

# BALTIC SEA REGION VISION OF SUSTAINABLE LIFE

*In 2035, a sustainable lifestyle is enabled through public-private-people collaboration as well as changes in education, regulations and city planning.*

*A sustainable future is made of solid local communities exchanging materials, goods, ideas, skills and support. Manual skills and community building are strongly integrated as basic skill development in the educational system and lifelong learning. Civil society actors are given practical means to foster and enable a sustainable lifestyle that is easy for people. People are aware of the impacts of their lifestyle and make decisions based on reliable data on the impacts of their choices.*

*This vision of sustainable life and recommendations for local authorities was made by a group of selected change agents from six Baltic Sea region countries.*



## Baltic Sea region Change Agent Process

We make transition! (2023-2025) is a transnational project that aims to find new ways for interaction and collaboration between local authorities as well as local civil society actors and small businesses that are working for sustainability in topics such as circular and sharing economy, sustainable food, biodiversity and social sustainability.

The project invited a transnational group of change agents from Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Germany and Norway to co-create a joint sustainability vision and recommendations to strengthen the role of civil society actors and their cooperation with local authorities. The BSR change agent group includes about 30 individuals representing civil society, entrepreneurs and local authorities. The common nominators of these individuals include transformative thinking and a strong devotion to make concrete actions to enhance sustainability.

### **The change agents identified key challenges they would like to see solved in the desired sustainable future, for example:**

- How to mainstream re-using, sharing, repairing and caring instead of a life based on consumption and individualism?
- How to make sustainable choices more accessible to make in everyday life?
- How to integrate more manual skills development into our education system?
- How can small-scale local food production be promoted over big corporations?
- How do we support more people to take action and develop local communities with the aim to enhance sustainability and community building?





## Key elements of the vision

### Legislative changes and regulations affecting business and urban development

In 2035, **circular and sharing economy** -based companies flourish due to legislative and regulative changes: there are special incentives and tax reductions for companies enhancing sustainability and radically reducing waste. Planned obsolescence is prohibited and products with more extended guarantees and repair support services have significantly lower VAT.

Cities look different due to the New European Bauhaus Act: old buildings are tailored for new roles instead of building always new ones. In addition, this new building and construction law enables cities to use urban space for impactful circular activities and to make the process easy for anybody. Local and self-organised circular activity is supported by relaxing hindering regulation.

A new EU directive requires that housing districts have a **community & sustainability center** organised by local authorities, local communities, social enterprises and non-governmental organisations in cooperation.



## Sustainable lifestyle supporting social sustainability

Regulatory changes and support from city strategy, active civil society organisations and conscious city officials have led to a tremendous rise of **circular shopping centres** that can compete with traditional ones. These circular shopping centres include a variety of high-quality secondhand and local handmade items as well as repair services, meeting points, cafes and spaces for workshops.

Consumption is geared towards meeting people's basic needs. People's mindsets have changed to prefer reusing over buying new products. The overall amount of waste has decreased due to decreased consumption and production. Sharing, swapping and renting have increased their popularity in relation to private ownership.

Value is not only counted in money, but also in time, collaboration and sharing. The **timebank model** is used, which means that one hour of sharing your skills or helping others (for example gardening or taking somebody to walk) earns you one time-credit, whatever the skill or task. You can spend your time credit by receiving an hour of someone else's time. For example, you could learn how to cook an apple pie, or get help with painting your fence.

The economy is organised around the self-sufficiency of small units. Civil society actors increase acknowledgement of the importance and the potential that lies in bringing social sustainability to the sharing economy. The time-banking system supports this.





## Education and training

Farming, community building, circular and repairing skills and how individuals can influence are integrated more strongly into education system as basic skills.

People are educated from a very early age to sustainable lifestyle and sharing of materials. Home economics lessons include the themes of farming, local seasonal food and use of food loss. Children learn in practice how and where food is made, and by whom.

