



Kristianstad  
University  
Sweden

# Citizen participation in climate smart urban development – Part 2

Kristianstad University, Faculty of Business  
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Citizen  
participation in  
climate smart  
urban development  
– Part II

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All photos in the report are taken by Michael Johansson and Kari Rönkkö during their walks in Näsby.

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## Preface

This report presents the final results of our engagement in the research project Climate-Smart Näsby financed by the European Union Regional Development Fund. Our involvement from January to December 2022 was aimed to explore how the Municipality of Kristianstad engages with citizens in urban planning related initiatives and identify different forms of participation possibilities. The results of such exploration led to the recognition of both the value and the difficulties of establishing fruitful forms of dialogue. One difficulty is engaging citizens at the early stages of an urban (re)building process, especially when sustainability concerns are at stake and apparent, and ensuring they remain anchored to the process, which usually takes a long time to be completed. The risk is that participation and dialogue remain fragmented over time, with different citizens being active in different stages of an urban planning process. This report presents a tentative model that facilitates the creation of platforms for *site specific active citizen dialogue* (In Swedish: platsbunden aktiv opinionsbildning) to alleviate identified difficulties. A selection of vignettes and photos, resulting from our fieldwork and displayed in various exhibitions, is included in the report to give the reader a sense of the studied site (Näsby, Kristianstad) and the citizens living there. This material is presented in English in this report, with Swedish and Arabic versions made available at the exhibitions to reach a broader audience.

This report consists of seven sections. Section 1 introduces the purpose and frames the background of the report. Section 2 illustrates how municipalities engaging in open government policies and initiatives attempt to involve citizens in their decision-making processes, highlighting the potential advantages and practical challenges of designing such involvement. Section 3 presents a selection of participation activities arranged by the Municipality of Kristianstad with a specific focus on the site and the citizens. This section is followed by an analysis in Section 4 that is informed by Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation; it explains how the extent of participation activities initiated by the Municipality can be ranked according to the power citizens have to influence the decision-making processes. Section 5 describes the exhibitions related to the project where the photos and vignettes were presented in different locations to increase public awareness and outreach. Section 6 discusses the learnings of our engagement in the Climate-Smart Näsby project by

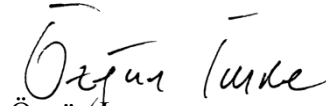
proposing a tentative model of citizen participation. The proposed model challenges the existing structure and working processes of municipalities, building on interactions between new professional roles for municipal officers and actively engaged citizens. Concluding remarks on the insights achieved in the project are presented in the closing section.

This report serves as the second and final report for the project's Work Package 3 and highlights our reflections and lessons learned through a literature review, document analysis, photo walks, interviews, observations and workshops. It conveys the results of interdisciplinary cooperation between four researchers that work in the Department of Business and the Department of Design of Kristianstad University. We appreciate the collaboration with our partners in this project, *Municipality of Kristianstad* and *Krinova Incubator & Science Park*. Special thanks are addressed to Elisabet Farner and Ebba Svensson for their effective coordination efforts especially at the final stages of the project. We are also grateful for the financial support provided by the *Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket)*, via funds from the *EU Regional Development Fund*, and the *Research Platform Business Development in Collaboration* established at the Faculty of Business, Kristianstad University. Most importantly, we express our gratitude for the input received from participants in workshops, interviews, photo walks and observations. We acknowledge the support received from the research environments GRIP (Governance, Regulation, Internationalization, and Performance) and DARC (Design A\* Research Collaboration) at the Faculty of Business, Kristianstad University. Special thanks go also to Dania Mahmudi, Malin Nordlander, Mona Johansson, Sandi, Klara, Elin and Lotta Billgren, Elvira, Victor and Anette Sandegård for their help in styling the vignettes and Thore Soneson for his help in composing the vignettes.

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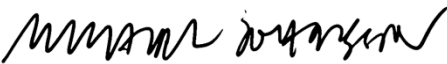


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# 1. Introduction

With increasing levels of urbanization, city governments increasingly engage with sustainable development projects aimed to create “urban spaces where individual and collective well-being is promoted through new forms of governance and greater economic, social and environmental sustainability” (Grossi et al., 2020, p. 633). Cities are growing rapidly, and such growth entails the need for policymakers and managers to make wise decisions concerning land use, transportation systems and spatial layout (Mori and Christodoulou, 2012). As cities grow and are being (re)built, minimizing negative impacts on the environment becomes as important as ensuring livability for people in the city and intergenerational equity (Argento et al., 2022; Brorström et al., 2018; Mori and Christodoulou, 2012). Single municipalities, with limited internal competencies, cannot be solely responsible for meeting such challenging requirements. Stakeholders and citizens need to participate in decision making and in improving public service design and delivery (see Ascione et al., 2021; Castelnovo et al., 2016; Dekker et al., 2020; Schmidhuber et al., 2020; 2022).

Municipalities and regions play a central role in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set in Agenda 2030 (SKR, 2022). The Municipality of Kristianstad (Scania region, Sweden) contributes to the cause in various ways, and among others it initiated the project “Carbon dioxide efficient urban planning process for sustainable urban development – Climate-Smart Näsby.” The project lasted a little over 2 years (from January 1, 2021, to February 28, 2023) and was a collaboration between three partner organizations: Municipality of Kristianstad, Krinova Science & Incubator Park, and Kristianstad University. The project was financially supported by the EU Regional Development Fund and the three partners.

The overall aim of the project was to pave the way for the reduction of climate impacts of urban development projects. It provided planning preconditions for a more carbon dioxide efficient development of the city area named Näsby, with a focus on reducing the climate impact of the construction processes and of transportation, which are two of the sectors that produce the highest emissions in Sweden (Argento et al., 2022).

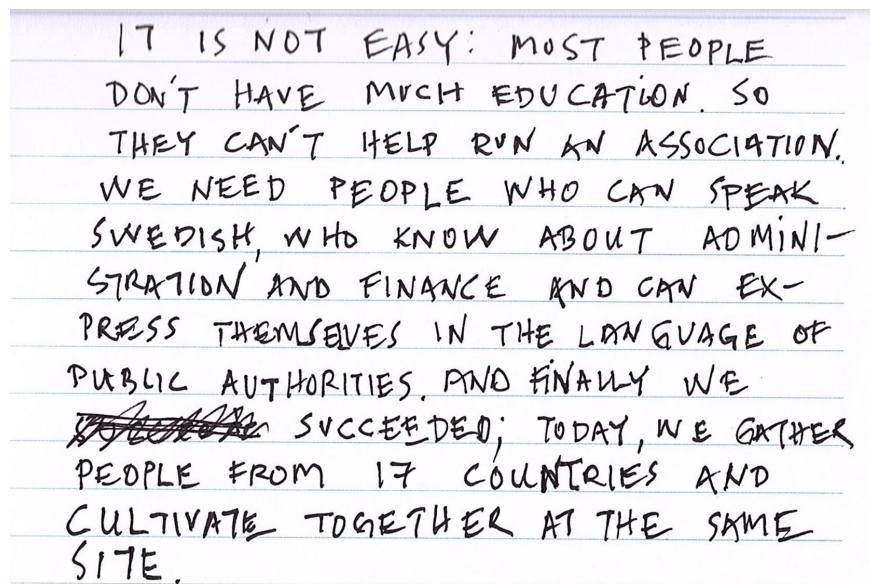
This report presents the results achieved within Work Package 3, which aims to promote the active and long-lasting engagement of citizens and other stakeholders in sustainable societal development by providing optimal conditions for their participation. Our specific goal was to analyze and enhance citizen participation possibilities. Every participation issue is unique. There are some general patterns of participation, and laws and regulations that govern participation, but the projects initiated by the Municipality are typically issue specific: a solution is implemented to address a specific problem. Further complicating the situation, the problems that a project is trying to solve may be a symptom of another problem – such as crime being a symptom of an underlying issue. These important aspects of public governance have implications for our report, given that the task of the Municipality and the expectation from participation is to solve these wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973). These problems are such that there are many interpretations of a problem and many possible solutions, which can give rise to difficulties with citizen participation –in terms of time, resources, and the expectations and roles of the various stakeholders.



