much more impactful online than in traditional media. These patterns influence emotions, and the language of communication becomes short, simple, and unambiguous (Sędłak, 2020).

³ Contrarian statements or contrarian claims are views, opinions, or assertions that go against the prevailing public opinion, scientific consensus, or mainstream thinking.

The European Union unequivocally identifies climate disinformation as a threat to democratic processes and public safety. "The European Commission defines disinformation as the 'creation, presentation and dissemination of verifiably false or misleading information for the purposes of economic gain or intentionally deceiving the public, which may cause public harm'. Such public harm includes threats to democratic political and policy-making processes as well as to the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security" (Europejski Trybunał Obrachunkowy, 2021, p. 7).

In order to effectively counter climate disinformation, coordinated action in the areas of education, legal regulations and public communication is required, which has been confirmed by the latest research on climate knowledge management (Herasimenka et al., 2024).

Climate Disinformation – A Threat to Environmental Policy

Climate disinformation is effective not only because it undermines scientific findings, but above all because it brings the debate from the level of expert knowledge to the realm of emotions and political disputes. "Ninety-seven percent of climatologists acknowledge the consensus on global warming. The debate has shifted from laboratories to the public sphere, where everyday and scientific approaches have become blurred. Content recipients stop having doubts due to an oversupply of authorities who decide matters for them" (Młyńczyk, 2017, p. 173).

Shifting the debate from the realm of science to the public sphere contributes to expert knowledge losing its privileged position. Studies confirm that climate disinformation undermines public trust in scientific consensus, particularly given the overproduction of media and political authority figures (Björnberg et al., 2017).

Thus, disinformation does not fill a knowledge gap, but it actively blocks the translation of scientific knowledge into political decisions. "On 20 June 2025, the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) published a groundbreaking assessment concluding that the greatest barrier to climate action may not be a lack of scientific knowledge, but the global spread of disinformation" (Elbeyi et al., 2025, p. 2).

These findings are consistent with those presented in the English-language literature, which argues that climate disinformation is among primary barriers to evidence-based public policy, hindering institutions' ability to make rational and timely decisions (Vivion et al., 2024).

Disinformation techniques work very effectively, constantly evolving to achieve the intended effect. The total denialism that existed earlier has transformed into strategic skepticism (campaigns focus on questioning the effectiveness or costs of proposed solutions). Disinformation is targeted, with political leaders, officials, and regulatory agencies being the main targets. Automated and coordinated actors (bots and trolls) play a key role in promoting misleading narratives (Elbeyi et al., 2025, p. 5).

According to research on climate disinformation, shifting from overt denialism to delay narratives and strategic skepticism increases the effectiveness of political influence

because it allows specific solutions to be undermined without denying the phenomenon of climate change itself (Treen et al., 2020).

Individuals who question climate change are united by a belief in global conspiracies. The European Union's climate goals have become a central theme of populist disinformation narratives, which most often take the form of disinformation (intentional actions) and misinformation (unintentional actions). They concentrate on trivializing the problem and its consequences. Delay narratives undermine the rationale for mitigation efforts (Bąkiewicz, 2024).

Public perception of climate disinformation is not uniform, leading to varied reactions that directly impact the effectiveness of environmental policy. The literature reveals a broad range of attitudes, such as:

- lack of interest – shifting focus to other issues (e.g., health),
- active denial – conscious rejection (denialism, climate denialism),
- belittling – viewing information as exaggerated and consequences as insignificant,
- rigidity – accepting climate change but lacking the will to adjust lifestyle,
- opportunistic use – exploiting what is still available despite awareness of risks,
- dramatization – perceiving the climate situation as catastrophic,
- active preparedness – developing survival skills for extreme environmental conditions,
- burnout – resignation,
- realism – seeking facts and taking small-scale mitigation measures (Gulla et al., 2020).

The diversity of social responses to climate disinformation confirms that these messages have cognitive as well as emotional and behavioral impacts. According to narrative analyses, the effectiveness of disinformation largely stems from the use of simplified narrative patterns rather than fact-based arguments (Zanartu et al., 2024).

Therefore, the effects of climate disinformation are not limited to social perception or individual attitudes. The literature on the subject emphasizes that anti-climate narratives are increasingly being used as a tool in ideological and political struggles, resulting in the systematic ideologization of ecology (Herasimenka et al., 2024).

Political Narrative – The Ideologization of Ecology

The ideologization of ecology is among key mechanisms of political instrumentalization of climate change. Individuals who succumb to conspiracy theories often act for the benefit of real interest groups. The following reactions have been identified:

- emotional ideological immunization – when beliefs relate to values or ideology and confrontation with the opposing side reinforces the views of climate deniers;
- ad hoc confirmation bias – the tendency to search for and overestimate facts that support an unfounded hypothesis while ignoring contradictory evidence (Łaszczycza, 2021).

A tendency to deny climate change is characteristic of individuals who refer to authoritarian structures of power. Adherents of extreme beliefs easily radicalize their

views. Polarization and denialism are reinforced by commercialized media coverage. In online communication, the dissemination of false, emotionally charged information (fake news) gains a significant advantage over reliable scientific information. Difficulties in assessing the data on environmental impact facilitate unethical information practices, often linked to deliberate disinformation spread by business groups seeking short-term profit. The position individuals take on environmental protection appears to be strongly linked both to their political beliefs and to personality traits (Łaszczyca, 2021).

Studies on political communication demonstrate that climate debates in the digital sphere are intensified by polarization mechanisms and information bubbles, which reinforce existing beliefs and hinder the acceptance of scientific knowledge (Bassolas et al., 2024). The ideologization of climate narratives is particularly evident amid rising populism in Europe. "Europe, like the entire world, has fully entered the age of populism. In the first two decades of the 21st century, the total number of votes cast for populist parties in Europe doubled. What unites right-wing populists is their search for support by invoking internal and external threats, as well as global 'conspiracies'. EU policies, such as the European Green Deal, have become primary targets of attacks from the populist right" (Fundacja Pole Dialogu, 2023, p. 4).

The links between industry, conservative think tanks, and political actors play a key role in this process.

Alliances between industry and conservative think tanks channel disinformation toward key decision-makers. Climate falsehoods are often expressed by politicians. In Europe, right-wing populist parties also actively oppose climate science (AfD in Germany, Vox in Spain, and the National Rally in France). Media with conservative or right-wing ideological profiles prioritize conspiracy narratives and climate skepticism (Janowska, 2025).

The literature on the subject distinguishes six types of disinformation actors: scientists, governments, political and religious organizations (including think tanks, foundations, and institutes), industry, media (especially right-wing outlets), and the public. These groups form a loosely connected coalition of interests supported by controversial scientists, conservative media, and politicians. Conservative think tanks play a significant role in producing and distributing disinformation. Their discourse is dominated by skepticism, and their credibility is built through the publication of reports presenting a critical approach to climate science (Bąkiewicz, 2024).

Attitudes of the public toward climate change are largely shaped by motivated cognition, that is cognitive processes that protect individuals from scientific evidence perceived as ideologically or economically threatening. Worldviews thus play a crucial role in the rejection of climate science (Lewandowsky, 2021).

Populist criticism of the Green Deal does not focus on denying climate change but on the social costs of transformation. Parties such as AfD and Fidesz use climate policy as a pretext to undermine EU legitimacy, reinforcing euroskepticism. The debate increasingly features elements of economic disinformation and emotional appeals linked to lifestyle, work culture, or agriculture. The European Union's climate policy has become a key component of the political narrative of conservative parties in Poland. Right-wing groups frame the EU's energy transition as a threat to energy sovereignty, presenting Brussels as

a center of ideological power. Parties such as AfD, Fidesz, and Lega portray the Green Deal as an instrument of coercion and centralization within the EU. These narratives construct the image of the climate transition as an ‘elitist whim’ detached from social realities.

Radicalization and Eco-terrorism

The climate crisis is progressing faster than most scientists anticipated. Its being real is further amplified by the dominant narrative, marked by expressions such as ‘biodiversity deficit’, ‘sixth mass extinction’, and ‘biological annihilation of life’. The climate debate has witnessed the evolution of concepts from practically neutral to apocalyptic. Terms like ‘climate emergency’ and ‘climate catastrophe’ now dominate, underscoring the gradual but existential nature of the threat. Institutions such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Alliance of World Scientists, and Nicholas Stern’s research team⁴ are upholding this alarmist tone (Ochwat, 2020).

According to studies on climate communication, escalating alarmist language can contribute to the polarization of public debate and lead to the radicalization of attitudes. This is especially true when the message is based on emotion rather than an explanation of the complexities of climate processes (Treen et al., 2020).

Climate-related emotions lose out to the demands of everyday life. The most important feature of climate change – its complexity – disappears in the background, while people want simple solutions and become indifferent when the message is either weak or overly emotional (Tryjanowski, 2020).

Narrative analyses demonstrate that when individuals are exposed to an abundance of emotionally charged messages, some respond with indifference, while others seek oversimplified, radical interpretations which contributes to the intensification of extreme attitudes toward climate policy (Zanartu et al., 2024).

Emotions can drive radical narratives. This has led to the re-emergence of the concept of eco-terrorism in public debate. “According to James F. Jarboe of the FBI, eco-terrorism is any action of a criminal nature involving the use or threatened use of violence against persons or property for ecological and political reasons” (Cheda, 2014, p. 58).

The call for a total shift in the civilizational paradigm, to allow nature to regenerate, was once presented as a necessary condition for moving from the age of economics to the age of ecology. Critics of ecological radicalism stressed that such a philosophy includes hostility toward modernity, cultural leftism, utopian messianism, and anti-capitalism. The literature of ecological extremists featured anti-democratic and authoritarian themes. Radical environmentalists view the ecological crisis as a universal cultural and personal crisis, a crisis of civilization itself. In their view, nature is where all elements (flora and fauna) possess equal intrinsic value.

⁴ *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* is a 700-page study that was prepared for the UK government and published on October 30, 2006, by economist Sir Nicholas Stern. It discusses the impact of climate change and global warming on the global economy.

In Poland, radical actions have taken various forms. The media highlighted the most spectacular cases of environmental blackmail, because that was what much of alleged eco-terrorism amounted to. In many cases, environmental activists were used by lobbyists to defeat competitors (Izak, 2022).

Globally, the number of eco-terrorist incidents has been systematically decreasing. Fewer aggressive pro-environmental actions result from several factors:

1. growing environmental awareness among societies and governments,
2. increased state activity in environmental protection,
3. the observable reality of climate change – global warming has become a fact (Izak, 2022).

This decline confirms the claim that ecological radicalization is not a unidirectional or permanent process, but depends on the political, social, and communicative context, including the way climate issues are presented in public debate (Herasimenka et al., 2024).

Today, politicians readily use the term ‘eco-terrorism’ to portray environmentalists as a ‘leftist’ political force that is against civilization. Investors acting without regard for environmental protection also deploy this label, and journalists in some media outlets repeat the accusation (Mączkowski, 2011).

However, empirical data show a clear disproportion between the scale of violence attributed to environmental movements and actual terrorist threats.

According to the website Animal Rights Extremism.info, approximately 2,500 acts described as ‘eco-terrorist’ were recorded worldwide between 2010 and 2019. The same period saw over 750 terrorist attacks with fatalities in Europe, and 79 people were killed in attacks motivated by right-wing ideology in the United States (Schuler, 2024).

Recent spectacular actions by environmental activists have primarily been symbolic and media-oriented. Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, and Letzte Generation interfered with museum spaces to draw public attention rather than cause real damage (Chabros, 2023). Interpreting them as ‘eco-terrorism’ is an example of how this concept is expanded for political and disinformation purposes.

Economic Narrative and Economic Interests

Climate disinformation is closely linked to economic interests which results in its structural and long-term nature.

“According to the report by the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), climate action is hindered and delayed by false and misleading information originating particularly from fossil fuel companies, right-wing politicians, and certain states” (Janowska, 2025).

Disinformation content on social media is often created and sponsored by industry actors who spend millions of dollars on publications and advertising (Bąkiewicz, 2024).

Studies clearly show that climate disinformation is not spontaneous but rather results from well-funded and coordinated networks. Lewandowsky (2021) highlights the role of conservative think tanks in producing pseudoscientific publications, many of which are not up to scientific review standards.

There is evidence of concerted efforts by interest groups to disseminate disinformation, especially when it comes to health issues that have the potential to motivate policies that would impose a regulatory burden on certain industries (e.g., tobacco manufacturers or the fossil-fuel industry). In 2006, a U.S. federal court ruled that major domestic cigarette manufacturers were guilty of conspiring to deny, distort, and minimize the hazards of smoking cigarettes. Industry groups formed alliances with conservative think tanks, using scientists (typically experts from unrelated domains) as spokespersons (Lewandowsky et al., 2012).

