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Success factors for climate and energy work in local government

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This report synthesises results from several projects from the Include research centre. All of these projects examine municipalities' work on climate and energy issues. The relevant municipalities are geographically and demographically different. Thematically, the studies cover topics from municipalities' innovative energy investments to their work on land-use planning and climate policy more generally. The projects are primarily based in a Norwegian context, but the case studies have been examined in light of Norwegian and international literature in the field.

Success factors

The municipalities that succeed over time in their work on climate and energy transformation have some commonalities, beyond the fact that they often have engaged individuals or groups that take responsibility for these issues. In particular, we identify three factors as triggering success: institutionalisation of the work, adaptation to local context, and flexibility and collaboration with different actors.

Institutionalisation

Institutionalisation of climate and energy work in a municipality entails creating formal structures for the work, and establishing a culture that creates interest in and commitment to the policies that are adopted and will be followed up. As such, institutionalisation has both a formal and informal side.

Formal structures, such as rules, guidelines, governing documents and formal organisation and division of responsibilities, provide opportunities or limitations. Without such formal structures, it is difficult to establish a local climate and energy policy that lasts over time. There are many examples of formal institutionalisation of climate and energy work in the studied municipalities:

- Several municipalities have decided that all matters under consideration by the municipal council should be assessed for climate and environmental consequences. One example is Tingvoll Municipality's eco-municipality declaration.



- Regular meetings between administrative and political leaders to discuss climate- and environment-related challenges. Example: Arendal Municipality.
- Positions established for specific transition-related purposes, for example Asker Municipality's project manager for reuse.
- Flakstad Municipality's work on operationalising the political decision on land-use neutrality exemplifies institutionalisation of innovative land-use management.
- The development of climate budgets. This is an example of formal institutionalisation to follow up the work on established municipal climate targets. Oslo municipality was the first municipality to develop a climate budget, and since then many others have followed suit.

Informal institutionalisation is also crucial for successful local climate and energy work. Values, attitudes and norms that generate positivity and commitment to the work, are essential. The work on climate and energy issues must feel meaningful and important to those involved.

Creating a culture of innovation and creative thinking is an important part of this. One example is Kongsberg Municipal Real Estate's openness and commitment to establishing innovative energy solutions in buildings. A climate that promotes collaboration and pride in the municipality's work provides opportunities for success. This is particularly shown through local industrial relations for sustainability in the municipal sector.

Adaptation to local context

Local governments have different prerequisites for contributing to the climate and energy transformation. For example, they have different local resources and different land use structures. Several of the smaller municipalities are important contributors to enabling transformation, for example in the form of access to forest resources and available land for energy development. The larger municipalities have several opportunities to promote climate-friendly transport alternatives, effective land management and sharing.

Local identity also plays a role. Whether a settlement is perceived as rural or urban will enable or constrain restrictive parking policies. Adapting climate and energy work to the local context can enable the work to go further and continue for longer than if this is not done. Even in the country's largest cities, the opportunity for local adaptation has been important in the work with Urban Contractual Agreements.

Kongsberg Municipality's focus on innovative energy solutions in buildings can be seen in light of the city's identity as the "Technology Town Kongsberg". The municipality of Gjøvik states that they have a vision of being "The University Town – leading in sustainable growth and development". Through their collaboration with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, energy companies and the private sector they have focused strongly on developing district heating and new green industry at Skjerven. Inderøy Municipality aims to be "Best together", and their focus on locally produced food can be understood in light of this. A strong local identity connected to the Norwegian practice of *dugnad* or communal voluntary work has had great importance for the establishment of local food initiatives in the municipality.



Flexibility and cooperation in governance and administration

The climate and environmental crisis demands transformation, but it is not always simple to know which instruments and measures are most effective. Success requires collaboration across sectors and levels of government, as well as with industry and local populations. In the literature, the terms adaptive co-management and adaptive governance are used to describe necessary changes in administrative and governance structures.

Flexibility is necessary to provide space for testing out different solutions and measures, and these must be adapted to the context in which they are to be implemented. Collaboration between local, regional and national levels must be achieved in order to find suitable transformation strategies, and the parties must to a greater extent meet as equals. In addition, solutions are not only to be found among public authorities, but in the interaction between different local actors. Local governments must therefore be open to collaborating with different actors in the local community, and take on a facilitating role to arrive at effective measures.

Urban Contractual Agreements ¹can in many ways be understood as adaptive co-management. Through negotiations and renegotiations, the different actors seek to find the best solutions to achieve the zero-growth target (growth in passenger traffic in urban areas should be covered by public transport, walking and cycling). This allows for flexibility as well as adaptation to local context. The parties have a joint responsibility to achieve the goals that have been set, and to find suitable instruments and measures in collaboration. There are, of course, a number of challenges associated with an adaptive co-management model, several of which are visible when it comes to negotiations on Urban Contractual Agreements. Power relations between different actors mean that there is a risk that some have greater influence than others, and established democratic channels may have reduced influence. These are factors that require attention in order for the decision-making processes to gain legitimacy.

