

**The Community Arena:  
Application of transition governance in local communities in three countries**

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**Abstract**

Challenges on a global scale, such as a public debt crisis, an instable financial and economic system, climate change or an ageing population are manifesting themselves most apparent on the local scale, in our backyards, in urban neighbourhoods, communities, towns, cities and regions. It is at this scale where human agents most noticeably interact with global challenges and structures and where these are contested, destructed, reconstructed and thereby become ‘indigenized’ (Appadurai 1990) in one way or the other. New answers to these societal challenges, such as participatory approaches for initiating and supporting action to sustainable development, are emerging bearing the promise of a global systemic shift.

The EU-funded InContext project coins such a new methodological approach, which theoretically and methodologically is based on elements of transition management, backcasting and inspired by the needs & capabilities approach. This methodological framework, the community arena, is an innovative method to meet societal challenges in that it supports local communities in co-creating sustainable behaviour. In short, the participatory community arena takes the individual inner contexts (like feelings, values, etc.) into account so as to support participants in (collectively) reflecting on their (un-)sustainable perceptions and behaviours. The premise is that by raising awareness and sensitivity amongst engaged citizens about other ways of perceiving reality, they open up to new ways of thinking about their individual behaviour in the broader societal context and of playing an active role towards a more sustainable development in their community.

After shortly outlining the theoretical basis, we focus in this paper predominantly on outlining the methodology of the community arena, and on discussing the first insights from three pilot areas in the Netherlands, Austria and Germany.

**Keywords**

sustainability transition, participatory process, backcasting, needs & capability, transition management

### 1. Introduction

Today's socio-economic landscape is in turmoil and our world faces prolonged austerity (O'Riordan 2012). The public debt crisis, an instable financial and economic system, climate change, an ageing population, weakened social ties, insecurity, poverty and work migration flows are only some of the challenges that the world society faces on an international or even global scale. The current crises are the symptoms of a more fundamental systemic problem which can only be resolved by a systemic shift; a transition. For these crises, there are no straightforward solutions because of their disputable, normative, context-dependent, long-term and multi-actor nature (Hisschemöller 1993, Rittel and Webber 1973, Rotmans et al. 2001).

These challenges on a global scale are manifesting themselves most apparent on the local scale, in our backyards, in urban neighbourhoods, communities, towns, cities and regions. It is at this scale where human agents most noticeably interact with global challenges and structures and where these are contested, destructed, reconstructed and thereby become 'indigenized' (Appadurai 1990) in one way or the other. New answers to these societal challenges, such as participatory approaches for initiating and supporting action to sustainable development, are emerging bearing the promise of a global systemic shift.

In the Netherlands, UK, Sweden and Belgium, serious efforts have been and are being undertaken with two participatory approaches, transition management and participatory backcasting in areas such as energy, building, health care, mobility and water management. Transition management (TM) has rapidly emerged over the past few years as a new approach dealing with complex societal problems and their governance towards sustainability. It is a learning and experimenting process open to a wide array of actors (Loorbach 2007, 2010). A normative approach to foresight, backcasting is "generating a desirable future, and then looking backwards from that future to the present in order to strategize and to plan how it could be achieved" (Vergragt & Quist 2011: 747). Both approaches have started off involving professional stakeholders, and are increasingly applied on the local level with citizens and/or consumers (Quist et al 2001, Carlson-Kanyama et al 2007, Kok et al 2006, Spekkink et al. forthcoming, Wittmayer et al. 2011b).

So far the interlinkages between transition management and backcasting, as well as their potential for addressing sustainability issues at the local level by taking the the inner context of individuals and groups into account have not been systematically explored. Addressing this gap, a new methodology based on transition management, backcasting and inspired by the needs and capability literature was developed and is currently being applied in communities in three pilot areas in the Netherlands, Austria and Germany as part of the EU-funded FP7 project InContext. This methodological framework, the community arena, is an innovative method to meet societal challenges in that it supports communities in co-creating sustainable behaviour. In short, the participatory community arena takes the individual inner contexts (like feelings, values, etc.) into account so as to support participants in (collectively) reflecting on their (un-)sustainable perceptions and behaviours. The premise is that by raising awareness and sensitivity amongst engaged citizens about other ways of perceiving reality, they open up to new ways of thinking about their individual behaviour in the broader societal context and of playing an active role towards a more sustainable development in their community.

The community arena is at the same time a research experiment through which we hope to learn about the further integration of insights from transition management, backcasting and social & environmental psychology as well as about possible ways to meet societal challenges.

