



Policy Brief: *Governance Factors Supporting the Local Co-Creation of Sustainability Transitions*

Executive Summary

The global GOGREEN research project led by researchers at Roskilde University, Denmark, and involving researchers from all parts of the world, has systematically studied how various constellations of governance factors shape the co-creation of local sustainability transitions. This policy brief translates the empirical findings into actionable policy recommendations to empower changemakers to build capacities for effective local green co-creation.

Policy Context

The planet faces escalating biosphere crises: biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, soil erosion, water and air pollution, and the over-extraction of natural resources. These challenges are intensified by climate change, which is accelerating droughts, floods, rising sea levels, and the emergence of new diseases and pests. The livelihoods of millions, and the stability of ecological systems, are at stake.

We need swift action to halt the nature and climate crisis. We must bring together relevant and affected actors to co-create green solutions. While every co-creation project is unique, the general principle is that collaboration in networks and partnerships allows a diversity of public, private and civic actors to solve problems that none of them can solve singlehandedly. The exchange and pooling of experiences, ideas and resources can spark learning and innovation while building a broad-based ownership over new and bold solutions that supports their implementation.

The co-creation of green solutions may be particularly impactful at the local level where biosphere problems are clearly visible, public and private actors may know each other well, and collaboration is driven more by pragmatic than ideological concerns. Local green co-creation projects may be small and have limited impact, but they benefit from the strength of numbers and from subsequent scaling and diffusion of best practices.

The GOGREEN contribution

The GOGREEN project argues that reaping the fruits of local green co-creation can be greatly enhanced by the presence of different constellations of governance factors that help prompt and scaffold emergent processes of collaboration, learning and innovation. To this end, we have explored the impact of 16 different governance factors to discover the conditions for successful co-creation of sustainability transitions at the local level.

Findings

GOGREEN researchers have conducted 36 case studies in 27 countries around the world, including nations as varied as China, Ghana, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Norway, Serbia, South Africa and the United States, and (case reports available at <https://www.gogreen-project.com/>).

The research focus has been on analyzing the different combinations of governance factors that support the successful co-creation of local green outcomes that contribute to solving the nature and climate crisis. We looked at 16 different systemic, strategic and tactical-operational governance factors. Local cases were carefully selected and research interviews, documents and observations provided data that allowed numerical scoring of the impact of governance factors backed by solid qualitative accounts.

Cross-case analysis indicates that the most impactful factors are the severity of biosphere problems, the existence of institutional channels for citizen participation, narratives of successful collaborative problem-solving in the past, the formation of collaborative platforms, the recognition of resource interdependence and the exercise of facilitative leadership. However, the most interesting finding is that these and other governance factors combine in multiple ways to produce successful outcomes. Hence, there is no 'one-best-way' to local green co-creation since different pathways may lead to successful outcomes.

Seven governance factors with high impact:

First, the *severity and discursive framing of biosphere problems* creates a sense of urgency that provides an important trigger of local co-creation.

Second, the *mutual recognition of the need to pool and exchange resources* make the local actors invest time and energy in collaboration.

Third, the *openness of the public sector and the presence of local channels for citizen participation* support public-private interaction.

Fourth, *collaborative platforms* lower the transaction costs of collaboration. By providing storylines and reusable templates, tools and resources, platforms makes it easy to collaborate.

Fifth, *local stories of successful collaboration in the past* help to build momentum for collaboration.

Sixth, *blended financing* of local projects that draw on several public and private funding streams eases the fiscal burden of local government.

Finally, *facilitative leadership* empowers the participating actors, builds trust ad drives the local co-creation to a successful conclusion.

Recommendations

The following set of specific recommendations of critical governance conditions supporting local green co-creation has been derived from an analysis of the 36 case studies.

I. Structural Preconditions

Align Multi-Level Governance and Legal Frameworks with Co-Creation Principles

To support local green co-creation, governments should embed co-creation principles across administrative levels and sectoral domains by ensuring that national and regional legislation explicitly recognizes the legitimacy of community-led initiatives, intermediary platforms, and partnerships with non-state actors. This alignment requires adjusting policy instruments, planning protocols, and institutional mandates to encourage flexibility, responsiveness, and cross-sector innovation that can spur sustainability transitions.

Enable Civic Participation Through Institutionalized and Inclusive Pathways

Inclusive and collaborative governance begins with building codified and resourced participation channels (community assemblies, co-design platforms, or participatory budgeting) that ensure meaningful citizen influence. These channels must be insulated from political cycles and designed to reach both active stakeholders and often-overlooked community members, including women, youth, and marginalized groups to ensure that local green co-creation builds on an understanding of local problems and needs.

Ensure Public Support for Intermediary Actors and Hybrid Institutions

Intermediary organizations, such as social enterprises, civic tech hubs, and multi-actor taskforces, play a crucial bridging role between formal government and localized grassroots experimentation. Governments should create mechanisms for recognizing, financing, and integrating these entities into policy processes, providing them with legal status, seed money and institutional anchoring.

