

# Global goals for local priorities: The 2030 Agenda at local level

Nora Sánchez Gassen, Oskar Penje and Elin Slåtmo

NORDREGIO REPORT 2018:2





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### Nordregio

is a leading Nordic and European research centre for regional development and planning, established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997. We conduct solution-oriented and applied research, addressing current issues from both a research perspective and the viewpoint of policymakers and practitioners. Operating at the international, national, regional and local levels, Nordregio's research covers a wide geographic scope, with an emphasis on the Nordic and Baltic Sea Regions, Europe and the Arctic.

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is a forum of co-operation between the Nordic governments. The Nordic Council of Ministers implements Nordic co-operation. The prime ministers have the overall responsibility. Its activities are co-ordinated by the Nordic ministers for co-operation, the Nordic Committee for co-operation and portfolio ministers. Founded in 1971.

### The Nordic Council

is a forum for co-operation between the Nordic parliaments and governments. The Council consists of 87 parliamentarians from the Nordic countries. The Nordic Council takes policy initiatives and monitors Nordic co-operation. Founded in 1952.

Stockholm, Sweden, 2018



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# Summary

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On 25 September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Municipalities are key when it comes to their implementation, since they are closest to the people, local businesses and civil society organisations. This report identifies 27 Nordic local authorities that are “first movers” in working with the 2030 Agenda and describes their priorities and activities. It also highlights challenges and success factors in working with the SDGs. The aim of this report is to provide local authorities with ideas on how to implement the 2030 Agenda and to inform experts and policy makers at national and regional levels on how to support the municipalities in their work.

The 27 first movers use the SDGs to inspire or guide new environmental policies, quality of life plans, the development of a new suburb, the design of local strategies, the merger of municipalities and many other purposes. They differ in their approaches, priorities, and their plans to involve the local population, businesses, civil society organisations and other partners in the work with the SDGs. Despite these differences, the first movers share common expectations towards national and Nordic authorities: They recommend a clearer communication of national priorities and activities within the 2030 Agenda, guidance on how to work with the 17 SDGs, and assistance in monitoring progress. Addressing these issues would facilitate local authority efforts to reach the SDGs.

## Ideas from the first movers on how to implement the 2030 Agenda in a local context:



Integrate the SDG's into key steering documents, plans and processes



Involve all local authority departments



Involve the local population



Encourage young people to participate



Support sustainable businesses and organisations



Use SDGs for urban planning and sustainable housing



Form strong partnerships

More ideas from all 27 first mover municipalities are described on page 43.

# Preface

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In September 2017, the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted the *Generation 2030* programme to support the Nordic countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Nordic region. The programme builds on a strong tradition of Nordic collaboration on Sustainable Development, with the first Nordic Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in 2001. For the period 2017 – 2020, Generation 2030 places particular emphasis on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and the involvement of Nordic young people. Another ambition is to involve the private sector, civil society, research networks and local authorities, which are regarded as having key roles to play in ensuring the success of the agenda.

This report presents an analysis of implementation of the 2030 Agenda at local level in the Nordic Region. In December 2017, the Nordic Council of Ministers commissioned Nordregio to conduct

the study as a part of the Generation 2030 programme. Key research goals were to identify which Nordic local authorities already work with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and to document their work and experiences.

The following researchers at Nordregio were involved in the project: Nora Sánchez Gassen (Project Leader), Oskar Penje and Elin Slätmo. The project team wishes to thank all interview partners from the first mover municipalities for their time and the valuable information about their work. The project team is also grateful to the many officials of Nordic and European associations, interest groups, as well as partners and stakeholders of Nordregio who recommended municipalities for this project. Finally, we want to thank the persons who attended and actively participated at the seminar 'Agenda 2030 at the local level' in May 2018.



# Introduction

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On 25 September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote social, environmental and economic sustainability. Since then, governments, businesses, associations, citizens and other actors have mobilised efforts to fight poverty, promote economic growth and reduce inequalities, while protecting the environment, tackling climate change and promoting peace and justice.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda is led by countries. UN member states are encouraged to establish national plans to achieve the 17 SDGs, and many have published Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to take stock of their achievements, ongoing activities and future targets. However, local authorities are key when it comes to implementing the 2030 Agenda. They are closest to the people, local businesses and civil society organisations. Local authorities are also responsible for much of the social and physical infrastructure that influence the population's living conditions and opportunities. Yet little systematic knowledge is available about the plans, activities and experiences of local authorities that are working with the 2030 Agenda. This report, *Global goals for local priorities*, addresses this by providing an overview of how municipalities in the Nordic Region are implementing the SDGs.

The Nordic countries are often leading global rankings on SDG performance (Sachs et al. 2018). Nonetheless, many Nordic local authorities are only just starting to link their sustainability efforts explicitly to the SDGs. This report identifies some of the local authorities that are in the vanguard in this respect – the “first movers”. It describes their main activities and programmes and highlights some lessons we can learn from their

experiences in working with the SDGs. The report is published on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers and forms part of the *Generation 2030* programme (Nordic Council of Ministers 2017). This programme was adopted in September 2017 to facilitate cooperation on the challenges faced jointly by the Nordic countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The report is structured as follows. A first section provides information on the methods that were used for the project and briefly describes national approaches to implementing the 2030 Agenda. A map then shows the 27 Nordic municipalities that were interviewed and identified as first movers in working with the 2030 Agenda. In the main part of this report, short profile texts describe how each municipality works with the SDGs. The section ends by summarising core ideas on how to use the SDGs in a municipal context. A final section discusses the challenges and success factors that the first movers have so far encountered and defines policy recommendations based on their input. These recommendations are intended to inform experts and policy makers at national and regional levels about how to support local authorities in their work.

There are many ways in which municipalities can improve their sustainability and contribute to the 2030 Agenda. We hope that this report will provide local authorities in the Nordic Region and beyond with ideas and inspiration on how to get started, build on their own strengths and contribute to the global goals by focusing on local priorities.

Stockholm, July 2018

Nora Sánchez Gassen, Oskar Penje and Elin Slätmo

# Methods and approach

In December 2017, the Nordic Council of Ministers commissioned Nordregio to analyse the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at local level. The analysis has been driven by two tasks:

- Identification of first movers:  
*Which Nordic local authorities are already working with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs?*
- Description of their work:  
*What goals are they pursuing, what activities are they implementing and what are their experiences in working with the SDGs?*

## Selection of the municipalities

To identify first movers, the authors contacted Nordic and European associations, interest groups, partners and stakeholders of Nordregio and asked for recommendations of municipalities that are already working with the 2030 Agenda. Based on these recommendations, local authorities in the Nordic Region were contacted and interviewed, and each was also asked to recommend other local authorities working with the 2030 Agenda. All municipalities included in this report were identified by this snowball sampling method.

Two criteria were used to make the final selection of first movers. First, all local authorities in this report explicitly link their work to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Second, they are beyond the planning stage and in the process of formally deciding on projects, policies or programmes linked to the SDGs or even starting to implement them.

### Case selection: Local authorities were identified as first movers if

- they were recommended during the snowball sampling stage;
- they actively link their work to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs;
- they are beyond the planning stage; and
- they responded to contact requests and agreed to be part of this report.

## Municipality profiles

The insights gained from the interviews are summarised in the municipality profiles in this report. The interview material was supplemented with municipal strategies, reports, or other types of publications that the interviewees shared with the authors of this report. Profiles are grouped into two categories according to the approach used by the local authorities in working with the 2030 Agenda:

**Holistic Approach:** Some local authorities use the SDGs to mainstream a sustainability perspective across all administrative levels and activities. This is done for instance by linking core steering documents such as Local Plans or Strategies (Hurdal, Bergen, Copenhagen, Kópavogur, Gladsaxe), local goals (Kristiansund, Örebro, Uppsala) or Sustainability and Quality of Life Programmes (Åtvidaberg, Växjö, Helsingborg, Odense) to the 2030 Agenda, by adapting management systems (Kemi, Malmö), or by using the SDGs to guide a merger of municipalities (New Asker). We refer to these local authorities as those that follow a 'holistic approach' in working with the SDGs.

**Targeted Approach:** Other local authorities work with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in specific projects or policy areas or for specific purposes. For instance, the local authorities of Mosfellsbær, Mariehamn, Pirkkala and Tórshavn have linked environmental policies or targets to the 2030 Agenda, Sermersooq has used the SDGs for a Design Plan on urban development, Arendal and Aarhus focus on climate issues and the reduction of emissions and Sønderborg has set up an ambitious project to teach the population about the 2030 Agenda and make them ambassadors for sustainability. Gotland plans to link a Regional Development Plan to the SDGs, Umeå relates different activities such as its Programme for Health and Wellbeing to the 2030 Agenda and Tampere refers to the SDGs in its innovation and procurement policies. Finally, Espoo addresses the SDGs through different projects within its four-year Sustainability Programme. In the following, we have grouped the profiles of these

local authorities under the section “targeted approaches”.

Municipality profiles within each of the two categories are ranked by population size. Icons at the top of each profile show whether the local authority is working with all 17 SDGs or prioritizes some SDGs more than others. Municipal Officers provided this information during the interviews. Each profile also contains information about population size, obtained from national statistical bureaus. Eurostat’s *Degree of urbanisation* (DEGURBA)<sup>1</sup> classification is used to describe the character of each municipality. Where the municipality is also part of what the OECD defines as a *functional urban area* (FUA), this information has been added to the profile (OECD 2013). Note that municipalities in Greenland and the Faroe Islands do not have DEGURBA or FUA classifications.

Each municipality profile also describes how and why the local authority started to work with the SDGs (“Starting point”), states what it is trying to achieve (“Goals and priorities”), highlights its main activities and projects (“Implementation and results”) and indicates goals for the coming years (“Next steps”).

Each profile ends by highlighting particularly interesting ideas, projects or approaches that were developed by the local authority. Table 1 lists these ideas. They may be a source of inspiration for local authorities who are starting to work with the 2030 Agenda.

## Analysis and Comparison

The last section of this report synthesises the experiences of the 27 local authorities that have been identified as first movers. What are the success factors they have identified in their work? What are the challenges they face, and what are possible next steps? This section has been based on an analysis of all interviews, to find common patterns and themes.

Throughout this report, we use key terms in the following manner. The term ‘municipality’ refers to a town or area with a local government. ‘Local authority’ refers to the administrative bodies and organisations that govern a municipality. Further information on the identification and selection of first mover municipalities, interviews, DEGURBA and FUA classifications and analyses can be found in the Annex of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/degree-of-urbanisation/background>



# National implementation of the 2030 Agenda

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The Nordic countries themselves follow different strategies in implementing the 2030 Agenda and set a frame that can influence how municipalities prioritize, plan and communicate their work with the SDGs.

