

University of Gothenburg: School of Global Studies



## **No sustainability without participation**

*A case study of three transition labs in Gothenburg and citizens' role  
in the city's environmental and climate goals*

Noah Good

---

Bachelor thesis in Global Studies, Human ecology

Semester: Spring 2025

Supervisor: Merritt Polk

Word count: 13515

## Abstract

Mitigating the impacts of climate change has become a global responsibility where both nation states and local municipalities are tasked with contributing to a sustainable transition of society. Making citizens involved in this transition has the potential to accelerate this process and at the same make it more legitimate. This study aims to understand how transition labs in Gothenburg work with citizen participation and how participation can contribute to the city reaching its environmental and climate goals. To do this, a transdisciplinary approach has been utilised through a collaboration with civil servants at Gothenburg's Environmental administration. Context is provided by laying out previous research in participatory methods such as citizens' assemblies and urban living labs. This previous research shows a need to increase participation while remaining wary of potential problems relating to the legitimacy of participatory methods. A theoretical framework consisting of transitions theory, deliberative democracy and participatory democracy is used as a frame of reference when reviewing empirical data. Empirical data consists of qualitative interviews with six respondents from three different transition labs. The results of the study show that there is potential to increase participation in the city's sustainable transition and that the transition labs believe this would be favorable to help reach the environmental and climate goals. While this may be desirable, the study also shows a number of hindrances making participation less accessible.

Key words: Participation, Sustainability, Transition labs, Democracy, Gothenburg, Transdisciplinary.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the people who have made this study possible.

Thank you Merritt for being an excellent supervisor. Your feedback and guidance has been of the utmost value to my work over the last few months.

A big thank you to Mats, Nadia and Salomon at the Environmental administration for offering your assistance and practical experience. Lasty, thank you to the respondents who contributed with their unique knowledge and insights.

# Table of contents

Abstract.....	1
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of contents.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Aim.....	7
1.2 Research questions.....	7
1.3 Subject relevance.....	7
<b>2. Background and previous research.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Background.....	8
2.1.1 Gothenburg's environmental and climate goals.....	8
2.1.2 Community Center.....	10
2.1.3 Omställningslabbet.....	11
2.1.4 Fritidsbanken.....	11
2.2 Previous research.....	12
<b>3. Theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 Transitions theory and just transition.....	15
3.2 Democratic governance.....	17
3.2.1 Deliberative democracy.....	17
3.2.2 Participatory democracy.....	18
<b>4. Research design and method.....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 Research design.....	20
4.2 Transdisciplinary research.....	20
4.3 Empirical method.....	21
4.3.1 Selection of respondents.....	21
4.3.2 Interviews.....	22
4.4 Analytical method.....	23
4.5 Validity, reliability and ethical considerations.....	24
<b>5. Results and analysis.....</b>	<b>26</b>
5.1 Participation through experimentation and co-creation.....	26
5.1.1 Making participation accessible.....	26
5.1.2 Experimentation in transition.....	29
5.2 Building relationships beyond city structures.....	32
5.2.1 Relationship between citizens and city.....	32
5.2.2 Struggles with city structures.....	35
<b>6. Discussion and conclusion.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>7. References.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>8. Appendix.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Interview guide.....	46

# 1. Introduction

Politics is currently a more all-encompassing entity than ever before, consisting of decision-makers representing a wide range of fields. The pursuit of solving the complex web of problems that a modern society faces relies on a great deal of collaboration between experts in these fields - and no current issue embodies this quite like that of the climate crisis. The last few decades have seen an array of international attention and agreements aimed at reducing global emissions. Even though the far reaching impacts of climate change are being felt across the world, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are 60% higher today than they were three decades ago (Stoddard, et al., 2021). The main goal of the Paris agreement, signed by 196 UN members in 2016, is to hold the increase in the global average temperature to “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” (United Nations, 2015. p.3). The latest report from The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that with current nationally determined contributions (NDC) it is likely that global warming will exceed 1.5°C before the end of the 21st century (IPCC, 2023). Evidently there is much room for improvement.

While politicians try to find solutions that can meet the goals of somewhat conflicting developmental principles, there seems to be a growing disconnect between the ordinary citizen and those who represent them in government (Vrydagh, 2023. p27). A way of mitigating this perceived disconnect has been to try and directly involve the ordinary citizen in policy-making. This can be done through methods such as *citizens' assemblies* (Muradova et al., 2020; Vrydagh, 2023). One such example is the recent *citizens' assembly* in Gothenburg which convened during 2024 to discuss the city's environmental and climate goals. Gothenburg's citizens' assembly was perceived by the participants as a successful way of discussing complex issues (Miljöförvaltningen, 2024). However, this method can be criticised as it can be seen to uphold existing power relations or as a way to legitimise predetermined policies (Vrydagh, 2023). Pateman (2012) argues that deliberative methods are central to all functioning democracies and that they are therefore necessary but not sufficient for a participatory democracy.

Swedish municipalities, like the city of Gothenburg, may be able to create the right conditions for a sustainable transition by exploring other ways of involving citizen participation. In 2021 the city of Gothenburg announced a new environmental and climate programme which is set

to guide a transition to an ecologically sustainable city in 2030 (Göteborgs Stad, 2021). This programme is in line with both national and international climate agreements but is nonetheless perceived as ambitious in a city facing a diverse range of problems. This issue of climate policies lacking public support is increasingly common when public discourse is directed toward more visible issues like the economy, crime, or education. According to Castan Broto (2017), there has been a shift from global cooperation to more localised transitions since COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009. She argues that more responsibility now lies with local governments and that participation is an important part of effective local governance for transition (Castan Broto, 2017). The geographical scale of the environmental and climate crisis can make it feel remote, and international agreements can give people the impression that their actions cannot make a difference. This is especially true when democracy in Sweden only involves voting every four years (or every two years with EU elections). More decentralised local government can be a way of strengthening democracy by bringing citizens closer to decision-making (Hysing, 2013). Given the right conditions, more people feeling involved in the transition may lead to a stronger sense of collective agency.

For many it has become increasingly clear how problematic it can be to separate the ecological and social aspects of climate change adaptation. This separation is compatible with technological linear development, such as green growth, which characterises today's view of transition (Warlenius, 2022). Eckersley (2021) exemplifies this by pointing to a scenario where a capitalist growth driven green energy transition likely leads to increased material consumption, emissions and waste generation in other sectors. This problem is shaped by who is seen as the main driving force behind a sustainable transition. As is often the case today, a strong emphasis on government institutions and industry solving the transition by themselves can lead to a separation of these interconnected elements in sustainable transitions. If, instead, emphasis is placed on just transition, it quickly becomes apparent that the ecological and social aspects are two sides of the same coin. That is, a just future is shaped by citizen participation (Fainstein, 2014. p.3). The way in which sustainable transitions are structured and articulated can open up pathways to new forms of democratic management and societal innovation (Eckersley, 2021). Open transition labs may be a forum for participation that can create a broader discussion in the city about who is helping to create the future Gothenburg. If these transition labs can foster a sense of agency, this could in turn lead to broader collective action on reaching Gothenburg's environmental and climate goals.

The existence of these physical transition labs in Gothenburg is a good start, but Castan Broto (2017) also argues that successful experiments need to be integrated into the city's regular activities. This is required because experiments “need maintenance and repairs to function for relatively long periods of time” (Castan Broto, 2017. p.10). These transition labs can also be compared to Urban Living Labs (ULLs), which are a kind of instrument for participation in sustainable urban planning. Von Wirth et al. (2019) describe ULLs as places in cities that enable stakeholders to design, test and learn from socio-technological innovations in real time. In these places shared learning is at the center (Von Wirth et al., 2019). The difference between having a participatory democracy and a deliberative democracy is simply that, in the former, citizens are given the opportunity to help create the future in their everyday lives instead of just talking about it when invited by conventional democratic institutions (Pateman, 2012). This suggests the conditions for a just transition in Gothenburg may lie in developing a common vision of the future and making it a reality together through participation.

## 1.1 Aim

This study sets out to examine the way in which local transition labs in Gothenburg work to involve citizens in the city's sustainable transition. The aim is also to explore how citizen participation can be a tool for sustainable urban transitions. The perspective of transition labs on this way of operating may be a useful insight into future improvements for similar projects. While this study is focused on three specific labs, the aim is to provide a holistic background that will serve as a meaningful frame of reference when analysing results. Every city faces unique challenges, and this study seeks to understand those faced by people working to make Gothenburg a more sustainable and inclusive city.

## 1.2 Research questions

- What types of citizen participation are used in Gothenburg's transition labs?
- In what ways can citizen participation in transition labs enhance the city's work with sustainable transition?
- What needs and limitations exist within the current scope of transition labs in Gothenburg?

## 1.3 Subject relevance

The field of human ecology seeks to understand the complex relationship of humans and their surroundings (McGregor, 2020). However, the scale of these relationships can range from a farmer and his crops to governments and large urban environments. The ways humans transform and use their environments have a long lasting effect, none more far reaching than those causing climate change. It is therefore evident that the ways in which we choose to tackle climate and environmental change are something that concerns the field of human ecology. People who study human ecology are not only interested in understanding how these relationships are realised but also in improving them by making it a more just and equitable exchange (Dyball & Newell, 2023). As a result it is not only the question of how, but also who, that concerns a study with a human ecology perspective. The issue of mitigating the effects of climate change is truly global, meaning every country, city, and person must do their part. This does not, however, entail an equal distribution of responsibility.

## 2. Background and previous research

In this section a background of Gothenburg's environmental and climate goals and the city's work toward sustainable transition will be presented. This is followed by a short introduction of the three transition labs that are the focus of this study. Subsequently, previous research of participation in sustainable transitions will be discussed.

