WE MAKE transition!

Practical use of the Transition Arena method to enhance cooperation between local authorities, civil society and business actors towards sustainability

- A manual for local authorities and other interested actors

Interreg Baltic Sea Region
Co-funded by the European Union
RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES
We make transition!

Foreword

Societal transitions are described as complex, non-linear, and long-term processes of societal change. Transition management seeks - instead of optimising existing systems - to anticipate transitions, and to accelerate and guide the types of emerging changes that could contribute to transitions with desired outcomes. (Notermans, von Wirth, Loorbach 2022).

*This manual is based on the "**We make transition!" project (2023-2025)**, whose aim was to utilise the transition arena method in a simple and inclusive way to promote interaction and transformative cooperation between local/regional authorities and civil society, business and other small local actors. The project, with co-funding from the EU Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, implemented local transition arena processes in 12 locations around the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Each transition arena had a unique sustainability topic that was chosen based on the local priorities and needs.*

The manual aims to reveal the high value of interactive processes that help break the silos and involve all levels of society. It provides practical advice to local authorities and any other interested actors on how to utilise the transition management approach to enhance common understanding, dive into systemic challenges, reduce polarisation and go beyond business-as-usual in public governance.

The manual introduces the key elements of transition management and particularly describes the "We make transition! approach" for practical low-threshold utilisation of the transition arena method with the aim to empower people and initiate concrete actions. The manual includes stories of the 12 transition arena processes as well as the main learnings and conclusions.

The main author of the publication:

Johanna Leino, the Baltic Institute of Finland

With contribution of following people:

Kati Lehtiö, Council of Tampere Region, Finland

Miranda Sundholm, Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa, Finland

Henna Salminen, Regional Council of Southwest Finland

Martin Noorkoiv, Joanna Kurvits & Christo Allikson, DD Foundation, Estonia

Lienīte Priedāja-Klepere, Zane Kake & Zane Pīpkalēja, Vidzeme Planning Region, Latvia

Marta Jarosińska, City of Gdynia, Poland

Tina Schneider & Anna Burhorst, University of Bremen

Kjersti Bjørnevik, Trøndelag County Authority, Norway

Visual design:

Anna Dudziak, Baltic Institute of European and Regional Affairs – BISER, Poland

Date of publication:

08/2025

This publication is made within the project "We make transition!" (2023-2025) that received co-funding from the EU Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme to promote cooperation between local authorities, civil society and small business actors to enhance sustainability. The project has focused on the following sustainability topics: 1) sustainable lifestyle, 2) agriculture & food, 3) biodiversity and 4) circular economy. The project has adapted the transition arena method to get small local actors on board, identify challenges, create a shared vision and build on this to develop new actions and cooperation towards a sustainable future.

Table of contents

1. The “We Make Transition!” Process

1.1 Transition arena and our approach to it

We make transition! (WMT!) is a transnational project, whose key aim was to adapt, pilot and learn about the transition arena method – in cooperation with local authorities - to enable bottom-up interaction, understanding of systemic challenges, and to initiate new transformative cooperation. The focus has been on empowering interaction and collaboration between local authorities and small local actors, co-create joint sustainability visions and agree on and start implementing concrete actions towards a sustainable future.

The ‘transition arena’ is a participatory method used to engage people in a collective process of understanding, learning, visioning, and experimenting around specific societal transition challenges. The arena outputs guide the search for strategies to transform existing structures, cultures, and practices and realise new projects, collaborations, and experiments. (Silvestri, Hebinck et al., 2022, p. 9.) It does so by focusing on the objective of radical innovation and a selective participatory approach (Loorbach 2010, p. 162).

A transition arena can be described as a structured space for a diverse group of ‘change agents’ to reflect critically on a current societal system and to problematise structures, cultures, and practices of an unsustainable *status quo* while stimulating a change in perspective towards a more sustainable and just future. This space is of a temporary nature and its core element is a series of workshops during which the participants meet to reflect on a shared problem critically (Loorbach 2010). The process aims for two key outcomes. First, this process should form a group of actors willing to act as ambassadors for change by linking innovative ideas for radical change that emerged in the co-creative process to their daily practices and engaging with their social networks on the matter. Second, this process should result in a set of concrete steps, or a transition agenda, that provide strategies for transforming current unsustainable structures, cultures, and practices (Roorda et al., 2014; Silvestri, Hebinck, et al. 2022, p. 9).

The transition arena acts as a temporary innovation network aimed at developing new ways of thinking and acting beyond ‘business-as-usual’. It is a collective and co-creative learning process that increases the participants' self-organisation capacity. The main outcomes of the arena are a sense of direction, an impulse for local change, and collective empowerment. (Notermans, von Wirth & Loorbach 2022, p. 6.)

Transition arenas have been developed and broadly applied in different contexts and levels (e.g. local/national). The arena is always context and challenge specific - the differences are related to the framing of the topic/challenge and consideration on who should be involved. The results also vary from concrete immediate actions to policy recommendations and fostering new discussion.

Transition arenas have been implemented in many European countries, cities and local neighbourhoods. For example, a neighbourhood transition arena in Carnisse, Rotterdam focused on the involvement and empowerment of the local residents to develop an alternative transition future to the framing of the municipality of the area of Carnisse (Notermans, von Wirth & Loorbach 2022, p. 15). In Finland, the transition arena method has been used for bringing together high-level experts from different sectors to make radical policy recommendations to foster transition for example in the energy sector (Sitra 2017).

The **"We make transition!**" has utilised the key elements and thinking behind the method but has not tried to copy it in all academic details. The aim was to modify the method into a practical, low-threshold tool that could be easily adopted by almost any organisation. It is notable that our approach indeed underlines the participatory aspect of the method and avoids too strict a selection of participants. **The WMT! critical focus has been, instead, to involve parties from different levels of society, paying particular attention to bringing various views and ideas of civil society, business and other local actors to the same table with local authorities and decision makers.** Another important aspect was to avoid predefinitions of sustainability and to let the participants bring their approaches to it.

The decision on who to invite has followed the idea of inviting those who are actively motivated to enhance the sustainability topic of the arena and those who have the capacity to introduce changes to the structure or established way of doing things (e.g., public-civic cooperation, daily practices). The aim has been to improve mutual, systemic understanding and co-create new cooperation models. A strong involvement of public sector, civil society and business representatives has been essential.

Involving actors with various backgrounds requires simplicity and openness: WMT! has paid special attention to using language that anybody can understand. Abstract or academic terms were avoided in the workshops to make them more accessible for people with different educational backgrounds. The number and complexity of transition arena workshops as well as the time required from the participants was also reduced to the minimum.

The aim, in addition to fostering new solutions with local actors, was also to provide local authorities with the opportunity to learn how they could apply elements and learnings of the piloted process to enable bottom-up knowledge and ideas in their regular planning and strategy development processes.

The eleven WMT! project partners from six countries piloted local transition arena processes in altogether 12 locations. The local arena processes have been implemented according to the following steps:

1. conducting stakeholder and system analysis: 2-3 focus group discussions on sustainability topics (local)
2. defining the topic and framing the challenges (local)
3. co-creating a joint Baltic Sea Region (BSR) vision of a sustainable future by a transnational group of change agents (transnational with participants from 6 countries)
4. organising a series of three local workshops: 1) visioning, 2) pathways, 3) concrete solutions and transition agenda (local)
5. evaluating (using questionnaires and interviews)
6. implementing actions and initiating the transition towards the local vision (local).

This manual focuses on describing the local steps 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6. The transnational element – step 3 - is described in the Appendix 1.

Figure 1. *The transition arena process in the "We make transition!" Project.*

1.2 Focus group discussions as a starting point

The transition arena process always starts with an actor and a system analysis. Two to three **focus group discussions** were organised for this in each partner location. Each focus group discussion had a specific topic that was chosen based on the local cooperation needs and interests. The topics were related to sustainable lifestyle, food & agriculture, biodiversity and circular economy. The focus group participants were local authorities, civil society members, and other relevant actors related to the chosen sustainability topic. Twenty focus group discussions were organised in 12 cities and municipalities in 2023. The focus group results in each location provided a basis for planning the local transition arena workshop processes.

Table 1. *Focus group locations, topics and number of participants.*

Country	City/municipality/region	Number of participants	Topic of focus group
Germany	Bremen	9	Sustainable Food
	Bremen	14	Climate change and youth involvement
Latvia	Cēsis	11	Biodegradable waste management
	Cēsis	10	Bioregion development in Gauja National Park
Estonia	Tartu	7	Circular economy
	Lääne-Harju	7	Community energy
Poland	Gdynia	9	Green urban spaces of participation
	Gdynia	9	Sustainable consumption
Finland	Tampere	14	Biodiversity
	Tampere	15	Sustainable consumption and lifestyle
	Hämeenkyrö	14	Sustainable mobility
	Hämeenkyrö	20	Sustainable agriculture and lifestyle
	Helsinki-Uusimaa	8	Sharing economy
	Helsinki-Uusimaa	8	Sustainable food system
	Helsinki-Uusimaa	7	Sustainable use of buildings and built space
	Kimitoön	8	Sustainable entrepreneurship and work
	Kimitoön	8	Youth participation and sustainable lifestyle
	Uusikaupunki	7	Biodiversity
	Uusikaupunki	10	Sustainable consumption
Norway	Trondheim	9	Circular economy and social sustainability

The focus group method was seen as suitable for the project because it enables inclusive, dynamic, and contextually relevant discussions. It is a qualitative research method designed to gather in-depth insights and perceptions from a diverse group of participants on a specific topic of interest. The moderator guides the conversation using a predetermined set of open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences, opinions, and ideas. The method leverages group dynamics, fostering interaction and allowing participants to build upon each other's responses. The aim is to uncover nuanced perspectives, explore shared understandings, and delve into the complexity of human experiences.

