Viable Cities

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From Climate Contract to societal transformation

Sweden's Climate City Contracts as an infrastructure for mission-oriented multilevel governance

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About Viable Cities

Viable Cities is a Swedish innovation programme for climate neutral and sustainable cities. 48 Swedish municipalities and six government agencies operate within the programme to accelerate the climate transition through the Climate Neutral Cities 2030 initiative, and with the Climate City Contract 2030 tool. Viable Cities' work is closely linked to the European mobilisation around "Mission Climate Neutral and Smart Cities 2030". The programme gathers over 160 member organisations from industry, academia, public and civil society organisations. It is a Swedish strategic innovation programme jointly funded by Vinnova, the Swedish Energy Agency and Formas. KTH, the Royal Institute of Technology coordinate Viable Cities.

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From Climate Contract to societal transformation

Sweden's Climate City Contracts as an infrastructure for mission-oriented multilevel Governance

This paper should be understood as a reflective governance paper grounded in the ongoing development, coordination and practical implementation of the Climate City Contract 2030 process in Sweden – both as an evolving governance framework and as a recurring multilevel process of collaboration, iteration and collective learning.

This paper offers an in-depth practitioner perspective on how recurring commitments, multilevel coordination, financing and collective learning can strengthen implementation capacity. Drawing on experiences from the Swedish Climate City Contract process, it explores how national governments, cities and other actors can connect shared ambitions with institutional mandates, investment priorities and practical implementation. Rather than presenting a fully evaluated or universally transferable model, it identifies emerging governance principles, practical lessons and questions requiring further analysis and testing in different institutional contexts.

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Abstract

No single actor or level of government can deliver the climate transition alone. Achieving climate-neutral and sustainable cities requires coordinated action across municipalities, national government agencies, businesses, civil society and European institutions. It also requires the ability to align political commitments, institutional mandates, investment priorities and implementation capacity over time.

In Sweden, Viable Cities provides a national platform for this collective effort, with Climate City Contract 2030 as a central, recurring process for mission-oriented multilevel governance. Sweden's Climate City Contract 2030 brings together 48 of the country's 290 municipalities – representing approximately half of the Swedish population – with six national government agencies and the strategic innovation programme Viable Cities around a shared mission to achieve climate-neutral and sustainable cities by 2030. The participating municipalities have voluntarily raised their hands to move ahead, test new approaches and contribute to accelerating the wider transition. A defining principle is that climate transition should not be organized as a parallel sustainability agenda or a series of temporary projects, but increasingly integrated into municipalities' ordinary governance, leadership, budgeting, investment planning, procurement and implementation structures.

Since the first Climate City Contracts were signed in 2020, the process has gradually evolved from a contractual framework into an emerging governance infrastructure for building collective transformation capacity. Annual and iterative Climate City Contracts are now combined with multilevel coordination, including local transition teams and arenas, Transition Lab Forums, system demonstrators, climate investment processes, Joint Commitments between cities, and a dedicated national coordination function. Together, these mechanisms increasingly connect political direction, institutional capacity, financing, implementation, experimentation and collective learning across local and national governance levels.

Mobilizing and directing financing towards climate transition, however, requires more than access to financial resources. It also depends on clear mandates, coordinated priorities, credible implementation processes and the capacity to develop and manage coherent portfolios of transition initiatives and investments.

This reflective governance paper explores this development from a practitioner perspective, drawing on thirty years of professional experience in sustainable development and direct involvement in the continued development and coordination of the Climate City Contract process within Viable Cities. The Swedish experience is situated within emerging research and practice on mission-oriented innovation, multilevel governance and sustainability transitions. Through its scale, continuity and close interaction between municipalities, national government agencies and European mission frameworks, Sweden has become one of the leading European environments for experimenting with how mission-oriented multilevel governance can be operationalized in practice.

This paper starts from a broader implementation challenge. Over the past decades, international agreements, national climate frameworks and mission-oriented policy initiatives have significantly

strengthened political ambition and established an increasingly clear direction for sustainable development. Yet the gap between ambition and implementation capacity remains. The challenge is no longer primarily a lack of knowledge, targets or technological solutions, but how societies develop the governance capacity required to coordinate, finance, implement and sustain transformation across institutional boundaries, sectors and governance levels.

Seen from this broader sustainability governance perspective, the Climate City Contracting process can also be understood as an attempt to operationalize the integrated logic of the UN sustainable development agendas. Frameworks such as Agenda 2030 have established shared goals and normative direction across interconnected dimensions of sustainable development but provide less guidance on how these ambitions can be translated into coordinated transformation in practice. Climate City Contract 2030 offers one practical response to this challenge: an iterative governance infrastructure through which global and national ambitions can be connected to local implementation, while climate transition is linked with social sustainability, resilience, economic development and the mission of a good life for all within planetary boundaries.

A central insight from the process is that transformation capacity cannot be built through isolated projects, individual frontrunners or temporary funding structures alone. It requires long-term institutional and relational infrastructures capable of connecting actors and resources, identifying governance gaps, learning from implementation and continuously adapting as the transition unfolds. The Swedish experience particularly highlights the importance of intermediary governance functions operating in the spaces between existing mandates, organizations and governance levels – enabling local implementation experience to inform national coordination and policy development while translating national and European frameworks into local governance realities.

The development of Joint Commitments between cities adds both a dimension of collective iteration and a distributed dimension to this governance logic. Rather than each municipality independently addressing recurring transition challenges, coalitions of cities can jointly develop, test and refine approaches and create pathways for others to follow. For example, 22 municipalities working collectively to develop public procurement and purchasing as strategic tools for climate transition can pool experience and capabilities, strengthen shared demand and market signals, with the aim to move the field faster than individual municipalities acting alone or benchmarking city to city can do. This illustrates what within Viable Cities is increasingly described as doing the necessary shift “in the power of many”: moving beyond networks primarily designed for knowledge exchange towards networks capable of jointly producing and scaling transformation capacity.

The paper also examines how such transformation processes can be monitored and evaluated. Emission reductions remain indispensable, but do not alone capture changes in institutional capacity, multilevel collaboration, implementation capability, learning or just transition. Monitoring and evaluation therefore become part of the governance infrastructure itself – supporting accountability, continuous learning and adaptation, while building evidence of what works, why, under what conditions, and what may subsequently be adapted or scaled.

Finally, the paper asks whether the value created through climate transition may extend beyond the multiple benefits traditionally associated with climate action. If the capacities developed through the transition – establishing shared direction, coordinating across institutional boundaries, mobilizing

actors and resources, experimenting, learning collectively and adapting under conditions of uncertainty – can also be mobilized in relation to other complex societal challenges, we may be observing the emergence of multiple transformation capacities.

From this perspective, Climate City Contract 2030 may represent more than a Swedish climate governance model. It may offer insights into how the systemic and indivisible ambitions of sustainable development can be translated into coordinated societal transformation – and how societies can build the governance capacity to collectively navigate complexity, interdependence and uncertainty, not only towards climate neutrality, but towards more resilient, equitable and sustainable futures.

Introduction

Over the past decades, climate ambition has increased significantly through international agreements, national climate frameworks and mission-oriented policy initiatives. At the same time, the gap between political ambition and implementation capacity has become increasingly visible across governance levels and societal sectors.

The Swedish Climate City Contracting process emerged within this context as an attempt to develop new forms of mission-oriented and multilevel governance capable of accelerating climate transition in practice. What gradually evolved was not only a contractual framework for climate-neutral cities, but a broader governance infrastructure connecting municipalities, national government agencies, European mission frameworks, financing structures, collaborative arenas and long-term institutional learning processes.

Over time, the process has increasingly combined:

- iterative multilevel coordination,
- intermediary governance structures,
- transition arenas and relational governance spaces,
- system demonstrators,
- integration with operational budgets and core funding streams and climate investment logic,
- governance-oriented climate analysis,
- distributed transformation capacity-building.

Together, these mechanisms increasingly form an operational governance infrastructure for organizing collective societal transformation under conditions of complexity, uncertainty and interdependence.

A central insight emerging from the process is that transformation capacity may depend less on centralized control and fixed institutional models, and more on the ability of governance systems to continuously coordinate, learn, adapt and reproduce collaborative structures across governance levels and societal contexts.

This insight has also contributed to a growing understanding of governance innovation itself as something relational, iterative and potentially fractal – where methods, collaborative structures and transition practices can evolve and reappear across local, regional, national and international governance contexts.

In this sense, the Climate City Contracting process may represent not only a Swedish climate governance model, but be part of a broader international exploration of operational governance approaches capable of connecting climate ambition, financing, implementation capacity and institutional coordination over time.

The reflections presented throughout this document therefore also point beyond climate neutrality itself – towards possible governance approaches for addressing other interconnected sustainability challenges and “wicked problems” in the decades beyond Agenda 2030.

Reflections

My professional journey in sustainability governance began during the Agenda 21 era in the late 1990s. Since then, I have worked across multiple levels of public governance – from local government and regional collaboration to national coordination and international partnerships.

Looking back, one recurring challenge stands out: sustainability ambitions have often been stronger than our collective ability to turn them into coordinated action. Over the years, I have seen how committed people, ambitious political goals and promising initiatives can struggle to achieve lasting change when responsibilities, mandates, financing and implementation processes remain fragmented.

This experience has shaped how I understand the development of Climate City Contract 2030 within Viable Cities. For me, one of the most important questions is no longer simply how we formulate ambitious goals, but how we build the collective capacity to act on them – across institutions, sectors and governance levels, and over time.

Part I – From climate ambition to governance capacity

1. The Swedish governance context

The Climate City Contracting process has emerged within a distinctive Swedish governance context characterized by a high degree of local self-government and distributed public responsibilities. Swedish municipalities enjoy significant autonomy in relation to the national government and are responsible for many of the sectors that are critical for climate transition, including spatial planning, housing, local infrastructure, energy planning, public procurement, mobility, waste management and local business development.