**The Danish government** considers the municipalities as central partners in achieving the 2030 Agenda, since they are closest to citizens and businesses and responsible for delivering most public services (The Danish Government 2017). This may explain the large number of Danish local authorities that are already implementing the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, the number of potential first movers that were recommended during the course of this project was so large that not all could be contacted and interviewed. The authors therefore selected municipalities by ranking them according to the number of times they were recommended and interviewed those that were ranked highest on the list. The underlying rationale for this was that the most frequently recommended municipalities are likely to be the most advanced in their work with the SDGs and therefore qualify as first movers. In comparison to other Nordic countries, Danish local politicians are particularly supportive of working with the 2030 Agenda (Deloitte 2018). In several municipalities, the idea to implement the SDGs was in fact first proposed by individual politicians or parties. Many of the Danish local authorities included in this report also put a strong emphasis on engaging the population in their work with the 2030 Agenda. They have developed creative ideas and tools to communicate their work.

**The Finnish National Commission** on Sustainable Development has set up an online platform entitled "Commitment 2050 – The Finland we want by 2050", a national instrument on sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development 2013). Public and private organisations, businesses, and private persons are encouraged to publish tangible commitments to sustainable development on this platform.

Indeed, all Finnish first movers use this webpage to communicate their work with the 2030 Agenda to the public. Many Finnish municipalities have a long history in working with sustainability issues. Networks such as the Hinku Forum, which brings together municipalities and cleantech experts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the local level, predate the 2030 Agenda. Many municipalities are already engaged in these types of networks. This may explain why the number of local authorities which explicitly link their ongoing sustainability efforts to the SDGs is smaller than in some of the other Nordic countries.

In **Iceland**, only few local authorities have started to work with the 2030 Agenda. A main factor for this lack of activity may be found at the national level. The government of Iceland has only recently published a Status Report with national priorities on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (The Government of Iceland 2018). Some of the local officials who were interviewed for this project pointed out that the previous lack of guidance made it difficult to implement the 2030 Agenda at the local level. It can be expected that the number of Icelandic first movers will increase now that the national government has published national priorities and information on how to work with the SDGs.

**Norway** was one of the first countries to publish a Voluntary National Review (VNR) about its implementation of the 2030 Agenda and considers the SDGs an important tool to accelerate national and international sustainability action (Norwegian Government 2016). Several municipalities in Norway have committed to working with the 2030 Agenda, and some have formulated ambitious plans. For instance, Asker, Hurum and Røyken will merge by 2020, and have decided to base key steering documents of the new municipality on the SDGs. Many other municipalities have strong histories in working with sustainability considerations but have not (yet) linked these activities to the global goals (Deloitte 2018).

**Sweden** regularly comes up as a leading country in sustainability rankings (Sachs et al. 2018), and the Swedish government also wants the country to be a role model in terms of SDG implementation. It recently published an Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Government Offices of Sweden 2018). The municipalities are identified as key contributors to reaching the SDGs, since they are responsible for many vital services that influence the living conditions of people and business environments. Many municipalities in Sweden have taken up the task and are already implementing the 2030 Agenda. As in Denmark, the number of potential case studies that were recommended was so large that not all could be interviewed. A comparatively

large number of the Swedish municipalities included in this report work holistically with the SDGs. They for instance adapt management systems, align local goals with the 2030 Agenda or implement the 2030 Agenda through spatial planning.

In the three autonomous regions **Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland**, local implementation of the 2030 Agenda has also started. One local authority from each of these regions is included in this report. All three first movers have started to work with the 2030 Agenda in specific sectors – environment or urban planning.

# The Nordic first movers in working with the 2030 Agenda

27 municipalities were identified as first movers in working with the 2030 Agenda in the Nordic countries. As shown in Figure 1, the group of first

movers includes large cities and small communities from all Nordic countries and regions.

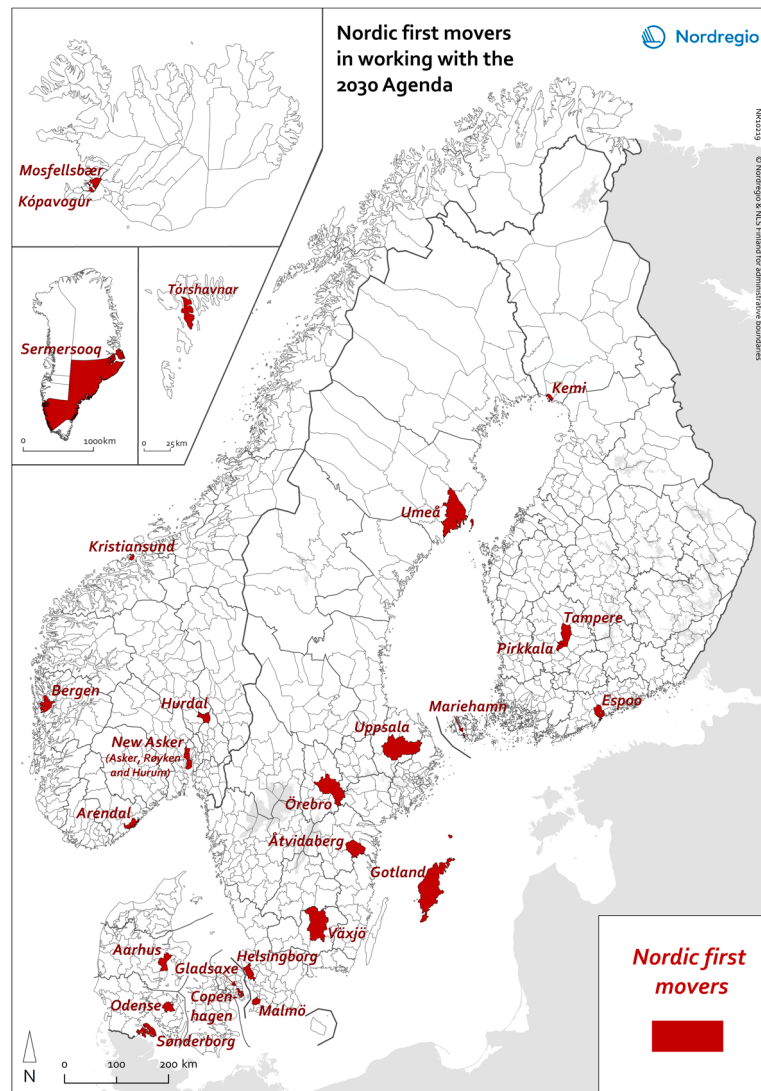


Figure 1: The Nordic first movers in working with the 2030 Agenda

## Holistic approaches

The following municipalities have been identified as using a holistic approach in working with the 2030 Agenda: Copenhagen (DK), Malmö (SE), Bergen (NO), Uppsala (SE), Odense (DK), Örebro

(SE), Helsingborg (SE), New Asker (NO), Växjö (SE), Gladsaxe (DK), Kópavogur (IS), Kristiansund (NO), Kemi (FI), Åtvidaberg (SE) and Hurdal (NO). The profiles in this section describe their work.





Source: Jacob Schjørring & Simon Lau, Copenhagen Media Center

- Population: 613,288 (2018)
- Densely populated area. Core of the functional urban area of Copenhagen

**Starting point:** In April 2017, the *Radikale Venstre* (Social Liberal) party proposed the adoption of an Action Plan with suggestions on how the municipality could contribute to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Other parties supported the idea and a cross-sectoral working group set out to draft the plan. The resulting Action Plan was adopted by the Local Parliament on 12 October 2017. Copenhagen has ambitions to be one of the most sustainable cities in the world and to help make the world more sustainable by sharing local solutions with other cities.

**Goals and priorities:** The Action Plan for Copenhagen describes how the local authority's ongoing policies and initiatives already contribute to the 2030 Agenda and points out where the city could do more (City of Copenhagen 2018). It also defines locally relevant targets that are linked to the SDGs and describes the policies and initiatives that need to be implemented to reach them. Copenhagen municipality places a strong emphasis on ensuring that all citizens understand the 2030 Agenda, are informed about local activities related to the SDGs, and know how to apply them in their daily lives.

**Implementation and results:** Many ongoing municipal activities are already contributing to the realisation of the SDGs. For instance, Copenhagen's plan to make the municipality carbon-neutral by 2025 is already advanced. It is also well on its way to ensuring that 95% of all young people obtain post-secondary or higher education. The cross-sectoral working group is planning the implementation of other activities defined in the Action Plan. It is also trying to involve businesses, civil society organisations and other partners to generate public ownership of the process. One way in which local people can join in is by participating in Copenhagen's living labs, urban sites where innovative solutions for local challenges are developed.

**Next steps:** The municipality of Copenhagen will use the Action Plan to assess the impact of all future policies and initiatives on the SDGs and the 49 local targets. It also aims to publish a guide on how citizens, businesses and organisations can work with the SDGs. Collaboration and knowledge-sharing with other local authorities will be strengthened via networks such as C40 and Eurocities.

**What could other local authorities learn from Copenhagen?** How to use living labs to engage the local population in developing innovative solutions for the SDGs.



Source: Ludvig von Hofsten, Malmö stad

- Population: 333,633 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Malmö

**Starting point:** In 2015, the Council in Malmö signed a declaration that the organisational structure of the local authority will be changed to facilitate work with the 2030 Agenda. The main driving force was a political leader who wants to make Malmö a sustainable society. The Council has been working on sustainability issues since the adoption of the Agenda 21 in the 1990s, for instance in relation to city planning and welfare. Malmö was also one of the first cities in the world to establish a Commission on Social Sustainability in 2010.

**Goals and priorities:** The local authority conducted a mapping exercise to determine how the municipality's nine local goals are related to the 2030 Agenda. This exercise showed that all 17 SDGs are relevant for Malmö but that seven are emphasised in the local goals: SDG 1, "No poverty"; SDG 3, "Good health and well-being"; SDG 4, "Quality education"; SDG 5, "Gender equality"; SDG 10, "Reduced inequalities"; SDG 11, "Sustainable cities and communities"; and SDG 16, "Peace, justice and strong public institutions". In 2017 and 2018, the local authority has also stepped up its work on SDG 14, "Life below water", and more specifically the role of Malmö as a Future Coastal Town in collaboration with Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)

and others.

**Implementation and results:** When it signed the declaration in 2015, Malmö Council agreed that it would adapt its management and steering system to the 2030 Agenda by 2020. This work is well underway. Officials in the newly established Office for Sustainable Development are devising a strategically integrated plan to quantify, follow up on and enhance this work. A range of activities are also directly related to the 2030 Agenda, e.g. museums and schools are working with different labs, pedagogy centres and innovation to engage children and young people in the work on sustainable development. The local authority is also working closely with the local sustainable businesses network, Meet Malmö.

**Next steps:** The implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Malmö is viewed as a learning process, and the local authority continues to work on integrating the SDGs into its budget process. The local authority has set up a joint financial and sustainability preparation unit which will adapt Malmö's budget to the work on the SDGs and look at funding opportunities for sustainability projects. The financial integration, viewed as crucial to the work, ensures that all long-term investments go through environmental and social impact analyses before decisions are made.

