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# PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING OF CITIES IN POLAND

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**Objective:** The cognitive objective of the paper is to present the target groups for the environmental marketing of cities. The research objective was to identify the priority audiences for the green marketing of cities in Poland and to indicate what activities are undertaken regarding these most important groups.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The primary research used the CAWI method, using a proprietary questionnaire. The research was conducted in Q1 2022. The subjects surveyed were cities in Poland. The questionnaire was sent out to all cities, and 414 returned and correctly completed questionnaires were analysed. The presented results represent a section of the entire research.

**Findings:** The interviewed stakeholders indicate that, of the many groups mentioned, residents are the key audience for green city marketing activities. Residents were divided into three groups - young residents, middle-aged residents and older residents. According to the statements, the key audiences are young residents - 95% of indications. Next are middle-aged residents with 67% of indications and older residents with 63%. The least frequently mentioned key audiences are those associated with the scientific community - 4.6% of indications and foreign tourists - 6.3% of indications. Activities undertaken to promote ecology in the city are mainly based on creating pro-environmental attitudes among the youngest groups of residents. **Research limitations/implications**: The research was quantitative research, in the future the research could be extended to include qualitative research that would indicate the motives for selecting specific groups for urban green marketing activities.

**Practical implications:** The results of the survey indicate that cities mainly focus on promoting environmental activities among their inhabitants. However, cities in most cases do not carry out surveys of their citizens about their environmental needs. It is worth considering conducting such a survey among residents in order to identify expectations and the most pressing issues. **Originality/value:** The research is aimed at all those interested in the subject of environmental marketing and in particular the target groups targeted by green city marketing activities.

**Keywords:** urban environmental marketing, target groups, city stakeholders, green marketing, urban ecology.

#### Introduction

Today, the world is facing a serious threat to sustainability due to the economic crisis, energy crisis, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions that are causing global warming. Our resources are limited, but human needs are unlimited, so our resources must be used economically and in an environmentally friendly manner (Mohajan, 2012). We live in a world where we are overwhelmed with information about threats affecting the environment and our lives.

In order to prevent this, more and more people are expressing the desire and conviction to make drastic changes in their daily lives in order to reduce the ecological footprint (Bostrom, Klintman, 2011). For sustainable human development, 'green' marketing practices in society are needed. This leads to the fact that also in marketing the green trend is taken into account by offering green products as well as building the image of the company as environmentally friendly. The development of green marketing is linked to a change in consumer awareness and attitudes.

# **Environmental marketing**

Back in 1993, J. Ottman, an expert in environmental marketing, first introduced a new group of consumers. According to Ottman, consumers are environmentally conscious, aware of the health and social problems affected by the industry and are prepared to act to protect their quality of life. As such, he sees environmental marketing as the wave of the future. He argues that companies that focus on 'green' products are more likely to reach these conscious customers (Ottman, 1993). In 1994 K. Peattie defined environmental (green) marketing more broadly as a holistic management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying the requirements of customers and society in a cost-effective and sustainable manner. According to this definition, green marketing is a tool for a company to conduct economically, socially and ecologically responsible activities (Peattie, 1995). The holistic orientation of a company towards the environment is referred to as green marketing orientation (Papadas, Avlonitis, Carrigan, 2017). Current various marketing concepts emphasise that companies need to engage in broad pro-social and environmental activities (Hunt, 2011). Similarly, management concepts, including marketing, can be applied to public administration and city management (Anderson, Nielsen, 2009). The idea of green cities itself is not new and its place in urban policy has been evident for a long time, with the term green cities gaining popularity worldwide in the 20th century, when industrialisation and urbanisation led to severe environmental pollution. The genesis of the concept can be traced back to E. Howard's idea of 'garden cities', which were

