



Local authorities becoming transition leaders

Ingredients for a successful
transformation



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Local authorities becoming transition leaders: ingredients for a successful transformation

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INTRODUCTION

The EU's bold ambitions to become carbon-neutral by 2050 means that they must cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80 to 95% compared to 1990 levels. Since cities are responsible for 70% of these emissions, local governments are required to accelerate efforts to deliver low-carbon, resilient and liveable urban environments for the well-being of their citizens in the collective fight against climate change. Within the framework of Horizon 2020, the project TOMORROW has been engaging with six pilot cities (Brasov, Brest Métropole, Dublin Region, Mouscron, Niš, and Valencia), to develop local transition roadmaps addressing the challenges of the energy transition in all of its aspects – environmental, economic and social. Benefitting from contributions of lighthouse cities such as Leuven, Nantes and Växjö, TOMORROW was able to set ambitious goals and foster strong political commitments. This allowed pilot cities to successfully engage citizens in decision-making, collaborative governance and implementation.

The following policy recommendations provide the lessons-learned from the project's efforts to empower local authorities as leaders of the transition towards climate-neutrality. Highlighting the core features of local transition roadmaps, each recommendation is complemented with a success story from a Pilot City of the TOMORROW project.

This booklet aims to inspire local decision-makers and administrators to become facilitators of their territorial transitions to climate-neutrality; by elevating ambitions, building capacities, nurturing existing initiatives, strengthening networks, and creating synergies among different actors, in a highly collaborative and co-creative process.

These recommendations address three important pillars to design a local roadmap:

- (1) The **political ambition** necessary to question the unsustainability of the status quo.
- (2) The **structural reorganisations** needed to equip local administrations with the tools to develop their transition roadmaps.
- (3) The **opportunities** for local governments to internally source greater **capacities and support**.

Political Initiative

Walking the talk and leading by example

To kickstart the profound transformational process that is an ecological transition, you need strong political drive. In any political system affected by crises, reliable leadership is necessary to respond to disillusioned citizens and to restore trust in public institutions. This is especially true at the local level, where Mayors have increasingly become first respondents to emergency situations. Climate change is no less. Mandated by the people, Mayors and Councillors must respond to their citizens' aspirations and position themselves on the frontline of the climate crisis, steering the profound changes that alleviate the social strains brought about by climate change.

Ambition & Leadership

Local transformation should be driven by a determination to change and the desire for one's city to respect the planet's boundaries. Only this will provide citizens with a wide range of sustainable services and result in adequate urban planning, in a way that regenerates the environment while improving public health. For this, **mayors and local politicians have crucial roles to play in raising ambitions for a greener future, without settling for superficial goals and 'easy-wins' to gain brief political approvals.** Joining the Covenant of Mayors and declaring climate emergencies, for example, have already been important milestones for local authorities embarking in an ecological transition. Among the six pilot cities of TOMORROW, Brasov, Dublin and Valencia raised their ambitions to the highest possible level by applying to the EU Mission "100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030", way ahead of the European Commission's net-zero objective by 2050. In addition to aspirations and good will, political leadership needs to deliver sustainable alternatives to inhabitants. **Local representatives, who are legitimated by the electoral process, must embody the sense of urgency that citizens increasingly feel, in their appeal for immediate climate action towards an inclusive ecological transition.** Mayors and Councillors need to display clear commitments, as well as set bold agendas, to guide their cities in a transformation process that meets the demand of their constituencies.

Valencia's selection in the 100 Climate-neutral cities

→ The local political class for long had concerns over climate deterioration and the consequences for its citizens. In 2019, the municipality declared climate emergency, pushing for a net-zero emissions target to be achieved no later than 2040. They put in place a transversal working group to coordinate all the departments responsible for implementing local climate actions in the framework of the newly developed SECAP. Determined to step up mitigating efforts, locally elected representatives approved with a large consensus the application for the European Commission's 100 Climate-neutral Cities by 2030. Following the successful selection, Valencia advanced its initial target by ten years. The strong interaction between the political class' vision and the civil servants' hands-on experience has been key to the Spanish city's success in its transition, allowing an effective cross-sectoral approach that also involves parastatal companies.