#### 1.1. Research objective, methodology and context

The research is embedded into an EU-funded project, InContext. The objectives of InContext are (1) to facilitate pathways towards alternative (more sustainable) behaviours of individuals and (2) to foster collective activities towards more sustainable communities (Schäpke & Rauschmayer 2011). The challenge of InContext is to support the transition to sustainable behaviour in local urban communities by aiming for a better understanding of how the inner and outer context on individual and group level

interrelate with individual and collective strategies and/or practices. As part of this project a methodology integrating insights from transition management, backcasting and the needs & capabilities approach, the community arena is implemented through an action research approach in three communities in Austria, Germany and The Netherlands. The aim is on the one hand to learn about this challenge and on the other to result into processes of reflection on individual and group level allowing for new strategies to emerge on how individual/groups needs are met more sustainably as well as into experiments with innovative practices as alternatives to established ones.

The research objectives of this paper are (1) to describe the methodological framework of the community arena based on the integration of insights from transition management, backcasting and inspirations by the needs and capability literature which focuses on co-creation of sustainability at the local level and (2) to learn about the receptivity of such an approach in the three pilot areas of InContext..

This paper is based on a literature review of transition management, participatory backcasting and the needs & capabilities literature. The first insights into the application of the community arena methodology are based on participant observation and interviews in each of the three pilot areas of the InContext project.

## **1.2. Structure of the paper**

This paper unfolds in five sections following this introduction. In section two, transition management and backcasting are introduced by means of a comparison and the individual level within both approaches is conceptualised. Following section three, where the community arena methodology is described, section four gives some first insights from the application of this methodology in three pilot areas. In a last section we conclude the paper by reflecting upon the lessons we can harvest regarding the drivers and barriers for implementing the methodology.

## **2. Theoretical basis: Transition management, backcasting & the needs and capabilities approach**

In this section transition management and participatory backcasting are introduced through a comparison while focusing on elements of learning (i.e. second order and social learning). Focusing on the learning elements within the approaches allows for an exploration of the interrelations of inner and outer context of individuals and groups. This is followed by an introduction of a conceptualisation of the relations between inner and outer context resulting in individual behaviour pioneered within InContext.

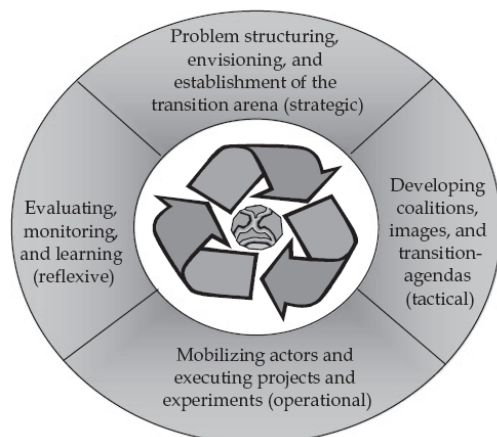
### **2.1. Transition management and participatory backcasting**

Transition management and participatory backcasting are closely related approaches (see Wittmayer et al. 2011b). Participatory backcasting work of the 1990's was one of the inspirations for the development of transition management. In transition management practice, backcasting is understood as a single step in the transition management process (the step linking transition vision and the problem definition in the transition agenda building phase) and not as a fully fledged methodological approach (Rotmans et al 2001).

Transition management as a governance approach aims at addressing persistent problems which are not solvable from within the dominant structures or culture through creating space for societal innovation networks, forming coalitions, innovating on the short-term and driving activities in a shared and desired direction: a co-created long-term sustainability vision (Loorbach 2007, Loorbach 2010, Rotmans 2005). Through the creation of a bottom-up movement connected by a sustainability vision, it aims at shaping

transitions towards sustainability. At the core of TM is a focus on innovation and the involvement of societal actors in reaching sustainability (Frantzeskaki et al. 2012). This is reflected in the different instruments through which structures, cultures and practices of societal systems are to be influenced. These instruments relate to different phases of the cyclical governance process and to different types of governance activities: strategic, tactical, operational and reflexive activities (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: Transition management cycle (Loorbach 2010: 173)**



Backcasting literally means looking back from the future. However, as an approach it can be defined as "generating a desirable future, and then looking backwards from that future to the present in order to strategize and to plan how it could be achieved" (Vergragt & Quist 2011: 747). It may but does not always include a focus on implementing and generating follow-up activities contributing to bringing about the desirable sustainable futures. It is a normative approach to foresight using desirable or so-called alternative futures, instead of likely or possible futures, which makes it well equipped to be applied to sustainability, as this is a normative concept too that requires choices and alternative ways of development (Quist 2007). Backcasting was proposed in the 1970s in energy studies and since the late 1980s it has been applied to sustainability planning, whereas in the 1990s a participatory variety emerged that became one of the source for transition management (for an overview Quist 2007, Quist & Vergragt 2006). It has been shown that participation in backcasting processes leads to individual and group learning through interactive vision development and assessment, in particular through meetings, discussions and other ways of (structured and facilitated) interaction (e.g. Van de Kerkhof & Wieczorek 2005; Quist et al 2011), while spin-off and follow-up activities could be found 5-10 years after that participatory backcasting studies had been completed (Quist 2007, Quist et al 2011). Finally, some examples of backcasting in a local or end-user setting can be found (Quist et al 2001, Carlsson-Kanyama et al 2007, Kok et al 2006, Eames & Egmosse 2011).

