Abstract
The engagement of local stewards is critically important for sustaining ecosystems services in cities. But what makes urban dwellers interested in stewardship of urban nature? This study conducted in Warsaw shows that activism is related to three intertwined areas of motivations: nature, place and community. Activism can be motivated by reasons not related to the natural environment such as democratization of decision-making in the city. The three areas of motivations combined create an ideal urban environment activists were willing to engage for. It can be called “countryside in the city”. This desirable urban environment provides naturalistic-looking nature, stronger social bonds between people, allow for feeling safe and relaxed. Activists are also acting against degradation of nature, places and community right to take a part in decision-making about their living environment. Activism for green areas in the city may require engaging in conflicts over the city space and discourse about it. Higher level of engagement was found aiming at co-creating the city. Social-ecological memory of agency was identified – a collective memory of the possibility of influencing urban environment based on previous experiences. The results suggest that urban stewardship seems to require all kinds of engagement also aiming for taking an active role in co-creating the city. The social-ecological memory of agency might be an important tool of activism. Engagement for urban nature may be driven by other than environmental reasons. This gives hope that various groups could potentially engage in activism for green areas. The idea of “countryside in the city” if seen in other context may be used for participatory urban planning.