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# PRO-CLIMATE

Proactive community adaptation to climate change  
through social transformation and behavioural change

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## How Europe's communities are taking climate resilience into their hands

As the climate crisis accelerates, Europe is witnessing a groundswell of local initiatives aiming to reshape how communities live, adapt, and respond to the unprecedented environmental challenges of our time. Among these efforts, the **PRO-CLIMATE project** stands out—not only for its ambitious goals but for the innovative way it engages local citizens and stakeholders. Funded by the European Climate Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA), this three-year initiative seeks to foster social transformation and behavioural change across diverse European regions, from the windswept shores of Ireland to the historic port city of Gdańsk.

At its core, the **PRO-CLIMATE project** is built on a network of six **Living Labs** established in six cities across Europe:

- [Sligo \(Ireland\)](#),
- [Leipzig \(Germany\)](#),
- [Badajoz \(Spain\)](#),
- [Bergen \(Norway\)](#),
- [Gdańsk \(Poland\)](#), and
- [Zakynthos \(Greece\)](#).

These Living Labs are real-life spaces where stakeholders—from local governments to citizens, businesses, and researchers—come together to co-create and test solutions to pressing climate problems. The Living Labs provide fertile ground for collaboration, learning, and, ultimately, the development of strategies to improve climate resilience at the local level.

### A Grassroots Approach to Global Problems

What makes the PRO-CLIMATE project distinct is its **bottom-up approach**. Unlike traditional top-down climate policies, which are often crafted in government offices far removed from the affected communities, PRO-CLIMATE focuses on involving local citizens directly in the decision-making process. This means that residents of Sligo, Leipzig, or Zakynthos don't just passively receive information about new climate initiatives—they actively shape the policies that will affect their futures.

Take **Sligo**, for example, where coastal erosion and flooding are becoming increasingly severe due to rising sea levels and unpredictable weather patterns. In this Irish Living Lab, local residents work alongside scientists and policymakers to identify the most pressing climate risks and develop solutions tailored to their unique geographic and socio-economic context. In **Gdańsk**, meanwhile, the lab is focusing on mitigating the impact of severe rainfall and inland flooding—an issue that has plagued the city in recent years. Here, stakeholders are using advanced technologies, combined with local knowledge, to create real-time monitoring systems that protect the city's residents from future flooding disasters.

The scope of these initiatives is broad, but each shares a common goal: to **build climate resilience** through a participatory model that recognizes the expertise and lived experiences of local communities.

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## The Power of Co-Creation

Central to PRO-CLIMATE's methodology is the concept of **co-creation**—the idea that solutions are best developed when all stakeholders are given a voice. Through workshops, bilateral meetings, and digital engagement, the Living Labs bring together not just local governments and technical experts but also citizens, who are often the first to experience the impacts of climate change.

In **Leipzig**, for instance, one of the key challenges is ensuring that urban development projects prioritize sustainability. The city has struggled with balancing economic growth and environmental protection, but the Leipzig Living Lab is hoping to shift the conversation by engaging local communities in the co-creation of new urban sustainable solutions. Incorporating citizen feedback into urban planning, the city aims to adopt sustainable approaches that not only improve quality of life but also mitigate the effects of climate change.

The process of **co-creation** in each Living Lab is tailored to the local context, ensuring that solutions are not only scientifically robust but also socially accepted. This, experts argue, is crucial to the success of climate resilience strategies. **Iason Tamiakis (TERO, Greece)**, PRO-CLIMATE's project manager, emphasized the importance of this inclusive approach: "Actively engaging local communities in the co-creation process, we're building solutions that are not only effective but also deeply rooted in the lived realities of the people affected by climate change. This is how we ensure long-term success."

**Salem Gharbia (Atlantic Technological University – Sligo, Ireland)**, one of the leading researchers on the project, notes: "Without the involvement of the local population, even the most advanced climate policies risk failing. People need to see themselves in the solutions."