	Structured Interview	Focus Group
Fixed questions	✓	✓
Fixed order of questions	✓	✗
Fixed number of questions	✓	✗
Option to ask addtitional questions	✗	✓

***Figure 2**. Comparison of a structured interview and a focus group discussion.*
Source: www.scribbr.com/methodology/focus-group/

The focus group session follows a structured format. It commences with introductions, creating an open atmosphere, and then progresses to the main discussion phase. The participants are encouraged to share their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives during this phase, with the moderator facilitating the conversation and potentially incorporating interactive activities. The session concludes with a thoughtful summary and closure.

The WMT! used the following questions in all focus group discussions:

1. What comes to your mind about topic X? What kind of activities currently and mainly support topic X (in your region)?
2. What type of civil society and small business actors are the most active in the X topic in your region? (NGOs, cooperatives, communities, small enterprises/entrepreneurs, individuals...?)
3. How do you see your role in enhancing the X topic?
4. How are activities of civil society and small business actors currently supported? What kind of support do you think is needed among various local actors in relation to X topic?

5. What are the current major challenges faced by local civil society and business actors in relation to the X topic? How would you suggest overcoming those?
6. How would you improve the cooperation between civil society and local authorities?
7. If you would be able to give only one advice on how to strengthen and improve the selected sustainability topic X in your region, what would you suggest?

The focus group discussions helped project partners to reach and engage relevant local civil society actors, business representatives, researchers and other important stakeholders to obtain their views on concrete sustainability topics. Representatives of local authorities and, in some cases, local decision makers participated in the focus groups. The discussion enabled participants to improve their understanding not only of the role and ideas of civil society actors in enhancing sustainability but also insights into the gaps within civil and public sector cooperation and how these could be solved.

1.3 Local transition arena workshop processes

The focus groups' results and conclusions and the BSR sustainability vision formed a good basis for planning local transition arena workshops in the 12 locations. Focus group discussions helped to analyse the cooperation needs and critical challenges related to selected sustainability topics and to identify the relevant actors to be invited from the focus group and beyond. A transition/planning team was formed in each location to plan the local arena workshops. The planning teams included, in addition to project partners, local authority and, in some cases, civil society representatives. In a few local processes, an external expert was involved to support the workshops' planning, implementation and facilitation.

Each local workshop process had a sustainability topic selected and formulated based on earlier focus group discussions. Table 2 provides an overview of the locations and topics.

Table 2. *Local transition arena topics in each partner location.*

Topical areas	City/municipality	Topic of arena process
Sustainable food and agriculture	Hämeenkyrö, Finland	Sustainable agriculture
	Cēsis, Latvia	Organic food and bioregion development
	Bremen, Germany	Organic food transition in schools
	Trondheim, Norway	Sustainable local food system
Circular and sharing economy	Tartu County, Estonia	Circular economy
	Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Finland	Circular economy and sustainable use of built space
	Namsos, Norway	Circular economy
Sustainable life (lifestyle, education and biodiversity)	City of Tampere, Finland	Sustainable life (of people and nature)
	Kimitoön, Finland	Sustainable future and youth participation
	Uusikaupunki, Finland	Biodiversity in nearby nature
	City of Gdynia, Poland	Cross-sectoral sustainability
	Lääne-Harju, Estonia	Sustainability transition in education

The local workshop process in most locations comprised three to four workshops (except for Bremen having two intensive workshop days). Each local process included the following:

1) **forming a broader understanding of the topic and identifying systemic challenges** (with the help of focus group results, expert speakers and discussion)
2) **forming a systemic understanding of the current situation and co-creating a local vision about the sustainable future related to the selected topic** (using tools such as future triangle, x-curve and envisioning in small groups, see Appendices 2-3)
3) **identifying potential pathways towards the agreed vision** (with backcasting method, see Appendix 4)
4) **formulating actions, choosing and defining concrete steps to focus on** (in small groups)
5) **developing a joint agreement on actions, initiatives, experiments, responsibilities and timetable** (transition agenda/action plan).

The partners organised additional meetings with participants and new stakeholders after the local workshops to ensure further communication and engagement of more actors.

2. Civil Society Making Sustainability Transitions

2.1 The role of active civil society in sustainability transitions

One of the key aims of the “We make transition!” project was to identify and raise awareness of the value of civil society actors. The following critical roles that civil society actors have in sustainability transitions were identified based on the workshops with the transnational group of change agents and through conducting interviews for a case study publication on “civil society making sustainability transitions”:

- organising direct actions to protect nature and enhance sustainability
- being source of inspiration, knowledge and innovations
- experimenting with new solutions and setting an example for others
- facilitating and connecting different sectors and actors
- community building
- raising awareness and raising the bar for sustainability
- being critical towards the system and create pressure for needed political changes.

Civil society actors can have a pioneering role in enhancing social innovations and sustainability in e.g. circular economy, food, biodiversity and energy. They are creative people who act according to their values and persistently strive to achieve their aims despite system challenges. Sometimes new businesses start from these initiatives.

Figure 3. *An NGO “Roheline Vald”, Lääne-Harju, Estonia.*

2.2 Challenges hindering cooperation between local authorities and civil society actors and steps to enhance cooperation

A transnational analysis based on all focus group results was made within the project. The joint analysis identified key challenges related to cooperation (table 3). Improving cooperation between civil society and the local public sector requires a strategic approach. Table 4 lists recommendations to improve cooperation.

Table 3. *Challenges hindering cooperation between local authorities and civil society actors.*

Trust and communication	Building trust between civil society actors and local government officials can be a significant challenge. Major factors influencing this include the lack of systematic interaction and communication, prevailing power structures, and the use of complicated language, which can cause misunderstandings and mistrust.
Resource constraints	Smaller organisations struggle to engage in meaningful cooperation due to resource limitations.
Differing objectives	Individual civil society organisations often have specific objectives and interests that may not be visible in the municipality's priorities. Balancing these differing objectives can be challenging. For this reason, methods like focus group discussions or joint visioning to discuss the desired objectives can bridge the gaps.
Power dynamics	Power imbalances arise when one party has significantly more resources or decision-making authority than the other.
Community engagement	Ensuring that cooperation is inclusive and represents the broader community's interests is challenging.
Capacity building	Development of skills, knowledge, and resources is important for effective partnership and trust building.
Bureaucracy barriers	Bureaucracy in the form of regulations is a good thing, but unnecessarily heavy bureaucracy related to various permits and rules, for example, prevents smaller actors from acting. More flexibility would be needed in interpreting the rules in some cases. These barriers vary from country to country.
Legal and policy frameworks	Outdated or inflexible legal and policy frameworks may hinder cooperation. Advocacy efforts to reform these frameworks can be a complex and lengthy process.

Table 4. *Recommendations to improve public-civic collaboration.*

Communication channels	Create a platform or hubs where both civil society organizations and municipal representatives can regularly communicate and share information. This could be an online forum or physical meeting spaces.
Define common goals	Identify shared objectives and areas of interest. This could include community development, environmental conservation, or public health initiatives. Ensure that these goals are well-defined and mutually agreed upon.
Training and Capacity Building	Organise training and joint workshops for both civil society and municipal employees to promote mutual understanding and skills in effective communication.
Regular Meetings and Collaboration Events	Host regular meetings or collaborative events where both parties can discuss progress, challenges, and opportunities for cooperation. These gatherings foster personal relationships and build trust. Establishing regular dialogue and collaboration platforms could help improve stakeholder communication and coordination.
Transparency and Accountability	Establish transparent reporting mechanisms for projects and initiatives. Ensure that both civil society and municipal sector representatives are held accountable for their commitments and actions.
Create Incentives	Develop incentive programs to encourage collaboration, such as awards or recognition for successful joint projects that add value to wider communities. Positive reinforcement can motivate both parties to work together more effectively towards common goals.
Public Awareness Campaigns	Collaborate on public awareness campaigns to engage the community on the importance of civil society and municipal cooperation. This can create public support and pressure for improved collaboration.
Technology	Leverage digital tools, AI and social media to facilitate communication and share information. These tools also help reach a wider audience and engage more stakeholders.
Funding and support mechanisms	Sometimes small seed money or other support mechanisms can enable civil society organisations and small business actors to provide significant value for the society.
Long-term Planning	Develop a long-term strategy for cooperation that includes milestones, regular evaluations, and adaptability to changing circumstances.
Feedback Mechanisms	Encourage feedback from both civil society and the municipal sector to continuously improve the cooperation framework.

3. Transition Arenas in the We Make Transition! Project

3.1 Overview of the twelve WMT! transition arena pilot processes

Transition arena workshop processes were implemented in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Germany and Norway during the WMT! project. Table 5 illustrates the topics, types of participants, number of workshops, and the connection to local strategies of each arena process.

