

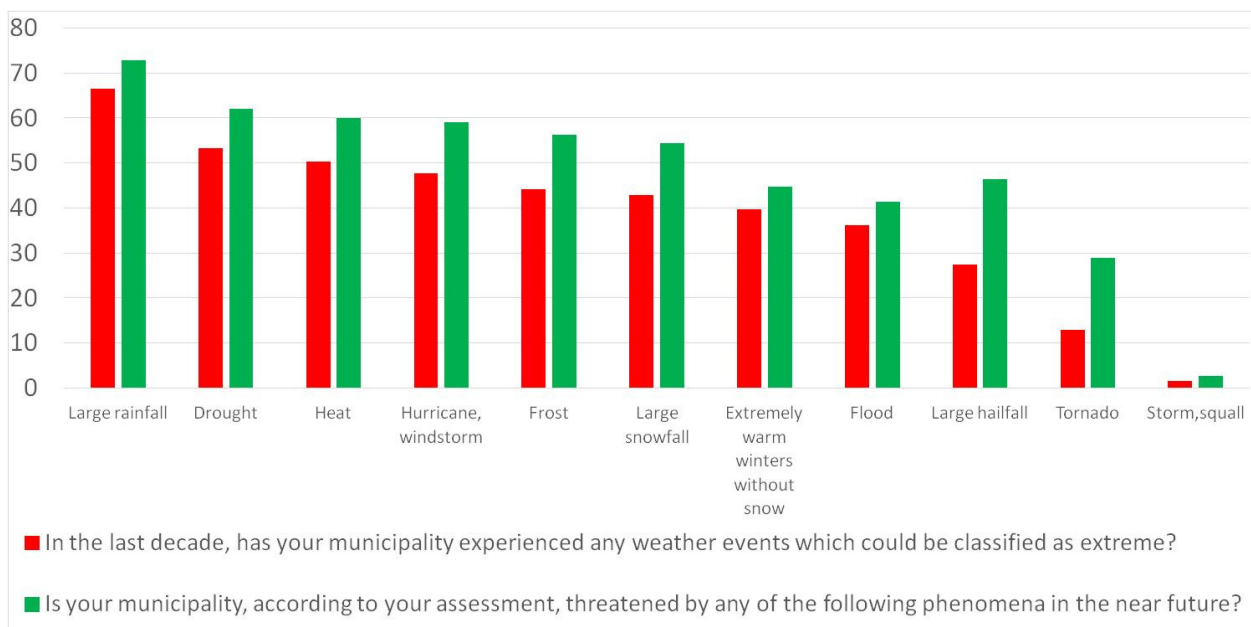
Perception of climate change by politicians and municipal officials

Climate change and human impact on climate are becoming increasingly important political issues. At the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw, in the Department of Local Development and Policy we are carrying out the project entitled *Organizing for Resilience. A Comparative Study on Institutional Capacity, Governance and Climate Change Adaptation in Poland and Norway* (POLCITCLIM). Its main goal is to assess the resilience of local communities, governance structures and policies regarding climate change. The project is realized in partnership with the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and financed by the Polish-Norwegian Research Cooperation. Our main question is whether the local politicians and administration notices problems caused by climate change, and if so, what action are taken to adapt to them?

We have just conducted the survey of municipalities and we would like to share the first results. The response rate was surprisingly large, we received 1311 responses to the survey, which stands more than 50% of all municipalities in Poland . The survey sample is representative for various types of municipalities and their location in different regions. The majority of respondents were officers (84%), while 16% of the questionnaires were filled by the mayor his/her deputy.

The aim of this questionnaire survey was to analyze the attitude of Polish local governments to climate change, human impact on these changes and its political dimension – assigning responsibility and undertaking actions by local government to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to reduce negative human impact on the environment.

Figure 1 Perception of vulnerability on extreme weather phenomenon nowadays and in the future