Social media have become a significant source of such pseudo-knowledge. Mass-produced and simplistic pop culture begins to shape the public imagination. Irrational messaging, often supported by politicians, is imposed on audiences (Kołodziejczak, 2022).

The European Union also highlights disinformation tied to economic interests, defining it as verifiably false or misleading information that is created and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm comprises threats to democratic processes as well as public goods such as EU citizens' health, the environment or security (Komisja Europejska, 2019).

The movement denying climate change and fueling skepticism regarding it is considered an example of the 'product defense industry' or the 'intentional creation of doubt and ignorance'. This refers to experts, think tanks, and research institutes whose business model is to maintain public belief in the harmlessness of selected products. They manufacture a sense of controversy around expert analyses that could harm certain industries or companies (Bińczyk, 2013).

A crucial, yet often overlooked, aspect of ecological radicalization and climate disinformation is physical violence against environmental activists. The most extreme forms occur in the Global South, particularly in Latin America. Under Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, rhetoric against environmentalists intensified, portraying them as enemies of Brazil's development. Disinformation framed Amazon forest fires as natural events and depicted the EU's Green Deal as a form of neo-colonialism. In this context, disinformation becomes a tool of delegitimization: activists are labeled as foreign agents, enemies of progress, or criminals obstructing development.

Reports from international organizations confirm that violence against environmental defenders is systemic and linked to conflicts over natural resources. According to Global Witness, approximately 200 environmental activists were killed in 2021, including as many as 54 persons killed in Mexico, primarily in disputes over mining and resource exploitation (Sienkiewicz, 2022).

Climate Disinformation in Hybrid Warfare

In the European Union, climate disinformation is increasingly becoming part of the logic of hybrid warfare, in which information is used as a tool for weakening the enemy without resorting to conventional military measures.

“For several years, climate disinformation in the EU has been on the rise, and its intensification coincided with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the EU’s subsequent decision to search for alternative energy suppliers” (Dzięgiel & Pawlik, 2025).

In NATO’s Security Impact Assessment on climate change, climate disinformation is identified as one of the challenges to NATO’s stability. It weakens NATO’s ability to respond rapidly to events induced by climate change and undermines its long-term operational planning and combat readiness (Dzięgiel & Pawlik, 2025).

The Russian Federation is exceptionally active in this area, using climate narratives to implement its geopolitical objectives.

“Russia has intensified its disinformation efforts concerning the climate crisis. The increase in activity has been observed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. It targets the entire European Union, with particular emphasis on Poland. Between May 2022 and May 2024, Russia was the primary generator of online communication in discussions on green energy across social media and news platforms. The goal of these activities is to divert attention and resources from efforts that could mitigate climate change” (Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości, 2025, p. 69).

These actions aim to weaken NATO’s military infrastructure, reduce operational effectiveness, and negatively influence such military elements as installations and strategic environment. Another key element is the exploitation of anti-Green Deal narratives and internal EU tensions as tools not only to undermine the Green Deal but the broader EU integration project. During farmers’ protests in Poland, slogans such as “No to the Green Deal” were accompanied by “No to the EU” and “No to Brussels’ diktat”.

Some instances of climate disinformation are spread by Russia and China, often targeting regions where they seek to expand their influence at the expense of Western states. Russian state media have portrayed emissions-reduction plans as a form of Western imperialism designed to hinder the development of the Global South (Hsu & Myers, 2023).

Poland, the United States, and the European Union

In individual EU member states climate disinformation is being adapted to local political and social conditions.

Populists in Poland have also altered their strategy by promoting delay narratives, with one of their main objectives being to undermine the EU’s decision to achieve climate neutrality. Due to the pro-European attitudes of Polish society, they cannot openly attack the European Union or advocate for Polesxit. Instead, they are adopting indirect tactics, targeting climate policies in particular. The effects of these efforts are visible and measurable. Studies have indicated that higher support for delay narratives in coal-mining regions is not driven by increased radicalization among right-wing voters. The difference lies in the growing acceptance of anti-climate populism among supporters of the Civic Platform (PO) party and, especially, the Left (Lewica). The result of intensive campaigns is not so much that climate deniers solidify their aversion towards climate policies, but that the position of supporters of climate policy softens. Climate and climate policies are

becoming tools wielded by populists and actors hostile to the EU, the tools for polarizing and mobilizing the electorate (Fundacja Pole Dialogu, 2023).

Opposition to climate movements is a significant identity marker of the Polish right. Right-wing climate discourse involves not only polemics with activists but also the outright denial of climate change as a scientific fact. For example, the language used to describe Greta Thunberg is not merely an isolated communication act but, first and foremost, an illustration of a broader political struggle against ideological opponents of the right (Radomski, 2021).

According to studies on populism and political communication, personalizing climate conflicts and making *ad hominem* attacks are effective tools for mobilizing the electorate while distracting attention from substantive debates about public policies (Stockemer & Bordeleau, 2024).

Empirical analyses confirm the scale of the phenomenon. Media monitoring revealed that about one-third of publications on climate and climate policy in Poland contained disinformation or propaganda narratives, particularly in outlets with a distinct ideological bent (Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości, 2025, p. 71).

Delay narratives in Poland primarily focus on the energy transition and defending fossil fuels, particularly coal. This further reinforces regional and social divisions. Meanwhile, reports by international organizations indicate that the involvement of Polish political parties in climate action is low compared to their EU counterparts (Ranke, 2020).

In contrast, polarization around climate change in the United States is long-term and systemic.

In the 1990s, Republican and Democratic voters showed similar levels of concern about climate change. Since around 2000, a distinct and growing divergence has emerged. By 2016, only 40% of Republicans expressed concern about climate change, compared to 84% of Democrats. Political polarization on climate issues is particularly pronounced in the United States. It reflects two main components: the global and widespread link between right-wing political views and 'climate skepticism', and concrete actions undertaken by segments of American political and economic elites (Lewandowsky, 2021).

"This association is particularly strong in Anglophone countries. (...) A meta-analysis confirmed the presence of the association across 56 nations around the world. (...) the strong association between right-wing political attitudes and climate skepticism represents one of the most robust – and large, up to 50% of variance accounted for – findings in the literature on people's acceptance of science" (Lewandowsky, 2021, p. 3).

Climate denial has become a common feature of many populist movements and far-right European parties. Populist rhetoric often overlaps with conspiracy discourse. Both offer the same interpretative framework based on a polarized worldview that constructs an external threat to the inner group. Conspiracy theories are therefore frequently present in science denial because they allow individuals to avoid confronting compelling scientific consensus by reframing it as a conspiracy among scientists with ulterior motives (Lewandowsky, 2021).

Elite cues are the main factor shaping attitudes toward climate change. In the 1990s, when both Democratic and Republican party leaders pursued joint solutions on climate issues, party affiliation had little influence on climate attitudes. In fact, some conservatives were then more likely than liberals to accept the reality of climate change. However, by 2010 the

issue had become deeply polarized. Data from 2001–2013 identified elite cues (e.g., voting patterns in Congress), amplified by the media, as the strongest determinant of public concern about climate change. Another study found that messages from Democratic elites – almost uniformly supportive of climate policies – steadily increased between 1990 and 2015, while the number of messages from Republican elites decreased. This has had long-term consequences, including increased social polarization (Lewandowsky, 2021).

“During the administration of President George W. Bush, political appointees demonstrably interfered with scientific assessments of climate change, and NASA’s inspector general found in 2008 that in previous years, the agency’s Office of Public Affairs managed the topic of climate change in a manner that reduced, marginalized, or mischaracterized climate change science made available to the general public” (Lewandowsky et al., p. 109).

Since the announcement of the European Green Deal in 2019, climate policy has become a major political fault line in the EU. Although the European Commission has consistently framed the green transition as an opportunity for sustainable development, many populist and nationalist parties – including AfD (Germany), Fidesz (Hungary), and Lega (Italy) – use it to construct anti-EU narratives. In Poland, anti-climate rhetoric serves as a mobilizing tool within identity politics. Climate policy is recast as part of a broader cultural conflict (climate vs. tradition, rural life, and national sovereignty).

An example of this ideological framing reads: “*Green Fraud* is a basic guide to exposing and combating the Marxist ideology disguised as environmental policy. The Green New Deal is simply the old red faction dressed in green. Don’t be fooled – it is nothing more than a New Red Deal. Marc Morano’s book *Green Fraud* is a collection of scientific and political facts about the Green New Deal and other misanthropic and selfish conspiracies of the global elite and their opportunistic or deceived followers” (Wydawnictwo Wektory, n.d.).

Unfounded claims of this type are reinforcing conspiracy theories, social divisions, and harassment. There is an “alarming mobilization to violence” against individuals working on climate issues. The campaign against meaningful emissions reduction is driven by an ecosystem with “‘weird informal allegiances and overlaps’ among countries, corporations and people – all with disparate agendas and motivations but united in their desire to discredit the climate change threat” (Hsu & Myers, 2023).

In this context, the issues of radicalization and violence arise again. Historical examples of narratives surrounding eco-terrorism in the United States demonstrate that the matters of security can be used to delegitimize environmental movements (Tomasiewicz, 2004). At present, similar mechanisms can be observed in Europe, where climate disinformation is becoming part of broader strategies of political destabilization.

CONCLUSION

1. Kołodziejczak argues that we are entering an era of neo-ignorance. The cause lies in rapid scientific and civilizational progress. The vastness of knowledge and the complexity of science and technology make them extremely difficult to assimilate and comprehend, even for educated individuals. Those without sufficient knowledge

resort to absorbing only headlines. Fake news provides simple explanations for extremely complex processes and phenomena. Uncritical assimilation of pseudoscientific information leads to creating personal interpretations that provide a false sense of understanding. Dangerous consequences arise when such neo-ignorant individuals occupy positions of power. This leads to ignorance combined with ideology, where science is replaced by pseudoscience for political purposes (Kołodziejczak, 2022).

2. Climate disinformation produces a number of systemic consequences that extend beyond public communication. It permanently distorts public opinion and the political agenda, influencing social attitudes and decision-making processes. In the long term, disinformation perpetuates a false balance between scientific knowledge and pseudoscientific messages thereby undermining the authority of science and diminishing acceptance of expert findings on climate change. This results in reduced ability of societies to rationally assess risks and support long-term public policies.
3. "The authors of the IPIE report conducted a systematic review, rigorously examining around 300 studies on climate disinformation. Their publication comprehensively assesses who produces it, how it is disseminated, what social impact it has, and how it can be countered. As stated in the summary: 'misleading information has undermined public trust in climate science. This crisis of informational integrity intensifies and deepens the climate crisis'" (Janowska, 2025).
4. "If a majority believes in something that is factually incorrect, the misinformation may form the basis for political and societal decisions that run counter to a society's best interest" (Lewandowsky et al., p. 107).
5. Effects also occur at the individual level. "We can already speak of climate depression in Poland – a chronic fear of destruction resulting from global warming. The flood of information and the fear of the unknown are accompanied by fatigue, which philosopher and sociologist Ewa Bińczyk calls 'ecological numbness'. Other terms that appear include ecological grief and climate trauma" (Lebda, 2020).
6. Counteracting disinformation is difficult. This difficulty results partly from cognitive variables in every individual that make disinformation 'sticky'.⁵ People more readily accept statements that align with their worldview or ideology, which plays a key role in the persistence of disinformation.
7. In order to effectively respond to climate disinformation not only does the amount of available information need to be increased but the way it is communicated needs to change as well. Public institutions' ability to quickly and clearly communicate knowledge about climate change and energy transition is crucial. Failure to address the information crisis results in both the public and political decision-makers making decisions based on incomplete or distorted data.

5 'Sticky' information refers to content that is highly memorable, easily spread, and difficult to erase or correct, even when it is later disproved. 'Stickiness' describes the ability of false information to become permanently embedded in people's beliefs and attitudes.