Table 5. *Topics, types of participants, number of workshops and connection to local strategies.*

Location	Title of Arena	Amount of participants	Key participants	Number of workshops	Connection to local strategies
Hämeenkyrö municipality, Finland	Agriculture Arena	30	Local authorities, politicians, educational organisations, agriculture entrepreneurs, experts	3 workshops, 1 result meeting	Municipal strategy, local climate programme
City of Tampere, Finland	Tampere Future Arena of Sustainable Life	40/60	Local authorities, politicians, associations, communities, cultural actors, individuals, entrepreneurs	1 future visioning workshop for residents, 3 workshops for various stakeholders ,1 result event	City strategy, local biodiversity programme
City of Gdynia, Poland	Cross-sectoral Sustainability	50	City councillors, City Hall employees, active individuals, NGO and youth representatives, business owners	3 workshops	Local sustainability programme, local climate education programme
Tartu County, Estonia	Tartu Circular Economy Transition	18/60	Small business, civil society actors. Local and regional authorities participated at the wider workshop.	4 workshops for a smaller group of actors, 1 public event for a larger group	Tartu County Roadmap for Circular Economy

Lääne-Harju municipality, Estonia	Sustainability Transition in Education	33	Local authorities, representatives of educational institutions, NGOs	3 workshops	Lääne-Harju Education Strategy, local green school initiative
Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Finland	Circular Transition: Sharing economy and better use of built spaces	27	Representatives of cities, regional authorities, NGOs, associations, small business actors and higher education institutions.	3 workshops	Helsinki-Uusimaa Circular Hub initiative
Kimitoön municipality, Finland	Sustainable Future in Kimitoön	29	Civil society associations, small enterprises, youth council, individual residents, municipality representatives	4 workshops and reflection meetings	Kimitoön Climate and Environmental Programme
City of Uusikaupunki, Finland	Nature in my Neighbour-hood	22	Local authorities, decision makers, civil society organisations, entrepreneurs, residents	4 workshops, and reflection meetings	Local climate programme
Namsos municipality, Norway	Circular Initiatives	25	County, local municipalities, public companies, private businesses, retail, volunteer organisations, state employment initiatives	2 workshops	Circular Economy Roadmap
Trondheim Municipality, Norway	Sustainable food	21	Municipalities, NGO representatives, farmers, food distributors, retailers, community organizations	3 workshops	Local Food Strategy
Bremen, Germany	Organic food transition in Bremen schools	23	Catering organisations, farmers, representatives of political parties, food associations, Kitchen Forum, BioStadt Bremen	2 workshops	Bremen 2040 Action Plan
Cēsis Municipality, Latvia	Co-creating Bioregion: Organic Food Promotion	40	Entrepreneurs, farmers, politicians, national institutions, educational and research institutions, municipalities, associations, organiser of local organic food market	3 workshops in 5 subtopic groups	Bioregion Memorandum, Vidzeme Sustainable Food Strategy

3.2 Stories of WMT! transition arena processes

3.2.1 Hämeenkyrö Agriculture Arena, Finland

Hämeenkyrö Agriculture Arena invited local agriculture entrepreneurs, educational institutions, local authorities and local decision-makers to discuss systemic challenges in agriculture, create a vision for Hämeenkyrö sustainable agriculture 2035 and identify concrete actions. The process of three workshops was organised in March 2024 in cooperation with Hämeenkyrö municipality – a rural municipality of 10 300 inhabitants, located 30 minutes from the City of Tampere.

Who was involved?

Approximately 30 local actors, including agricultural entrepreneurs, companies, representatives of the municipality, local politicians, and representatives of educational institutions, trade and civil society participated in the workshops.

Identified challenges

The process focused on the following challenges, which were identified in the focus group discussion: 1) the dramatically decreasing economic profitability of farming in Finland, 2) the capacity of farmers and securing the continuation of farms, 3) the promotion of local food, 4) the ways to interest young people more in agriculture and related job and innovation opportunities, and 5) the lack of positive communication about agriculture.

The arena process

The Hämeenkyrö arena process was supported by an external service design expert who supported facilitation and summarised the results. The workshops started with a lunch where the participants had a chance to exchange thoughts and deepen their knowledge of each other. Two of the workshops had few external speakers who provided a valuable overview on different factors that influence Finnish agriculture at the moment and what the possible pathways are towards sustainable practices like organic and regenerative farming. For example, the increase in the production input prices causes profitability challenges for rural entrepreneurs. Organic and regenerative farming were discussed as solutions to eliminate increasing fertilizer costs. A major challenge is that consumers do not buy or even recognise domestic products in grocery stores well enough.

Based on the improved common understanding, a vision for “sustainable agriculture in Hämeenkyrö 2035” was created in small groups who worked with the future triangle tool (Appendix 2). The vision includes five themes:

1. a well-being countryside focusing on peoples’ and animals’ well-being
2. versatile, profitable and sustainable rural entrepreneurship
3. a strong appreciation of agriculture
4. the agroecological symbiosis of Hämeenkyrö
5. flourishing local and organic food culture.

In the second workshop, the participants created pathways to the vision and selected the key actions needed to achieve the vision. In the third workshop, the participants voted for the most important transition steps and created action plans with detailed actions and responsibilities in small groups. A fourth meeting was organised to discuss the results, immediate actions and next steps.

Results

The participants co-created an action plan from the voted change proposals, including:

- Promoting local food and agriculture through positive communication and events.
- Making city dwellers aware of the local food through positive agriculture communication in social media and discussion events.
- Integrating agriculture in school education: e.g., children visiting farms and practicing farming at school to improve their understanding of sustainable food from production to table.
- Forming an innovation group in Hämeenkyrö to boost joint communication and collaboration.
- Making the Agriculture Arena an annual one-day event to follow up the actions and enable interaction and exchange with the municipality.
- Reforming local procurement policy to favour domestic and local food, starting with a market survey on local food production.

The vision and results of the process were utilised in the local climate programme and municipal strategy. The arena provided for Hämeenkyrö municipality a direct link to be in touch and collaborate with agriculture entrepreneurs. It served as a platform of discussion for all, enhanced mutual systemic learning and joint understanding, co-creating and co-visioning. This built a good basis for cooperation and linking with on-going initiatives and projects.

3.2.2 Tampere Future Arena of Sustainable Life, Finland

Tampere Future Arena of Sustainable Life engaged local NGOs, cooperatives, culture actors, individuals and representatives of many city departments and local decision makers from different political parties. The process included a visioning workshop for residents, a visioning workshop with 60 participants, and a pathway and solution workshop with 40 participants. The topic "sustainable life" is related to both people and nature.

Who was involved?

The Tampere Future Arena attracted various people who were interested in providing their views on a sustainable future and enhancing direct discussion with the city. The main three workshops had over ten city representatives from different departments, representatives of Youth Council, students, individuals, cooperatives, associations, communities and small business actors. An important element was the intensive participation of local politicians from five different political parties in the visioning workshop and later as commentaries in the result event.

Identified challenges

Several key challenges related to the sustainability work of local actors were identified in the focus group discussions, such as:

1. Use of urban space - how do urban spaces enhance community building and sustainable life?
2. Participation in urban planning - how to improve this, especially early-stage participation?
3. Visibility for secondhand and repair services - how could the city support in this?
4. Biodiversity – how to promote biodiversity in better cooperation with local actors?

The arena process

The Tampere arena consisted of three main workshops and an additional workshop solely for residents (visioning of a good and sustainable life). The process started with the workshop for residents, which was followed by the main visioning workshop with 60 participants. The residents' workshop results were presented in the main visioning workshop to obtain more voices from ordinary residents into discussion about a sustainable future.

The main visioning workshop started with inspiring presentations by the local civil society (e.g. urban gardening, secondhand business and citizen participation). Participants were divided into seven small groups and each group could select a sustainability topic or topics to focus on. These topics were circular economy, sustainable business, biodiversity, youth & education

and participation. Local politicians participated in the workshop that ended in a panel discussion with politicians and local actors.

Pathway and solution workshops had 35-40 participants divided into four thematic groups according to their interests: 1) Biodiversity promotion, 2) Utilisation of empty spaces to enhance sustainable life, 3) Participation in urban planning and 4) Secondhand and repair services. Each group created an action plan and identified the first steps and actions.

A result event was organised after two months of the solution workshop, where the representatives of four thematic working groups presented results. Local decision makers from five political parties made commentary speeches and answered questions from the participants. Each decision maker had to say what issues they would be ready to enhance and take further in the political decision making.

Results

The Tampere vision of sustainable life underlines the role of the city in supporting community building, civic participation and possibilities of influencing the living environment. The importance of having nature everywhere in the city is highlighted.

Each four thematic groups created a list of actions and formulated key messages to be delivered widely to the city administration.

The key results were:

- A Culture Center of Sustainable Life, that is a new cooperation model between the city and local actors to enhance community building and sustainable life.
- A Biodiversity Center to gather knowledge and create a group of voluntary-based “biodiversity ambassadors” around the city.
- Actions to strengthen the visibility of secondhand and repair services.
- Recommendations for the city on how to improve civic participation in sustainable urban planning.

Key messages and actions are taken forward by the working groups and in further discussions with the city and local politicians. The pilots were financed by the city development programmes and the We make transition! project. The results have an impact on the Biodiversity Programme and City Strategy.

In Tampere, a success factor was the participation of politicians and engagement of many city departments. Another key factor was the openness to new participants: Some participated only in one workshop and suggested new relevant people to join in the other workshops. Engagement of new people along the way empowered the implementation of results.

3.2.3 Cross-sectoral Sustainability, Gdynia, Poland

The Gdynia transition arena focused on enhancing green urban spaces, improving waste management practices, and mapping existing sustainable initiatives in the city. The process of three workshops was organized by the Gdynia City Hall in collaboration with the Baltic Institute for Regional Affairs (BISER).

Who was involved?

About 50 local actors participated in the Gdynia transition arena, including city councillors, City Hall employees, individuals, NGO and youth representatives, and business owners.

Identified challenges

The following sustainability challenges were identified:

1. **city greenery**: poorly connected parks, limited accessibility, and low public awareness of their potential for community use
2. **inefficient waste segregation**: lack of a unified system for waste segregation, weak enforcement, and excessive reliance on single-use utensils
3. **more visibility for sustainability services**: need for a central database for locating sustainable businesses, repair hubs or public water stations in the city.

Systemic barriers such as unclear regulations, decision-makers' limited awareness of sustainability issues, and weak collaboration between stakeholders were also discussed.

The arena process

The process was planned and executed through a series of structured workshops. The preparatory phase the Transition Team, comprising of NGO and city representatives, defined the focus areas and invited around 100 participants from various sectors. The first workshop divided participants into three teams (greenery, zero waste, and mapping sustainable initiatives) and facilitated initial visioning exercises. The second workshop refined these ideas through pathways and backcasting exercises in smaller subgroups. In the third workshop, participants developed pilot projects, presented them, and conducted an anonymous vote to select one initiative for implementation in the city.

Results

The key outcome of the Gdynia transition arena is a pilot project aimed at reducing single-use items by establishing a shared dishware depot for public events. This initiative will encourage citizens to donate reusable plates and utensils, which will then be made available for rental to event organizers, food vendors, and community groups. Key considerations include logistics such as storage, marking the items, and coordinating the collection and cleaning process afterward.