Targets

One way to successfully translate these pledges into concrete and traceable actions, is to anchor political objectives to quantifiable and non-partisan targets. An urban transition is a long-lasting process that takes time and needs to outlive legislatures' cycles. Politicizing the transition agenda makes the transformational process vulnerable to structural changes and party reshufflings in local government. To prevent this from happening, it is important to secure the transition roadmap to scientific targets, which should be both quantifiable and beneficial for the community. Merging local objectives with scientific and widely recognised goals, not only increases transparency of the administration, but also allows for comparisons and referencing to other national and local efforts. Naturally, monitoring and dissecting data to extract relevant information and to provide targeted solutions, require a good deal of technical and scientific expertise. **For this, establishing a scientific group that complements the local government will ensure that decision-making is well-informed and calibrated,** which is essential for identifying long-term objectives, designing local climate action plans and monitoring progress. Establishing local expertise as such, further increases autonomy in local

governance and reinforces decentralisation, as a critical feature of the transition process.

Dublin’s Scientific Pathway

→ The evidence-based targets that Dublin is using for its roadmap come from the findings of the Dublin Region Energy Master Plan, which provides realistic and scientific pathways for the Dublin Region to achieve its carbon emission reduction targets by 2030 and 2050. It is the result of three years’ worth of research by Dublin’s Energy Efficiency Agency’s (Codema) energy planning team. Carrying out the first study of its kind in any city or town in Ireland, they identified the areas of greatest potential to reduce emissions related to heat, electricity, transport and buildings in Dublin. The master plan uses spatially-driven energy scenario modelling to identify the most cost-efficient solutions, while always considering local socio-economic impacts, based on the specific energy features of each particular area. The energy strategy has found an answer to ‘what should go where?’ for each district of Dublin, taking into account the technologies that are best suited to reduce energy-related emissions within that area.

Shared Governance

Designing and steering together

There is no one-size-fit-all model of governance universally capable to drive a local transition; it is rather a set of practices that strengthens decision-making and project development with new points of view. To develop a shared vision for the city which resonates with citizens and can be transformed into concrete actions benefitting the local community, there must be complete transparency among the local administration. An open governing structure where local leaders can directly reach out to its population and listen to its interests, is crucial for the design and implementation of a local climate action plan answering to citizens’ aspirations.

Boundaries & Actors

Municipalities are not empty boundless shells consisting of administration and citizens, but large laboratories of stakeholders with diverse and often competing interests. **As local**

governments gear up and implement the transition, it is in their interest to develop a broad understanding and awareness of the territorial context in which the roadmap will unfold. Designing a local transition strategy thus requires a careful assessment of the city's background, past transition experiences and current challenges. Therefore, the first step to setting up an effective governing structure that is ready to address the city's needs, is to frame the context in which the new transition's agenda will take place. To do so, one should start by identifying boundaries and the actors within them. This in turn includes defining territorial scope of action (i.e., matching local administrative capacities and ambitions with the geographic and infrastructural landscape of the municipality) and mapping stakeholders within the community (i.e., identifying businesses, civil society organisations, knowledge institutions and parastatal agencies that could be cooperatively engaged in the local transition).

Governing Model

Systemic transformation in local administrations is often held back by a silo's mentality and narrowly defined competences. It is thus **fundamental to restructure how municipal departments and civil servants are organised, in order to fully address the cross-sectoral issues outlined in local roadmaps.** Common administrative organisations, featuring rigid structures, are a barrier to the holistic approach necessary to steering an ecologic transition. The principles of inclusion and participation highlighted in local strategies, should be replicated throughout the administration, departmental units and personnel. Moreover, broadening the local decision-making process is vital to increase adaptability to ever-changing circumstances, to expand the acceptability of resolutions and to maintain open lines of communication across stakeholders and initiatives. This then allows feedback to be more systematically acknowledged and integrated.

