

I believe that the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs are all about generosity and empowerment



Micke Larsson, Secretary General of the Development and Sustainability Council of Åland, Government of Åland

With this background, we are delighted that the ESDN, in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers and ourselves, the Government of Åland, chose to put focus on civil society and citizen engagement by organizing the [6th Peer Learning Platform](#) on the Åland Islands on this theme.

Åland is an autonomy located between Finland and Sweden in the center of the Baltic Sea, and in June, Åland will celebrate its first century as an autonomy. A resilient and sustainable development has long been an essential part of the society on the Åland Islands. It was an easy decision for the Government of Åland to accept the offer from the ESDN to host the 6th Peer Learning Platform.

The Peer Learning Platform gave us several valuable insights. First of all, there seemed to be a common understanding between the participants of the Peer Learning Platform that engaged citizens are one of the most important keys to a successful implementation of the 17 SDGs. I was happy to hear that governments all over Europe are trying to reach out to civil society organizations in order to establish fruitful

cooperation for successful national and local 2030 Agenda implementation.

Nevertheless, when it comes to individual citizen engagement, there were relatively few examples on governments trying to engage individual citizens. One of the Dutch youth participants of the Peer Learning Platform asked for “shared ownership”. I agree, although it might be thinking outside of the box and difficult to realize, broad citizen engagement for the 2030 Agenda can only be achieved if governments systematically empower citizens with a sense of shared ownership.

However, life is local. Our experience from the Åland Islands is that the global 2030 Agenda is not enough to generate citizen engagement, you also need a clear connection to the local and national society. You need a citizen created vision for the responsibility sphere of your government that answers the question: “What’s in it for us?” and at the same time contributes to the realization of the 17 SDGs.

In 2014, the Åland Parliament and the Åland Government decided to adopt a common goal of total sustainable development in Åland. The decision enabled the Government of Åland to invite everyone who lives on Åland to participate and create a common vision for our society. A true inside-out, bottom-up process led us to a vision that can be summarized in one sentence:

[*Everyone Can Flourish in a Viable Society on the Islands of Peace.*](#)

The vision reflects the best version of the society that we can imagine and [acts as a source of inspiration and a driver of change.](#) Nevertheless, there are limits to the vision, as the vision should push the society towards a sustainable future. The vision was developed within the framework of a scientific understanding of sustainability.

[Based on the vision, seven strategic development goals have been defined, all of which are to be achieved by 2030.](#) The seven goals cover social

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sustainability, biodiversity, clean water, climate action, as well as sustainable and mindful consumption and production. Reaching these goals will make our society even more attractive than today.

We have been implementing the vision and the strategic development goals for the past five years. Step-by-step, we are getting closer to reaching the goals, although many challenges lie ahead of us. We have supportive structures in place for the implementation. A network for multisectoral collaboration and guidance fosters change. The network is not a government agency, instead it is a freely formed collaboration between all its participants. Within the network, citizens, business leaders, politicians, civil servants and civil society representatives can collaborate and join in conversation with one another.

To conclude, we value the voice of everyone – and the fact that the 6th ESDN Peer Learning Platform was organized in connection with the 4th ReGeneration 2030 Week, a platform by and for the voice of the youth, enabled the participants of the Peer Learning Platform to listen to young and engaged citizens from 18 countries and autonomies in the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region.

[The ReGeneration 2030 Movement handed over their new Declaration to the European Commissioner Mr. Virginus Sinkevicius](#), who

attended the ReGeneration Week on site. The Government of Åland congratulates the ReGeneration 2030 Movement to a successful organization of the 4th ReGeneration Week.



*The five persons on the picture (from left): **Petra Granholm**, Vice President of the Development and Sustainability Council of Åland (representative of the civil society of Åland), **Peter Wiklöf**, Vice President of the Development and Sustainability Council of Åland (and CEO of Bank of Åland), **Virginus Sinkevicius**, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, **Veronica Thörnroos**, President of the Development and Sustainability Council of Åland (and Head of the Government of Åland), **Micke Larsson**, Secretary General of the Development and Sustainability Council of Åland*

Finally, there is a close connection between citizen engagement and the topic of the [19th ESDN Workshop](#) in June 2021: “Parliamentary involvement in the implementation of the SDG”. I look forward to listen to your thoughts on this connection.

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