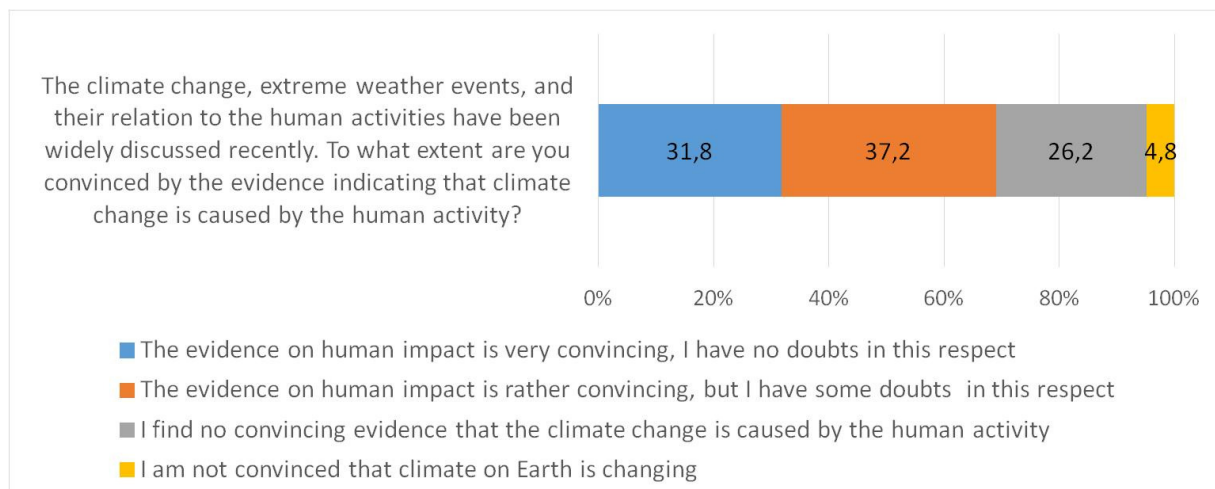


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The representatives of the Polish municipalities declare that during last 10 years, local communities have experienced all sorts of extreme weather events. First of all, they point to the heavy rainfall, but also droughts or heat waves, hurricanes, storms, frosts, heavy snowfall or an exceptionally warm and snowless winter (more than 40% of respondents). Respondents think that the occurrence of these phenomena will be intensified in the future, this expectations particularly refer to heavy hailstorms and tornadoes (Figure 1). These opinions suggest “awaiting attitude” towards climate change. According to respondents, these changes to a very large or large extent will affect primarily flood control (73%), water drainage (69%) and water and sewage system (59%).

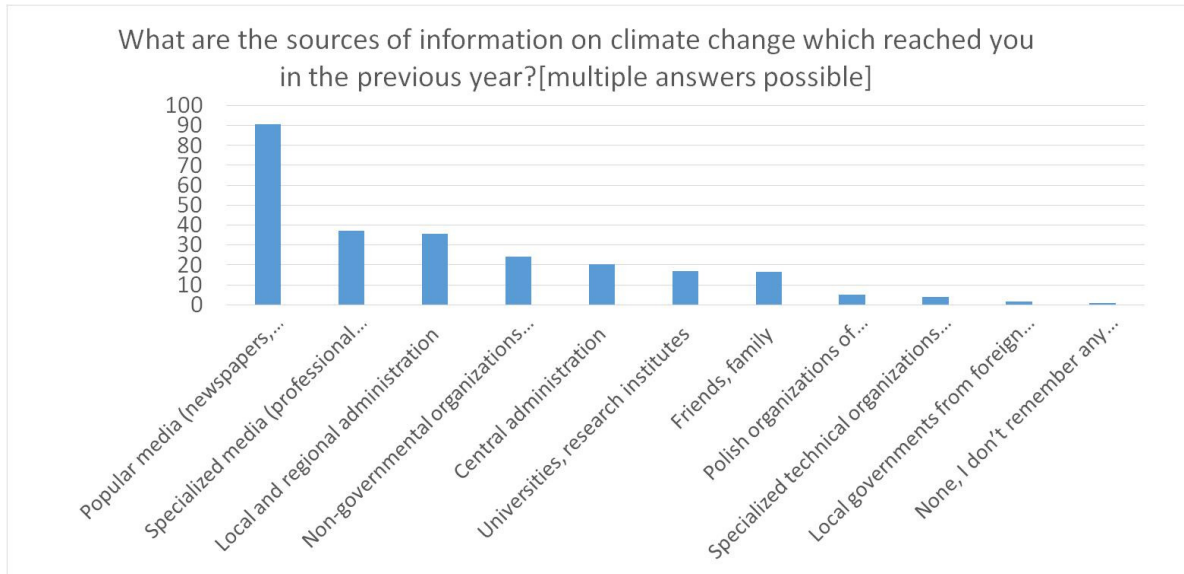
The severity of the intensity of extreme weather events in recent years is noticed by more than 52% of respondents. The same number (50%) consider that these events are caused by climate change. But there is still a large group of officers and politicians, who for the question of whether extreme weather events are the result of climate change, answer: "do not know" (44%). Moreover, despite the fact that 69% of municipal officers and politicians claim that they recognize the human impact on climate change (with no doubt or with some doubts), there is a large group (26%) which states that there is either no convincing evidence on that issue or they just do not believe that the global climate is changing at all (5%). (Figure 2)

Figure 2 Perception of human activity impact on climate change



The most important source of information on climate change are for municipal officials and politicians popular media (almost 91% of responses), and secondly (but the difference is significant) specialist media (37%). It is not well-established knowledge by trainings or contacts with specialized organizations. Little knowledge (20% response) come from the government. Nearly 17% of respondents answer that the universities and research centers are source of knowledge, similar importance is assigned to the knowledge derived from friends, colleagues and family. What draws attention is little use of international administrative contacts for this purpose - only 1.5% of respondents indicated it option (Figure 3).