supposed to combine the advantages of the city (entertainment, access to work, high wages) with the benefits of living in the countryside (clean air, natural beauty, low rents) (Howard, 2015). The concept she presented in her 1898 book radically changed thinking about the city and the countryside, and although it seemed like a social utopia to many, it quickly gained great popularity. Today, the term green cities is used to describe cities that focus on environmentally friendly solutions. A separate issue is marketing activities that promote pro-environmental attitudes and build the image of a green city. However, it is important to recognise that territorial marketing is somewhat different from corporate marketing. Territorial marketing is a targeted and regular activity of the local government administration and separate services and institutions. In this activity, the desires and needs of the local community are identified, shaped and satisfied. Activities are aligned with the interests of residents, other groups of people and economic actors (Szromnik, 2016). This alignment means taking into account the trends that occur in stakeholder groups, but also influencing their attitudes towards the environment. In the case of a city, the product is not only the tangible (streets, parks, buildings, roads) but also the intangible. The activities that make up territorial marketing should be understood relationally. This is because they include 'the creation of one's own image, the value of achievements and resources, as well as the creation of one's own relations between entities and the territory in which they function' (Duczkowska-Piasecka, 2013). Of particular relevance to the relationship with the territory is the genius loci, the spirit of place, which is influenced by all experiences of the city (Lenartowicz, 1997). Genius loci enriches man's spiritual sphere, enhances his artistic sensitivity, intellectual and creative capacities. Therefore, it is a potential source of inspiration for the shaping of urban space. A proper reading of the spirit of the place and inspiration by it result in interesting landscape compositions (Dabrowska-Budziło, 2011). Undoubtedly, the approach to the environment influences the spirit of the place. Therefore, the 'green' challenges are not only about the mere promotion of the city's environmental activities, but also about shaping the environmental attitudes of different stakeholder groups, shaping the landscape and creating positive experiences with the city.

## City stakeholders

Stakeholder theory has been transferred to cities from business management theory and practice. The creator of one of the most well-known stakeholder theories is R.E. Freeman, who recognises that stakeholders are those without whom no organisation could function, it is any group or individual that is influenced or likely to influence the achievement of the organisation's objectives (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are therefore most often defined as individuals, groups of individuals, institutions that have an interest in the performance of an organisation. From this point of view of the city, stakeholders are defined as "all individuals

and organisations that are important to the functioning of the city" (Braun, 2008). This is a very broad definition that indicates the complexity of the audience of the city's offer. Three groups of customers of a city are most often mentioned in the literature: its residents, entrepreneurs and tourists. L. Van den Berg and E. Braun distinguish four general categories of city customers: residents (inhabitants), entrepreneurs, visitors and investors (van den Berg, Braun, van Winden, 1999). The following can be regarded as the city's partners, also referred to as local development actors: entrepreneurs, business organisations, investors, NGOs, public institutions, representatives of various professions, opinion leaders, and residents (Duczkowska-Piasecka, 2013). In another conception, the city's stakeholders are divided into internal (those making up the organisation, e.g. employees) and external (those located in both its closer environment, e.g. residents, community organisations, and remote, e.g. climate policy makers at the national or EU level, scientists, supra-local leaders, climate activists, other cities) (Legutko-Kobus, 2017). Despite the different approaches, there are common elements in all of them: residents, entrepreneurs and visitors (tourists). What is the importance of these different groups for the city? Residents are the backbone of the city without which the city could not function. From a marketing perspective, residents are the city's brand ambassadors (Kavaratzis, 2004). The views of residents are important to others who do not know the city, as their views are considered authentic and as an internal source of information about the place (Braun, 2012). In terms of visitors, the more visitors a city has, especially foreign visitors, the more wellknown the city's brand will be, and this reputation can help a city compete with other wellknown cities for a place on the world stage (Hanna, Rowley, 2008). Tourists also represent tangible revenues for cities. Companies and investors, especially foreign ones, can improve the overall economic development of a city and help a city to capitalise on its competitive advantage (Turnock, 1997). In addition to those mentioned above, students are also an important group. Students can also be residents, visitors (tourists), entrepreneurs, which consequently creates an overlap of customer groups. However, it is argued that they should be explicitly included because the student community is essential for cities that want to protect their competitive position in the knowledge-based economy (van den Berg, Russo, 2004). The above groups are users of the city. However, not every stakeholder is necessarily a user, hence it is also worth mentioning the group of investors who invest capital in the city, but do not necessarily locate in a particular place. These investors are very important for the development of new housing projects, new office developments, new urban attractions or infrastructure.

