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A call for action on sustainable urban transformation: How to govern missions towards climate neutral cities?

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A call for action on sustainable urban transformation

How to govern missions towards climate neutral cities?

Rallying Cry - Call for Action

The transitions to a low carbon and sustainable society are urgent, but at the current level and pace of action there is a significant risk we will escalate and exceed the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement and fail to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. By engaging cities, we can build momentum around bottom-up interconnected actions and accelerate societal and technological transitions.

But the current focus is on large, global cities with minimal attention on small cities, villages, and urban nodes. Current actions are often based on top-down “urban optimism”. Current practice is fragmented and often focused on fixing failures. Current action emerges as isolated projects with limited systematic learning. The need for game changing efforts in cities is more critical than ever.

The missions approach appears to present an opportunity for cities. Missions are mechanisms indicating a clear direction with ambitious innovation actions, which are delivered through multiple top-down and bottom-up solutions, and rely on cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and multi-level relationships and activities.

This agenda is developed, based on, and as part of the City Futures Summit organized by International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics (IIIEE), Lund University in October 2020. We want to thank the participants from around the world who attended the Summit! Special thanks to the keynote speakers and panelists of Cathy Oke, Philip Näslund, Jennifer Lenhart, Sylvia Schwaag Serger and Helena Bjarnegård.

The coordinating scientific team at the IIIEE, Lund University for the Summit is Kes McCormick, Lena Neij and Jenny Palm. Further thanks goes to organisers, moderators, chairpersons and helpers at the Summit including Charlotte Leire, Peter Arnfalk, Jessika Luth Richter, Björn Wickenberg, Li Sandberg, Anna-Riikka Kojonsaari, Yuliya Voytenko Palgan, Daniela Lazoroska, Frans Libertson and Alicia Requena.

Setting the Agenda - Key Recommendations

Cities can play a fundamentally important role in creating a low carbon and sustainable society. But it is imperative that missions for sustainable urban transformation and climate neutral cities quickly shift from an abstract level to rapid action. In this agenda, we argue that there is a need for more specific and concrete directions on how to govern missions in cities.

Missions for climate neutral cities need to excite, inspire and unite! First, these missions need to be exciting and capture the imagination of the general public and urban actors. Second, these missions need to be inspirational, engaging and inviting to the general public and a range of urban actors. Third, these missions need to be uniting on a common goal to design and bring about climate neutral cities.

Teams working with climate neutral cities need to confront two immediate challenges: shifting mindsets and breaking boundaries. First, mindsets refer to our attitudes, perspectives and how we think about the world. In this case, we need to rethink and reimagine cities in relation to mobility, energy, water, food, consumption, waste, resources, infrastructure, buildings and nature.

Second, stimulating collaboration and finding synergies are a key. However, boundaries exist within and between organisations, sectors and disciplines. New forms of collaboration between social and technical studies are critically needed to work towards transforming socio-technical systems to meet the ambitions of climate neutral cities.



Taking Charge - Priority Actions

Designing and operationalising missions for sustainable urban transformation and climate neutral cities demands concerted action across actors and domains.

1 UNASHAMBLY BOLD, INSPIRATIONAL AND WITH WIDE SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

“Transformation will be propelled by inspiring leaders and empowered communities which are guided by visions, knowledge and a shared commitment to a better future.”

Sylvia Schwaag Serger, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Lund University

“We need to understand that the mission to be a climate neutral city in 10 years, can only be met by a high level of trust among each other. Social sustainability is the cornerstone for climate action! We are all part of the solution.”

Philip Näslund, Strategic development Officer, City of Umeå

2 CLEARLY NAVIGATING AND SETTING OUT DIRECTIONS WITH CHECK POINTS

“Ambitious climate goals require long-term visions, narratives and stories to gain legitimacy and collaborative actions supporting innovative transitions.”

Lena Neij, Lund University

“A mission-led approach for cities will help to ensure that innovation, both technological and social, will find a home in our communities and achieve the necessary speed and scale for transformative climate action in cities.”

Cathy Oke, Senior Advisor, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy

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HUGELY SUPPORTIVE OF EXPERIMENTATION AND LEARNING

“Working with missions demands engagement in learning and experimentation processes to kick-start creativity and collaboration to drive change.”

Kes McCormick, Lund University

"From the corona virus to climate change, cities are the epicenter of compounding challenges. But cities have also proven their resilience, learning from each other, adapting new models of sustainable urban development amid crisis – from massive cycling rollout to better green spaces."

Jennifer Lenhart, Global Lead, WWF Sustainable Cities

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EMPHATICLY PROMOTING CROSS-DISCIPLINARY, CROSS-SECTORAL AND CROSS-ACTOR COLLABORATIONS

“The transition towards climate neutral and sustainable cities needs to be just and build on trans-local, trans-national and international collaboration.”

Helena Bjarnegård, National Architect of Sweden

“Dialogue between actors promotes the exchange of perspectives and yields new knowledge, which is an important prerequisite for understanding and addressing complex urban challenges.”

Jenny Palm, Lund University

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