Unlike backcasting, transition management pays more attention to implementation and follow up activities, i.e. to develop coalitions and shared strategies to accelerate and guide changes within the daily context of involved actors and to govern and facilitate the implementation (Loorbach 2007, Loorbach 2010). Backcasting on the other hand has a larger diversity of practices including also non-participatory studies and focuses more on the development and evaluation of desirable (alternative) images of the future (Quist 2007, Vergragt and Quist 2011, Wangel 2011; Höjer et al 2011). In the following we will describe more similarities and differences between participatory backcasting and transition management focusing on elements of learning (i.e. second order learning processes) as this bridges the individual and group level in a participatory process. Figure 2 summarises similarities and differences between transition management and participatory backcasting.

***Similarities of transition management & participatory backcasting***

Both approaches share the same understanding of societal change as non-linear and uncertain process with a strong focus on stakeholder involvement, stakeholder learning and the development and assessment of desirable future visions. A shared activity is the development of normative or desirable

future images. Both approaches see the need for iteration between future and present for developing ideas and raising sensitivity to the possibilities of multiple future pathways. Through this visioning process actors are motivated and inspired to develop further action. The vision and learning process aims also to create endorsement for the outcomes of back- and forecasting. At group level it may lead to shared ideas/beliefs, consensus (agreement or win-win) or congruence (win-win in the sense that there is no conflict in interest or values) and lateral change / shifts (moving of actors/persons toward another viewpoint). In higher order learning, a distinction has been made between learning at the individual level and at the group level. It is indeed learning at the group level (Brown et al 2003), which is the seed for change and agency. Here, of course, diffusion of learning is essential, but not easy to achieve (e.g. Brown et al 2003).

In the group setting, first order learning takes place through the introduction of new knowledge whereas second order learning is conceptualised to take place through consciously confronting, questioning and thereby shifting different worldviews and perspectives and their underlying values and beliefs (i.e. interpretive frames; see also Grin and Loeber 2007). All this happens in a social setting and through interaction, which links to concepts of social learning (see Garmendia and Stagl 2010 for a discussion on social learning). In addition, diffusion of learning is important, which takes place through individuals who are able to disseminate and embed it within their organisation or network. This calls for involving, what is in TM being referred to as, frontrunners who have the ability to become such change agents. A final similarity between transition management and backcasting is the focus on actors or stakeholders.

**Figure 2: Similarities and differences between transition management and participatory backcasting**

<i>Similarities</i>	<i>Differences</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder participation, focus on actor/stakeholder level</li> <li>• Shared vision development</li> <li>• Higher order learning by involved stakeholders</li> <li>• Turning long-term visions into short-term actions &amp; agendas</li> <li>• Stakeholder commitment to results &amp; agendas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TM is rooted in transition theory building on the Multi-Level Perspective, BC is agnostic about system innovation theory and niches</li> <li>• TM has a stronger focus on developing a shared problem definition</li> <li>• In TM implementation and follow-up is key, whereas in BC it is more an add-on</li> <li>• BC has larger methodological diversity, TM has a more focussed profile</li> </ul>

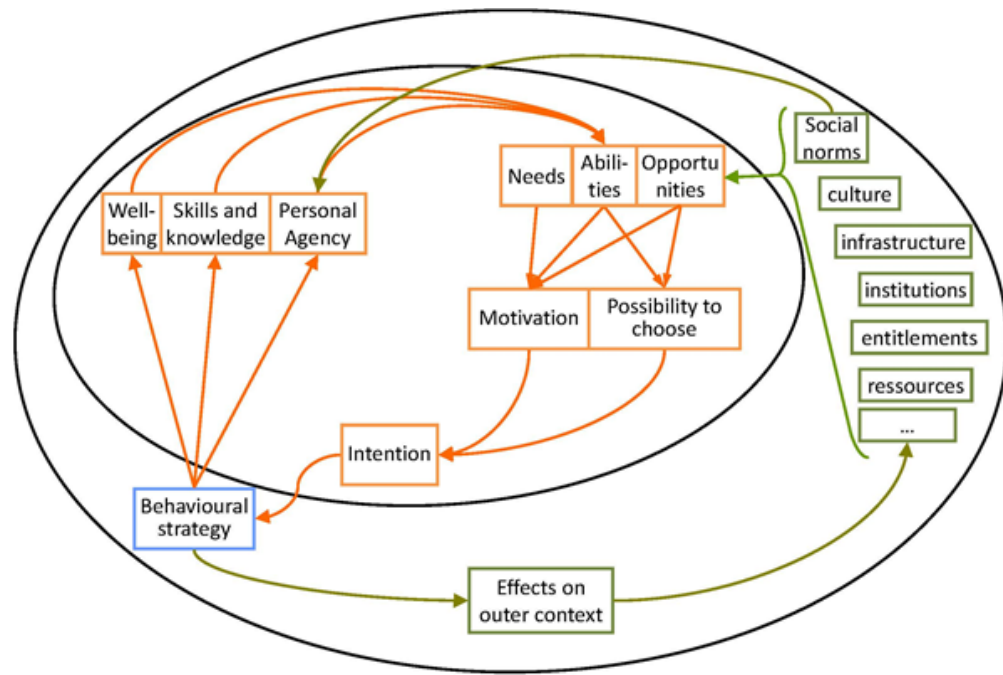
***Differences of transition management & participatory backcasting***

