

Humble Governance model for increased climate action in Umeå

NET ZERO CITIES

EU MISSION PLATFORM | CLIMATE NEUTRAL AND SMART CITIES

Executive snapshot



As in cities everywhere, achieving Umeå's goal of climate neutrality relies on coordinated action across the public and private sectors, as well as active engagement with the broader community. To help build effective partnerships that lead to concrete and impactful climate action, a new partnership model was co-developed by the City of Umeå together with Demos Helsinki and the members of the local climate partnership Umeå Climate Roadmap.

The work applied the Humble Governance model (developed by Demos Helsinki) that supports shared problem-solving in complex challenges. This project was supported by funding from the EU Cities Mission, provided through the City Expert Support Facility (CESF) of NetZeroCities.





Knowledge Report

THE IMPACT

Through the development of the new partnership model, Umeå strengthened its capacity to lead and coordinate multi-actor climate cooperation. The CESF-funded project enabled the City to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and potential of its existing model, resulting in recommendations for how to revise its partnership model to enable more effective cooperation and implementation of concrete climate action.

The model clarifies and redistributes accountability and responsibility between partners, outlines revised cooperation formats and suggests strengthened participation of all municipal departments in climate projects together with companies. In this way, it supports effective and meaningful implementation of the Umeå Climate Roadmap across the city's public, private and academic actors.

THE APPROACH

The Humble Governance Model adopted in the City is iterative and consists of the following steps.

Diagnosis: Document review, interviews with City Officials and Municipal Companies, and a survey for Climate Roadmap partners.

Co-creation: In-person and online workshops with City Officials, Municipal Companies and Umeå Climate Roadmap Partners, followed by surveys on further development needs.

Design: Co-development of a new Partnership Model guided by the Humble Governance model developed by Demos Helsinki.

Iteration: Feedback loops with the City Executive Office, key partners and existing working groups within the partnership.



OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

- A proposed model for climate partnership, including, revisions to roles and responsibilities between actors, suggestions on improving the incentive structures, and revising some of the cooperation formats (e.g., introducing new smaller working groups with accountability and iterative workplans).
- Strategic recommendations for concrete next steps in the partnership model development process (e.g. starting a process of internal engagement across City departments).
- Strengthened capacity and understanding of the needs of the partnership within the City Executive Office and increased awareness of the usefulness of partnerships for administrative departments (incentives). As well as increasing and promoting usefulness of the partnership for administrative departments (incentive to engage).

What worked:

- Including City Officials across departments, municipal companies and partner stakeholders in an iterative process was essential for the development of the new partnership model.
- The Humble Governance model provided a shared framework and vocabulary for improving collaboration among actors as well as the analysis of the current partnership model, including its development needs and the design of the new model.
- Clarification on the municipalities roll in the partnership as a partner that shares responsibility instead of having ownership of the transition process.

Transferable insight:

- The results of the analysis and co-creation processes highlight the importance of clearly defined accountabilities and responsibilities between partners. Collaboration in smaller and more actionable working groups enables more concrete action and increased accountability and ownership.
- The project demonstrated that stronger involvement of all municipal departments is beneficial as it improves internal coordination and create clearer incentives for other partners to engage.
- The findings underline the importance of embedding partnership redesign in existing city processes and governance structures. This makes pre-analysis and a solid understanding of the institutional context critical for institutionalisation and impact.
- City as system host: Sharing responsibility to increase accountability is essential for accelerating climate action implementation. At the same time the system perspective and long-term holistic vision is a responsibility that ideally a neural agent can take and public authorities in this case the city are often the most natural choice. The concept of a systems host is informed by research from Karlstad University.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?



Learn more about Umeå

Consult the Humble Governance Model

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NEXT STEPS FOR THE CITY

- Together with partners from NetZeroCities, Umeå will continue structuring and framing their strategic climate governance work in line with the Humble Governance principles. Further, Umeå will test some of the concrete Humble Governance recommendations as part of HYDROSYM- 2030 (an Enabling Cities Transformation programme project with Helsingborg), e.g., on smaller working groups for concrete climate action or incorporating learnings for the continued development of the Climate Roadmap partnership.
- Umeå plans to implement several of the actions proposed in the project, such as identifying, strengthening, and crystallising the roles of different Municipal Departments in enabling the climate partnership in their topic areas. The City has updated the framework Umeå Climate Roadmap as the current roadmap work period has ended and in that process utilised the learnings from this project in re-organising the partnership for the current 3-year period 2026-2028.
- Umeå is also interested in peer-learning on climate partnership with other cities, such as Turku and Leuven.