8. Social media significantly amplifies the reach and speed of climate disinformation by linking it to other ideological narratives and conspiracy theories. To curb this phenomenon an interdisciplinary approach needs to be taken that combines education, legal regulations, technological solutions, and social psychology expertise. However, the effectiveness of these measures is limited by the existing socioeconomic balance of power, which favors maintaining the status quo.
9. The persistence of climate disinformation is largely due to its ability to elicit emotional responses. The emotionality of a message, rather than its factual accuracy, increases the likelihood of its further dissemination. Understanding these mechanisms is fundamental to designing effective communication strategies and is in the public interest.
10. Disinformation has accompanied humanity since the beginning of time, but recently the scale and speed at which disinformation is distributed has changed significantly. This analysis confirms that populist parties use climate policy, European Green Deal in particular, as a tool for mobilizing the electorate and polarizing public opinion. Their narratives are based on oversimplifications and emotional appeals and serve the purpose of building political capital rather than conducting substantive debates.
11. Political consequences for the European Union and the project of integration are multi-dimensional:
 - erosion of legitimacy – climate policy is becoming a symbol of ‘Brussels’ coercion’,
 - rise of euroskepticism – the Green Deal is becoming a pretext for anti-EU narratives,
 - political polarization – climate is becoming a worldview battleground,
 - weakened EU agency – disinformation is undermining the EU’s ability to implement climate policies and respond effectively to global challenges.

In conclusion, political climate-related disinformation extends far beyond environmental discourse. It functions as a mechanism weakening the EU’s capacity to act as a global climate leader and as a tool systematically undermining European integration. In the long term, combating climate disinformation is not only an ecological imperative – it is a critical component of defending democracy and the future of the European project.

This analysis confirms the research hypothesis posited in the introduction whereby the climate narrative, which is simplified, polarized, and strongly ideological, has become a tool of political struggle and an element of identity mobilization for political actors. The study has demonstrated that climate disinformation is not random or marginal, but rather an instrument of political influence that is deliberately used to delegitimize the European Union’s climate policy and, indirectly, the project of European integration itself. An analysis of populist narratives, economic interests, psychological mechanisms, and the context of hybrid warfare empirically and analytically confirms the hypothesis that climate has been instrumentalized as an ideological fault line.

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CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT: A COMPARISON OF ASIAN AND EUROPEAN CASES

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Abstract

Smart city strategies are increasingly becoming key tools for modernizing administrative units and introducing innovative approaches into public policy. Their emergence and dynamic development are closely linked to the rapid advance of digitalization and energy transitions, both of which have the potential to significantly influence the quality of life of residents. At the core of this concept is the use of digital tools and data-driven solutions that enable cities to better understand developments within their territory, respond to emerging challenges, and manage local processes more effectively. Although modern technologies are often presented as the decisive factor of transformation, the practical implementation of smart cities is always shaped by the specific conditions of individual regions. Therefore, it is important to examine how smart solutions adapt to local political, social, and economic contexts. This article evaluates two approaches to building intelligent models – one in the Indonesian province of Yogyakarta and the other in the Trnava Region of Slovakia. The selected administrative units offer distinct perspectives on the implementation of smart initiatives, with each model grounded in unique territorial and institutional assumptions. The analysis highlights different ways of integrating local context into strategic planning and identifies types of contextualization practices that may enrich current knowledge on Smart City issues from the perspective of real-world application.

Keywords

Smart City, innovations, Trnava region, Yogyakarta province

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INTRODUCTION

The Smart City concept represents an increasingly prominent phenomenon in the modernization of public policies. It also reflects ongoing processes of digitalization and energy transition aimed at improving the quality of life of local communities. As a result, the concept has become a central paradigm of urban innovation, planning, and governance. Its core idea lies in the use of information and communication technologies – in the form of hardware, software, data, and connectivity – as the backbone of cities, enhancing their ability to monitor, anticipate, and address urban challenges. Through ICT-based solutions, cities strive to optimize resource management, improve service delivery, strengthen citizen engagement, and support sustainable development. In many major smart city initiatives, technology is seen as the primary driver of transformation. For instance, the deployment of Internet of Things devices, big data analytics, and cloud infrastructures is often presented as the foundation of urban resilience, mobility, energy efficiency, and governance (Bibri & Krogstie, 2020).

Although the Smart City concept has generally defined criteria, its concrete application within specific administrative units is always shaped by distinctive political, social, and economic factors. From this perspective, it is useful to examine Smart City implementation under differing conditions across Europe and Asia. Based on this, we selected two unique models from Slovakia and Indonesia. The primary objective of this article is to assess the specific approaches to Smart City development in the Indonesian province of Yogyakarta and in the Trnava Region of Slovakia. Both applied Smart City models reflect unique territorial, administrative, political, and economic characteristics. By comparing the implementation of Smart City initiatives in Yogyakarta Province and the Trnava Region, we can extract a typology of local contextualization strategies employed in both settings. This typology can enrich the literature beyond general calls for “context sensitivity” by demonstrating how local contexts are mobilized differently depending on institutional traditions, resource availability, and governance norms.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design aimed at examining how Smart City strategies are locally contextualized under distinct institutional, cultural, and socio-economic conditions. The methodological approach is exploratory and theory-informed, focusing on understanding mechanisms of contextualization rather than measuring performance or outcomes. The selection of the Trnava Self-Governing Region (Slovakia) and the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Indonesia) followed a purposive case selection strategy. The cases represent a *most-different systems design*, as they differ substantially in geographical location, cultural traditions, governance arrangements, and levels of economic development. At the same time, they remain functionally comparable. Both cases operate at the regional level of public administration, belong among the most socioeconomically developed regions within their respective national contexts, and have adopted formal, strategically anchored

Smart City (or Smart Province) frameworks. This combination of maximum contextual diversity and functional comparability makes the two regions analytically suitable for examining how local contexts shape distinct smart development models.

The primary research method employed in this study is systematic document analysis. The analyzed materials include official Smart City and Smart Province strategies, regional development plans, conceptual and methodological documents, and related policy frameworks at both regional and national levels. These documents represent authoritative sources guiding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of smart initiatives in both regions. To strengthen contextualization, the document analysis was complemented by secondary academic literature on Smart City theory and governance, as well as selected socioeconomic indicators used to characterize the broader development context of the two regions. An important aspect of the data collection process is the direct expert involvement of the authors in the preparation of the analyzed strategic documents. In the Slovak case, Dalibor Mikuš and Richard Brix co-authored the SMART Strategy for the Development of the Trnava Self-Governing Region. In the Indonesian case, Lukito Edi Nugroho co-authored the Smart City Readiness framework that forms the methodological basis for smart development in Indonesia. This involvement provided in-depth contextual knowledge and access to internal strategic rationales. At the same time, the potential risk of normative bias was mitigated through a structured comparative framework and systematic cross-case analysis.

The comparative analysis follows a qualitative, dimension-based comparison. Rather than assessing which model is more successful, the comparison focuses on how different local contexts are translated into distinct Smart City development logics. The cases were compared across several analytical dimensions, including the role of technology, the integration of local values and cultural narratives, governance and coordination mechanisms, institutional arrangements, and the translation of strategic visions into implementation frameworks. This approach allows for the identification of patterns of contextualization and for explaining how specific regional characteristics give rise to distinct smart development models.

The study relies primarily on document analysis, which represents a key methodological limitation. The absence of interviews, surveys, or direct observations restricts the ability to assess how smart strategies are perceived and experienced by local stakeholders and residents. This limitation is partly justified by the exploratory nature of the study and the scope of the article. Future research could extend the findings by incorporating qualitative interviews, participatory observations, or quantitative indicators to examine the societal impacts of different contextualized Smart City models.

Theoretical Reflection on the Issue of Smart Cities

The idea of the Smart City has deep historical roots that can be traced back to early reflections on the concept of an ideal urban space. Although the term Smart City emerged only in the modern era of digitalization, its philosophical and conceptual foundations

reach back to the 19th century, when the first visions of a harmonious, functional, and ecologically balanced city began to appear. Even at that time, architects and urban planners sought to respond to the negative consequences of industrialization and searched for new models of urban life that would connect technological progress with the quality of life of inhabitants.

One of the first researchers who sought to connect social, natural, and technological aspects within urbanism was Geddes (2022), who in his work *Cities in Evolution* promoted the idea of the city as a living organism. Geddes's approach to urban planning, which emphasizes education, participation and ecological relationships, is considered a precursor to concepts found today within smart cities (Talen, 2019; Batty, 2013). In the second half of the 20th century, the vision of a technologically advanced city as a tool for social development came to the forefront. For example, Jacobs, in her work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), rejected modernist approaches to urbanism and highlighted the importance of diversity, participation, and the spontaneous development of communities. In general, these are elements that resonate today in models such as "Smart Governance" and "Smart People" (Jacobs, 1961; Townsend, 2013).

In the 1960s, Weber (1964) introduced the concept of the "non-place urban realm," referring to the changing relationship between modern technologies, physical space, and social ties. This approach foreshadowed the emergence of Digital Cities and later Smart Cities, where the physical and virtual dimensions form a unified system (Giffinger et al., 2007; Komninos, 2016). From the 1980s onward, urbanism increasingly drew on the principles of sustainability and the integration of information technologies. Hall (1988) and Castells (1996) examined how globalization, communication networks, and digital economies transform the urban environment. In his work *The Rise of the Network Society*, Castells emphasizes that cities are becoming nodes within a global network of information and data flows, which is understood as one of the key pillars of the entire model (Castells, 1996; Hall, 1988).

If we look at the comprehensive concept of the Smart City in its contemporary understanding, we can identify its grounding in the 1990s, when the need for sustainable development and responsible resource use came to the forefront of urban planning. This shift was a response to growing environmental problems, urbanization pressures, and the globalization of urban structures. A significant milestone was the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which defined the commitments of states regarding the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and stimulated the emergence of new approaches to urban planning with an emphasis on sustainability and ecological technologies (Joss, 2018; Ahvenniemi et al., 2017).

During this period, the first concepts of digitally interconnected cities began to emerge, linking urbanism with information and communication technologies (ICT). Graham and Marvin (2001), in their work *Splintering Urbanism*, pointed out that technological infrastructure would begin to shape new layers of urban space, with digital connectivity becoming just as important as the physical transport network. Their predictions were fulfilled at the beginning of the 21st century, when the internet and mobile technologies fundamentally transformed how cities function (Komninos, 2016; Townsend, 2013).

In this context, the development of the internet is objectively considered a decisive milestone in the emergence of smart cities. On a practical level, it enabled the collection, processing, and analysis of large volumes of data in real time. This technological shift created the foundation for the development of concepts such as Digital Urban Governance (Hollands, 2015) or Big Data Urbanism (Kitchin, 2016), which have become pillars of the modern Smart City. From this perspective, Caragliu et al. (2011) emphasize that a truly smart city is not only technologically advanced but, above all, continuously “learning” in the sense of using information to improve quality of life, governance, and the economy.

Another rise in interest in Smart Cities was associated with developments following the global financial crisis of 2008, when cities began to focus on innovative solutions as a means of economic recovery. The crisis itself revealed weaknesses in existing urban management, and in an effort to support economic growth and attract new investment, cities began searching for new Smart City tools. A key role was played by IBM, which introduced the Smarter Planet initiative as a vision for a more efficient functioning of society through the interconnectedness of people, data, and technologies (Nam & Pardo, 2011; Paroutis et al., 2014). This approach popularized the very term Smart City and became a foundation for the strategic programs of many metropolitan areas.

Following the technological initiatives of the private sector, public administration institutions also began to engage in the process. Within its Europe 2020 strategy, the European Commission set the objective of promoting smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, thereby creating a framework for the development of “smart cities” as key elements of economic and environmental policy (Bibri & Krogstie, 2020; Dameri, 2017; Bihl, 2020; Nastjuk et al., 2022; Voorwinden, 2022). This strategy was followed by initiatives such as the European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities (EIP-SCC), which supported knowledge exchange and the creation of pilot projects across Europe (Cocchia, 2014).

At the same time, alternative approaches to the concept of the smart city also began to take shape. Batty (2013) introduced the vision of the “city as a complex system”, in which intelligence results from the interconnectedness of data, infrastructure, and resident behavior. Harrison and Donnelly (2011) defined the Smart City as an adaptive ecosystem that uses information flows to continuously improve its functions. This systems-oriented perspective became the foundation for contemporary approaches to data-driven urban management (data-driven governance). After 2010, the Smart City became a global trend that took on various forms depending on regional and cultural contexts. Kitchin (2016) and Shelton et al. (2015) pointed out a problematic element: the term “smart” is often used as a marketing tool without emphasis on social inclusion or the ethical aspects of data use. For this reason, efforts emerged to balance technological and humanistic perspectives through concepts such as Smart Sustainable Cities (Ahvenniemi et al., 2017; Bibri & Krogstie, 2020) or Human-Centered Smart Cities (Yigitcanlar et al., 2021).