While municipalities have significant responsibilities, mandates, budgets and investment capacities, they do not control all the decisions, resources and assets required for climate transition. Businesses, property owners, infrastructure operators, residents and national actors all play essential roles. Municipalities can therefore act as conveners and mobilizers of local climate transition, bringing together actors around a shared direction and enabling coordinated action across organizational and sectoral boundaries. In this broader sense, the city becomes an arena for collective transformation, where local ownership and shared responsibility extend beyond municipal government – towards the mission of climate-neutral cities and a good life for all within planetary boundaries.

At the same time, municipalities have no explicit statutory responsibility for delivering climate neutrality or leading climate transition. While Swedish legislation requires municipalities to maintain an energy plan, there is no equivalent legal obligation to develop or implement a comprehensive climate transition plan. Climate action therefore largely depends on local political leadership, voluntary commitments and the ability to mobilize actors across sectors and governance levels.

This creates an interesting governance paradox. Many of the policy areas and implementation levers necessary for climate transition are located at the local level, while many of the regulatory frameworks, financial instruments and policy mandates remain situated at national or European levels. Climate transition therefore becomes a shared governance challenge that cannot be addressed by any single actor or level of government alone.

Against this backdrop, the Climate City Contracting process can be understood as a voluntary governance mechanism designed to strengthen coordination, shared directionality and collective implementation capacity between municipalities, national government agencies and other societal actors. The fact that 48 municipalities have voluntarily chosen to participate as pioneering cities is therefore significant. Rather than responding to a legal requirement, they have collectively committed themselves to accelerating climate transition and contributing to a common goal of climate-neutral and sustainable cities by 2030.

In this sense, the Climate City Contracting process represents not only a climate governance innovation, but also an institutional response to the challenge of coordinating transformation within

a decentralized governance system where responsibility, authority and implementation capacity are distributed across multiple actors and governance levels.

2. Climate City Contract 2030

The former chair in Viable Cities, Allan Larsson, and his earlier work "*Swedish Governance Model for Accelerating Climate Transition"*[1] played an important role in articulating the political and institutional rationale behind Climate City Contracts as a new governance model for climate transition. This paper builds on those foundations, while drawing on several years of practical implementation, coordination and institutional development within the Climate City Contracting process itself.

This paper also builds further on recent research by Pereverza, Kordas and Rohracher, which has analysed the Viable Cities programme and the Climate City Contracting process as an emerging model for governance innovation, multilevel coordination and transformative innovation policy for urban climate transition. Building on this substantial foundation, the present paper adds *a reflective practitioner perspective* grounded in the continued practical development and implementation of the Climate City Contracting process in Sweden.[2]

A central insight emerging from the Viable Cities process is that such transformation capacity cannot be created through isolated projects or temporary initiatives alone, but requires long-term governance structures capable of connecting actors, institutions, financing, implementation processes across governance levels and a portfolio approach.

Climate City Contract 2030 – together with the core coordination of the process and, more recently, the *"Joint Commitments between cities"* – represent an emerging governance architecture for operationalising this transformation capacity. The Climate City Contract as the core and central instrument through which annual development, learning and progression within each municipality can both be guided, strengthened and documented over time.

The Climate City Contract brings together the key elements of each city's climate transition in a common framework. It sets out the city's climate ambitions and targets, its climate transition roadmap and strategic priorities, and the commitments and measures intended to accelerate implementation. It also describes how the transition is organised and governed locally, including collaboration with businesses, academia and civil society, and how climate analysis, investment planning and financing support the work. Alongside the municipalities' commitments, the contract includes commitments from the participating national government agencies and Viable Cities, reflecting the shared responsibility for accelerating the transition.

3. A Governance Gap

So where do we begin to understand the rapid emergence of "missions" as an innovation governance approach for addressing climate change and other sustainability challenges?

[1] Larsson, Allan (2023. *En svensk governance-modell för att öka takten i klimatomställningen*. Viable Cities.
[2] Pereverza, Rohracher & Kordas (2025). *Fostering Urban Climate Transition Through Innovative Governance Coordination. Environmental Policy and Governance.*

From Climate Science to Transformation Challenge

One possible starting point is the governance gap that gradually became visible through the evolution of international sustainability agreements – not least since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where Agenda 21 established one of the first comprehensive global frameworks for sustainable development.

At the same time, a broader landscape of international conventions and rights-based frameworks also shaped governance systems globally and nationally. These include, among others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and international frameworks concerning biodiversity, gender equality, disability rights, resilience, risk reduction and social inclusion.

Over the past decades, in the light of these overarching and ambitious frameworks, climate science has developed an increasingly robust understanding of the causes, impacts and risks associated with climate change. Successive assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[3] have progressively strengthened the scientific consensus that human activities are driving unprecedented changes in the Earth's climate system and that rapid emissions reductions are required to limit the most severe consequences.

As scientific understanding has evolved, the challenge facing societies has also changed. While earlier debates often focused on understanding the problem itself, attention has increasingly shifted towards questions of implementation, societal transformation and governance. The challenge today is no longer primarily a lack of knowledge about climate change, but how to organize institutions, investments, policies and collective action at sufficient speed and scale to respond to the scientific evidence.

In this sense, the growing urgency communicated through successive IPCC assessments has gradually transformed climate change from an environmental policy issue into a broader governance challenge — raising fundamental questions about how societies build the capacity to coordinate and sustain long-term transformation across governance levels and sectors.

Formally, these conventions and agreements are ratified and adopted by the nation states, which carry the primary responsibility for implementation. In practice, however, the realization of many of these commitments increasingly depends on governance systems extending far beyond national governments alone.

This has become particularly visible within climate governance following the Paris Agreement and the introduction of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), where countries commit to national climate targets and transition pathways. While NDCs establish national ambition and accountability, implementation frequently depends on municipalities, regions, infrastructure providers, public agencies, businesses and civil society actors operating across multiple governance levels.

[3] IPCC (2023). Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Together, these developments have contributed to an increasingly interconnected (and disconnected!) governance landscape, where local and regional governments are expected to simultaneously address climate mitigation, adaptation, public health, social equity, economic development, democratic participation and human rights obligations.

In practice, municipalities and regions become the arenas where global ambitions, national regulations and local realities intersect. Here, climate goals are negotiated alongside housing shortages, social inequality, infrastructure needs, children's rights, public health responsibilities and fiscal constraints.

More recently, this has resulted in a growing focus around the strategic role of cities, multilevel governance and local implementation capacity in delivering societal transformation – reflected for example in the EU's evolving Agenda for Cities[4] and related international discussions on urban climate governance and mission-oriented transition.

The challenge is therefore not only how to accelerate climate action, but how to organize governance systems capable of navigating multiple simultaneous societal commitments, conflicting institutional logics and emerging goal conflicts in legitimate, democratic and transformative ways.

Yet, while these global frameworks significantly strengthened both ambition and normative direction, they provided far less guidance on how societal transformation should actually be organized and implemented across governance levels.

In many cases, the assumption appeared to be that goals, targets and commitments would naturally translate into coordinated implementation through existing institutional structures. In practice, however, responsibilities often remained fragmented across sectors, mandates and governance levels, with limited mechanisms for collective coordination, prioritization and long-term transition management.

This implementation gap became increasingly visible within Agenda 2030 itself. While most Sustainable Development Goals define sectoral or thematic outcomes, Goals 16 and 17 stand out by emphasizing the importance of effective institutions, governance capacity, collaboration and partnerships as enabling conditions for sustainable development. Yet even these goals provide only limited operational guidance for how transformative multilevel governance can be institutionalized in practice.

The emergence of mission-oriented governance

It is within this broader governance context that mission-oriented approaches began to emerge as a response to increasingly complex societal challenges. Building on earlier traditions of public-sector coordination and innovation policy, mission-oriented frameworks gained renewed attention through the work of Mariana Mazzucato and others, emphasizing the need for bold, cross-sectoral and outcome-driven societal transformation.[5] Rather than focusing solely on individual projects, technologies or sectoral policies, missions were increasingly framed as collective societal efforts

[4] European Commission, EU Agenda for Cities: *Shaping Europe's Urban Future*, 2025.

[5] See for example: Mazzucato, Mariana. *Mission-Oriented Research & Innovation in the European Union: A problem-solving approach to fuel innovation-led growth.* European Commission, 2018.

capable of mobilizing actors across governance levels, disciplines and sectors around shared long-term objectives.

However, while missions helped articulate directionality and ambition, the practical question of how such transformations should actually be organized, coordinated and implemented across institutional boundaries largely remained unresolved.

It was also within this context that Viable Cities emerged in Sweden as the country's first strategic innovation programme explicitly shaped by a mission-oriented approach to societal transformation.

Established as a national platform for climate-neutral and sustainable cities, Viable Cities brought together municipalities, national agencies, academia, industry and civil society around the shared mission of achieving climate-neutral cities by 2030 – while contributing to a good life for all within planetary boundaries.

In many ways the programme logic is an attempt to operationalize the systemic and interconnected logic of Agenda 2030 in practice, with particular emphasis on Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), while simultaneously recognizing the interdependence between climate transition, social sustainability, democratic governance and long-term societal resilience.

Unlike many traditional innovation programmes focused primarily on technology development, Viable Cities increasingly evolved into a platform for governance innovation – exploring how societal actors, governance levels, financing structures and institutional processes could be coordinated to accelerate transformation capacity in practice.

It was within this context that the process of Climate City Contract 2030 gradually emerged as one of the programme's central governance innovations.

Reflections

During my time as Head of Sustainability in Växjö, I became involved in the early development of what would later become the Viable Cities programme and the Climate City Contract 2030 process. Växjö was among the first nine pioneering cities participating in the initiative.