Furthermore, a report compiling all the ideas developed during the arena was submitted to the city council, providing a broader roadmap for future sustainability initiatives.

The transition arena process proved valuable because it strengthened local networks, encouraged collaboration, and created a space for meaningful discussions that may not have happened otherwise. Participants expressed a sense of inclusion in decision-making, and the pilot project will now serve as a practical test of the city's commitment to sustainability, revealing potential challenges and areas for improvement.

Figure 4. *Transition arena in Gdynia, Poland. (RATfilm, Łukasz Rudy).*

3.2.4 Tartu Circular Economy Transition, Estonia

The Tartu County Circular Economy Transition Arena brought together NGOs and other local actors to foster the transition towards a circular economy in Tartu County. Through four transition arena workshops and a wider agenda event, significant contributions were made to the county's Circular Economy Roadmap and potential created to form a local network of frontrunners in the circular economy.

Who was involved?

Four workshops were carried out with around 18 representatives of social enterprises and NGOs including neighbourhood and advocacy organisations and foundations. A wider event for introducing and discussing the results was organised with 60 participants including representatives from municipal governments, business sector, NGOs and the general public.

Identified challenges

The main challenge of the process was how to speed up transition to a circular economy in cooperation with civil society organisations and other local circular economy actors.

The arena process was connected with the drafting of the Tartu County Roadmap of Circular Economy affecting eight local municipalities. The arena process helped to map all relevant civil society and small business actors who are already working for the circular transition and to obtain their views on and recommendations for the roadmap process.

The arena process

The arena process consisted of four workshops and a wider agenda event. The first workshop was used to map the current state of the circular economy in Tartu County, using the X-Curve visual tool (see Appendix 3) aimed at creating a common understanding of the local circular economy dynamics. A joint vision was created based on this understanding of trends. The second workshop was used for mapping the things that are stopping the local actors from moving faster and the things that could support them and the society as a whole. The third workshop focused on formulating concrete suggestions to the roadmap. At the final workshop, the participants voted on actions and planned collaboration and new projects for the future. The integration of ideas and recommendations into the Circular Economy Roadmap was discussed in a wider event with local authorities and other stakeholders.

Results

The process brought together for the first time the local actors leading the change in sustainability in different sectors, creating a possibility for forming a local network. The arena helped participants to understand their role and connection with the transition to circular economy. The public discussion and engagement event tapped into wider interest in what the

municipalities are planning and a possibility for the municipalities to sense the interested public's expectations, before the final draft of the roadmap.

The transition arena group provided feedback and 34 concrete proposals to the roadmap's draft version, focusing on four key impact areas: 1) community involvement and co-creation, 2) recycling, 3) sustainable food systems, and 4) monitoring roadmap outcomes. Half of the proposals were taken into account by officials in the final roadmap.

Finally, the transition arena group was brought together with the policymakers to discuss possible cooperation. Authorities confirmed that the recommendations helped them take into account the civil society needs, and also make the final version of the roadmap more concrete. The following future cooperation plans were discussed together with the Association of Municipalities of Tartu County:

- A plan to start an annual networking meeting of circular economy stakeholders and promoters to exchange information, discuss the progress, ask questions, make plans and find partners for further activities in implementing the roadmap.
- Developing cooperation formats between local authority recycling stations and REuse organizations, focusing specifically on waste reform starting 2025.
- Designing science-based interventions in people's behaviour to introduce and deploy REuse models in cooperation with experts in relevant fields (e.g. behavioral sciences).
- Mapping of existing circular initiatives as well as promoters in communities (schools, libraries, community centres, cultural centres, churches, etc.).

Figure 5. *Group picture from the Tartu transition arena, Estonia. (Karl Piirimees).*

3.2.5 Sustainability Transition in Education, Lääne-Harju, Estonia

The Lääne-Harju transition arena focused on making a transition in education by addressing environmental responsibility, resource efficiency, and students' well-being. It was linked to the municipality's green school initiative and played a key role in shaping the Lääne-Harju Education Strategy 2025-2030. The process sought to ensure that sustainability becomes a priority in local schools by aligning with these ongoing efforts,.

Who was involved?

Around 33 participated in the workshops, representing a diverse group of stakeholders, including school and kindergarten principals, NGOs, local government employees, mental health specialists, and university representatives.

Identified challenges

The arena process explored how to improve sustainability in education, focusing on three main questions:

1. How can schools be made more sustainable by reducing food and general waste, repurposing materials, and increasing energy efficiency?
2. How can students gain better knowledge of environmental protection, local ecosystems, and nature?
3. How can learning environments be made more supportive for students' mental and physical health?

The arena process

The transition arena planning began with focus group discussions and meetings with municipality officials to identify the most pressing challenges. After selecting the main focus areas, the planning team invited stakeholders from various fields to the arena workshops. The arena process included three full-day workshops.

Each workshop followed a structured format, beginning with a shared understanding of the challenges, followed by discussions and brainstorming sessions. A tool to imagine and create a vision of a young person was used. It became clear during the process that certain perspectives were missing. Additional mental health professionals from NGOs and private sector were invited to later workshops to address this, broadening the discussions.

The final workshop focused on refining ideas into concrete proposals. A student-centred approach was emphasised throughout the process, ensuring that the perspectives of young people remained in the focus.

Results

The transition arena process led to the integration of several proposals into the Lääne-Harju Education Strategy 2025-2030. These are:

- **Outdoor Learning and Active Lifestyles:** The municipality and educational organisations are committed to build outdoor activity spaces and develop pedestrian and cycle path connections to promote both outdoor education and physical activity for students.
- **Restructuring the Role of Class Teachers:** A key innovation was to redefine the role of class teachers as mentors acting as a trusted adult for students. A working group was established to further develop this idea.
- **Mindful Eating Choices:** Schools and kindergartens agreed to introduce plant-based diets in schools and engage students in the decision-making of menus to promote mindful eating and food choices.

Furthermore, practical activities will be promoted, such as repair workshops and excursions focused on local biodiversity. The municipality will oversee implementation through working groups. The arena process strengthened collaboration between different stakeholders in addition to shaping policy, fostering long-term commitment to systemic sustainability initiatives in education.

Figure 6. *Transition arena in Lääne-Harju, Estonia. (Ivo Panasjuk).*

3.2.6 Helsinki-Uusimaa Circular Transition, Finland

The Helsinki-Uusimaa Circular transition arena brought together various civil society and small business actors with the region's Circular Hub initiative. The transition arena workshops focused on sharing economy and sustainable use of built space. A tool to measure the social impact of non-profit activities was developed and tested with one NGO as a result.

Who was involved?

27 representatives of cities from the region, regional authority representatives, NGOs, associations, small enterprises and higher education institutions participated in the process.

Identified challenges

The following challenges were identified and discussed:

1. How to change attitudes and measure the societal impacts of sharing economy and sustainable use of buildings?
2. How to raise the lifespan of buildings and use the existing built space more effectively?
3. How to foster new initiatives promoting sharing economy from the grassroot level?

The arena process

The transition arena process engaged civil society and small business actors in the development of the Helsinki-Uusimaa region's Circular Hub initiative. The Helsinki-Uusimaa Circular Hub forms an innovation ecosystem of expert organisations, municipalities, companies, and research institutes, all working towards systemic change and new business opportunities based on a circular economy.

The arena workshop facilitation was supported by external experts. The first workshop utilised the 'BSR Vision of Sustainable Life', which was made in the WMT! project. The participants specified it and produced concrete goals based on the vision: 1) Increase collaboration between public, private and third sector to promote sharing economy; 2) promote diverse and sustainable use of buildings and built space; 3) double the lifespan of buildings from 50 to 100 years.

The participants were divided into three groups in the second workshop, each group focusing on a specific goal. The participants made action proposals in the third workshop, and they were prompted not only to identify their own organisation's role but also ideate pilots. The participants ultimately voted for one pilot for immediate implementation. The transition agenda including recommendations and actions was compiled and validated with the participants by email.

Results

The immediate result of the process was the development of a social impact measurement tool that was piloted with one NGO. The tool will help to measure the value of the social impact of non-profit activities. It aims to demonstrate why it is valuable to support and enable spaces for non-profit actors.

The transition arena process also resulted in the following recommendations that are discussed and shared with the cities and municipalities of the Helsinki-Uusimaa region:

- Promoting a sharing economy requires collaboration to share good practices and experiences. Information exchange events, including tips on how to set up procurement contracts for sharing economy services, will be organised in 2025.
- The long-term social impact must be measured and adequately taken into account when considering the costs and benefits of sharing economy services or the use of buildings and built space.
- Civil society actors should be given the chance to contribute to the discussion on the shared use of built spaces. A stronger sense of ownership brings motivation to participate in the maintenance of one's own living environment.

Figure 7. *Group picture from the Helsinki-Uusimaa transition arena, Finland. (Mia Sorri).*

3.2.7 Sustainable Future in Kimitoön, Finland

The Sustainable Future Kimitoön (Kemiönsaari) focused on creating a good and sustainable life for and with the local youth. A four-workshop transition arena process was organised for this. It resulted in an inspiring transition agenda and several transition experiment ideas. Kimitoön is a rural municipality of about 6 000 inhabitants located in the archipelago in Southwest Finland. It has a good communal spirit and a vivid civil society for a small municipality.

Who was involved?

Altogether 28 representatives of associations, small enterprises, youth council, individual residents, and the municipality participated in the arena workshops.

Identified challenges

The transition arena was based on the following identified challenges:

1. How to build a sustainable and appealing future in Kimitoön for the youth and make youth moving back after studies to be a viable option?
2. How to strengthen possibilities of living a good and sustainable life in a small municipality?
3. How to support youth participation in creating this future?