As for the definition of Smart City, it still remains a subject of ongoing debate among experts. Despite the frequent use of the term in academic, political, and technological spheres, there is still no single, universally accepted definition. This is primarily due to

the multidimensional nature of the concept, which encompasses technological, social, environmental, economic, and to a large extent also political dimensions. At the same time, it must be noted that its meaning changes depending on the context, region, or the objectives of individual stakeholders (Albino et al., 2015; Yigitcanlar et al., 2021; Ibănescu et al., 2022).

According to Caragliu et al. (2011), a smart city is one that invests in human and social capital, modern communication infrastructure, and sustainable energy management in order to support economic growth and the quality of life of its inhabitants. This approach extends the understanding of the Smart City beyond technology – emphasizing education, citizen participation, and an innovation ecosystem as fundamental pillars of urban development. In contrast, Batty (2013) view the smart city as a complex “system of systems,” in which all urban processes – from transport and energy to the economy and governance – are interconnected through data. According to them, a city’s intelligence does not lie in the technology itself, but in the way data are interpreted and used for decision-making.

Harrison and Donnelly (2011) define the Smart City as an environment that “integrates physical, digital, and human systems to create sustainable, prosperous, and friendly urban spaces”. Their definition emphasizes the interconnectedness between physical infrastructure and the virtual realm, which corresponds to today’s trend of data-driven governance, that is, governance based on data.

In recent years, critical and alternative perspectives on the definition of smart cities have come to the forefront. Hollands (2015) emphasizes that a Smart City should not be reduced to technological efficiency and profitability, but should also reflect social justice, the ethics of data use, and equal access to digital services. Similarly, Shelton et al. (2015) argue that Smart City definitions must take into account the political and economic power of technology corporations, which often influence how a city’s “intelligence” is interpreted. Current approaches also expand the Smart City concept to include aspects of sustainability and climate resilience. Ahvenniemi et al. (2017) propose linking smart cities with the goals of sustainable development (SDGs), claiming that a “truly smart city” is one that optimizes its resources not only for efficiency but also for long-term environmental balance. Likewise, Bibri and Krogstie (2020) introduce the concept of the Smart Sustainable City, emphasizing that technologies should serve merely as tools for achieving ecological, social, and ethical objectives. The essence of the concept is expressed by Yigitcanlar et al. (2021), who define the Smart City as an adaptive and evolutionary system that changes alongside technological progress, cultural shifts, and political decisions. They argue that the definition of a smart city can never be static, because cities themselves are dynamic organisms that continually adapt to new challenges.

An analysis of the selected regional units – the Trnava Self-Governing Region in Slovakia and the Province of Yogyakarta in Indonesia – indicates the presence of several shared socioeconomic characteristics that guided the selection of these. Both regions demonstrate relatively strong labor markets, robust economic performance, and well-developed human capital, which together provide conducive environments for the adoption of smart innovations.

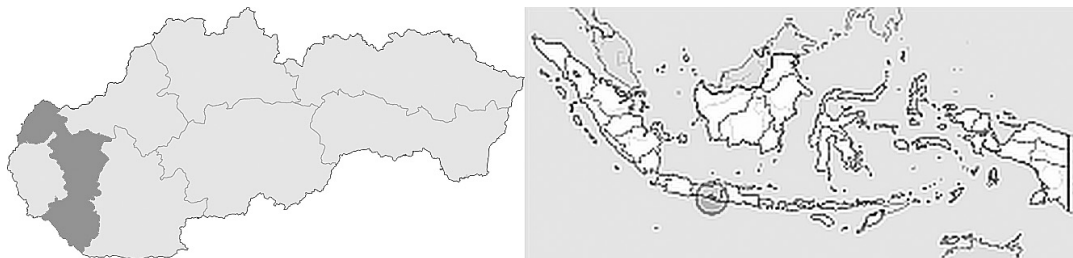
Table 1 Socioeconomic Profile of the Trnava Self-Governing Region and the Special Region of Yogyakarta

Indicator	Trnava Self-Governing Region	Special Region of Yogyakarta
Unemployment rate	2.7 %	3.4 %
GDP per capita	21,403 €	3,315 €
Difference from national average	+ 9.9 %	+ 27 %
Average Salary	1,814 €	1,020 €
Human Development Index (HDI)	0.880	0.8248

Source: Own processing based on Trnavský samosprávny kraj (2023), Government of Yogyakarta (2023).

Table 1 highlights that both the Trnava Self-Governing Region and the Special Region of Yogyakarta represent economically and socially advanced territories within their respective national contexts. Despite operating in different macroeconomic and cultural environments, both regions exhibit favorable labor market conditions, above-average economic performance, and high levels of human development. These characteristics indicate a strong capacity to absorb innovation, implement data-driven governance, and support long-term strategic planning. At the same time, the regions function as important educational and knowledge centers, which strengthens their institutional readiness for the adoption of smart solutions. The combination of economic stability, human capital, and governance capacity creates a supportive environment for experimenting with and implementing Smart City strategies tailored to local conditions. Consequently, the comparison of these two regions enables a meaningful analysis of how smart development can be contextualized across different regional and institutional settings.

Figure 1 Map of the Trnava Self-governing region and Special Region of Yogyakarta



Source: Own processing based on Trnavský samosprávny kraj (2023), Government of Yogyakarta (2023).

Evaluation of the Smart City strategy for the Yogyakarta province

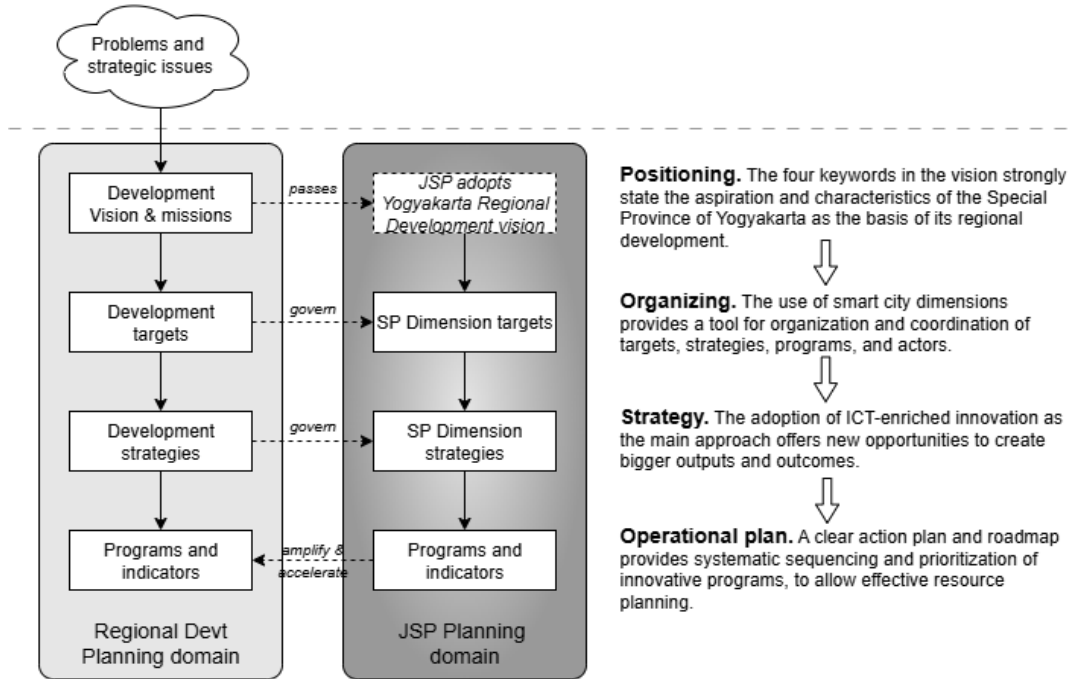
The history of incorporating technology in government processes in Yogyakarta has dated back to 2006 where the Governor of the Special Province of Yogyakarta announced the Governor Decree No. 42/2006 that initiated the implementation of electronic governance in the scope of the Special Province of Yogyakarta (Governor Decree No. 42/2006: Blueprint Jogja Cyber Province, 2006). The initiative, dubbed as Jogja Cyber Province (JCP), marked an era where ICT was considered as a strategic tool for delivering public services. Jogja Cyber Province initiative stepped into the next phase in 2017 when the Government of the Special Province of Yogyakarta launched a fully revamped version of the JCP blueprint. The new master plan expanded the scope of JCP: technology no longer became the focus, but a strategic driver and enabler for a more holistic development strategy (Government of Yogyakarta, 2017). The new program, nicknamed Jogja Smart Province (JSP), also acknowledged innovation as the main component in every action plan.

The second phase of JSP started in 2023 when the Government of the Special Province of Yogyakarta launched the updated version of the master plan document. The document was written in collaboration with the Ministry of Communication and Information, as part of the National Smart City/Province Movement. Since 2017, the movement has assisted more than 200 cities and districts in Indonesia to develop a master plan for smart city development, including all cities and districts in the Special Province of Yogyakarta.

A unique case of JSP is its underlying vision. As articulated in the master plan, JSP vision is derived from the regional development vision. It reflects a strong local contextualization strategy by grounding technological development within the region's cultural, social, and historical values (Government of Yogyakarta, 2023). It emphasizes the achievement of *Pancamulia*, a holistic long-term aspiration that integrates social justice, economic inclusivity, cultural harmony, democratic governance, and dignified public service. The notion of 'social harmony' underscores the centrality of community as active agents in development, promoting collaborative and participatory governance. The commitment to use innovative technologies highlights the strategic use of digital technologies not as an end in themselves, but as tools to accelerate institutional reform and spatial transformation. Lastly, the 'culture and character' principle affirms the importance of preserving Yogyakarta's cultural identity and philosophical values as guiding norms in the formulation and implementation of smart initiatives. Together, these elements frame a vision that balances technological advancement with cultural integrity and social cohesion.

Bringing local contextualization of smart city development into realities is difficult. Not only local contextualization itself is an abstract concept (i.e., what does local context really mean? How is it related to smart city?), its scope can be very broad and divergent, making its implementation a daunting task. JSP approaches this problem using a framework that decomposes the difficult task into simpler ones with clearer objectives. The framework consists of a layered structure that transforms abstract ideals into concrete, implementable actions. Figure 1 illustrates the framework for contextualizing smart city development in JSP.

Figure 2 The framework for local contextualization of smart province development in JSP



Source: Own processing based on Jiang et al. (2023)

As a development strategy, JSP fits smoothly with the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan which becomes the sole official reference for all government bodies/offices in planning their programs and budget. Local contextualization starts from the vision level, since vision is the best place to define the context to be brought to smart province development. At the vision level, JSP adopts the overarching vision for Yogyakarta regional development in the development plan document. As stated previously, the vision puts technology as a development engine on top of local values and realities rooted from the spatial and social existence of Yogyakarta. Consequently, these also become the basic pillars of the design, plan, and implementation of JSP.

Since local contexts are typically unstructured, diverse, and complex, bringing them into smart city development requires effective structuring, allowing the development process to be more convergent. JSP presents an organization structure based on smart city dimensions widely used in many smart city implementation (Giffinger et al., 2007). This organization is used to cluster and coordinate operational strategies, action plans, and roadmap of innovative programs that become the heart of JSP and form solution elements for Yogyakarta's major problems. Choosing smart city dimension as an organizing tool is necessary since JSP will have to be in collaboration with smart city initiatives run by Yogyakarta City, Bantul, Kulon Progo, Sleman, and Gunung Kidul, since many of Yogyakarta Province's problems are also shared with these cities and districts.

The next layer, strategy, deals with methods and approaches in solving the problems. As in other smart city initiatives, JSP also relies on ICT as the spearhead element in designing solutions. However, JSP adopts “innovation before ICT” principle: ICT is considered as enablers and accelerators for innovative programs that are specifically designed to solve existing problems. Problem solving should start with innovative solution ideas, which are then realized or accelerated using ICT. The emphasis of placing innovation and creativity over technology aims at maximizing the opportunity to seek for the most optimum solution. Placing solution optimization at the idea level would give more holistic, technology-unbounded perspective.

Finally, action plans and roadmap organize JSP’s innovative programs into manageable execution sequences. This allows careful planning and prioritization of resource allocation for program implementation.

Due to its enormous scale and complexity, the implementation of JSP needs to be carried out in several stages. However, at the same time both the Government and Yogyakarta people need to be convinced about the feasibility of the JSP concept. A quick win program is needed, and the Government choose to run a small-scale implementation called the “*Cosmological Axis Smart Area*”.