What made this initiative particularly interesting to me was not only its ambition – climate-neutral cities by 2030, fifteen years ahead of Sweden's national climate target – but the approach to governance. From the outset, it was about building a shared commitment between local and national actors, working towards a common mission and connecting to emerging European mission-oriented approaches.

By then, I had already gained experience across local, regional and national levels of government. Yet this felt fundamentally different. Rather than focusing on individual projects or sector-specific interventions, it sought to create a framework for long-term transformation based on collaboration across governance levels, sectors and institutions.

Looking back, what appeared most innovative was the recognition that achieving climate neutrality would require not only new technologies and investments, but also new forms of governance, coordination and institutional collaboration capable of operating across existing organizational boundaries.

The governance logic behind this emerging model was, as mentioned early in this paper, later further articulated by Allan Larsson in his work on new forms of governance for climate transition, where the Climate City Contract 2030 was described not merely as an agreement, but as an instrument for mobilizing collective action, coordinating investments and accelerating systemic transformation across governance levels.[6]

Recent reflections by Allan Larsson have also situated the emergence of Climate City Contract 2030 within a broader historical trajectory of Swedish urban sustainability experimentation – from Hammarby Sjöstad and local eco-cycle models towards more integrated governance systems for climate-neutral cities.[7]

[6] Larsson, Allan. (2023) *En svensk governance-modell för att öka takten i klimatomställningen*. Viable Cities.
[7] See for example: Allan Larsson, *Klimatkontrakt 2030 – i Sverige och i EU*, and the recent Smithsonian Magazine feature on Hammarby Sjöstad and Viable Cities: *This Stockholm Neighborhood Was Built on Ambitious Sustainability Goals. When It Came Up Short, It Doubled Down and Became a Blueprint for Others*, Smithsonian Magazine, 2026.

Part II – Climate City Contracts as Governance Infrastructure

4. From climate agreements to transformation capacity

So the Climate City Contracts 2030 emerged from a growing realization that achieving climate-neutral and sustainable cities would require more than ambitious targets, isolated projects or sector-specific policy measures. What was increasingly missing was not vision, but governance capacity for implementation: institutional structures capable of coordinating long-term societal transformation across governance levels, sectors and organizational boundaries.

While international climate agreements, national climate frameworks and emerging mission-oriented approaches provided directionality and political ambition, municipalities were often left to navigate implementation within fragmented governance systems, short-term project logics and disconnected financing structures. Cities carried substantial responsibility for transition in practice, while lacking sufficient mechanisms for coordination, collective learning, integrated investment planning and long-term institutional alignment.

Against this backdrop, the Climate City Contracting process gradually developed within Viable Cities as an attempt to create a new governance infrastructure for mission-oriented transformation. Rather than functioning as a regulatory instrument, the process can be understood as a relational and iterative governance model connecting municipalities, national government agencies, European mission frameworks, academia, businesses and civil society actors around a shared mission of climate-neutral and sustainable cities by 2030.

Over time, the Climate City Contracting process increasingly came to function as an operational structure for building collective transformation capacity – linking governance, financing, climate analysis, experimentation, institutional learning and multilevel coordination into a more integrated transition system.

Several of these developments have also later been conceptualized in research connected to the Viable Cities programme as forms of governance innovation, intermediation, polycentric coordination and transformative innovation policy for urban climate transitions. In this perspective, the Climate City Contracting process can be understood not only as a policy framework, but as an evolving governance infrastructure designed to strengthen collective transformation capacity across governance levels.[8]

5. Annual revision, collective learning and iterative governance

The Climate City Contract itself functions primarily as a shared directional framework. It establishes a common mission and creates long-term political commitment around climate-neutral and

[8] Pereverza, Rohracher & Kordas (2025). *Fostering Urban Climate Transition Through Innovative Governance Coordination*. Environmental Policy and Governance.

sustainable cities by 2030. Rather than being legally binding, the contract operates as a relational and strategic instrument for alignment across actors and governance levels.

A defining feature of the Swedish model is the annual co-signing process between municipalities and six national government agencies.

Responsibilities within this recurring process are differentiated but interconnected. Municipalities lead local implementation, working with businesses, civil society and other actors through their own governance, budgeting and investment processes. The national government agencies use their joint action plan to connect emerging local needs and barriers with their respective mandates, instruments and opportunities for coordinated action. Viable Cities, through its coordination function, supports dialogue, joint analysis and learning, feeding insights from implementation back into the development of subsequent Climate City Contract cycles.

This institutionalizes multilevel governance not merely as consultation, but as a tangible token of a recurring process of shared responsibility, coordination and mutual learning.

Another central feature of the Climate City Contracting process is what can be described as *iterative sharpening*. Rather than relying on static plans or fixed commitments, the process is designed for continuous revision, learning and strengthening over time. Each annual cycle creates opportunities to deepen collaboration, refine priorities, strengthen governance mechanisms and gradually increase both ambition and implementation capacity across actors and governance levels.

For example, when municipalities identify recurring barriers to climate-oriented public procurement, these challenges can be brought into the Joint Commitments between cities for shared analysis and development. Where barriers relate to national guidance, regulations or support instruments, they can also inform dialogue with relevant government agencies. The resulting insights may lead to revised procurement approaches, targeted support or proposals for changes within existing mandates. Subsequent follow-up can then assess whether these responses have strengthened local implementation and identify what further action is needed.

Through recurring followup and renewed commitments, the process creates opportunities for each actor to account for progress within its own responsibilities, while jointly identifying unresolved barri ers and agreeing on priorities for the next cycle.

Over time, this also creates the need for a more dedicated intermediary structure capable of supporting coordination, alignment and collective learning across governance levels. As a result, a strengthened, formal coordination function is established within the Viable Cities programme office since 2023.

Rather than treating climate transition as a fixed plan or isolated sets of projects, the coordination function supports an ongoing process of analysis, dialogue, facilitation and progressively strengthened commitments across governance levels. By operating in the interface between municipalities, national agencies, European mission frameworks and other national and international initiatives, the function helps translate emerging needs, policy gaps and lessons learned into stronger governance mechanisms and increased collective transformation capacity over time.

As the Climate City Contracting process continues to evolve, the coordination function itself gradually becomes an increasingly important governance innovation within the programme – a development explored further in a later section of this paper.

The current Climate City Contract process is based on annual revision and renewed commitments. Looking beyond the 2027 contract cycle, a possible – but not yet decided – development would be to establish a more stable contract framework from 2028 through 2030, while retaining annual processes for implementation, follow-up, collective learning and renewed joint action.

This would not make the Climate City Contracts less important. On the contrary, each participating city would continue to have a Climate City Contract as a common foundation for its transition, connecting political direction, governance, implementation and investment. What may change is where the annual iteration primarily takes place. Rather than repeatedly revising the contract format itself, the annual process could increasingly focus on implementation and concrete action points – including the continued development, delivery and follow-up of the Joint Commitments. In this sense, the process may be moving from annual iteration of the contract towards annual iteration of collective action and implementation.

6. The Governance architecture of the Climate City Contract

From Commitment to Operationalisation

An important dimension of the Climate City Contract architecture is how the shared commitments are translated into the existing governance structures, mandates and operational processes of the signatories. The contract is therefore not intended to function as a parallel governance structure, but as a mechanism for increasingly aligning and mobilizing existing institutional responsibilities and capacities around the shared mission.

For the national government agencies participating in the Climate City Contract, this has gradually developed into a recurring process of coordination through the joint agency action plan. The plan provides a mechanism for connecting the agencies' shared commitments under the Climate City Contract with their respective mandates, ongoing assignments and policy instruments. Through continuous coordination and iteration, the ambition is to strengthen alignment between agency activities, identify gaps and opportunities for joint action, and mobilize existing national capacities more effectively in response to implementation needs emerging from cities.

At the local level, operationalisation takes different forms depending on municipal governance structures and local conditions. A common foundation, however, has been the development of local transition teams and broader transition arenas capable of connecting political leadership, municipal administrations and companies with businesses, academia, civil society and other local actors. Through these structures, the Climate City Contract can increasingly become embedded in ordinary governance, budgeting, investment planning and implementation processes rather than remaining a separate climate initiative.

At the same time, local implementation is reconnected to the wider Climate City Contracting process through mechanisms such as the Joint Commitments between cities. This creates a continuous movement between local implementation, collective learning and national coordination:

experiences and barriers identified locally can inform shared development processes, while jointly developed methods, capacities and national support structures can strengthen implementation within individual cities.

In this sense, operationalisation is not a final step following the signing of the Climate City Contract, but part of the iterative governance process itself – continuously connecting shared commitments with institutional mandates, local implementation and collective learning across governance levels.

Similar coordination logics can thus be observed across governance levels, although their institutional forms differ – a recurring pattern that will be explored later in this paper.

An important characteristic of the Swedish Climate City Contract model is that the contract itself operates across multiple interconnected levels of commitment, governance and implementation.[9]

The multilevel architecture of the Climate City Contracting process has also been visualized through process models illustrating how local, regional, national, European and global governance processes interact over time through recurring coordination, budgeting, implementation and learning cycles.[10]

Rather than functioning as a bilateral agreement between a municipality and the state, the Climate City Contracting process has gradually evolved into a layered governance architecture combining shared mission commitments, institutional coordination and distributed implementation responsibility across actors and governance levels.

At the core of the model lies a common mission commitment shared by all signatories: the transition towards climate-neutral and sustainable cities by 2030, with a good life for all within planetary boundaries. This shared directionality is then operationalized through several interconnected layers of commitments and governance processes.

