THE ÅLAND FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The aim of this document is to describe an example of a society working with widescale sustainable transformation.

This document describes the Åland Framework, a process used to guide a society towards sustainability. The document contains our theory of change, and a description of the structures supporting the transformation.

The theory of change is the theoretical framework for decision-making. It is important both during initiation and throughout the transition. Furthermore, the theory illustrates the importance of having a multisectoral approach, as certain key elements are otherwise easily overlooked.

The description of the supportive structures provides more detailed information on the implementation of the Åland Framework. Necessary actions, networks, and agencies are explained. By describing our framework, we hope to inspire other societies in their strive towards a life within our planetary and humanitarian boundaries.

It is worth bearing in mind that no model or framework can be imported into a new context without adjustment and adaptation. The Åland Framework is just that, a framework, and by adapting it to the community's needs we hope it can help the community to visualise and realise a sustainable future.

1. Theory of change

Our theory of change is centred around a community vision developed through a participatory process. Attached to the abstract vision are tangible strategic development goals, leading to action.

The first version of the vision and the goals are developed by citizens, businesses, civil society organisations, and government agencies aware of the challenges facing their society. It is imperative to make an active effort in including a wide range of different stakeholders as early as possible. Without the support of the whole community, the vision and goals will not take off.

Figure 1. The Åland Framework Theory of Change
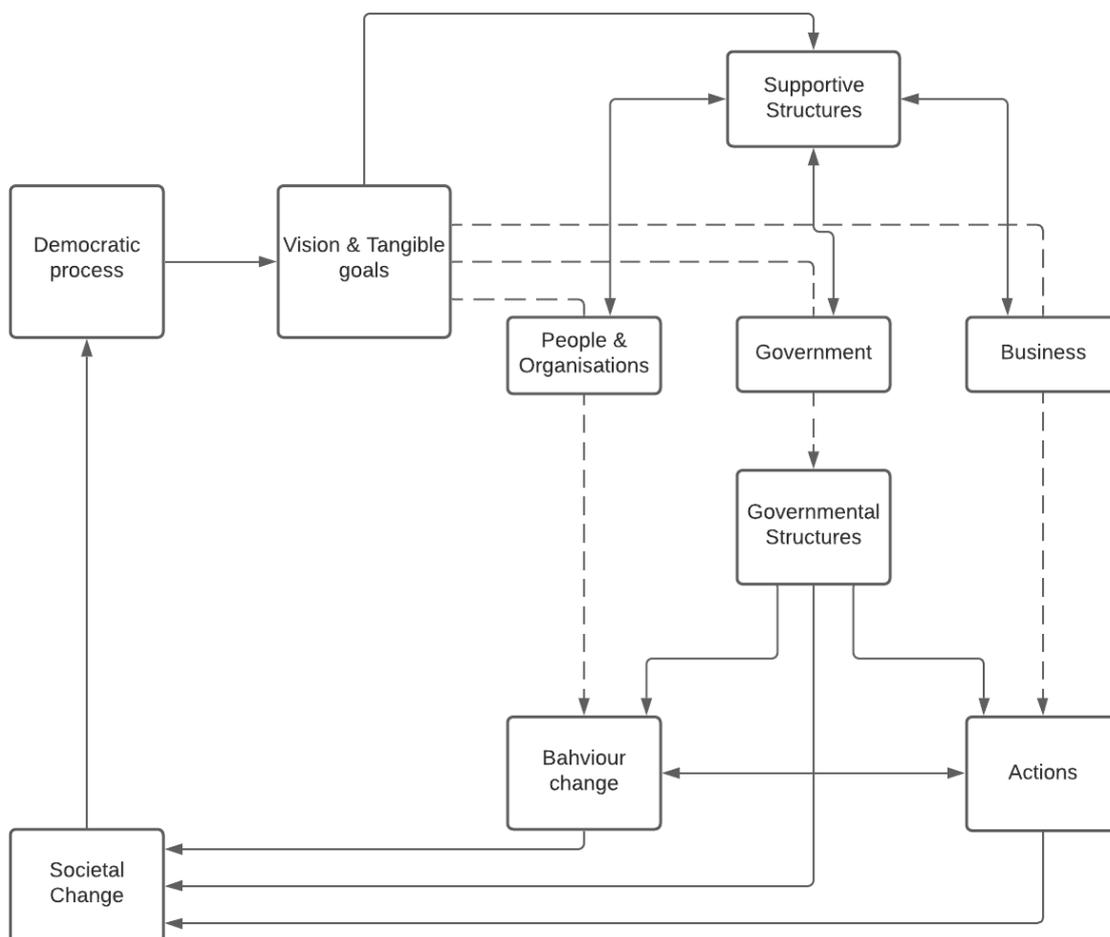
As government subsequently incorporate the vision and the strategic development goals in its decision-making, structures are created that aid the implementation across different sectors. These structures include, but are not limited to, legislation and economic incentives. The governmental structures, in tandem with public demand, forces business and other organisations to develop new action-plans, products, and services. In turn, the actions, products, and services support both government and the citizens as innovation and price-reduction makes new technologies and services more available.

