Community-based dialogues

City of Malmö

INTRODUCTION

Between 2024 and 2026, Malmö ran a **series of community dialogues** in **three neighbourhoods**: Västra Hamnen (Western Harbour), Limhamn, and Augustenborg. Residents took part in **workshops exploring sustainable lifestyles and "sufficiency"**, the idea of living well without over-consuming.

The goal was to understand how residents themselves think about a good life, what sufficiency means to them, and which local policies could support more sustainable living without lowering quality of life.

Each dialogue combined a **few activities**: a **presentation on local climate facts** (informing), a **"Walk & Talk" observation exercise** in the neighbourhood (consulting), and **visioning and backcasting exercises** to develop concrete policy ideas (involving).

The initiative aimed to **surface locally grounded insight** into sustainable living, **spot barriers and opportunities** for cutting consumption-based emissions, and feed that into **municipal policy development**. It also gave residents **space to reflect together** on everyday habits, social norms, and collective solutions.



SWEDEN

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

- **Inform**
- **Consult**
- **Involve**
- Collaborate
- Empower



MANDATE

The first two dialogues grew out of a **research partnership between the City of Malmö and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)**, a research institute focused on sustainability and the environment. The third dialogue was run together with **MKB, Malmö's municipal housing company**.

There was **no formal decision-making mandate** here. The dialogues were meant to **generate insight and policy ideas** that could feed into future municipal strategies on climate action, sustainable lifestyles, and neighbourhood development. Participants knew from the start that their input would be documented and used for further research and policy discussion, not acted on directly.

So the outcomes were **advisory and exploratory**, not binding. Still, the process gave residents a real chance to shape how local sustainability challenges and solutions get understood, and **local politicians have shown interest in this kind of process going forward**.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Recruitment happened in **three neighbourhoods**, chosen specifically to bring in **different socioeconomic conditions** and levels of consumption-based emissions.

In Västra Hamnen, a **high-income area** with relatively **high emissions** despite plenty of sustainability initiatives, recruitment ran through **personal invitations, Facebook, the city's website, and local community groups**. Twelve residents signed up, and **six to ten residents** took part across **three sessions**, spanning different ages, family situations, and housing types.

In Limhamn, a **locally active resident from a housing cooperative** helped drive recruitment, through neighbourhood networks and Facebook. **26 residents** took part, including people from three housing associations as well as independent residents, a mix that varied in age, gender, education, and employment.

In Augustenborg, a **lower-income neighbourhood** with lower emissions, MKB handled recruitment through its own communication channels. **18 residents** living in MKB buildings took part.

Two additional neighbourhoods, including one low-income area, were originally considered too, but recruitment there didn't bring in enough people to run a session, so they were dropped from the final set.

Participants received **small symbolic gifts**, but no financial compensation, in any of the three neighbourhoods.

PROCESS DESIGN

The City of Malmö's Environment Department and SEI developed the dialogue method together. The first two editions were run by both, the third by the city and MKB.

Each dialogue ran as **three evening workshops**, **one per week**, from 17:00 to 19:30, mixing information, hands-on activities, and group discussion.

The first workshop introduced climate challenges and sustainability targets, at both global and local level. Participants saw l**ocalised emissions data** through **SEI's Consumption Compass**, a tool that shows what everyday consumption, like food, travel, and housing, actually costs the climate. **Sufficiency** was introduced here too, and participants reflected on what living sufficiently could look like day to day. The session ended with a **Walk & Talk through the neighbourhood**, spotting real opportunities and barriers to sustainable living around food, mobility, and housing.

The second workshop moved into visioning. Participants imagined a **future neighbourhood** that had already gone through a sustainable transition, then sketched "utopian" ideas directly onto photographs of their own streets and public spaces.

The third workshop used backcasting, working backward from that future vision to figure out what needs to happen now. **Municipal experts** from several departments joined this session, and participants worked through the policy, behavioural, and technological changes needed, and who should be responsible for what.

Municipal staff, researchers, and MKB staff facilitated together, **mixing academic knowledge with local policy know-how.**

OUTPUT & FOLLOW-UP

The dialogues produced a set of **shared visions** and **concrete policy ideas** for more sustainable neighbourhoods. Residents imagined **greener, more socially connected communities**: less consumption, more sharing, repair, and local production, slower-paced living, stronger social ties, and better access to nature and public space.

From there, backcasting turned those visions into a **shortlist of concrete proposals**: more cycling infrastructure and less car dependency, support for local food production and markets, repair and reuse initiatives, shared community spaces, better public transport, resource-sharing schemes like tool libraries, and more green space.

All of this was compiled into a **summary report**, capturing **residents' perspectives and suggestions for ongoing research and municipal discussions** on sustainable lifestyles and neighbourhood-based climate action.

The outputs **feed knowledge and policy thinking**, rather than triggering binding decisions right away. It's too early to say how much of this will actually be implemented.





RESOURCES

The initiative ran as part of a **research collaboration between Malmö City and academic partners**, with municipal staff and researchers handling planning, facilitation, and documentation. Resources mainly went into **staff time, workshop facilitation, and preparing materials**, with sessions held in local venues and public spaces in the neighbourhoods themselves.

There was no separate formal evaluation study. But participants were asked about the dialogue before and after, and their reflections suggest the **process genuinely helped build insight into sustainable lifestyles**, local climate knowledge, and ideas for moving forward.

STRENGHTS

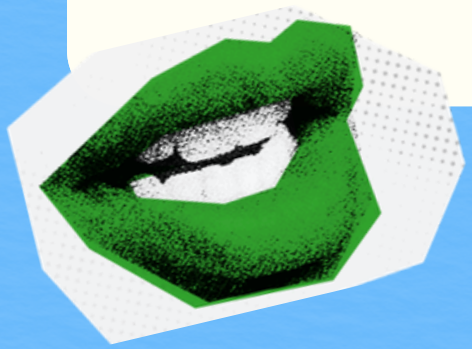
- A **place-based approach** grounded discussions in residents' everyday experience of their own neighbourhood.
- Small group discussions allowed more **balanced participation**, especially where some individuals tended to dominate.
- **Weekly meetings** built a study-circle feel that participants appreciated, with time to reflect between sessions.
- **Strong collaboration** between municipal, academic, and external partners brought complementary expertise into the dialogue.

CHALLENGES

- Recruiting a **broad and diverse group of participants**.
- **Time constraints**, for both participants and organisers.
- Translating broad visions into **realistic policy measures**.
- **Managing different expectations** about the municipality's role, including the organisers' own expectations.
- Deciding whether, and how, to **scale up the approach**.
- **Representativeness**, desirable in principle, but not always necessary in this context.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sustainability discussions land better when framed around **quality of life, community, and well-being**, rather than restrictions.
- Place-based dialogues surface locally specific opportunities and barriers. Linking discussions to **concrete local examples and actors** makes them more relevant and credible.
- **A well-sequenced process works well**: Walk & Talk, then climate knowledge, then sufficiency, then visioning, each building on the last.
- Dialogues can serve **several purposes at once** (influence, learning, social connection), which makes them harder to keep focused, but also more valuable.
- **Highly localised climate data** is powerful for engagement, but it can also **provoke strong reactions**.



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