The contracts include:

- **shared commitments between all signatories** related to shared and continuous learning, governance development, climate analysis and financing structures,
- **municipality-specific commitments** connected to climate targets, transition roadmaps, investment planning and local implementation,
- **joint commitments between national government agencies** focused on policy development, financing coordination and European alignment,
- **commitments by Viable Cities as a national platform** related to coordination, learning, international alignment and governance innovation,
- and, more recently, the **Joint Commitments between cities** designed to strengthen collective implementation capacity and accelerate transformation within strategic governance areas.

[9] Viable Cities (2025). *Climate City Contract 2030 – framework, guidance documents and annual contract process.* Available at: https://viablecities.se/en/klimatkontrakt-2030/
[10] Viable Cities programme office, *Climate City Contract 2030 – multilevel governance process visualizations*, 2025.

Again – together, these layers create a governance structure where responsibilities are both differentiated and interconnected. The process thereby combines local ownership with national coordination, while simultaneously linking municipal implementation to European missions and emerging international governance frameworks.

Another important institutional dimension of the process is the **annual co-signing ceremony** held in Stockholm during the first week of December each year: **European Viable Cities Day.**

Beyond its symbolic value, the event functions as a recurring governance ritual institutionalizing the multilevel partnership itself. Municipal political leaders, national government agencies, Viable Cities and international partners gather to renew commitments, present progress, strengthen accountability and collectively sharpen the direction of the transition process.

The annual revision provides an opportunity to revisit the city's targets, transition roadmap, strategic priorities and commitments in light of new knowledge, implementation experience and emerging needs. In this way, the contract serves not only as a record of political ambition, but also as a means of documenting progress and strengthening the conditions for implementation over time.

In this sense, the annual signing ceremony becomes part of the governance infrastructure itself – reinforcing continuity, legitimacy, visibility and long-term relationship-building across governance levels and societal sectors.

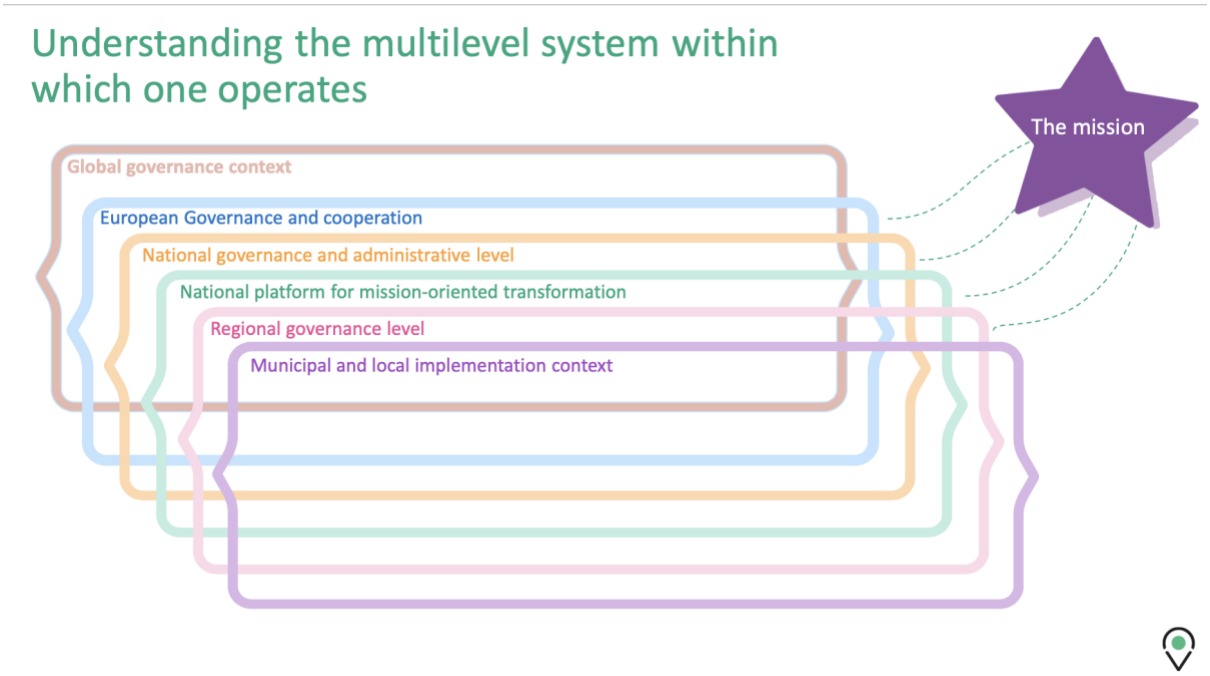
7. Visualizing multilevel governance and “windows of opportunity”

An important aspect of the Climate City Contracting process has also been the development of more generic multilevel governance models and process visualizations designed to support collective reflection and systems understanding across governance levels.

While governance contexts differ significantly between municipalities, regions, national agencies and countries, many of the underlying coordination challenges related to mission-oriented transformation remain structurally similar. The process models developed within the Climate City Contracting process are therefore not intended as fixed representations of Swedish governance alone, but as more generic analytical frameworks for understanding how governance structures, financing systems, implementation processes and institutional responsibilities interact around a shared mission.

By placing the mission — in this case climate-neutral and sustainable cities by 2030 — at the centre of interconnected governance and implementation processes, the models help identify relationships, governance gaps, institutional dependencies and potential “windows of opportunity” across and between governance levels.

In this sense, the visualizations function not only as communication tools, but as reflective governance instruments capable of supporting collective analysis, coordination and strategic learning across different institutional and geographical contexts.



Part III – Building Transformation Capacity

8. From Coordination Function to Development Hub

Building Institutional Capacity for Multilevel Governance and Transformation

As the Climate City Contract process evolves and expands – from 9, then 23 and now 48 participating municipalities – an increasingly important realization emerges: accelerating climate transition requires not only local experimentation and collaborative arenas, but also stronger institutional capacity for iterative coordination, collective analysis and long-term multilevel governance integration.

In response, a strengthened coordination function[11] is established within the Viable Cities programme office from 2023 onwards. The purpose of the function is not primarily administrative coordination, but rather to strengthen the Climate City Contract process as an evolving governance infrastructure for mission-oriented societal transformation.

The coordination function operates as a continuous intermediary capacity within the broader Viable Cities platform, rather than as a separate governance structure. While the function focuses on strengthening the Climate City Contract process through multilevel coordination, analysis and collective learning, the wider platform brings together additional capacities, partnerships and

[11] Viable Cities (2025). *Samordningsfunktion för Klimatkontrakt 2030 – uppdrag och utveckling 2025–2027*. The coordination function was established to strengthen multilevel governance, implementation capacity, policy alignment and collective learning within the Climate City Contract process.

instruments for experimentation, innovation, financing and implementation. The value lies in how these complementary functions can reinforce one another around the shared mission.

A central role of the coordination function becomes the *continuous analysis, iteration and sharpening* of the Climate City Contract process itself. Through annual reviews of municipal Climate City Contracts, governance dialogues, progression analysis, indicator development and facilitation of Joint Commitments between municipalities, the function increasingly supports collective learning and iterative governance development across governance levels.

This also creates a stronger focus on identifying governance gaps, institutional bottlenecks and areas where improved coordination, policy development or new support structures are needed in order to accelerate implementation capacity. Particular attention is directed towards governance and leadership structures, climate analysis and carbon accounting, financing logic, procurement, investment planning and the integration of climate transition into ordinary municipal governance and budgeting processes.

An important dimension of this work is the development of shared methods for collective reflection, sensemaking and institutional learning across governance levels. Over time, the coordination function facilitates collaborative formats designed not only to exchange information, but to jointly interpret emerging transition challenges, implementation barriers and governance needs together.

These include collective readings and analysis of Climate City Contracts, thematic reflection processes, policy labs between municipalities and national agencies[12], shared learning sessions and recurring governance dialogues connected to financing, climate analysis, procurement and mission-oriented governance.

By operating between municipalities, national government agencies, European mission frameworks and international climate initiatives, the function helps translate local implementation experiences into national and European policy discussions, while simultaneously contextualizing emerging EU frameworks, financing opportunities and mission-oriented governance approaches within local governance realities.

In this sense, the coordination function increasingly operates as a relational and intermediary governance capacity – strengthening alignment, coordination and institutional learning across governance levels rather than governing through centralized control. Over time, the function also contributes to strengthening the overall transformation intelligence of the Climate City Contract process by connecting analysis, governance development, financing structures, implementation capacity and collective learning into a more coherent iterative governance system.

The coordination function can therefore be understood as part of a broader institutional shift within mission-oriented governance: from isolated innovation projects and experimental platforms towards more permanent structures for collective transformation capacity-building across governance levels.

Over time, the function itself has gradually evolved beyond traditional notions of coordination. In practice, it increasingly operates as a development hub for transformative societal initiatives –

[12] Insights and learnings from PolicyLab within Klimatkontrakt 2030 / Viable Cities report 2025:5

supporting iterative multilevel governance, collective learning, governance innovation and long-term institutional transformation across governance levels.

Reflections

From my own experience of leading the coordination work, one of the most important lessons has been that multilevel coordination cannot be reduced to creating more meetings or formal coordination structures. The real work often takes place in the spaces between existing mandates, organizations and governance levels – where no single actor has the authority, knowledge or resources to resolve the transition challenge alone.

Much of the coordination function has therefore evolved through practice rather than through a predefined institutional design. Recurring analysis of the Climate City Contracts, dialogues with cities and national agencies, and the gradual identification of common implementation barriers have continuously reshaped both the function and the wider Climate City Contract process.

For me, this has reinforced the understanding that intermediary governance is not primarily about coordinating existing activities. It is about creating the conditions for actors to collectively identify what is missing, develop new responses and continuously adapt the governance system as the transition progresses.

