



The Aalborg Conditions

Unlocking the full potential of local governance in the democratic transformation towards a climate neutral, equitable and resilient Europe

Shared Governance
Integrated Finance
Cohesive Transition



**10TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON
SUSTAINABLE CITIES & TOWNS**

AALBORG | DENMARK | 1-3 OCTOBER 2024



The Aalborg Conditions have been developed based on a continuous European Sustainable Cities movement over the past 30 years in response to global and European agreements and policies. They build on milestones such as:

- the **Aalborg Charter** (1994) introducing local consultation processes,
- the **Aalborg Commitments** (2004) introducing local targets,
- the **Basque Declaration** (2016) introducing systemic change, and
- the **Mannheim Message** (2020) introducing Local Green Deals.

They reflect and respond amongst others to the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda and the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Kunming Montreal Biodiversity Framework, as well as the New Leipzig Charter, the EU Green Deal and the increased focus on implementation towards climate neutrality and competitiveness in the EU.

THE SPIRAL OF INACTION

Public awareness and knowledge of the global environmental crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation have risen over the past years. Considerable progress has been made, however recent data shows that this has not been sufficient and more effort is urgently needed. At the same time, the window of opportunity for effective mitigation is shrinking continuously.

The pressure to implement more assertive measures within shorter timeframes not only accelerates the pace of change but also amplifies the immediate costs and investments

required. This raises fears of over-burdening among societal groups and individuals.

Simplistic reactions and messaging that merely aim at dispelling such fears fail to address the problems we face in an adequate way. Instead, they rather hinder a cohesive, democratically organised transformation of our societies, stifle innovation, and further delay the changes required to overcome crises.

In effect, this can lead to an accelerated deterioration of global ecosystems, and to a higher frequency of disastrous events and unwanted impacts. More disasters and unexpected crises however will probably result in an even higher demand for rapid and decisive short-term responses, which bear the risk of inadequately prepared, unjust and top-down management of the transformation – which is precisely contrary to what people require.

THE POTENTIAL OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Cities and urban regions vary in their geographic settings, economic structures, historic developments and composition of their populations. Consequently, the potential impacts from climate change, pollution or biodiversity loss they face also vary. Therefore, any European and national strategy for a transformation towards climate neutrality and resilience will ultimately have to be implemented place-based and locally. Today thousands of cities and local governments have already developed integrated climate and energy plans, biodiversity and nature protection strategies, sustainable urban mobility plans, Local Green Deals or Climate City Contracts in response to their challenges and in line with European and global goals. In most cases, local stakeholders and the civil society have participated in these processes.



In times of a permanent flow of short messaging, fast, and sometimes contradictory information, cities and local governments are providing a long-term basis for the transition by working in co-creation with their citizens and all relevant stakeholders. As the government level closest to citizens, they need to deliver tangible results in a transparent and accountable way, which makes them implementation-focused and inclusive in their approach to finding local solutions for local challenges. In this way, local governments play a key role in safeguarding democracy in general, and particularly for managing the transformation of our societies in a democratic way, with the highest potential to turn perceived threats and burdens into a shared positive vision of a climate neutral, equitable, competitive and resilient Europe.

WE WALK THE TALK.

We, cities and local governments, have successfully created ambitious integrated climate and sustainability strategies and projects in Europe. We are establishing partnerships with business and civil society to ensure that all relevant local parties take ownership of the transformation. Through the transformation of thousands of cities and towns in Europe, we create markets for clean industries and jobs for people and strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of Europe and its countries. We walk the talk and are ready to:

- **Establish strong leadership** throughout our local governments and their utilities for the implementation of ambitious integrated climate and sustainability strategies and action plans.
- Underpin our strategies and action plans with adequate **investment plans**.
- Increase the speed of turning knowledge into action by prioritising climate and sustainability strategies and action plans when **allocating human and financial resources**.
- Plan our investments based on tangible and measurable climate and sustainability goals and regularly **report on our achievements**.
- Communicate and stay in touch with our citizens and discuss and **clearly explain both challenges and improvements** coming with the transformation.
- Identify and take care of those local groups facing hardship because of the actions implemented, and ensure **adequate compensation is channelled towards those unable** to carry the contribution asked from them.
- Engage in **constructive, permanent collaboration with our national governments** to ensure the best legislative, fiscal and financial framework conditions for the transformation.

BUT WE CAN'T DO THE JOB ALONE.

We invite national governments and the European Union institutions to enter into a real and serious collaboration with local governments and create the framework conditions we need in order to implement the transformation together.



Condition 1: Shared Governance

Recognition: We need to be empowered to play the key role cities and local governments have in the multilevel governance system so we can ensure a successful and democratic transformation of our societies towards climate neutrality, equity and resilience.