**What could other local authorities learn from Malmö?** How to integrate the SDGs into budgeting and decision-making processes.





Source: Elisabeth Sørheim, Bergen municipality

- Population: 279,792 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Bergen

**Starting point:** Incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local planning was a natural step for the local authority of Bergen, since it has been actively working with sustainable development issues since the 1990s. Bergen incorporated the UN programme Agenda 21 into strategic documents after its launch in 1992, and in 1999 the first climate Action Plan was in place. The MIK reform<sup>2</sup> is also seen as instrumental in building up knowledge around environmental sustainability. The local authority has been able to build on these established structures and experiences in its work with the 2030 Agenda. Bergen now implements the 2030 Agenda through all local steering documents and strategies.

**Goals and priorities:** Bergen's Society Plan (Samfunnsdel), the Land Use Plan (Arealdel) and the Green and Business Strategies all have clear links to relevant SDGs (Bergen Kommune 2015). The Business Strategy, for instance, states that green and sustainable development should be the overarching principles in all planning and activities within the organisation and in the local area (Bergen Kommune 2017). Infrastructure, transport planning and smart urban growth are key topics. As a growing city region, Bergen has

set out to take the lead in reaching the national climate goals and to become fossil-free by 2030. The Council's ambition is to make Bergen the greenest metropolis in Norway. It also has ambitious goals for the business sector. The Business Strategy sets clear guidelines on which type of growth will be prioritised, with clear links to the SDGs that are relevant for sustainable growth. Bergen wants provide advantages in the regional business environment to companies that focus on sustainable workplace environments and responsible use of resources. SDG 11, "Sustainable cities and communities", is also highlighted as being important for Bergen and has relevance for all local authority departments.

**Implementation and results:** In a city as large as Bergen, a substantial proportion of greenhouse gas emissions comes from the transport sector. Therefore, it is crucial to create a shift in how households make their everyday transport choices. One effective way to make that happen is through long-term physical planning of infrastructure and housing, and a citizen travel survey is being conducted regularly to monitor progress in this field.

**Next steps:** Bergen Council adopted a new Action Plan for climate and energy, entitled "Green Strategy", in 2016 (Bergen Kommune 2016). The Council is now actively promoting its implementation in public sector departments, as well as encouraging private sector actors and ordinary citizens to give the work their full backing.

**What could other local authorities learn from Bergen?** How to link a Business Strategy to the SDGs and support sustainable enterprises.

<sup>2</sup> MIK "Miljøvern i kommunene" (Environmental preservation at local government level) was a national reform between 1992 and 1996 that aimed to build up competence around natural resource management in local authorities.



Source: Michal Gorski, Wikimedia commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

- Population: 219,914 inhabitants (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Uppsala

**Starting point:** Uppsala has had a sustainable development policy since 2008. Before the 2030 Agenda was formally adopted by the UN in 2015, local politicians in Uppsala had already instructed their officials to facilitate future work on sustainability issues by adjusting the administrative structure. The local authority was reorganised, with personnel working on sustainability (social issues, environmental issues, the economy and business) moving closer to the political leadership.

**Goals and priorities:** Officials and Councillors met at a workshop to explore how the SDGs relate to specific local challenges. Previously, the local authority had around 100 goals steering its day-to-day work. Based on the 17 SDGs, nine local goals were developed, and budgets drawn up for them (Uppsala Kommun 2017). All 17 SDGs were considered important but not equally so for

every department. Some were considered more obvious for local authorities such as Uppsala to work on. Local officials say that these are SDG 1, "No poverty", SDG 2, "Zero hunger", and SDG 4, "Quality education". SDG 1 and SDG 2 can be addressed by reducing inequalities (SDG 10).

**Implementation and results:** Political agreement on the nine new local goals and the budget was reached in 2017. Since then, the goals have steered the work in all local authority departments and organisations. The goals are also used to gauge how each department contributes to the local, national and global work towards fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

**Next steps:** Officials have developed a "social compass" which combines statistics and spatial analysis. This tool is now used to help decide which SDGs to prioritise in different local communities and to communicate to decision-makers at local level.

**What could other local authorities learn from Uppsala?** How to use spatial analyses to decide which SDGs to prioritise in different local areas.





Source: Nils Lund, Municipality of Odense

- Population: 202,348 (2018)
- Densely populated area. Core of the functional urban area of Odense

**Starting point:** Odense plans to implement the 2030 Agenda through a new Sustainable Development Policy. The local authority has a long history of working with sustainability initiatives and set up a Sustainability Council (Odense Bæredygtighedsråd) in 2009 to promote sustainable solutions. When the 2030 Agenda was adopted, the local authority saw many overlaps between the SDGs and its own understanding of sustainability, and the City Council decided to use the global goals as a new framework for local activities.

**Goals and priorities:** Odense is establishing a new committee, the Sustainable Development Committee (Verdensmål Udvalget), which will bring together local politicians, stakeholders from businesses, NGOs, schools and other organisations. It will be tasked with drawing up a new Sustainable Development Policy linked to the SDGs. The new policy will focus on ecological issues, but social and economic sustainability will be considered as well. The committee will also make concrete recommendations about how the SDGs can be used to mainstream sustainability considerations across municipal activities.

**Implementation and results:** A number of activities are already ongoing to raise awareness about sustainability and the SDGs. The Sustainability Council, for instance, presents an annual award to recognise and promote people, organisations or companies that develop sustainable solutions. In 2010, the local authority developed a ring-shaped puzzle that visualises Odense's understanding of sustainability. It consists of pieces in three colours, with each colour representing a different dimension of sustainability: social, ecological and economic. Each of the 30 puzzle pieces describes one field of action such as "integration", "biodiversity" or "education". The aim is for businesses, local authority departments and other organisations to find new inspiration on how to improve the sustainability impact of different projects, activities or campaigns by discussing the different puzzle pieces and the fields of action defined on them.

**Next steps:** The new Sustainable Development Committee will present the draft for a new Sustainable Development Policy within the next year, and this will be adopted by the City Council. Based on the new policy, an Action Plan and tangible activities will be developed.

**What could other local authorities learn from Odense?** How to promote sustainable local businesses and organisations by awarding a sustainability prize.





Source: Fredrik Kellén, Örebro municipality

- Population: 150,291 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Örebro

**Starting point:** In Örebro, the former director of the local authority initiated work with the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in 2016. In 2018, all senior politicians and officials are on board with the local work on sustainable development. However, when it comes to how to work with this theme, there are somewhat different views.

**Goals and priorities:** So far, Örebro has not established a Sustainability Programme for communicating the work regarding the 2030 Agenda. Instead, the work with sustainable development is integrated in local authority goals and the annual budget. The four strategic goals of the local authority – sustainable growth, human empowerment, needs of children and young people, and safe welfare – are all related to several of the SDGs. As in many local authorities these are measured with key indicators.

**Implementation and results:** The local authority measures progress on the local goals with precise targets and key indicators and each department has specific work descriptions stating what should be done in order to fulfil the local goals. This creates a culture that is oriented towards

sustainable development. One of the officials in Örebro says, "All local authorities want to be sustainable, but it is hard to resist when someone wants to make a large investment in your municipality, even if there is a risk that it will harm the environment or the local community. It is important that local authorities resist the urge to proceed without an impact analysis in those cases. To be able to do that, a clear division of roles and an established confidence in the organisation is important. It is, however, nothing that a document can create on its own." Örebro also has one of the highest rates of new housing per 1000 inhabitants in Sweden, and at the same time the highest number of nature reserves. One prerequisite for this achievement is that private market actors are viewed as partners in the work to create a sustainable city; another is that the local authority offers clear guidelines for how they can act.

**Next steps:** A new Head of Sustainability has been appointed, and the Department of Spatial Planning is developing further bases for decisions regarding, for instance, gender budgeting and gender equality impact analyses.

**What could other local authorities learn from Örebro?** How to work together with private and civil society actors, with a clear division of roles, for instance in the housing sector.





Source: Sofia Kokacka, photographer

- Population: 143,304 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Helsingborg

**Starting point:** At the end of 2014, during a revision of the local authority's Programme for Environmental Work, the signals from senior local politicians and officials were clear: the programme had to acknowledge Helsingborg's regional, national and global context. When the 2030 Agenda was adopted in 2015, it was only natural, therefore, that the SDGs should influence the new programme.

**Goals and priorities:** Helsingborg's main steering document, the Quality of Life Programme, was adopted in 2016 (Helsingborg Kommun 2016). It does not focus solely on the 2030 Agenda but also includes national, regional and local goals for public health, the environment and sustainable development. With the Programme, the local authority seeks to enhance the social and environmental conditions that people need in order to stay well and enjoy a good quality of life. As such, the local authority does not use the language or symbols of the 2030 Agenda for communication; for example, instead of "sustainability" it uses the concept of "quality of life". Despite this, the programme includes aspects of all 17 SDGs. All local authority departments and associated companies are involved in implementing the Quality of Life Programme.

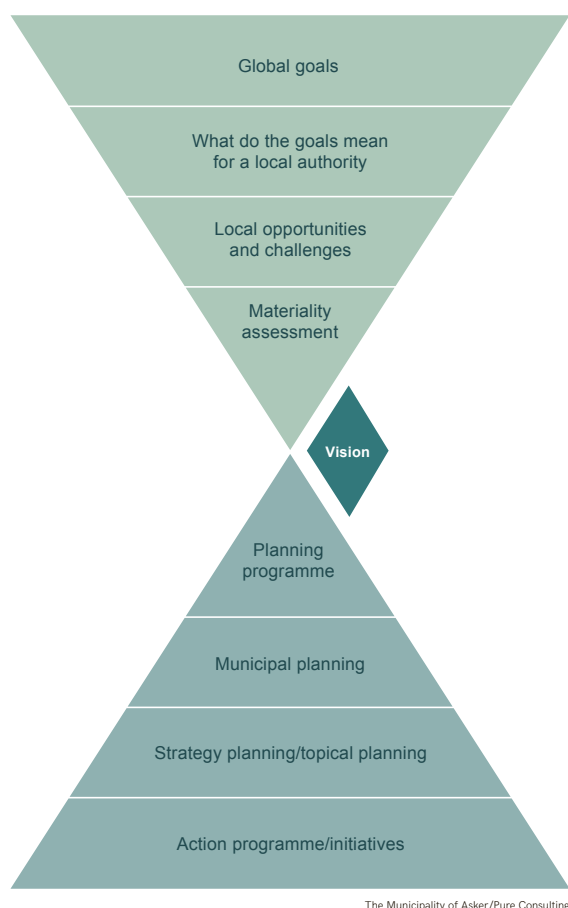
**Implementation and results:** In 2017, a "children's hearing" was held, at which local officials and Councillors met children aged 5 to 18 to discuss sustainable development and the children's future. One local official says, "We do a lot of planning and decision making on behalf of children, but we seldom ask them what they want. One of my colleagues has called what we were doing before 'adult-guessing'. That term is, of course, a bit of a joke, but we learned a lot from the children's hearing; for example, we now focus more on children's outdoor environments."