9. Transition Lab Forums

A relational coordination and trust-building arena

An important dimension of the Climate City Contract process is the gradual development of recurring governance arenas for collective learning, coordination, experimentation and long-term relationship-building across governance levels and sectors.

The concept of Transition Labs builds on broader traditions within sustainability transitions research, including transition management, transition arenas and governance-oriented experimentation.[13]

Within Viable Cities, however, the Transition Lab forums approach gradually evolves beyond isolated experimentation formats into a recurring governance infrastructure for collective learning, coordination and transformation capacity-building across governance levels.[14]

Inspired by the idea of the "Transition Lab" as a space for systemic learning and collaborative transformation, Viable Cities and the participating municipalities developed a series of interconnected arenas and working formats over time. These include the larger Transition Lab Forums (TLF), Arena Climate City Contracts, CityLabs, Climate Breakfasts, thematic taskforces and a range of more focused peer-learning and policy-development processes.[15]

Within these arenas, pioneering municipalities, national government agencies, researchers, businesses, civil society organizations and other societal actors meet regularly to jointly explore

[13] Loorbach, D. (2010). *Transition Management for Sustainable Development: A Prescriptive, Complexity-Based Governance Framework*. Governance, 23(1), 161–183; Frantzeskaki, N. et al. (2018). *Urban Sustainability Transition Experiments*. Journal of Cleaner Production, 169, 17–27.
[14] Viable Cities (2025). *Transition Lab – tools and arenas for accelerating climate-neutral cities*. Available at: https://viablecities.se/en/klimatneutrala-stader-2030/transition-lab/
[15] Examples include Transition Lab Forum #17 (Lund, 2025), #18 (Linköping, 2025) and #19 (Karlstad, 2025), where Climate City Contracts, financing, mobility, preparedness and governance innovation were explored through recurring multilevel collaboration arenas coordinated by Viable Cities and participating municipalities.

barriers, identify governance gaps, exchange experiences and strengthen collective implementation capacity.

The purpose of these arenas is not primarily consultation or information-sharing in a traditional sense. Rather, they function as relational governance spaces designed to create trust, shared directionality and long-term collaboration around complex transition challenges. Through recurring interaction over time, they help establish institutional relationships between cities and process leaders, and collective learning processes that are often difficult to achieve within ordinary sectoral or hierarchical governance structures.

Another important dimension of these governance arenas is their intermediary role between governance levels and institutional logics. Local experiences and implementation barriers can be translated into national policy discussions, while emerging national, European and international frameworks can simultaneously be interpreted, contextualized and operationalized within local governance realities.

Over time, these arenas contribute to stronger alignment between local transition needs, national policy development and broader European and international mission-oriented governance frameworks. They also help strengthen the social and institutional infrastructure necessary for long-term transformation capacity – where trust, continuity, shared language and collective problem-solving become as important as formal governance mechanisms themselves.

10. System demonstrators

Experimentation, system boundaries and integrated implementation

The development of system demonstrators within Viable Cities began with preparatory work and dialogue in 2020, followed by more focused development together with pioneering municipalities from 2021. A dedicated funding programme was subsequently launched in 2022, with successive design, planning and implementation phases. The approach was developed to accelerate climate transition within emission-intensive and system-critical areas of society, moving beyond isolated projects and technological experimentation towards integrated, mission-oriented systems change.[16]

Rather than focusing on individual pilot projects or technological solutions, system demonstrators bring together portfolios of mutually reinforcing interventions around a shared mission and an identified systemic shift. These interventions are developed and implemented across interconnected parts of an urban system, requiring continuous orchestration, collective learning and adaptation. The approach creates opportunities to combine changes in governance, financing, infrastructure, regulation, behaviours, business models and technologies within real-world settings.

In this sense, system demonstrators function not only as innovation platforms, but also as governance laboratories for societal transformation. They create concrete contexts where municipalities, businesses, national agencies, researchers and citizens can jointly explore how

[16] Viable Cities & Vinnova (2022–2024). *System Demonstrators for Climate-Neutral Cities* – including design phase, planning phase and implementation calls. Available at: https://viablecities.se/en/klimatneutrala-stader-2030/systemdemonstrator

systemic transition can be organized, financed and implemented across institutional and sectoral boundaries.

The original Swedish system demonstrator programme worked with five dimensions of systemic change. The approach has subsequently evolved, and the 2026 blueprint proposes a six-dimensional framework, explicitly distinguishing governance and decision-making as a separate dimension while broadening the dimension of business models to include value creation, investment, procurement and market development. This further emphasizes the need to address interconnected institutional, financial, social and technological conditions for systemic transformation.

An important contribution of the demonstrator logic is its ability to make complex societal systems more visible and understandable. By working within clearly defined but interconnected transition domains, the demonstrators help reveal how governance levels, institutional mandates, financing structures, market conditions and sectoral responsibilities interact in practice – and where friction, policy gaps or structural lock-ins emerge.

This also shifts the role of experimentation itself. Rather than testing technologies in isolation, system demonstrators increasingly become mechanisms for testing institutional capacity, coordination structures and governance arrangements necessary for large-scale transformation.

Through these real-world testbeds, climate transition becomes not only a question of scaling technical solutions, but of developing collective implementation capacity and creating new forms of collaboration, investment logic and institutional alignment capable of supporting systemic change over time.

An important contribution of system demonstrators to multilevel governance is their ability to connect local implementation with the wider conditions required for systemic change. As portfolios of interventions are developed and tested, they can reveal barriers that municipalities and local partners cannot resolve alone, including regulatory constraints, financing gaps, fragmented investment responsibilities and insufficient market demand. Through the wider Viable Cities platform and the Climate City Contract process, such insights can inform dialogue with national government agencies, financial actors and other relevant partners, contributing to the development of enabling conditions for implementation and scaling. System demonstrators thereby serve not only as environments for practical transformation, but also as sources of learning for the continuous development of governance, investment and market-shaping capacities across levels.

11. Climate investment logic

From fragmented projects to financial transformation

An increasingly important dimension of the Climate City Contract process has been the shift from isolated climate projects towards a broader logic of financial transformation for accelerated climate transition. Early work on climate investment plans gradually evolved into a wider understanding that municipalities cannot rely solely on their municipal investment portfolios, or external funding of temporary project financing, to achieve climate neutrality.

Instead, the work on climate transition must be integrated into the core governance and financial structures of municipalities – including regular budgets, existing mandates, organizational capacities and everyday decision-making processes. This also implies a broader portfolio perspective, where investments, operations, procurement and public purchasing power are understood as interconnected levers for systemic transition.

Such transition portfolios are broader than investment plans alone, encompassing changes in governance, institutional practices, behaviours and other conditions that enable climate transition. Some of these changes may generate concrete investment opportunities, while others require different forms of action and resources.

In this context, procurement and purchasing budgets become just as strategically important as traditional investment budgets. Climate transition should therefore not be treated as a parallel sustainability agenda, but increasingly as an integrated governance and financial logic shaping how municipalities prioritize resources, manage risks and direct long-term societal development.

This broader financial perspective also reflects a growing recognition that long-term transition capacity depends less on isolated external funding streams and more on the ability to redirect and align already existing institutional resources, mandates and investment flows toward shared transformation goals.

12. Joint Commitments – a collective and distributed transformation capacity

The next evolution of the Climate City Contract process

As the Climate City Contract process matures and the number of participating municipalities expands, recurring governance challenges increasingly become visible across cities and governance levels. Annual analysis and iterative revision of the Climate City Contracts reveal common needs related to governance and leadership capacity, climate analysis and carbon accounting, financing logic, procurement practices and multilevel coordination.

Three interconnected challenges become particularly visible. First, the need to strengthen local governance and leadership capacity in line with emerging transition-oriented governance frameworks within the EU Cities Mission, particularly the NetZeroCities Transition Map[17], which increasingly emphasizes governance capacity, institutional alignment and systemic implementation as central dimensions of urban climate transition. Second, the need to improve climate analysis, available data for carbon accounting and the collective understanding of current status, gaps and transition pathways. Third, the need to more systematically connect governance and climate targets with financing, budgeting, investment planning and procurement practices.

Rather than addressing these challenges municipality by municipality in isolation, Viable Cities and the coordination function gradually facilitate collective development processes where municipalities

[17] NetZeroCities (2023). *Transition Map Explorer.* The framework identifies key transition dimensions for climate-neutral cities, including governance, finance, citizen engagement, integrated planning and systemic implementation capacity.

jointly build methods, governance structures and implementation capacity together. It is within this evolving governance logic that the Joint Commitments between cities emerge.

The ten Joint Commitments are designed as collective governance pathways for accelerated transition, structured around the progression levels “Initiate”, “Establish” and “Transform”. Together, these levels create a shared developmental logic through which municipalities can gradually strengthen institutional capacity, governance structures and implementation maturity over time – while simultaneously learning from one another through collective iteration and peer development.

In several ways, the Joint Commitments between cities operationalize and contextualize elements of the NetZeroCities Transition Map within the Swedish Climate City Contract process, translating broader European transition frameworks into practical governance pathways adapted to municipal implementation realities.

Rather than focusing primarily on sectoral themes such as mobility or energy alone, the Joint Commitments address enabling capacities and strategic governance dimensions considered critical for accelerating systemic transition. These include governance and leadership, climate analysis and carbon accounting, climate investment planning, procurement and purchasing, digitalization, communication for transition, just transition and complementary climate measures. Three of the ten Joint Commitments between the cities form a common foundation for all participating cities, while the remaining seven allow cities to engage according to their local priorities and development needs.

This represents an important shift in the governance logic of the programme. Instead of viewing municipalities merely as parallel frontrunners, the process increasingly enables coalitions of cities to move together around specific transformation challenges.