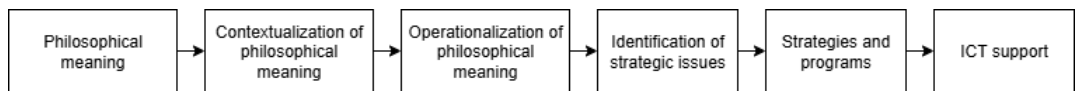
The *Cosmological Axis* of Yogyakarta represents a unique spatial and philosophical conception of urban design rooted in Javanese cosmology. This linear, imaginary axis extends from Mount Merapi in the north, through *Tugu Pal Putih*, *Kraton Yogyakarta*, and *Pangung Krapyak*, to the Indian Ocean at Parangtritis in the south. Each component of this alignment holds both spatial and symbolic significance: Mount Merapi symbolizes the realm of the gods (spiritual power), the *Kraton* signifies the human world and center of earthly governance, while the Indian Ocean represents the domain of nature and the mystical Queen of the South Sea. Collectively, these elements form a sacred axis that embodies the Javanese worldview of cosmic harmony between the divine, human, and natural realms. Philosophically, the axis reflects the concept of *hamemayu hayuning bawana*, the ethical imperative to nurture and maintain the harmony of the universe through balanced governance and moral leadership. Thus, the axis is not merely a spatial arrangement but a manifestation of Javanese metaphysical and cultural values, deeply embedded in Yogyakarta’s identity and daily life.

Following the establishment of JSP phase 1 in 2017, the *Cosmological Axis* is promoted as a pilot project for JSP implementation. The reason is simple: it covers an area of 268 hectares, quite manageable for a small-scale smart province implementation, but the most important reason is that the *Cosmological Axis* embodies a strong cultural value, a perfect candidate for local contextualization of smart province development.

The biggest challenge of the *Cosmological Axis Smart Area (CASA)* project is to connect two widely separated domains: technology and philosophy. Only after this issue is resolved can ICT support be built on top of it, to address existing problems. This framework, illustrated in Figure 2, is designed as a cascade, beginning from high-level normative guidance, down to operational strategies and implementable action plans (Governor Decree No. 42/2006: *Blueprint Jogja Cyber Province, 2006*). The flow goes from normative to strategic and to operational layer, ensuring that technological innovation does not stand apart from, but is harmonized with, Yogyakarta’s sociocultural

and spatial identity. This approach enables the Smart Province initiative to preserve local wisdom while simultaneously adopting modern, ICT-driven innovations for sustainable development. It can also be seen that the CASA framework inherits the structure of the JSP framework, with the positioning and organizing elements are represented by the first three steps of the CASA framework.

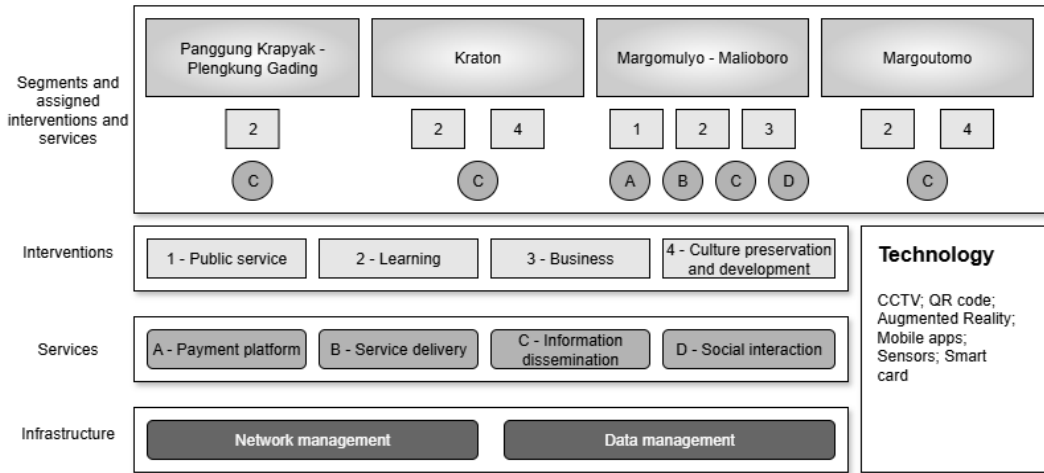
Figure 3 The framework for the Cosmological Axis Smart Area project



Source: Own processing

The CASA framework is realized by an implementation model that consists of 4 layers. The first layer defines philosophical meanings embodied by 4 road segments located in the axis. The segments become the unit of development where strategies, programs, and ICT support are designed and implemented. The second layer describes the form of intervention domain required to operationally realize a segment's philosophical meaning. The intervention domain can be considered as the "work area" where technological solutions will be implemented. The third layer describes services that technological solutions will be implemented. These services are generic, and their concrete forms are tailored to the conditions on the ground. For example, a service for information dissemination could take form of a website, push applications, or digital displays. Finally, the bottom layer is the ICT infrastructure layer which implements the various technological solutions to be built. The CASA implementation model is shown in Figure 3. It should be noted that the model can be viewed as a generic platform for developing a wide range of ICT support for philosophical meanings. This model is also flexible to changing needs due to its modular nature and the ability to mix and match building blocks.

Figure 4 The implementation model of the Cosmological Axis Smart Area



Source: Own processing

Evaluation of the Smart city strategy for the Trnava region

The Trnava Region is one of Slovakia's eight regions and represents one of the country's important economic, cultural, and historical centers. Due to its unique geographical location bordering Hungary, Austria, and the Czech Republic, it is a natural hub for development. SMART solutions have been adopted gradually in the region over the past decade, but they lacked a conceptual long-term solution. A prerequisite for such an approach is the adoption of conceptual material, which was successfully implemented in 2023 when the self-governing region adopted a document entitled SMART Strategy for the Development of the Trnava Self-Governing Region.

The SMART Strategy for the Trnava Self-Governing Region represents a comprehensive framework for the modernization of public policies that responds to current megatrends in digitization, climate change, energy transformation, and the need to improve quality of life. The Trnava Region has a strong economic base, a favorable geographical location, and developed infrastructure, but at the same time faces uneven development of individual districts, varying levels of digitization of local governments, and the absence of a unified data and innovation ecosystem (Finka et al., 2014).

It is therefore necessary to systematically develop all key areas of the SMART agenda, with an emphasis on coordination between the region, cities, and municipalities. The Trnava Region should strengthen partnerships and networking throughout the region. This means building a professional governance model that will enable the interconnection of local governments, companies, universities, and professional institutions. The region needs to create an innovation cluster similar to those operating abroad and support processes of

data sharing, joint projects, and coordinated decision-making. A unified methodology for SMART projects and a support platform for municipalities will create the basis for a harmonized approach across the region. Another important area is data management and the development of digital services. The Trnava region needs to build a central data ecosystem that will enable the effective collection, analysis, and use of data across public policies. The digitization of public administration services, increasing cybersecurity, and training employees in digital skills are key prerequisites for increasing the efficiency and transparency of the functioning of the region and municipalities. In the area of healthcare, the region is facing a growing number of senior citizens, unevenly distributed capacities, and a lack of modern infrastructure. SMART solutions such as the Internet of Medical Things (IoMT), telemedicine, intelligent hospital process management, and data planning for provider networks can significantly contribute to increasing the availability and quality of healthcare services (Adamovský et al., 2019).

The region should support the digitization of workplaces, the interconnection of information systems, and the creation of integrated health services. Similarly, in the social sphere, it is necessary to respond to the aging population and growing demands for care. Modern technologies can improve client monitoring, increase the safety of seniors, and support the development of field and community services that make life easier for residents. Intelligent capacity planning based on demographic trends will enable effective investment in social infrastructure. Education is a strategic pillar of the region's development. The Trnava Region should modernize vocational education, strengthen links between schools and the labor market and universities, and support the development of STEM skills. It is also important to expand the use of digital tools in teaching and modernize school facilities to reflect the demands of the changing labor market. Integrated transport is another key element of SMART development. The region should continue to digitize transport services, introduce intelligent management systems, smart stops, traffic monitoring, and develop cycling. Strengthening IDS, multimodal transfers, and low-emission solutions will improve the mobility of residents and contribute to reducing the environmental burden (Trnavský samosprávny kraj, 2023).

The environment also plays an important role. The region can use smart sensors for air monitoring, intelligent waste management systems, support renewable energy sources, energy communities, and intelligent building management. Data-driven approaches will strengthen the region's ability to adapt to climate change and increase energy efficiency. In the field of culture, the aim is to digitize cultural services and make them accessible to the public through modern platforms. The region should support the digitization of archives, museums, and galleries and introduce interactive tools for visitors, thereby increasing the attractiveness of cultural heritage. Regional development must focus on strengthening the innovative potential of small and medium-sized enterprises, improving the absorption of funds, and supporting exports and economic diplomacy. The creation of a strong innovation ecosystem will enable the region to remain competitive and develop high value-added industries. Tourism has significant potential in the region, mainly thanks to Piešťany, the Danube area, the Little Carpathians, and other tourist attractions. SMART solutions can support intelligent destination management, visitor monitoring, digital marketing tools, and interactive tourist applications. Modern, data-driven tourism will

increase visitor numbers and strengthen the economic contribution of the sector. Spatial planning is an important tool for coordinated regional development. The digitization of land-use plans, modern GIS platforms, the use of BIM, and interconnected data models will enable more accurate planning of infrastructure, energy, and transport development. Strengthening inter-municipal cooperation is essential, especially in rapidly growing parts of the region. The overall objective of the SMART strategy is to strengthen the region's resilience, increase its competitiveness, and create a harmonized framework for cooperation between the region and local governments. The introduction of SMART principles will enable effective management of public policies, support innovation, and create an environment that improves the quality of life for all residents of the Trnava Self-Governing Region (Trnavský samosprávny kraj, 2023).

The center of the region is the city of Trnava, which, in addition to the adopted strategy for the region as a whole, is also undertaking activities for its own development. The city of Trnava hosts a significant concentration of business entities, primarily in the engineering and automotive industries. A considerable share of the local economic base is also formed by research and academic institutions. The city closely cooperates with non-governmental and civic organizations to connect people through various activities. However, it has not yet fully utilized the potential of involving these actors in its developmental initiatives (Majerčák, 2014).

As a member of Energy Cities, Trnava has had its own energy manager since July 2017. The energy manager is responsible for managing the city's energy management system, monitoring energy consumption in municipal buildings, and identifying effective measures to reduce it. The main reason for introducing this position was that, in the past, each municipal building managed its own energy affairs independently, which proved unsustainable in the long term in terms of energy efficiency, organization, and finances. The city therefore aims to establish a unified system for all municipal buildings, which is expected to generate annual savings of approximately 50,000 euros. One of the main challenges in this field is the development of a methodological guide for obtaining financial resources to support green construction projects. Such projects contribute to mitigating urban heat islands during the summer months and improving air quality through natural filtration. The energy manager also represents the city of Trnava in the Energy Cities association, whose main objective is to promote sustainable energy use. Trnava became the first Slovak city to join this network. The headquarters of Energy Cities are located in Besançon, France, and Brussels, Belgium. Mayor Peter Bročka personally visited Brussels, where he met with the coordinator of the Smart Cities initiative to discuss advisory and financial support for implementing this concept in Trnava (Lacinák & Ristvej, 2018).

The city recognizes that within the Energy Cities and Covenant of Mayors communities, there are numerous energy-advanced cities. Therefore, Trnava believes that for any new project it initiates, it will likely find partners with relevant experience who can provide assistance – either in financial or implementation aspects. The Concept for the Development of Static Transport represents one of the steps on Trnava's path toward becoming a Smart City. Its main goal is to sustainably regulate the development of static transport while considering all functional components of the urban area. The city intends to record parking capacities through a geographic information system and

apply modern digital tools for operational management. The implementation of this concept should promote pedestrian and non-motorized transport, particularly in the city center, prioritize residential parking in housing estates, and optimize parking fees. This would create new financial resources for the development of both static and public transport. Since the arrival of the new mayor, Trnava has become increasingly focused on sustainable urban mobility, energy management, and environmental protection. Within environmental initiatives, the city has installed semi-underground waste containers in selected areas. A key element of public participation and environmental education is the annual Eko Fest, a benefit festival established in 2008 and unique in Slovakia. The proceeds from the festival are used to build green infrastructure in the city, involving broad public participation each year (Mestský úrad Trnava, 2018).