Helsingborg did not have a good reputation on ethnic, LGBTQ and gender discrimination issues and greater effort and more resources have now been put into SDG 5, "Gender equality". The Council has organised an annual Pride Festival for several years now in collaboration with a range of diversity-oriented NGOs. In 2018, the responsibility was passed to these organisations, demonstrating that the local authority trusts civil society with ownership of the process and event. In addition to these activities, the local authority also implements SDG 12, on responsible consumption and production, by trying to establish circular systems and close nutrient, chemical and water loops in its waste and water companies.

**Next steps:** The local authority departments are continuing to link the Quality of Life Programme more clearly to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

**What could other local authorities learn from Helsingborg?** How to link the SDGs to a Quality of Life Plan for the local population.

## New Asker (NO)



- The upper triangle shows a broad-based starting point which is then narrowed down from the global to the local perspective.
- The lower triangle shows the hierarchy of our local plans, where initiatives are incorporated for subsequent implementation.

Source: Asker/Pure consulting

- Population: approx. 93,000 after merger
- Intermediate density area. Asker and Røyken are part of the functional urban area of Oslo

**Starting point:** In early 2016 a letter of intent was signed by Asker, Hurum and Røyken Councils to merge on 1 January 2020 and a Joint Commission was set up to plan the merger. The members of the Commission agreed early on that key steering documents for the new municipality, called New Asker, should be closely aligned to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The letter of intent also defined core values that will guide the work in the new local authority:

- Good and equal services for all
- Comprehensive and coordinated social development
- Sustainable and economically robust communities
- Enhanced local democracy.

**Goals and priorities:** The Commission is currently discussing what New Asker can do to help reach the SDGs. One important outcome from the discussions is that priorities need to be set. Although all dimensions of sustainability are tightly interwoven and "serve" each other, not every SDG might be relevant or applicable in a local Norwegian context. An early assessment result is that specific implementation strategies will be defined for SDGs 3, 4, 9, 11, 13 and 17. SDGs 12 and 16 may also be relevant. Of the 169 indicators defined by the UN to measure progress toward the SDGs, 84 have been selected to track progress toward the prioritised goals in New Asker.

**Implementation and results:** The Joint Commission is currently planning how to formalise the letter of intent into a Local Plan for New Asker. A methodology tool is being developed to define the measures that will be taken and to identify which sector will lead the process. The three local authorities are also identifying interest groups and actors from the private sector who will be involved. Discussions concerning the practical implementation of the letter of intent, and how this will contribute to the selected SDGs, are still at an early stage. Nonetheless, some projects have already been launched.

**Next steps:** The pre-assessment of prioritised SDGs, including how to implement them in New Asker, was finalised in March 2018 in collaboration with the private firm Pure Consulting. As a next step, the Committee is seeking to gain full political support for the conclusions of the pre-assessment. Work on drafting the Local Plan will commence in autumn 2018 and a first section of the report dealing with social issues shall be adopted in early 2020. The SDGs will then be integrated into all underlying steering documents. Concrete projects and activities will be launched to reach them.

**What could other local authorities learn from New Asker?** How to use the SDGs to guide a merger of municipalities.



Source: Mats Samuelsson, photographer

- Population: 91,060 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** The local authority of Växjö started to work with the 2030 Agenda in 2016. Local officials received funding for communication support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The money was used to organise a one-and-a-half-day seminar to explore the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs within the local authority. The local Councillors were on board right from the start, and in only four days work had started on making the 2030 Agenda a tool for the work of the whole local authority.

**Goals and priorities:** The local authority is putting in place a Sustainability Programme, which will draw inspiration from the SDGs to define solutions to the specific challenges faced by Växjö. According to one local official, work on environmental issues and quality, in line with the National Environmental Objectives and the Environmental Code, is already well-established thanks to hard work since the 1980s. Social issues, by contrast, are more likely to be the subject of political debate during the coming year, when the Council discusses and decides on the Sustainability Programme.

**Implementation and results:** The work started with a reorganisation within the local authority.

Experts on the environment, human rights, well-being and health moved into a joint Sustainability Office that has direct contact with the political and administrative leadership of Växjö. In 2016, a half-day seminar was organised to bring together local politicians, officials, civil society organisations and private sector companies and create a common base for work on the 2030 Agenda. In addition to these activities, officials also examined more than a hundred steering documents, including the budget, to relate them to the SDGs. During this process, they identified some 50 specific challenges faced by Växjö in relation to the SDGs. The discussion about challenges has been guided by the following questions: Which goals are we good at? Which goals are we not working on? Do we need to do more?

**Next steps:** A new Head of Sustainability has been appointed and working groups set up to address the identified challenges with personnel from all local authority departments. The Councillors will decide on political priorities on the basis of the results of these working groups. These are important steps in the process of putting the Sustainability Programme in place by early 2019.

**What could other local authorities learn from Växjö?** How to organise seminars involving local companies and civil society organisations to plan the work on the 2030 Agenda.





Source: Gladsaxe municipality

- Population: 69,484 (2018)
- Densely populated area. Core of the functional urban area of Copenhagen

**Starting point:** The local authority of Gladsaxe has been looking for ways to enhance co-operation and dialogue between its different departments. Sustainability was identified as a relevant horizontal theme that could be used to bind their work more closely together. The 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs were considered an ideal framework for this approach since they are in line with the City Council's vision, which focuses on social, environmental and economic balance. The local authority used the 2030 Agenda for inspiration to develop ambitious local targets. These targets are incorporated in its Gladsaxe's new Municipal Strategy.

**Goals and priorities:** The City Council developed the new Municipal Strategy with six local goals in 2017 and 2018. These include making Gladsaxe greener and more vibrant, promoting the health and well-being of people of all ages, and providing equal opportunities to all. The Strategy, entitled "Gladsaxestrategien 2018-2022", describes these

goals and highlights the activities that will help achieve them (Gladsaxe Kommune 2018). Each of the six goals is explicitly linked to one or several SDGs to highlight how Gladsaxe, by working on local goals, will contribute to achieving the SDGs on a global level.

**Implementation and results:** The Strategy has not yet been adopted but is open for public review as of this writing (summer 2018). However, many ongoing municipal activities already relate to the six local goals. Further programmes and projects in order to reach the local goals and contribute to the SDGs will start once the City Council has adopted the Strategy.

**Next steps:** Gladsaxe is currently developing indicators to measure progress in reaching the six local goals. This will allow the officials working in the public administration as well as local people and companies to follow the implementation of the Strategy over time. The participation of local actors will be an important element in reaching the goals.

**What could other local authorities learn from Gladsaxe?** How to link and integrate the SDGs into a Municipal Strategy and help to reach the global goals by focusing on local priorities.





Source: Kópavogur municipality

- Population: 35,970 inhabitants (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** Kópavogur implements the 2030 Agenda through its Municipal Strategy and an extensive set of indicators that measure social progress. In order to explore how other public authorities engage in long-term strategic and financial planning, a delegation had travelled to Texas and New York in 2014. Fifty staff members from the various local authority departments then drafted the new Strategy based on ideas picked up during the trip. The Strategy now sets out a vision on which all strategic planning is based.

**Goals and priorities:** For Kópavogur, the development of effective performance indicators was a key task and challenge in terms of strategic planning. The local authority used the Social Progress Index (SPI) developed by the US-based non-profit Social Progress Imperative for this purpose. The SPI is a holistic measurement tool based on a range of social and environmental outcome indicators. These are organised around three dimensions of social progress: basic human needs; foundations of well-being; and opportunity. The SPI can be used as a tool to describe an existing situation and to define priorities in policy making. It can also be used as a benchmark against other societies, cities or countries. Kópavogur used the SPI to map the challenges it faces and

to arrive at a better understanding of social progress, policy priorities and specific needs of the local community. It also linked the index to the SDGs to show how, by promoting social progress locally, Kópavogur contributes to reaching the global goals. The SPI captures outcomes related to 16 of the 17 SDGs.

**Implementation and results:** With assistance from SPI headquarters and the local SPI partner, Cognitio, Kópavogur defined 56 locally relevant indicators to measure the three dimensions of social progress. All are linked to one or several SDGs. The local authority developed software to keep track of these indicators, which is based on existing statistics and facilitates the processing of data. It allows employees, residents and others to track Kópavogur's performance.

**Next steps:** In April 2018, the local authority launched the "Kópavogur scorecard", a publication demonstrating how Kópavogur is currently performing according to the 56 indicators (Haraldsson, Friðriksson and Jónsdóttir 2018). A newly elected Council will continue to implement the local Strategy and formally base its goals on the SDGs. The Council is therefore asking all agencies to draw up strategic plans indicating how they will meet the SDGs in their work.

**What could other local authorities learn from Kópavogur?** How to use indices and indicator systems, such as the Social Progress Index, to measure progress in reaching the SDGs.



Source: Odd-Arild Bugge, photographer

- Population: 24,300 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** Kristiansund's new Council leader, appointed in 2015, has put a strong emphasis on sustainability goals. In this context, the Council and local administration became increasingly aware that they lacked access to basic information to follow up on their sustainability efforts. In 2016, the local authority merged different operations management systems which provided an opportunity to review data sources and indicators. The 2030 Agenda had been launched the previous year, making the time right to integrate the SDGs into the new system.

**Goals and priorities:** Based on the 2030 Agenda, the local authority crafted a set of 12 tailor-made local goals to be attained by 2030. These goals incorporate elements from all 17 SDGs and are entitled: Good health; Good education; Infrastructure; Less inequality; Sustainable towns and communities; Marine space; Cooperation; Local knowledge potential; Public finance; Urbanisation; Green transition; and Sustainable work/life balance. The local authority used a customised version of the "SMART" model to identify and prioritise its goals. According to the model each goal should be:

- Specific: The goals must be precise and tangible.
- Measurable: Progress toward the goals must be quantifiable.

- Attractive: The goals must be important, relevant and reflect a shared vision.
- Realistic: The goals must be achievable with the resources available.
- Time-related: The goals must have completion dates.

**Implementation and results:** The commitment to the goals was formalised in the local authority's 2018 Action Programme, which sets the budget for the year and includes an economic plan for the years 2018–2021 (Kristiansund Kommune 2017). Based on the programme, specific Action Plans will be developed for each local authority department. All 12 local goals are relevant for each department.

The 12 local goals and corresponding indicators are built into Kristiansund's operations management system. The company Stratsys provided software for monitoring progress. Kristiansund also seeks to engage the local people via positive scenarios, a concept it calls "future images". The future images are built around four core values that describe the municipality in 2030: SMART – WISE – BRAVE – WARM.

**Next steps:** The next step for Kristiansund is to steer the Action Programme through the political process and adopt specific Action Plans for each sector that will put their vision into practice.