Circular economy is crosscutting in the curriculum of the school system: handwork lessons focus on repairing and tuning e.g. their own textiles. Circular and sharing principles are also embedded in vocational training. Due to changes in education, there is a culture of doing, taking initiative yourself, instead of pointing the responsibility to act to others.

## Food system

The changing climate increases the pressure for improving security of supply, and local food production rises in importance. Regulation is more flexible to allow innovative ways of producing food.



Sustainable and reliable ways to produce and distribute food will increasingly rely on more diverse, decentralized and flexible solutions. In practice, this means local services for growing and distributing food and nutrient cycling. **Urban farming** spreads everywhere and more urban spaces can be used for small-scale farming. Cities fragment into villages that aim for self-sufficiency. Solutions like community agriculture, food collectives, co-ops & associations, and services for biowaste upcycling into biobased products are popular.

**Local communities** play a more important role in local food topics. Citizens are gathering face-to-face and they do food-related things together, e.g. growing food and arranging group orders to local farms. People helping one another becomes an essential element of the society and a guiding principle for everyday life. More leisure time is spent in gardening circles. This strengthens the connection with nature and improves understanding of our dependence on it.

Freshness, seasonality and local varieties are important for consumers as well as sustainable farming methods and biodiversity. The public procurement system is developed to favour local organic food. Public institutions are obliged to favour local food to support the local economy. Locally produced plant-based proteins play an important role.

Small producers are empowered to have their voices heard. Collaboration between food producers is strong (cooperatives, shared logistics, storage systems). Trust has been built in the new cooperation forms between food producers, suppliers, and consumers. Food stores and restaurants have personnel to help local producers to sell their products and the whole food system is organised in cooperation with local producers.

*“People are aware where food and things come from, reliable info is easily found”*

### **Civil society, public sector, and business work together towards common goals**

Decision-makers are open to new ideas and encourage citizens to work on them; When people have new ideas, it is easy to find support for realising them. Civil society can act as testbeds (for small scale testing) and have a proof-of-concept role.

In 2035 there is an EU directive stating that all neighborhoods have **community & sustainability centers** as the norm in each city. These meeting points support community building, sustainable lifestyle and participation. They are at least partly funded by the municipality and run by the grassroots level actors in cooperation with local authorities.

Centers enable the networking and cooperation between various sustainability actors, they offer possibility for any citizen to easily participate and influence on more sustainable living and environment. This provides feeling of belonging to many. Running the centers together with civil society actors and local authorities enables also better planning and initiation of joint projects.

Community centers offer training, courses and practical activities with focus on sustainable lifestyles, for example enabling people to take part in a circular economy in their everyday life. The space offers possibilities for small-scale farming, repairing, sharing and re-using.

Community centers offer space for everybody: the space is a place to learn, share thoughts as well as get ideas and do meaningful activities. They offer solutions to deal with environmental anxiety. Centers provide feelings of togetherness and inclusion of currently marginalized groups as well. Everyone feels that they are welcome to these centers. Centers can also provide shelter-oriented services in case of need.

Centers also work as places where opinions can be shared and heard across political bubbles and levels of power. The center is a space where the local decision-makers also visit regularly. The information about how the citizen views has affected the decisions is shared in these meeting points. A facilitator takes care that the discussions are constructive. Civil society actors are given practical means to drive change: they are part of city decision-making and collaboration with city officials which is long lasting – not just guest lectures or showing up.

Artists, cultural actors and scientists play an important role in creating this shared space of discussion and changing of habits. Scientists can provide expertise to workshops or discussions as a part of their research work – so it wouldn't need payments or specific funding. Artists can contribute with bringing in alternative perspectives.

***“No more polarisation,  
create space for a dialogue”.***





## Work

Work happens collaboratively in hubs and people learn through asking for input from colleagues. Work aims at contributing to the community and hands-on work is highly valued. Paid work time is shorter (5-6 hours per day) providing more space for voluntary work. Timebank is in use allowing people to exchange services using time as the currency. AI has enabled efficient use of data leading to a situation where people can have shorter working days.

