

Krakow in Transition

Phase by Phase Toward the Green City of Tomorrow

Objective of the Strategy The strategy aims to provide more space for nature and for residents within the city. Since Kraków's inner city was not destroyed during the Second World War, it still retains its former medieval, dense urban layout and a high concentration of historical landmarks. However, this gives rise to two major challenges. First, aside from the Planty Park, the city center lacks meaningful green spaces, which negatively affects both the urban climate and overall quality of life. Second, the center is characterized by a high density of tourist-oriented uses such as accommodation. This “touristification” pushes out residents as well as everyday local businesses.

The strategy of gradually introducing more greenery into the inner city aims to partially address both issues. Increasing green spaces creates a more livable urban environment for both people and wildlife. New parks, community gardens, and biotope landscapes are planned, while existing green areas will be upgraded, as many current green spaces lack meaningful function. There are different types of green spaces, each with distinct benefits and purposes for humans and the environment, as illustrated in the pictograms. Every green space should meaningfully contribute to its surroundings, and these purposes should be evenly distributed throughout the city.

The newly planned green areas will be implemented primarily in public spaces—especially on heavily sealed surfaces that have no architectural function, or in areas with low building density. Where appropriate, low-density zones will be partially replaced by green spaces. One example is the riverbanks, where a new floodplain landscape is to be created, providing ecological value, recreational opportunities, climate regulation, and flood protection. Other areas will be densified with a combination of buildings and green structures. A significant portion of the new green space will come from former streets. The city will gradually transition toward a car-free center—for example, beginning with the inner historic core in Phase 1. Former streets will become shared green spaces for pedestrians: low-threshold meeting places for residents, including new community spaces such as urban gardening areas within neighborhoods.

Private areas, such as courtyards, should also become greener, as they offer ecological benefits for the city and improve residents' well-being. To implement the green strategy on private land, incentives for property owners will be needed—financial aid and subsidies, such as grants for planting or tax benefits for greening measures. In addition to incentives, regulations such as minimum green-space requirements could also be introduced.

This approach will create a more livable inner city for residents. However, the lack of quality of life is not the only issue—the larger problem is the scarcity and high cost of housing due to touristification. The abundance of tourist apartments makes housing scarce and expensive. This challenge can only be addressed at a political and administrative level: by regulating short-term rentals, introducing funding programs for long-term housing, and establishing a socially oriented housing policy. The goal is not to push tourists away, but to regulate unregulated tourist apartments so that residents regain space in the city center, creating a more balanced coexistence. Community spaces such as cultural centers, co-working areas, and community gardens are intended to further strengthen this sense of community. The strategy will be implemented in phases to strengthen public acceptance by first testing the approach within a smaller area of the city and introducing gradual changes that do not overwhelm the urban environment. The process will begin in the historic old town, where the density of green spaces is particularly low and where urban challenges—such as high traffic pressure—are especially pronounced.