*Figure 1.* Picture 035 from Näsby, 2021-05-05.

This report builds upon the findings presented in Report I published in February 2022 (see Argento et al., 2022). As a result of workshops, interviews and photo walks, as well as a literature review, that report argued that many municipalities are moving towards citizen

engagement but are confronted with the challenge that there is no best model for establishing effective engagement and participation. Given Näsby's multi-cultural background, issues of communication identified in the literature turned out to be crucial for the success of the sustainable urban development project. As photo walks and workshops showed, while citizens are happy to live within the area, they are not acutely engaged with issues related to climate smart or sustainability-oriented projects. Furthermore, with a stakeholder mapping, Report I argued that organized stakeholders are more likely to engage in and influence these projects, but that the citizen as an individual does not have many opportunities to meaningfully engage with or affect the outcome of the projects.



IT IS NOT EASY: MOST PEOPLE DON'T HAVE MUCH EDUCATION. SO THEY CAN'T HELP RUN AN ASSOCIATION. WE NEED PEOPLE WHO CAN SPEAK SWEDISH, WHO KNOW ABOUT ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE AND CAN EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN THE LANGUAGE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES. AND FINALLY WE ~~WAS~~ SUCCEEDED; TODAY, WE GATHER PEOPLE FROM 17 COUNTRIES AND CULTIVATE TOGETHER AT THE SAME SITE.

Figure 2. Vignette 005, Many people with a low level of education can't help.

The current report, Report II, focuses on the findings from the interviews, observations and workshops that were conducted during the second half of the project, that is, from January to December 2022. While the first report aimed to create a broader understanding of citizen engagement, in this second report we analyze the data collected first by categorizing the different forms of citizen participation the

Municipality uses when engaging with citizens, and we provide examples of their use. The forms of citizen participation were chosen to represent the participation possibilities citizens have to influence the various projects conducted within the area. We then analyze these examples by using a classic model of citizen participation – Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969) – to reveal how the Municipality’s activities rank in terms of the opportunities citizens are given to genuinely participate in the processes of urban planning.

Report I argued that despite the existence of many types of citizen participation, ranging from traditional town hall meetings to digital platforms, there is no optimal way to engage with citizens. This report, based on examples of participation activities, supports the same conclusion, namely that there is not a one-size-fits-all model. However, considering the multiple projects a single municipality runs simultaneously and the time horizons of this interconnectedness, this report presents a model that can be used to identify the various roles of stakeholders – with a focus on citizens – and the different roles that internal and external stakeholders can play depending on the phase of the project.

## **2. Citizen participation at the municipal level**

In recent decades, municipalities have tended to adopt open government policies and initiatives aimed at exchanging knowledge and solving problems in collaboration with external stakeholders (Schmidhuber and Hilgers, 2021). Open government refers to “a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth” (OECD, 2022, p. 3). Municipalities that embrace such principles have the potential to establish relationships between public officials and citizens that entail mutual benefits and trust (Schmidhuber et al., 2020).

Government-citizen collaboration is especially desirable when handling wicked problems such as, for example, social cohesion, societal ageing, climate change, unemployment, crime, homelessness, healthcare, poverty, pollution, education and immigration (Bianchi, 2021; Bianchi et al., 2021). The issues that municipalities face in urban

planning processes, including sustainable development at the city level, are akin to wicked problems. As noted by Rittel and Webber (1973), solutions to wicked problems are not “true-or-false solutions,” but rather “good-or-bad.” There is also no immediate test of a solution to a problem that can show if the solution works as intended. The solutions are “one-shot operations,” which limit opportunities for learning. There are no “trial” solutions; a solution rather creates “waves of consequences,” which can result in other problems and solutions.



*Figure 3.* Picture 016 from Näsby, 2021-03-24.

As noted above, wicked problems are complex and cannot be solved by single organizations. Municipalities cannot tackle in solitude the challenges that require the commitment and participation of external stakeholders. Therefore, collaborative governance based on the involvement of a variety of community stakeholders with a municipality can generate positive outcomes for the community (Bianchi et al., 2021). The need for stakeholder participation and collaboration to achieve success in sustainable city development projects has been recognized in various fields in the academic literature (Argento et al., 2022; Fung, 2006; Nabatchi et al., 2017; Källström and Smith, 2022). Such need is connected to the challenges that municipalities are currently experiencing with how to plan and monitor the execution of sustainable city development projects (Argento et al., 2020; Brorström et al., 2018).



Citizen participation and collaboration is core to open government. Currently it is often stimulated using digital technologies (Schmidhuber et al., 2020; Meijer and Bolívar, 2016; Källström et al., 2021) in addition to more traditional engagement channels such as hackathons, forums for creating policies, meetings, pop-up citizen dialogue, and survey kiosks (Sánchez Vergara et al., 2021). Municipalities move beyond the classic “command and control” approach by leading open innovation and collaboration initiatives to engage with more stakeholders (within and outside the boundaries of the administrative unit) to achieve sustainability goals (Ascione et al., 2021; Castelnovo et al., 2016).

A transparent and participative municipality enables citizens to be integrated in various processes, such as service planning, decision-making and monitoring (Schmidhuber and Hilgers, 2021). Such integration increases democratic capacity by reducing the distance between citizens and government (Fung, 2006; Osborne et al., 2016; Schmidhuber et al., 2020). Citizens who perceive their engagement as potentially making an impact on public service delivery and quality feel satisfied and may be willing to maintain their participation (Schmidhuber et al., 2022).



*Figure 4.* Picture 033 from Näsby, 2021-05-05.

Showing that citizen input and suggestions are seriously taken into account in decision making processes helps municipalities that are embracing open government principles. Through citizen dialogues municipalities can gather better bases for decision making and thus achieve better results (Boverket, 2022). At the same time, municipalities cannot accept every request and fulfill every wish expressed by citizens. Responsibilities for some requests may lie outside the mandate of the governmental organization that receives the request. For this reason, municipalities that seek citizen input and want a continued collaboration over time need to be transparent. Giving citizens feedback on their input and explaining the reasons for denying a citizen's request can motivate them to continue their participation (Schmidhuber et al., 2022).

However, providing honest feedback might also lead to counterproductive side effects. citizens seem to understand and accept a denial when the government is not able to comply with a request because it lies outside their sphere of responsibility – another municipality or organization may be responsible. Yet “citizens may not understand why the government has no financial resources or organizational capacity to fix problems that they perceive as most pressing. They may perceive the setting of priorities as unfair and conclude that the government is not working hard enough to solve citizens' problems” (Schmidhuber et al., 2022, p. 972).

All in all, the adoption of open government principles is not easy and various challenges arise. Some of the critical issues recognized in various studies are: attracting the right number of interested citizens, investing time and resources to interact with them, and assimilating/using their input/knowledge (Schmidhuber and Hilgers, 2021). The reliance on digital solutions, such as information and communication technologies (ICT), is also being questioned as they do not always enable the desired inclusiveness and equal opportunity in terms of citizen participation (Castelnuovo et al., 2016; Shelton and Lodato, 2019; Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2012). Municipalities embracing open government principles and seeking to be citizen-centric must consider the pros and cons of the impact that technologies have on different categories of citizens (Degbelo et al., 2016), and find ways of increasing citizens' motivation and willingness to participate (Li et al., 2020).

Therefore, open government requires both organizational capacity (in terms of tangible and intangible resources as well as organizational support) and decision-makers (city managers and politicians) who believe that open government is valuable and outweighs its risks (Schmidhuber and Hilgers, 2021). That is, decision makers need to consider citizens as active participants and actually viable partners, by involving them in early stages of sustainable city development projects (Ascione et al., 2021; Osborne et al., 2016; Voorberg et al., 2015).



