“We are not waiting for the great transformation to come! We are part of it!” – Pioneers of change and the creation/development of (a) culture(s) of sustainability” in the European cities of Munich, Barcelona and Copenhagen

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My dissertation project is based in Munich, Barcelona and Copenhagen. I focus on civil society movements, participation and the co-creation process of a sustainable city by citizens (bottom up) instead of looking at top down processes by international, national, regional or local governments. I want to find out if and how different urban civil society actors discuss, communicate, generate and transform environmental, economic and social issues and if they – by organizing different projects – create a "culture of sustainability” in their cities. As concrete fields of research, I’ve chosen two NGOs or eco-/social-entrepreneurs and the Transition Town Initiatives in each city. I have conducted interviews with around 30 persons who hold an important role as founders, leaders, ‘masterminds’ or important actors within these initiatives/organizations.

My interviews have shed light on the following questions with regard to the interviewees within their initiative/organization:

Values, worldviews and ideas of man; History of becoming founders, leaders etc.; Most important topics and contents of projects; Ways of learning of new knowledge and skills within and for the initiative/organization; Possibilities of participation and co-creation of new ideas and projects; Ways of cooperation and collaboration within the initiative/organization and with other initiatives and institutions in the city; Building and using social networks (locally, regionally, nationally, internationally); Dealing with personal issues and conflicts within the initiative/organization and in a collaboration or cooperation process with other initiatives and institutions in the city; Relationship to the city / importance of the city within the work and everyday life of the interviewees; Pending problems in the city concerning social, economic, ecologic and cultural sustainability.

I will present my research concept, the empirical process and first results of my research.

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