Another step toward smart solutions has been the replacement of city buses with eco-buses powered by compressed natural gas. These vehicles produce 95% fewer harmful emissions compared to the previous fleet, thereby reducing negative environmental impacts and improving air quality. The city also strives to ensure the interconnection of municipal, suburban, and railway transport so that all lines are well coordinated. Due to the growing congestion of traffic routes, Trnava has also strengthened cycling transport in recent years. In the field of energy, the city is gradually replacing outdated public lighting – especially in the city center – with LED lamps, which offer higher energy and lighting efficiency as well as lower operating costs. Urban development in Trnava focuses primarily on the sustainability of urban mobility, social capital, and human resources. In the area of social capital, a potential lies in establishing a public space in the city center dedicated to the development of social innovations and technologies that enhance communication between the municipality and residents. Another objective is to support public education and increase civic participation in creating and implementing Smart City strategies. In terms of transport infrastructure, potential development includes connecting the network of cycling routes and installing monitoring devices in public bicycle parking areas. Reducing the number of cars on the roads could be achieved by extending cycling routes between residential and industrial zones and promoting pedestrian mobility.

An analysis of educational facilities in Trnava revealed a large number of kindergartens and elementary schools, where encouraging walking to and from school could have a positive impact on traffic conditions, air quality, and overall quality of life. The Smart City Trnava concept targets the general public with the aim of involving citizens in both the creation and implementation of Smart City strategies and initiatives. It emphasizes the development of cycling and pedestrian transport as well as the enhancement of social capital. In the communication between the municipality and citizens, the concept envisages the use of smart technologies to improve the quality of urban life. The concept also includes the creation of a multifunctional public space for social integration, education, social innovation, and both active and passive leisure. At the same time, it seeks to preserve existing infrastructure while expanding facilities dedicated to public education and community integration (Trnavský samosprávny kraj, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The comparison of smart city development in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and the Trnava Self-Governing Region demonstrates that the effectiveness and character of Smart City strategies depend less on the level of technological sophistication and more on the degree to which smart initiatives are embedded within local institutional, cultural, spatial, and socio-economic contexts. This finding aligns with critical strands of Smart City literature that challenge technologically deterministic interpretations of urban intelligence and emphasize governance, human-centered approaches, and contextual sensitivity. The analysis shows that local context does not merely influence the implementation phase of smart initiatives, but fundamentally shapes the underlying logic of Smart City models. In the case of Yogyakarta, smart development is deeply rooted in cultural continuity, philosophical traditions, and participatory governance norms. The Jogja Smart Province framework demonstrates how abstract cultural values, such as social harmony and cosmological balance, can be systematically translated into strategic priorities, governance structures, and ICT-supported solutions. This value-driven and culturally embedded model supports existing arguments that smart cities can function as instruments for preserving local identity while facilitating modernization and institutional transformation.

In contrast, the Trnava Region represents a predominantly system-oriented Smart City model characteristic of the European governance context. Here, smart development is shaped by the need for institutional coordination across fragmented territorial structures, compliance with European policy frameworks, and pressures to enhance efficiency, competitiveness, and service quality. The emphasis on data ecosystems, inter-municipal cooperation, and sectoral modernization reflects a governance- and performance-driven logic in which smart technologies serve as tools for regional integration and policy coordination rather than as carriers of cultural narratives.

The existence of these distinct models is not accidental. Rather, it emerges from deeply embedded regional characteristics. Strong cultural capital, historical continuity, and societal cohesion in Yogyakarta enable a normatively grounded and participatory smart model. Conversely, the administrative complexity, multi-level governance environment, and policy-driven nature of regional development in Trnava foster a system-based and data-driven approach. These findings contribute to the Smart City literature by moving beyond general calls for context sensitivity and by empirically demonstrating how specific contextual factors translate into concrete Smart City development logics.

Overall, the article contributes to current debates on Smart City governance by illustrating that smartness is not a universal or transferable blueprint, but a contextual construct shaped by local values, institutions, and development trajectories. Recognizing these differences is essential for both policymakers and researchers seeking to design, evaluate, or transfer Smart City strategies across diverse regional settings.

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SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AT A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Michaela Mláka Kakašová¹

Abstract

This study aimed at analysing the perceived importance and satisfaction with the particular domains of life among students and teachers at a secondary vocational school and comparing their respective views on the quality of life in the school setting. The research is based on a multidimensional concept of quality of life, which includes the domains of health, basic needs, close relationships, leisure time, and abstract values. The SQUALA subjective quality of life questionnaire (Dragomirecká et al., 2006) was used to collect data, which allows for the evaluation of not just satisfaction with, but also the importance of particular domains of life. The research sample consisted of 77 students and 39 teachers. The data were processed using descriptive and non-parametric statistical analysis.

The results demonstrated that students attribute the highest importance to health and basic needs, with which they also report the highest level of satisfaction. Teachers, on the other hand, rated abstract values, close relationships, and leisure time as more important, but their satisfaction in these domains was lower, especially in the domain of leisure time. A comparison of the two groups suggests that health, interpersonal relationships, and a balance between work and personal responsibilities are key determinants of the quality of life in the school setting.

The findings confirm the usefulness of the SQUALA questionnaire outside the clinical context and point to the need to developing a school setting that supports mental health, mental hygiene, and positive relationships. The study also offers a starting point for the creation of school well-being strategies and for further research into the quality of life of students and teachers at secondary schools.

Keywords

quality of life, SQUALA, students, teachers, school setting, satisfaction, well-being

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INTRODUCTION

Psychology, healthcare system, economics, environmental studies, urban planning, architecture, and many other fields try to frame the quality of life. These fields have at the centre of their research the human being, for whom they want to create the best possible environment for life – to satisfy his/her needs both physiologically and in terms of self-development. And they often want them to live in an even better environment than the person him/herself wants. The concept of the quality of life can thus be grasped in several ways. Our objective will be to provide an insight into the quality of life from the psychosocial perspective, focusing on the quality of life in the environment of a secondary general education school in the Slovak Republic.

Theoretical definition

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the term of the quality of life as "...the subjective perception of one's own life situation in relation to the culture and value system in which one lives, also in relation to one's goals, expectations, and concerns," (WHO, 2013, p. 11). More recent research has expanded the conceptualisation of well-being and quality of life by emphasising the dynamic balance between an individual's resources and the challenges they face, and the role of institutional and contextual factors in educational settings, particularly in shaping students' subjective experience of quality of life (Dodge et al., 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017). Many authors use this, or a very similar definition. Džuka states that "a person's subjective assessment of the Quality of life is based on his/her judgment and evaluates the conditions of his/her own life," (Babjáková & Kačmárová, 2020, p. 39). Others define the quality of life as "...a subjective phenomenon, which we will call experienced quality of life," (Kallová, 2020, p. 213), "...the degree to which a person, in his/her own opinion, is able to function not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally, and socially," (Národní zdravotnický informační portál [NZIP], n.d.).

As stated by Džuka (2004), nowadays we distinguish four streams concerning the quality of life and subjective well-being:

- Research into the quality of life is conducted in parallel and independently of research into subjective well-being, (e.g., Schumacher, Klaiberg, and Brähler).
- The quality of life is considered a multidimensional construct that integrates subjective well-being (e.g., The WHOQOL-Group).
- The quality of life is identified with subjective well-being, or both terms are used alternatively (e.g., Cummins, Eckersley, Pallant, Van Vugt, and Misajon).
- Subjective well-being is considered an indicator of the quality of life (e.g. Diener and Suh).

The term of the quality of life was first coined in the 1920s (Payne et al., 2005, p. 205). The American economist and sociologist Galbraith is considered the author who first used the term of the quality of life in 1958. The issue of the quality of life started to be

discussed especially in the economic context when it was found that the satisfaction and well-being of a society are not only influenced by the amount of goods consumed, but by the subjective perception of these conditions, with personal evaluation and emotional perception being of crucial importance (Tokárová et al., 2003, p. 14).

Several scientific disciplines, ranging from theology, psychology, economics, etc., have attempted to understand the nature and definition of the quality of life. Matis (2002, p. 11) defines the quality of life as "that aspect of life which is related to the quality, the standard of satisfaction of people's material and spiritual needs". These are thus the aspects that are related to people's comfort and satisfaction in everyday life.

The concept of the quality of life cannot be expressed in a single specific instruction as no definition is universally accepted. At the basic level, the quality of life is understood as the result of the interaction of many factors that often influence individual as well as social development in an undetected way (Hnilicová, 2005, p. 207).

The most widely accepted definition of the quality of life is one by the WHO, where the quality of life is understood through an individual's understanding of his/her position in the world context of the culture and value systems in which he/she lives, in relation to his/her goals, expectations, lifestyles, and interests. The current conception is based more on the influence of an individual's health status and conditions (Payne et al., 2005, p. 208). Kováč (2007, p. 102) describes in his publication that "the quality of life is how a person sees his/her position within the context of his/her culture and in relation to his/her goals, expectations, lifestyle, and interests".

According to Uher (2014, p. 8), "Quality of life is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that implies biological, psychological, economic, aesthetic, social, ethical, philosophical, and other dimensions. Health is the determinant of the quality of life".

The quality of life of children was described by Mareš (2006, p. 25) as follows: "It is an individual's perception of his/her position in life, in the context of his/her culture and the value system in which the individual lives, it expresses the individual's relationship to his/her own goals, expected values, and interests. It encompasses in a complex way the individual's somatic health, psychological state of being, level of independence from the environment, social relationships, the individual's beliefs, faith – all of the above in relation to the main characteristics of the environment. the quality of life expresses a subjective appraisal that takes place within specific cultural, social, and environmental contexts. The quality of life is not identical to the term of 'health status', 'life satisfaction', 'psychological state' or 'well-being'. It is thus a multidimensional concept".

According to Drobná (2002, p. 580), "the quality of life can be considered as the level of being that arises from the combination of measurable and abstract values of life (the level of tangible and intangible values), and human development can be seen as a space for expanding the chances and possibilities of a person to attain these values".

The quality of life encompasses the total objective and subjective aspects of an individual's actions and feelings in everyday life, within a real social environment governed by specific rules of interaction, and involving realistic questions of meaning and purpose in life (Strieženec, 1999).

Quality of life in the school setting represents a specific aspect of the broader concept of subjectively experienced well-being, which is determined by personal, social, and

institutional factors. For students, quality of life is linked to feelings of safety, the school culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships, academic stress, and opportunities for self-achievement.

Extensive research indicates that a positive school climate – characterised by supportive teacher-student relationships, peer support, feelings of safety and connectedness – is significantly associated with enhanced student well-being, including emotional health, life satisfaction and overall academic engagement (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Lombardi et al., 2019). As Mareš (2006) states, the quality of life of children and adolescents includes not only their somatic and mental health, but also their level of independence, social relationships, and value-anchoring in the school context. Similarly, Babjáková and Kačmárová (2020) point out that the quality of life of students is closely linked to their sociometric status and socio-economic background, while a supportive school setting can significantly mitigate these disparities.

In the school setting, quality of life is also impacted by the teacher-student relationship, which, according to Džuka (2004), contributes to the emotional well-being and sense of meaningfulness of everyday learning. A favourable school culture, fair assessment, student participation, and clear communication from teachers are among the basic prerequisites for a positive school experience (Mareš, 2006; Babjáková & Kačmárová, 2020). Negative factors such as excessive classroom demands, a conflict-ridden setting, or a lack of support can lead to a reduced quality of life and symptoms of school stress or psychosocial overload.

Teachers represent the second group of actors for whom the examination of quality of life is of particular importance. Their profession has long been characterised by a high level of mental stress, emotional engagement, and the risk of burnout syndrome (Hnilicová, 2005). The quality of life of teachers is shaped by a combination of work and personal factors – such as job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, support from the school management, and work-life balance (Payne et al., 2005; Uher, 2014). Recent international systematic reviews highlight that teacher well-being is a central factor influencing not only teachers' professional functioning – including work satisfaction, stress and burnout – but also broader educational outcomes, such as teacher retention and the quality of instructional support provided to students; moreover, research shows that high well-being among teachers is associated with lower attrition and improved psychosocial school climate overall (Aziku & Zhang, 2024; Dreer, 2023). OECD's TALIS (2020) research confirms that teachers' subjective satisfaction with the school setting is significantly associated with their work motivation, sense of autonomy, and support from the school management.

Empirical research in the school setting (Brodňani & Kováčová, 2019; Babjáková & Kačmárová, 2020) shows that health, social relationships, and the opportunity for self-achievement are among the most important dimensions of the quality of life for both students and teachers. These factors also contribute most to subjective satisfaction, confirming the need to perceive school as a place not only for education, but also for social and emotional development.