*Figure 5.* Picture 023 from Näsby, 2021-04-21.

Municipalities need to constantly think of how to design open government strategies, how to bring new perspectives and stakeholders into the policy process, and how to communicate open government initiatives and develop monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms (see toolkits available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/guide/open-government/>). In addition, legal and ethical considerations in relation to data collection and processing must also be taken into account by municipalities implementing sustainable city development projects (Ranchordás, 2020).

### 3. Instances from the city

In this section, several instances of participation activities are presented. As noted in Report I (Argento et al., 2022), the Municipality of Kristianstad, basing its development goals on Agenda 2030, set three interrelated goals that have direct connections to sustainability, namely: “a city for all” (*Stad för alla*), an “attractive city” (*Attraktiv stad*), and “a green-blue city” (*Grönblå stad*) (Johansson & Moberg Persson, 2021). In line with the literature, the Municipality noted that citizen participation was important for achieving these three goals within the urban planning process for Näsby.

To gather the instances of participation, we analyzed the Strategic Roadmap 2020 (Kristianstads kommun, 2015), the Strategic Roadmap 2021-2024 (Kristianstads kommun, 2021) and reports previously commissioned by the Municipality (e.g., Johansson & Moberg Persson, 2021; Sweco, 2021). We also used the Municipality’s governance structure to situate these instances. In Spring 2022, we conducted a series of interviews to develop a deeper understanding of how the Municipality uses stakeholder engagement in urban planning projects and how citizen participation is handled. Through these interviews we achieved a greater understanding of the regulations and processes that underlie existing routines of citizen participation.

We interviewed municipal officers from the Department of Environment and Urban Planning (Miljö- och samhällsbyggnadsförvaltningen – MSF) and the Department of Technical Services (Tekniska förvaltningen). We also interviewed representatives from the Division of Land Development (Mark och exploatering – MEX) and the Division for Growth and Sustainable Development (Avdelningen för tillväxt & hållbar utveckling), which are affiliated with the Municipality Executive Office (Kommunledningskontoret).

We also conducted observations of the spontaneous dialogue meetings arranged within the Näsby Urban Development Project (Stadsutveckling Näsby projekt), which allowed us to have informal interviews with additional persons representing the Department of Social Care (Omsorgsförvaltningen), the Department of Environment and Urban Planning (Miljö- och samhällsbyggnadsförvaltningen – MSF), and the Department of Childcare and Education (Barn- och

utbildningsförvaltningen – BUF), and to listen to and talk with the residents of Näsby.



Figure 6. Picture 078 from Näsby, 2021-03-24.

The topics covered in the interviews, both the formally scheduled ones and those held informally, were: the internal and external processes related to *citizen dialogues for planning work* (Medborgardialoger i planarbete), the regularly held *dialogue meetings* (Dialogmöte), *spontaneous meetings* arranged within specific projects (e.g., the Näsby Urban Development Project), and *citizen suggestions* delivered to the Civic Centre (Medborgarcenter). The Municipality arranges various forms of dialogues with citizens, conducted at different times and serving overlapping purposes. For example, spontaneous dialogue is often combined with law-related dialogue. However, we explain them separately below to highlight their individual characteristics and value.

An analysis of the data revealed the following participation opportunities.

### **1) Citizen participation in planning work (Medborgardialoger i planarbete)**

Opportunities for citizens to influence the urban planning process is governed by existing regulations and laws, which municipal officers are aware of. Consequently, municipal officers fulfill the timing and structural obligations for regulated (mandatory) citizens dialogue. The

degree of citizen engagement and willingness to participate can vary depending on the project at stake and the time horizon of urban planning processes. These processes are long as planning work (planarbete) includes the preparation of an Overview (Comprehensive) Plan (Översiktsplan – ÖP), subsequent Detailed (Development) Plans (Detaljplan – DP), and Land Allocation (Markanvisning) before the Implementation (Genomförande) actually can take place.

There are five phases to the planning work in urban planning processes: assignment, consultation, review, adoption, and legal force (uppdrag, samråd, granskning, antagande, laga kraft). The first round of citizen dialogue takes place in the consultation phase, once the Overview (Comprehensive) Plan has already been drafted, though a pre-dialogue may be arranged before the Overview (Comprehensive) Plan is proposed. Citizens are invited to offer suggestions related to the issues covered in the proposed Overview (Comprehensive) Plan. The time period for suggestions is also regulated but, in some instances, the Municipality extends the deadline to give citizens more opportunities to engage. Citizen dialogue continues in the review phase.

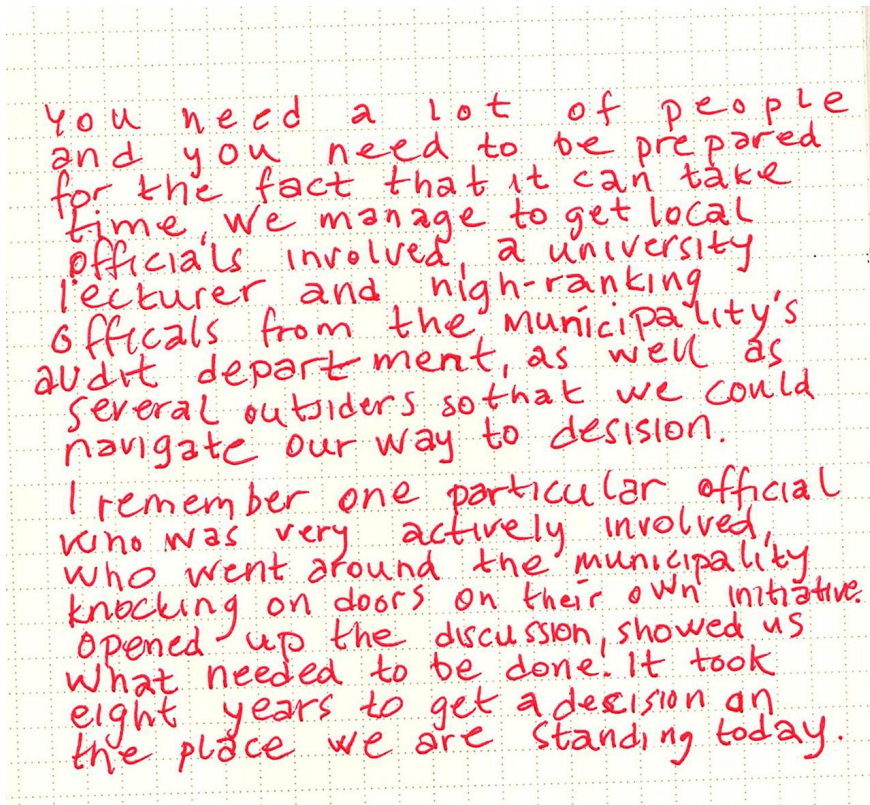


Figure 7. Vignette 002, You need a lot of people onboard.

Not many suggestions typically come in from individuals. Organizations and associations are more likely to engage. The County Administrative Board (Länsstyrelsen) is also active given its mandate to contribute to urban planning processes (among others). In the review phase the Municipality can initiate contact with stakeholders to ensure the process runs smoothly – by having dialogue with targeted stakeholders, for example.

There are various ways consultation takes place. Citizens now commonly use digital means to communicate their suggestions/-opinions rather than more old-fashioned letters and phone calls. The Municipality seems to be taking the initiative to engage citizens in more holistic ways. For instance, citizens are encouraged to send their suggestions to the Civic Centre because in that way they will be officially registered in the system. All *citizen suggestions* and opinions

are registered, regardless of whether they are submitted via the Civic Centre or through other channels, and are public.

