



HOW CAN CITIES ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE WITHOUT WIDENING INEQUALITIES?

Our monthly science question: a series that demystifies complex topics with simple, effective answers.

INRS



BEYOND THE BUZZWORDS: A CHANGING REALITY

Every new reality brings its own vocabulary — and climate change is no exception. In cities, terms like active transportation, greening, and pedestrianization have now become part of everyday conversation. But these words represent much more than government or municipal measures. They involve significant changes to living environments, which affect urban residents in different ways.



WHEN WELL-INTENTIONED INITIATIVES HAVE MIXED IMPACTS

Research reveals a paradox: actions designed to reduce the impacts of climate change in cities can sometimes lead to undesirable social consequences. Neighborhoods that become greener, better served by public transit, or richer in local services tend to experience rising rent prices and property values. In turn, this can displace long-standing residents, create feelings of exclusion, and deepen social inequalities — tensions that reshape the urban and social fabric. This phenomenon is known as eco-gentrification or green gentrification.



MALADAPTATION: AN EQUITY ISSUE

In the context of climate adaptation, a policy or action is considered maladaptive when it generates negative effects that were not anticipated. This concept is at the center of the work conducted by Professor Sophie Van Neste and postdoctoral researcher H el ene Mad enian at the Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS). Their research focuses on climate justice, equity, and political action. They study tools that help assess the situation of a territory and its population, identify potential pitfalls before implementing “green” measures, and design actions that prioritize the people who need them most.



RETHINKING HOW WE DESIGN URBAN SPACES

Working at the INRS Urbanisation Culture Soci et e Research Centre, the two researchers explore how future programs and public policies can both improve living conditions in the face of climate change and reduce inequalities. A recent concept gaining traction, equity lens, offers a framework that keeps fairness and justice at the center of planning processes. It is one way to ensure that climate adaptation is not only technical — but also social.