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Lessons we can learn from Scandi cities

Scandinavian cities are the places to go to find out what it takes to be a 'next level' city on climate. Here's what I learnt in Malmo

▶ Scandi cities like Malmo are the hope of the world on climate. Sure they are doing all the things everywhere else is doing on transport (zero-emission vehicles, modal shift and so on) but they are also doing the research and development for the rest of us on what you need to do next on climate. Willing to take risks, and learn by doing. Keen to ensure that they think fast and listen more to what all their communities are telling them. But they are also international - they want to share their successes, failures and works in progress with the world. They are the places to go to find out what it takes to be a 'next level' city on climate. So I did go - courtesy of the excellent ICLEI (Local Government for Sustainability) summit. Here's what I learned in Malmo about eight priorities for those cities that want to be 'next level' on climate.

Decarbonisation of construction

If concrete was a country it would be the third largest carbon emitter in the world. Whichever city you live in construction plays a big part in carbon emissions - in Malmo it's 25% of emissions. What can you do about it? Now that the Oresund bridge links Malmo with Copenhagen there is no need for the hovercraft service terminal it replaced. But rather than flatten the terminal and then cart the rubble off for landfill they are going to 'un-build' it. The building is examined to find which parts and materials of the building can be reused, repurposed and recycled. From

bulky raw materials like sheet metal, stone and steel to fixtures and fittings like ceiling tiles, doors and lighting.

There are many challenges, such as where do you store the various elements of the deconstructed building while you wait to identify a use for them? How do you make potential re-users aware that you have these materials available? How long before a commercial market can be established and the re-use of deconstructed buildings becomes mainstream? Over in Copenhagen, you can begin to see building recycling in action - apartments with bricks from the old Heineken brewery, an office block with recycled concrete flooring and recycled wood wall fittings.

Back in the UK, there's a lot of construction going on in transport (which is great news, of course) and Network Rail's sustainability strategy has some ambitious targets for recycling - which makes the decarbonisation of construction feel like it's going to be one of the next big things for decarbonising UK transport provision.

The circular economy

Decarbonising construction is in some ways a sub-set of big idea number two: the circular economy. In a nutshell, the circular economy means moving from a 'take, make, waste' model to one of 'rethink, regenerate, reduce, reuse and recover'. We have a long way to go before we get there given that 90% of biodiversity loss is due to processing and extraction and 45% of

global greenhouse gas emissions are from goods production. Are there things that could be done to reduce the waste packaging around on-train catering that also be a signifier of a wider intent on behalf of the industry?

Local microgrids

District heating (where a district has one boiler for every dwelling rather than every dwelling having its own boiler) is creeping in, in the UK, but is more common in northern and central Europe. Indeed some districts also have their own parallel cooling grids to save houses from needing their own energy-hungry air con units. Throw in on-site turbines, heat pumps, solar panels and technologically advanced control systems into the mix and you can create your own local grid able to manage and balance power generation, and storage efficiently.

E-vehicles (from cars to bikes and scooters) can also be part of these local networks to create more resilient, carbon neutral and locally responsive micro-grids than being subject to the corporate machinations of national grids.

Biodiversity

The rapid decline in biodiversity feels sometimes like one existential crisis too many - plus plants and animals don't vote and aren't particularly investible. However, like many other cities, Malmo is turning more of its lawns over to meadows as part of a wider strategy of preserving, restoring and creating new habitats. A lot of the surface land in our cities is devoted one way or another to transport and there is the potential for more of that land to be made available to promote biodiversity.

Working with all communities

Malmo is a growing city and not without its social problems. But it has also sought to ensure that the work it does on climate is done through working with all of its communities as part of a just transition. One way of doing this has been through working with communities to promote local food production and small businesses which helps tackle another emerging focus for carbon reduction - which is food. Malmo purchases 8,500 tonnes of food a year (65,000 lunches a day). By 2021, they had gone 70% organic and reduced greenhouse gases by 30%. More to do but the best in Sweden.

“Scandi cities are a source of hope as we all seek to move towards more climate intelligent lives”



The Malmö district of Augustenborg became the city's first 'ekostaden' with an open storm water system and botanical rooftop gardens



A snapshot of a residential area of Malmö



Cycle parking facilities don't have to be ugly. Who knew?



Accept no substitute if you want a bus that doesn't have the temperature controls of a greenhouse and a tumble dryer ride quality. Not cheap mind



The world's first bike hotel. Every room has a bike. No car parking

Sources of funding

There is only so much funding national governments are going to provide for improving public transport but there are other sources of funding out there looking for long term, low risk, no surprises investments which will have climate impact investment. Pension funds are one source of this 'patient capital'. At COP26 a collective financial commitment of \$130bn was announced by Nordic and UK investment funds to be invested in clean energy and climate investments by 2030. And there's potentially a lot more where that came from.

Climate budgeting

These days every private and public sector body has some kind of target for going net zero. But it's not always clear how these overall targets are driving the work of the organisation (either as a whole or within its component departments). The danger is that targets become more of a displacement activity rather than a central organising principle. Climate budgeting aims to tackle this by ensuring that it is every department's job within the organisation to deliver on its carbon budget. And that this carbon budget is given the same importance as delivering on the financial budget. Critically this also includes the head of finance, and their team, at the organisation. Climate budgeting is a way of joining up the aspirations of high-level targets and declarations with what everyone does when they show up for work on Monday morning.

'It's a triathlon'

Reading about climate tends to be an oscillation between hope and despair but Scandi cities are a source of hope as we all seek to move towards more climate-intelligent lives. The approach of learning by doing also feels right. Or as someone said at the event: "It's a triathlon, you don't have to be the best at everything." ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

▶ Jonathan Bray is the director of the Urban Transport Group. Throughout his career in policy and lobbying roles he has been at the frontline in bringing about more effective, sustainable and equitable transport policies.