**What could other local authorities learn from Kristiansund?** How to incorporate the SDGs into the operations management system and engage citizens with positive scenarios.





Source: Kemi municipality

- Population: 21,256 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** In March 2019, Kemi will celebrate its 150th anniversary. To mark the occasion, the local authority has taken the ambitious decision to apply for an ISO 14001 certificate. This is given to organisations whose environmental management systems meet high international standards. Realising that many activities linked to the ISO 14001 standard are also relevant to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the local authority in Kemi made the decision to combine the two.

**Goals and priorities:** Kemi seeks to raise awareness of sustainability issues in the local authority departments and in the population at large, and to promote a resource-efficient business culture inside its own organisation. This goal is at the core of its new strategy, "Green and Sustainable Kemi", which was recently drawn up and adopted by the City Council. Under the strategy, which links to the 2030 Agenda, specific SDGs will be selec-

ted each year. The local authority prioritises these SDGs in its work. In December 2017, the Council decided to focus its work in 2018 on SDG 3, "Good health and well-being", SDG 9, "Industry, innovation and infrastructure" and SDG 11 "Sustainable cities and communities".

**Implementation and results:** As a first tangible activity, the local authority has made a commitment on Finland's Commitment 2050 web page to reduce the use of plastic. To reach this goal it has committed to avoiding purchasing plastic products and finding bio-based alternatives. It will also increase its efforts to recycle ICT devices and encourage its staff to avoid plastic products and step up their recycling efforts.

**Next steps:** Over the next few months, the local authority will place strong emphasis on implementing the changes needed in its administration and organisation to comply with the ISO 14001 standards. More activities related to the three prioritised SDGs are also planned.

**What could other local authorities learn from Kemi?** How to start small and implement the 2030 Agenda by focusing on a few SDGs at a time.





Source: Ellen Rudholm

- Population: 11,631 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Part of the functional urban area of Linköping

**Starting point:** Work on the 2030 Agenda in Åtvidaberg started when the Environmental Department revised the Environmental Programme in late 2015 and early 2016. During the process, officials became aware of the 2030 Agenda and suggested to develop a Sustainability Programme. The Council approved the proposal.

**Goals and priorities:** The Sustainability Programme was developed based on the 2030 Agenda, the National Environmental Objectives and the National Objectives for Public Health. The local authority held workshops with the heads of all of departments. These used the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as a starting point, but the participants were also asked to identify priorities and challenges in their sectors. The workshops adapted the SDGs to the context of Åtvidaberg, taking into account the size and organisational structure of the local authority. The final product, Åtvidaberg's Sustainability Programme, consists of five goals: a safe and robust society; sustainable consumption and resource use; an energy-efficient and fossil-free municipality; a chemical-smart municipality; a municipality that cares for and develops natural and cultural heritage values (Åtvidaberg Kommune 2016). The Council adopted these goals in December 2016 and all local authority departments are now working with them.

**Implementation and results:** The five goals in the Sustainability Programme are long-term, and each has specific targets to be achieved by 2020. Åtvidaberg also has a programme to measure the implementation of the Sustainability Programme. It has been developed to explain how each department needs to work towards the goals and improve its results each year. The progress towards fulfilling the local goals is linked to Åtvidaberg's annual accounts. The local authority is working toward fully integrating the Sustainability Programme into its budget.

As part of the goal "a safe and robust society" a successful collaboration between a childcare centre and a home for the elderly has been started. It brings together the generations and enables new friendships at no extra cost. Once a month, the children visit the elderly people, and they get to know each other through arts, crafts and games. Åtvidaberg considers this kind of collaboration as especially important in Nordic societies, where people seldom live together in multi-generational households.

**Next steps:** In Åtvidaberg's Sustainability Programme the 17 SDGs are not mentioned explicitly but local officials say that they are always there in the background and that they are working to link the achievements of local goals to the global SDGs. Greater efforts to engage local businesses and civil society organisations in the sustainability work is the next step.

**What could other local authorities learn from Åtvidaberg?** How to develop a Sustainability Programme that involves all local authority departments.



Source: Hurdal Økolandsby

- Population: 2.903 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** The local authority wants to promote Hurdal as a "Sustainable Valley". This vision was partly inspired by Dag Kittlaus, the founder of the company that invented the iPhone's Siri voice control system. He had the idea of building a "Silicon Valley" based on sustainability near Oslo's Gardermoen Airport. With a focus on the future, science, knowledge and sustainability, it was intended as a hub for pilot projects and testing. In 2014, Hurdal Council decided that it would be a leading light in the creation of a smart sustainable society, stating that the municipality "will become a sustainable society that is carbon neutral, enjoys economic growth and provides local people and visitors with enhanced quality of life". In 2015, the necessary agreements transcending political boundaries were in place to tackle the challenges. Hurdal now implements the 2030 Agenda through its Municipal Plan and sustainability targets, with involvement of all local authority departments.

**Goals and priorities:** Hurdal's Municipal Plan states that the local authority "will base its work on the UN's sustainability goals, especially in land use and community planning, business development and service production/development" (Hurdal Kommune 2018). This overarching goal will serve as a guide in all local authority activities: planning, management, services and development. The social part of the Municipal Plan (Sammfunnsdel) defines local sustainability targets for the

municipality. These include the goal to use Hurdal's natural assets to generate business development, to develop sustainable services and prioritise the conservation of biological diversity. One or more documents define how each target will be reached. Each target is also linked to related SDGs. In this work, Hurdal considers the SDGs as interconnected parts of one overarching goal. However, SDG 11, "Sustainable cities and communities", plays a key role in the Municipal Plan.

**Implementation and results:** One of the specific activities that Hurdal is already implementing to achieve SDG 11 is to promote green housing in development projects. The concept of eco-villages is one example. This supports the use of green materials and methods in the building process and promotes eco-friendly lifestyles for the people who live in them. Another project that is underway involves building an urban, sustainable village in the centre of Hurdal. In collaboration with a private firm, Hurdal has also developed a framework and methodology to measure progress in reaching the local sustainability targets.

**Next steps:** The local authority will soon implement the newly developed methodology to measure progress toward fulfilment of its goals. In 2019, individual Action Plans for all local authority departments will be developed to facilitate the implementation of the Municipal Plan. The local authority is also actively seeking partners elsewhere in Norway and abroad.

**What could other local authorities learn from Hurdal?** How to promote green housing, for instance with eco-villages.



# The Nordic first movers in working with the 2030 Agenda

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## Targeted approaches

This section describes the work of municipalities that follow a targeted approach in working with the 2030 Agenda. These are: Aarhus (DK), Espoo (FI), Tampere (FI), Umeå (SE), Sønderborg (DK),

Gotland (SE), Arendal (NO), Sermersooq (GL), Tórshavn (FO), Pirkkala (FI), Mariehamn (AX) and Mosfellsbær (IS).



*Source: Mosfellsbær municipality*



Source: City of Aarhus

- Population: 340,421 (2018)
- Densely populated area. Core of the functional urban area of Aarhus

**Starting point:** The local authority of Aarhus has a long history of working actively on climate issues. After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the City Council saw potential overlaps between its own activities and the climate- and energy-related SDGs in particular. It decided to set up a Committee on Sustainability to identify and deepen links between its ongoing climate-related activities and the global goals.

**Goals and priorities:** Already in 2007, the City Council had decided on an ambitious strategy to lead to Aarhus becoming carbon-neutral by 2030. Since then, it has adopted a series of climate plans aimed firstly at measuring CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the municipality and then implementing steps towards reducing emissions. Specific activities included the switch to green district heating by burning biomass rather than coal and the renovation of Council-owned buildings to improve their energy efficiency. In its current Climate Plan 2016–2020, Aarhus has defined milestones in six areas that will help to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions further: energy, transport, buildings, industry, local engagement and growth, and City Council organisation (City of Aarhus 2016). Among other goals, Aarhus aims to: promote

fossil-free transport by encouraging citizens to cycle, walk or use public transport; encourage industry to phase out fossil fuels and promote the circular economy; raise awareness of climate management among the general population; and phase out fossil-fuelled cars in the local authority's own fleet. These goals are linked to six SDGs.

**Implementation and results:** Aarhus has already come a long way in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In addition to the switch to green district heating and the ongoing renovation of municipal buildings, Aarhus has started to operate a new electric light railway to meet the growing demand for public transport. It has also published a green city map that shows locals and visitors where to find sustainable hotels, restaurants and shops, and gives them inspiration on how to get involved with and experience the best of the outdoors in Aarhus.

**Next steps:** Many activities and projects are ongoing or will start soon, involving external stakeholders (private companies, universities, NGOs) and other relevant partners in Aarhus and beyond. The local authority wants to involve as many stakeholders as possible to ensure a solid foundation and wide support for its climate work.

**What could other local authorities learn from Aarhus?** How to bring businesses and other organisations on board and promote their sustainable work, for instance through a green city map.





Source: City of Espoo

- Population: 279,044 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Helsinki

**Starting point:** Espoo has a long history of working on sustainability issues and has been ranked as Europe's most sustainable city by the Telos Research Institute at Tilburg University in 2016 and 2017 (Zoeteman et al. 2017 and 2016). The 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs addresses many of the topics that are prioritised by Espoo and it was therefore considered an ideal framework for future activities.

**Goals and priorities:** Espoo is currently implementing a four-year programme entitled "Sustainable Espoo" that involves all of the departments in the local administration. One of the projects focuses on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The local authority identifies the policy areas in which Espoo already has a strong portfolio of sustainability activities and those where more could be done. Based on the priorities that

result from this work, specific goals and activities will be defined by all departments in the near future.

**Implementation and results:** Espoo has published an ambitious plan to make 100 commitments on Finland's Commitment 2050 web page. Many of these have already been published. The Environmental Department, for instance, is developing an indicator to measure the surface and connectivity of green areas in Espoo; and together with the energy provider Fortum, the Council has committed to making all of its district heating fossil-free by 2030. Other commitments will be defined and implemented during the next months.

**Next steps:** The local authority is developing an app inspired by the success of Pokémon Go. It will allow users to solve tasks in the city and learn about the effects of climate change. The app will be used for educational purposes in secondary schools in Espoo.

**What could other local authorities learn from Espoo?** How to teach young people about sustainability by using apps and games.





Source: Laura Vanzo, Visit Tampere

- Population: 231,853 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Tampere

**Starting point:** Tampere represents Finnish local authorities in the National Commission on Sustainable Development based in the Prime Minister's Office and is committed to ambitious sustainability goals. The local authority also has a long history of working with initiatives such as Local Agenda 21 and the Aalborg Charter, an urban environment sustainability initiative first adopted in 1994. The 2030 Agenda is considered a useful tool for reaching out to new audiences and promoting sustainability in new policy areas.

