

Collaborating towards a Horizon Europe mission on climate-neutral cities by and for citizens – how do we ensure smartness?

On 4 December, Lärosäten Syd – the network of Universities in South Sweden – together with the other south Swedish Brussels offices – Skåne European Office, Småland Blekinge Halland South Sweden, Skåne Association of Local Authorities and City of Malmö EU Office – co-organised a policy event in Brussels to present the main wishes and expectations of south Swedish actors on the Horizon Europe mission on cities, as well as to discuss with European partners the main recommendations for the implementation of the mission.

The following points summarise the discussions between the speakers, the respondents and the audience. They should not be interpreted as an official position of the organisers, but rather a recount of the main points raised which found general agreement in the room.

- The mission should refer to climate neutral cities – a short and clear mission to facilitate a clear commitment. Smartness is an enabler for climate neutrality. Climate neutrality is the most useful concept to frame the idea behind the mission. The mission should recognise the co-benefits coming from climate-neutrality.
- The mission should target all sizes of cities, including small and medium-sized ones, as well as metropolitan regions.
- It is vital to involve students in research, and universities have an important role in building capacity for the future through for example MOOCs and exchange programmes between academia and cities.
- To fully involve citizens, it is important to consider the design of participatory processes carefully, to be aware of who we invite to participate and the method of participation – from consultation, collaboration, coordination and co-design. Universities have an important role to play in facilitating this process, for example in mapping and critically analysing the target group to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable are not left behind during rapid societal transitions.
- ‘Smartness’ does not only need to be technology-driven. Urban green spaces is a well-documented response to many contemporary urban challenges. Smart is also to allow long-sighted thinking (e.g. to work with nature instead of against it), and to work with engagement to set the necessary goals and create a partnership where nature is allowed to inspire our governance system in cities – a governance system that is holistic, cross-disciplinary and long-sighted.
- There is a real risk that any gains in the selected climate neutral cities may be lost through carbon emission increases resulting from other funding streams (i.e. funding outside the focus area of the mission) – for example highway construction that induces vehicular traffic and sprawling cities. The success of the missions must be considered in the context of wider planetary climate-neutrality.
- Transport is a difficult area to decarbonise. Substituting internal combustion engines for electric vehicles will help reduce vehicle emissions, but will not address the long distances, high embodied energy of low density development. By contrast, planning for more compact urban patterns inherently better suits the climate-neutral city agenda – reducing vehicular travel demands, lowering embodied energy, and supporting efficient public transport.

- Predictive maintenance and district heating and cooling offer opportunities for energy savings and can be adapted to local and regional contexts.
- Local scientific policy advisory boards, as championed in Lund, is one example of how citizens can be meaningfully engaged in the transition to climate-neutrality.
- The mission must be transparent in the language it is using around costs. The transition will involve costs.
- Many cities in south Sweden have done all the ‘easy stuff’. Now it is the complicated things that are left to achieve. Accelerators will be needed and companies have a vital role to play here.
- National support systems are important. EU investment will create more value added and leverage and situations where there is a national and regional support system for the climate transition in place.

You can access the full presentations by our speakers here:

- [Future by Lund – Innovations for smart and sustainable cities of tomorrow](#) | Peter Kisch, Project Manager – Future by Lund, City of Lund
- [Helsingborg as a climate neutral and smart city 2035](#) | Jens Gille, Head of Environmental Strategic Department, City of Helsingborg
- [Building carbon neutral cities in collaboration – discussing the role of academia](#) | Lena Neij, Professor, International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics, Lund University
- [Strategic approaches to urban sustainability transitions](#) | Giles Thomson PhD, Department for Strategic Sustainable Development, Blekinge Institute of Technology (BTH)
- [Building smart cities through urban open space governance and management](#) | Thomas Barfoed Randrup, Professor in Urban Open Space Management, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)
- [Building smart cities & communities through predictive maintenance and district heating](#) | Kristian Widén, Associate Professor and Deputy Program Director Smart Cities and Communities, Halmstad University

For further information about the event and the collaboration in south Sweden, please contact:

- Rickard Eksten, Universities in South Sweden, rickard.eksten@fsi.lu.se
- Ylva Reisnert, Skåne European Office, ylva.reisnert@skane.eu

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UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH SWEDEN



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