The structures created by new governmental decisions also support the citizens as they incorporate the vision in their daily lives. Furthermore, conscious citizens demand more of both their government, the products and services they buy, and the businesses they work for – driving and accelerating the transformation.

Democratic process, Vision & Tangible goals

Starting in the upper left corner of the process-flow diagram, a community vision as well as tangible goals for realising the vision are created through a deliberative and democratic process. This can be done in a variety of ways, through citizens juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polls, or town square meetings.

The arrangement and monitoring of the democratic process are the responsibilities of the government, which plays the vital part of upholding structures that can either harm or foster societal change. Therefore, it is important to include at least part of the government from the start, even though the initiative can originate in civil society.

Through the participatory process, citizens and other stakeholders create a vision for their community. As the name suggest, the vision should be visionary. It is supposed to reflect the best version of society the citizens can imagine and act as an inspiration and a driver of change. However, there are also limits to the vision. As the vision should push the society towards a sustainable future, it needs to be developed within the framework of a scientific understanding of sustainability. Such an understanding can be the four principles of sustainability developed by Karl-Henrik Robért et al. in the beginning of the 1990s.

Apart from creating a joint vision, the participatory process should also formulate strategic development goals in collaboration with expert groups. These goals should be sufficiently

specific and measurable. Designated working groups consisting of experts and representatives of different stakeholders should agree on indicators and progress monitoring.

People & Organisations

For the individual, adapting to the vision will often require a mind-change. Even though the vision is created by people, it will certainly require a shift in behaviour as the whole point of the vision is to change elements in society the citizens are dissatisfied with. These elements are part of everyone's daily routine and only become visible by visioning a better and different society and new behavioural norms.

For the individual, civil society organisations and NGO:s serve as a place for meeting like-minded people and contribute to the society through volunteering. Through the organisations, people can accelerate their possibilities to be drivers of change and share experiences and best practices. They create a sense of belonging and a way for citizens to be a part of the transition.

Behavioural change is no easy task, and cannot be left to the individual alone, as many of the structures maintained by the government reinforce destructive or unwanted behaviour. Nonetheless, a vital part of the transformation is dependent on individual mind-change, and structural change can only partly support the individual process.

But not everything needs to change in an instant. Built into our theory of change is a positive feedback loop. As more people change behaviour and start demanding public and corporate action – through democratic elections, deliberative conversations, and product demand – the structures and actions by government and business will develop and multiply, making it easier still for citizens to make the necessary behavioural changes.

Government

The participatory approach of creating the vision and the strategic development goals gives the agenda legitimacy. As the goals become incorporated in public decision-making, the government starts to create structures aiding the overall development towards fulfilling the vision. Structures can be legal (e.g. prohibition of certain unwanted elements) economic incentives (such as taxes or subsidies) or they can be even more tangible, such as direct

investments in desired infrastructure. In turn, the structures provide support for the other two aspects of society: people and business.

Business

Businesses primarily respond to changes in demand and are therefore expected to change their products and services as consumers change their consumption behaviour. However, businesses and consumers are not altogether different entities as both are made up by citizens and operate within the legal boundaries of the state. Therefore, the same mind-change that applies to citizens, which resulted in behavioural change, will affect business management.

Furthermore, the structures businesses operate within affect their actions and production processes and can therefore either support positive change or hinder it. The actions taken by business and organisations also affect the consumers buying their products and services, and the citizens working for the business. Making desirable goods and services more available support behavioural and mind-change among people influenced by the products.

Supportive Structures

As described, the three sectors of society are all connected by positive feedback loops and reinforce each other. However, to aid the transition, supportive and change driving structures are established. The kind of sustainable transformation visioned here is an extremely hard and slow process, therefore the creation of these structures are the first tangible actions taken towards the agenda.

It is important to notice the two-way flow between each sector and the supportive structures. They are not a top-down system designed to provide a framework and rules for society, instead it constitutes every part of society and is virtually negligible without active citizens and member organisations.

By working towards the strategic development goals, all these processes contribute to the realisation of the community vision and the desired changes in society. As the vision places emphasis on participatory processes and democracy, the actions taken will support and build a stronger foundation for future democratic procedures. Through this foundation and democratic framework, the empowered citizens can contribute on an even wider scale. At

deliberative events the citizens can themselves act as decision-makers, and through representative democratic processes they will also further enhance the parliamentary decision-making process and streamline it with the vision.

2. Structures supporting transformation

After initiation, certain structures are needed to make the transformation flow smoothly and institutionalise the vision and the strategic development goals. In the flow diagram the supportive structures are mentioned as an umbrella concept. The following chapter outlines the structure of two vital parts of the transition process: the participatory process, and the network platform.

2.1.   Participatory process

The backbone of the Åland Framework is its participatory approach. It is imperative that all sectors of society participate during the whole transition process. This assures commitment to the changes wanted and confidence in the decision-making process. The first step is therefore deliberation among citizens aiming to create a joint vision for the community.