There are several differences. First of all transition management is rooted in transition theory building amongst others on the multi-level perspective which outlines that novelty starts in niches and may replace or adjust the dominant regime (Grin et al. 2010, Grin et al. 2011). By contrast, backcasting is not rooted in a particular social system theory and is agnostic if novelty starts in a niche or in the regime itself (Vergragt & Quist 2011). Secondly, in transition management the group process of developing the sustainability narrative including problem description, transition vision and pathways are as important as the narrative itself – being part of the learning process of the transition arena participants.

Backcasting primarily focuses on the process of delivering and analysing an inspiring vision linked to certain pathways and not so much on the process and the other components of the sustainability narrative. Thirdly, the focus on experimentation and generation of follow-up activities is one of the key aspects of transition management, while within backcasting diffusion activities contributing to bringing about the generated desirable sustainable futures are still an add-on. And finally, backcasting shows a larger methodological diversity, whereas transition management has a stronger and more focused profile.

**2.2. The individual level in TM & participatory BC**

Interestingly, participatory backcasting, as well as transition governance assume higher order learning at both the actor and group level. Also diffusion of learning and learning outcomes through actors and individuals present in the backcasting or transition processes is crucial for implementation and spin-off. Transition management and participatory backcasting are both supporting the exploration of individual inner contexts (values, norms, motivations, expectations, ambitions and preferred solutions) in a group setting, while relating this process to the broader societal context. However, the individual inner context and the (individual) learning processes are underexplored in transition management and participatory backcasting.



**Figure 3: Aspects influencing individual behaviour – a feed-back model (source: Schöpke and Rauschmayer 2012): individual inner context: orange, individual outer perspective: blue, collective inner and outer context: green**

It is the absence of these aspects within transition management & participatory backcasting that is addressed in the InContext project, which explicitly aims to enrich these approaches with the inner context of behaviour, i.e. the needs, values, beliefs of individuals in case of sustainability transitions in general and sustainable ways of behaviour and living in particular (Schöpke and Rauschmayer 2012). Building on Max-Neef (1991), Schöpke and Rauschmayer (2012) distinguish between fundamental human needs that are abstract, few, and finite in number (such as freedom, affection, or subsistence, e.g. food, water, shelter) and strategies to satisfy needs (such as: having a car, caring for kids, eating a sandwich). This differentiation allows for the hypothesis guiding InContext that people can change their strategies in a more sustainable direction once they are aware of their needs and can themselves differentiate between their needs and their strategies used to fulfil these needs.

Schöpke and Rauschmayer (2012) have proposed a circular model based on the capability approach and the needs-abilities-opportunities model of Gatersleben & Vlek (1998). The latter assumes two kinds of feedback processes (see Figure 3): First, experiences with behavioural strategies affect individual skills (experience, learning), well-being (by needs getting met), and personal agency (e.g. due to experiencing own abilities to change something). Second, behavioural strategies affect the collective context aspects, e.g. by maintaining or questioning social or political institutions and policies or by changing the impacts of consumption on natural resources. As Schöpke and Rauschmayer (2012) argue, this second feedback loop leaves room for the idea of co-evolution and joint development of individual and collective context aspects and behavioural strategies. In general, the impacts of individual behaviour changes on the

collective context is rather low, but at the collective level the outcome of transition arena processes may include such feedback.

### 3. Methodological approach: the community arena

In this section, the community arena methodology is outlined, based on the arena methodology of transition management, integrating backcasting and social learning theories and being inspired by the needs & capabilities literature as outlined under section 2.2.

#### 3.1. Community arena methodology

The community arena aims at long-lasting transformation at by making space for individuals to reflect on their inner context in relation to broader societal changes to sustainability. As a co-creation tool for sustainable behaviour by local communities the community arena builds upon insights of transition management, backcasting and social psychology. The community arena focuses on articulating, confronting and connecting individual inner contexts in a participatory process so as to influence both how individuals think as well as how they behave. The premise is that by raising awareness and sensitivity amongst engaged citizens about their own and other people’s needs as well as other ways to look at reality, they open up to new ways of thinking about their individual behaviour in the broader societal context. This should result into processes of reflection on individual and group level allowing for new strategies to emerge on how individual and groups needs are met and also into experiments with innovative practices as alternatives to established ones.