The process of identifying and classifying stakeholders is carried out first and foremost in order to know their expectations and to properly manage the relationship with them. Maintaining good relations with the city's various stakeholders is also key to building the city's brand. The basis for stakeholder relations management is the mapping of a city's stakeholders, including key stakeholders, and identifying their relationships and impact on the city. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that such a city stakeholder map is not fixed,

but depends on the specifics of the city and the aspect in which it is considered. From the point of view of city branding, other groups may be key than in the case of green marketing. Stakeholder groups may have conflicting expectations, for example environmental issues may be a priority for some, but not for others. Residents looking for a 'place to live' prefer a clean environment, tourists want to enjoy the natural environment, often without seeing it degraded, entrepreneurs will be interested in exploiting the environment to realise a profit. Emphasis should be placed on the word "may", as the interests of the different groups often coincide. There is a growing environmental awareness and understanding of the impact of their activities on the environment among residents, tourists and entrepreneurs alike. Cities are faced with the task of balancing the interests of different groups, and in doing so, they must take into account environmental considerations that express the interests of future generations of stakeholders. The realisation of these interests should, however, always coincide with the overarching goal of city functioning, which is to satisfy the collective needs of the citizens. The demand to reconcile the interests of all is often difficult or impossible to fulfil. It can be said that the realisation of the interests of one group may have consequences, direct or indirect, in the realisation of the interests of another group.

# Method and results of the study

The overriding objective of the local authority's activities should be to know and meet the needs of the different users of the city (both as individuals and as social groups). However, as noted earlier, the key target groups for each area of local government activity may vary, e.g. tourist cities may prioritise tourists and/or residents, industrial cities entrepreneurs, non-polarised cities all groups or only residents. Hence, the question is which groups are most relevant to a city's green promotion activities?

The results presented below are from our own research. The survey covered a wide range of questions on green marketing in the city. The survey was conducted in Q1 2022, using the CAWI method. Questionnaires were distributed online to all 954 cities<sup>I</sup>, 414 returns were received. The sample is therefore representative. The data presented here cover only a slice of the survey on green marketing in cities, concerning the target groups. The question posed in the survey was who is the main target audience for green marketing promotional activities in a city? This question was intended to show whether the city's green city promotion would be targeted at selected groups or whether all groups would be equally important recipients?

<sup>1</sup> The list was compiled in December 2021, when there were 954 cities in Poland. As of 1 January 2022, there are 964 cities in Poland, https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/10-nowych-miast-na-mapie-polski-od-1-stycznia-2022-roku.

The multiple-choice question listed 12 stakeholder groups, with the additional opportunity to add other groups. The first three groups relate to residents, with a division into young, middle-aged and elderly. The next groups are:

- students this group was singled out because encouraging people to stay in or study in a particular city after graduation is also related to its environmental conditions. It should be remembered that students can be recruited from different groups (this was written about in the literature section);
- teachers this group was singled out because they have a significant influence on the attitudes of the younger generation;
- tourists divided into domestic and foreign tourists the range of marketing activities aimed at tourists residing in Poland is different from that of foreign tourists;
- entrepreneurs already operating in the city, divided into micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SME sector) and large enterprises the interest and impact on the city's ecology of these entities will be of a different scale;
- new investors whose investments are linked to, among other things, environmental requirements and the state of the environment in the area;
- non-profit organisations that can partner with environmental marketing activities undertaken by the city;
- representatives of the scientific community scientists can assist in the development of pro-environmental measures (expertise, advice or specific technological, logistical solutions, etc.), and have an influence on the younger generation.

The results of the survey indicate that cities place different emphasis on different groups when promoting ecology.

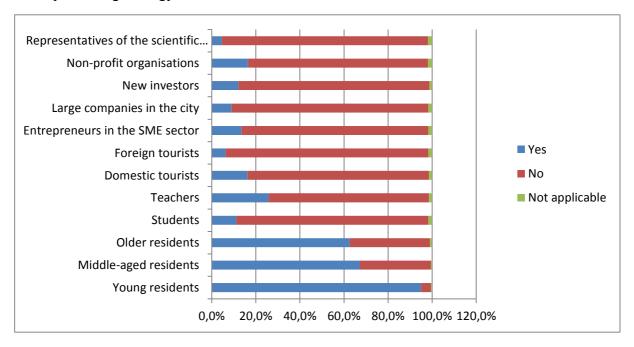


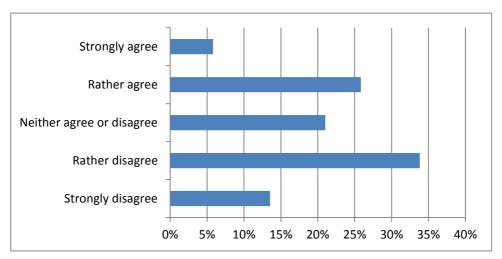
Figure 1. Who are the main targets of green marketing activities in the city?