## Tackling Systemic Change

Beyond the development of local solutions, the PRO-CLIMATE project is also focused on identifying **social tipping points**—moments where small changes in behaviour or governance can lead to widespread systemic transformation. The idea of tipping points has been gaining traction in climate research in recent years, as scientists try to understand how minor interventions can lead to large-scale change.

In PRO-CLIMATE, each Living Lab acts as a microcosm, experimenting with different methods of engagement, technology, and policy. Whether it's through community-driven adaptation projects in **Badajoz** or the use of smart sensors to track environmental changes in **Sligo**, these labs are designed to test what works and what doesn't in building climate resilience.

One particularly promising area of focus is **citizen science**—the involvement of non-professionals in scientific research. Leveraging local knowledge, PRO-CLIMATE aims to enhance its data collection and ensure that its interventions are based on a comprehensive understanding of the local environment. In **Zakynthos**, for example, citizen science initiatives are helping to improve water management and sustainable tourism development — critical to the island's economy and way of life.

But while these labs are small in scale, the PRO-CLIMATE team hopes that their findings will be scalable—offering valuable lessons for cities and regions beyond Europe.

## Barriers to Overcome

Despite its potential, the PRO-CLIMATE project faces several challenges. One of the biggest is the **varying levels of technical expertise** and financial resources among the different Living Labs. While cities like **Gdańsk** have well-established innovation ecosystems, other locations, such as **Leipzig** and **Badajoz**, have struggled with securing the necessary funding and expertise to implement their climate adaptation strategies.

Moreover, **governance** remains a critical issue. For co-creation to work, there needs to be a willingness on the part of local governments to share power with citizens—something that has not

always been easy. In some cases, local governments have been hesitant to fully embrace the participatory approach, fearing that it could lead to conflicts or delays in decision-making.

Finally, there is the question of **long-term sustainability**. While the PRO-CLIMATE project is set to run until 2026, many of the challenges it seeks to address—rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and biodiversity loss—will require long-term commitment and funding. Ensuring that the work of the Living Labs continues beyond the lifespan of the project is a key priority for the PRO-CLIMATE team.

### Looking Forward

As Europe grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, the **PRO-CLIMATE project** offers a glimpse into what the future of climate resilience might look like. Placing communities at the heart of climate adaptation, it challenges the traditional top-down approach and instead embraces a model of **shared responsibility**.

In doing so, it taps into a critical truth: that the people best placed to solve the climate crisis are often those who are closest to its effects. Whether it's a farmer in Spain grappling with drought or a coastal resident in Ireland fearing the next flood, local knowledge and engagement are essential to building resilience in a warming world.









As the project progresses, the hope is that its findings will inspire other regions—both in Europe and beyond—to adopt similar approaches. For now, the six Living Labs serve as a powerful reminder that real change happens not just in conference halls or government buildings but in the everyday actions of communities determined to secure a better future.

### Factbox: The Six Living Labs of PRO-CLIMATE

- **Sligo, Ireland:** Focus on coastal erosion and flood management.
- **Leipzig, Germany:** Adoption of sustainable solution for future urban development.
- **Badajoz, Spain:** Public policy improvements and sustainable behaviour change.
- **Bergen, Norway:** Urban land-use planning and sustainable urbanization.
- **Gdańsk, Poland:** Severe rainfall management and real-time monitoring systems.
- **Zakynthos, Greece:** Water management resources and sustainable tourism development.

The PRO-CLIMATE consortium consists of 10 partners from 7 countries, with excellent experience in all the tasks defined for PRO-CLIMATE. It represents a unique and true interdisciplinary group of highly competent and experienced research teams composed specifically for the project.

To learn more about our project you can visit our [website](#) and you can [subscribe](#) to our newsletter.

| Key facts  | Online presence   |
|--|---|
|  Starting date: 1/1/2024      |  <a href="https://pro-climate.eu">https://pro-climate.eu</a> |
|  Duration: 36 months          |  <a href="#">@PRO CLIMATE EU</a>                             |
|  EC funding: €3,666,685       |  <a href="#">@proclimate.project</a>                         |
|  10 partners / 7 EU countries |  <a href="#">pro-climate-project</a>                         |