At the core of this development lies an emerging governance logic sometimes described within Viable Cities as “the power of many” – a recognition that transformation capacity grows when municipalities collectively develop and iterate governance structures, implementation models and institutional learning processes together rather than in isolation.

In this sense, the Joint Commitments function not only as thematic collaboration platforms, but as mechanisms for collective acceleration and distributed transformation capacity-building across the broader transition system. By enabling municipalities to work collectively on shared governance challenges, they provide a concrete mechanism for network-based governance, in line with Viable Cities’ theory of change: capacities, methods and solutions are developed collaboratively across cities rather than independently within individual organizations.

Through the Joint Commitments, municipalities collectively develop and test governance practices, procurement approaches, strategic frameworks and implementation models that can subsequently be adapted and scaled by others. Viable Cities provides the coordination structures and collaborative environments supporting this distributed learning, lowering the threshold for implementation across the wider network.

Climate Transition, Market Development and Competitiveness

The experience from the Climate City Contract process also points to an important relationship between local climate transition, market development and competitiveness. Cities are not only sites of transition; through their investments, procurement and purchasing, they are also significant market actors. When several cities align ambitions and requirements around common transition challenges, their combined demand can send clearer and more predictable signals to the market.

This logic is becoming increasingly visible through the Joint Commitments, particularly in the work on strategic purchasing and procurement. By identifying shared needs, developing more consistent requirements and creating opportunities for joint learning and implementation, cities can help strengthen demand for low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions. The “power of many” therefore has a market dimension as well as a governance dimension: coordinated public demand can reduce fragmentation, provide greater predictability for suppliers and create better conditions for companies to develop, test and scale new solutions.

At the same time, the relationship between climate transition and business development also plays out locally. Through local climate contracts and transition arenas, municipalities can engage businesses and other local actors around shared transition priorities, creating stronger connections between climate objectives, local investment and economic development. In this way, the transition can contribute not only to emissions reductions but also to strengthening local and national businesses and their capacity to compete in emerging low-carbon markets.

From this perspective, competitiveness is not a separate objective added to the climate transition. It can emerge as part of the same transformation process: cities articulate and aggregate demand, businesses develop and scale solutions, and public and private actors jointly build the markets and implementation capacity required for the transition.

Reflections

One of the most significant shifts I have observed during the development of the Climate City Contract process is the gradual movement from supporting individual frontrunner cities towards building collective transformation capacity across the network.

Initially, much of the work naturally focused on the progression of individual municipalities. Over time, however, recurring analysis revealed that many cities were struggling with similar governance and implementation challenges. This raised a simple but important question: rather than municipalities developing responses to the same systemic challenges separately, what could become possible if groups of cities worked on them collectively?

The Joint Commitments emerged partly from this realization. For me, they represent practical expression of what we increasingly refer to as “the power of many”. This does not necessarily mean mobilizing all 48 pioneering municipalities around the same challenge. A coalition of cities can itself create significant transformative momentum. For example, when 22 municipalities jointly develop public procurement and purchasing as strategic tools for climate transition, they can pool experience, strengthen shared demand, develop and test common approaches, and move the field forward considerably faster than individual municipalities acting alone. In doing so, they can also create pathways, methods and market signals that make it easier for other municipalities to follow.

The important shift is therefore not simply from individual action to collective action, but towards a network-based model in which different constellations of cities can take the lead in developing solutions to shared transformation challenges and make the resulting knowledge, methods and approaches available to the wider system.

For me, this represents an important evolution in mission-oriented governance: from networks primarily designed for knowledge exchange towards networks capable of jointly developing, testing and scaling transformation capacity.

13. Monitoring – emission reduction, transformation capacity and governance progress

One of the emerging challenges within mission-oriented governance concerns how transformation processes can be monitored, evaluated and made visible over time. Traditional climate indicators – primarily focused on emissions reductions – remain essential, but are insufficient for understanding broader governance transformation, implementation capacity and systemic transition processes. This calls for a more systemic approach to monitoring, where emissions trajectories are understood alongside changes in governance, implementation and institutional capacity, and where different indicators and outcomes are interpreted in relation to the actions and processes through which transformation is expected to occur.

In this context, monitoring and evaluation serve several complementary purposes. First, they provide *accountability:* are commitments being translated into action, are resources and interventions directed towards the intended objectives, and are the actors involved doing what they have committed to do? Second, they enable *learning about the intervention itself*: to what extent does the Climate City Contract process function as an effective governance mechanism for addressing complex, systemic challenges, and under what conditions? Third, they support *continuous learning and adaptation during implementation*, making it possible to identify barriers, adjust interventions and governance arrangements, and improve approaches as the transition unfolds.

This broader perspective also resonates with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) approach developed within NetZeroCities and the EU Cities Mission, where monitoring is increasingly connected to learning, adaptation and the wider transition process rather than treated solely as measurement of end outcomes.[18]

Beyond supporting cities in governing and continuously adapting their own transition processes, *monitoring, evaluation and learning* also serve a broader purpose for Viable Cities: generating evidence and insights that can inform adaptation, diffusion and scaling. If mission-oriented governance innovations such as Climate City Contracts, local transition arenas, Joint Commitments or new coordination mechanisms are expected to contribute beyond individual cities or projects, it becomes necessary to understand not only whether they work, but how, why and under what conditions they can be adapted, replicated or scaled. Monitoring and evaluation therefore become

[18] Edmondson, D. et al. (2026), *City-driven Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)*, NetZeroCities.

part of the infrastructure for transformation itself – supporting accountability and learning while generating the evidence needed for continuous improvement, wider diffusion and systemic change.

Climate analysis within the Climate City Contract process has from an early stage included an interest in how transition processes and institutional change can be understood and monitored, alongside the development of emissions inventories and climate analysis. Building on this work, the process is now moving towards a more integrated approach to transition monitoring, connecting emissions outcomes more explicitly with changes in governance, implementation capacity and institutional development.

This challenge also relates to the complexity and ambiguity of climate accounting at city level. Municipalities operate within a landscape of international, European and national reporting frameworks and methodologies, while system boundaries, local conditions and access to data influence what can be measured and how emissions are interpreted and calculated. Within the Climate City Contract process, municipalities work in relation to frameworks such as the Greenhouse Gas Protocol for Cities, the Global Protocol for Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas Inventories (GPC), CDP reporting structures, EU climate monitoring frameworks and various forms of territorial carbon accounting and climate budgeting methodologies.

Greater alignment across methodologies and approaches remains important. At the same time, the Climate City Contract process provides a shared space for municipalities to compare approaches, discuss system boundaries and data limitations, and learn from one another. This collective learning can gradually strengthen both consistency and the shared understanding needed to interpret climate progress across different local contexts.

At the same time, collaborations with initiatives such as WWF's One Planet City Challenge (OPCC) have contributed to strengthening both data quality and the broader governance perspective on climate transition. Through these collaborations, municipalities are not only encouraged to monitor emission trajectories, but also governance structures, implementation strategies, citizen engagement, climate adaptation, financing approaches and long-term transition capacity.

Over time, climate analysis within the Climate City Contract process has therefore evolved from a relatively narrow focus on emissions inventories towards a broader governance-oriented understanding of transition monitoring. The current development therefore places particular attention on questions such as:

- how climate targets are integrated into governance and budgeting systems,
- how municipalities develop institutional capacity for long-term transition management,
- how climate investment logic and procurement structures evolve,
- how collaboration across governance levels is strengthened,
- and how collective learning and implementation capacity develop over time.

This points towards a broader monitoring perspective in which emissions outcomes are considered alongside changes in governance, implementation processes, institutional capacity, collaboration

and the distribution of transition benefits and impacts. The purpose is not necessarily to establish a fixed taxonomy of indicators, but to develop a more integrated understanding of whether the conditions and capacities required for sustained transformation are strengthening over time.

In this sense, the monitoring challenge is not only about measuring climate outcomes, but about understanding whether societies are developing the governance capacities required for long-term systemic transition that are sustainable and durable even under uncertain conditions.

This also points toward a broader shift in climate governance itself: from monitoring isolated projects and sectoral outputs towards understanding transformation as an ongoing societal process involving institutions, financing systems, governance relationships, collective learning and multilevel coordination.

The Climate City Contract process can therefore also be understood as part of an emerging international effort to develop more integrated frameworks for monitoring transformative capacity and governance progress in relation to climate transition.

From a practitioner perspective, this remains one of the most difficult and important questions in the Climate City Contracting process. We can increasingly observe changes in how municipalities organize, collaborate, finance and govern climate transition, but we still lack sufficiently robust ways of capturing these changes over time. What we are trying to make visible is, in many respects, the very transformation capacity that this paper seeks to describe.

Part IV – From National Innovation to International Relevance

14. From a national governance innovation system to international relevance

The governance challenges – and the growing need for governance innovation – that gave rise to the Climate City Contract process are not unique to Sweden. Across Europe and globally, increasing climate ambition has exposed a widening gap between political commitments and implementation capacity. While cities are expected to play a central role in delivering climate targets, governance systems often remain fragmented across institutional mandates, financing structures and governance levels.

In this context, the Swedish Climate City Contract model has gradually attracted international attention – not primarily because of individual climate solutions, but because of its attempt to operationalize mission-oriented multilevel governance in practice. The international relevance of the model lies less in replicating specific Swedish approaches, and more in demonstrating how governance systems can be organized to collectively build transformation capacity across levels, sectors and institutions.

The Swedish experience is, of course, shaped by its own institutional context, including municipal autonomy, established relationships between different levels of government and the long-term development of Viable Cities as a nationally funded innovation programme. What may be relevant in other contexts is therefore not necessarily the organizational model itself, but the underlying principles of recurring commitments, intermediary coordination, shared learning and collective implementation.