Mouscron's Transition Team

→ In view of empowering the local administration to adopt a holistic approach to the ecological transition, the City has set up an efficient and cross-sectoral Transition Team to oversee and coordinate municipal departments involved in the transformational process. Composed of 16 contact points from key territorial stakeholders in public institutions, private sector, associations and citizens, the Transition Team's competences and scope reflect the 17 themes of the UN's Agenda 2030, embedding the local transition roadmap in the global effort to stop climate change. The diversity among the members converging from the municipality in turn reflects the transversal mindset that guides local governance, with representatives from the departments of (1) Economic and Social Development Coordination, (2) Energy, (3) Environment, (4) Mobility, and (5) Communication. The objective of the Transition Team is to align the agenda and respective projects of participating stakeholders with the common vision defined in the local SECAP, directing them towards the net-zero emissions objective by 2050. The Transition Team meets every two months to share details on programmes, funding and communication approaches, enabling collaborations and opportunities for departments to complement one another.


Citizen Engagement

Municipalities have only one client: their citizens. In the promise of leaving no one behind and making everyone's voice heard, a city embarking on an ecological transition must maintain open channels of communication with its constituency. Legitimacy – key to strengthening local transformative processes – derives **from opportunities where citizens are able to express their views and doubts on the developing transition, whether they be part of civil society, industries or knowledge institutions**. Local administrations should set up participatory platforms that open the public sphere to marginalised groups, offering them outlets to express concerns and making sure transition objectives work towards eliminating social fragmentation. Furthermore, establishing forums promotes participation and dialogue, not only to keep the local decision-makers accountable for their actions, but also to foster a greater acceptability of the ecological transition, ensuring its durability. Nevertheless, outcomes of citizen engagement vary across contexts, depending heavily on a local

government's longstanding commitment to consistently approach inhabitants in order to nurture collaborations and connections that can improve public services.

Brest's Local COP

→ As a way of pursuing greater inclusion, the City is organising its first COP in November 2022, a 2-week event to share knowledge on climate issues, to disseminate actions that local stakeholders are already undertaking, and to highlight opportunities for mobilisation. The gathering will feed the local debate around climate action, encouraging citizens and businesses to do their part when it comes to their respective lifestyles and activities. The format of Brest's Local COP will host a wide range of participants, providing conferences, roundtables, workshops, field tours, expositions, a business forum and a climate village. The City will take this opportunity to further reflect on climate change's impacts on key sectors and how to leverage local capacities to tackle it.

 **Awareness Raising and Empowerment**
Inspiring, supporting and cherishing the community

Municipalities can count on a pool of resourceful actors and communities, rooted in their territories, that are impacted by climate change, directly or indirectly. Within the scope of their actions, these actors and communities have the potential of becoming valuable partners for the implementation of roadmaps. Citizens' active participation is indeed crucial for a just transition: a local transformative process needs to be built on the endorsement of its citizens. This is achieved by creating windows of opportunity for them to make concrete contributions, through investment venues that can sustainably improve the local economy, as well as with information campaigns promoting the benefits coming from the roadmap. However necessary and rewarding it may be to gather public support, reaching out to the community involved in the transition can also be a challenging and time-consuming endeavour. Leading an ecological transition requires skillsets and capacities that are not yet mainstream in local recruitment processes or human resource allocations, demanding constant engagement with stakeholders. Therefore, taking advantage of already existing experiences, know-hows and

deployable capabilities across the urban community, will be crucial to accelerating the transition and making it more participative.

Public-Private Partnerships

Very often, economic interests between public authorities and enterprises find common ground in changing landscapes, as they mutually support each other's respective financial and investment needs. By identifying common objectives and overlapping interests, a community can develop synergies within projects, making use of already existing locally sourced capacities, strengthening cooperation and expanding participation, while retaining value within the city. **Public-private partnerships are tools that local decision-makers have at hand to boost participation and collaboration of businesses, by offering investment opportunities that are beneficial for citizens and in line with the goals laid out in the roadmap.** When municipalities host an industrial network, for example, public-private partnerships can provide opportunities to bridge the gap between industries and urban areas, in order to strengthen a sense of belonging and responsibility in a shifting landscape.