People spend a great part of their leisure time in activities that take place within their neighbourhood. It is through these gatherings that co-created innovations develop. This in turn creates new types of (economic) activity. Frequent encounters in public spaces create opportunities for ideas and initiatives on new collaborative projects, services and businesses. Daily practices and lifestyles are formed strongly around collective activities and sharing.



### Some examples of obstacles that are in the way of the vision

- Difficulty in doing sustainable choices due to lack of proper and reliable data.
- Current norms and regulations prevent many things: e.g. time banking is difficult to organise in many countries due to legislation, regulations hinder circular economy.
- Individualism rules over community needs.
- Social media increases polarisation.



## Elements of a person's life in the vision

**Person's use of time is more balanced between paid and unpaid work.** Paid work is meaningful and voluntary work is seen to develop manual and other skills that are needed also in the paid work. This balance decreases the burn-out risks that our current working life has. There is more time to rest and spend quality time with friends and the family. One does not need to go far away to escape the exhausting life.

**A timebank concept is implemented,** which makes it possible to divide working time between one's conventional job and volunteering in the community, as well as helping, and in exchange getting help from others. The timebank is used to partly take care of children, elderly and disabled.

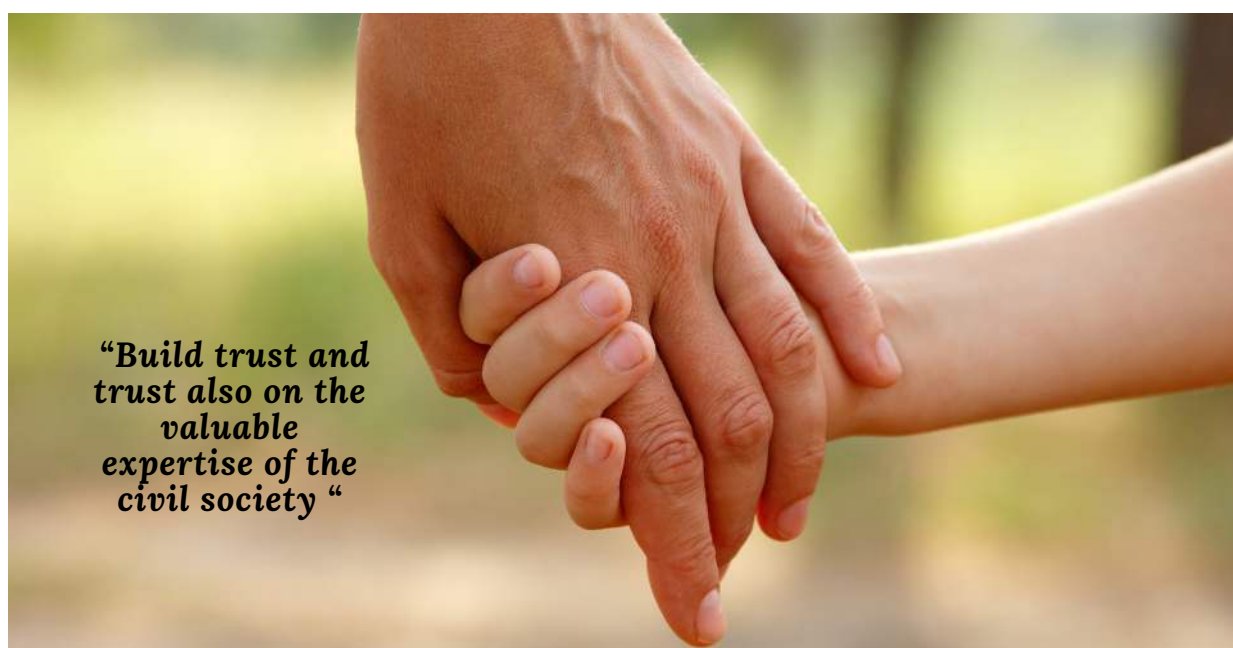
**A mindset oriented towards sharing is the norm.** Utility goods such as tools, books, bikes and cars are shared, and commuting to work is done for example with a shared bike, shared car or by public transport. There is a well working system for shared goods at the public library. Public buildings have an efficient shared use. Clothes, furniture and other materials can be repaired at repair shops. People are much more involved in circular and sharing economy business.

