

Environmental justice in the urban climate neutrality transition: The case of participation in the Italian Mission Cities

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Abstract Cities and municipalities have become central actors for the transition to a greener and more just society, as e.g. SGD11 promotes more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements. While cities are the most vulnerable to and directly impacted from the effects of climate change (Bulkeley et al. 2015), they are also among the main polluters, as the estimates talk about 70% of greenhouse gases (GHGs) globally being produced in urban areas (IPCC 2022). Policymakers worldwide are thus implementing new strategies to tackle climate change in the urban context. The goal of the present research is to investigate how cities are implementing climate change mitigation strategies, understood as the efforts to drastically reduce the concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere, by deeply decarbonizing the main energy and emission sources (Seto et al. 2021). While these efforts are often presented as a mainly technological and economic challenge, numerous studies show that smartness and technology for climate neutrality do not automatically produce social equity, but on the contrary can exacerbate already existing inequalities (e.g. March, 2022). The research thus focuses on questions of environmental and climate justice (Schlosberg, 2007) in the transition to urban climate neutrality at the European level, in the framework of the Horizon Europe Mission "Climate-neutral and smart cities". Through a qualitative analysis of the discourse in the main policy documents developed by European cities selected for the Mission (i.e. Climate City Contracts - CCC), an attempt is made to understand what kind of sociotechnical imaginary (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015) for the climate-neutral city is envisioned by policymakers and what role, if any, issues of environmental and climate justice play in the urban transition to net-zero at the European level. This is done in particular through the analysis of the Italian case, with an in-depth analysis of the CCCs developed by the Italian cities part of the Mission, by investigating what challenges and solutions are identified by policymakers in the transition to net-zero emissions, and whether participation plays a role for the definition of more equitable policies, or as Hakuta and colleagues (2018) suggest, is rather a device for engaging citizens' responsibility for the transition.