These governance discussions were also reflected in a series of early European collaborations connected to the EU Missions and urban transition governance. Through cooperation between Viable Cities, the Spanish CitiES 2030 platform and other European mission-oriented actors, joint reflections and policy proposals were developed and communicated to the European Commission concerning the need for stronger multilevel governance structures, intermediary capacities and implementation-oriented coordination for climate-neutral cities.[19]

The resulting *"Development Declaration"* emphasized that climate transition requires not only ambitious targets and technological innovation, but also new governance capacities capable of connecting cities, national governments, financing structures, citizens, businesses and European institutions around shared missions and long-term transformation processes. In many ways, these early discussions anticipated several of the governance questions that today have become increasingly central within European and global climate governance debates.

[19] Viable Cities, CitiES 2030 et al. (2023). *Development Declaration – towards stronger multilevel governance and mission-oriented coordination for climate-neutral cities.* Available at: Development Declaration

The declaration highlighted the need for integrated governance approaches connecting implementation capacity, financing, mission governance and urban transition processes across governance levels.

This growing focus on implementation capacity can increasingly be seen within emerging international climate governance discussions. A particularly important turning point became visible in connection with COP30 and the Local Leaders Forum in Belém, Brazil, where mayors, governors and local leaders representing more than 14,000 cities and regions collectively emphasized that climate transition can no longer be understood primarily as a national policy responsibility alone.[20]

The message emerging from Belém (and Rio) was clear: cities and regions are not merely implementers of national climate policy, but active political leaders, governance innovators and operational drivers of societal transformation. The outcome statements and political messaging from the forum highlighted the growing recognition that achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement depends on robust multilevel governance, stronger local implementation capacity and improved access to financing for local climate action.[21]

In many ways, this represents a broader shift within international climate governance itself – from a predominantly state-centric understanding of climate responsibility towards a more distributed governance model where national governments, cities, regions, public institutions, businesses and civil society increasingly operate as interconnected transition actors.

Similar developments can also be observed within the European Union. The EU Missions framework and the NetZeroCities platform increasingly emphasize experimentation, systems transformation and mission-oriented governance, while the emerging *"EU Agenda for Cities"* highlights cities as essential partners for delivering Europe's green, digital and social transitions.[22] The agenda explicitly recognizes that European policy objectives increasingly depend on stronger urban governance capacity, multilevel coordination and improved integration between local implementation and European policymaking.[23]

At the same time, discussions around "country platforms" within organizations such as WRI, CCFLA and international development finance institutions increasingly focus on how governance systems, financing structures and institutional partnerships can support integrated climate transition and help address the growing urban climate finance gap.

In this broader context, the co-ordination of the Swedish Climate City Contract process can be understood as part of an emerging international search for operational governance models capable of connecting climate ambition, financing, institutional coordination and implementation across governance levels.

[20] COP30 Local Leaders Forum, *A Message from Local Leaders to COP30*, Belém, 2025.
[21] ICLEI, UN Secretary-General António Guterres receives Joint Outcome Statement from local leaders at the COP30 World Leaders Summit, 2025.
[22] European Commission, *EU Agenda for Cities*, 2025.
[23] European Commission, *EU Agenda for Cities: Shaping Europe´s Urban Future,* 2025.

Part V – Beyond Climate Neutrality

15. From Multiple Benefits to Multiple Transformation Capacities

An important perspective in climate transition concerns what is often described as the multiple benefits, or co-benefits, of climate action. Measures primarily designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions can simultaneously contribute to improved public health, cleaner air, reduced energy costs, increased energy security, societal preparedness and resilience in times of crisis, conflict and disruption.

This perspective is important because it challenges the idea that climate transition should primarily be understood as a cost or as a narrowly defined environmental policy objective. Climate investments and transition measures can create value across several societal objectives simultaneously. Sustainable mobility can reduce emissions while improving health and accessibility. Energy-efficient buildings can lower emissions while reducing energy vulnerability and improving indoor environments. Nature-based solutions can contribute to carbon sequestration while strengthening biodiversity, climate adaptation and urban wellbeing.

Climate mitigation and adaptation – governing interdependencies

A particularly important dimension of the broader climate transition concerns the relationship between climate mitigation and climate adaptation. The two have developed as partly distinct fields, with different objectives, knowledge bases, institutional responsibilities, time horizons and forms of intervention. Whether they should become more closely integrated or continue as distinct but increasingly coordinated fields remains an important question. What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that they meet within the same societies, governance systems, public budgets, investment decisions and local communities.

The need for adaptation is also becoming increasingly urgent. The EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change aims to support European regions and communities in becoming climate resilient by 2030 through improved understanding of climate risks, development of adaptation pathways and implementation of innovative solutions. The European Commission explicitly notes that, despite efforts to reduce emissions and achieve climate neutrality, further warming is inevitable and increased preparedness is therefore necessary. At the same time, the Commission stresses that the feasibility and effectiveness of adaptation depend on the level of warming, making immediate and deep emissions reductions themselves fundamental to limiting future adaptation needs (European Commission, 2026).[24]

This interdependence creates a potentially growing governance and resource challenge. As climate impacts and extreme weather events intensify, increasing financial and institutional resources will be required for adaptation, preparedness, recovery and the protection of critical infrastructure, ecosystems and vulnerable populations. These investments are unavoidable and essential. Yet they will need to be mobilized at the same time as substantial investments are still required to accelerate

[24] European Commission. (2026). *EU Mission: Adaptation to Climate Change*. European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change

emissions reductions and transform energy, mobility, buildings, industry and other systems towards climate neutrality.

This raises an important question for long-term transition governance: *how can increasingly urgent adaptation and recovery needs be met without crowding out the resources, political attention and institutional capacity required for mitigation?* If growing climate impacts lead societies to direct an increasing share of available resources towards managing consequences rather than addressing underlying causes, insufficient mitigation could contribute to greater future climate impacts and, consequently, even greater adaptation needs. The challenge is therefore not one of choosing between mitigation and adaptation, but of maintaining the capacity to pursue both under increasing resource pressure.

At the same time, important opportunities exist to create synergies. Decisions concerning urban development, buildings, energy systems, mobility, land use and green and blue infrastructure can simultaneously affect emissions, climate vulnerability, biodiversity, public health, social equity and long-term economic resilience. The EU has increasingly recognized this mitigation–adaptation nexus. The Cities Mission and the Mission on Adaptation have, for example, established cross-mission collaboration focused on identifying co-benefits and strengthening links between climate neutrality and urban resilience. Importantly, this work recognizes both the value of stronger integration and the continued need to understand synergies and trade-offs between the two fields.

This development is also becoming tangible in Sweden. Within the EU Mission framework, SMHI, Viable Cities and RISE are jointly establishing **Adaptation Hub Sweden** as part of the European AdaptationHubs initiative. The Swedish hub builds on the three organizations' existing structures and aims to strengthen multilevel governance across climate mitigation and adaptation, involving actors at local, regional and national levels. SMHI describes the establishment of the national hub with Viable Cities as an ongoing initiative within Sweden's national climate adaptation work, while the EU Mission portal describes Adaptation Hub Sweden as a joint venture between SMHI and Viable Cities designed to facilitate multilevel governance across mitigation and adaptation.[25]

This creates an interesting next step for the governance infrastructure described in this paper. The question is not necessarily whether mitigation and adaptation should be merged into a single policy field, but how governance arrangements can enable them to reinforce rather than undermine each other as demands on financial, institutional and political resources increase. This requires the capacity to identify synergies and trade-offs, coordinate investment decisions across different time horizons, protect long-term mitigation capacity while responding to increasingly urgent adaptation needs, and make transparent and equitable decisions about how limited societal resources are allocated.

Seen in this way, the relationship between mitigation and adaptation provides a concrete example of the broader transformation capacity discussed in this paper. It requires institutions not only to deliver against several climate objectives, but to navigate their interdependencies, manage competing priorities and sustain long-term transformation while simultaneously responding to increasingly immediate consequences of climate change. *The capacity to govern several necessary*

[25] SMHI, 2026; MIP4Adapt, 2026

transformations at the same time – without allowing the urgent systematically to displace the transformative – may itself become an increasingly important dimension of societal transformation capacity.

The relationship between mitigation and adaptation also illustrates a broader governance challenge: societies increasingly need to pursue several interconnected objectives and transformations simultaneously, often under growing pressure on financial and institutional resources. The experience emerging from the Climate City Contract process therefore raises a further question.

What if the multiple benefits of climate transition are not limited to the outcomes of individual climate measures?

The transition process itself may also generate societal capacities that are valuable far beyond climate mitigation.

When municipalities strengthen their ability to coordinate across organizational and sectoral boundaries, develop long-term partnerships with businesses and civil society, integrate climate objectives into ordinary governance and budgeting, mobilize and redirect financial resources, collaborate across governance levels, and even country borders, and continuously learn and adapt, they are simultaneously developing institutional and relational capacities that can be mobilized in relation to other societal challenges.

Seen from this perspective, local transition arenas, multilevel coordination, system demonstrators, climate investment processes and the Joint Commitments between cities do more than accelerate climate action. They also create and *strengthen governance infrastructures for collective action*.

These infrastructures can contribute to institutional capacity, collaborative leadership, trust, strategic foresight, implementation capability, innovation capacity and the ability to coordinate action under conditions of complexity and uncertainty.

This becomes particularly relevant in a period characterized by multiple and increasingly interconnected societal challenges. Climate change interacts with biodiversity loss, geopolitical instability, demographic change, technological disruption, economic uncertainty, growing inequalities, pressures on democratic institutions and increasing demands for preparedness and societal resilience.

These challenges are clearly different in character and cannot simply be treated as manifestations of the same problem. Yet many of them expose similar weaknesses in contemporary governance systems: fragmented responsibilities, institutional silos, short political and financial time horizons, difficulties in coordinating across governance levels and sectors, and limited capacity for collective action under conditions of uncertainty.

