

SUDEA: Conducting Arctic Research from Outside the Arctic. Key Constraints to Sustainable Urban Development in the European Arctic

Michał ŁUSZCZUK^{1,✉}, Dorothea WEHRMANN², Katarzyna RADZIK-MARUSZAK³,
Jacqueline GÖTZE², and Arne RIEDEL⁴

¹Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Faculty of Earth Sciences and Spatial Management,
Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Lublin, Poland

²German Institute of Development and Sustainability, Bonn, Germany

³Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism,
Institute of Political Science and Administration, Lublin, Poland

⁴Ecologic Institute, Berlin, Germany

✉ michal.luszczuk@mail.umcs.pl

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this presentation is to share the experiences and outcomes of a Polish-German research project conducted between 2020 and 2024, funded by the National Science Centre (NCN) and the German Research Foundation (DFG), which examined the challenges to sustainable urban development in the European Arctic. Carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project required adaptations to qualitative research methodologies—particularly the shift of interviews and consultations to remote formats. This transformation introduced new limitations but also opened up a space for critical reflection on conducting social research “from outside” the studied region.

2. THEMATIC SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The paper will focus on two main areas:

- (1) Methodological challenges of conducting social research in the Arctic without direct field presence. The discussion will include approaches to maintaining researcher–participant relationships in online environments, issues of access to local knowledge and building trust

at a distance, as well as limitations resulting from the lack of direct participation in the everyday life of Arctic communities.

(2) Findings on the implementation of sustainable development policies in Arctic cities (Wehrmann et al. 2025). Based on the analysis of interview data and municipal policy documents, the paper will present key constraints in implementing global agendas—such as the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda, and the New Urban Agenda—within the local contexts of peripheral cities in the European Arctic. Particular attention is given to:

- a) the impact of the multidimensional effects of climate change on urban functioning,
- b) tensions related to the crisis of international cooperation in the Arctic,
- c) barriers to effective local participation in planning and implementing development policies.

The presentation shares insights gained from conducting research under the challenging conditions of the pandemic and demonstrates how methodological challenges are deeply intertwined with the research topic—the dynamics of local and global processes in a region marked by high levels of uncertainty and volatility.

References

- Wehrmann, D., M. Łuszczuk, K. Radzik-Maruszak, J. Götze, and A. Riedel (2025), *Sustainable Urban Development in the European Arctic*, Routledge, London, 258 pp., DOI: 10.4324/9781003284864.

Received 3 September 2025

Accepted 20 October 2025