Some of these participation possibilities were observed in the projects that took place within Näsby. Our analysis of those projects enriched our understanding of how the Municipality engages with citizens. One such project was the construction of Lingenässkolan. The intention was to build a school that was reachable on foot by all children, with no need for a car or bus, and to unite the children from the northern and southern areas in one school to offset the segregation and other social issues existing in Näsby. However, some people expressed dissatisfaction with both logistics and the impact in terms of cultural integration.



*Figure 8.* Picture 046 from Näsby, 2021-05-19.

In relation to our understanding of citizen engagement, a major decision was to find a suitable place to build the school. The Department of Childcare and Education promoted building the school to link the two sub-areas of Näsby, namely Gamla Näsby and Gamlegården. In line with existing regulations, the Department of Childcare and Education hired a consultant and an architect. This procedure is compulsory in the public sector and the choice of who to hire must be in accordance with



the existing contract (Avtal). The final location was adjacent to the nature reserve area of Näsby fält, where nothing had previously been built, leading to concerns about the ecological impact of the project. The area's ecological importance led to more visible citizen engagement.

Afterwards, the Department of Environment and Urban Planning was involved and had to make a *Detailed Plan* because none was available. During this stage, a consultant had to be hired and selected according to the existing contract.

A consultation meeting (samrådsmöte) was held in the library in Näsby with several departments/divisions/units and politicians representing the Municipality. That meeting was attended by a few citizens as well. The Municipality wrote a summary report (redogörelse) of the issues raised during the meeting and clarified how it was going to proceed with them. During this phase, Villa Association (Villaförening) expressed an interest and asked the Department of Environment and Urban Planning and the Department of Childcare and Education to attend their yearly meeting to discuss the project. The County Administrative Board also had remarks, especially with respect to the proximity to the Näsby fält. Even within the Municipality, there was some conflict/discussion about whether the social or the green aspects were to be considered the most relevant.

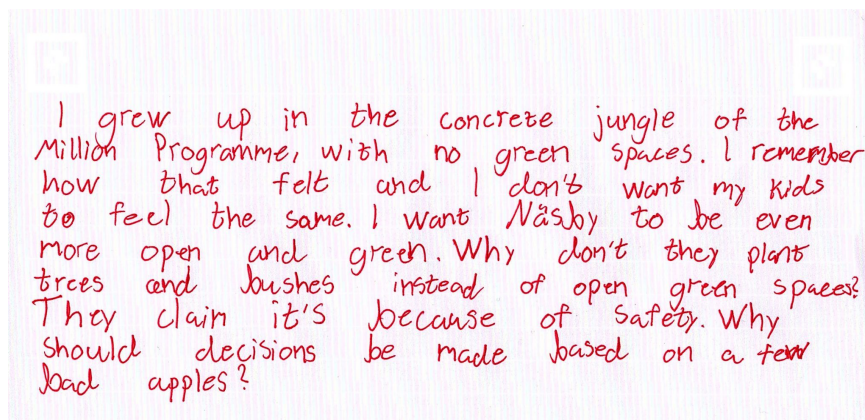


Figure 9. Vignette 032, I don't want my child to grow up in the concrete jungle.

The salient stakeholders had the opportunity to influence the process while citizens, even if consulted, exerted less influence. Citizens were informed in the sense that information was communicated to them but any possibility for them to influence the building process was limited; that is, there was no extensive form of engagement, even though citizens were concerned about changing the area having an impact on nature.

Separate from the formal opinion time (yttrandetid), some people sent a letter to the newspaper (insändare). These letters were mostly negative, showing that some citizens might not know how to contribute otherwise, for instance, by participating in the Detailed (Development) Plan process. It should be noted that some citizens might try to advance their personal perspective instead of thinking of the common good and existing regulations. In contrast, the Municipality has to balance the common good with individual needs.



*Figure 10.* Picture 077 from Näsby, 2021-05-19.

Another project within the area was the Gert-Wingårdshus project, with residences to be built on the plot called Majoren 1 owned by the Municipality. The Detailed (Development) Plan för Majoren 1 went into the Detailed (Development) Plan of Lingenässkolan. Citizen suggestions were received in accordance with the regulated procedure. During the process, the Detailed (Development) Plan had to be revised to create a better structure for buildings and transportation routes such

as pedestrian and bicycle paths. As is typically the case, the Division of Land Development initiated the new Detailed (Development) Plan and the Department of Environment and Urban Planning continued the process, affording the typical two chances for anybody to give comments. Once the Detailed (Development) Plan was finished, the Land Allocation was made, taking into account the comments previously made by citizens. Around 6 to 7 construction companies expressed interest by sending an offer, and the Municipality moved forward with the two whose offers were considered more appealing based on the published criteria. They were contacted and a mini-dialogue was held leading to the selection of the construction company. This dialogue is important because construction companies have specific knowledge on construction. In addition, they will carry the risks related to selling the buildings once they are ready to be sold.

## **2) Citizen participation in politically led dialogue meetings**

The Municipality provides several other means of participation. One of these is the *politically led dialogue meeting*. These regular dialogue meetings are arranged by the Municipality with the participation of politicians. The meetings take place twice in accordance with a political mandate and are located in different towns.

Each meeting typically lasts 2 hours and is designed with stations representing various departments that citizens can visit. People can attend whenever they want, ask questions, and leave once they get the answers they seek. The organizer of the meetings advertises the dialogue meetings (using the Municipality's webpage, social media and local newspapers) to give citizens the opportunity to prepare by sending in questions beforehand and to attend. The organizer also makes sure that the various stations are properly staffed, that is, that the appropriate/knowledgeable politicians and municipal officers actually attend the meeting to answer citizens' questions. The minutes of the meetings are prepared and reviewed by the participating officials. The final version is published on the Municipality's webpage and made available to the public within two weeks. It is rare that citizens complain about or comment on the minutes. The suggestions/ideas that emerge during meetings are subsequently ranked and those that are feasible and relevant are implemented by the Municipality.



*Figure 11.* Picture 011 from Näsby, 2021-03-24.

These meetings serve several purposes. They provide a forum where citizens can interact with the Municipality, which increases the legitimacy of the Municipality and helps citizens understand the operations of the Municipality. They also provide an opportunity to gather *citizen suggestions*. However, hindrances can arise that thwart these purposes.

When analyzing the data related to these meetings, one important issue was attendance. A meeting in Näsby, at the premises of Lingenäs-skolan, was attended by 23 people from the Municipality, with only 12 people from the area showing up (see Figure 12). Such low attendance raises the issue of representability within these meetings.

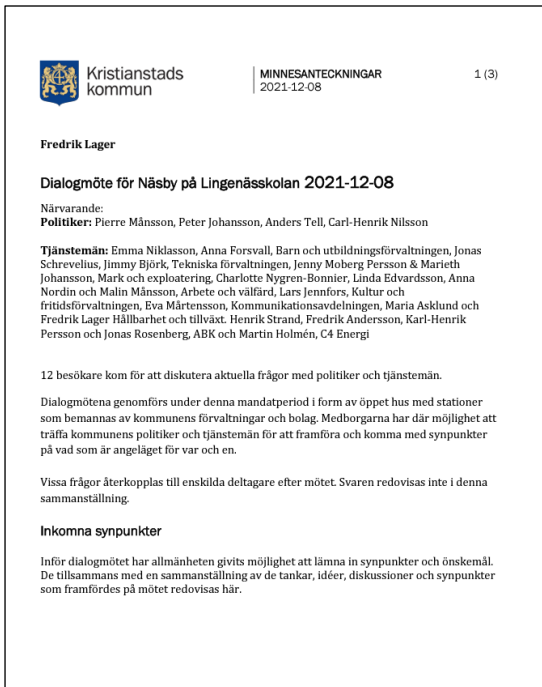


Figure 12. Minutes from Dialogue Meeting.

Another issue was that often the same people or the same demographic groups attended these meetings, reducing the representability of the meetings and thus the potential impact of participation by a broad spectrum of citizens.