Through a process of self-reflection and learning, envisioning, backcasting and experimenting, the changes in inner and outer context as well as activities on individual and collective level bringing the concept of sustainable development on the local level to life will be defined. Whereas the model of figure 3 offers an opportunity to connect concepts like needs, strategies and opportunities to similar concepts at the actor and group level, it still needs further development and conceptualisation as well as further integration into the community arena methodology.

Within the community arena approach we distinguish between five phases, preceded by a pre-preparation phase (see figure 4). Each of these phases has a different objective in the process; they consist of transition management and backcasting exercises as well as methods addressing the inner context and include a minimum of five participatory meetings (for an elaborate description see Wittmayer et al. 2011a).

<b>Phases of the Community Arena</b>		
	<b>Key activities</b>	<b>Key output</b>
<b>0. Pre-preparation</b>	A. Case orientation B. Transition team formation	A. Initial case description B. Transition team
<b>1. Preparation &amp; Exploration</b>	A. Process design B. System analysis  C. Actor analysis (long-list and short-list of relevant actors) incl. interviews D Set up Monitoring framework	A. Community Arena process plan B. Insightful overview of major issues/tensions to focus on C. Actor identification and categorisation + insight inner context D Monitoring framework
<b>2. Problem structuring &amp; Envisioning</b>	A. Community arena formation B. Participatory problem structuring*  C. Selection of key priorities D. Participatory vision building*	A. Frontrunner network B. Individual and shared problem perceptions & change topics C. Guiding sustainability principles D. Individual and shared visions

<b>3. Backcasting, Pathways &amp; Agenda Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Participatory backcasting* &amp; definition of transition paths</li> <li>B. Formulation agenda and specific activities*</li> <li>C. Monitoring interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Backcasting analysis &amp; transition paths</li> <li>B. Transition agenda and formation of possible sub-groups</li> <li>C. Learning &amp; process feedback</li> </ul>
<b>4. Experimenting &amp; Implementing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Dissemination of visions, pathways and agenda</li> <li>B. Coalition forming &amp; broadening the network</li> <li>C. Conducting experiments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Broader public awareness &amp; extended involvement</li> <li>B. Change agents network &amp; experiment portfolio</li> <li>C. Learning &amp; implementation</li> </ul>
<b>5. Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Participatory evaluation of method, content and process*</li> <li>B. Monitoring interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Adapted methodological framework, strategy and lessons learned for local and EU-level governance</li> <li>B. Insight in drivers and barriers for sustainable behaviour</li> </ul>

**Figure 4: Phases of the Community Arena; \* meeting**

### **Phase 0: Pre-preparation**

Part of this phase are two activities, case orientation and the formation of the team initiating and leading the team, the so-called transition team. The case orientation is a first exploration of the context within which a community arena is to take place which includes social, ecological and economic features of the context as well as active involvement of actors in the context. The transition team is the core driver of the process and should consist of 3-5 members, a strategic and content based mix of employees of the initiating organization, experts in the field under study, transition management experts, change-oriented representatives from the local government and process facilitator. The tasks of the transition team are quite demanding and time-consuming; the team not only prepares, documents, analyses, monitors, coordinates, manages, facilitates and evaluates the whole process, but also chooses the participants and feeds them with background information and detailed knowledge. It brings together the various parties, is responsible for the internal and external communication, acts as intermediary in discordant situations and has an overview of all the activities in and between arena meetings.

### **Phase 1: Preparation and Exploration**

In the crucial phase of preparing the stage for the frontrunners, several activities can be distinguished, process design, system analysis and actor analysis as well as setting up a monitoring framework. The transition team is getting together to determine the process design written up in a community arena process plan (output 1A) which includes the basic set up of the community arena (amount of meetings, methods used, mode and level of documentation), the time planning (amount of meetings), the communication, and other topics such as relating the arena process to relevant ongoing (policy) processes.

Both, the system and the actor analysis serve as giving insight into the local context by describing it as a system. The transition team delimits system boundaries and selects relevant stocks of the system (social, environmental and economic capital e.g. labour force, infrastructure, air quality, housing stock) along which the system is described also in time. In combination with the actor analyses this first phase is the foundation of the process and serves as a starting point for monitoring the behaviour and input for the arena meetings. The main function of the actor analysis in this phase is to prepare the selection of participants for the transition arena. Ideally, the group is a mix of ‘frontrunners’ who combine creativity and imagination with the openness to evaluate and appreciate other perspectives and ‘enlightened’ regime actors (resource holders). It should include a diversity of competences, types of power and backgrounds.



A last activity includes the setting up of the monitoring activities. The monitoring & evaluation framework helps to adjust and improve the community arena process, to communicate with stakeholders, to justify investments to investors and to learn (participants and transition team).