Source: own research.

The responses indicate that residents are the priority target groups for green urban marketing activities. The highest percentage, as much as 95% of the responses, indicated young residents, followed by 67% of middle-aged residents and almost 63% of older residents. In addition, in a few cases other responses indicated that the youngest residents were the target group - pre-schoolers and pupils in the younger grades of primary school were mentioned.

One in four towns also stated that teachers are an important group for activities promoting ecology. The fewest responses came from the scientific community, which was mentioned by only 4.6% of the cities. This may be due to the fact that many cities do not have academic and scientific centres. Foreign tourists came second from last, with only 6.3% indicating them as the most important in promoting ecology. There are few cities attractive to foreign tourists in Poland, and ecology is not the main deciding factor for tourists when choosing destinations. Few cities indicated large companies operating in the city as a priority - 8.9% of indications. A slightly larger number of cities, as an important group, select domestic tourists - slightly more than 16.2%, non-profit organisations - 16.4% and entrepreneurs from the SME sector - 13.5%.

The research also formulated questions (in the form of statements) about the activities aimed at the various target groups of the cities. The statements included those concerning residents and activities to promote and shape pro-environmental attitudes. The responses, in which it was necessary to indicate to what extent a given statement was consistent with the actual state of affairs in the city, were included on a five-point scale based on a Likert scale. Below are the results of those actions taken towards priority groups, i.e. residents.

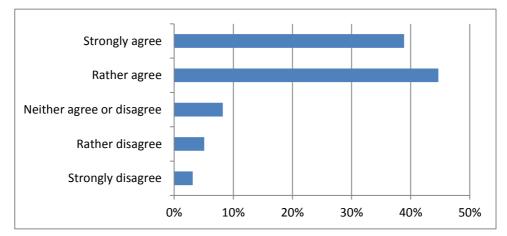


**Figure 2.** Residents are surveyed about environmental needs in the city.

Source: own research

According to the responses, the majority of cities do not survey their residents about their environmental needs - 48%. In the survey, a large group (21% of cities) was unable to say whether such surveys are conducted and chose the option - do not have an opinion. However, in one in three towns such surveys are conducted, of which 6% chose the answer - strongly agree. Conducting a resident survey is obviously a burden on a city's budget, but it could indicate the main areas that are important to residents and that are worth including in

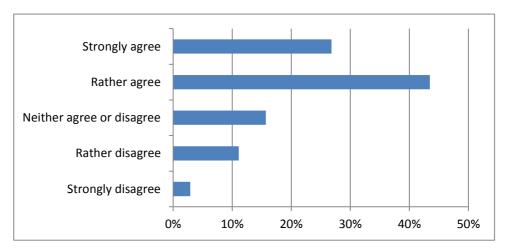
an environmental strategy, as far as the city is able to do so. Surveys can be carried out in conjunction with other surveys or public consultations. Having an environmental policy that takes residents' expectations into account would help to increase their identification with the city. Engaging at the level of dialogue about the city's ecology can have a measurable impact on residents' actions and involvement.



**Figure 3.** The city runs educational programmes on environmental protection (ecology) in kindergartens, schools.

Source: own research.

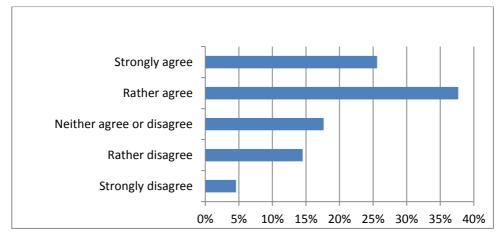
The cities' declarations that young inhabitants are the main audience for environmental marketing coincide with the actions taken by the cities. A vast majority of 84% of cities run educational programmes aimed at kindergartens and schools. Only 8% indicated that they do not conduct such activities.



**Figure 4.** The city conducts awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of environmental protection (ecology) activities aimed at older residents.

Source: own research.