The main messages from the focus group discussions were that all youth should have spaces to discuss and express their thoughts on sustainability, the future, and the ecocrisis; youth participation should be made appealing and easy, and community building should be supported. Having more bike routes and public transportation are important for accessible and ecologically sustainable everyday life in a geographically large rural municipality.

The arena process

The process was implemented through four transition arena workshops. The first one was for formulating the vision, the second for distinguishing specific pathways, the third for identifying steps and transition actions, and the fourth for compiling a transition agenda. Additional meetings were held to elaborate the subsequent actions.

Five transition paths for a sustainable future were co-created:

1. sustainable transport
2. building sustainability with communal spirit, locality, and culture
3. nature protection and climate action
4. increasing the production and consumption of local seasonal food
5. strengthening skills for a sustainable life.

Each path describes the steps and roles of different actors to reach a vision of a good sustainable life in Kimitoön.

Results

The process brought together civil actors, municipal officials, and the youth, offering them a space to discuss the future. The developed transition agenda is published on the municipality's website. The agenda includes several ideas for sustainability actions in which the youth and associations have an active role. Three follow-up meetings for all participants were organised to support developing many of the ideas further.

There are following ideas and actions in the agenda:

- 'Generations meet', where younger and older generations meet and the youth help the elderly in learning digital skills. This would increase communal spirit and social wellbeing and enable learning also skills of sustainable life. It was agreed that intergenerational digital skill support will be provided at the municipality's events.
- The youth council made an initiative for the municipality on increasing and developing public transport. A working group made of youth, civil sector, and municipal representatives drafted a questionnaire to all residents to gather information on the needs for the development of public transport.
- 'More plant-based proteins to plates' aims to familiarize people of all ages to plant-based dishes. A group of volunteers organises tasting events where ordinary residents get to try vegetarian protein sources and break their prejudices about them.
- A student-led rubbish picking competition will be organized in schools. The youth coordinators teamed up with an elderly association to support the youngsters in implementing their idea.
- A non-political citizen discussion group on the municipality's carbon neutrality goal was formed. The idea had existed already before the transition arena, but the arena helped it find a new drive to proceed with the meetings.
- An idea 'Sharing economy in villages' was combined with the municipality's ongoing project planning. The idea is to arrange discussion events in each village to map resources for enhancing sharing economy locally.

3.2.8 Uusikaupunki - Nature in My Neighbourhood, Finland

Nature in My Neighborhood - a transition arena in Uusikaupunki brought together local people interested in enhancing biodiversity in their nearby nature and private yards. Through a process of four workshops and follow-up meetings, they proceeded to agree and implement biodiversity actions with the city and launched a shared digital space for coordinating the activities. Uusikaupunki is a coastal town of about 15 000 inhabitants in Southwest Finland.

Who was involved?

Over 20 local actors were involved in the arena workshops, including representatives of the municipal government, nature and gardening enterprises, environmental NGOs and local residents. All the participants were interested in promoting more pop-up-voluntarism and individual participation in their own yards through first coming together and learning from others.

Identified challenges

The biodiversity topic was chosen to support the municipality's environmental work and to utilise the great number of local leisure gardeners as a ground for bottom-up enthusiasm. The arena tackled four challenges regarding biodiversity:

1. How to fight biodiversity loss locally? What is the role of local civil actors?
2. How to make biodiversity promotion accessible for citizens?
3. How to enhance wellbeing and community building through inclusive participatory methods and events among biodiversity work?

The arena process

The arena process of four workshops was coordinated by a "local transition team" consisting of representatives of project partner organisation, Uusikaupunki city and civil society. The arena was built upon an earlier survey on ecosystem services in the city centre area that mapped both gaps in green areas and pollinators' needs. Collective action and concrete outcomes were achieved through careful planning and the creation of a shared vision 2035 based on local nature work, key actors, and preferred forms of participation.

The arena fitted well into the local government's ambitions to organise the general city area development and city environmental work in a participatory manner and to work in stronger cooperation with local associations and residents. The arena provided input to the drafting of the local climate programme.

Results

The most significant outcome of the Uusikaupunki transition arena is the empowered network-based collaboration. The direct results are the following local biodiversity actions started in Uusikaupunki with the support of the WMT! project:

- producing signs for private yards to highlight active efforts to support biodiversity and shift perceptions away from seeing these areas as neglected
- organizing informal gatherings called “Biodiversity Coffees” for sharing knowledge, fostering dialogue, and supporting collaboration around biodiversity
- establishing an urban meadow on a vacant lot, with the aim to enhance both community engagement and biodiversity

The arena participants, including municipal representatives established a “Biodiversity Circle” that enables wider and low-commitment involvement in promoting biodiversity. The network created an open Facebook group that gained 120 members within nine months. A Biodiversity Forum will also be organised annually to monitor the implementation and develop further actions.

Nature in My Neighbourhood managed to create structures for local biodiversity work and to awaken the residents’ interest and cooperation on the topic. An important benefit of the method was creation of a space to discuss solutions and create a positive vision about the future. This was possible even though many of the participants did not have previous expertise in biodiversity. The most important benefit was the shared will to act and creating a fun atmosphere for collaboration.

Figure 8. *Transition arena in Uusikaupunki, Finland. (Jere Satamo).*

3.2.9 Namsos Circular Initiatives, Norway

Trøndelag County Council with assistance from Innovation Namdal, brought together a number of actors and key people from municipalities, intermunicipal waste companies, private entrepreneurs, volunteers and public employment. Significant experiences related to the county's circular economy roadmap were gained through company visits and workshops. Namsos is located in Namdalen county - a geographically large region in the central part of Norway with a low number of inhabitants.

Who was involved?

Twenty-five participants attended the two arena workshops. The arena bridged various sectors, including the county, local municipalities, intermunicipal companies, private businesses, retail, volunteer organisations, and state employment initiatives.

Identified challenges

The main identified challenges were related to large geographical distances, a small market and challenges with the operation of circular solutions based on a traditional commercial model.

The arena process

An emphasis was placed in the initial meetings and in the first workshop on obtaining a factual basis to describe the current situation and current solutions. Furthermore, an emphasis was placed on finding out which challenges prevent development to a more sustainable society.

In the first workshop, the participants generated a common statement as an overall work goal. Several relevant focus areas were identified that the actors could reflect on. In the second workshop, the participants were divided into groups based on defined areas of development. This way, different actors became better acquainted with each other's different starting points and needs. This laid a better foundation for further cooperation between the parties.

Work continued on three identified focus areas in the groups:

- development of competence line at upper secondary school for repair and reuse
- development of a commercial solution for increased reuse of building materials
- opportunities for the development of secondhand shops in collaboration between volunteers and business/entrepreneurs

The groups discussed opportunities and challenges from the perspective of common future goals and thus got to know each other better. Representatives from the public sector were present in all the groups; otherwise, the groups were composed of actors with the greatest relevance to the topics in question.

Results

The second workshop summarised the thoughts and discussions of different focus areas. The following initiatives were presented, as a result:

- Olav Duun Upper Secondary School wants to discuss further the possibility of developing a national line in reuse and repair.
- Retura and MNA with several participants want to continue working to develop a commercial concept for handling and reusing building and construction products.
- The Red Cross and private entrepreneurs want to take a closer look at the possibility of developing second-hand shops and repair workshops in collaboration between different sectors such as volunteering, work inclusion, private business and public waste management.

The participants brought with them increased knowledge of potentially collaborating actors and have received concrete initiatives for further follow-up under the actors' own auspices.

Figure 9. *Participants in the Namsos transition arena, Norway. (Lykt AS).*

3.2.10 Trondheim Sustainable Food System, Norway

Trondheim Municipality and Trøndelag County Municipality collaborated with a variety of local stakeholders to co-create solutions for a more sustainable food system in Trondheim. The Trondheim transition arena aimed to tackle the pressing challenges in the local food system, foster collaboration, and create a sustainable Trondheim food vision.

Who was involved?

Around 30 stakeholders participated in the workshops, including representatives from Trondheim Municipality, Trøndelag County Municipality, local NGOs such as “Future in Our Hands”, as well as farmers, food distributors, retailers, and community organizations. The founder of “The Just Store” that connects local food producers directly with consumers, also contributed to the discussions. The variety of participants ensured a broad range of perspectives on local food system challenges.

The Just Store in Trondheim is a shop that focuses on sustainable local food. They aim to become a key player in developing a fair food system for all involved parties. They prioritise selling locally produced food from the Trondheim region and are committed to giving farmers a fair price for their products. Many of the items they sell are organic, and they place a strong emphasis on reducing food waste and environmental impact.

Identified challenges

The following key challenges were identified within Trondheim’s food system: limited awareness and knowledge about sustainable food practices:

1. unequal access to locally produced food
2. inefficient distribution networks that hinder the availability of local produce
3. the decline of shared meals as a community-building activity

The arena process

The arena workshops followed a three-phase structure. Phase 1 focused on visioning, during which the participants explored the question, "How can we facilitate a food system that benefits nature and all links in the value chain?". Participants identified challenges in the current food system, envisioned a sustainable future, and formulated a shared vision.

In phase 2, the participants created transition pathways through backcasting exercises to determine the actions needed to achieve the shared vision. Participants outlined goals,

identified necessary actions, and selected potential transition experiments to facilitate change.
In phase 3, the participants set an agenda for pilot projects. This phase culminated in the creation of concrete action plans as well as forming the working groups for implementation.

