Sign in | Sign up
Get unlimited access to the rest of Medium for less than $5/month. Become a member

The Viable Cities Transition Lab — A Collaborative Learning Environment

Viable Cities · Follow
Written by Carsten Ohlsen · 1 min read · Aug 20

By Anna Holmberg, Lund University

The Viable Cities Transition Lab is a strategic initiative that aims to create a shared capacity to address major societal challenges such as climate and environmental transformation. It is a tool to accelerate and spread change. The means bringing about transformative systemic change and taking bold actions to reshape our social institutions towards an equitable and circular economy, developing responsible and inclusive governance and transformed changing behaviors for a more sustainable society. Join the Transition Lab strategic a deep-dive together with examples of activities.

Viable Cities Transition Lab Foundations

Viable Cities is a broad collaborative network emerging innovation program. In order to reach the minimum Viable Cities neutral cities 2030 with a good life for all citizens, a transition process is needed. Transition processes are complex, unpredictable and need to work together. Although Sweden has signed the Paris agreement and has a Climate Law, there is very little direct power that can be used. Instead, facilitation is needed to make collaboration easier for different levels when it comes to tasks such as identifying stakeholders, making sense of situations, setting goals, designing interventions and making them happen.

Viable Cities is an intermediary organisation with the task of facilitating the collaboration between cities, companies, academia, authorities and citizens. It was designed as such from the beginning, with a broad representation of organisations in the board and in the program management team. This team consists of people from the municipality of Malmö, Malmö University, Malmö actors, and others with a background from the municipality. Together with experts from the cities and from research, a learning environment called Viable Cities Transition Lab has been developed, consisting of a great number of different activities.

The Viable Cities Transition Lab is about exploring and shaping change theory and methodology, and building distributed knowledge and skills as a basis for action and for achieving change in depth. We need to move beyond dealing with symptoms and rather target the underlying problems in our institutional structures. The transition process is a challenge to the system. This requires us to build a shared understanding and capacity to work beyond isolated efforts that address individual challenges and instead aim for large-scale interventions in complex systems.

According the Viable Cities Impact Logic, the Transition Lab as a whole addresses the following objective although specific activities focus on one or a couple of them:

- Clarify common direction
- Create engaging visions and stories
- Build a common language for change
- Use synergies
- Create momentum for climate change
- Orchestrate relevant initiatives in Sweden
- Show how a holistic, system-oriented approach provides multiple benefits
- Renew decision-making
- Renew policy development
- Build capacity for change and new practices
- Drive institutional learning

The activities vary in forms of theatre, learning, inner projects, emphasis on different aspects of the transition process, and in how they are implemented. But they also have a lot in common. Most are interactive in character, bringing people with different backgrounds and roles. They also cover a range of different topics such as energy, mobility, health environments and so on. An always in relation to sustainable urban transition management. A key aspect is the fact that knowledge from various areas is needed and that it is vital that people from different organisations work together.

Illustration of the various topics covered in the Viable Cities Transition Lab. Illustration made by Anna Holmberg and designed by the entrepreneurship process for the 10 cities in the second cohort joining the Climate Neutral Cities 2030 program.

The activities range from short breakfast seminars introducing new ideas to year-long development and research projects. They also include more communication, for example using the web and social media to combination of physical and digital meetings and to reach more people and organisations. The program is also evolved and refined in a complex process, using a learning process focusing on the impact logic. Some of the Transition Lab activities are focusing on knowledge transfer for example when presenting facts about a new method that has been developed, while others are focusing on learning and development of competencies and capacities. Some are in order to gain proficiency and skills training is needed on a scale that is hard to provide for the Viable Cities program management team, why consultants sometimes are contracted and the cities are also encouraged to provide more support when needed.

Many events are recorded, to make it accessible for a large number of people and to make it possible to go back to, when expertise is needed but also enabling the constant onboarding needed to handle the fact that new people continuously join the mission. It is also easy to reuse material in local events, putting it in another context. The material produced is often a mix of videos, articles, presentations, data sets, graphs and so on in order to take individual differences in learning approaches into account.

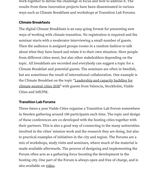
Another important aspect is to make the learning a positive experience, since emotions enhance learning. One way of doing this is to use cross-creative learning approaches [1], where the participants are asked to help each other in the learning process. Another way is to make the learning very interactive in character with lots of discussions, providing lots of opportunities for people to get to know each other, emphasizing the personal element in the transition management processes.

Examples of Transition Lab Activities

The contents and the formats of the Transition Lab activities are continuously developed based on the needs of the participants, the presentation of needs and willingness to share driving the development. Much of the work in the Transition Lab is supported by design and facilitation experts, where design is considered to be a learning process in itself. A number of examples of how this is done are provided in more detail below.

The Climate City Contract Process

In Viable Cities, the development and signing of the Climate City Contract (CCC) is an annual iterative learning process. Throughout the year workshops and meetings take place in order to define what should be part in the contract and what should be left out. The contract is signed by the city's politicians and officials and represents a commitment to the mission. Although it is also made, as an input for the next steps in the process. This iterative process allows for more citizen and authorities to join and the possibility of aligning with other processes such as the EU CC through NetZero Cities and the EU Mission for Adaptation to Climate Change.


Climate City Contract – until 2030
23
9
4
Actions
Indicators
Goals
Vision
Climate City Contract
Climate City Contract
Climate City Contract

Lists

Interesting Design Topics

201 stories · 121 saves

Kim Witten, PhD

Stop Trying to Manage Your Time

Do this instead

· 6 min read · Aug 22

6.4K 136

Unbecoming

10 Seconds That Ended My 20 Year Marriage

It's August in Northern Virginia, hot and humid. I still haven't showered from my...

· 4 min read · Feb 16, 2022

61K 915

May Pang in Better Humans

Statistically, You Will Marry the Wrong Person. Here's Why.

Luckily, statistics also tell you how not to.

· 9 min read · Jul 14

15.8K 289

Markham Heid

Experts May Have Figured Out Why We Yawn

One of human physiology's great mysteries may be solved, finally.

· 4 min read · 3 days ago

1.7K 32

See more recommendations