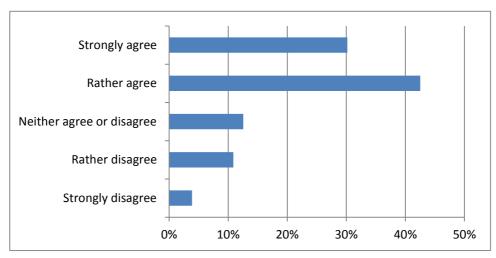
Also in case of older residents, the cities are active in making them aware of the importance of environmental activities - 70% of cities. Only 14% do not undertake any activity in this area towards older groups. 16% have no opinion.



**Figure 5.** The city organises outdoor events, festivals aimed at promoting environmentally friendly lifestyles and farming among its residents.

Source: own research.

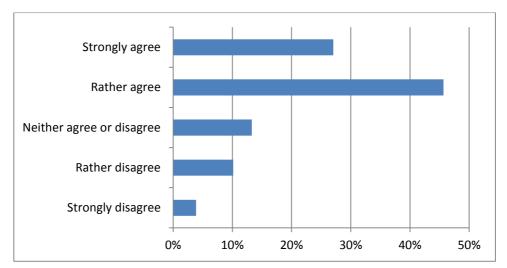
In an effort to promote pro-environmental lifestyles and farming among residents, a large percentage of cities 64% organise festivals and outdoor events. Thanks to such events, residents can learn not only about environmental problems in the city, but also about ways to solve them or reduce their negative effects. It is also an opportunity to meet and activate residents. 19% of the cities surveyed do not organise this type of event. 18% could not specify whether such events take place in their city.



**Figure 6.** The city promotes environmental attitudes through social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others).

Source: own research.

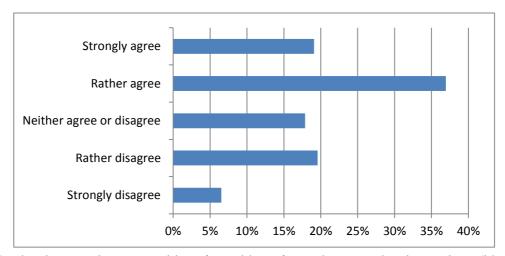
To promote attitudes, cities use communication tools that are primarily characteristic of the young and middle-aged generation, i.e. social media. As many as 73% declare that they promote pro-environmental attitudes using media such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, for example. 15% do not use social media platforms for this purpose.



**Figure 7**. The city often initiates social actions to mobilise residents for environmental activities in the city - e.g. tree planting, cleaning the Earth, litter clean-up, etc.

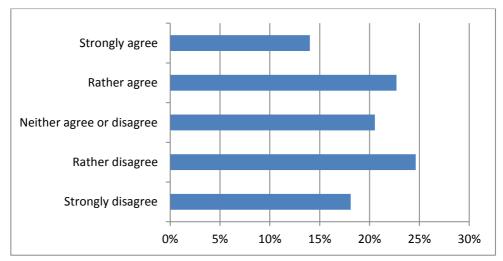
Source: own research.

In addition to promoting attitudes and awareness-raising activities, cities declare that they initiate various actions in which residents participate. 73% carry out actions to mobilise residents, such as planting trees or cleaning up litter in the city. This approach certainly increases the residents' sense of empowerment and impact on the immediate environment around them.



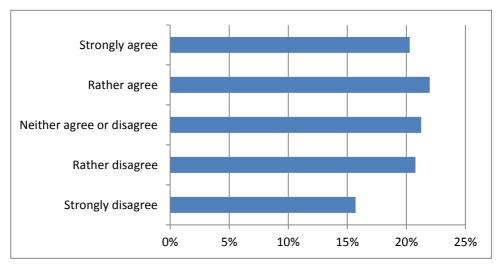
**Figure 8**. The city organises competitions for residents for environmental action projects (ideas). Source: own research.

Another activity allowing inhabitants to participate in activities for the benefit of ecology are competitions organised for inhabitants, in which they can submit projects to improve the environment in the city. According to declarations, such competitions are organised by more than half of the cities surveyed - 56%.



**Figure 9.** Green personal transport - city bikes and/or scooters - is strongly promoted in the city. Source: own research.

A measure taken by cities to change the habits of their inhabitants is to promote clean individual transport by providing and promoting city bicycles or electric scooters. Promotion of such means of transport is declared by 37% of cities, but the vast majority do not offer such solutions to inhabitants.



**Figure 10.** The city runs a programme to subsidise households to switch to green energy (participates in the 'Green Energy' programme).