Whether it is in setting toll rates, the number and price of parking spaces, facilitation for pedestrians and cyclists or other measures that can create resistance among the population or certain groups, local authorities must make decisions about their level of ambition and how the measures can be introduced smoothly. One example of the latter is to implement a gradual escalation of car-restrictive measures, while at the same time continuously improving infrastructure for alternatives to car use. It must also be assessed what kinds of cost levels public authorities can afford to take on. Trondheim Municipality illustrates this. They have chosen a relatively inexpensive increase in public transportation infrastructure, which means that there has been little change in toll rates in recent years.

Several municipalities are working to establish sharing schemes and encourage reuse, in collaboration with local community actors. For example, Buskerud County Council has conducted an experiment with vehicle sharing in its own operations in collaboration with a private actor. Many organisations offer attractive opportunities for sharing in local communities, such as sharing cabins through The Norwegian Tourist Association. Municipalities can facilitate for these solutions in the

¹ The Norwegian urban contractual agreement is a governance platform combining transport-infrastructure development with land-use and transport policy. It is a policy package of measures involving network cooperation between national, regional and local government levels established to coordinate transport and land-use development.



form of offering cheap premises and grants, and by engaging in dialogue with these organisations to gain inputs on their own policies. Several municipalities are also working to establish reuse centres in collaboration with private actors (for example Asker and Hamar municipalities). These initiatives require dialogue between public, private and non-profit actors to succeed. What is often called *co-production* is essential.

Finally, government incentive schemes and trust between administrative levels should be emphasized. The Urban Contractual Agreements are an example of a large incentive scheme for the biggest urban areas. Klimasats is an example of a scheme that has a considerably smaller financial framework, but is widely used by Norwegian municipalities. The scheme is important for innovation, testing and implementation of climate measures in the municipalities. Cooperation and trust are also important outside of such incentive schemes. In Flakstad, it is reasonable to assume that the road to a decision on land-use neutrality would have been longer if cooperation with the regional and central government levels had been more conflict-filled.

Large and small municipalities

Municipalities with low populations are important to mobilise in order to achieve greater legitimacy in the work on climate and energy transformation, and with regard to distributional consequences of transformation initiatives between rural and urban areas, particularly when it comes to participation in the opportunities generated by climate and energy transformation strategies and measures. They also possess resources that are essential for the needed transformation, in the form of land and natural resources.

However, large and small municipalities have different prerequisites for carrying out effective and long-term climate and energy transformation work, both in terms of capacity and financial resources and in terms of different resource bases. It is therefore often the case that smaller municipalities do not have the same opportunities as larger municipalities when it comes to working toward climate and energy transformations. Nevertheless, there are several examples of smaller municipalities that have had success in some periods, such as Hurdal Municipality and Tingvoll Municipality. Hurdal describes themselves as the “Sustainability Valley”, has an ecovillage and is working on a proactive plan for the city centre with a focus on sustainability. Tingvoll is the “Eco-Municipality” with an eco-municipality declaration, and they have held trainings for new politicians in environmental issues.

However, both municipalities have struggled to maintain this work over time due to a lack of human and financial resources. Efforts from the regional and state levels are required in order to initiate and maintain commitment to climate and energy transformation in smaller municipalities. A possible measure could be establishing Transformation Coordinators at the regional level, who can contribute resources to local climate and energy transformation work. Another measure could be Rural Contractual Agreements oriented around climate, environment and energy considerations. In addition, it is important to establish financial schemes that are accessible to many types of municipalities and their work toward climate and energy transformation. Klimasats has played and continues to play a crucial role in this respect.



You can read more about this in the following articles and reports:

Christiansen, P., Stokstad, S., Tønnesen, A & Westskog, H (2021). Hvordan har rettferdighetsspørsmål blitt behandlet i byveksttalenene? *Plan: Tidsskrift for samfunnsplanlegging, byplan og regional utvikling*. Plan.

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Inderberg, T. H. J., Leikanger, I., & Westskog, H. (2023). Institutional context, innovations, and energy transitions: Exploring solar photovoltaics with hydrogen storage at a secondary school in Norway. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 101, 103147.

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Westskog, H., Aarsæther, N., Hovelsrud, G. K., Amundsen, H., West, J. J., & Dale, R. F. (2022). The transformative potential of local-level planning and climate policies. Case studies from Norwegian municipalities. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 2033457.

Westskog, H., Amundsen, H., Christiansen, P., & Tønnesen, A. (2020). Urban contractual agreements as an adaptive governance strategy: under what conditions do they work in multi-level cooperation?. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 22(4), 554-567.

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