### 3) Citizen participation in spontaneous dialogue meetings

Even though the intention exists to offer participation opportunities with the meetings, the turn out can be rather low. To reach a greater number of target groups (and thus include broader array of people/citizens), spontaneous events, such as standing outside shopping areas are probably more effective. This was the case in the *spontaneous dialogue meetings* in the Näsby Urban Development Project. Within this project, a number of meetings were scheduled and publicly announced to enable citizen to know in advance when and where they would take place. While the dates, times and location were planned (see Figure 13), the content of the meetings was not.



Figure 13. Timetable for dialogue meetings Autumn 2021.

Spontaneous meetings/dialogues (which are not regulated by law) are valuable because the people who live in the area under re-construction (that is, Näsby) know the needs and issues of the area and can provide honest and relevant insights/ideas for development. Even if not all of the targeted groups have people coming to the dialogue meetings, often those who do come represent only a few of the target groups. Furthermore, within any one target group the views are not always consistent. A participant may simply have unique individual needs; there may be people of similar age, gender, or socio-economic background, and so on, who express completely different opinions.

As discussed in section 2, opening up opportunities to citizens requires a more flexible way of working by municipalities. The Municipality had become aware of the need for the departments to collaborate instead of working in silos. For this reason, representatives of various departments and the Municipality's largest housing company ABK (AB Kristianstadsbyggen) formed a collaboration group (samverkansgrupp) and they meet people in the various dialogue meetings.

How to give feedback to citizens and how to integrate citizens' suggestions in the planned activities is a challenge. Therefore, in this project, the suggestions were collected in a public document shared

with departments, people who had contributed, and the general public. Specifically, the document was published on the Municipality's website for citizens to consult (see Figure 14). Citizens receive clear information when the proposals raised in the dialogues are implemented, for example by clarifying on an information board that the proposal came from residents in the area.


 <p>Kristianstads kommun</p>  <p>Stadsutveckling Näsby</p> <p>Dialog på Näsby</p>	<p>Ett återkommande tema under dialogen har varit arbetsintegrerade insatser som jobbmatching, praktik och språkutveckling - många tycker det är svårt komma vidare till intervjuar på grund av brist på kontakter inom näringslivet.</p> <p>Många boende önskar ett allaktivitetshus/kulturhus fyllt med olika typer av aktiviteter med allt från fritidsaktiviteter såsom konst, musik, schack och bordtennis till stöd med myndighetsärenden, språkutvecklingsmöjligheter och en mötesplats för lokala föreningar.</p> <p>Några populära och uppskattade mötesplatser är Hjärtebackes park, den stora lekplatsen, friluftsbadet på Gamlegården, urbana hembygdsgården och den öppna förskolan.</p> <p>Gamlegårdens centrum upplevs av många som otryggt på kvällstid på grund av narkotikaförsäljning, nedskräpning och ungdomsgång - här finns önskemål om ökad vuxennärvaro och fortsatta nattvandringar.</p> <p><b>Önskemål från barn och unga</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• En linbana</li> <li>• En labyrint på marken</li> <li>• Fler gungor</li> <li>• Konstgräsplan för fotboll</li> <li>• En fontän i park</li> <li>• Mer färg/mönster i området</li> <li>• Ljus med olika färg</li> <li>• Fler butiker</li> <li>• Högtalaren för musik</li> </ul> <p>Kristianstads kommun   2022-06-03</p>
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Figure 14. Extract from the summary of spontaneous dialogue meetings held within the Näsby Urban Development Project.

The Municipality was able to gather a multitude of suggestions from citizens during these *spontaneous meetings*, which complement the other forms of participation. However, the restricted resources of the Municipality place some limits on this form of participation. In addition, the Municipality is not able to implement all *citizen suggestions*. Some issues raised by citizens are not under the responsibility of the Municipality; consequently, the municipal officers cannot address them, thus risking disappointing the engaged citizens. Some criteria should be used to prioritize suggestions/requests: those getting the most votes or providing greater benefit to more people should be prioritized and possibly implemented.

The crucial point is that the knowledge generated by a specific project, and any project in general, should not be confined to the project leader and participants, but spread internally and externally. Spreading knowledge can minimize the risk of reinventing the wheel and using resources that could be better invested elsewhere.

#### **4) Citizen participation through citizen suggestions**

Engagement with citizens can also be achieved through *citizen suggestions*. The citizens can contact the Municipality for various reasons, to report faults, to request building permits, and so on. One reason for contacting the Municipality is to make *citizen suggestions*, with the aim of changing something within the Municipality.

Most of the input from citizens is received by the Civic Centre, which responds to much of it. However, *citizen suggestions* – which can be lodged by individuals as well as citizen associations, but not corporations – need the Municipal Council (Kommunfullmäktige) to decide on them. The result is that often suggestions are delegated to a specific department to be investigated and discussed by people with specialist knowledge about the issue.

The very idea of citizen suggestion is naturally connected to citizen participation. Citizen suggestions can, as mentioned during some of the interviews, pave the way to the start of new projects, leading to change processes originating from the bottom, that is, from citizens. By having clear deadlines (1 year to make a decision) the Municipality manages the expectations of the citizens, which in turn can increase participation.





*Figure 15.* Picture 008 from Näsby, 2021-04-24.

However, for those who did not make a citizen suggestion themselves, it can be hard to track what's done with these suggestions. One citizen suggestion for lowering the age for subsidized bus cards for seniors was rejected after being discussed in several departments. When we asked during a meeting with representatives from the Municipality if there is an easy way to see what was discussed in these meetings, one answer was that interested parties can make a "request for information." It is possible that the citizen who made the suggestion received more information. However, as can be seen in Figure 16 no full reason was given for rejecting the proposal aside from saying it is not within the plans of the Municipality, and naming the decisions made by the various departments based on the internal discussions/evaluations. This lack of transparency can be a disincentive for those thinking of making similar suggestions. It can also result in dissatisfied people sending similar suggestions.

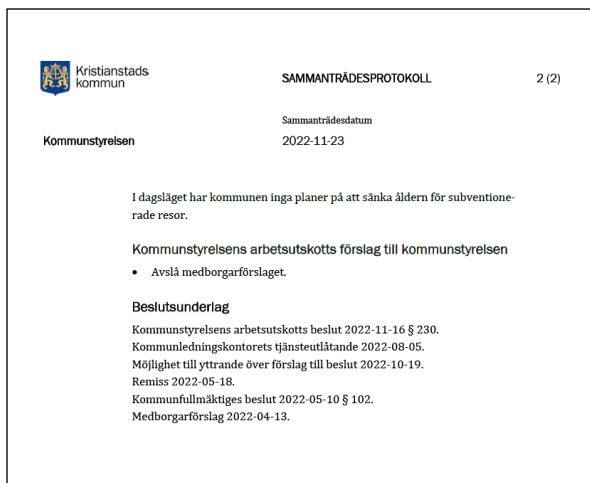


Figure 16. Extract from Municipality Minutes (Kristianstads kommun, 2022c).

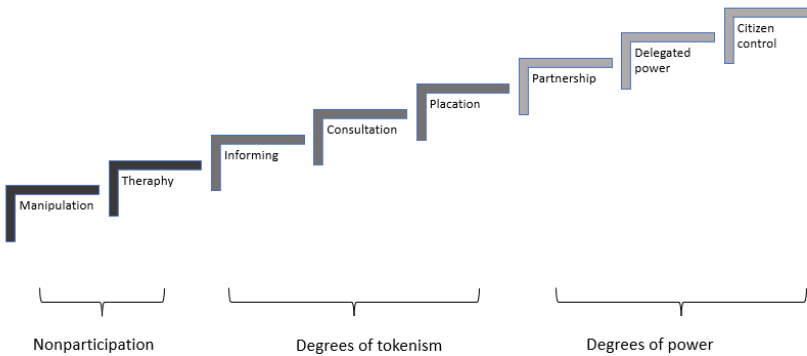
As with the dialogue meetings discussed earlier, area of responsibility is relevant. On their webpage related to *citizen suggestions*, the Municipality provides examples of where it has responsibility – streets and roads, for instance – that can also involve other actors, such as the regional collective transportation company (Skånetrafiken), or the Swedish Transport Administration (Trafikverket). This split responsibility can create frustration for citizens as a rejection based on other actors’ areas of responsibility can be taken as the Municipality’s unwillingness to act. It can also affect negotiations that can result in long feedback/decision cycles.