### 2.1 Background

#### 2.1.1 Gothenburg's environmental and climate goals

In 2021 Gothenburg unveiled a new environment and climate programme set to guide the city toward being an ecologically sustainable city by 2030. As stated, the programme's focus lies in the ecological dimension of sustainable development, but it also acknowledges the fact that the three dimensions (ecological, social and economic) are indivisible and interconnected (Göteborgs stad, 2021). The programme is divided into three main goals; “Gothenburg has a high level of biodiversity”, “Gothenburg's carbon footprint is close to zero”, “Citizens have a healthy living environment” (Göteborgs stad, 2021. p.10). Within the programme there are seven strategies that the city<sup>1</sup> works with to reach the goals. This study will focus on the two strategies that are most relevant to citizens’ participation in reaching these goals, namely *Vi agerar som föregångare* (we act as pioneers) and *Vi skapar förutsättningar för att leva hållbart* (we create conditions for sustainable living) (Göteborgs stad, 2021). Every other year the Environmental administration (EA) follows up this programme with a report on progress made and recommendations for improvements. The latest report from 2023 shows that the city is moving in the right direction, but too slowly (Miljöförvaltningen, 2023).

Alongside the environmental and climate goals, the city has its own goals for making Gothenburg more equitable. *The City of Gothenburg's programme for an equitable city 2018-2026*, aims to create conditions for participation, influence and trust (Göteborgs stad, 2018). Gothenburg is a segregated city where, for example, participation in elections can vary immensely in different geographical areas. This programme aims to combat this issue but also to increase participation in society outside of parliamentary politics, such as in civil society. This is vital in order to foster a sustainable transition where grassroots can play an important

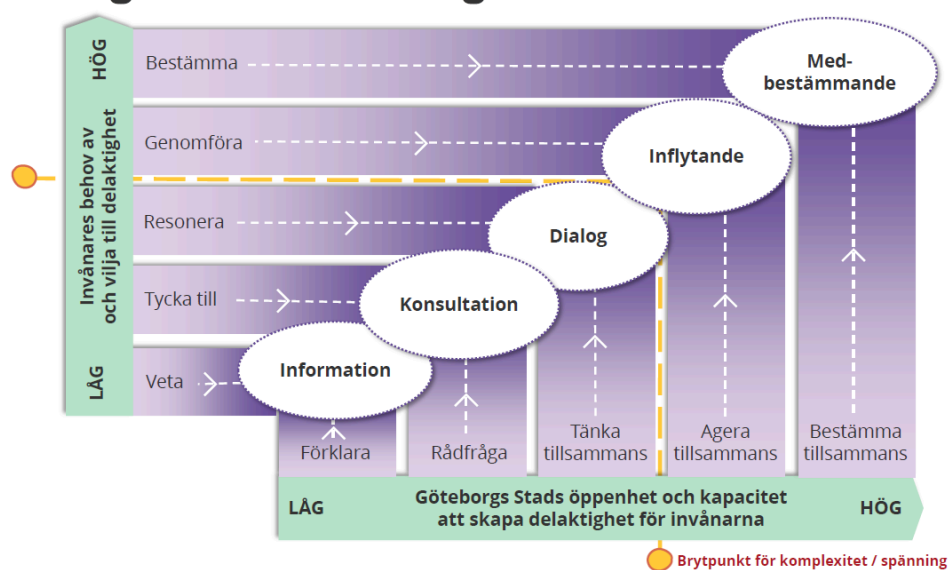
---

<sup>1</sup> When *the city* is used in this way the author is referring to the municipality and its employees at the local administrations, as well as publicly owned companies.

part. To support grassroots participation the city wants to help establish citizen-driven meeting places (Göteborgs stad, 2018).

Figure 1 shows a diagram which guides municipal participation initiatives by explaining the underlying meaning of relations between citizens and the municipality. Inspired by Sherry Arnstein's *Ladder of Participation* (1969), the diagram shows five levels of participation; Information, Consultation, Dialogue, Influence, Co-determination (Demokrati och medborgarservice, 2025). The y-axis shows from 'low' to 'high' citizens' need and willingness to participate. The x-axis on the other hand shows the municipality's openness and capacity to create conditions for participation (Demokrati och medborgarservice, 2025). The dotted yellow line is used to signify how there is a breakpoint for complexity and tension between dialogue and influence. These municipal initiatives show that there is room for citizens to actively participate in reaching the sustainability goals (Demokrati och medborgarservice, 2025; Göteborgs stad, 2018; Göteborgs stad, 2021).

## Göteborgs Stads Delaktighetskarta



Hållbar stad – öppen för världen

Figure 1. Göteborgs delaktighetskarta (Participation map). (Demokrati och medborgarservice, 2025)

This study is conducted in the context of the city's work with sustainable transition. It is based on both my experiences during my internship at Gothenburg's EA and previous work done there. This previous work is related to a FORMAS-funded project named *Governance for an equitable and inclusive climate transition in Gothenburg*. The first part of the project in 2023

was an academic study that aimed to strengthen the City of Gothenburg's ability to implement an inclusive and equitable climate transition through collaboration between city officials and researchers. The goal was to develop the city's transitional capacity by identifying barriers and opportunities to an equitable and inclusive climate transition in Gothenburg (Miljöförvaltningen, 2025). The results showed, amongst other things, that clear synergies between environmental and social sustainability are not being utilised (Miljöförvaltningen, 2025). Following this, EA submitted a new application (September 2024) to continue work on developing cooperation between existing transition labs to strengthen collaboration and learning within the city. The three selected transition labs are Community center, Omställningslabbet and Fritidsbanken. These labs work in different ways but are all innovative and strengthen citizens' participation in the city's sustainable transition. However, this new application was not granted. I have therefore worked together with civil servants, during my internship, to develop a basis for a new application through interviews with representatives from these three places.

### **2.1.2 Community Center**

Community Center (CC) is an activities based meeting place for residents of a local area in northern Gothenburg. The vision for the meeting place is to increase participation and trust in society, and between people in the local community (James, respondent). The aim is to co-create a meeting place together with civil society, business and public sector actors. At Socialförvaltningen (Social services) there is a committee that meets four times a year to plan and discuss new projects. They are given a lot of freedom to experiment with different activities and to listen to what residents want to do. Apart from experimenting there are a number of day-to-day activities, such as language café, parent meetings and various physical activities. During the summer months larger events, like food festivals, are made possible with the help of volunteering residents. Since opening three years ago the Community Center has been run and financed by Socialförvaltningen, with support from the real estate companies Bostadsbolaget and Stena (James, respondent). The Center has one full time employee who is employed as a development manager.

### **2.1.3 Omställningslabbet**

Omställningslabbet is open for a variety of civil society actors to use the area as a safe space to experiment with sustainability solutions. The Lab promotes dialogue between planners and users, giving citizens the opportunity to influence the development of the site. Through this methodology they aim to accelerate sustainable urban development (Fiona, respondent). After the first phase of the project there was a flurry of activity during the city's 400 year anniversary. This was then followed by a lull until 2024 when The Urban Environment administration (Stadsmiljöförvaltningen), who had been present there for a few years, established a partnership with KES (Kollaborativ Ekonomi Sverige). This collaboration was made possible through an IOP-agreement (Idéburet Offentligt Partnerskap [public-private partnership]). This form of agreement is based on a collaboration between the public sector and non-profit organisations. It can be used when both parties see a need for concrete cooperation to solve a particular social challenge (Göteborg, n.d.). Omställningslabbet (The Transition Lab) started as a Vinnova-financed project within a collaboration between Älvstranden Utveckling and the City Planning Office (Stadsbyggnadskontoret) (Fiona, respondent). Then there was a reorganisation and this project was handed over to the Development administration (Exploateringsförvaltningen), but The Urban Environment administration (Stadsmiljöförvaltningen) is now responsible for its implementation.

### **2.1.4. Fritidsbanken**

Fritidsbanken is one of the country's fastest-growing organisations in the circular economy (Tim, respondent). They describe themselves as a library, but for sports and outdoor equipment where you can borrow equipment for an active leisure time. There are four full time employees who work in the shop and approximately one full time position filled by part-time employees. One person is also employed to work externally with collaboration and marketing. Their main task is to collect reused equipment and lend out reused equipment, but they also have ambitions of being a place for events and meetings to discuss sustainability (Tim, respondent). This specific branch of Fritidsbanken is one of many in Sweden and is organised under Gothenburg's Social services. They used to be run by a non-profit organisation until the municipality took over the day to day operations. Fritidsbanken is funded by the city council and in part also by Västra Götalands Regionen, the regional administration (Tim, respondent).

## 2.2 Previous research

As previously discussed, participation in sustainable transitions can manifest itself through several methods or practices. This section on previous research will compare Urban living labs and Citizens' assemblies, and lay out the pros and cons of these participatory methods in order to provide context for the present study. A comparison is relevant with regard to the two methods both being used in the city of Gothenburg.

While a transition lab can be a myriad of different types of organisation, a helpful frame of reference within academia can, as previously stated, be the term Urban Living Labs (ULL). The concept of ULLs is relevant to this study as they have contributed to the dispersal of more sustainable structures, cultures, and ways of doing things differently in cities by creating space for participation and experimentation (Von Wirth et al., 2019). There are several adjacent terms that are also used, such as; sustainability lab, change lab, city lab, and design lab (McCrorry et al., 2022; Afacan, 2023). Scholl et al. (2017) integrated knowledge of different labs and developed the following core principles of sustainable and inclusive urban labs. These eight principles are: aligning agendas; fostering plurality; finding a position; building the organisation; experimenting all the way; maximizing learning; creating public value and continuing labbing (Scholl et al., 2017; Afacan, 2023). To summarise, the principles emphasise the importance of bringing together a wide range of actors with different backgrounds, sectors, work practices and professions with shared objectives (Scholl et al., 2017; Afacan, 2023). They also highlight how shared learning is created through experimentation which is “neither close to the local administration nor remain at a distance.” (Afacan, 2023. p.3). These terms are all relevant to the present study as they align with what Gothenburg's EA, and I, have chosen to call transition labs<sup>2</sup>. The three labs in this study are united by the fact that they are all open physical places in an urban environment where people from different backgrounds can meet to explore different ways of sustainable living.

Mukhtar-Landgren et al. (2019) study four examples of ULLs to analyse how urban governance can be used to enable participation in sustainability. In their study of two ULLs from Sweden and two from the Netherlands it is concluded that “the municipality is a key actor because of its legitimate position in the local context, its trustworthiness in research applications, and its role in highlighting priorities for the city through urban visions.”