**Goals and priorities:** The local authority decided to prioritise promoting innovation and a resource-efficient economy and placing greater emphasis on environmental standards and Fairtrade certificates in its procurement policy. SDG 8, "Decent work and economic growth", and SDG 9, "Industry, innovation and infrastructure", are of particular relevance to the municipality which faces high unemployment levels and a process of

industrial renewal. Nonetheless, the local authority also considers the other SDGs as relevant for the municipality. In March 2017, a cross-sectoral working group on sustainability was set up to promote and evaluate local sustainability actions in the light of the SDGs.

**Implementation and results:** Tampere is implementing the 2030 Agenda through the Commitment 2050 platform. It has published a commitment entitled "Sustainable economic and innovation policy and responsible procurement in Tampere". The text defines Tampere's goals and the steps that need to be taken to achieve them.

**Next steps:** As part of its commitment, all departments of the local authority have been challenged to reflect on how they can help improve Tampere's sustainability and to publish additional commitments on the Commitment 2050 web page. The local authority is also collaborating with the consultancy Benviroc to develop indicators that track progress in working with the SDGs.

**What could other local authorities learn from Tampere?** How to engage all local authority departments in the work on the SDGs, for instance by making sustainability commitments.



Source: Peter Steggo, photographer

- Population: 125,080 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Core of the functional urban area of Umeå

**Starting point:** Umeå has a long history of working on sustainable development issues, focusing mainly on gender equality, environmental and climate-related topics. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the local authority has been working on sector integration to make its work on the SDGs more holistic. An official says: "We need to adapt to the SDGs and then we need to work in a more integrated way. We must start with the question, 'Why do we work with air quality?' So our citizens can have a good quality of life. The 2030 Agenda ties together environmental and social issues, and it serves as a framework for local initiatives."

**Goals and priorities:** In Umeå, SDG 11, "Sustainable cities and communities", was a starting point. By relating it to existing work, the local authority could translate the 2030 Agenda relatively easily to suit the local context.

**Implementation and results:** In Umeå, many different activities relate to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, ranging from a Programme on Health

and Well-being to participatory dialogues with young people and other age groups. Progress on the Programme for Health and Well-being is measured by key indicators on environment, nature, public health and accessibility. More focused work in relation to social sustainability was promoted when the local authority, together with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), arranged a "national meeting place for social sustainability" in June 2017. The local authority of Umeå also organises annual meetings at a secondary school where pupils and local politicians discuss sustainability issues. The political leadership of the municipality appreciates the meetings as an important opportunity to learn about young people's ideas and concerns.

**Next steps:** The local authority continues to analyse how ongoing activities link to the 2030 Agenda, and how the different SDGs can be further related to each other and already existing local goals. For instance, a next step is to integrate gender equality assessments (SDG 5) into spatial planning (SDG 11).

**What could other local authorities learn from Umeå?** How to facilitate discussions about sustainability between politicians and school children.





Source: House of Science, Sønderborg Municipality, Denmark

- Population: 74,650 (2018)
- Densely populated area

**Starting point:** Sønderborg has a long history of incorporating sustainable solutions. ProjectZero, the goal of which is to make Sønderborg carbon neutral by 2029, is one of the most successful and best-known projects, involving housing and sports associations, the transport sector and local companies. The local authority wants to build on this success and motivate citizens to take action for sustainability. The Agenda 2030 is considered as a welcome global framework to use for this work.

**Goals and priorities:** Sønderborg wants to encourage local people to take the initiative and foster their understanding of how small steps can make a difference in tackling global challenges. The overall goal is to encourage 10,000 citizens to become ambassadors for sustainability. In order to achieve this, a particular focus is placed on educating pupils, students and families on sustainability and the SDGs. The framework for this is already in place, with the appointment of Sønderborg as a UNESCO Learning City, which addresses active citizenship, sustainability and lifelong learning for all. The project also requires collaboration across the local administration, as

well as the involvement of local businesses and organisations.

**Implementation and results:** In collaboration with the consultant agency Sustainia, Sønderborg accelerates endeavours towards active citizenship based on the SDGs. The local authority organises SDG workshops and SDG learning weeks for children, often in collaboration with local schools. For instance, at Sculpture4kids, children and artists worked with a colour palette based on the SDGs to increase public awareness of them; and local schools participated in the ambitious 2Impresz initiative by implementing energy saving measures in school buildings to reduce energy consumption and costs and increase comfort.

**Next steps:** A web app is planned, which will increase knowledge and understanding of the SDGs and will be a step towards the goal of 10,000 local ambassadors for sustainability. A focus on commitment and action for SDGs by families and associations is also planned over the next year. Sønderborg will organise SDG activities with the support of Sustainia and will incorporate the SDGs into events in local towns.

**What could other local authorities learn from Sønderborg?** How to engage young people in the discussion about sustainability by forging strong partnerships with schools.



Source: Schorle, Wikimedia commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

- Population: 58,595 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** In the island region and municipality Gotland, a number of public, private, and civil society actors have been working on the 2030 Agenda, and the SDGs, since it was adopted in 2015. In 2016, the regional science centre, Fenomenalen, received funding for communication support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). These funds enabled the science centre, which is owned by the regional authority, to form a new interactive section around the global agenda, develop a memory game and write a book for children and young people on how everyone can help fulfil the SDGs.

**Goals and priorities:** Gotland considers all SDGs as relevant and sees no. 17, on global partnership, as core around which the other 16 global goals revolve. Although all are considered important, Gotland's island context means the two SDGs on water (SDG 6 and 14) are especially crucial.

**Implementation and results:** Gotland has a long history of working on sustainability and has been addressing many of the goals and targets in the SDGs for a long time, albeit under different names. Regional officials have also worked on the connections between the 2030 Agenda

and European, national and regional goals and objectives in order to explain to their superiors and politicians how these policies interact and can jointly be used for the steering of the region. The work is driven by an urge to create a better world for all. However, one Gotland official points out that there is also a need to be pragmatic in order to get people to implement the SDGs: "It is important [...] to show that we are working on the 2030 Agenda. It is similar to Europe 2020. Both are transnational visionary steering documents that will be in place for a long time, and therefore it is important that we in regions and municipalities integrate them into our day-to-day work."

**Next steps:** In January 2018, the region, the county administrative board and the university-based Centre of Education for Sustainable Development (SWEDESD) organised a workshop for 70–80 individuals from private companies, academia, civil society and public authorities. During the workshop, material on how Gotland works and will continue to work with the 2030 Agenda was developed. This material will form the basis for a new Regional Development Plan for Gotland, which will be drawn up in 2019.

**What could other local authorities learn from Gotland?** How to design a book to teach young people about the SDGs and sustainability.



## Arendal (NO)



Source: Arendal municipality

- Population: 44,645 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** The municipality houses the United Nations Environment Programme Global Resources Information Database (UNEP/GRID). The Centre was opened by then Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland in 1989 as a Norwegian response to the Brundtland report. During a UNEP meeting at the GRID Center in Arendal in 2007, Torill Rolstad Larsen, then Mayor, described the ambition to make the municipal operating system climate neutral in accordance with the UN's definition. The proposal was unanimously approved by the Council in 2008 and since then the Council has been working on CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation measures. Arendal now works with the 2030 Agenda in the context of its climate and emissions policies.

**Goals and priorities:** Arendal focuses strongly on SDG 13, to "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts". The environmental strategy, "Green Strategy for Arendal", which is currently under development, is intended to form the basis for a new climate and energy plan. The vision for Arendal is to "be a nationally leading and internationally recognised climate and environmental city, and a learning partner for other local authorities". The Strategy also states that the local authority will stimulate established and new businesses to develop in a greener direction.

**Implementation and results:** Arendal's internal technical operation system is already climate

neutral according to the UN definition, showing an 80%-reduction of emissions in the period 2007 to 2017. A new climate and energy plan will be adopted towards the end of 2018, which proposes that Arendal aims for similar achievements in all local authority departments. Its ambitions should always be in accordance with the Paris climate agreement to limit global warming to well below 2°C and in line with the most ambitious towns in Europe with populations below 100,000 people. Arendal has also adopted a framework for public procurement that obliges contractors to declare emissions from their activities. The goal is to increase transparency about emissions not only in the public sector but also from service providers in the private sector. Arendal also hosts an annual conference called Fremtidens kommuner/ Arendalskonferansen. This conference brings together local authorities and other stakeholders in the public and private sector and facilitates the exchange of innovative ideas in the field of smart and green development.

**Next steps:** Arendal is in the process of revising its Local Plan so that it will be founded firmly on the 2030 Agenda. There is political consensus on this direction, although no written mandate is yet in place. The committee that prepares the new local Plan currently discusses how the City Council committees will work on the various SDGs.

**What could other local authorities learn from Arendal?** How to be an active player in global networks for change and facilitate exchanges with other local authorities, for instance through a conference.



Source: Siorarsiorfik, Nuuk city development

■ Population: 22,738 (2018)

**Starting point:** In autumn 2017, three members of the Department for Urban Planning and Housing attended a course on the 2030 Agenda. This was the starting point for the municipality's work with the SDGs. The local authority decided to define sustainability goals for the development of Siorarsiorfik with the help of the SDGs. Siorarsiorfik is a new suburb for the capital city Nuuk, which the municipality of Sermersooq is planning. The overall goal of the project is to promote Nuuk as a key city for the entire Arctic, to support economic growth and the quality of life for all new residents of Siorarsiorfik, and to ensure that buildings in the new area are functional, sustainable and appealing.

**Goals and priorities:** The Manual for Siorarsiorfik describes the design vision and strategic objectives for the development of Siorarsiorfik in eight chapters (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq 2017). It covers topics such as landscape design and infrastructure, buildings and public spaces, art and public transport. Six SDGs are explicitly referred to. They are used to define how sustainability considerations will drive the development of

Siorarsiorfik. Among other goals, the Manual states that all energy in the suburb will come from sustainable sources, buildings will be built with sustainable materials and technologies, public transport will be accessible to all and open spaces will be kept in their natural state to the greatest possible extent in order to protect the biodiversity of the area.

**Implementation and results:** Sermersooq has established a foundation to oversee the development of Siorarsiorfik. The emphasis is on ensuring that the goals and priorities set out in the Design Manual are met at all stages of the implementation of the project, from planning and design to construction.

**Next steps:** One of the first buildings that will be built as part of the Siorarsiorfik project is a school. The local authority is in the final stages of planning it and construction work will start soon. The first part of a new coastal path will also be developed in the near future. In addition, Sermersooq will start to use the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs as a strategic tool to plan activities in other policy areas.

**What could other local authorities learn from Sermersooq?** How to use the SDGs for urban planning and development.





Source: Tórshavn municipality

■ Population: 21,127 (2018)

**Starting point:** Members of the Planning and Environmental Department first heard about the 2030 Agenda at a dialogue meeting on Nordic Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Helsinki in 2016. In order to learn more about how to work with the SDGs in practice, a delegation visited the municipality of Copenhagen's Department for Sustainable Development to exchange ideas, especially on how to engage young people.