Methodology

The research issue is in the subjective perception of the quality of life in the selected secondary school, which is addressed by a standardised SQUALA questionnaire (Dragomirecká et al., 2006)², which was translated into Slovak for the purposes of this research while retaining its original structure, items, and rating scale. The translation was carried out with the aim of preserving the content and semantic equivalence of the items. The translation was carried out while preserving the semantic consistency of the items; semantic consistency and language accuracy were verified in consultation with experts in the fields of psychology and pedagogy.

The research provides answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in the importance of different domains of life for students measured by the SQUALA questionnaire?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in satisfaction with different domains of life among students as measured by the SQUALA questionnaire?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference in the importance of each life domain for educators measured by the SQUALA questionnaire with respect to life domains?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference in satisfaction with different domains of life among educators as measured by the SQUALA questionnaire?

The research population was selected on the basis of the available sample, and therefore the selected secondary school is the Secondary Grammar School at Trebišovská 12 in Košice with a 4-year course of study.

The subjective quality of life includes the respondent's opinion on the importance and satisfaction in 21 life domains surveyed.

The students include full-time students of the 4-year teaching line of study at the Secondary Grammar School at Trebišovská 12 in Košice.

Teachers include educational staff in the position of teacher at the Secondary Grammar School at Trebišovská 12 in Košice in the 4-year teaching line of study.

Data were collected between the 5th and the 13th March 2024 via a web-based form provided to the school administrators. This ensured distribution among the students and the teaching staff of the school. There are 123 students in 4 forms in the 4-year study programme attending the Secondary Grammar School. The school has 51 qualified teachers, 41 of whom are female (Gymnázium Trebišovská 12, Košice, 2023).

The SQUALA questionnaire is a standardised quality of life questionnaire and focuses on the subjective dimension of the quality of life. This means that the quality of life is understood and declared subjectively by the respondents for whom the questionnaire is administered (Křivohlavý, 2004).

The author of the SQUALA questionnaire is M. Zannotti from Nice, France. He understands the quality of life as an individual's perception of satisfaction or dissatisfaction throughout his/her life, with satisfaction with different aspects also having different importance. In its original form, the SQUALA questionnaire was compiled in 1992. The questionnaire

² The Slovak version of the SQUALA questionnaire (Džuka, 2004) was not freely available at the time of the research, so the Czech version (Dragomirecká et al., 2006) was used, adapted into Slovak.

can be grouped into batteries of the so-called self-assessment questionnaires, and was constructed according to clear, focused, and methodologically appropriate criteria. The SQUALA questionnaire in its original version focuses on 23 domains (Dragomirecká et al., 2006).

As Dragomirecká et al. (2006, p. 9) put it, "the Czech SQUALA questionnaire is much more widely used and better known than the French original".

The key concepts include satisfaction and importance. Satisfaction is rated on a five-point scale from 1 = very disappointed to 5 = completely satisfied. Importance is also rated on a five-point scale, with 0 = unimportant to 4 = essential.

It can be concluded that the SQUALA questionnaire is widely applicable. Its use can be found e.g. "in the medical, social, psychological, and pedagogical fields, especially for the purpose of diagnosis or improvement of care and services" (Mühlpachr, 2005, p. 63).

In the processing of the data collected, the so-called score is used. A raw score is assigned in order to obtain a subjective assessment (satisfaction) of the different life domains. The partial score is dependent on the given life domains (e.g. the health domain – The quality of life¹ is the product of the importance score D01 and the satisfaction score S01 – together it takes the summative values of 0–20. The partial score is displayed in the form of the quality of life profile; the total score is given by the sum of all the partial scores (Dragomirecká et al., 2006). If a participant in the investigation rates the domain of life as unimportant, it does not matter how he/she rates his/her satisfaction with that domain. That is, the partial score is 0. The maximum score, the score of 20, is present if the investigation participant is 'completely satisfied' with the domain he/she rated as 'essential'. The results can be processed in the form of a profile of partial scores, providing an overview of which domains of life are disrupted for a certain group of people, or to what extent (Dragomirecká et al., 2006).

Findings

The data were statistically processed using the SPSS 22 software. For statistical analysis, due to the research questions and the nature of the data, Cronbach's alpha reliability test, Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test, Wilcoxon signed-rank test, Shapiro-Wilk normality test, Chi-square test of data distribution, and Mann-Whitney U-test for 2 independent samples were used for statistical analysis. We applied each of these tests to the research questions in accordance with the nature of the specific data appearing in the hypothesis or the research question.

The sample consisted of 116 respondents of whom 77 were students, representing 66.4%, and 39 were teachers, representing 33.6% of the total sample.

The largest group (37.9%) in terms of size of residence was made up of respondents living in a city of between 10,001 and 50,000 inhabitants.

The smallest group (8.6%) was made up of respondents who live in a city of between 5,001 and 100,000 inhabitants. The largest group in the sample in terms of material security were respondents who perceived their material security as average, and they made up

52.6% of the sample. Conversely, the least numerous group consisted of the respondents who perceived their material security as significantly below average, and they made up 0.9% of the sample.

Description of the sample

Girls were the largest group in the sample in terms of gender (58.4%). In contrast, the smallest group consisted of the respondents who did not want to indicate their gender (1.3%). In terms of the age of the students, the sample reached an average age of 16.57 years.

The largest group in the sample (82.1%) in terms of gender of educators consisted of females. The smallest group consisted of the respondents who did not want to state their gender, and they constituted 5.1% of the sample of educators. In terms of the age of educators, the sample averaged 45.59 years.

In the case of teachers, up to 92.3% reported a second-level university degree. The smallest group (2.6%) was those with a first degree.

In terms of marital status, 69.2% of the teachers were married. Divorced respondents represented the smallest group (7.7%).

Testing of research questions and hypotheses

The partial importance score was determined based on the responses of respondents who were given the following choices in the importance domain: unimportant (0 points), not very important (1 point), moderately important (2 points), very important (3 points), and essential (4 points). Thus, the partial importance scores could take values from 0 to 4, taking into account the distribution of the items listed above into dimensions.

Partial satisfaction scores were determined based on the responses of respondents who had the following choices in the satisfaction domain: very disappointed (1 point), dissatisfied (2 points), somewhat satisfied (3 points), very satisfied (4 points), completely satisfied (5 points). Partial satisfaction scores could take values from 1 to 5, taking into account the distribution of the items listed above into dimensions.

The partial item scores were calculated as the product of item importance and item satisfaction; the dimension score is the sum of the adjacent partial item scores. We computed the average score to achieve score parity between the dimensions, since the dimensions are made up of different numbers of items.

Research question 1

Research question No. 1 focused on identifying differences in the perceived importance of individual domains of life among students. The findings are based on an analysis of the

average scores in the SQUALA questionnaire, where 0 represents the lowest and 4 the highest perceived importance.

The results showed that students attach the highest importance to the domain of health, which scored the highest average value ($M = 3.42$). This suggests that health is perceived as a key determinant of the quality of life in adolescence, with students recognizing its importance for personal well-being and everyday functioning.

The domain of abstract values ranked second ($M = 3.30$), which can be interpreted as a relatively strong orientation of students towards values such as morality, justice, future goals, and the meaning of life. A similarly high score was reported in the domain of basic needs ($M = 3.31$), indicating that material security, safety, and stability remain important factors in the subjective assessment of life.

The domain of close relationships ($M = 3.06$) scored slightly lower, which may indicate that although interpersonal relationships remain an important part of students' lives, they are perceived as slightly less intense than health or value and existential aspects.

The lowest average score was reported in the domain of leisure time ($M = 2.92$). However, this result still points to the relatively high importance of this domain, as even the lowest score is above 2.5, i.e., above the midpoint of the scale. Leisure time is therefore perceived by students as an important but not a priority element of the quality of life compared to health or value-existential domains.

Overall, it can be said that students attach a high level of importance to all the domains of life surveyed, with health and values occupying a dominant position, while leisure time is the least important, but still relevant, domain.

Table 1 Mean values of the average score of the perceived importance of life domains of the students (SQUALA)

Domain	Average value (points)
Abstract Values	3.30
Health	3.42
Close Relationships	3.06
Leisure Time	2.92
Basic Needs	3.31

Source: Our own elaboration

Research Question 2

Research question No. 2 focused on the level of subjective satisfaction of students with particular domains of life. Respondents rated their level of satisfaction on a Likert scale from 1 (minimum satisfaction) to 5 (maximum satisfaction). Since the data did not show a normal distribution, non-parametric tests were used for statistical analysis, which increases the robustness of the interpretation of the results.

The results show that the highest average level of satisfaction was reported in the domain of basic needs ($M = 4.02$). This result indicates that students largely feel materially and existentially secure, which may include a sense of safety, a stable family background, or the satisfaction of physiological needs.

Satisfaction with health ranked second ($M = 3.82$), which is consistent with the results of the first research question, where this domain was also rated as the most important domain. We can assume that the positive perception of health is conditioned by the fact that most respondents belong to an age group with a low incidence of chronic diseases. The domain of abstract values ($M = 3.75$), which includes, for example, ethical beliefs, spiritual values, or personal meaning in life, also scored relatively high in terms of satisfaction. This suggests that most students have a relatively stable value system and do not feel significant tension or frustration in this domain.

Satisfaction in the domain of leisure time ($M = 3.66$) is slightly lower than in the previous domains, but still exceeds the midpoint of the scale. Students therefore report relatively good opportunities for spending their leisure time, but this domain is not experienced as a source of maximum satisfaction.

The lowest score was reported in the domain of close relationships ($M = 3.58$). Although this value still indicates relative satisfaction, it also suggests a certain level of tension or ambivalence in interpersonal relationships (family, friends, classmates). In the context of adolescent development, this slightly lower value may be natural given the process of socialisation, identity formation, and increased sensitivity to social interactions.

Overall, it can be said that students show high to moderately high satisfaction in all the domains of life surveyed, with the most positive ratings given to the satisfaction of basic needs and health status. The domain of close relationships, although rated lowest, remains above the average value of the scale, which indicates an overall positive experience of the quality of life.

Table 2 Mean values of the average score of the perceived satisfaction of the domains of life of the students (SQUALA)

Domain	Average value (points)
Abstract Values	3.75
Health	3.82
Close Relationships	3.58
Leisure Time	3.66
Basic Needs	4.02

Source: *Our own elaboration*

Research question 3

Research question No. 3 focused on identifying which domains of life teachers consider most important. Perceived importance was rated on a scale from 0 (least important) to 4 (most important).

The highest average score was reported in the domain of health ($M = 3.56$), indicating that teachers consider physical and mental fitness to be a key prerequisite for personal well-being and professional performance. The high rating of this domain can also be interpreted in relation to the demanding nature of the teaching profession, which requires mental stability, stress resistance, and good health.

The domain of abstract values ($M = 3.21$), which includes life beliefs, moral values, spirituality, and the meaning of life, ranked second. Teachers thus reflect on the importance of value rootedness and personal integrity, which may be related to their professional role in forming the personalities of their students.

The domain of close relationships ($M = 3.14$) also achieved a relatively high importance, confirming that interpersonal bonds, family and partner relationships, play a significant role in teachers' lives.

The use of leisure time was rated relatively lower ($M = 3.00$), although it still remains above the midpoint of the scale, indicating that relaxation and personal interests are considered important, but not a priority.

The lowest rating was scored in the domain of basic needs ($M = 2.72$). This value may indicate that teachers perceive material security or economic stability as satisfactorily covered, and hence it does not feature prominently in their current value hierarchy. Alternatively, it may also be an indicator that teachers prioritise the psychological, ethical, and relational aspects of life over the material ones.

Overall, the results show that teachers attach the highest importance to health and the value domains of life, while material aspects and physiological needs take a back seat.

Table 3 Mean values of the average score of the perceived importance of life domains of educators (SQUALA)

Domain	Average value (points)
Abstract Values	3.21
Health	3.56
Close Relationships	3.14
Leisure Time	3.00
Basic Needs	2.72

Source: Our own elaboration

Research question 4

Research question No. 4 examined teachers' subjective level of satisfaction with particular domains of life. The evaluation was conducted on a scale from 1 (minimum satisfaction) to 5 (maximum satisfaction).

Teachers expressed the highest average satisfaction in the domain of close relationships ($M = 3.81$). This result suggests that family and social ties are an important source of support, stability, and personal satisfaction.

This is followed by the domain of basic needs ($M = 3.73$), which indicates a relatively high level of satisfaction with material security, living conditions, and a sense of security.

The domain of health ($M = 3.71$) was also rated positively, which may reflect relatively good health and the ability of teachers to adapt to stressful situations.

