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Achieving 100 climate neutral cities in Europe: Investigating climate city contracts in Sweden

Snapshot



This study investigates the first Climate City Contracts (CCCs) in Sweden and consequently Europe. To do so, it evaluates the content of the Swedish CCCs against a framework for best practice deep decarbonisation plans.

Context

The European Commission has established a mission to achieve 100 climate neutral cities by 2030. A key element in the process is for municipalities to develop Climate City Contracts (CCCs).

Simultaneously, Viable Cities, a national strategic innovation program in Sweden, is also focusing on the transition to climate neutral cities where CCCs are being developed.

Viable Cities is at the forefront of the process by not only creating the first CCCs at the national level but also in supporting the European Commission in developing CCCs at the European level.



Climate change is one of the most complex and significant risks facing humanity. Cities provide an extraordinary opportunity to drive ambitious climate policies.

– Shabb & McCormick





Key Insights and Messages

This study outlines eight key elements in Climate City Contracts (CCCs).

- **Fostering multi-Level governance:** CCCs aim to enhance cooperation between local, national, and European actors, creating a cohesive framework for action.
- **Embracing flexibility:** As non-legally binding documents, CCCs allow for adaptive governance that can respond to evolving challenges and a diversity of conditions.
- **Engaging stakeholders:** The development of CCCs emphasizes the importance of involving citizens, research organizations, and the private sector in the climate action dialogue.
- **Driving innovation:** CCCs aim to unlock new governance models and economic strategies that support sustainable urban development, where cities can be a platform for different modes of experimentation with technologies and social innovation.
- **Addressing inequalities:** There is a risk that climate initiatives can inadvertently exacerbate social inequalities if not carefully designed and implemented.
- **Navigating complexities:** Aligning objectives across local, national, and European levels presents significant challenges that require strategic navigation.
- **Measuring progress:** Establishing consistent metrics for evaluating progress towards climate neutrality is essential for accountability and learning.
- **Shifting towards transformation:** CCCs represent a shift towards transformative climate action, focusing on systems change rather than incremental approaches.



Policy and Practical Actions

- **Embrace an iterative process:** Shift the focus from merely achieving outcomes to fostering a dynamic, iterative development process for Climate City Contracts (CCCs). This approach encourages adaptability and continuous improvement.
- **Catalyze plans for financing and investment:** Create robust Climate Investment Plans that actively engage the private sector, diversifying funding sources beyond traditional municipal budgets.
- **Foster collaborative governance:** Break down silos by promoting innovative partnerships between local municipalities and national government agencies, enhancing cooperation and resource sharing.
- **Balance speed with inclusivity:** While quick action is essential, ensure that stakeholder engagement is prioritized to build consensus and legitimacy around CCCs.
- **Build on existing goals:** Leverage established climate goals and strategies as a foundation for developing CCCs, streamlining initial efforts while ensuring alignment with long-term objectives.
- **Integrate climate actions across departments:** Think holistically about climate issues, integrating climate strategies into various departments and fostering cross-sector collaboration.
- **Ensure transparency and accountability:** Maintain an open process that allows for external scrutiny, fostering trust and legitimacy in the development of CCCs.
- **Engage key stakeholders:** Secure buy-in from political leaders, government agencies, and influential stakeholders to create a support network for CCCs.
- **Align with local visions:** Ensure that CCCs reflect the unique vision and climate targets of the municipality, reinforcing commitment to local priorities.
- **Allow time for participation:** Plan in time to incorporate new actions and engage in participatory processes during the development of CCCs.

Background

Selected cities from across Europe are tasked with creating climate city contracts (CCCs) that encompass comprehensive plans for achieving climate neutrality across all sectors.

CCCs are non-legally binding agreements that symbolize a commitment among cities, national governments and the European Commission to pursue climate neutrality.

The European Commission aims to establish 100 climate neutral cities by 2030, with CCCs serving as a pivotal tool in this ambitious goal.

The Viable Cities program in Sweden is at the forefront of implementing CCCs, engaging cities in a collective effort to achieve climate neutrality.

In 2020, nine Swedish cities collaborated with Viable Cities and national agencies to develop CCCs, which are updated annually to reflect increasing ambitions and lessons learned.

Objective

The objective of this study is to investigate and provide an analysis of the first CCCs from Sweden, evaluating their content and process against a framework for best practice deep decarbonization plans, and generating insights for subsequent CCCs across Europe.

The framework applied in this study on best practice deep decarbonization plans is developed by Linton et al. (2021). The framework combines both strategies for action as well as the governance structure and approaches shaping outcomes.

Methods

This study is based on a literature review, document analysis of the Swedish CCCs from nine municipalities, and draws on five interviews with the municipalities of Lund, Umeå and Stockholm and Viable Cities.

Reference



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