Less than 8% of UK urban areas are tracking climate adaptation outcomes

Cities and urban areas (UAs) are now home to the majority of the world's population (over 4.2 billion people) and by 2050 it is estimated that 68% of the world's population will be urban (UN, 2018). For this reason, cities are now hotspots for disaster and risk and are not only central stages for future sustainable development, but also in any work to mitigate and adapt to climate change (Wamsler, 2014). There is need to understand progress on adaptation across governance levels. However, many urban areas are not adequately tracking adaptation progress. This study finds that although the majority of UK urban areas have published climate action plans, less than 14% have monitoring, evaluating, reporting and learning systems for adaptation and less than 8% actually track adaptation outcomes.

Evidence of best practice can be seen in some urban areas. Best practice may include localising international agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals, taking a flexible and transparent approach which enables learning, and considering the broader social agenda. Further work is needed to build capacity of urban authorities to effectively track adaptation, so that implementation at the local level can be used to inform global goals.

As more and more urban areas are planning and responding to climate change there is a need to understand the role that local action is having at the national and international level. The Paris Agreement called for a global goal on adaptation (GGA) but in practice evaluating progress on adaptation across different levels of governance is hard to achieve. Effective monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning (MERL) systems are crucial to inform decision-making and track progress at all levels of government, and adaptation planning documents contain the most up-to-date information on how urban areas are tracking progress.

The aim of this thesis was to understand the characteristics and use of adaptation metrics across climate adaptation-related planning. A case study is used to analyse what is being done in practice, particularly at the urban scale. To achieve this aim 199 urban areas in the UK were analysed, indicators collected for 27 urban areas and the policies' analysed for a subset of 14 urban areas.

The aim of the thesis was broken down into two research questions. Research Question 1 (RQ1) looks at "What is the share of UK local adaptation plans that include adaptation metrics, and what are their main characteristics?" and is addressed through an indicator analysis. Research Question 2 (RQ2) is addressed through a policy analysis and asks, "How are adaptation metrics used in UK local adaptation plans to track outcomes?".