Results

The Trondheim transition arena process resulted in the creation of a comprehensive transition agenda and vision document, providing a clear roadmap for change. Several pilot projects were launched, such as:

- ***Food Competence Center:*** The Competence Center, located at the Just Store, aims to share knowledge and networks that support the vision of sustainable local food system. A pilot project was implemented with the municipality to increase the use of locally produced food in public kitchens.
- ***Education in kindergartens and schools:*** This pilot focuses on cultivation, cooking and nutritive knowledge; emphasises practical teaching and close collaboration with the food competence center; and strengthens interdisciplinary learning in alignment with the Norwegian curriculum.
- **Neighbourhood long table:** This pilot aims to both increase knowledge about food and use food as a social glue in the local community by bringing people from different neighbourhoods together around a long table with locally produced, sustainable food. This will strengthen the sense of community and empower residents to make sustainable food choices.
- **Urban cultivation "Pallet Box School":** The Pallet Box School is a competence-building program for residents where they can enrol in a two-year educational program to learn from professionals how to grow food. This will increase knowledge about food production and thus lead to increased self-sufficiency, home gardening, and better understanding of food production.
- **Increased diversity at the Trøndersk Food Festival**: The pilot project showcases the ethnic diversity within Trøndelag, building stronger communities where everyone feels included. It also recognises the value of cross-cultural learning and collaboration in developing an inclusive sustainable food system.

Working groups were established to coordinate these projects and actions. The transition arena demonstrated the power of bringing different actors together and laid a solid foundation to transform Trondheim's food landscape in the long term.

3.2.11 Organic Food Transition in Bremen Schools, Germany

The transition arena in Bremen focused on increasing the use of organic food in local school meals. An intensive two-day workshop on 6-7 June 2024 was implemented by the University of Bremen and Biostadt Bremen, a city-state initiative of the Federal State of Bremen. A wider exchange between parents, pupils, cooks, caterers, politicians and public administration was organised, as a result, to take the first steps towards the goal of healthy food in schools in Bremen for 1 EUR per child.

Who was involved?

The participants included catering organisations, representatives of political parties, one teacher, cooks, pupils, local farmers, parents, representatives of food associations, Kitchen Forum (Competence center for sustainable nutrition) and BioStadt (municipality).

Identified challenges

The arena process was based on the "Action Plan 2025. Healthy nutrition in the municipality of Bremen" of the Federal State of Bremen with the aim to increase the share of organic food in public catering (hospitals, childcare and schools) up to 100%.

The quality of lunch varies greatly from school to school in Bremen. Some children do not eat enough or do not eat at all in school. Many parents complain about the quality of the food. Only a few schools achieve the goal according to the Action Plan 2025. Old non-flexible contracts between the schools and catering organisations/wholesalers make it difficult for schools to focus on ordering local, organic and healthy ingredients.

The arena process

The University of Bremen planned the process with BioStadt Bremen, a city-state initiative of the Federal State of Bremen responsible for carrying out and monitoring the Action Plan 2025.

The workshop participants used adapted creative workshop methods to develop the vision and future pathways together. They first created a vision of the future for one exemplary child (Pauline) using guided questions ("What is eaten by the children? How is it made? Where is it stored?"). The participants then created role profiles (farmer, parents, kitchen, children) and asked what motivates these actors (in their roles) and what goals they pursue. On the basis of these images for Pauline and the role profiles, the participants worked out the various steps that are important to reach the future images using the backcasting method.

Results

The key results of the Bremen transition arena process are the following:

- stronger exchanges with and empowerment of pupils, parents, schools, kitchen and public administration to enhance organic food in schools
- nutrition and food to become a state-wide educational task for example in the form of a subject in specific grades in school and/or included in other subjects such as biology and gradually introduced in school curricula
- prioritisation of organic food in politics, especially the education authority

A meal currently costs around 4-6 EUR per day in schools; funding is therefore an important factor. The operator of school provision needs to be decided in order to realise the vision. Should school provision be private, should it be state-wide, should it be managed by an NGO? Another next step would be to secure funding and ensure more flexible contracts.

The food provision in schools is dependent on many actors who need to work together. The first steps have been taken to improve the exchange and information flow between pupils, parents, schools, kitchen and public administration. A wider meeting with these actors was organised after the arena workshop to plan a pilot in 1-2 schools that will offer organic, seasonal and regional food at 1 EUR per child. A school class cooked for all the meeting participants. Two cooks taught the children the organic recipes and cooked with them.

The organic food arena in Bremen has formed a committed group of various actors to work toward putting more organic food in schools.

***Figure 10**. Participants in the Bremen transition arena, Germany. (University of Bremen).*

3.2.12 Organic Food Transition in the Vidzeme Region, Latvia

The transition arena in the Vidzeme Region was started by a Bioregion Forum where 200 individuals signed a Memorandum with an ambitious goal to develop the* Gauja National Park *into a Bioregion. The transition arena workshops focusing on organic food and Bioregion development were organised in the Municipality of Cēsis in spring 2024. The process engaged local actors to envision an ideal food system, define action plans and responsibilities, and develop five initiatives that will be delivered by the established Bioregion Initiative Group.

Who was involved?

Around 100 individuals participated in three arena workshops, including entrepreneurs, farmers, politicians, representatives from national institutions, educational institutions, municipalities, organic farmers, local organic food market organisers, school principals and tourism entrepreneurs.

Identified challenges

The transition arena on organic food was a continuation of the Bioregion Memorandum signed by 200 people in a Bioregion Forum in October 2023. The Memorandum expressed support for the establishment of the first Bioregion in Latvia within Gauja National Park. The arena's key challenge was how to promote local organic food.

The arena process

The arena workshops envisioned a sustainable food system for the Vidzeme Bioregion 2035. Action plans were defined and responsibilities were allocated to achieve this goal. The participants worked in five subtopic groups: 1) consumption habits, 2) dining out and public catering, 3) supermarkets and food producers, 4) agriculture, and 5) governance, cooperation and education.

Results

Five initiatives were co-created during the process:

- **School Rye Bread**: Offering children rye bread and honey, honouring traditions and introducing organic products in schools.
- **Restaurant Week in the Cēsis schools:** Promoting local organic food in schools.
- **BIO-bus**: Promoting organic farmers through mobile organic food sales.
- **I'd eat local food**: Compilating local organic food producers' offers.
- **Open days at organic farms**: Building trust and developing business.

School Restaurant Week was voted for immediate implementation. An organic food competition was launched in Cēsis schools as part of the initiative to encourage classes and their teachers to compete for the prize: an educational visit to a professional chef who prioritises the use of organic products in the meals.

Each class participating in the competition had to, in cooperation with the school cook or teacher, prepare a meal that meets nutritional standards and is made using organic products from local farms. The process was documented, with participants submitting photos, videos, and the recipe to the competition organizers. Winning teams were rewarded with a visit to the chef's kitchen.

Among the winners, Cēsu Jaunā Skola stood out for its innovative approach to integrating local ingredients while still honouring traditional recipes in school meals. The initiative highlighted that local food continues to be a vital part of school culture—one that should be supported through education and awareness efforts among teachers, students, school staff, local government and parents. Clear potential exists for new initiatives and a variety of activities that can further encourage the regular use and appreciation of locally sourced food.

The outcomes of the organic food transition arena were incorporated into the Bioregion Action Plan and the *Vidzeme Sustainable Food Strategy 2035*. The second Bioregion Forum took place in May 2025, aiming to monitor progress and foster resilient, locally grounded solutions towards the shared vision. One of the forum highlights is a series of "speed dating" sessions, where caterers - including those serving schools - are matched with local producers to encourage cooperation and strengthen supply chains.

Other initiatives identified during the local transition arena outlined a range of potential actions for advancing bioregional development. Among them is a practical proposal to train school chefs in the use of organic products as cooking with organic ingredients often requires adjusting recipes and techniques.

The broader aim is to raise awareness among all stakeholders—educators, cooks, public institutions, local authorities, and families—about the value of consuming local food. This includes recognizing its role in strengthening economic resilience, supporting public health and well-being, and fostering a deeper sense of local identity.

3.3 Identified success factors and challenges of WMT! arenas

All local transition arena processes were evaluated by external evaluators in each country. External evaluators interviewed 3-5 participants of each local arena (see interview questions in Appendix 5). The following summary highlights the key success factors and key challenges of WMT! arenas identified through reflections of project partners and the 37 participant interviews conducted across the six partner countries.

The WMT! transition arena process engaging a diverse set of local actors and local administration has proven to be an effective tool for fostering constructive discussion, systemic understanding, bottom-up ideas and new collaboration. The processes generated positive solution-oriented thinking and empowered concrete actions. The WMT! arenas fostered trust, cooperation, and the perceived level of influence. Notably the perceived level of trust increased due to listening the views of local actors, bottom-up co-creating and experimenting with new ideas and solutions.

The WMT! transition arenas have – according to the interviewees - demonstrated significant potential for fostering long-term sustainability discussion and transformation. The interviews reveal that the WMT! process has successfully increased stakeholder engagement and generated practical insights to complex sustainability challenges. Several interviewees stated that the arena created a positive atmosphere to discuss different approaches and raise the “voice of grassroot expertise”.

"It was incredible to see so many people working towards a positive change. The transition arena created a vibrant community where new partnerships, ideas and opportunities in co-creation with the public sector could grow."

"There was respect, and everyone listened. The atmosphere was good. Participation was made in such a way that people did not just sit in their chairs."

"At the beginning, there were comments like 'the city doesn’t listen to us,' but by the end, people were saying, 'It’s great this is happening, and we feel heard.'"

"It was amazing how quickly one idea clicked with the small group, and we built a solid concept around it."

The key challenges identified in some arenas were related to insufficient municipal and political involvement, thus affecting the liability and long-term impact of the process. Some participants felt that the use of time was not efficient, limiting the depth of discussions and hindering the full exploration of ideas. In some cases, there were difficulties in ensuring effective follow-through.

“The biggest challenge is making sure everyone feels their input is valued and that the vision addresses what is important to different people.”

"The method could be the start, but there needs to be a planned systematic continuation process in place."

Key factors for success included good preparation, wide and strong stakeholder participation, good communication with participants during and after the workshops, political and institutional support, and a focus on tangible, actionable outcomes. The arena process works best when it is well-structured, inclusive, and supported by clear follow-up mechanisms that ensure the ideas generated translate into real-world actions and new cooperation. The importance of cross-sectoral collaboration and engagement of various groups of people were also highlighted. The fast progression from discussions to concrete actions engaging new actors was especially considered valuable.

