

Climate Justice in Basel

Block 4. Preparatory Session 29.04.2025 | Public Panel Discussion 06.05.2025

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This summary looks into the concept of climate justice in the urban context of Basel, Switzerland. It explores how a diverse range of actors—from planners or store owners to small collectives—strive to shape a more just and sustainable future in the city. By analysing governance frameworks policy instruments and also local campaigns, the text highlights the potentials of achieving climate justice through a variety of interventions, presented by a few guest speakers at our public panel discussion. Together with looking at the literature, read in our class, the text reflects on the dynamics between bottom-up activism and top-down policies, and presents how justice-oriented urban futures can emerge through collective strategies.

To understand the topic of climate justice better, we look into some of the required readings for the class first. In Pickerill et al. (2024), the researchers propose five eco-community strategies to build more sustainable urban futures. The importance of localized, community-led initiatives that challenge dominant top-down models and foster a more inclusive ecological transitions is of their key arguments. They emphasize the need for diverse ownership models and also that small everyday practices sometimes can be challenged and changed in order to make a lasting change. Here in Basel, Erle Perle and the Backwaren Outlet are great examples for this. Granberg and Glover (2021) introduce the concept of the “climate just city” and highlight the need to prioritize procedural and recognition-based justice. These examples demonstrate how climate policies must be embedded in everyday experiences and local needs, so that they can be truly effective. In Hearn et al. (2021) energy districts are being investigated. Often they are considered as technologically innovative but that does not mean they are socially just – in fact the opposite is often the case. Their findings stress the need to go beyond the plain

efficiency metrics and address also important topics such as inclusion and participation to be more climate just too. In Basel there are some large-scale areals like like Klybeck+ and 2000-Watt Areal, where questions considering a more climate just planning and equity remain pressing. The Social Change Lab's post outlines factors behind successful protest movements, including positive framing, coalition-building, and strategic visibility. These elements are evident in the “Basel 2030” campaign and the opposition to the Rhine Tunnel project. Both campaigns built alliances across unions, churches, and community groups and others to achieve public engagement and policy shifts. Grassroot movements such as the *Collective Climate Justice* talked about successful campaigns and their strategies as well.

The podium discussion featured insights from key climate justice actors in Basel. Axel Schubert, an urban planner and lecturer at the Fachhochschule Nordwest Schweiz, was one of the key founders of the initiative “Basel 2030” and described the campaign as a strategic effort to embed climate justice in the city's constitution. Schubert showcased how well-organized activism can transform institutional frameworks and how they continued shaping Basel's future by protesting against the Rhinetunnel. The second speaker was Tanja Zürcher from BastA!, a member of the green/left alternative party in Basel. She emphasized the importance of political engagement and radical imagination in shifting urban priorities. Her critique of the Rhine Tunnel highlighted the tension between car-centered infrastructure and sustainable mobility goals. Zürcher stressed the party's commitment to reusing existing structures and promoting social equity through planning.

As mentioned before, a member from the *Collective Climate Justice*, Zoe, outlined the

group's bottom-up approach. Their work on climate camps and protests reflected a belief that transformative change comes from empowered communities and not top-down mandates. She highlighted the most important recourse-time. Not just each individuals own time, but also the time which is still left in order to make a lasting change. Last but not least, the discussion welcomed Marko from the Backwaren Outlet, an anti-food waste shop, and one of the members from Erle Perle, a community project in Basel. These two speakers showed hyper-local responses to tackling climate injustice. Both projects focus on everyday needs—food and space—and invite community co-creation and action. While small in scale, projects and initiatives

like these make a change and contribute to a more inclusive city.

The case of Basel and the speakers from the session highlights both the potential and limits of climate justice in local practice. Local initiatives like “Basel 2030” and Erle Perle show how grassroots efforts can drive place-based change and succeed, aligning with Pickerill et al.'s vision of bottom-up urban futures. Yet, structural barriers, limited scalability and peoples time investment remain challenges that persist. Basel serves as a complex but instructive example of how cities can navigate toward more just and sustainable futures and how even small stores can make a difference.

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