Bottom-up initiatives

Ambition and willingness to change for a greener city does not come exclusively from local governments, but also from communities and neighbours pursuing social justice. Civil society addresses territorial difficulties through community-led projects and actions. Here, citizens become frontrunners of initiatives that tackle social issues and regenerate surroundings, as a way of providing for themselves and ensuring that circumstances regarding collective wellbeing are adequately addressed. **Bottom-up – or grass-roots initiatives – generally go hand in hand with the social pillars of transition roadmaps, allowing cities' projects to unlock the potential of already existing bases for change.** These initiatives take the form of projects with direct positive impacts on citizens' daily life – such as greening areas, energy communities, co-housing facilities, collective farming, etc... This in turn can improve the perception of the roadmap, if adequately addressed by local authorities. Nevertheless, the lack of communication channels between involved citizens and local governments, often means that projects have a difficult time taking off, leading to discontent towards public authorities. It does not have to be this way. Local governments are extremely well placed to support bottom-up initiatives, expanding the communities who benefit from such initiatives, as well as building on their capacities and experiences to replicate beneficial projects throughout the city.

Brasov's inclusive financing

→ The municipality organizes each year participatory budgeting sessions, which are venues where local governments co-decide public spending with citizens. In these sessions, individuals can enrol their projects, which are later evaluated, submitted to a vote and then implemented in the city. The open sessions cover different fields, such as education, mobility, smart cities, green spaces, and urban planning. On top of that, there are additional funds allocated to climate, social, cultural and sports projects, also chosen from the ones proposed by the citizens. Both initiatives are dedicated to supporting the sustainable development of the city.

Training & Hiring

Climate-neutrality and sustainable objectives cannot be achieved without the right capacities to translate ambitions into implementable action plans. Although reduced in scope compared to national counterparts, local transition planning heavily relies on expertise and knowledge to make sure that all the transversal themes of a roadmap are thoroughly addressed. Hence, **for municipalities to be successful in their transition, it is essential that they provide training on sustainability issues and develop the relevant skills to address the ecological transition.** Through workshops, masterclasses and learning materials, local civil servants – as well as businesspeople and citizens – can be trained on the principles and methodologies of green collaborative projects, transmitting available techniques and encouraging cooperation. Knowledge transfer bolsters the intrinsic participatory processes of the transition, in its pursuit of territorial expertise and its endeavour to ensure collective benefits. In addition to training, it is essential to hire additional specific and competent workforce to strengthen the local administration, as a way of further consolidating transition efforts, while also encouraging a generational shift in public administration.

Niš' capacity-building

→ In partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), civil servants receive training in management of energy efficiency projects as part of a memorandum of understanding between the City and the German development agency to strengthen thermal insulation, improve heating and cooling systems and repair structural damages. With the support of the Royal Institute of Stockholm (KTH), the City's chamber of commerce receives training to incorporate sustainability topics across all of its activities. These capacity-building projects strengthen the skills of local administrators to monitor and evaluate the undertakings necessary to implement the transition roadmap.

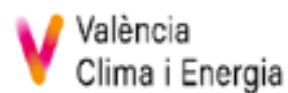
Local Networks

Beyond public engagement within municipalities, it is also important to foment cooperation and mutual support across transitioning cities, for local governments to learn from one another and to advise each other on transformative governance. **Regional and transboundary networks are useful platforms for the exchange of best-practices and recommendations, building solidarity between cities that are undergoing the same transformation process.** Transitioning cities that face similar barriers can also form coalitions to amplify their voices and to advocate for financial and administrative reforms at the national and EU level.

Public & Digital Campaigns

Conscious citizens are more likely to take part in opportunities to exchange ideas when they are given available platforms to provide feedback, which in turn boosts the action plan's legitimacy. Local governments need to commit to disseminating objectives, strategies and projects, not only for transparency reasons, but also to raise awareness among citizens around the municipality's pledge to pursue climate neutrality. In parallel, campaigns about sustainable livelihood and the harms of climate degradation, reinforces the role of the individual as a customer/consumer capable of driving the ecological transition. **Local governments thus need to promote their commitment in the transformation process in a transparent and constructive manner.** Thanks to the progress being made with digitalisation, citizens can be more effectively connected and engaged in the transitioning urban landscape, and cities can reach a broader audience with its communication activities. The breakthrough of digital identities bridges the gap between offline and online statuses, allowing citizens to be more than mere observers, and become active participants with near-immediate interactions.

drift
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Tomorrow is a Horizon 2020 funded project, aiming at empowering local authorities to lead the transition towards low-carbon, resilient and more liveable cities. In the framework of the project, six cities will develop 2050 transition roadmaps together with citizens and other local stakeholders and serve as pilot for the transition of European territories.

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