

Advancing sustainability in the municipal context

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Sustainability in the municipal context

Outline

- Role of municipalities in advancing sustainability
- How is sustainability understood in municipalities?
- Managing sustainability



The role of municipalities in advancing sustainability



Municipalities Act

1 §

Municipalities shall advance the well-being of their residents and the vitality of their respective areas and organise services for their residents **in a way that is financially, socially and environmentally sustainable.**



Sustainability transformation as a local challenge



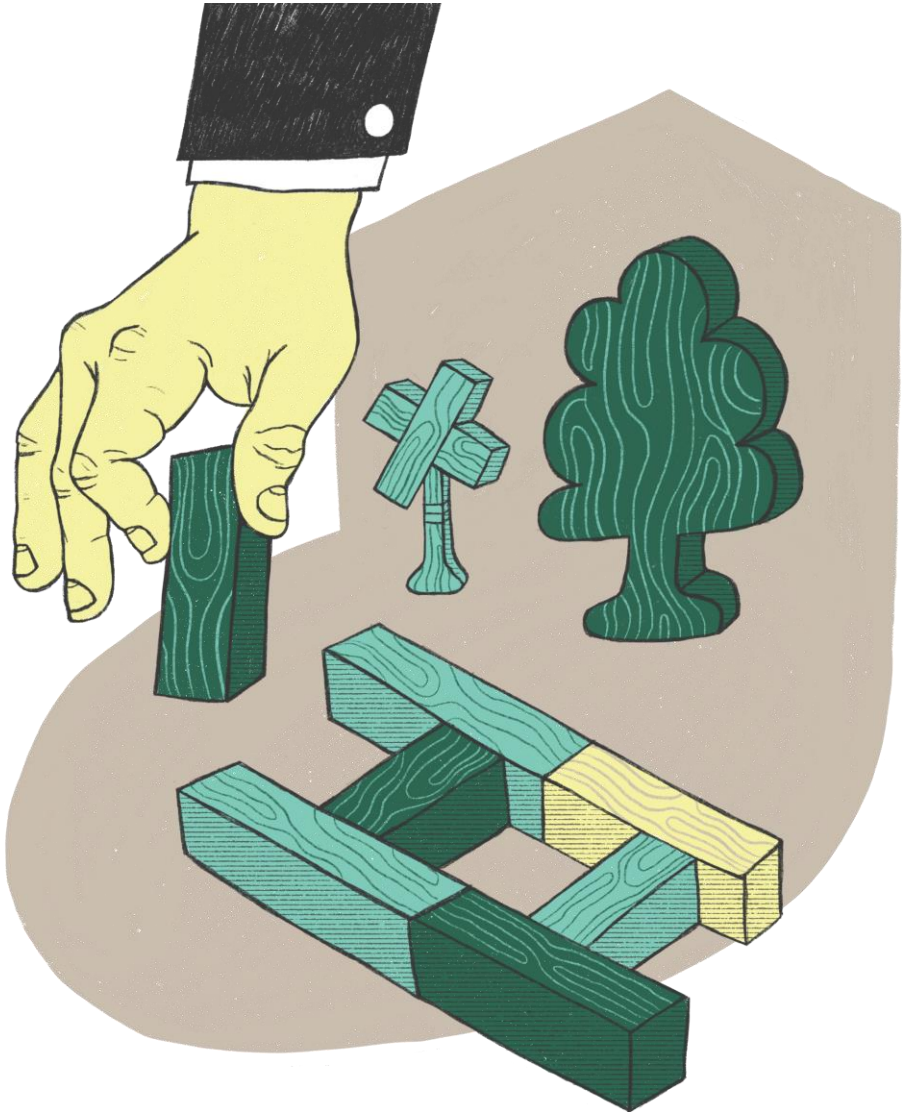
The crucial role of cities

- Contributing to and combating
- Consequences of crises are felt locally

Municipalities have

- Wide range of tasks
- Responsibility in organising services
- Strong role in creating the conditions for residents & businesses

Managing sustainability in municipalities



Questions of power

- Decision makers & policy makers
- National steering vs municipal autonomy
- Regional Councils & Wellbeing Service Counties

Question of resources

- Largest cities & smaller municipalities

How is sustainability understood in municipalities?



Municipal strategies

- **Each municipality shall have a municipal strategy** in which the municipal council determines the long-term objectives for the municipality's activities and finances.
Municipalities act § 37
- **Strategy is an important tool in integrating sustainability into decision-making**



Sustainability in municipal strategies

A. Guiding value or principle

"Our home city is an international and responsible city. We build its future in a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable way – with fairness, braveness and love." (Kotka)

- C21 city strategies
- Cities over 50t inhabitants
- 55 % of Finnish population

B. Problem to be solved

"During this decade of action, it will be solved whether the world achieves the UN Agenda 2030 sustainable development targets, which have also been steering the preparing of Tampere city strategy." (Tampere)

In press: Jäntti et al. (2025) "Unpacking sustainability in city strategic plans: Value, problem or instrument?" International Journal of Public Sector Management,xx.