---

<sup>2</sup> Translated from the Swedish term *Omställningsplats* used at EA.

(Mukhtar-Landgren, et al., 2019. p.728). These examples show how enabling experimentation is key to promoting participation, but also that ULLs bear a responsibility to guide participants from being perceived as mere service users to being conceptualised as more engaged co-creators. Diaz-Sarachaga and Sánchez-Cañete (2024) examined several ULLs operating in the city of Madrid to ascertain their contribution to the attainment of the Spanish Urban Agenda. The results of their study show a general lack of engagement in ULLs which hindered any form of meaningful contribution to sustainable urban development (Diaz-Sarachaga and Sánchez-Cañete, 2024). In general there seems to be a missing link between ULLs and decision-making which can lead to experiments not gaining the necessary traction to impact policy.

The term citizens' assembly (CA) originates from the political subfields of democratic innovations and deliberative democracy (Vrydagh, 2023). The term does not imply a strict definition and is broadly used as a “generic term for all participatory institutions which brings together an inclusive group of lay citizens who deliberate together on a public issue so as to exert a public influence.” (Vrydagh, 2023. p29). It is often government spending which sponsors these programmes and as a result the subject of discussion is chosen and monitored by this local or national government (Pateman, 2012. p.8). As inclusion is an important aim in these forms of deliberation, the process of choosing participants can not be completely random. The commissioning body must ensure that no affected group is excluded (Pateman, 2012).

Although the concept of *citizens' assemblies* has been discussed since the 1990s there had not yet been an abundance of practical examples until the 2010s (Vrydagh, 2023). Two recent examples are the Irish citizens' assembly of 2016 (Muradova et al., 2020) and the 2020 climate citizens' assembly of Kawasaki, Japan (Mori & Yoshida, 2024). These projects were both successful in bringing together a group of ordinary citizens to discuss climate policy and turning these discussions into suggestions for public servants. There are, however, valuable lessons to be learned from these examples. In the context of issues such as climate change there is still a need for a dialogue between experts and the participants in the CA. The Irish example, though a great success, found that the increased information provided for the participants did not always have the desired effects (Muradova et al., 2020). This method relies heavily on the individual being able to absorb the expertise being conveyed to them.

The Kawasaki assembly encountered a few difficulties along the way, one of which being collective decision making. In total the assembly provided 77 recommendations leading to concerns that the result was “too numerous, and too dispersed to generate impacts” (Mori & Yoshida, 2024. p103). As a result they convened once more after this to look over the results but “no collective decision was taken” at this meeting (Mori & Yoshida, 2024).

Both ULLs and Citizens’ assemblies serve important democratic functions in urban environments. The two methods present a range of possibilities and challenges. In different ways they aim to govern through enabling participation. ULLs do this in a more dynamic way which lets citizens experiment with co-creation in a way which they deem fit. Citizens’ assemblies on the other hand do this in a much more controlled and organised fashion by facilitating public deliberation. ULLs can therefore enable the formation of niches that aim to challenge dominant narratives, yet as previously stated they may find it hard to do so without support from inside administrative structures. Citizens’ assemblies have proved more fruitful when it comes to producing policy recommendations (Vrydagh, 2023). However, the problem here lies in the power of the facilitating body deciding on the agenda and what to do with the outcomes. Both methods face issues of building knowledge in participants and whether to strive for consensus or not. These problems of deliberation, consensus and more will be discussed further in the next section.

### 3. Theoretical framework

#### 3.1 Transitions theory and just transition

This study will focus on transitions theory to provide a theoretical base to frame citizen participation and the ways it can contribute to sustainable transitions. The terms transition and transformation are often used interchangeably to refer to non-linear and non-incremental systemic change (Linnér & Wibeck, 2019. p.5). Transitions theory attempts to conceptualise the complex ways in which societies change and how these changes can be caused by different system levels interacting with each other (Linnér & Wibeck, 2019). A pioneer within sustainability transitions theory is René Kemp who was one of the first to consider environmental sustainability as a type of technological regime shift, or technological transition (Petrovic, 2024). Due to the necessary regime shift, a sustainable transition was for Kemp a gradual and slow process (Petrovic, 2024).

This regime shift can be hard to conceptualise but deploying a multi-level perspective of socio-technical transitions can make this clearer (Petrovic, 2024). A prominent example of the multi level perspective in transitions theory is presented through Geels' (2002) three-level structure of landscape, regime and niche (see figure 2). The landscape level refers to general societal trends or challenges which through socio-cultural and socio-ecological phenomena, such as climate change, form a context of social order (Geels, 2002; Linnér & Wibeck, 2019). From this level a base set of ideas, beliefs and feelings forming public opinion lead to lifestyles and socio-technical systems. The regime level refers to the connection of settled institutionalised systems that are shaped by industry, policy, technology, science, culture, market structures and user preferences (Öztekin & Gaziulusoy, 2020. p.202). To keep the regime settled it is stabilised and reaffirmed by itself when outside pressure from landscape or niche levels threatens to change the status quo. The fossil-fuel dependent energy sector, for example, delivers vital societal functions that create stability and counteract change (Warlenius, 2022. p.151). The third level, called the niche, is a space where alternative innovations of socio-technical configurations are developed (Petrovic, 2024). These can be local experiments which in their early phases are loosely or not at all connected to the regime (Öztekin & Gaziulusoy, 2020. p.202). Once a niche has established itself locally it is possible for it to take hold and destabilise the regime through spreading itself geographically or in the market (Warlenius, 2022). In an adjacent conceptualisation Loorbach proposes the Macro,

Meso and Micro system levels (Öztekin & Gaziulusoy, 2020). The main difference here being the overarching levels of these systems, landscapes and macro. In the case of Loorbach’s model the macro level refers more to socio-cognitive ideas and paradigms that shape our worldviews (Öztekin & Gaziulusoy, 2020), instead of the socio-ecological.

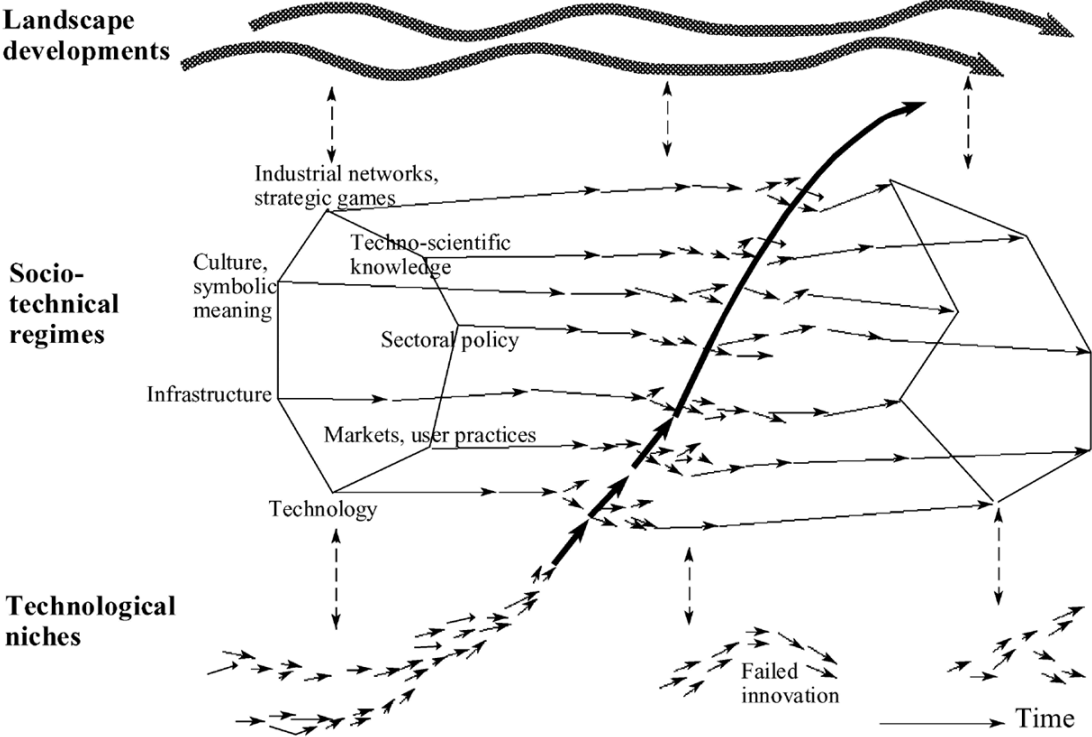


Figure 2. A dynamic multi-level perspective on technological transitions (Geels, 2002).

Just transitions encapsulate the need for rapid decarbonation while at the same time making sure this benefits, or at least does not harm, impoverished or vulnerable (Scoones et al., 2015). The concept of just transition is closely tied to that of environmental justice as they both focus on the inequity of environmental ‘bads’ (Schlosberg, 2013). An essential aspect of environmental justice discourse, according to Schlosberg (2013) is participation in addressing injustices. There has to be a deliberative dialogue with those who see their livelihoods threatened by decarbonation, and for these groups to feel included in the solutions (Linnér & Wibeck, 2019. p.160). The element of justice in just transitions is multidimensional and includes distributive, procedural, and restorative justice (Eckersley, 2021). A societal transition involves systemic disruption which can create room for human and ontological security can be addressed in new ways (Linnér & Wibeck, 2019). Achieving just transitions

requires new transformative learning processes that consider different social contexts and goals (Boström et al., 2018). The state is still recognised as being the main source of power in making a just transition possible through its capabilities to provide new infrastructure, compensation, and recognition of and responsibility for people affected (Eckersley, 2021).