This raises a potentially more fundamental question.

Are we observing not only multiple benefits from climate transition, but the emergence of multiple transformation capacities?

If the governance capacities developed through climate transition can be mobilized across different societal challenges, the value of mission-oriented climate governance may extend considerably beyond the original mission itself.[26]

The capacity to establish shared direction, coordinate across institutional boundaries, mobilize actors and resources, experiment under real-world conditions, learn collectively, manage competing objectives and continuously adapt governance structures is not inherently climate-specific. These are capacities for navigating societal transformation more broadly.

This does not mean that governance models developed for climate transition can simply be transferred to other policy challenges. Nor does it suggest that climate transition should become a vehicle for solving every societal problem. Different challenges involve different actors, conflicts, knowledge systems and institutional conditions.

Rather, the Climate City Contract experience raises the possibility that mission-oriented climate transition can function as a practical arena in which societies develop more general capacities for collective transformation.

From this perspective, the concept of multiple benefits can potentially be extended from the outcomes of climate action to the capacities created through the process of transformation itself.

The question then shifts from:
"What additional benefits can climate action generate?" towards a broader question:

"What capacities are societies developing through climate transition – and what else might those capacities enable them to navigate?"

Reflections

This question also connects back to my own professional experience. Having worked with sustainable development since the Agenda 21 era, I have seen successive frameworks, strategies and policy ambitions emerge in response to increasingly interconnected societal challenges. What feels different in the current phase of the Climate City Contract process is that the focus is gradually shifting from coordinating individual sustainability objectives towards developing the institutional capacity to navigate transformation itself.

This leads me to wonder whether one of the most important long-term outcomes of climate transition may be something we have not yet learned to measure: societies becoming better equipped to collectively navigate complexity, uncertainty and change.

This perspective also introduces a more fundamental political and societal dimension to climate transition. In a period of interconnected crises and profound technological, ecological and geopolitical change, the challenge is not only how societies can achieve climate neutrality, but what kind of societies they seek to become through the transition – and whether their governance systems are developing the collective capacity required to navigate an increasingly uncertain future.

[26] European Commission. (2023). *EU missions assessment report.* European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. EU missions assessment report

In this sense, transformative climate governance may have a dual significance: enabling the transition towards climate neutrality while simultaneously strengthening society's capacity for transformation itself.

16. An Emerging Governance Infrastructure for Transformation

What gradually emerges through the Climate City Contract process is not only a governance model for climate transition, but something closer to an evolving operating governance system for societal transformation - from both a multilevel as well as a polycentric perspective.[27]

An increasingly important insight from the process is that many of the coordination methods, relational structures and collaborative practices developed within Viable Cities appear capable of adapting across governance levels and institutional contexts. Similar logics reappear in different forms: Climate City Contracts are translated into local transition arenas, Transition Lab methodologies into regional collaborations, while Climate Breakfasts, CityLabs and peer-learning approaches spread into new settings.

This suggests that transformation capacity may depend less on replicating centralized institutional models and more on enabling principles, relationships and collaborative practices to evolve across scales and contexts. In this sense, the emerging operating system is relational, adaptive and potentially fractal – connecting with broader ideas of polycentric and adaptive governance.

From this perspective, governance innovation itself increasingly appears relational, adaptive and potentially fractal.

While “fractal governance” is used here primarily as an analytical metaphor, it resonates with broader theories of polycentric governance, adaptive governance and multilevel transition management, where similar coordination logics evolve recursively across interconnected governance systems.

The Climate City Contract process may therefore point toward a broader shift in how societal transformation is organized – from isolated projects and sectoral governance toward continuously evolving governance infrastructures capable of supporting long-term collective transition under conditions of complexity, uncertainty and interdependence.[28]

17. Beyond climate neutrality – towards governance models for broader societal transformation

Finally, an important question emerges from the experience of Viable Cities, the Climate City Contracting process and the coordination function: can this mission-oriented governance approach also be applied to other complex societal challenges linked to a sustainable future?

[27] Pereverza, Rohracher & Kordas (2025). *Fostering Urban Climate Transition Through Innovative Governance Coordination.* Environmental Policy and Governance.
[28] Ostrom, E. (2010). *Polycentric systems for coping with collective action and global environmental change*. Global Environmental Change, 20(4), 550–557; Folke, C. et al. (2005). *Adaptive Governance of Social-Ecological Systems*. Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 30, 441–473; Loorbach, D. (2010). *Transition Management for Sustainable Development.* Governance, 23(1), 161–183.

The experience so far suggests that it can.

While the Climate City Contracting process has focused on climate-neutral and sustainable cities, many of the underlying governance challenges are not unique to climate transition alone. Questions related to social inequality, public health, resilience, democratic participation, integration, preparedness and long-term societal wellbeing are similarly characterized by fragmentation across sectors, governance levels and institutional mandates.

In this sense, the process also reconnects to the original systemic and indivisible logic of Agenda 2030.[29] The strength of the Sustainable Development Goals lies precisely in their interconnectedness – but this has also proven to be one of their greatest governance challenges. The question has never only been what societies need to achieve, but how collective mobilization, coordination and long-term implementation can actually be organized across increasingly complex governance systems.

The experience from Viable Cities suggests that mission-oriented multilevel governance may offer one possible response to this challenge. Through iterative coordination, shared directionality, intermediary structures, collaborative arenas, institutional learning and distributed transformation capacity, the process has gradually developed practical methods for mobilizing societal actors around long-term transition.[30]

The experience from Viable Cities also suggests that long-term societal transformation increasingly requires new forms of intermediary governance structures capable of connecting actors, governance levels, financing systems and institutional learning over time.

In this perspective, the coordination function developed within the Climate City Contracting process may point toward *a broader need for development hubs for transformative societal initiatives* – not only in relation to climate transition, but also for addressing other complex societal challenges linked to resilience, equity, preparedness and sustainable development.

An important insight from this work is that governance innovation itself may also function fractally. Many of the methods, relational structures and collaborative practices developed within the national platform have gradually been translated and reproduced across governance levels and institutional contexts – from national coordination structures to regional collaborations, local Climate City Contracts, citizen engagement arenas and cross-sectoral transition processes.[31]

This perspective also aligns increasingly with emerging European and global governance discussions, including the EU's evolving Agenda for Cities[32], CHAMP[33] and growing international recognition of cities and local actors as essential partners in delivering climate neutrality, resilience and broader societal transformation. The recent nine-year evaluation of Viable Cities further highlights the

[29] United Nations (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.*
[30] Loorbach, D. (2010). *Transition Management for Sustainable Development: A Prescriptive, Complexity-Based Governance Framework.* Governance, 23(1), 161–183./ Mazzucato, M. (2018). *Mission-Oriented Research & Innovation in the European Union.*
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[32] European Commission (2025). *EU Agenda for Cities.*
[33] CHAMP – Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships for Climate Action (COP28/COP30 framework documents)/ *A Message from Local Leaders to COP30*, Belém, 2025.

programme's contribution in developing governance innovation, multilevel coordination and mission-oriented implementation capacity across Swedish cities and institutions.[34]

Beyond its shared climate objectives, the European Cities Mission is also creating a community of practice across cities, national platforms, researchers and institutions, strengthening relationships, trust and collaboration across national boundaries. In a period of growing geopolitical uncertainty, these institutional and relational capacities may have significance beyond climate action, contributing to societal preparedness, resilience and the ability to respond collectively to crises and disruption. In this sense, the European mission may not only accelerate climate neutrality, but also strengthen Europe's capacity to navigate uncertainty and change together.

Looking back at the development of Climate City Contract 2030, one of the most important insights is that accelerating climate transition is not only about setting ambitious targets or identifying the right solutions. It is also about developing the collective capacity to turn ambitions into action. Through recurring commitments, multilevel coordination, local transition arenas, Joint Commitments, system demonstrators and shared learning, the process has gradually contributed to an emerging governance infrastructure that connects actors, institutions, resources and implementation across governance levels. How effectively this infrastructure contributes to actual emissions reductions and wider societal outcomes remains an important question for continued learning, analysis and evaluation.

At the same time, I believe that what we are developing may have a significance that extends beyond climate neutrality. The relationships, institutional capacities and forms of collaboration built through the climate transition are not necessarily limited to one mission or one policy area. They may also help us navigate other complex societal challenges – from climate adaptation and preparedness to social sustainability and resilience. This is not something we can simply assume, but a possibility worth exploring and testing further.

Looking towards 2030 and beyond, another fundamental question emerges: how do we ensure that the capacities, relationships and ways of working developed through this process can be sustained over time? Programmes, funding periods and political priorities change, while the need for collective transformation capacity will remain. This raises important questions about long-term institutional ownership, mandates, resources and the ability to maintain and further develop the governance infrastructure that has gradually emerged.

The challenge now is to develop and sustain our collective ability to make that change happen – across institutions, sectors, governance levels and generations. In that sense, the Climate City Contracting process may represent not only one response to Agenda 2030, but also part of an emerging governance approach for what comes beyond it.

/ Charlotte G Brynielsson, Stockholm, 26 October 2026

[34] Vinnova (2026). *Nioårsutvärdering Viable Cities – en plattform för klimatomställning i svenska städer.*

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A note on the development of this paper

This paper originated in my writings and reflections, drawing on Climate City Contracts, programme reports, analyses and documentation developed within Viable Cities, primarily between 2022 and 2026. I am grateful to my colleagues and subject-matter experts within the Viable Cities programme team for their valuable comments, insights and contributions to the development of this paper. AI tools were used to support the compilation and analysis of Climate City Contracts, as well as the editing, structuring and linguistic refinement of the manuscript. The interpretations and conclusions presented remain my own.