In conclusion, there are many ways that the Municipality creates possibilities to engage citizens. From consultation sessions within the planning work to spontaneous citizen dialogues, these different fora have different purposes and serve different expectations. The Detailed (Development) Plan consists of a plan map (plankarta), a plan description (where prerequisites, needs and proposals, etc. are explained with text and images), and all technical investigations that form the basis of the plan proposal. Compared to *spontaneous meetings of citizen suggestions*, which could cover any topic, the opportunities for expression in the planning work process are more limited. They are about the planning area and thus location-bound to the geographical area that the map deals with. These different forms of participation

should be considered as complementary and not substitutable. The degree of participation can vary across projects and time. That is, participation can span various overlapping projects with different temporalities, owners and implementers. Therefore, engaging citizens as active partners earlier in the processes of (re)constructions of parts of the city is both valuable but also difficult.

## 4. Analysis

Existing theoretical models and typologies can be used to categorize the citizen participation presented in Section 3. One such typology is provided by Arnstein (1969), who argues that though citizen participation is endorsed by many actors, the degree of participation presents problems. Her ladder of participation categorizes participation in terms of the power it confers on the citizens engaging in it to influence the decisions. See Figure 17.



*Figure 17.* Ladder of citizen participation (adapted from Arnstein, 1969, p. 217).

Though it is not the aim of this report to situate the provided citizen participation examples within the ladder exhaustively, exploring how the existing participation possibilities correspond to the ideas presented by Arnstein can still help analyze possibilities of engagement. The model is a simplification of reality. It does not consider the roadblocks

that hinder genuine levels of participation, nor take into account that there might be reasons for a lower level of participation being preferable to a higher one based on context. Nonetheless, it is still important to note that in large projects such as Climate Smart Näsby, it can be expected that several of the levels should be present.



*Figure 18.* Picture 060 from Näsby, 2021-10-18.

Citizen control and delegated power, the two top-most levels, entail citizens having considerable power in the projects, such as being responsible for management, having decision-making authority, or having direct public funding. At the partnership level, the citizens and the Municipality “agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for re-solving impasses” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 221). For many of the examples presented in Section 3, citizens were invited to provide input to the planning activities, with the possibility that their concerns could lead to changes in the process. However, considering a more detailed understanding of partnership – such as citizens having a considerable number of representatives on decision-making boards, having formally established organized activities, being able start initiatives of their own, and having veto powers – it is clear that the examples of engagement do not reach the partnership level.

The examples in Section 3, however, do share similarities with the levels of participation found under “degrees of tokenism.” “Informing,” according to Arnstein (1969, p. 219), often involves “one-way flow of information – from officials to citizens – with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation.” As noted in the examples, citizens in the urban planning process have different fora in which they provide inputs to the projects. At the same time, a suggestion from a citizen can lead to a new project starting, such as via *citizen suggestions*. It can be argued that having mandated time intervals to provide suggestions/complaints about projects elevates citizen engagement above mere informing. However, when it comes to negotiations, such possibilities can be restricted, as there are many laws and regulations that govern projects. Many of the decision-making bodies that govern the issues that start citizen participation are composed of specialists within the Municipality or consultants that are not part of the political section of the Municipality.

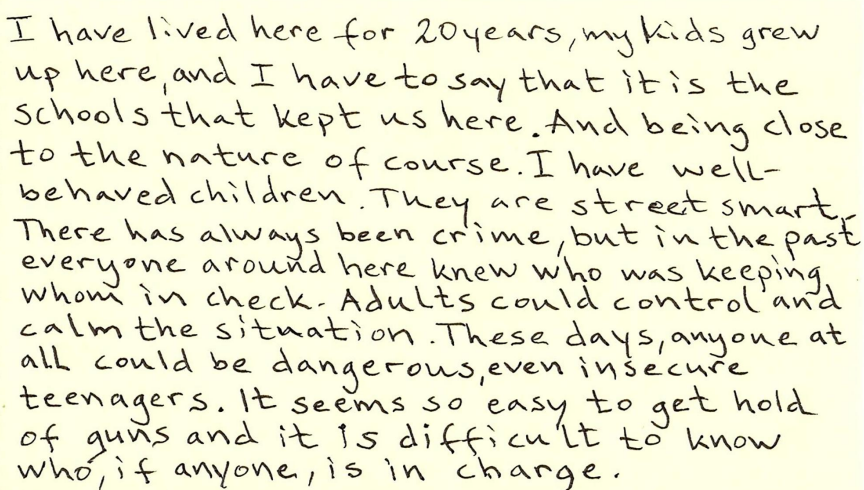
The openness of the Municipality to gather input from the citizens is akin to “consultation,” which often entails public hearings/meetings, neighborhood meetings and surveys. Many of the examples provided had explicit meetings set up, be it a neighborhood meeting or issues that were taken up in politically led dialogues. What becomes important, then, is to provide “assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219). Because *citizen suggestions* can affect portions of the projects, the examples suggest that the participation options reached a positive consultant stage, where citizen input is used to improve the projects and the Municipality/neighborhood overall. These suggestions can be easy to implement, such as planting blueberries, which was a suggestion in one of the *spontaneous meetings*. However, even an easy-to-implement suggestion can require the Municipality to check with different departments about feasibility – can blueberries and gooseberries be planted near each other? In this specific example, the response was that those two plants should not be planted together.



Figure 19. Picture 043 from Näsby, 2021-05-19.

As can be seen, the Municipality actively consults citizens and asks for input, which should in turn increase participation. However, there are several issues that should be mentioned: first is the timeline of the projects. The Municipality has a mandate to respond to *citizen suggestions* within a year. The result of a suggestion, however, can take several years to become visible and material to the citizens. When discussing the planning activities and citizen participation, several municipal officers pointed out that these suggestions led to new assignments (uppdrag) and were incorporated in the Overview (Comprehensive) Plan and Detailed (Development) Plan. As these plans have a perspective of 2-10 years, the suggestion might lose its relevance to the citizen. A further issue is how these suggestions – be it informal as in *spontaneous meetings* or the more official *citizen suggestions* – are prioritized: as far as we know, there is no publicly available guideline on how these suggestions are decided upon. As noted by Schmidhuber et al. (2022), there is evidence within the literature suggesting that being transparent in the decision-making process is an important way to increase further participation. Especially for rejected proposals, the “likelihood of continued participation depends on the causal attributions associated with the response provided by the government” (p. 972), suggesting that how and why the

government decided to reject should be made clear. As discussed in Section 3, it is possible that such a response is sent to the individual person that made the suggestion, but as an issue of public concern, having those decisions and decision criteria more publicly available could increase the motivation to participate (Li et al., 2020) and could, over time, become an institutionalized pattern of action.



I have lived here for 20 years, my kids grew up here, and I have to say that it is the schools that kept us here. And being close to the nature of course. I have well-behaved children. They are street smart. There has always been crime, but in the past everyone around here knew who was keeping whom in check. Adults could control and calm the situation. These days, anyone at all could be dangerous, even insecure teenagers. It seems so easy to get hold of guns and it is difficult to know who, if anyone, is in charge.

Figure 20. Vignette 021, These days, anyone at all could be dangerous.