### **Phase 2: Problem structuring and envisioning**

This phase starts after the arena participants are selected (based on the actor analysis) and invited to join. In a first step the community arena is formed, and thereby a frontrunner network created (output 2A). This frontrunner group meets twice in phase two, once for a participatory problem structuring and once for the selection of key priorities and the participatory vision building.

Through a strongly interactive process a joint perception of the problem and a joint definition of the main change topics are reached in the first meeting (output 2B). The open discussion is based on the system analysis and the formulation of the main transition challenges. A secondary objective is to create commonality between participants. The selection of key priorities is one of the key activities of the second meeting which focuses on the formulation and discussion of a shared vision. In the meeting, all kinds of ideas for the future emerge. Some will be embraced and elaborated in a lively discussion; others won't be picked up (yet) by the group. A good starting point for selecting key priorities is the shared problem perception, which are translated into guiding sustainability principles (output 2C). These are the general principles formulated by the frontrunner network for a sustainable community and individual behaviour (e.g. self-responsibility, rewards for sustainable behaviour, individualized sustainability behaviour).

During the second meeting the focus is on the formulation and discussion of a shared vision. The vision is based on the consolidated problem perception and change topics as well as the guiding sustainability principles. During the meeting there are several moments for (critical) self-reflection. Facilitated by appropriate methods, frontrunners can reflect on their own needs, become aware of their strategies and their capability to influence their local environment and what this means for the vision. This way the inner context can be analyzed as well, resulting in both a shared and individual vision (output 2D).

### **Phase 3: Backcasting, Pathways and Agenda Building**

In the next phase the arena builds upon its problem definition and its shared vision to develop actions and targets. During this phase, the interests, motives, and policies of the participants come out into the open; there are negotiations about investments, and individual plans and strategies are fine-tuned (Loorbach 2010). This is done in two participatory meetings, with the first focusing on participatory backcasting and the definition of transition paths.

Based on the sustainability vision developed, a process is initiated in which a backcasting analysis is conducted for each of the visionary images, and one or several transition paths are developed (including questions such as what needs to change, who is necessary for this change). The output is a backcasting analysis and transition paths (output 3A). Transition paths are possible routes from the present towards sustainable images and behaviour and have the same timeframe as the vision, i.e. 2030. They connect the long-term vision to the short-term action.

During a fourth meeting feedback on the final drafts of the backcasting analysis is received as well as a common agenda defined. The different perspectives on how to reach the vision and images can not only be elaborated into transition paths, but also into more short-term specific activities, i.e. a transition agenda (output 3A). The members of the community arena are divided into different sub-groups (e.g. on visionary images, transition paths, activity-related). Step-by-step, the sub-groups will organize their work themselves. Based on the outcome of the backcasting, the sub-groups formulate an agenda, elaborate on transition paths and finally translate the agenda into activities. The agenda forms the long-term context for short-term activities and policy. The transition team and the frontrunners can choose to involve a broader group of people in this meeting, by inviting relevant parties and asking the arena-participants to invite people from their networks.

## Authors and title

The outcome of this phase functions as a compass for future actions and experiments. By building coalitions and networks in the next phase the conditions for desired experiments are designed. Ultimately this leads to influencing behaviour, policy making and lobbying. During this phase the second interview, leading to new insights on changes in the inner context of the individual participants are conducted (output 3C).

### **Phase 4: Experimenting and implementing**

In this phase the process opens up to the public through e.g. the dissemination of visions, pathways and agenda in order to keep arena participants from abandoning the process and to create and maintain support from external actors such as general public, policy makers, interested stakeholders (output 4A). Also in this phase, strategic coalitions should be created around the subgroups established in phase 3. This change agent's network (output 4B) broadens the overall network. Specific activities as well as transition experiments should be performed through the existing networks of arena participants. This ensures on the one hand direct involvement of these frontrunners and on the other that experiments based on input from previous phases (visions, agenda, etc.). Efforts focus on creating a portfolio of related experiments which complement and strengthen each other as much as possible (output 4B). Support by policy makers can be guaranteed via an external steering group or a supportive policy arena.

A third activity relates to the operational level of transition management, the carrying out of transition experiments and actions (output 4C) aimed at deepening, broadening, and scaling up existing and planned initiatives and actions (Kemp & Van den Bosch 2006, Raven et al. 2007; Van den Bosch & Rotmans 2009, Van den Bosch 2010). The importance of short-term activities is of great importance for commitment and enthusiasm towards an arena process. The experiments have a high level of uncertainty and are focused on new combinations and insights as answers to societal challenges. They are searching and learning processes (doing by learning and learning by doing). During this phase the behaviour of the participants is monitored also. In how far are their strategies changing? Which side experiments and actions do participants undertake next to the arena-process?

### **Phase 5: Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation (of process and content) are key elements in this methodology with its focus on learning. This last phase is not sequential as the others, as monitoring is a cyclical and constant process and is performed throughout the process. Monitoring supports in communicating results to the public, in justifying investments to stakeholders and investors, in learning (participants, transition team), and importantly in adjusting the process if necessary (process design and substance of e.g. meetings, paths and experiments can be adjusted when needed).