**Eating has more than just nutritional meaning.** Food is based on local production. Meals are quality time with family, neighbours and other community members, where different generations gather and learn from each other. There are community gardens e.g. in parks and rooftops, where everyone helps take care of food produce.



## Recommendations for local authorities and decision-makers

- Provide financial support for good ideas and initiatives of civil society actors to enhance sustainability. Financial support should be easy to access for example in the form of public-people partnerships and participatory budgeting prioritising ecological and social sustainability with societal added value.
- Provide also other forms of support for sustainability ideas and initiatives, for example by providing free legal advice, tax reductions and by sparring/helping to bring ideas to life.
- Make free spaces available for citizens and associations, either at no cost or with a low cost. This can mean both temporarily free spaces for evening use or unused spaces for groups or start-ups to test their operations.
- Make public procurement to prioritise circular, local, and organic.
- Build new buildings only when necessary, make multiple use and repair already existing buildings.
- Foster and support collaboration among civil society actors to combine and accumulate knowledge and experience.
- Publish necessary data and information of the city functions for the civil society actors to base their proposals on.
- Make decisions based on scientifically proven data and calculation of the long-term impact to nature, justify decisions transparently.
- Collaborate with civil society and allow them space for democratic participation.
- Have a transparent decision-making process that allows also civil society actors provide their knowledge and views, speak in a way that everyone can understand.



***“Build trust and trust also on the valuable expertise of the civil society “***

## How the joint vision was made?

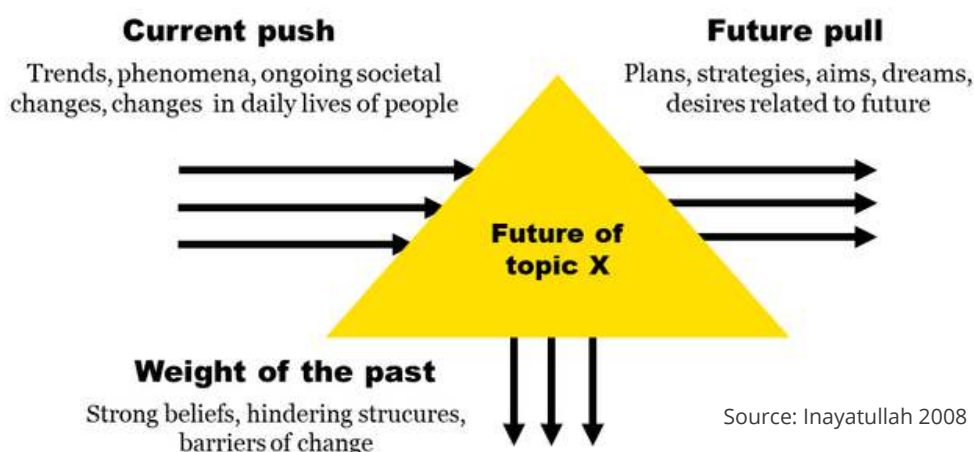
The Baltic Sea region vision of a sustainable life 2035 was co-created as part of the We make transition! project, as an inspirational framework for implementing local transition arena processes in altogether 12 locations. The vision brings together key desirable elements of sustainable life that are relevant especially from the civil society point of view.

The transnational change agents participated in three online workshops in the autumn of 2023 and one live meeting in Gdynia, Poland.

During the workshops, change agents were divided into four thematic groups according to their interests:

- 1) circular and sharing economy
- 2) food
- 3) sustainable lifestyle
- 4) social sustainability.

The future triangle tool (see below) was used in small groups to identify factors influencing the topics. After the exercise, the groups selected issues and challenges they would like to see solved in the future.



The groupworks were planned in line with methods used in the We make transition! project with the advice received from the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra. The online workspaces Howspace and Miro were utilised during the process.



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