This issue of transparency in participation is also a concern when moving up or down the participation ladder. As Arnstein argues (1969, p. 220), when the powerholders, in our case the Municipality, retain the right to judge the legitimacy and/or feasibility of the advice, the participation is not a genuine participation but *placation*. As stated at the start of this section, our aim is not to categorize the participation channels but to highlight some issues. The decisions related to *citizen suggestions* can be accessed via the Municipality's webpages: however, they are often spread across various meeting minutes (sammanträdesprotokoll), which are not easy to navigate. Sometimes the Municipality and the departments involved provide a legal basis for a decision, and sometimes more qualitative reasoning is given. However, when suggestions could necessitate substantial effort, some of the responses can be considered non-replies. Looking into one such case, in which the issue of a light rail between Kristianstad and Åhus was raised by a citizen suggestion dated 2022-03-26 (Kristianstads

kommun, 2022b), the end result was that because one part of the track runs near an area where new embankments may be built, it is not possible to decide on the case. By stating that, the issue was considered as “answered” by the Municipality (Kristianstads kommun, 2022c). However, no details are given on when the embankments might be built or when – if at all – this suggestion might be put on the table again.

Another example is the previously mentioned rejection of the suggestion regarding the age limit of subsidized bus cards. The minutes show two parties (Social Democrats and The Left Party) arguing that the issue is an important one and saying that they also want clarification and even expansion of such issues. The rejection decision itself, however, simply says that “Currently, the Municipality has no plans to lower the age for subsidized travel,” without giving any details on when – if at all – such an issue could be in the Municipality’s plan.

With the types of participation discussed, the dependencies between and the time horizons of the various projects come into focus. Most of the participation lies within the middle of the ladder and, as Arnstein (1969) argues, it might not be necessary or feasible to have all the stages covered. Furthermore, there are linkages between the layers of the ladder: to genuinely participate, citizens should have information on what the issues and consequences are, something that is hard to achieve without “informing” the citizens. Similarly, if a *citizen suggestion* bears fruit in five years, there is a high likelihood of other participation activities taking place during the period in which the project started and ended. Hence, the various participation activities mentioned should be thought of as a scale of activities that cover various rungs of the ladder.





Figure 21. Picture 040 from Näsby, 2021-05-19.

If one considers that the Overview (Comprehensive) Plan has a long-term perspective, and the Detailed (Development) Plan is more medium/short term, there are many participation activities going on at the same time that affect the same neighborhood. There are also many projects taking place at the Municipality aside from these planning processes. There were approximately 80 ongoing projects in Näsby during the time we were involved with Climate Smart Näsby. The participation activities for one issue, *spontaneous meetings*, for example, can feed into another project that was not originally tied to the issue. In such a case, the question is if the participation activity counts for the second project. Such a question was raised in some of the meetings held with the Municipality when we asked where the assignments (uppdrag) come from: sometimes they are actually initiated by *citizen suggestions*.

Mapping the various activities to a timetable is beyond the scope of this report, as these activities are rather fragmented. As noted in relation to the difficulties of tracking *citizen suggestions*, there is not an easily accessible database to track which participation activities were conducted for a project and the content of these activities and what, if any, impact they had on other projects and activities. What is important

though is for the Municipality to accept these dependencies and make the process transparent and accessible to the citizens to increase their awareness. We attempted to track the outcome of *citizen suggestions* as part of this research project and realized that it is a resource intensive activity. To the best of our knowledge, none of the citizens we engaged with would follow a similar approach to track how *citizen suggestions* are handled over time.

As an example, it should be noted that in one of the documents reviewed (Kristianstads Kommun, 2022a) dated 2022-11-09, an update paragraph mentions that the school Österänggymnasiet will move to the shopping mall in the city center. It is notable that the same date the local newspaper announced the move, a search in the Municipality's webpages (2022-12-11) did not have an easily accessible link to the project and what it entails, even though the discussion to relocate/upgrade the high school already started in 2017. These lapses in communication can hinder participation as they make it harder for citizens to track the progress of the projects. To overcome this problem, one solution can be to have the decisions related to the projects grouped under project-specific webpages.

Having the suggestions and ideas from citizens grouped and published is one way of increasing transparency. However, the challenge of gathering the input from the citizens remains a piece of the puzzle of sustainable urban development projects. In the Climate-smart Näsby project, we used photo-walks to gather citizens' ideas on the area that they live in. From these photo-walks we organized several exhibitions to serve as an input to the Municipality's decision making and to increase awareness by visualizing the citizens' ideas. At the same time, the exhibitions provided feedback to the citizens by highlighting their contributions in a tangible manner.

## 5. Exhibitions

When thinking of how to gather citizens' ideas and feelings about Näsby, we aimed to focus on the *particulars* rather than the *universal*. That is, we wanted to capture things that distinguish Näsby and its inhabitants from other places in Sweden. In our approach, the particulars are an important component in which both understanding and conveying content is strongly related to capturing and conveying

emotions. Walking with others was the most central design activity we created in this project; its aim was to facilitate meetings with citizens in a period of Covid restrictions (see Argento et al., 2022). In the walks, we endeavored to capture the hopes and fears of the citizens. Our ambition was to create a complement to the often-used conventional methods, which largely aim to capture the universal, as our focus was instead to capture the particular. When capturing the universal, abstraction together with general solutions is the key aspect. However, in striving to capture the particular, we took all details as potentially significant and refrained from abstraction as it might hide potentially important details.



*Figure 22.* Photos from exhibitions.

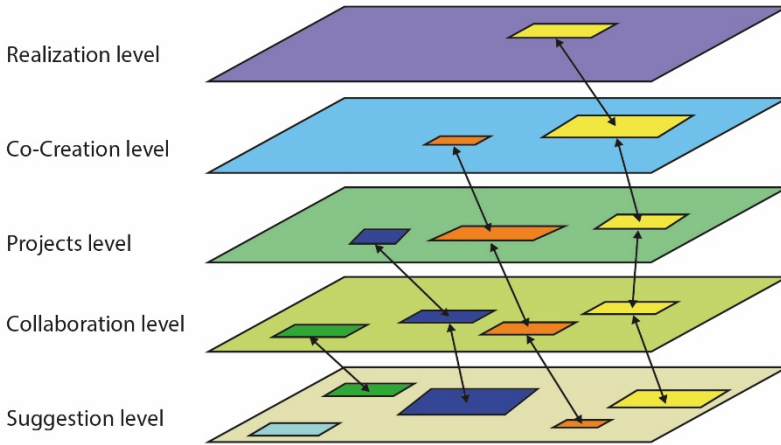
In the exhibitions at the library at Gamlegården-Näsby, Kristianstad City Hall and Kristianstad University Library we presented the results of these walks and talks. The design activities were captured in a series of both physical and digital photo albums. As a conscious choice, we avoided framing and limiting the discussions with citizens by not directly raising issues related to climate issues. We did not want to collect obvious, expected and already known impressions but rather give the citizens freedom to express their ideas and feelings about the site.

The chosen method tried to capture the messy, complex, and sprawling particulars that characterize the site. The approach offers municipalities “levers” that contribute to discussing and working with citizens’ future living environment towards climate-smart solutions, while providing an opportunity to citizens to participate.

## 6. Discussion

The starting point for this report was that the lack of a clear conceptual overview (i.e. a model) makes it almost impossible for citizens to understand when, where and how they could participate in order to have a desired effect on a municipality's sustainable city development. A well-known key for creating citizen engagement is to ensure transparency and feedback in planning and decision making. To address the challenges of creating platforms which include citizens in municipalities' decision making and development processes, a model titled *Site specific active citizen dialogue* is proposed.

The model is based on the layered approach which characterizes the Geographical Information System (GIS) used by the Municipality of Kristianstad. The GIS is a data system for handling location-related information which can consist of maps, images, database information or text documents. In addition, with a GIS the information can be visualized and made understandable to users (Kristianstads kommun, 2023). GIS systems can facilitate open and layered perspectives on citizen engagement and participation. The proposed model has five layers, as can be seen in Figure 23, whose application in practice can lead to the creation of a platform for interactions. Starting at the suggestion level, active dialogue proceeds via collaboration and identification of viable projects to co-creative design and actual realization. Each level entails the engagement of specific actors, which is a precondition for sustainable urban development processes.