## **4. First insights from pilot projects**

After having outlined the theoretical basis of the community arena methodology as well as its procedural steps, we turn in this section to the implementation of the methodology in three European locations (for their characteristics see figure 5). In this section, the focus is on the first months of the implementation focusing on the pre-preparation and the preparation and exploration phase. Insights are given into the characteristics of the three pilot areas as well as a short discussion started comparing the first phases in the three locations

### **4.1. Insights from Finkenstein, Wolfshagen and Carnisse**

#### **Finkenstein**

The initial community (Gmunden) after a period of uncertainty finally withdrew from their commitment of taking part end of June 2011, which resulted into an extensive search for a new pilot project area, where the two following problems were encountered several times: 1) the problem of co-financing and

2) the problem of accepting an open-ended process. The process in Finkenstein was only started in November 2011.

Regarding the first problem of co/financing, the communities were asked to support the project "InContext" through co-financing, i.e. the provision of a budget to implement the measures developed in the process, which is for the benefit of the future development of the community. This guarantee in advance posed a major problem, but since the project partner knew from experience that the start of a participatory project with uncertain financing of the achieved results is a very difficult and risky business; this was not really a viable alternative. There would be a high probability that the participants leave the process disappointed, when their developed visions and implementing measures eventually cannot be realized for financial reasons. Under these conditions the process would be complicated, because the motivation of the citizens to participate would drop and the project would lose credibility. Such an outcome of a participatory process can also permanently temper the readiness for civic engagement in a community.

Regarding the second problem, the envisaged process for the pilot project is an open process without defined results which can be ascertained in the beginning. Thus, it needs a lot of trust from all sides (participants, researchers, decision makers, community representatives) to believe in positive and beneficial outcomes. It is difficult to get this trust from all people involved in the decision – a fact that unfortunately hindered a univocal decision on accepting the project. In those communities where it came to a vote in the community council, the project was usually supported by some fractions / people – whereas others remained sceptical about it. Since some parties have always been anxious about the outcomes of such a process, there was the demand to define possible results in order that the parties can ensure that the project complies with the party interests. However, it is precisely the openness of the participation process that is one of the core elements of the method and it is exceedingly important for ethical reasons.

	<b>Finkenstein (A)</b>	<b>Wolfshagen (D)</b>	<b>Carnisse (NL)</b>
Inhabitants	8.509	13.840	10.533
Type of community	Market town consisting of a conglomerate of twenty-eight villages of which six are dominant, situated at the border of Austria with Slovenia	Rural town (with a core city and eleven rural districts), situated in the centre of Germany	Urban neighbourhood of Rotterdam, situated in the West of the Netherlands
Characteristics of outer context	Decentralised structure; conflict of interest between tourism, population and industry; hardly any community meeting facilities; two language groups	High percentage of commuters; population decline; frontrunner in renewable energy; fading city centre	Deprived neighbourhood; high turnaround of inhabitants; severe budget cuts threat the continuation of main community facilities; around 170 nationalities and lot of migration
Phase of the methodology (end 2011)	Phase 0 completed, phase 1 started	Phase 0 and 1 completed, phase 2 started	Phase 0 and 1 completed, phase 2 started

**Figure 5: Overview of the three pilot areas**

### **Wolfshagen**

The arena process in Wolfshagen focuses on issues on sustainable living in the inner city.

The process was supported by local policy makers and local NGO's from the beginning which facilitated the finding and selection of participants. Most of the selected actors are members of non-profit associations on different tasks, like associations for protection of the environment, social services,

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etc. In small communities and rural areas, non-profit organisations as well as engaged citizens are often lacking additional resources for engaging in new and additional projects. Partly different than in metropolitan areas, engaged citizens in small communities are mainly active in institutionalized structures, like charitable organizations. In the preparation phase, meetings with potential local project partners and political stakeholders in Wolfhagen have been conducted to announce the InContext project in the community, to gain information for the selection of potential workshop participants.

Like other rural cities in Germany, Wolfhagen has to face a decline in population (about 6% in 2020). During the last 10 years, a couple of developments had led to rising vacancy rates in the historic town centre. Unoccupied buildings (both for living and trade) are unsustainable because of economic, ecologic (e.g. sealing of surfaces) and also social aspects (quality of living). The interviewed participants reported strong interest in making the inner city a more attractive and social place which is told to be an important aspect of the own life quality. In general, the participants state a high quality of living but like a lot of other rural communities, Wolfhagen is also facing a decrease of attractiveness in the inner (historic) city parts. Therefore, the group decided to focus on this issue for its further work.