**Goals and priorities:** Tórshavn adopted a new Environmental Policy in 2016 (Tórshavnar kommuna 2016). However, work on it had started back in 2014, which is why the SDGs are not explicitly mentioned in the document. Nonetheless the environmental SDGs closely correspond to the goals and priorities that are defined for Tórshavn in the policy document:

- Green energy: promotion of hydropower and wind energy; improvement of building insulation; promotion of walking, cycling and use of electric cars; and free public transport
- Waste treatment: reduction of waste; promotion of recycling, composting and the circular economy; reduction of plastic use
- Nature: protection of the environment against contamination; improving and developing green spaces in the city and villages

■ Local authority activities: consideration of environmental aspects in procurement, energy use, and other activities.

**Implementation and results:** Many of the activities described in the Environmental Policy have already been implemented and several projects launched. The city bus service, for instance, is free of charge. Electric cars and bikes are available for local authority staff. A toy library is one of the most recent initiatives in terms of the circular economy. The local authority also organises an annual environmental week with a different theme each year. In 2018, the focus was set on food security and sustainable food production. Among other events, school students were invited to participate in sustainability workshops. The local authority also organises lectures and excursions for local people of all ages.

**Next steps:** The Environmental Policy is revised and updated every few years. The link between the SDGs and the different local priorities will be made explicit when the next revision takes place. While Tórshavn does not yet work explicitly with the SDGs, it is the first municipality on the Faroe Islands to move in this direction, and hence the first mover in this region.

**What could other local authorities learn from Tórshavn?** How to organise a sustainability week filled with activities for the entire population.



Source: Pirkkala municipality

- Population: 19,237 (2018)
- Intermediate density area. Part of the functional urban area of Tampere

**Starting point:** Pirkkala adopted new environmental targets in 2016, which have been linked to the 2030 Agenda. The local authority implements its environmental targets through the Finnish Commitment 2050 initiative. On the Commitment 2050 web page, Pirkkala has published a commitment that describes its environmental targets and the way they are linked to the SDGs.

**Goals and priorities:** Pirkkala's targets focus on urban planning, energy, nature and education. The local authority seeks to: 1) improve the cohesion of the urban structure by developing the town centre and improving public transport; 2) promote energy-efficient solutions and the use of renewable energy in new Council construction projects; 3) promote ecosystem services and biodiversity, and anticipate and prepare for the impact of climate change; and 4) develop environmental education materials and collaborate with companies to find solutions to environmental pollution.

**Implementation and results:** In 2017, a Sustainable

Development Standing Committee was set up with the central task of promoting sustainability in Pirkkala. It prepares and plans activities and projects and presents them to the appropriate decision-makers. In addition, all of the local authority departments have defined their own commitments about how they can contribute to the improvement of Pirkkala's sustainability. A web page allows local people, private companies and other stakeholders to participate in the Council's work on sustainable development.

**Next steps:** Several ambitious projects are currently being planned. These include plans to join the Hinku group, a network of local authorities committed to significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The local authority is also discussing how to improve waste recycling and energy efficiency. As part of this discussion, it plans to install noise barriers that can generate solar energy along the motorway. Pirkkala is also preparing a Sustainable Transport and Mobility Plan with the support of the Finnish Transport Agency.

**What could other local authorities learn from Pirkkala?** How to promote and centralise sustainability planning with the help of a Standing Committee.





Source: Mariehamn municipality

- Population: 11,677 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** Mariehamn first adopted local environmental goals in 2005. When a new Environmental Programme for the years 2018 to 2030 was discussed and adopted in 2017, the local authority decided to link its targets to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. It prioritizes environmental and social sustainability in this work.

**Goals and priorities:** With its new Environmental Programme, Mariehamn seeks to reduce its environmental impact and create even better living conditions for its population. The Programme defines targets in the following areas, each of which is linked to one or several SDGs:

- **Energy:** Mariehamn seeks to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 85% by 2030.
- **Traffic:** CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from traffic will decrease by 50% by 2030.
- **Sustainable consumption:** Mariehamn will increase the share of organic food and environmentally friendly goods and services it procures.
- **Nature and water:** Green areas will be preserved and the environmental impact on coasts, beaches, rivers and other bodies of water will be reduced. The local authority departments and the population will be better informed about Mariehamn's nature and environment.

■ **Adaptation to climate change:** The local authority will draw up climate scenarios for Åland and Mariehamn and identify areas and sectors that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. The report also defines the activities that will be implemented to reach each target.

**Implementation and results:** In November 2017, the Council appointed a Political Committee tasked with conducting a political review and implementing the Environmental Programme. Many activities that contribute to the five targets are already ongoing. For instance, the local authority is increasing the number of electric cars to reduce its climate impact and has introduced a weekly "climate-smart day" when only vegetarian food is served in local schools and day-care centres. The local authority has also adopted new guidelines about the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products, furniture and toys for childcare facilities.

**Next steps:** Other activities and projects will commence in the next few months. For instance, the local authority will develop two wetland areas that will help to clean Mariehamn's water off pollution, including microplastics, and provide recreational space for its population.

**What could other local authorities learn from Mariehamn?** How to link the SDGs to an Environmental Programme with relevant local targets.





Source: Mosfellsbær municipality

- Population: 10,556 (2018)
- Intermediate density area

**Starting point:** Mosfellsbær will implement the 2030 Agenda through a new Environmental Policy. The local authority was very active working on the Local Agenda 21, and the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were considered a natural framework to continue this work.

**Goals and priorities:** The local authority has placed great emphasis on involving the local population in the development of its new Environmental Policy. In March 2018, the local people were invited to a meeting at a school to share their ideas and visions about what the local authority should try to achieve in the next few years and which environmental issues to prioritise. Local politicians listened and took note of ideas. The input from this meeting was compared to the 2030 Agenda to identify links, and a draft for the new Environmental Policy has been drawn up on this basis.

**Implementation and results:** The Draft Environmental Policy defines a set of goals, among them developing Mosfellsbær in a sustainable and progressive way, protecting its nature and promoting quality of life of the population. These goals are to be achieved through activities in 10 sectors, among them environmental education, sustainable transport, and waste management. The policy describes the objectives in each of these sectors and the activities planned to achieve them, and links each sector explicitly to one or more of the SDGs.

**Next steps:** Local elections were held in Iceland on 26 May 2018, and it was decided that the Environmental Policy would be adopted and implemented by the new Council. This will give newly elected Councillors the chance to include their own ideas and priorities. It also ensures that the new Policy will be supported by all.

**What could other local authorities learn from Mosfellsbær?** How to engage the population in the work with the SDGs through public meetings. This is particularly suitable for smaller

**Table 1: 27 ideas on how to implement the 2030 Agenda in a local context**

**Getting started, ensuring progress and following up**

1. Start small and implement the 2030 Agenda by focusing on a few SDGs at a time (→ like Kemi)
2. Set up a Standing Committee for Sustainability to coordinate the work (→ like Pirkkala)
3. Use spatial analyses to decide which SDGs to prioritise in different local areas (→ like Uppsala)
4. Use indices and indicator systems to measure progress (→ like Kópavogur)

**Integrating the SDGs into key steering documents, plans and processes**

5. Use the 2030 Agenda to develop a Municipal Strategy (→ like Gladsaxe)
6. Link an Environmental Programme to the SDGs (→ like Mariehamn)
7. Develop a Quality of Life Plan for the local population with links to the SDGs (→ like Helsingborg)
8. Integrate the SDGs into budgeting and decision-making processes (→ like Malmö)

**Involving all local authority departments**

9. Challenge all departments to make sustainability commitments (→ like Tampere)
10. Develop a Sustainability Programme with contributions from all departments (→ like Åtvidaberg)

**Involving the local population**

11. Develop sustainable solutions with the population through living labs (→ like Copenhagen)
12. Organise a sustainability week (→ like Tórshavn)
13. Listen to people's ideas at public meetings (→ like Mosfellsbær)
14. Engage the population with the use of positive scenarios (→ like Kristiansund)

**Encouraging young people to participate**

15. Form strong partnerships with schools to engage young people (→ like Sønderborg)
16. Develop apps and games to teach young people about sustainability (→ like Espoo)
17. Facilitate discussions about sustainability between politicians and school children (→ like Umeå)
18. Publish a book about sustainability and the SDGs (→ like Gotland)

**Supporting sustainable businesses and organisations**

19. Award a sustainability prize (→ like Odense)
20. Link the Business Strategy to the SDGs and support sustainable enterprises (→ like Bergen)
21. Design a green city map (→ like Aarhus)

**Using the SDGs for urban planning and sustainable housing**

22. Use the SDGs to develop a new suburb (→ like Sermersooq)
23. Promote green housing and eco-villages (→ like Hurdal)

**Forming strong partnerships**

24. Organise a conference to exchange experiences with other local authorities (→ like Arendal)
25. Host a seminar with businesses and civil society organisations to plan the work (→ like Växjö)
26. Involve private-sector and civil-society stakeholders in different sectors (→ like Örebro)

**Or even...**

27. Use the SDGs to guide a merger of municipalities (→ like Asker, with Hurum and Røyken)

# Analysis: Success factors, challenges and next steps in implementing the 2030 Agenda at local level

local authorities. The 27 municipalities included in this study differ in size and population. They have different environmental and geographical prerequisites, vary in terms of their organisational structure and political leadership. The demand on providing public services, the challenges they face, and their possibilities to address them in terms of budget, competence and personnel are depending on these differences. In short, local conditions affect the way in which the 2030 Agenda is implemented. The aim of the below analysis is to look beyond these differences to find Nordic commonalities.

## Success factors and lessons learned at the local level

The two factors in working successfully with the 2030 Agenda that were mentioned by most of the interviewees are: political support from the local Council and involvement of all local authority departments in the development and implementation of the sustainability work. Local authorities also recommended relating the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs to work already being done at local level. Some officials said it has been

“ Kemi is a small municipality, which is an advantage. Everyone knows each other so collaborations are easy to start, and administrative issues are easier to get done. Small municipalities may face challenges in working with the SDGs because of their size, but they also have these advantages.

**OFFICIAL WORKING IN KEMI MUNICIPALITY, FINLAND**

helpful to create a narrative about the future of the municipality and tell this story when reaching out to colleagues, local people, companies and civil society organisations. One helpful tool in creating such a story is to hold strategic workshops for politicians and officials to explore the SDGs and how they relate to the specific local context. Respondents from smaller municipalities argued that their size may be an advantage as it is easy to connect with each other and to do work that transcends hierarchies and sectors.