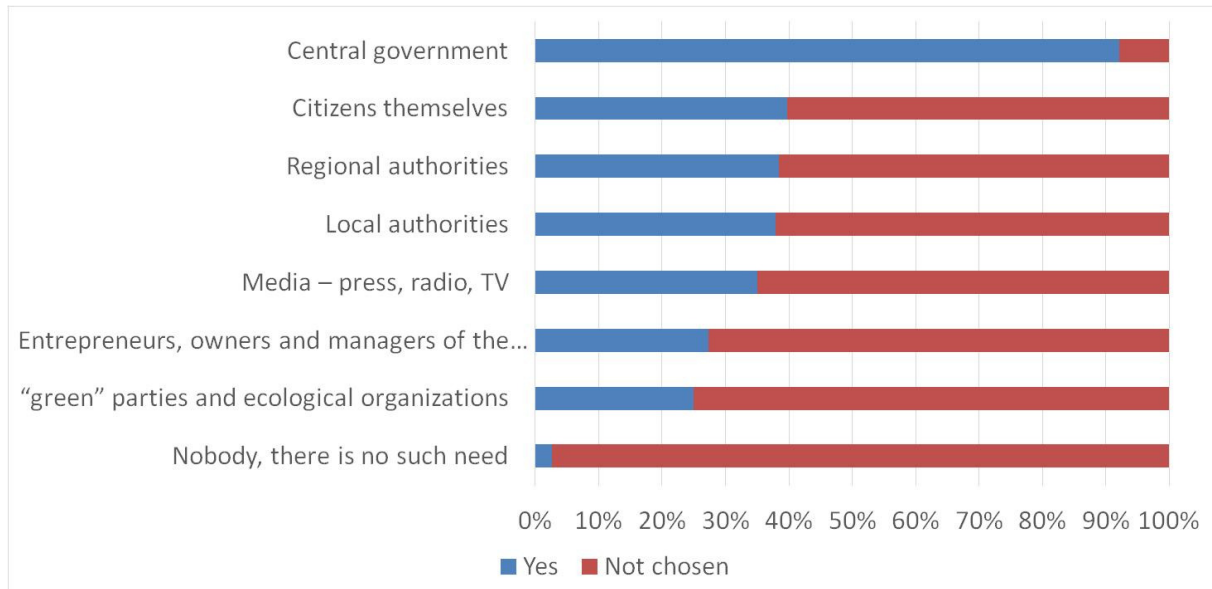
Figure 3 Knowledge – sources of information on climate change



The respondents think that local governments are not the most suitable place to locate the responsibility for tackling climate change. This role is assigned to the central authorities (92%), even to a greater extent than international organizations (58%). More municipality officials believe that the residents themselves and the regional authorities are more relevant communities to take action to tackle climate change issues than local authorities (Figure 4). In addition to this, a lot of respondents agree with the statements that the state should show more initiative on the issue of adaptation to climate change (82% of those who responded to the survey). 37 % of respondents claim that insurance against the consequences of climate change should be mandatory and that compulsory insurance (eg. insurance of buildings endangered with flooding) practically would solve the problem of adaptation to climate change (33%).

Nevertheless, representatives of 38% of the local governments think that municipalities and cities should take action on preventing climate change (Figure 4). They were the representatives of larger and wealthier local governments than the other. 70% of respondents state that their municipality is not enough wealthy to cope with climate change, and 61% declare that is too small to deal with this problem.

**Figure 4 Who should be responsible for the responses to climate change in Poland?
[multiple response possible]**



The results presented above will be compared with the results of a similar study conducted on Norwegian municipalities at the beginning of the next year. In the next step, we plan a detailed study of adaptation to climate change in four Polish cities. The study is planned for 2015.

The organization responsible for the research project: University of Warsaw, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, Department of Local Development and Policy.

The Polish research team: Prof. Paweł Swianiewicz (project manager), Dr. Adam Gendźwiłł, Dr. Marta Lackowska, MA Natalia Szajewska, Dr. Katarzyna Szmigiel-Rawska.

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More information about the project: www.polcitclim.uw.edu.pl.

Contact: Prof. Paweł Swianiewicz, pswian@uw.edu.pl, Phone / Fax 225 520 650.