4. Learnings and Recommendations

The “We make transition!” transition arenas provided practical insights for addressing sustainability challenges from the grassroot point of view. A common theme was the importance of co-creating a shared vision that resonated with all stakeholders, motivating greater engagement. It was crucial that the arena topics and used language were easy for participants to relate to, which supported a sense of ownership. Despite the diverse perspectives and sometimes difficulties in reaching consensus, the process was seen as valuable for fostering highly inclusive non-polarised discussion and promoting innovative, long-term thinking. Many participants expressed that the process allowed them to move beyond short-term constraints and improve understanding of systemic barriers. Figure 11 summarises the identified key success factors of WMT! arenas.

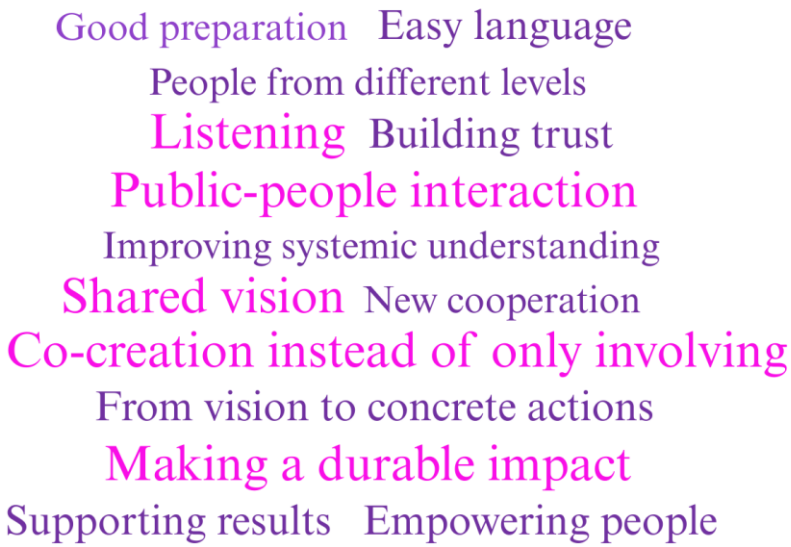

Figure 11. *Word cloud summarising the identified key success factors of the WMT! arenas.*

The We make transition! key learnings include:

Attracting participants that represent diverse set of stakeholders. It was important to attract participants representing different approaches to the selected sustainability topic. Wide representation of both municipal and local actors was a success factor. The arenas avoided abstract and political terms, and thus provided a safe space for diverse actors, also new voices, to contribute meaningfully. This created a sense of ownership for participants. The commitment of local public authorities and their openness to new perspectives effected the level of empowerment. In many cases, new actors and public representatives joined along and after the workshop process. This inclusive welcoming nature of arenas proved to be another success factor and fostered the level of empowerment.

Differences in framing the topic: Some arenas had a wide sustainability topic and some more focused topics. Wide topic (such as in Tampere and Gdynia) enabled more cross-sectoral discussions and participation of different city departments. This provided great possibilities for new linkages between different sustainability topics and creating cooperation possibilities between people with different sustainability approaches. In more framed topics (e.g. Trondheim and Tartu) the selection of participants was based on a certain sustainability topic. In such cases, both the participants and arena outcomes were more focused. Both approaches were successful and had their benefits.

Importance of co-creating a shared sustainability vision: A common theme in all arenas was the importance of a shared vision that was co-created by participants and resonated with all stakeholders, motivating greater engagement and ensuring a stronger sense of ownership. In WMT! arenas, setting the target year 10 years ahead from the current moment was sufficient and helped focusing on what is possible in the near future. Despite the diverse perspectives and sometimes difficulties in reaching consensus, the process was seen as valuable for promoting mutual understanding and innovative, long-term thinking. Many participants expressed that the process allowed them to move beyond short-term constraints and think more strategically about addressing future challenges.

Engagement of local authorities and decision makers: Arenas with strong municipal participation tended to have a greater impact, as they were more likely to integrate outcomes into existing policies and thus ensuring a longer-term impact. Those arenas that were successful in engaging decision makers were able to raise the awareness at policy level and influence in the policy level discussions. Those arenas that had weaker engagement of decision makers were still able to empower local actors and cooperation.

Focus on empowering concrete actions: The fast progress from the vision to identifying concrete actions in the nearest future received positive feedback from the participants. It was important that the participants with very different educational backgrounds were not asked to solve highly complex structural challenges. Instead, the focus was on fostering dialogue improving mutual understanding of the different aspects to sustainability topic, and empowering concrete actions and cooperation. Participants appreciated the structured, yet flexible format, but some expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of outcomes. The crucial aspect to ensure long-term sustainability of outcomes was the regular communication with participants during process and providing support for implementation of the arena results.

To further enhance the effectiveness of the arena processes, several recommendations emerged from the reflections and interviews:

1. **Enhanced stakeholder engagement**: Broadening stakeholder participation to include underrepresented groups, such as municipalities, youth, and educational institutions, was emphasised to ensure inclusivity and stronger institutional support. It was noted that keeping the arena workshops open for new people to join during the process fostered the wider empowerment effect and impact.
2. **Need for structured, ongoing follow-Up:** A common observation across regions was the importance of systematic follow-up to ensure that the outcomes of the transition arena process lead to meaningful, durable changes. Establishing strong follow-up mechanisms to track the progress of initiatives and maintain momentum is crucial. Launching regular updates and periodic meetings help to ensure that the efforts do not lose steam over time.
3. **Concrete action and implementation:** A significant recommendation was the need to move beyond visioning to focus on actionable, concrete steps. The ideas generated during the process should be implemented, and participants underlined that clear action plans and accountability mechanisms be put in place to make this happen.
4. **Process streamlining:** Adopting digital tools and standardised workflows was suggested to improve efficiency, thereby enabling the process to run more smoothly.
5. **Adapt to political and bureaucratic reality:** Acknowledge the role of political context in shaping the potential for long-term change. Be creative in overcoming bureaucratic hurdles and flexible to adapt to changing political climates.
6. **Institutionalisation of the process:** In some regions integrating elements of transition arena approach into regular municipal and regional planning frameworks was started.

List of References

Brandes, O. M., & Brooks, D. B. (2007). *The soft path for water in a nutshell*. Friends of the Earth Canada & POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, University of Victoria.

de Geus, T., Wittmayer, J. M., & Vogelzang, F. (2022). "Biting the Bullet: Addressing the Democratic Legitimacy of Transition Management." *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 42, 201-218.

Holmberg, J., & Robèrt, K. H. (2000). Backcasting—A framework for strategic planning. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, *7*(4), 294.

Inayatullah, S. (2008). "Six Pillars: Futures Thinking for Transforming." *Foresight*, 10(1), 4-21.

Loorbach, D., & Rotmans, J. (2010). The Practice of Transition Management: Examples and Lessons from Four Distinct Cases. *Futures*, *42*(3).

Notermans, V.I., von Wirth, T., & Loorbach D. (2022). *An Experiential Guide for Transition Arenas*. DRIFT, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2022/09/An-experiential-guide-for-Transition-Arenas.pdf

Roorda, C., Wittmayer, J., Henneman, P., Van Steenbergen, F., Frantzeskaki, N., & Loorbach, D. (2014). Transition Management in the Urban Context: Guidance Manual. *DRIFT, Erasmus University Rotterdam: Rotterdam, The Netherlands*.

Silvesteri, G., Diercks, G. & Matti, C. (2022). X-Curve A sensemaking tool to foster collective narratives on system change. *Drift, Climate-KIC Transition Hub.* https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2023/08/X-Curve-booklet-DRIFT-EIT-Climate-KIC-2022-1.pdf

Silvestri, G., Hebinck, A., von Wirth, T. & Mulders, W. (2022). *SHARED GREEN DEAL Arena guidelines: Designing translocal, inclusive spaces for co-creation to achieve the EU Green Deal*. Cambridge: SHARED GREEN DEAL.

Sitra. (2017, December 4). *Energy Transition Arena provides practical proposals for Finland*. https://www.sitra.fi/en/news/energy-transition-arena-provides-practical-proposals-finland

Ylikoski, T., Rekola, S. & Poussa, L. (2023). *The Future Triangle.* Sitra https://www.sitra.fi/en/cases/the-futures-triangle/

We make transition! (2024). *How to strengthen cooperation between local authorities and civil society actors to enhance sustainability? - A transnational gap analysis.* https://interreg-baltic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/WMT-gap-analysis_final.pdf

We make transition! (2024) *Baltic Sea region vision of sustainable life*. https://interreg-baltic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/BSR-vision-of-sustainable-life.pdf.pdf

We make transition! (2025). *Civil society making sustainability transitions in the Baltic Sea region: case studies for inspiration.* https://interreg-baltic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/CASE-STUDIES.pdf

Appendices

Appendix 1. *Transnational change agent envisioning process*

The joint Baltic Sea region vision of a sustainable future 2035 was co-created as an inspirational transnational framework for all the local transition arena workshop processes. The vision brings together key desirable elements of sustainable life, mainly from the civil society point of view. It was co-created by a selected transnational group of change agents from the project partner countries. The group includes about 30 individuals representing civil society, entrepreneurs, and local authorities. The common denominators of these individuals include transformative thinking and a desire to enhance eco-social sustainability in different ways.

The transnational change agents participated in three online workshops in the autumn of 2023 and a live meeting in Gdynia, Poland. The change agents were divided into four thematic groups based on their interests during the workshops: 1) circular and sharing economy, 2) food, 3) sustainable lifestyle and 4) social sustainability. The groupworks were planned in line with methods used in We make transition! project and advise received from the Finnish Innovation Fund (Sitra). The work was done using an online workspace.