## 3.2 Democratic governance

### 3.2.1 Deliberative democracy

Democracy is at its core a political system which allows people to influence the society they live in (Bächtiger et al., 2018). There are however different forms of democracy which dictate how the people can influence society. All democracies involve some degree of debate but the theory of deliberative democracy takes that a step further (Pateman, 2012). In the 1990s democratic theory took a turn toward more deliberative methods which represented renewed concern for democratic authenticity (Dryzek, 2000). In this theory deliberation is fundamental for decision-making and coming to a collective agreement on what the best way forward is becomes a key goal. Deliberative democracy evolved alongside philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls (Dryzek, 2000; Bächtiger et al., 2018) and their search for more just power relations. Deliberative democrats believe that an equal right of influence is important in legitimising decision-making (Bächtiger et al., 2018). This line of thought led to the ideal of a collective agreement, or consensus, which posits that the force of the better argument will prevail (Zakhour, 2020). Deliberative discussion should take place in what Habermas called the public sphere and be oriented toward “the common good” (Bächtiger et al., 2018. p.8). This common good may however risk an anthropocentric perspective which can disregard the value of a healthy environment. Public deliberation of climate change policy can open up for a conversation regarding ethics and morals that is sometimes excluded (Willis, Curato & Smith, 2022). This is important in order to avoid solely technological solutions that can come as a result of an expert driven transition.

Many critics of deliberative democracy express their concerns of it being a too idealistic theory which is not applicable to the reality of social hierarchies and power relations (Zakhour, 2020). One of the most acclaimed critiques comes from Chantal Mouffe who does not agree with Habermas’ idea that the goal of deliberation is consensus (Fainstein, 2014; Dryzek, 2006). Mouffe instead believes that there will always be disagreements in political

deliberation but that they should be encouraged (Dryzek, 2006). When referring to such positive disagreements between adversaries instead of enemies, Mouffe uses the term *agonisms* (Martin, 2013; Dryzek, 2006). The absence of visible disagreements in politics risks what Mouffe seeks to avoid, namely antagonistic relations which result from a lack of legitimate channels for dissenting voices (Machin, 2020).

Deliberative theories can also be criticised from an ecological perspective as the only entities that matter are those capable of engaging in dialogue, or in other words only human beings (Dryzek, 2000). Kronsell and Hildingsson (2022) express fears that deliberation may not be the most efficient form of ecological governance. It is claimed that these forms of deliberative governance risk unequal procedural access and that concepts such as co-creation rest on the consensus oriented view on change, making them inefficient (Linnér & Wibeck, 2019. p.138). This critique is aligned with Mouffe's views on unavoidable agonisms within democracy that could halt a much needed sustainable transition (Kronsell & Hildingsson, 2022). While democracy may currently be the best form of legitimate environmental governance, many environmental officials and experts express that contemporary representative systems require reform (Hysing, 2013). This could open doors for more participatory political systems, but environmental officials have historically favoured the empowerment of experts as opposed to empowering citizens (Hysing, 2013). Climate change and especially mitigating it is such a contentious issue that public deliberation on these far reaching policies can be a fruitless endeavour (Dryzek, 2006).

### **3.2.2 Participatory democracy**

Proponents of participatory democracy argue that there is a need for citizen participation to represent genuine opportunities to determine collective action with equal distribution of decision making power (Bächtiger et al., 2018). They argue that socio-economic inequalities determine the extent of opportunity, and that given the incentives and opportunities citizens could overcome the instrumental barriers to political participation (Bächtiger et al., 2018. p.189). Public participation can come in many forms and be varying in degrees of legitimacy. Sherry Arnstein (1969) has developed a model for categorising different types of participation which she calls *A ladder of citizen participation*. This model includes eight different types of participation, which in turn are divided into three different categories. The lowest category,

called *nonparticipation*, includes manipulation and therapy (Arnstein, 1969). These aim at educating or curing citizens and are, according to Arnstein, not valid forms of participation. The next category is labeled *degrees of tokenism*. This includes information, consultation and placation. These can contain a degree of valid participation but lack the power to drive real change. The highest category is called *degrees of citizen power* and includes partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Here, citizens have the power to turn their will into reality by negotiating or holding positions of power (Arnstein, 1969). An ambitious citizens' assembly, for example, could involve these legitimate forms of participation. However, for participants this method still risks reinforcing unequal power dynamics in relation to officials and politicians.

Rather than revitalising democracy, the actual delegation of power away from authorities onto marginalised groups has proven to be outliers when taking into account the wide variety of participatory practices being tested (Zakhour, 2020). However, as Arnstein's ladder plainly states, participation is a broad spectrum and the fact that a method is not ticking all boxes does not make it illegitimate. The aim with many participatory efforts is as Pateman (2012, p.10) puts it “democratising democracy”. That is to say opening up structures which hinder certain individuals from participating in decision making in their everyday lives (Pateman, 2012), and not only by casting their vote in elections. Some more organised forms of participation can be criticised due to them at times being seen as ways of neutralising resistance by funneling dissenting voices through bureaucratic systems, thus watering down their sentiments (Zakhour, 2020).

## 4. Research design and method

### 4.1 Research design

This is a qualitative study which seeks to understand the experiences and actions of respondents through semi-structured interviews. As opposed to quantitative research, which focuses on larger data sets, this study has relatively few respondents (Bryman, 2018. p.487). Although the results of the interviews will be the main data source, they will be viewed with help of relevant policy documents from the city of Gothenburg. Therefore the label of case study can be applied here through the focus on three specific transition labs in the wider context of the city's sustainable transition (Silverman, 2015. p.69). It could be argued that there is a degree of a mixed methods approach to research being applied as a result of the analysis through the aforementioned policy documents (Ritchie et al. 2014). Abduction is then used to understand the data collected. This method combines deduction and induction to take a more pragmatic approach to theory and data. By using a theoretical background of transitions theory, deliberative and participatory democracy I hope to create a holistic view on the questions of who and how the sustainability goals are reached. The study also deploys a transdisciplinary perspective, which is discussed further below.

### 4.2 Transdisciplinary research

A transdisciplinary approach can be taken to solve complex problems. This research method seeks to understand problems beyond a solely academic context. As opposed to interdisciplinary, which operates between academic disciplines, transdisciplinary (TD) research aims to involve other relevant stakeholders with different perspectives in knowledge production (Polk, 2014). The issue of sustainable transition in Gothenburg is an example of such complex problems which requires a wider perspective than that which is provided by a solely academic study. In order to conceptualise TD research methods Lang et al. (2012) develop a three phase model. Phase A defines the need for building a collaborative research team and for this team to work together on framing the selected real-world problem (Lang et al., 2012). Following this, phase B consists of co-creating solution-oriented and transferable knowledge and includes conducting the research agreed upon in phase A. Finally, in phase C the research team works together to re-integrate and apply the co-created knowledge (Lang et al., 2012). This model helps conceptualise TD research, but as Lang et al. (2012) also point out the actual process is not this linear and the model represents a simplified version of

reality. Without credible methods to guide TD research these studies may fall short in terms of reliability and validity when seen from a conventional research perspective, while also failing to provide relevant practical results for stakeholders (Lang et al., 2012).

This study applied a TD approach by close collaboration with the EA during an internship in order to present a holistic view on citizen participation in Gothenburg's sustainable transition. Both previous work done at the EA and my preparations during the internship laid the groundwork for this to be possible. Employees at the EA and I have jointly formulated the aim of this research and questions to respondents, thus providing an important practical perspective for this study. Respondents from the transition labs have been involved in the process from the start, not only through the interviews in this study. Though the EA have been the main driving force there has been a degree of joint ownership of the previous project. This can however, as Polk (2014) points out, lead to new problems related to scalability and knowledge transfer. For TD research to be successful there has to be a sense of joint responsibility that does not relegate non-academic sources to study objects (Polk, 2014). Civil servants at EA have, together with researchers and practitioners at the transition labs, participated in meetings and workshops to discuss both this study and future research on transition labs in Gothenburg. This TD process has resulted in shared responsibility where involved stakeholders have had their say throughout.

## 4.3 Empirical method

### 4.3.1 Selection of respondents

Due to the relatively small number of active employees working on the chosen transition labs a strictly purposive sampling method was used when selecting participants (Bryman, 2018. p.497; Ritchie et al. 2014). The criteria for this study is only the profession of the participants and therefore age, gender and experience did not influence selection. This was important as too narrow criteria may have led to a lack of participants due to the small number of relevant potential respondents. The aim was to interview at least 2 representatives from each transition lab. Even though this may seem like a small number of respondents it sufficed for this study due to the representatives having unique expertise regarding their own work. This study is intertwined with work at the EA and subsequently my internship there. For this reason there was, although minimal, some degree of previous contact with respondents. All respondents

were already familiar with the study’s main objectives. Respondents were asked to participate through email. In this email an explanation of the study was presented and also three main themes for the interviews, but no specific questions. This was done in order to let the respondents mull over the subject without formulating any exact answers beforehand.

**Table 1.** List of interview respondents (pseudonyms)

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Transition labs</b>
James	Community Center
Alice	Community Center
Fiona	Omställningslabbet
Liam	Omställningslabbet
Tim	Fritidsbanken
Jane	Fritidsbanken

### **4.3.2 Interviews**

To understand the experiences of the representatives of Community Center, Omställningslabbet and Fritidsbanken semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of them. Each transition lab was represented by two people who were interviewed jointly, resulting in three interviews and six respondents. As a part of the TD process an interview guide was developed together with civil servants at the EA. The questions were formulated to fit the aims of this study but also to mirror the knowledge needs of practitioners. This guide used both specific and open questions in order to navigate the interview, but plenty of room was left for the interviewee to answer as freely as they wished (Bryman, 2018. p.563). This interview guide was still sufficiently detailed to extract relevant and coherent answers (Bryman, 2018. p.565). To close off the interviews time was allocated for reflections and for the respondents to bring up anything they deem relevant. The length of the interviews varied with one lasting for 50 minutes, another for 1 hour, and one for 1 hour and 20 minutes. This was plenty of time for both general questions about each lab but also deeper reflections on participation in transition. During the process of conducting this research the aim of the study

has changed slightly resulting in some of the questions no longer being relevant. This has not prevented the interviews as a whole from still being relevant and respondents were made aware of the changes as they happened.