Translate Global Sustainability Frameworks into Local Narratives

While global green targets, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, helps legitimize local action, they must be translated into locally relevant goals and practices. Policymakers should invest in building communicative bridges between global frameworks and place-based needs and knowledge, allowing communities to co-define what sustainability looks like in their specific ecological, economic and cultural contexts.

Design Public Communication for Accessibility and Cognitive Inclusion

Policy instruments and governance protocols should use inclusive and plain language to foster broader comprehension and engagement. This effort not only involves simplifying technical documents but also incorporating multilingual, visual, and story-based communication strategies that resonate across literacy levels and cultural groups.

II. Organizational Design

Institutionalize Multi-Actor Platforms for Collaborative Governance

Sustainable co-creation demands enduring institutional backup systems. Governments should support the establishment of collaborative platforms by providing organizational templates, clear rules of engagement, access to relevant expertise, designated facilitative leadership, and mandates that span planning, implementation, and evaluation. These platforms should be open to expansion and designed to evolve as new challenges and actors emerge.

Support Diverse and Reflexive Leadership Models

Leadership in co-creation settings must be facilitative, distributed, and adaptive. Governments and funders should invest in leadership development programs that train public, private or civic leaders of local co-creation in mediation, inclusive facilitation, power-sensitive communication, and collective decision-making. Leadership legitimacy should come from demonstrated responsiveness and competence rather than positional authority.

Design Inclusive Processes and Structures to Address Power Asymmetries

Co-creation processes must be proactively structured to deal with and mitigate existing inequalities in access, resources, and voice. This effort involves setting participatory quotas, offering stipends for community involvement, ensuring multi-language facilitation, and building physical and digital infrastructure that enables equitable participation.

Adopt an Asset-Based Logic in Project Design

Rather than focusing on community deficits, local initiatives should begin by mapping existing assets (natural, human, cultural, and infrastructural) and designing interventions that build on and harness these strengths. Recognizing and integrating traditional ecological knowledge, trusted social networks, and local economic systems enhances ownership and long-term impact.

Create Adaptive, Spatially Anchored, and Digitally-Enabled Spaces

The success of co-creation often hinges on the availability of welcoming, inclusive, and contextually embedded spaces where stakeholders can interact meaningfully. These spaces should be resourced, maintained, and deliberately designed to cultivate familiarity, security, and iterative collaboration. They may be physical meeting spaces allowing face-to-face interaction or digitally-enabled spaces and tools that facilitate easy, low cost access to information and enable the reporting of events, problems and small wins.

III. Strategic Interventions

Establish Horizontal and Vertical Accountability Mechanisms

Co-creation processes must be governed by shared accountability frameworks. This includes jointly defined performance indicators, transparent resource tracking, public reporting, and social auditing. Accountability should be reciprocal; government actors must answer to

communities, just as community actors must be accountable for their efforts to design and implement solutions.

Embed Iterative Learning and Adaptive Evaluation as Core Design Features

Co-creation should be governed by a culture of joint learning rather than top-down control. Joint learning requires built-in mechanisms for regular reflection, experimentation, failure documentation, and course correction. Evaluations should go beyond output measurement and include stakeholder perception, narrative tracking, and ecological or social system effects.

Scale Through Modular and Demonstrative Approaches

To support scalability without homogenization, local initiatives should adopt a modular structure that allows components to be replicated, adapted, or recombined in new or bigger contexts. Pilot projects and demonstration sites play a vital role in validating ideas, inspiring replication, and building confidence among hesitant actors or communities.

Create a Narrative Infrastructure to Sustain Motivation and Coherence

Narratives are not simply stories; they are tools of alignment and meaning-making. Policymakers and project leaders should invest in cultivating shared narratives that articulate the rationale, vision, and identity of local projects. These narratives should reflect diverse cultural rationalities and remain flexible enough to accommodate learning and evolution.

Secure and Incentivize Blended and Flexible Financing Mechanisms

Funding systems must be as agile and multi-scalar as the problems they seek to address. Governments and philanthropic actors should support the development of blended financing models—including matched crowdfunding, social impact bonds, and co-investment schemes—that reward collaboration, experimentation, and long-term outcomes over short-term deliverables.

Strengthen Capacities for User Involvement and Downstream Implementation

End users must be engaged early and consistently in the design of solutions that will affect them later on. Training, co-design sessions, and iterative feedback loops should ensure that innovations are practical, socially embedded, and desirable from the perspective of users' lived realities.

Integrate Knowledge Institutions and Innovation Networks

To bridge the gap between research and implementation, policies should support sustained partnerships between universities, R&D units, and co-creation platforms. This includes creating physical hubs for exchange, fostering translational roles for academic staff, and promoting mutual learning between experts and community actors.

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4	Translate Global Sustainability Frameworks into Local Narratives and Commitments	I. Structural Preconditions
5	Design Public Communication for Accessibility and Cognitive Inclusion	I. Structural Preconditions
6	Institutionalize Multi-Actor Platforms for Collaborative Governance	II. Organizational Design
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