The future triangle tool was used in small groups to identify factors influencing the topics. Based on the future triangle exercise, the thematic groups identified key challenges they would like to solve in the desired sustainable future. These were, for example:

- How to mainstream a sustainable life instead of life that is based on consumption?
- How to make sustainable choices easy in everyday life?
- How to mainstream community building over individualism?
- How to integrate more manual skill development into our education system?
- How to promote small-scale local food production over big corporations?

After that, the groups discussed what would need to happen to solve these challenges. Based on the groupwork results, a joint vision and recommendations for local authorities were formulated. This vision is described briefly below.

Summary of the Baltic Sea region sustainability vision (co-created in WMT! project)

In 2035, a sustainable lifestyle is enabled through public-private-people cooperation and changes in education, regulations, and city planning.

A sustainable future is made of local communities that exchange materials, goods, ideas, skills, and support. The educational system and lifelong learning path highlight manual skills and community building as basic skills. Sustainable lifestyle is easy for people.

Legislative changes and regulations. Special incentives and tax reductions will be available for companies whose business is based on a circular and sharing economy. Planned obsolescence is prohibited, and products with more extended guarantees and repair support services have a lower VAT.

Sustainable consumption supports social sustainability. Regulatory changes, local strategic support and active civil society organisations have led to a rise in circular shopping centres that compete with traditional ones. These centres offer various high-quality secondhand and locally handmade items, repair services, meeting points and cafes, and workshop spaces.

Education and training. Children are educated about sustainable lifestyles and the sharing of materials. The circular economy is crosscutting in the curriculum: handwork lessons focus on repairing and tuning, e.g., textiles. Home economics lessons include the themes of farming, local food, and the use of surplus food. Circular and sharing principles are also embedded in vocational training.

Sustainable food system. Sustainable ways to produce and distribute food will increasingly rely on more diverse, decentralised and flexible solutions. This means local services for growing and distributing food and nutrient upcycling. Urban farming spreads everywhere. Helping one another becomes an essential element of society and a guiding principle in everyday life. Cities fragment into villages aiming for self-sufficiency. People eat seasonal and locally grown food. Other solutions are community agriculture, food collectives, co-ops and associations, and services for municipality biowaste upcycling.

Cooperation between the public sector, business, and civil society. An EU directive states that all neighbourhoods have community & sustainability centres as the norm in each city. These meeting points are (at least partly) funded by the municipality and run by the grassroots level actors in cooperation with local authorities. Centres enable collaboration and offer the possibility for any citizen to participate easily and influence their own living environment. This provides a feeling of belonging. Running the centres with civil society actors and local authorities also enables better planning and initiation of joint projects.

Work. People spend a significant part of their leisure time in activities within their neighbourhood. Innovations are also developed through these gatherings, and this will create new types of (economic) activity. Frequent encounters in public spaces create opportunities for ideas and initiatives on new collaborative projects, services, and businesses. Daily practices and lifestyles are firmly based on collective activities and sharing.

Appendix 2. *Future triangle*

The Future Triangle tool was used in some of the local transition arenas. This easy tool can be used to support the visioning process in small groups.

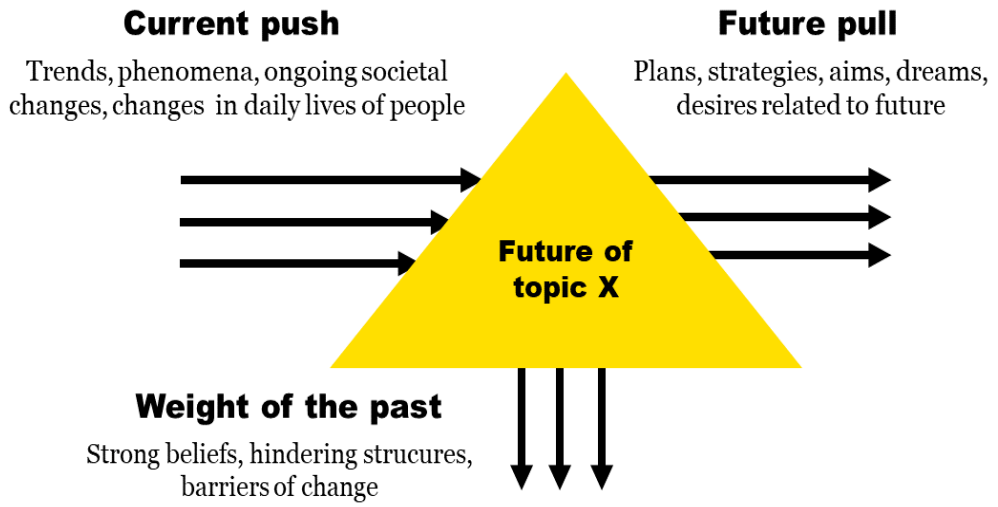

Figure 13. *The Futures Triangle (Sitra 2023, adapted from Inayatullah 2008).*

Appendix 3. *X-Curve*

The X-Curve is a visual tool designed to enhance comprehension of transition dynamics within a society or specific context, such as a neighborhood, city, or region. It establishes a shared language and a collective understanding of the societal dynamics that are actively unfolding.

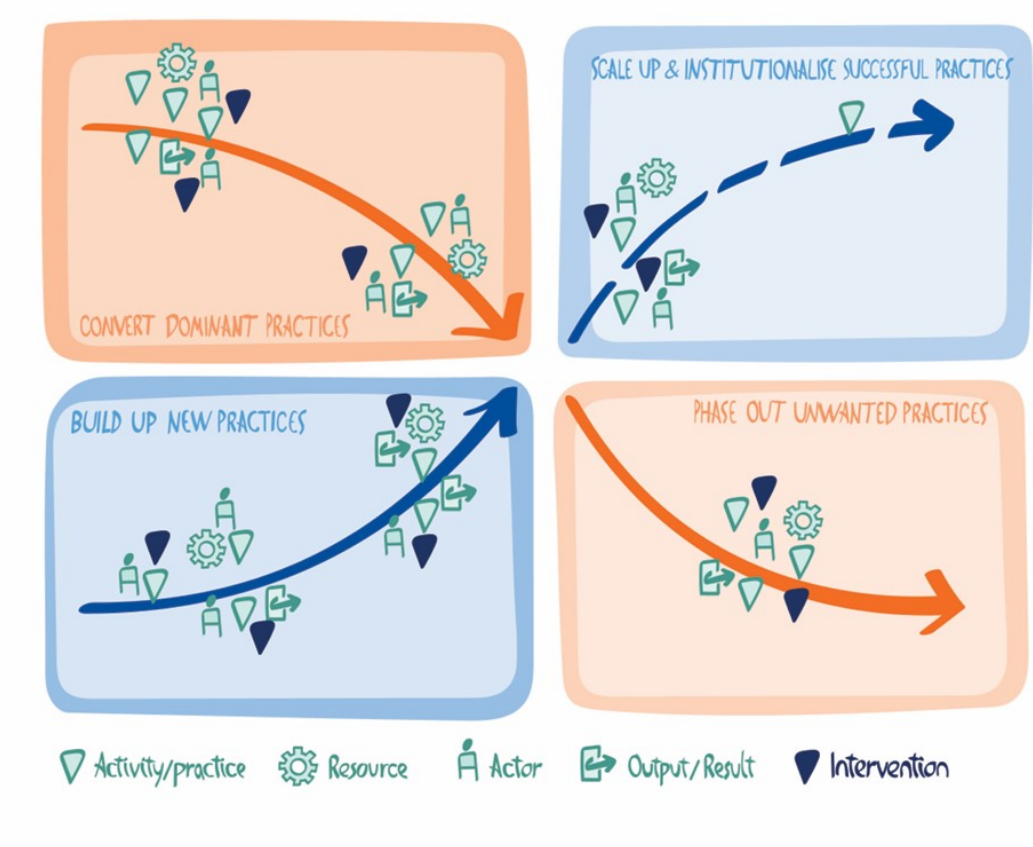

Figure 14. *X-Curve (DRIFT & EIT Climate-KIC Transitions Hub, 2022).*

Appendix 4. *Backcasting method*

Backcasting is a planning method that starts with defining a desirable future and then works backwards to identify policies and programs that will connect that specified future to the present (Brandes & Brooks, 2007, p.12). The fundamental question of backcasting asks: "if we want to attain a certain goal, what actions must be taken to get there" (Holmberg & Robèrt, 2000, p. 294).

While forecasting involves predicting the future based on current trend analysis, backcasting approaches the challenge of discussing the future from the opposite direction; it is "a method in which the future desired conditions are envisioned and steps are then defined to attain those conditions, rather than taking steps that are merely a continuation of present methods extrapolated into the future". (Holmberg & Robèrt, 2000, p. 294.)

Backgasting method is a core element of the transition arena method. Backcasting is usually used to co-create possible pathways to the jointly agreed vision starting the discussion from the vision backwards to current situation. This helps participants to look first beyond the current reality. In the We make transition! arenas, this part of the process was simplified. Backcasting was used to identify several concrete actions and changes that would be needed on the possible pathway towards the vision. After listing various actions and needed changes on the pathway, the focus was put on joint identification of concrete actions and steps that participants would be ready to launch together immediately.

Appendix 5. *Interview questions of the arena workshops' evaluation*

1. *In which events you were involved and what was your role?*
2. *What were the most valuable elements of the local transition arena process for you? Why? What was the value of the process for your region? Why?*
3. *Were there any challenges that occurred during the process?*
   Were there any unexpected results or serendipitous benefits observed during or after the local transition arena process? Please describe them.
4. *Do you feel that the process empowered the participants? Did you feel that the process gave you an opportunity to change things?*
5. *Please describe what new methods or ways of achieving certain goals you learned during the transition arena process?*
6. *What long-term impacts do you expect if the transition arena process of the project "We make transition!" will be applied in your region for the next 5 years?*
7. *How could the method or elements of the method "local transition arena" be utilized in the near future by your public administration/in your region?*
8. *Please feel free to add further thoughts and ideas!*