## Challenges involved in implementing the 2030 Agenda

One of the most discussed challenges in working with the 2030 Agenda is the integration of the Agenda and/or the SDGs into the way the local authority is run. Some local officials said that there is a lack of interest or that they are met with scepticism by colleagues, executives and politicians. They argued that it is necessary to

### Success factors identified by the first movers

- Get political support
- Get all local authority departments on board
- Relate the SDGs to ongoing local activities
- Create and tell a story about the municipalities' future
- Start with local strategic discussions
- Network and collaborate with other local authorities
- Network and collaborate with inhabitants, companies and civil society organisations
- Accept that change takes time
- Implement the SDGs through tangible, local actions



remind people constantly of why it is important to work with sustainability issues such as peace, gender equality and environmental protection in the Nordic context. This is related to the challenge of making the global relevant locally and helping people understand that the 2030 Agenda is important for everyone, not only something to be implemented by someone else, somewhere else. Involving actors outside the local authorities is also considered challenging. Some interview partners are struggling with how to best engage inhabitants, local companies and civil society organisations.

“ In the beginning it was tricky to make people understand the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, what they are about and how they relate to Odense. The first SDG is on “zero hunger”. When we started to talk about the SDGs, audiences were often a bit confused how the SDGs would matter for Odense, because of the first goal. Perhaps it seemed more of an issue in the developing world.

**OFFICIAL IN ODENSE MUNICIPALITY,  
DENMARK**

Nevertheless, in the interviews with officials from the first mover local authorities, not everyone identified challenges in their work with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Some interviewees stated that there were no challenges, but that the work with the SDGs was an ongoing learning process with no strict “rights” and “wrongs”.

“ There is no challenge, we are used to work with goal integration into steering systems. We are used to work with sustainability issues. The SDGs are going into the current steering system.

**OFFICIAL IN UPPSALA MUNICIPALITY,  
SWEDEN**

## Challenges identified by the first movers

### ■ Integrating the work internally in the local

**authority:** Targeting lack of engagement and scepticism. The respondents identify a constant need to empower officials and department managers to take on responsibility

### ■ Integrating the work externally:

Engaging other stakeholders via external communication and networking. Getting local businesses on board

### ■ Making the global relevant at the local

**level:** Getting people to understand that the 2030 Agenda is for everyone and not only something to be implemented by someone else, somewhere else

■ **Goals and priorities:** Prioritising goals and actions while maintaining a consensus on the holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda. Coping with potential conflicts between some of the SDGs

■ **Time:** Accepting that it takes time to change an organisation. Budgets and investments are planned for the short term, but results from sustainability efforts only become visible in the long term

### ■ Comparing progress with other

**municipalities:** Many indicators are comparable only at a state and/or regional level. Indicators measuring local developments are often not streamlined between municipalities

### ■ Budget and resource constraints:

Dealing with lack of personnel devoted to sustainability in the local authorities

### ■ Lack of support from national and/or

**regional governments:** Challenges relate to funding, prioritisation, networking opportunities, comparisons and coordination

■ **SDGs offer too many options:** Deciding how and where to start in the work with the SDGs. Defining relevant actions

■ **Counterproductive legislation:** Some national and European laws and policies are counterproductive to the 2030 Agenda as they promote fossil-fuel energy and continuous economic growth

## Next steps for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the local level

During the interviews, officials from the first-mover local authorities were asked if they could think of ways in which policy makers at regional, national or Nordic level could support their work with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and whether local authorities themselves could take additional steps to ensure success. Respondents stated that help from national governments and the Nordic Council of Ministers could indeed support their local work. For instance, many national governments could be clearer in communicating which SDGs and related activities they prioritise and how national agencies and delegations are working to implement the 2030 Agenda. This could help to avoid that work at local authority level counteracts national efforts and priorities.

Some interviewees also pointed out that there is a need for national actors to understand that the process of identifying sustainability priorities, developing and implementing activities and measuring their effects are related to local conditions. Most of the local authorities that were consulted want to measure progress in comparison with other cities, regions and local authorities. Globally, several indicator tools and benchmarks are available to do this but if local authorities do not use the same indicators it is impossible to compare them directly. Some respondents stated, however, that comparing themselves with other local authorities is not a priority; they work for the politicians and people in their local area and do not view such comparisons as their responsibility.

“ It is important that the NCM and national authorities provide funds, communicate how the 2030 Agenda is relevant in our Nordic context, and assess what the municipalities are doing to implement the 2030 Agenda and how we are doing it.

**OFFICIAL AT UMEÅ MUNICIPALITY, SWEDEN**

## Recommended next steps

### National governments and/or the Nordic Council of Ministers could:

- offer customised training on how to work with sustainable development at local level
- increase funding for strategic and outreach activities in relation to the SDGs at local level, for instance related to start-up activities such as workshops and education, and to measure effects
- relate funding to performance in the work with the SDGs (for instance by linking funds for investment in infrastructure to high scores in social sustainability); this could enhance the work in several sectors and/or sustainability dimensions
- communicate more with local authorities on their priorities within the 2030 Agenda
- provide more information and educational campaigns about the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in all Nordic languages to inform the public
- provide more opportunities for knowledge-sharing between local authorities
- help to raise awareness of the fact that the selection of priorities, their implementation and measurement of their impact are dependent on local conditions
- award a sustainability prize to reward sustainable businesses, schools, institutions and other public or private stakeholders

### Regional authorities could:

- measure progress with harmonised indicators to allow comparisons between municipalities, not forgetting to analyse what each indicator means at the local level
- spread good examples and solutions for inspiration, but also tell stories of failure so that local authorities can learn from the mistakes and problem-solving skills of others

### Local authorities could:

- improve relations between local politicians and administrations, with Councillors requesting assessments of outcomes and results of SDG-related activities to encourage the administration
- use European directives on procurement, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA, for projects) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA, for plans and programmes) more strictly to fulfil the 2030 Agenda
- involve children in the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda



# Conclusions and outlook

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This report has identified 27 Nordic local authorities as first movers in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs. Other local authorities are currently planning to link local priorities to the global goals and are likely to join the group of first movers in the next few years. The experiences described in this report are intended to provide ideas and guidance for that process.

The profile texts in this report show that there are many approaches to start working with the 2030 Agenda in a local context. Some local authorities use the SDGs as a communication tool. By linking existing or new sustainability actions to the SDGs, they demonstrate how the municipality contributes to the global goals by focusing on local priorities. Other local authorities turn to the SDGs as a source of inspiration. As some interviewed officials state, the SDGs can be a powerful point of reference to “raise the bar” and define more ambitious goals for the local context. The SDGs can also be used as a checklist. Some local authorities systematically compare ongoing activities with the 17 SDGs to identify areas of strength and areas where the municipality could achieve more. Individually or in combination, these approaches may be useful starting points for other municipalities that want to work with the 2030 Agenda.

A comparison of the 27 profile texts shows that the first movers differ in terms of how they implement local strategies, plans and programmes on the 2030 Agenda. Some local authorities prioritize selected SDGs. Others strive to build up a general culture in which the 2030 Agenda is considered in all routines and processes “as a whole”. Some local authorities place strong emphasis on engaging young people

in their work with the SDGs, while others involve businesses or civil society organisations. Local authorities also differ in terms of the departments or units that steer the work with the SDGs, and how other government sectors and agencies become involved. Some of these approaches and priorities depend on the characteristics of the municipality. The first movers portrayed here are located in all of the Nordic countries and regions and include small towns and capital cities; island, coastal and inland municipalities; municipalities with vast territories, such as Sermersooq, and those with smaller areas, such as Kemi. Regardless of which approach a local authority chooses, an important step is taken when political consensus is reached, mandates are agreed and the SDGs are written into steering documents.

Moving forward, interviewed officials offered a range of recommendations how the implementation of the 2030 Agenda could be supported by national or Nordic authorities. A clear communication of national priorities and activities within the 2030 Agenda, guidance on how to work with the 17 SDGs, and support in measuring progress are key. Support in these areas would not only help the first movers to progress with their work but may also encourage more municipalities to contribute to the global goals.

A clear majority of the local representatives who were interviewed in this project also confirmed that a Nordic network in which local authorities could regularly exchange experiences would be helpful for their work. While this message is clear, the format and the practical set up of such a collaboration remains to be settled.

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## Selection of municipalities

Organisations that helped to identify first mover municipalities include local authority associations such as Local Governments Denmark and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), and city and local authority networks such as the Nordic City Network, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and Eurocities. Members of the three thematic groups under the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R), for which Nordregio acts as a secretariat, also recommended local authorities for this study. The Nordic Council of Ministers' Expert Group for Sustainable Development also provided valuable advice.

In some countries, most notably Sweden and Denmark, so many municipalities were recommended that not all could be interviewed. In these two countries the authors selected municipalities by ranking them according to the number of times they were recommended and interviewed those that were ranked highest on the list. The underlying rationale for this was that the best known and most frequently recommended municipalities were likely to be the most advanced in their work with the SDGs and hence qualified as the first movers in their country.

## Interviews with Municipal Officials

The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with all selected local authorities. The people interviewed were officials working in public administration, strategists within social, environmental and/or economic sustainability, and spatial and comprehensive planners. Discussions with interviewees loosely followed a pre-prepared questionnaire that covered topics such as: the motivation to work with the 2030 Agenda; the goals that local authorities try to achieve; the activities or projects they are implementing; the approaches they use to involve the local population (in particular young people); the challenges they see in working with the SDGs; and how these challenges are tackled.

## Degree of urbanisation (DEGURBA)

Eurostat distinguishes between three degrees of urbanisation<sup>3</sup>:

- Densely populated area – at least 50% of the population lives in high-density clusters
- Intermediate density area – less than 50% of the population lives in rural areas and less than 50% lives in high-density clusters
- Thinly populated area – more than 50% of the population lives in rural areas.

## Functional urban area

A functional urban area (FUA) consists of a city ("urban core") and its commuting zone ("hinterland"). An urban core consists of a high-density cluster of contiguous areas with a density of at least 1,500 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. A municipality is defined as being part of an urban core if at least 50% of its population lives in an urban cluster. If at least 15% of the employed residents in a municipality are working in a neighbouring municipality defined as an urban core, this municipality is called a hinterland. In this report, these municipalities are defined as "part" of a FUA (OECD 2013).

## Analysis and comparison

The results presented in the discussion chapter are based on the notes from all interviews with local authorities. For the analysis the notes were coded in the qualitative analytic software programme Nvivo, and dominant themes emerged from the coding process. For transparency it should be noted that not all respondents have listed success factors, challenges, next steps and policy recommendations.

## Presentation of project results

The results of this project were presented during a seminar on 9 May 2018 at Nordregio offices in Stockholm. Councillors and officials from Nordic local authorities, staff from local authority associations, regional associations, consultancies and government agencies attended the seminar.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/degree-of-urbanisation/background>

In addition to the presentation of core results of this project, selected first mover municipalities presented their work with the 2030 Agenda. Seminar participants provided feedback in interactive debates and reflected on success factors, challenges, and recommendations on how to work with the 2030 Agenda.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Presentations and summaries of discussions are available online: <http://www.nordregio.org/events/agenda-2030-at-the-local-level/>.







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