Source: own research.

Cities also offer dedicated assistance to residents. 42% of cities have a programme whereby it is possible to subsidise households to switch to green energy. Such subsidies not only change air quality, but also build, albeit to a limited extent, environmental awareness.

It should also be mentioned that, in Poland, cities are increasingly deciding to impose solutions on residents in order to improve the state of the environment. Examples include a ban on combusting solid fuels or restrictions on driving old cars into city centres (so-called clean transport zones).

#### **Conclusion**

In the case of a city, the product is not only the tangible (streets, parks, buildings, roads), but also the intangible. Environmental marketing is a value that falls into both the tangible sphere (the shaping of the environment in a city) and the mental sphere of the inhabitants (manifested in environmental awareness or compliance with environmental standards). This gives cities an individual quality. Different cities face different environmental problems. Dealing with such problems is reflected in the way the city is experienced by different audiences, and this translates into the genius loci of a place. Residents feel the genius loci to the highest degree, as they often carry out a large part of their activities in the city. The awareness of the importance of residents' attitudes towards the environment makes them the most attractive target group for promotional activities undertaken by cities.

Taking residents as the main (priority) audience for marketing the city's ecology and targeting them with various programmes is correct for several reasons:

- Residents are to a large extent the unique fabric of the city, creating an atmosphere in the city that is part of its identity. Among other things, the attitudes of residents and their environmental awareness determine the state of the city's environment, which translates into the opinions of other stakeholders. Residents are therefore the environment that influences the creation of the city's image among various groups in line with the principle that good public relations start from within.
- Marketing activities to involve residents in green initiatives and to make them aware of
  the importance of environmental protection make it possible to involve residents in
  efforts to adapt cities to climate change. Greater awareness and pro-environmental
  attitudes on the part of residents means lower costs for the city.
- A problem that many cities are facing is depopulation. Taking specific action and showing the city as caring about ecology and improving environmental living conditions will allow it to retain some of its residents, for whom this issue is important. Of course, it should be borne in mind that this is not the most important aspect of residents' attachment to the city, as there are a number of factors which determine this, e.g. jobs, opportunities to study, safety in the city, housing prices, access to entertainment, etc. However, the importance of the environment and its condition is increasingly important, especially when looking for a place 'to live'. By promoting the environment, it can therefore not only influence the attachment of residents to the city, but also attract new residents. Cities are interested in population growth. Tax revenues then increase and the unit cost of living decreases.
- The issue of depopulation is also linked to another problem: the ageing population. Targeting ecological measures at the youngest, as declared by the cities, makes sense, since it is the young who most often migrate out of the city. The environmental

awareness of the young also seems to be higher than that of older people. Ecologically clean cities, when viewed from a perspective, may be one of the criteria for young people to evaluate a city as a place to live and build a future.

- A key task for local authorities is to ensure a high quality of life for their residents and this must be done while taking into account observed climate change and environmental concerns. Addressing this issue in local policy and marketing plans is becoming a driver for development.
- By activating residents, through marketing activities, for environmental protection, we increase their sense of responsibility for their own city. It makes them partners of the local authorities and not just passive recipients of top-down decisions. This translates into a stronger sense of local identity. By involving users in processes related to adaptation to environmental problems, cities achieve tangible benefits: they can more accurately diagnose local environmental problems and expectations, strengthen the city's adaptation potential, and generally increase the involvement of various stakeholders in environmental adaptation activities.

The declaration that residents are the priority groups for promoting green attitudes and actions in the city does not mean that other stakeholder groups are not important. It does, however, indicate that cities recognise the importance of this group as an audience for environmental marketing. Residents want an attractive environment to live in the city, but they are also the ones who influence the quality of this place through their behaviour and decisions. According to the survey, city authorities are aware of this and are undertaking a range of green marketing activities. Many cities do not carry out a survey on the environmental needs of their citizens. It is worth planning such a survey, especially as it is becoming a necessity and a challenge for cities to adapt to environmental changes already occurring or expected. The problem of the urban population's exposure to the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation will grow. Actions taken directly by city authorities, especially those involving citizens, therefore play a major role for the future of the city. Passivity on the part of municipal authorities in relation to environmental change can have irreversible consequences, such as a mismatch between public services and the needs of users. This results in the depopulation of the city and, with increasing maintenance costs, can lead to urban decay (fall).

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