### **Rotterdam Carnisse**

In the Dutch pilot also additional funding was arranged, and the EU-funding was matched with funding from a national programme for deprived neighbourhoods in the city of Rotterdam. The latter was accorded to a consortium of four partners called Veerkracht (translation: Resilience), with the Dutch pilot project partner being one of them. The process of negotiating and lobbying between the consortium and the city of Rotterdam took almost four years. With the municipality of Rotterdam drastically cutting costs, there was a rather long period of uncertainty with an agreement being reached in August 2011. Thereupon initial political support for the community arena process was provided. Against the background of budget cuts and failures of previous participatory processes in Carnisse, the framing of the community arena proved difficult. The open nature of the proposed arena (with regard to outcome) as well as the different methodology led to a certain amount of scepticism by local policy makers (What is new or different? What will the process deliver in concrete results?). Other barriers in the process of getting the Veerkracht project approved were the bureaucratic accountability relations (e.g. conflicting interests) and the high fluctuation amongst decision makers.

When looking at sustainability in terms of social, ecological and economic sustainability, the emphasis in Carnisse is on the social aspect of this triangle. Regarding the actor analysis as part of phase 1, a listing was started of potential arena candidates as well as of people that could give insightful input for the system analysis, via desk research (searches in press articles, internet, policy documents, etc.), the Veerkracht partners, networks in other neighbourhoods nearby and snowballing in interviews. For the selection of potential arena candidates the focus was on frontrunners within Carnisse, which are individuals who are passionate about their neighbourhood, who are active in the neighbourhood, those with new ideas and creative actions. This group consists of a diverse set of people (inhabitants, artists, local entrepreneurs, public officials, etc).

## **4.2. Discussion**

Up to now there is only limited data available from the processes in the three pilot projects. The short descriptions of the three pilot areas above only allow for some preliminary comparison of the barriers and opportunities that the implementation partners were dealing with when starting off the project. Four issues warrant the start of a discussion.

The first two issues relates to the influence of local government. Commitment within the local government as well as continuity within that same structure is vital for such a process. Without commitment nor continuity, the chance of starting off the community arena process are small as the example of the Austrian pilot clearly show. But it was also the German pilot, where the support of local policy makers was helpful in setting up the process. It is here only the Dutch pilot which is somewhat an exception due to the local governance structures: while the municipality of Rotterdam agreed on the additional founding and was informed about the activities, the 'partial municipality' [deelgemeente] of

Charlois (of which Carnisse is part) was more or less presented with the results. In addition, the non-continuity of personal within both the deelgemeente and the municipality are challenging for embedding the process.

For at least two of the pilots (Austrian and Dutch pilot) the openness of the process was another challenging issue, closely related to the fourth issue of co-funding which also plays in these two pilots. A crucial aspect of the community arena is the open setting of the process. Because of this open setting no defined results can be ascertained in the beginning. Thus, it needs trust from all sides and involved parties (participants, researchers, decision makers, community representatives, arena participants) to believe in positive and beneficial outcomes. This open nature does not seem to fit well with current policy schemes in either Austria or the Netherlands. Through connecting to large policy programs, the German pilot could use their agenda as door opener for interviews.

In addition, the different experiences in the three pilot arenas show the importance of a case specific use of the methods, taking into account the specific local conditions (e.g. composition of the group, group dynamics, local discourses). Within the arena process equal consideration of ideas, ensuring broad participation of different actors and also the inclusion of wide sections of the population are important aspects. Therefore, the selection of participants and the design and implementation of the arena meetings are essential elements for the development of the arena processes. Therefore, these aspects will be subject of the monitoring process implemented after phase 4.

## **5. First insights**

In this paper we introduced the community arena methodology as a participatory approach for initiating and supporting action to sustainable development on the local level by finding more sustainable ways on how individual and group needs can be met. The methodology is a start of an integration of insights from transition management, backcasting and needs & capabilities literature which looks promising in terms of its open character allowing for local sustainability agendas to emerge, its focus on linking the individual, the group and the societal level as well as addressing individual and group needs and strategies towards sustainable behaviour.

Rather than offering conclusions, we can offer some preliminary insights into the receptivity of the approach in the three pilot areas of the InContext project. On the basis of the first insights from the pilots, the preparation phase seems crucial for the process. The local context including its history and present as well as its culture of policy making and steering are to be taken into account including an adaptation of the methodology so as to fit the context. It is during the preparation phase where this adaptation takes place, where actors get to know each other; the process is set up, finances clarified and responsibilities divided. Though focussing on participation and empowerment of a diverse group of actors, the support of local decision makers is an important factor to deal with from the beginning. The preparation phase therefore warrants attention in practice but also in theory, especially for the latter this paper could only give some initial hints.

Next to the further exploring the receptivity of the process with different actors also the following phases of the methodology still ask for further exploration. There are still more questions with regard to the actual participatory meetings and regarding the empowerment of the citizens towards more sustainable lifestyles. First, how could these more sustainable lifestyles be mainstreamed and lead to further activities and learning processes? Second, how could be ensured that the developed ideas and projects are not only short time activities but will last longer than the life span of the InContext project?

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