The domain of abstract values ($M = 3.66$) shows stable satisfaction, which may be related to internal value beliefs and a sense of meaningfulness in the profession.

The lowest, but still above-average level of satisfaction was reported in the domain of leisure time ($M = 3.53$). This result may indicate that although teachers value their leisure time, its use may be limited by workloads, administrative burdens, or various professional responsibilities.

Overall, it can be said that teachers report relatively high satisfaction in all the domains of life, with close relationships, basic needs, and health dominating. The results also suggest that teachers are able to maintain a balance between personal and professional demands, although the domain of leisure time may offer some room for improvement.

Table 4 Mean score of perceived life domain of satisfaction of educators (SQUALA)

Domain	Average value (points)
Abstract Values	3.66
Health	3.71
Close Relationships	3.81
Leisure Time	3.53
Basic Needs	3.73

Source: Our own elaboration

Discussion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that students consider health to be the most important domain of life, rating it higher than relationships, abstract values (security, justice, freedom, beauty, art, and truth), or leisure time. They also prioritise basic needs (housing, money, food) over close relationships and leisure time. At the same time, it

has been shown that in the domains that students consider most important – health and basic needs – they also score the highest levels of satisfaction. This correlation between importance and satisfaction can be considered a positive indicator of the overall well-being of students.

The present findings are consistent with recent international evidence indicating that teachers' well-being is closely associated with professional functioning, retention, and the psychosocial climate of schools. Systematic reviews further suggest that supportive organisational conditions and positive interpersonal relationships represent key protective factors for sustaining teacher well-being over time (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Dreer, 2023). In the group of teachers, it turned out that they consider basic needs to be less important, while they attach greater importance to abstract values, close relationships, and leisure time. Abstract values were rated as more important than leisure time, but satisfaction in these domains did not reach as high a level as among students. Teachers were least satisfied with their leisure time, which may be related to their workload, lack of recovery time, and need for mental hygiene. From the perspective of the work setting, it is therefore appropriate to analyse the obstacles to satisfaction in this domain and to distinguish which factors can be affected by the school as an employer (e.g., distribution of workload, support for relaxation activities) and which are within the competence of the teachers themselves (e.g., organisation of their leisure time, personal self-reflection).

The finding that health is the most important area of the quality of life is consistent with the results of other authors. Broďáni and Kováčová (2019) state that in the population of secondary school students, the dimension of physical well-being was of the highest subjective importance. In his framework model of the quality of life of children and adolescents, Mareš (2006) considers health to be a key component of psychosocial well-being and emphasises its connection with social relationships and the overall experience of school life. These findings confirm that health and a sense of physical and mental comfort are central factors in the quality of life in the school setting.

Our results on satisfaction with particular domains of life also support Džuka's (2004) concept, according to which subjective well-being is the result of a balance between internal goals and external conditions. Hnilicová (2005) also emphasises that satisfaction with health and material security forms the core of the subjective perception of the quality of life. In the group of teachers, the results are consistent with the findings of Babjáková and Kačmárová (2020), according to which higher teacher satisfaction is related to social support, recognition, and work-life balance. In our research, teachers scored highest in the domain of close relationships, confirming the importance of interpersonal bonds as a source of emotional stability. Conversely, lower satisfaction in the domain of leisure time may indicate a need to strengthen regeneration, mental hygiene, and stress reduction, as confirmed by Hnilicová (2005).

From a practical point of view, these results point to several possibilities for intervention in the school setting. In the case of teachers, we recommend identifying barriers to satisfaction in the area of leisure time and differentiating those that can be influenced by the school (e.g., organisation of work hours, support for recreational activities, teamwork) from those related to teachers' personal strategies. For students, satisfaction in the areas of close relationships and abstract values can be promoted through activities that develop

socialisation, empathy, and value orientation – for example, morning community meetings with the form teacher, group projects, encouraging teamwork, or expanding the scope of the school support team.

This research also expands our knowledge on the quality of life in the school setting and confirms the usefulness of the SQUALA questionnaire in the domain of education. The comparison of students and teachers provides important insights into differences in understanding the importance of and satisfaction with various aspects of life and may serve as a starting point for targeted interventions aimed at promoting well-being at schools. The theoretical contribution lies in expanding knowledge of how quality of life manifests itself in everyday school reality and how it can be influenced by psychosocial factors and the school culture.

This research has had several limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results. These mainly concern the use of a translated Czech version of the SQUALA questionnaire (Dragomirecká et al., 2006), which has not been officially standardised for the Slovak population. Although the tool was adapted to the Slovak language while maintaining the original structure and semantic consistency of the items, it is not a formally validated version. For this reason, the results should be viewed with some caution, as differences in language or cultural interpretation may affect the accuracy of the measurements and their direct comparability with other studies.

The availability of information on the internal processes of the school under study was another limiting factor. The data were drawn only from publicly available sources, which did not allow for a deeper understanding of the school setting and interpersonal relationships through qualitative methods such as interviews or observation. In the future, it would therefore be appropriate to expand the research to include objectively assessed indicators (e.g., MANSA or LSS tools), satisfaction questionnaires, and school culture measurements. Investigating the academic and social integration of students, indicators of health, well-being, and school success in the context of well-being may also be of interest.

Overall, it can be said that the quality of life in the school setting is the result of a combination of individual and organisational factors. Health, interpersonal relationships, and work-life balance represent the key pillars of subjective well-being. Schools should therefore be understood not only as places of learning, but also as settings that promote overall life satisfaction, health, and personal development for all their members.

CONCLUSION

The presented study offers several theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. From a theoretical point of view, it expands the knowledge base on the quality of life in the school setting, which in Slovakia has so far been studied mainly in the field of social work and health sciences, but rarely in the context of secondary education. The results empirically confirm that even in healthy populations – of students and teachers – the SQUALA questionnaire can be used to obtain a relevant and reliable depiction of the subjective quality of life.

From a methodological point of view, the research verified the usability of the SQUALA questionnaire in school settings and pointed to the need for its further adaptation for the teaching population. The interpretation of the particular scales provides a useful profile of satisfaction and perceived importance of the domains of life which can be beneficial for school psychologists, educational counsellors, and school management in planning their preventive and support programmes.

From a practical point of view, the study identified the domains in which the well-being of students and teachers can be specifically supported. For students, this mainly involves the development of interpersonal relationships, the promotion of a healthful lifestyle, and the creation of opportunities for meaningful leisure time. For teachers, measures aimed at reducing the workload, systematically supporting their mental health, and encouraging more teamwork seem to be key. These findings may serve as a basis for creating school programmes focused on well-being, stress prevention, and fostering a positive school culture.

The quality of life of students and teachers at secondary school is the result of several factors, including the physical and social environment, emotional and physical well-being, and opportunities for personal and professional development. Specific aspects include the quality of educational opportunities, student involvement in school life, teacher support, available resources, school facilities, and the level of diversity and inclusion. Quality of life is therefore dynamic and can vary significantly from school to school, as well as between students and their teachers. The role of schools and educators is to create a setting that consistently supports the sound development, satisfaction, and well-being of all the stakeholders.

Measuring the quality of life at secondary schools is a complex task, as it involves a wide range of aspects, from education and social relationships to emotional well-being and physical health. Choosing a suitable tool to capture such a multidimensional phenomenon is challenging, and our research took into account the options available to the research team. Nevertheless, it can be said that the SQUALA questionnaire has proven to be an effective means of assessing subjective well-being in the school environment.

We consider the main contribution of the study to be the finding of relatively high overall satisfaction among students in the domains they themselves consider most important, primarily health and basic needs. Among teachers, a difference was confirmed between the perceived importance and satisfaction of leisure time, which is important to them but is associated with a lower level of satisfaction. Although these findings cannot be considered alarming, they provide an important basis for future research and proposals for interventions aimed at promoting work-life balance. However, they must be viewed in the context of the limitations of the research, which result from the methodology employed and the availability of data, which also opens up opportunities for further, methodologically expanded research.

The results of this research thus provide a starting point for building further frameworks for assessing and improving the quality of life in the school setting, as well as for developing a school culture focused on the well-being of students and teachers.

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REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW ETHICS AND MÉTIS [ETIKA A MÉTIS]

Author: Petr Slováček

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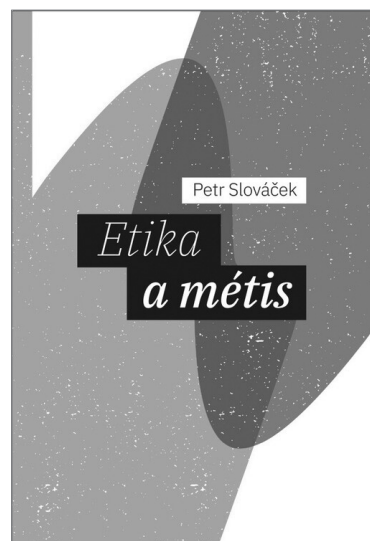
Although the word “philosophy” may evoke a variety of feelings in many of us – even a deep fear of misunderstanding – this publication is one of the many exceptions. It reads relatively easily, but it does require some concentration and, not least, some reflection. As the author himself states in the introduction, “this project of experimental ethics, which on the one hand cautiously explores the limits of one’s own moral perspective, and on the other hand strongly resists its elimination in the name of the ossified projection of a single moral intuition, has existed here for thousands of years, yet for many reasons remains merely marginal.”

Although many people avoid anything that smacks of philosophy, out of fear that they do not understand the subject matter or that it is too far removed from their comprehension, some chapters and subchapters in the publication are titled in a perfectly understandable way. For example: the philosophy of homelessness, conflict of interest, cooperation, and conflict. The very natural ordinariness of human beings – above all, being good, cooperation, and conflict, etc. The content of many of these is also reflected in the present day, particularly in politics.

The fact that this is a work of philosophy is evident not only from the overall title, but also from the title of the first chapter – Hubris (p. 4). The Greek word itself, whose appeal and utility, as the author notes, lie “in the fact that it refers to something that is undoubtedly inherent in human nature: pride, excessive self-confidence, and a tendency to overstep bounds”. Furthermore, the author refers in numerous places throughout the text to stories and lessons from ancient works.

This brings to the fore not only the presentation of selected ancient works but also the ability to illustrate certain philosophical messages through examples. Numerous overviews and diagrams, in which the author illustrates selected philosophical contexts, also contribute to the clarity of the text. The same applies to examples where he refers to ancient sources, such as Homer and a whole range of ancient and more modern figures.

Based on the abundant examples, we can conclude that hubris can be perceived as something positive. On the other hand, there are indications here that may lead some of us to certain doubts and disappointment, but



also to hope. This is the so-called *métis* (see the title of the publication itself), which has both an active and a passive dimension (p. 44).

One of the 11 chapters, which is particularly relevant in light of current political events, is titled "Conflict of Interest" (p. 90). Here, the author also refers to the study of the so-called banal phenomenon of lying and deception (by Robert Trivers) and supplements it with a significant insight with practical implications not only for every ethical theory, but "for practice (action) itself". According to the aforementioned biologist and anthropologist, "what profoundly drives human cooperation or sociality in the context of cooperation/deception is the relationship to oneself". As the author further clarifies, "we lie to ourselves so that we can lie better to others." (p. 92). And as previously noted, the author provides a wide range of examples that serve not only to clarify the contexts themselves but also to make this complex and, for many, incomprehensible area of philosophy accessible to the broadest possible readership.

The text itself also includes several dilemmas that serve to seek the most optimal solution, specifically in connection with one's own (individual) moral dilemma and conscience; the solution is not merely the primacy of "We all" over "We," but the tragedy of common morality (p. 110).

One illustrative example cited here (by author E. Mayr) is: "A monkey without a realistic perception of the branch it wants to jump onto would soon be a dead monkey – and would thus not be among our ancestors." (p. 92)

Given its content, this publication is suitable not only for students and readers who love "classical" philosophy, but also for anyone who wants to take a step back and look at certain life questions – or, as we say today, from a different perspective. It may be of particular interest to those working in the field of elder care, as well as to those involved in the prevention of various forms of risky behavior.

In a similar vein, the author concludes the final sentence of this publication: "The primary task of *métis* ethics – as we have tentatively named this ancient inspiration found primarily in the tragedians – is to regard, above all, the rejection of the chimpanzee-like effort to 'manage our leisure time'".

Final note: The author's effort to base the entire text on foreign sources can also be fully commended, as this has introduced new information into our academic environment that may assist other interested parties in preparing scientific, professional, and study materials, as well as bachelor's and master's theses.

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