All three interviews were meant to take place in person but due to unforeseen circumstances one interview was conducted over Microsoft Teams. Meeting in person was preferable but conducting one interview online did not affect the study as both methods allowed for the same data collection. With the prior consent of all respondents, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. These recordings have aided the analysis without hindering the personal element of a qualitative interview (Bryman, 2018. p.577-579). A common problem with these chosen methods is that terms are not sufficiently defined and therefore create a disconnect or confusion (Boreus & Bergström, 2012. p.83). To avoid this, respondents were provided with definitions of potentially unclear terminology and continuously asked whether anything needed clarifying before they answered. For example, when referring to sustainability or transition it was necessary to define what this meant in the context of this study. A qualitative semi-structured approach was taken when conducting the interviews in order to understand individual experiences and perspectives (Bryman, 2018. p.564). This method also allowed for participants to answer freely and highlight what they deemed most important. The result of this was subjective opinions that can not be generalised to represent all such transition labs. As Silverman (2015. p.70) points out, case studies are however often an important base for further generalisation in later research.

#### 4.4 Analytical method

For analysis of the empirical data a thematic analysis was used. The transcriptions of interviews were sorted into themes and categories to make comparisons of experiences possible. The way these themes were identified varied and included recurring subjects across interviews, differing answers in interviews, and answers relating to previous research, theoretic framework and research aims (Bryman, 2018, p.702). These tools fit what Boreus and Bergström (2012. p.51) describe as a content analysis which is useful to find patterns in written material. Once the interviews were transcribed a systematic theme based sorting provided a base for this content analysis. These themes go beyond specific words and are instead based on sentiments expressed by respondents (Boreus & Bergström, 2012. p.85). This is done to see whether the participants share common experiences, but also whether the

individual interviews carry a common theme throughout (disappointment, approval, frustration, etc.). When identifying themes it is important to look for characteristics such as repetitions, metaphors, analogies and theoretical connection (Bryman, 2018. p.705). As the purpose of this study is to understand the respondents' knowledge of participation and sustainable transition in Gothenburg it is relevant to generate experiential themes that describe a lived experience (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021).

All interviews were conducted in Swedish due to this being the mother tongue of all respondents. After being transcribed they were then translated into English in order to make the data applicable to this study. Doing this can be problematic as some meaning may be changed slightly or lost in the process which could in turn affect the analysis. I have however deemed this necessary as conducting the interviews in English would have entailed another set of hurdles to overcome.

#### 4.5 Validity, reliability and ethical considerations

Validity, in this context, refers to the degree of accuracy a method measures what it is intended to measure. The study's aim and research questions relate to theory presented in the theoretical framework, thus ensuring its validity (Bryman, 2018). This is also backed by ample previous research which strengthens claims made in the present study. Moreover, working closely with employees at the EA through the TD process adds an extra layer of credibility. Respondents are experienced civil servants who are qualified to make judgements on the subjects discussed in the interviews. Together this makes for adequate internal validity, but for such qualitative research external validity can be questioned due to their tendencies to be case studies or to have limited sample size (Bryman, 2018). External validity refers to the degree to which a study can be generalised in other social environments or situations (Bryman, 2018. p.466).

When it comes to reliability this study can, as is the case with most qualitative research, be criticised for lacking reliability (Ritchie et al. 2014). Reliability refers to “the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions” (Silverman, 2015. p.83). Due to the small number of respondents this research can, and does not, present itself as representative of all people working with transition labs. However, as the study sets out to examine transition labs

in Gothenburg specifically this increases the reliability as this is not a wide field to generalise from the procured data. The method outlined above aims to provide an overview of this study's approach to both increase transparency and to facilitate replicability.

This study has strived to uphold a high level of transparency throughout the process, both in relation to respondents and readers. The aim of upholding a high level of transparency is to try to avoid making untrue or misleading statements. When trying to make accurate statements Silverman (2015) presents two kinds of errors that may occur. The first of those being “believing a statement is true when it is not”, and the second is rejecting a statement which, in fact, is true” (Silverman, 2015. p.90). To avoid misinterpreting or disregarding facts, the results section of this study relies heavily on quotes from respondents. By just paraphrasing the true meaning of respondents words can be lost or watered down. These quotes are in turn backed by my own analysis of the empirical data through the lens of the theoretical framework.

Due to this study dealing with interviews with respondents as a form of data collection it is important to consider the ethical implications (Ritchie et al. 2014). In regards to the respondents' anonymity no real names will be shared in the study and names appearing in the results have been changed to pseudonyms (Bryman, 2018. p.170). Any time where names appear in the transcribed interviews these will also be changed to preserve anonymity. The study as a whole is not however considered sensitive from an ethical standpoint, which is why no further anonymisation is required. Owing to the relatively small population of potential respondents it is not possible to anonymise further without damaging the study. From an ethical standpoint it is also important to continually ensure that respondents are comfortable with participating, and with the interviews being recorded (Ritchie et al. 2014). For this reason it was made clear both before and during the interviews that respondents could choose to withdraw their participation at any time. The fact that respondents were contacted and informed about the interviews several weeks before gave them plenty of time to consider participating, and avoided any decisions being made in haste.

## 5. Results and analysis

The following chapter will consist of both a presentation of the study's results and an analysis of the results. This presentation and analysis will be presented in two main themes that appeared throughout the collection of data to make the findings more accessible. These themes are: Participation through experimentation and co-creation, and Building relationships beyond city structures. These main themes are in turn divided into subsections with different topics of the empirical material.

### 5.1 Participation through experimentation and co-creation

The first theme from the interviews is one of creating a sense of togetherness through participating in co-creating sustainable practices. All respondents expressed how they, through their work, meet people who find meaning by doing new things together. Here lies a deeper discussion of who has the right and opportunity to shape the future of Gothenburg and for whom this future is created. These questions arise from problems relating to both accessibility and inclusion. Respondents express that instead of seeing sustainable practices as a burden there is a need to highlight the many good things that people already do in their everyday lives.

#### 5.1.1 Making participation accessible

Exploring what brings people together and what makes people involved is a central theme in all three transition labs. When discussing the transition labs' own role in activating citizen participation several key points came up. To make sustainability accessible it is important to make sure everyone feels a sense of agency both collectively and individually. At the Community Center they strive to be facilitators to uplift and enable citizens with bright ideas. They have identified that a lot of people only need to be given encouragement and a safe space to participate in creating sustainable practices together. The alternative being individualism and consumerism, which is often a norm in modern cities. James, for example, believes that money can be a factor but that its importance in participation is often overstated:

*We really just want to be the ones who start something. Then we can support with tables, electricity and so on. But it is they who... It should be driven by them. I think that's one of the strengths. I see in many other places, they pump in money.*

*So the money is the most important thing for the activities. Money is not the most important thing. Money is important, but it's not the attraction. You get in, it's a community. You mean something and it gives something back. (James)*

As was highlighted in the interview, the main goals of the CC are to bring citizens together and to create a sense of togetherness in the area. When reflecting over their activities Alice notices how from an environmental perspective “we do a lot without thinking about it”. Their social activities become in practice ecologically sustainable, something that they hope can become a standard for those participating. Additionally, this combination of social and ecological sustainability can lead to an “increased quality of life” (Alice). Omställningslabbet also strives to involve citizens from the start when creating some new project or event. However, those who participate at Omställningslabbet are often already interested or active in sustainability circles. Liam expresses how “that target group is important, but we're not satisfied if they're the only ones who come” (Liam). Compared to CC, Omställningslabbet has more defined goals when it comes to contributing to the city's sustainable transition. However, they don't have the same reach when it comes to communicating with citizens. Here is one of several potential areas where the transition labs can learn from each other.

*It is a basic physical premise for being able to co-create at all. That it is possible to reach out. Then there is a constant dialogue between the association that I represent and Fiona where we have the role of inviting and asking the question: does this event fit. Will these citizens or initiatives co-create the place according to our visions and guidelines? And can we develop this together? So we are constantly striving for co-creation. (Liam)*

Liam believes that Omställningslabbet works in a unique way for a municipal organisation as they look for a common ground where they can meet with citizens to create their space together. This lets people outside the organisation have a say in what they think is important for Omställningslabbet to prioritise and thus makes it a space for increasing democratic participation in sustainable transition. In the end Omställningslabbet still decides whether the outside initiatives fit their agenda, thus making the form of participation fall in the breakpoint for complexity between dialogue and influence (Demokrati och medborgarservice, 2025).

Fritidsbanken is frequently praised for its contribution to a more circular economy and its economic sustainability. This is appreciated, but Tim would like to see city officials and others also talk about how this ties into other aspects of sustainability. When they market themselves externally Fritidsbanken therefore avoids this economic perspective and instead focuses on the environment and public health. Fritidsbanken hopes to broaden the discussion and make their service more accessible to all citizens.

*We don't want to point out that Fritidsbanken is only for the poor, because libraries aren't only for those who can't afford [books]. We want to try to tone it down, and that's a bit because when others talk about it, there's such a focus on the fact that so many people can't afford it. (Tim)*

Through communicating in this way Fritidsbanken hope to create a different perception of their work in order to reach other groups who could afford to buy new sports equipment but who may choose not to from an environmental perspective. They want to avoid boxing themselves in through helping people view Fritidsbanken as a place for all societal groups. Tim hopes that they can help high income families “reduce their consumption while we could get nice things here” (Tim). This can be both a conscious and subconscious change in behaviour. As Tim points out there are ways such as *nudging* to get people to make a positive change without realising it themselves. The idea that Fritidsbanken can become like a library in the sense that you don't necessarily see a library as a part of a circular economy. When reflecting on resource efficiency Jane would like to help people realise that sharing resources is just a smart, rational way of living both individually and collectively. She states that just by existing, Fritidsbanken becomes a site that enables participation in a sustainable transition.

*Likewise, we have a situation where you have stuff in the basement that you have not used in the last two years, and then somewhere between 80 and 90% raise their hand. Then and then like this, yes, but hand in your stuff to us others can borrow. We sharpen all the equipment, so when you need it next time, come and borrow a pair of freshly sharpened skates... (Tim)*

This sentiment is echoed by work done at the Community Center. A while back the CC had cycling courses where they invited someone responsible for promoting cycling in the city.