*Figure 23.* Site specific active citizen dialogue model.

In the platform, citizens can inform the municipality of their site-specific ideas, both problems and wishes about the future, through A) the **suggestion level**, which is owned by the municipality, and B) communication with a collaboration “pilot,” who brings back suggestion to the suggestion level. The suggestion level of the platform allows participants to add “post it” notes representing their ideas on the (GIS) layer that will be visible to all actors. The collaboration pilot is an employee of the municipality who regularly spends time in areas of special interest for the municipality. The collaboration pilot is easily recognizable through signs or clothing, and also well known to many citizens due to the amount of time they regularly spend in the field. Collaboration pilots are the municipality’s ear to the ground. At the same time, they also are the citizens’ pilot regarding how to understand and participate in the municipality’s different processes for change. The output of this level is the emergence of site-specific problems and possibilities.

At the **collaboration level** actors such as collaboration pilots, citizens, co-planners and other relevant staff from the municipality have an opportunity to discuss and develop the suggestions received in the previous phase, that is, at the suggestion level. Collaboration in this level can be seen as an organizational solution to the challenges that a

single department cannot handle on its own, a form of systematized collaboration and matchmaking that breaks the typical working silos. For the collaboration level to be effective, the municipality governance and structure needs to be reorganized to reduce typical bureaucratic and hierarchical approaches to public service delivery. Such reorganization is needed because sustainable urban development processes are often hindered by existing laws, regulations, time constraints and resource scarcity, which restrict the opportunities for meaningful collaboration in terms of which ideas can be transformed into projects. Tentative potential ideas that have a match to stakeholders and resources can be advanced to the next phase. Collaboration can lead to the identification of tentative ideas and to project participants assigned specific responsibilities.

At the **project level**, the feasibility of the suggestions is investigated in more detail. In this phase officials and citizens have an idea of what they want with the ongoing dialogue about the projects. More importantly, both parties (officials and citizens) need to let go of their own scripts when the conversation becomes lively and let it take its own course. This important approach widens the space in which the unfamiliar can be confronted, the uncertainties can be explored and debated and resolved. This approach relates to the term *active* suggested by Wiberg (2018), which inspired the title of the model in this report. The project level is challenging because an initial suggestion can take unforeseen paths and result in something that could not be fully understood at earlier levels. At this level the suggestions must pass reviews that reference laws, regulations, time frames and resources. All actors must agree to escalate the project to the next level. The output of this level is a project brief that details the agreement reached on which projects to follow through with and which participants will be involved in the next level.

At the **co-creation level** the project brief is conceptualized by invited experts, municipal officials, and the citizens involved. We define this level as a joint development of new values (concepts, solutions, products and services) within the framework of particular project briefs already decided. Ideas at this level are considered to be on equal terms and thereby designed and improved together rather than owned by one actor. This level leads to blueprints and models that can be realized by industrial actors.

At the **realization level** industrial partners/professional actors realize the project in continuous dialogue with the municipality and citizen representatives who created the project.

The suggested platform is flexible in that, depending on how the collaboration between the actors evolves, not all suggestions made at the first level reach the realization phase. As seen in Figure 23 suggestions can reach different levels. For example, the cyan colored suggestion stopped at the suggestion level, the green suggestion reached the collaboration level, the blue suggestion reached the project level, and so on.

An issue raised in the interviews was that because every project is unique, they cannot be managed the same way and learnings from one project cannot be easily transferred to another. Our position differs to the extent that our purpose was to present a platform that can help with citizen participation, thus to create a transferable model. While we do not claim that our platform is applicable to every situation, it can be taken as a starting point for discussing how to increase citizen participation by pointing out various possible participation roles and activities. Devising roles that both internal and external stakeholders can play helps clarify what is possible and what can be expected of citizens, thus increasing their participation. By opening up the possibility of citizens doing more than merely informing or acting at the consulting level, the platform aims to sketch a range of possible activities and roles within a project.

## 7. Conclusions

Our aim with this report was to explore how the Municipality of Kristianstad engages with citizens in sustainable urban development projects and identify different forms of participation possibilities. We sought to contribute to the wider debate on citizen participation in sustainable urban development, which has been the focus of various research streams in the past decades.

There are several take aways from the results of the implementation of the project. As known from the public management literature, municipalities' working processes are "top-down" and seldomly start from spontaneous initiatives. Innovation projects are often initiated

through political mandates, which trigger the bureaucratic engine characterized by stiff rules and regulations. This project shows that participation possibilities steered by law are necessary to ensure the fairness of public processes. However, such bureaucratic processes can also hinder effective participation by citizens because the opportunities for interactive dialogues are limited by existing rigid frames.

Citizens are often not fully aware of the available forms of participation. Municipalities are not equipped with participation models that apply to various public policy matters. The current available forms of participation often cater to limited core stakeholders that have a salient stake and a reason to seek active participation. The majority of stakeholders, and particularly citizens, do not engage. Participation is not only a matter of resources but also a matter of willingness. There needs to be a match between the demand for the participation of citizens by the municipality (to ensure better informed decision making on public policy matters) and the supply of information, knowledge and ideas that citizens can actually offer.

For the demand and offer to meet, effective two-way dialogue is required to overcome operational paralysis and strengthen democracy. Allowing spontaneous forms of participation and dialogues is a way through which a municipality implements principles of open government, based on openness, transparency, and accountability. Therefore, municipalities need to experiment with new ways of working, not only oriented to external stakeholders but also with internal working processes across departments, divisions and units. When municipal officers work within different silos, duplication of work and effort occurs, which hampers synergetic gains.

As this report shows, introducing a site specific active citizen dialogue platform would entail the creation of new professional roles within municipalities; that is, municipal officers would be appointed with new titles and tasks that cross the silos. Having those new roles embedded in the structure of the municipality, and not only for temporary projects, leads to collaborative governance that closes the gap between the municipality as an administrative body and civil society. By closing this gap, participation opportunities can cover a broader range of possibilities as conceptualized by Arnstein (1969) and offer more meaningful opportunities for citizens to participate in sustainable urban development processes.



Public organizations are concerned with balancing the common good and individual requests from citizens. Municipalities can improve decision making as well as increase citizen participation by adopting more flexible models that provide different opportunities for participation, creating new roles for both the citizens and municipal officers that foster effective dialogue. Models that incorporate genuine dialogue with citizens can help municipalities identify problems and opportunities that are hard to grasp using only the traditional town hall meeting model. By drawing from a variety of research traditions, our report highlights how a combination of existing participation opportunities and new methods – such as spontaneous dialogues and photo-walks – can help municipalities be visible and actively involved within an area while providing citizens additional fora to participate in decision making and in influencing their city’s development.

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**THIS REPORT PRESENTS** the final results of our engagement in the research project Climate-Smart Näsby. Our involvement from January to December 2022 was aimed to explore how the Municipality of Kristianstad (Sweden) engages with citizens in urban planning related initiatives and identify different forms of participation possibilities.

The results of such exploration led to the recognition of both the value and the difficulties of establishing fruitful forms of dialogue. One difficulty is engaging citizens at the early stages of an urban (re)building process, especially when sustainability concerns are at stake. In addition, it is difficult to ensure that citizens remain anchored to the whole process, which usually takes a long time to be completed. The risk is that participation and dialogue remain fragmented over time, with different citizens being active in different stages of an urban planning process. This report presents a tentative model that facilitates the creation of platforms for site specific active citizen dialogue (In Swedish: platsbunden aktiv opinions-bildning) to alleviate identified difficulties. A selection of vignettes and photos, resulting from our fieldwork and displayed in various exhibitions, is included in the report to give the reader a sense of the studied site (Näsby, Kristianstad) and the citizens living there.