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Swedish Platform for System Innovation Research in Interaction

POLICY BRIEF

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Climate transitions in collaboration

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Climate transitions in collaboration

Many municipalities are actively working with climate and sustainability issues, while at the same time struggling to create long-term and equitable forms of collaboration with citizens and civil society. Climate work is often organised through projects, which risks producing fragmented efforts without clear continuity.

This policy brief explores how a municipality can advance climate transition through collaboration with citizens and civil society actors. The analysis is based on the researchers' long-term engagement with the work of the Environmental Department in the City of Malmö, participation in collaborative activities, as well as literature studies and experience from participatory design research.

The study shows that successful climate transition in collaboration with citizens is not primarily determined by individual dialogues or events, but by the quality of the processes that connect actors over time. Recurring formats for interaction, shared learning processes, and clear opportunities for continued involvement were all found to be central for building momentum and trust. The role of the municipality is therefore not only to

invite participation, but also to create structures that allow participation to continue and make a difference after a specific activity has ended.

Another key finding is that coordination and relationship-building often take place both formally and informally. In the Malmö case, some coordinating functions were clearly recognised within the municipal organisation, while other crucial links to civil society were made possible through informal and relational work. The study also shows that climate transition must be understood as a matter of climate justice: who gets to participate, under what conditions, and which groups risk being negatively affected by policy decisions are all central to the legitimacy and long-term sustainability of transition processes.



These findings matter because they show that municipal climate transition cannot be reduced to technical solutions or one-off participation initiatives. For transition processes to become both effective and socially sustainable, municipalities need to build capacity for long-term collaboration, shared learning, and coordination across organisational boundaries. The study also highlights that justice and representation are not secondary concerns, but fundamental to whether climate action is perceived as legitimate, inclusive, and durable.

THE ROAD FORWARD FOR POLICY

- Treat climate work as an interconnected ecosystem and continuously map actors, initiatives, and governing structures.
- Make orchestration and relationship-building a core task, with clear mandates, time, and resources.
- Create structures for feedback and continued participation so that citizen engagement can be sustained over time.
- Build shared interfaces across departments and sectors instead of launching new parallel projects.
- Develop place-based and justice-oriented approaches that strengthen both ecological and social sustainability.

KEY POINTS FOR POLICY

- Municipal climate transition becomes more sustainable when it is built on long-term relationships, not only time-limited projects.
- Collaboration with citizens and civil society requires clear coordination, continuous feedback, and structures for ongoing engagement.
- Informal relationship-building and orchestration are often crucial for making collaboration work, but are rarely recognised in formal project logics.
- Climate transition needs to be shaped with attention to social justice, local context, and different groups' unequal opportunities to participate.
- Municipalities need organisational conditions that support shared learning, cross-silo collaboration, and more experimental ways of working.

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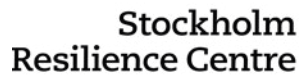
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