They had participants in the area learn to be more comfortable cycling which then led to these people not being as reliant on cars. Several respondents expressed such realisations where they discovered a new way of making a small change for a more sustainable everyday practice. These everyday practices can contribute to reaching the city's goals but also in the way Pateman (2012. p.10) describes participatory democracy as “democratising democracy”. Furthermore, by trying to reuse as much as possible, reducing waste can become an everyday practice for all. They try to encourage a “reuse mindset” :

*This house was a co-creative meeting place. Long before I started working. They had collaborations that made all the furniture a recycled item. If you look at this stool, it's old cross stitch stuff. We try to preserve that in the house. That there should be such a reuse mindset. (James)*

Throughout the interview there is a theme of the transition labs trying to encourage or promote certain behaviours. All three labs do this in various ways. Even though what they are promoting is sustainable, one may question the balance between trying to form citizens' behaviours and still treating them as equals. These methods risk falling short of what Arnstein would call legitimate forms of participation. The middle tier of Arnstein's ladder which includes informing and consulting citizens can be legitimate but falls short of giving citizens any real power or influence (Arnstein, 1969). In Gothenburg's own participation map there is a breakpoint for complexity and tension between dialogue and influence, showing an awareness of these issues (Demokrati och medborgarservice, 2025). The map also illustrates the split between thinking together (dialogue) and acting together (influence) which dictates the degree of participation. The transition labs themselves operate somewhere in this breakpoint. If Gothenburg is to really encourage citizen participation in reaching the city's environmental and climate goals, opening up avenues for influence through transition labs could be a way to validate their ambitions.

### **5.1.2 Experimentation in transition**

Another theme that becomes apparent through analysing the results is the need to be able to test ways forward in order for participation to be possible. None of the respondents claim to know the right way to quickly transition Gothenburg into a sustainable city, but the desire to

experiment in order to find new methods is expressed. As Bulkeley and Castan Broto (2013) argue, governing climate change should not be confined to policies and plans but also take place through urban experiments. If these experiments become regarded as valuable contributions they can become critical in sustainable governance (Bulkeley & Castan Broto, 2013). These discussions also led to a conversation on how transition is manifest in communication and that the way we talk about it influences our actions.

Methods of testing sustainability such as making circular economics more accessible are discussed where both ecological and social dimensions of sustainability are easily unified by creating a stronger sense of community. This is clear when, for example, Fritidsbanken lends sports equipment to people who can not afford to buy. Not only is this having a positive environmental effect by reducing consumption, but it is also helping low income individuals have a fulfilling experience through sports. Experimenting with new activities and methods of participation can open new doors, such as ways of connecting these aspects of sustainability:

*I haven't thought about it that much. But then when we started creating activities, we realised that this is both social sustainability and ecology. As soon as there is community, there is ecological sustainability. (James)*

In what is now slowly becoming a classic way of exemplifying a societal transition, Liam raises the Covid pandemic. He points out how large-scale changes were made in a matter of weeks that changed the way in which people lived, and furthermore, these changes were widely accepted (Eckersley, 2021). According to Liam, similarly widespread changes to everyday lifestyles, although not in the same way, need to be made for a societal transition. Doing this goes beyond doing things differently and includes talking about the way we live in a different way to today. This respondent claims that instead of a sustainable transition being an academic theory, it needs to become a lived experience for the sense of urgency to appear. Eckersley (2021) agrees, calling for transformative change instead of short term problem solving.

*“Transition for me is getting a new language and being able to see the world in a new way to think differently. The social contract or the visions we get from society today, none of them are fundamentally sustainable so other stories are needed.*

*Transition for me is a lived experience and not a theory. To be able to test things.”*  
(Liam)

According to Liam a hindrance to sustainable transitions are that people can have a hard time imagining a different society. We can say that things need to change but if you don't have an easy way of visualising this change it can be hard to create and the distance there can seem too far. A solution to this could be individually taking sustainability one step at a time, but constantly moving forward. This discussion can be compared to Geels (2002) multi-level perspective on social change where gradually a niche manages to break through into the regime and pressure a change. As *figure 2* shows this change happens through a wave of similar niches pushing for the regime to shift. Some of them may fail to break into the regime but the combined steps made can create sufficient pressure. Liam expresses their vision of this:

*When we talk about utopias, sustainable societies or the future we want to live in, we think about what could happen if we had... and then something very abstract. That utopia is very far away. But it's ant steps we're talking about where you can be part of this small step forward that I can take. I am interested in these small steps and they are different for different people and different cultures but you have to experience them. Then Omställningslabbet can be a safe space for transition where you feel that I can take my step. (Liam)*

Similarly to Liam, Jane believes people have a hard time imagining something new and that it can be hard to see change as something positive. She hopes that Fritidsbanken can lead by example and show how a new idea can grow from a small ‘niche’ to a larger more mainstream practice. It can be a struggle to start up this kind of niche, especially if it challenges fundamental societal activities such as unsustainable consumption. Fritidsbanken has been able to show that there are viable alternatives to the way we consume new products today by gradually influencing what the multi-level perspective on transitions theory calls the regime (Geels, 2002).

## 5.2 Building relationships beyond city structures

Following on from the first theme, this second theme relates to frustration that comes as a result of struggles in building relationships caused by hindrances in city structures and agreements. Several respondents expressed the importance of reaching out and creating alliances both within and outside of the municipal administrations. This was however often easier said than done. One main reason for this is that there is a perceived lack of creative communication from the city to the citizens which leads to a distanced relationship. Another problem is the lack of trust and stability caused by temporary sustainability projects that are not fully integrated into the city. One positive aspect that was highlighted was the type of agreement called IOP (Idéburet Offentligt Partnerskap [public-private partnership]). As mentioned earlier, these agreements are meant to create a bond between administrators and civil society. There is nevertheless also reason to criticise this form of cooperation.

### 5.2.1 Relationship between citizens and city

Several respondents expressed the need to build trust between city officials and citizens in order to make participation viable. This can be done through interactions at transition labs but also how the transition labs communicate outward. One way Liam thinks this can be made possible is through communication that challenges the norms of the municipal media. He exemplifies this by criticising the city's own newspaper, which he thinks does not allow for creative communication as it always has to be “neat and tidy” (Liam). This tidiness risks missing channels for reaching people because it is supposed to be ‘suitable’ for anyone. The municipal view on communication shows a consensus oriented perspective on deliberation which seeks collective agreement (Zakhour, 2020). Yet responses to this perspective from respondents are more aligned to the agonistic perspective on deliberation which highlights that disagreements should be encouraged to create legitimate channels for dissenting voices (Dryzek, 2006; Machin, 2020).

*You think that the audience for this needs to be everyone instead of being allowed to tell you weird things... It always has to be neat and it gets in the way of a lot of learning because you create a lack of clarity by presenting everything too neatly.  
(Liam)*

James agrees with Liam's view on the city's external communication. They feel that they are discouraged from thinking outside the box which leads to uninspiring results that don't create a change in behaviour. James states that when you are involved in sustainable development you need to create an environment for doing things differently which starts with not doing what you've always done. With their strong relationship to local citizens the Community Center tries to challenge this municipal status-quo but have found that to be tough.

*It's so embedded in the whole system. I'm really excited that we've done so many fun things in three years, and that we're now getting an evaluation and a [short] film, and not a City of Gothenburg film. A little outside the box, but it is difficult with high thresholds at all these points. It must be made easier. (James)*

It can be a slow process but this citizen engagement is central to everything the CC does. When they started out the people living in the area did not know what the Center did or what it was for. They started organising events, but important to this was that the Center did not own the event or manage the details of the events. As stated by Alice, the enabling of collective meeting places is central to co-creation:

*At the beginning they didn't know that it was the Community Center doing a party. They just went to a fun party. But after a year or so, they started to realise who the senders were... In that way, I can see that we work a bit uniquely. But one of the things we work with is that it is very participant-driven and co-creative. When we have parent meetings, it's not that we decide that now these [...] will lecture to you. We ask what you want to talk about. (James)*

As people start to gain confidence and trust they start to feel more comfortable participating in co-creating activities where they can express themselves. This perspective shows that lower levels of participation can lead up the ladder. Building trust can be a way for people to feel comfortable with seeking participation at a higher level if seen through the lens of Arnstein's ladder (Arnstein, 1969). At the CC they have a constant dialogue with citizens about their needs and wants. Alice believes that you first need to build this base of trust before you can have an honest conversation about co-creation. According to her, CC has been successful in doing so and would like to see others learn from them. Gaining trust can be

done through supporting initiatives that already exist instead of trying to compete with them. This is something that Omställningslabbet also tries to enable, and yet another example of how the transition labs can learn from each other.

When it comes to building relationships between the city and its citizens Fiona highlights the need for the city to tread carefully in their pursuit of inclusion. She points out how it is just as important for the city to be included by new innovative experiments. In the interview I asked how Omställningslabbet works to include citizens. This question prompted an interesting reflection from Fiona regarding power imbalances when one party includes another:

*If I may start by just commenting on the question. I am a little puzzled by the word include because I think it means that one party does something and then you have to get other parties into it. So I don't think that's the case [here], and we work with a lot of initiatives that have arisen in completely different structures, so you might as well say that they are the ones who include the city... That it is just as much the municipality that needs to be included in the work of civil society. (Fiona)*

Another way to bridge the gap between citizens and city officials could be for the transition labs to become more connected and to strengthen the relationship between themselves. The transition labs all express a need to work together but that they first need to work to build a relationship. This could be through sharing goals and ambitions in order to learn what they can help each other with. Liam believes that it is when two parties express a shared vision that you feel the similarities that make working together possible. As he puts it, “If we want what you want, then collaboration is easy” (Liam). In a municipal context building relationships is worth it even though it can take a long time. Omställningslabbet hopes that building relationships between transition labs, and other municipal organisations, can create a snowball effect onto their participants:

*It would be great if this led to increased access to city resources and trust between these communities that take place at these sites. Communities that have trust in places could have an automatic trust in other places. Relationships are important and when they are in place, it is easier to think about things. But in the municipal*

*context, I find that cooperation is often slow. One might think: why don't you co-operate? But yeah, our bosses haven't told us to... (Liam)*

Lastly, the way IOP-agreements can help to make cooperation easier for civil society actors is something that was brought up. Fiona considers these agreements to be a “fantastic form of cooperation” and highlights the fact that they work outside the conventional grants and procurements to create a stronger bond between the parties involved. Before such agreements are made they first have a discussion with those involved where both parties decide what to work toward and how to do so, which creates a level playing field which aims at avoiding unequal power relations. While these agreements may be a good start, Fiona believes that there is still room for improvement. One problem is that even though they make equal collaboration possible, access to the municipal premises can still be an issue.