C. Instrument to achieve other goals

"An attractive city brings also visitors to the city. We will develop Helsinki to be the world's most sustainable and smart tourist attraction." (Helsinki)

Jäntti, A., & Peltomaa, J. (2024). Kestävyys kuntajohtamisessa: Analyysi Suomen 21 suurimman kaupungin kuntastrategioista. Focus Localis, 52(1)

Implications

Good news

- Sustainability is taken seriously
- Covers a wide range of municipal activities
- Best used simultaneously both as a value and concrete objectives
- Strong emphasis of sustainability provides a backbone for work.

Something to consider

- Ambiguity of the concept can be both an asset and an obstacle
- Mere rhetoric or implementable objectives?
- Discursive formulations vs. implementation
- If everything is defined as sustainable, where to focus?

Managing sustainability in municipalities



Problem: Managing complexity

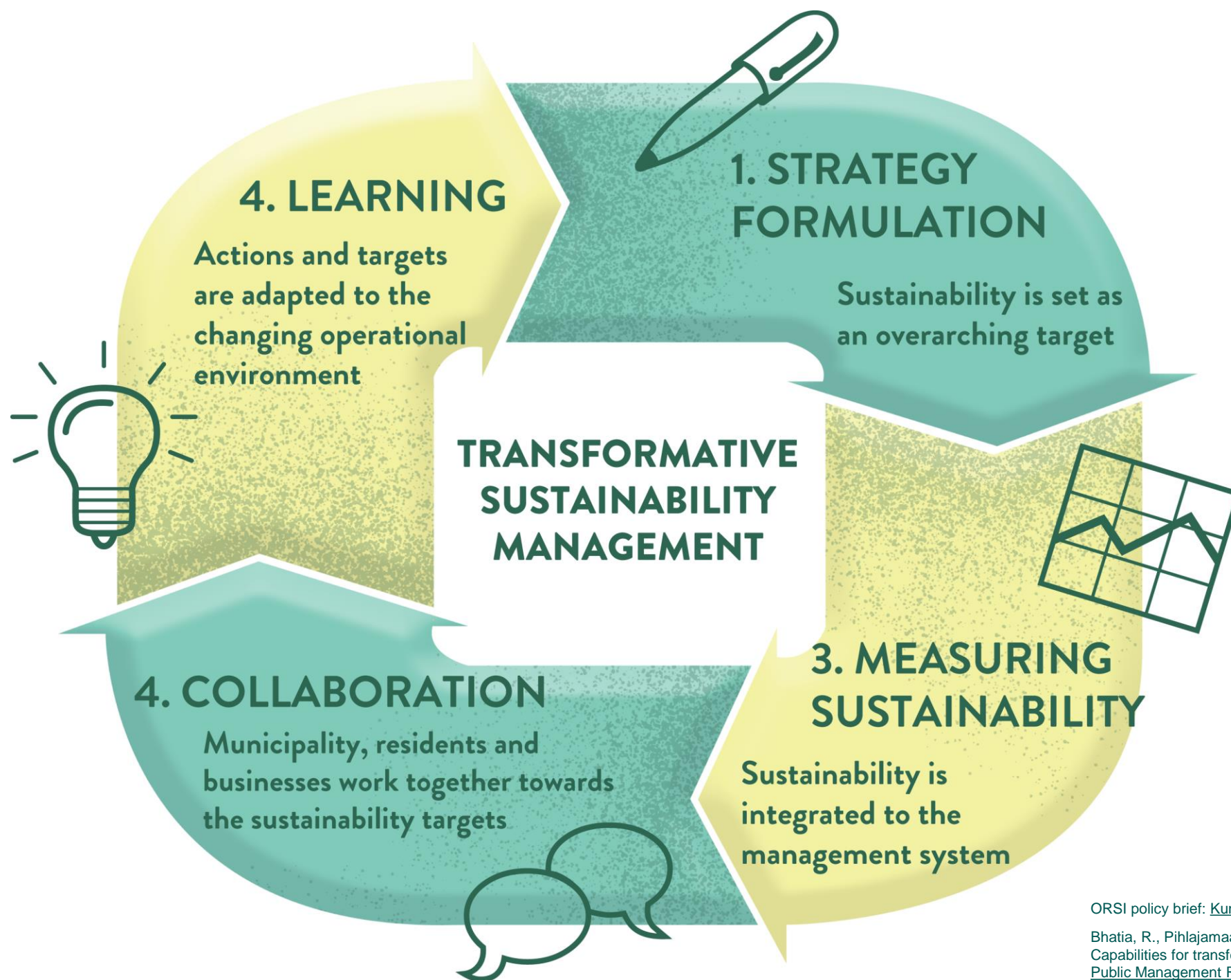
- Sustainability problems transcend administrative sectoral boundaries and require long-term solutions.
- **Current management models are typically based on integrating sustainability perspectives into existing management practices.**



Inability to respond to complex sustainability problems



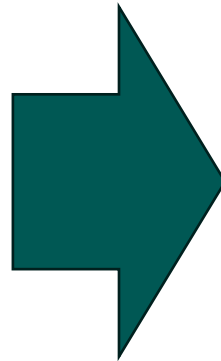
ecowelfare.fi



SUSTAINABILITY BONUS: Sustainability as an asset!

E.g.

- *Securing green environments*
- *Providing green energy*
- *Enabling sustainable everyday choices*
- *Supporting circular economy*
- *Advancing sustainable mobility*
- *Accessible well-being services*
- *Strengthening inclusion*



Sustainable municipalities will succeed in the increasingly global competition between municipalities for companies, investments and residents.



THANK YOU!

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