Respect: We need to play an active part in all relevant legislative processes across all levels as cities and local governments are the executive level implementing large parts of European and national regulation and policy goals - to achieve better legislation that supports better implementation.

Flexible regulation: We need adaptive regulation and policies across all governance levels that can accommodate the innovative solutions emerging from integrated local strategies for climate neutrality and sustainability.

Dialogue: We need continuous exchange and collaboration across all governance levels, enabling the revision of outdated regulations, removal of regulatory hurdles, and establishment of experimental spaces essential for testing innovative or alternative approaches and solutions within our cities and towns.

Shared goals: We need the focus of national and European policies and regulation to be on what should be achieved, and less on the details of how exactly it should be achieved.

Unified reporting: We need reporting and monitoring frameworks towards climate neutrality, equity and resilience that are unified, rigorous and smart enough to track results and show progress whilst minimising the administrative burdens related to feeding them with data.

New data: We need access to relevant data from various sources for monitoring and reporting – including satellite data and crowdsourcing – and the use of artificial intelligence to support this process where possible.

Condition 2: Integrated Finance

Trust: We need public financing mechanisms across governance levels to be based on trust in the knowledge and expertise of local governments and their partners, and in their locally developed strategies, action plans, and place-based solutions.

Adequate scale: We need moving away from small-scale and fragmented financing programs towards large-scale framework financing for cities and local governments, based on action plans and related investment plans. Clearly agreed impact goals would reduce administrative burdens and transaction costs.

Vertical and horizontal alignment: We need better coordination of financing programmes for cities and local governments across all levels of governance as well as better integration of programmes across ministries and departments on each level.

Realistic time horizons: We need moving away from short-term project-based financing towards longer-term strategic and goal-oriented financing that enables cities and local governments to implement strategies and action plans reliably over time.

Access: We need access for cities and local governments to relevant programmes for direct investment financing from the EU level. Considerable shares of all relevant EU funds need to be exclusively reserved and directly accessible to cities and local governments based on clearly defined action plans and KPIs.

Blended finance: We need better regulation and support for developing innovative structural solutions that help accommodate a higher share of private financing and investment for the implementation of measures and projects to achieve our climate, equity and resilience goals.

Divestment: We need a national and European-wide financing infrastructure that is up to date and fit for purpose. Any financial support for practices that jeopardise the transformation towards climate neutrality, equity and resilience needs to be phased out in order to enhance Europe's future economic competitiveness.

Condition 3: Cohesive Transition

Sensitising: We need to acknowledge and address collectively that the rapid transformation towards climate neutrality, equity and resilience brings cultural and economic challenges and raises fears for a considerable part of our population.

Transparency: We need clear and open communication at all governance levels of the positive and negative impacts of each step in the transformation not only for the global climate but also for our own country, region, city, and for the individual citizen.

Attractive messaging: We need consistent communication that provides a coherent and positive narrative about the transformation across all levels of governance. This narrative should underscore the benefits of modernising fundamental societal systems for all, both for the current generations and future ones, with a particular focus on human health.

Empowerment: We need to ensure that all societal groups experience themselves as actors rather than observers in the transformation towards climate neutrality, equity and resilience. This will require more participatory approaches in the development and implementation of strategies and action plans at all governance levels, and more opportunities for societal dialogues.

Re-skilling: We need to invest in building and updating the capacity of staff working in industry, commerce and public administration so they have the necessary skills, knowledge and resources to drive and implement innovative solutions effectively.

Predictability: We need changes of the fiscal and legal framework conditions, such as taxes on resource use or the phase-out of unsustainable technologies and practices, to be implemented in reliable, predictable steps over a longer period of time. This will allow local governments, business and individuals to make decisions and choices in a forward-looking way and make associated risks manageable.

Advancing together: We need assistance in mitigating the economic effects of transformative initiatives on vulnerable or marginalised groups, including those facing energy poverty or barriers to accessing mobility, housing, and essential services. It is crucial to implement such support without adding new bureaucratic complexities at any administrative level.

Endorse the Aalborg Conditions

The Aalborg Conditions have been signed by the mayors of cities and towns gathering at the 10th European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns from 01 – 03 October 2024 in Aalborg Denmark, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Aalborg Charter and the 20th anniversary of the Aalborg Commitments.

They are directed at the national governments of Europe as well as the institutions of the European Union.

Endorsement of the Aalborg Conditions is open, and all cities and citizens are invited to express their support for the Conditions here:
aalborg2024@iclei.org

For more information, contact us at:
conferences.sustainablecities.eu



**Aalborg
Kommune**



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