*It was mentioned about IOPs where they get money but then a lot just goes back to the city in the form of rents. So how can we work on making available premises that are empty that could be used or co-utilised. They have an idea that you could connect different kinds of activities. (Fiona)*

### **5.2.2 Struggles with city structures**

In Gothenburg, like many other cities, it can be difficult to criticise existing structures and break new ground with innovative ideas. This theme is connected to the stability of the regime (Öztekin & Gaziulusoy, 2020) which in this case is the municipal structure. Respondents' answers show that the regime is tough to influence but that it can be possible if those willing to do so join forces as established niches (Warlenius, 2022). As his job title suggests, James is employed to manage development of his transition lab. Despite this job description he often finds it hard to break out of ‘status quo’ ways of operating. He feels as if he lacks support from above when trying to break new ground on a project. There seems to be an embedded inertia that makes those with responsibility feel comfortable enough with their positions as to counteract initiatives that seek change. He then calls for people who want this change to come together to make it happen as no one person can do it alone.

*Now it's like this: [...] we are transition centers that become the little dandelion in the asphalt. How do you get this new thing when there are so many people telling us to do what we've always done... I might be singling out my boss here but I realised when she said that: I've probably settled down now that this is how it is in the City of Gothenburg. Then I feel no, we have to [work] in a new way, [...] but you can't do it yourself, you need support from friends. (James)*

Similarly, Liam expresses frustration with struggles when identifying new ways of operating. He states that implementation is only possible through adoption of new 'methods' which makes experimentation impractical. Due to rules and regulations there are strict limits to what civil servants can do and how they can communicate. This is not necessarily a bad thing but can be a burden when there is a need to do things differently, as in a sustainable transition. According to Liam, the city needs to see over and develop new ways of mutual learning that can help people work in new ways.

*In a municipal context, it is easier to adopt a method, such as if we were to call this the Fiona method of place development. Then another administration can use the Fiona method. But otherwise you can't make a new decision about it. Strategies like how do you get an attitude change or methodology change through. Thinking about how we communicate internally to create learning within the city. (Liam)*

Omställningslabbet aims to have a variety of civil society actors use their location through a *right of use agreement*. Local businesses have also been identified as a stakeholder that they would like to involve more. They have previously managed to successfully involve academia in their activities but have aims of broadening their collaborations during 2025.

Fritidsbanken used to be run by a non-profit organisation until the municipality took over the day to day operations. They are an example of how the city of Gothenburg can work together with civil society when sustainable solutions grow and attract a wider audience. Tim believes that it can be important for the municipality to encourage and work together with such participant-driven organisations and be there to take over when they eventually become too big to run for a non-profit.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

This study has contributed to the understanding of how transition labs in Gothenburg work with citizen participation, and how this can help the city to reach its environmental and climate goals. Through interviews with six representatives from three transition labs this study hopes to add to the understanding of the benefits of involving a wider population in sustainable transitions. The analysis of results has been aided by a theoretical framework consisting of democratic theory and transitions theory. By working together with civil servants at the Environmental administration the use of transdisciplinary methods of research has proved valuable in connecting the academic elements of such a study with practical knowledge of sustainable practices. Further depth is provided to the analysis by comparing participatory methods in practice.

The results of this study show that there is a great deal of potential for increasing participation in Gothenburg's sustainable transition. In terms of the types of participation that the transition labs use, all three transition labs have experienced positive engagement when they have encouraged citizens by creating conditions for experiments and community building. The term inclusion was discussed as potentially problematic when the city is including citizens as it can be equally as important for citizens to include the city. When creating conditions for participation in transition labs, or elsewhere, it is important to consider on which grounds one is doing so and whether the people involved are being treated as equals (Arnstein, 1969). As discussed earlier, these transition labs seem to operate in the space between dialogue and influence which the city itself calls a breakpoint for complexity (Demokrati och medborgarservice, 2025). There are instances where ambitions for further influence are expressed but also sentiments where the transition labs themselves seek to influence citizens which risks less legitimate forms of participation (Arnstein, 1969). Several respondents suggest there is a lack of trust between citizens and the city, but that they can be reconciled when citizens are able to participate on equal grounds.

When it comes to the ways in which citizen participation in transition labs can enhance the city's work with sustainable transition, respondents recognise that there are multiple ways to do so. One way that stands out is the potential for transition labs to contribute to creating a common vision of a sustainable future. Respondents argue that this is needed in order to be able to communicate what a sustainable transition entails and what it means for citizens. This

is connected to the way transition labs can be innovative niches that can pressure the existing regime. Establishing organised pressure in this way has the potential to destabilise the status-quo, which has so far proved ineffective in reaching the city's environmental and climate goals (Warlenius, 2022; Miljöförvaltningen, 2023). Further research on specific policy or implementation would be relevant in order to better understand how these transition labs can expand their efforts to make participation accessible and a part of the city's sustainable transition. It would also be of interest to know how transition labs in other cities work with citizen participation and whether or not they face similar struggles.

The City of Gothenburg has lofty ambitions of transitioning to a sustainable city. This process has proved to be a complex challenge which requires a wide range of interconnected solutions (Göteborgs stad, 2021). The responsibility to work toward these goals lies with all people living and working in the city. In 2024 Gothenburg's climate council (klimatråd) released a report titled *How do we avoid everyone's responsibility becoming no one's responsibility?* (Brorström, et al., 2024). The report describes the inertia of everyone's responsibility becoming nobody's in the city's work with climate change mitigation. They discuss the complex problems of short-term status quo activities oftentimes counteracting the public sector acting on long-term climate goals, by focusing on measurement and evaluation (Brorström, et al., 2024). There must be a strong demand for these goals to be met in these cross-sectoral objectives which risk being overlooked in favour of the strong organisational structure and administrative objectives (Brorström, et al., 2024). Echoing this sentiment, the results of this study show several ways in which transition labs in Gothenburg are hindered by stringent administrative structures. This is exemplified when respondents convey their frustration with decision-makers in the administrations they work and how they favour short term stability over experimentation. Another example of this is the frustration expressed in relation to the way that the transition labs are permitted to communicate externally. This may be overcome by creating pressure to do things differently through participation in sustainable transitions.

While it is important to understand that the climate crisis can not be solved with a silver bullet solution, increasing citizen participation can be a crucial step in dealing with these complex issues. As urbanisation continues and inequality grows, the need for cities to meet the needs of their inhabitants, now and for the future, becomes all the more crucial. Governments and

municipalities can not possibly do this without the help from willing citizens. As Jane Jacobs so eloquently describes, “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” (Jacobs, 1992. p.238). A search for a sustainable future calls for thinking beyond “forms of horizontalism that overstate the capacities of grass-roots innovation to change the world” and “paternalistic verticalist imaginaries with their command-and-obedience models of social change” (White, 2019. p.44). As is the case with the transition labs in this study, a closer collaboration between local government and the citizens it serves may prove crucial for Gothenburg if it is to reach its environmental and climate goals.

## 7. References

- Afacan, Y. (2023). Impacts of urban living lab (ULL) on learning to design inclusive, sustainable, and climate-resilient urban environments. *Land Use Policy*, 124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2022.106443>
- Arnstein, S. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35(4): 216–224
- Boréus, K., & Bergström, G. (2012). *Textens mening och makt: Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Boström, M., Andersson, E., Berg, M., Gustafsson, K., Gustavsson, E., Hysing, E., Lidskog, R., Löfmarck, E., Ojala, M., Olsson, J., Singleton, B. E., Svenberg, S., Uggla, Y., & Öhman, J. (2018). Conditions for Transformative Learning for Sustainable Development: A Theoretical Review and Approach. *Sustainability*, 10(12), 4479. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10124479>
- Brorström, S., et al. (2024). *Hur undviker vi att allas ansvar blir ingens ansvar?* Miljöförvaltningen Göteborgs Stad, 2024:13. Göteborgs Stads klimatråd 2024
- Bryman, A. (2018). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder* (Tredje upplagan). Liber.
- Bulkeley, H., & Castán Broto, V. (2013). Government by experiment? Global cities and the governing of climate change. *Transactions - Institute of British Geographers* (1965), 38(3), 361–375. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00535.x>
- Bächtiger, A., Dryzek, J. S., Mansbridge, J., Warren, M. E., & Bächtiger, A. (2018). *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy* (First edition). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198747369.001.0001>
- Castán Broto, V. (2017). “Urban Governance and the Politics of Climate Change.” *World Development* 93: 1–15.

Demokrati och medborgarservice. (2025). *Invånarnas möjligheter till demokratisk delaktighet och inflytande*. Göteborg: Förvaltningen för demokrati och medborgarservice

Diaz-Sarachaga, J. M., & Sánchez-Cañete, F. J. M. (2024). Boosting the Spanish Urban Agenda through urban living labs: The case study of Madrid. *Sustainable Development*, 32(5), 5019–5030. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2950>

Dryzek, J. S. (2000). *Deliberative democracy and beyond : liberals, critics, contestations*. Oxford University Press.

Dryzek, J. S. (2006). *Deliberative global politics : discourse and democracy in a divided world*. Polity.

Dyball, R. & Newell, B. (2023). *Understanding human ecology. A systems approach to sustainability*. 2nd ed. Routledge.

Eckersley, R. (2021). Greening states and societies: from transitions to great transformations. *Environmental Politics*, 30(1–2), 245–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1810890>

Fainstein, S. (2014). The Just City. *International Journal of Urban Sciences* 18(1)

Geels, F. W. (2002). Technological transitions as evolutionary reconfiguration processes: a multi-level perspective and a case-study. *Research Policy*, 31(8), 1257–1274. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(02\)00062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(02)00062-8)

Göteborg, n.d., *Idéburet offentligt partnerskap (IOP)*.

<https://goteborg.se/wps/portal/start/foretag-och-organisationer/foreningar/radgivning-till-foreningar/idburet-offentligt-partnerskap-iop>

Göteborgs Stad. (2021). *Göteborgs Stads miljö- och klimatprogram 2021-2030*.