Deliberation is a powerful tool in the decision-making process, as it conceptualises the opinion of the citizens as it would be had they full access to researched material and the different opinions prevalent in society. Participatory processes streamline opinions and build trust both within society and between the state and the citizenry. After all, the societal changes wanted must be based on the opinions and desires of the people making up the society. As the process develops, government must continue to secure the multisectoral approach and involve citizens and the private sector in important policy decisions.

In the Åland Framework, deliberation acts as a complement to representative democracy. During the creation of the vision and strategic goals, deliberation takes place among a representative selection of citizens through a process akin to a deliberative poll. As the transformation develops, deliberation is used to capture the opinions and feelings of specific groups through focus group discussions. The point of such discussions is to involve groups whose interests are weakly represented in the political sphere.

As described in the theoretic outline, the democratic and participatory process is the starting point for the whole transformation and thus vital. However, it is important to realise that not only is the participatory process essential in the beginning of the transformation, but it is also a necessary part moving forward.

This process serves as the connection between the citizens, the vision, and the transformation. Change will not happen instantly, therefore citizens must have the opportunity to change the vision as the process advances. By hearing the citizens opinions and thoughts, trust and participation grows. Participation can also be an end in itself, fostering good conversation and concern for a shared community.

2.2.   Network platform

The network is a platform for coordinating and driving change through multisectoral collaboration, inspiration, and guidance. It is created as a collaboration between the public, the private, and the third sector. Therefore, it is not a government agency, instead it is a freely formed collaboration between all its participants. Through the initial participatory process, government endorse and incorporate the vision and strategic development goals in its decision-making, institutionalising the agenda.

Within the framework of the network, business leaders, politicians, and civil society representatives can collaborate and join in conversation with one another. The network organises meetings where representatives of all member organisations can take part of the development towards a sustainable society. This process creates a sense of community and fosters cooperation.

The network is the platform for several collaboration groups, as well as a guidance and coordination function. This function serves as the publisher of roadmaps and reports. Through its communication efforts, the function act as the public face of the transition process and can organise events, for example to acknowledge efforts in realising the vision, or to strengthen the connection to the public.

The Council

The Council is tasked with the assessment of the ongoing work taking place throughout society, approving the status report, and developing the strategic development goals, subgoals, and indicators. The Council anchors the responsibility of reaching the strategic development goals with the government.

It is vital that not only government is represented, but also civil society, business, the educational sector, and agriculture, to name a few. Together, they share the responsibility for ensuring the vitality and longevity of the transformation and the joint effort of realising the strategic development goals and the vision.

The Council members are appointed biannually and should hold regular meetings. Representatives of the government (e.g. head of government), parliament (e.g. speaker), and governance should act as permanent members of the Council. The other members should be leaders representing different stakeholders in the community. For their meetings, experts can be summoned to provide insight and an evidence-based discussion.

The working group for coordinating and reporting

The working group is appointed by the Council. Its main tasks are coordinating the efforts by different actors who are implementing the strategic development goals, following up on the various actions, and reporting on indicators. In practice, this means creating roadmaps for each goal, including its subgoals, and prevent duplication of actions by independent actors.

The working group should allocate responsibility for the different goals to members of the group, simultaneously ensuring a holistic approach, as the realisation of the vision will require all goals to be fulfilled. The annual status report describing the progress made on each goal and measuring specific indicators is drafted by the working group and subsequently approved by the Council.

The status report is a public document, made available to the citizens, and wide distribution is encouraged. A citizen's assembly should be held to present the report and enable the citizens to assess the progress and revaluate the priorities if necessary.

Network groups

Within the framework of the network there is a possibility to create specific network groups for different stakeholders. Such stakeholders could be businesses or civil society organisations. By providing a platform for collaboration within a sector, each group can focus on models of change and sustainability relevant for them. It is also easier to set goals and share best practices among peers.

The guidance and coordination function

The network also serves an inspirational and consultative role. Directly employed by the network are several coordinators tasked with providing guidance, educational activities, and communication efforts to further accelerate the transition. Organisations and businesses can ask for assistance in their endeavours to streamline their activities with the vision. The coordinators will also create platforms for different kinds of organisations to share good practices and examples, further accelerating the rate of transition.

In guiding organisation towards sustainable practices, the coordinators recommend the use of a back casting method. Through back casting, the organisation receiving guidance starts by identifying the desired outcome in relation to the vision and the strategic development goals. The second step is mapping the current situation and outset, after which solutions and roadmaps are brainstormed. Finally, actions are prioritised among all suggestions and tangible goals and indicators decided upon. The role of the coordinator in this process is to act as guide and inspiration, the solutions must come from within the organisation for a real change in actions to occur.

The role of government

The government is vital for the development towards a sustainable society. In relation to the supportive structures, the government functions as an enabler and driver. The strategic development goals should be endorsed by parliament and incorporated in government budgeting. The government should also hold the political responsibility for reaching the goals. Through the Council, government is in close contact with both civil society and the business sector.

Final Words

With this document our intensions were to share our experiences and provide an example of a society working with sustainable transformation. Åland is a society moving forward, embracing the challenges the future holds for our common planet. This challenge is something all societies face.