[https://www4.goteborg.se/prod/Stadsledningskontoret/LIS/Verksamhetshandbok/Forfattn.nsf//6B3CA866EF066429C12586B200449D53/\\$File/C12574360024D6C7WEBVD2H37P.pdf?OpenElement](https://www4.goteborg.se/prod/Stadsledningskontoret/LIS/Verksamhetshandbok/Forfattn.nsf//6B3CA866EF066429C12586B200449D53/$File/C12574360024D6C7WEBVD2H37P.pdf?OpenElement)

Göteborgs Stad. (2018). *Göteborgs Stads program för en jämlik stad 2018–2026*.

<https://goteborg.se/wps/wcm/connect/3acbb00f-65fd-4ab6-94bd-ab7325c08353/G%C3%B6teborgs+Stads+program+f%C3%B6r+en+j%C3%A4mlik+stad+2018-2026.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

Hysing, E. (2013). *Representative democracy, empowered experts, and citizen participation: visions of green governing*, *Environmental Politics* 22(6): 955-974, 19s. DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2013.817760

IPCC, 2023: Summary for Policymakers. In: *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* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

Jacobs, J. (1992). *The death and life of great American cities* (Vintage books ed.). Vintage.

Kronsell, A. and Hildingsson, R. (2022) '*Green State Theory: Approaches and Critical Issues*', in Hay, Marsh, Lister (eds) *The State: Theories and Issues*. Bloomsbury

Lang, D. J., Wiek, A., Bergmann, M., Stauffacher, M., Martens, P., Moll, P., Swilling, M., & Thomas, C. J. (2012). Transdisciplinary research in sustainability science: practice, principles, and challenges. *Sustainability Science*, 7(Suppl 1), 25–43.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-011-0149-x>

Linnér, B.-O., & Wibeck, V. (2019). *Sustainability transformations : agents and drivers across societies*. Cambridge University Press.

Machin, A. (2020). Democracy, disagreement, disruption: agonism and the environmental state. *Environmental Politics*, 29(1), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1684739>

Martin, J. (2013). Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony, radical democracy and the political*. Routledge.

McCrory, G., Holmén, J., Schäpke, N., & Holmberg, J. (2022). Sustainability-oriented labs in transitions: An empirically grounded typology. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 43, 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2022.03.004>

McGregor, S. (2020). Conceptualizing Transdisciplinary Human Ecology. *Human Ecology Review*, 26(1)

Miljöförvaltningen. (2024). *Erfarenheter och lärdomar från ett test av metoden medborgarråd i miljö- och klimatomställningen*. Göteborg: Miljöförvaltningen

Miljöförvaltningen. (2023). *Uppföljning av mål och delmål i Göteborgs Stads miljö- och klimatprogram 2021–2030*. Göteborg: Miljöförvaltningen: Rapportnummer 2023:06.

Miljöförvaltningen. (2025). *Vetenskaplig återrapporering till Formas*. Göteborg: Miljöförvaltningen

Mori, H., & Yoshida, T. (2024). *Lessons from a Climate Citizens' Assembly Kawasaki, Japan*. *Sustainability Science*, 19(1), 99–104. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-023-01404-2>

Mukhtar-Landgren, D., Kronsell, A., Voytenko Palgan, Y., & von Wirth, T. (2019). Municipalities as enablers in urban experimentation. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 21(6), 718–733. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2019.1672525>

Muradova, L., Walker, H., & Colli, F. (2020). Climate change communication and public engagement in interpersonal deliberative settings: evidence from the Irish citizens' assembly. *Climate Policy*, 20(10), 1322–1335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2020.1777928>

Pateman, C. (2012). *Participatory Democracy Revisited*. *Perspectives on Politics*, 10(1), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711004877>

Petrovic, E. K. (2024). Sustainability Transition Framework: An Integrated Conceptualisation of Sustainability Change. *Sustainability*, 16(1), 217. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16010217>

Polk, M. (2014). Achieving the promise of transdisciplinarity: a critical exploration of the relationship between transdisciplinary research and societal problem solving. *Sustainability Science*, 9(4), 439–451. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-014-0247-7>

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C., Ormston, R. (2014). *Qualitative research practice : a guide for social science students and researchers* (Second edition). SAGE.

Scoones, I., Leach, M., & Newell, P. (2015). *The politics of green transformations*. Routledge.

Schlosberg, D. (2013). Theorising environmental justice: the expanding sphere of a discourse. *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.755387>

Scholl, C., Agger Eriksen, M., Baerten, N., Clark, E., Drage, T., Essebo, M., Hoeflehner, T., de Kraker, J., Rijkens-Klomp, N., Seravalli, A., Wachtmeister, A., & Wlasak, P. (2017). *Guidelines for Urban Labs*. URB@Exp project 2014–2017, JPI Urban Europe.

Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting qualitative data* (5. ed.). Sage.

Stoddard, I., Anderson, K., Capstick, S., Carton, W., Depledge, J., Facer, K., Gough, C., Hache, F., Hoolohan, C., Hultman, M., Hällström, N., Kartha, S., Klinsky, S., Kuchler, M., Lövbrand, E., Nasiritousi, N., Newell, P., Peters, G. P., Sokona, Y., ... Gadgil, A. (2021). Three Decades of Climate Mitigation: Why Haven't We Bent the Global Emissions Curve? *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 46(1), 653–689. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-012220-011104>

United Nations. (2015). *The Paris Agreement*. Paris: United Nations

von Wirth, T., Fuenfschilling, L., Frantzeskaki, N., & Coenen, L. (2019). Impacts of urban living labs on sustainability transitions: mechanisms and strategies for systemic change through experimentation. *European Planning Studies*, 27(2), 229–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2018.1504895>

Vrydagh, J. (2023). *Citizens' assemblies: An introduction*. In *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–18). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110758269-003>

Warlenius, R. (2022). *Klimatet, tillväxten & kapitalismen*. Stockholm: Verbal.

White, D. F. (2019). Ecological Democracy, Just Transitions and a Political Ecology of Design. *Environmental Values*, 28, 31–53.

<https://doi.org/10.3197/096327119X15445433913569>

Willis, R., Curato, N., & Smith, G. (2022). Deliberative democracy and the climate crisis. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews. *Climate Change*, 13(2), <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.759>

Wiltshire, G. & Ronkainen, N. (2021). A Realist Approach to Thematic Analysis: Making Sense of Qualitative Data through Experiential, Inferential and Dispositional Themes. *Journal of Critical Realism* 20 (2): 159–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2021.1894909>.

Zakhour, S. (2020). The democratic legitimacy of public participation in planning: Contrasting optimistic, critical, and agnostic understandings. *Planning Theory (London, England)*, 19(4), 349–370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095219897404>

Öztekin, E. E., & Gaziulusoy, İ. (2020). Co-positioning design for sustainability transitions, practice theory and transitions theories: towards dialogue and collaboration. *Journal of Design Research (Geneva, Switzerland)*, 18 (3–4), 196–223. <https://doi.org/10.1504/JDR.2020.115935>

## 8. Appendix

### Interview guide

Ta gärna tid att tänka igenom svaren, ingen stress!

- Ni är anonyma och kan avbryta när som helst.

1. Hur är verksamheten organiserad och hur arbetar omställningsplatserna för att inkludera medborgare i klimatomställningen?

Hur är ni organiserade på er omställningsplats? Hur många anställda, heltid och timanställda?

- Hur ser den dagliga verksamheten ut?

- Vilka resurser finns att arbeta med inom organisationen?

- Är verksamheten ett tidsbegränsat projekt eller fast verksamhet?

- På vilket sätt är chefer involverade i verksamheten och på vilken nivå?

- Hur är verksamheten förankrad inom organisationen Göteborgs stad (ledningsgrupp/enhet)?

- Hur förankrat är det i organisationen att ni är en omställningsplats för ekologisk hållbarhet?

På vilket sätt inkluderas medborgare i er verksamhet (genom deltagardrivna praktiker) och hur kommer ni i kontakt med de (marknadsföring)?

- Är ni riktade mot någon specifik målgrupp? Har ni en plan eller behov av att nå ut till övriga målgrupper?

- Vad är syftet med verksamheten och hur jobbar ni mot det? Vad är ert uppdrag?

Vad betyder omställning för er (och hur vill ni nå dit)?

- Anser ni att ni är en del av Göteborgs miljö- och klimatomställning? Hur?

2. Hur kan de tre omställningsplatserna samverka och stärka varandra för att öka den enskilda platsens omställningskapacitet och platsernas gemensamma omställningskapaciteten?

- Vilken samverkan finns redan idag mellan omställningsplatserna?

- Hur ser ert behov av samverkan mellan omställningsplatserna ut?

- På vilket sätt tror ni att omställningsplatser kan lära sig av varandra? Praktiskt/teoretiskt?
- Vad skulle ni vilja samverka kring? (Metodik? Områden? Miljökunskap?)
- Vad tror ni att samverkan mellan omställningsplatserna kan leda till?
- Vad tycker ni skulle krävas för att ni har möjlighet att jobba mer utåtriktat med utbyte och samverkan mellan platserna?
- Vad skulle ni behöva på er plats för att öka att medborgare blir deltagande i omställningen genom samverkan?

3. Hur kan lärandet som utvecklas genom samverkan mellan de tre omställningsplatserna få spridning och bidra till en lärandemekanism (dockning) för omställning i Göteborgs stad?

Hur kan lärandet som utvecklas genom samverkan mellan omställningsplatserna spridas vidare inom staden? (Hur kan ert arbete bli en del av Göteborgs stad)

- Vad ser ni för typ av lärande mellan de tre omställningsplatserna som hela staden kan ha nytta av?
- Vad ser ni att samverkan med andra omställningsplatser kan ge för effekter och resultat i staden?

Vad skulle ni behöva för stöd från Göteborgs stad för att kunna bidra mer till målet om att staden ska bli ekologisk och socialt hållbar?

- Vem inom staden? Mottagare?
- Hur ser ni på Stadens roll i att stärka samverkan mellan omställningsplatserna?
- Finns det något annat ni skulle vilja ta upp kopplat till det vi pratat om idag?