Lessons learned from the co-creation of the energy part of the Ida-Virumaa Green Plan
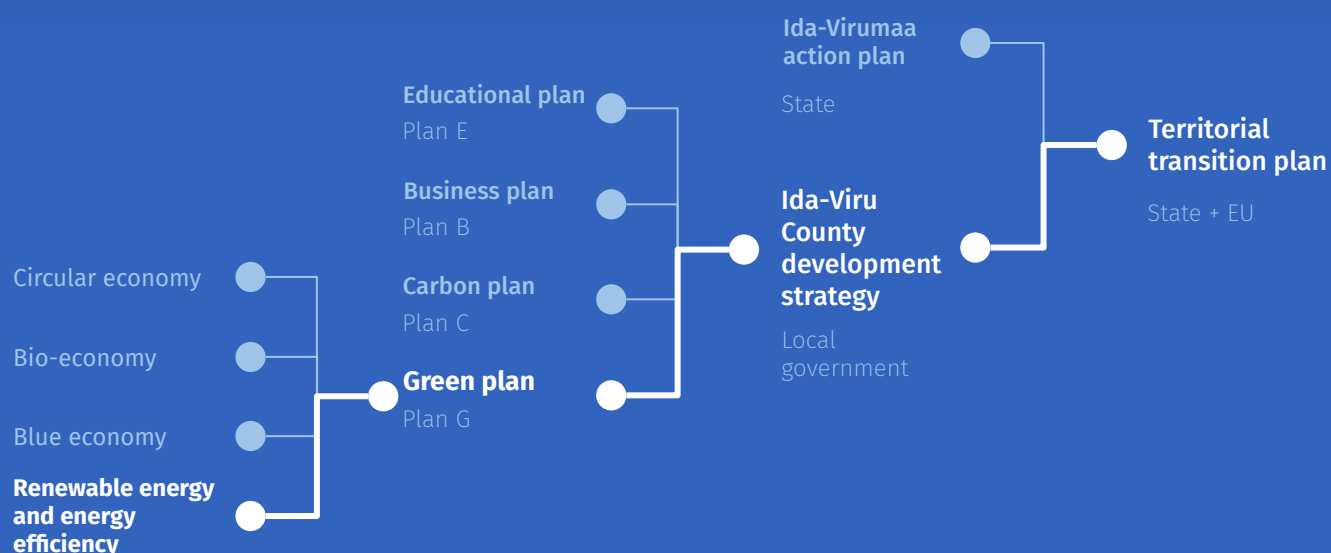
Introduction and Background

Educational plan
Plan E

Business plan
Plan B

Carbon plan
Plan C

Green plan
Plan G

Circular economy

Bio-economy

Blue economy

Renewable energy and energy efficiency

Ida-Virumaa action plan
State

Ida-Viru County development strategy
Local government

Territorial transition plan
State + EU

The objective of the project was to provide input for the energy part of the Ida-Virumaa Green Plan. The client requested to see how a **co-creation based** approach could be effective and create the basis for a successful transition to a climate-neutral economy. This way of thinking is based on transition studies[1], which describe them as non-linear cross-societal processes in which bottom-up innovation, experimentation, learning and networking have a central role. Management of change in complex systems requires cooperation between different parties and intelligent testing. Therefore, **a process that has an experimental and practical purpose** that involves the parties and enforces their participation in the implementation of the solutions is very well suited to enhancing the ambitions related to fair transition.

In other parts of the world, the benefits of the co-creation based approach have been noted, especially in the context of climate change in environmental and energy policymaking.[2] This approach has been particularly popular in the Dutch and Danish energy policy, where it has been used to **initiate and direct regional transition processes similar to ours**.[3]

[1] EEA report (2019). Sustainability transitions: policy and practice. Available at:
https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/sustainability-transitions-policy-and-practice
[2] OECD website. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/energy-environment-transition.htm
[3] Frantzeskaki, N., Hölscher, K., Bach, M., Avelino, F. (2018). Co-creating Sustainable Urban Futures. Available at:
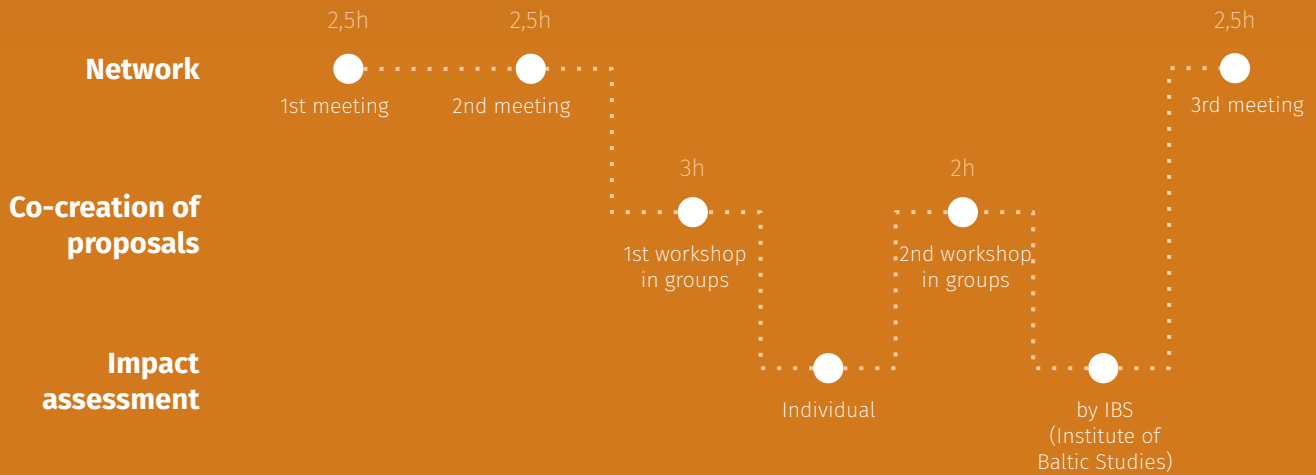https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319692715

Introduction and Background

Compared to traditional policymaking, a co-creation based approach helps to overcome barriers between sectors and areas, take the biggest trends and a longer horizon period into account in planning, and set more ambitious objectives. A good example and a global success story is the Sønderborg region in Denmark, where a transition process was launched in 2007 in co-creation with the private-, public-, and third sector with the aim of making the whole region carbon neutral by 2029. As a result, carbon emissions have been reduced by nearly 50% and energy consumption by nearly 15% in the past 13 years.

Under this project, due to the terms of reference and short timeframe, it was possible to test the methods of co-creation in developing proposals in one specific thematic area related to fair transition – energy. In Estonia, it is relatively new to use a co-creation based approach as an integrated process for identifying solutions to complex problems and our project was the first co-creation experiment in the process of fair transition in Estonia. We added networking and elements of involving a wider array of parties to the process, with the aim of strengthening relations and creating the conditions for continuing with co-creation in the next stages of the green plan development. In the case of co-creation processes, the dialogue and experimentation between the parties may sometimes produce different outcomes from those planned. In these cases, the client had set specific expectations for the outcome of the project. The timeframe did not allow for experimentation and learning from it.
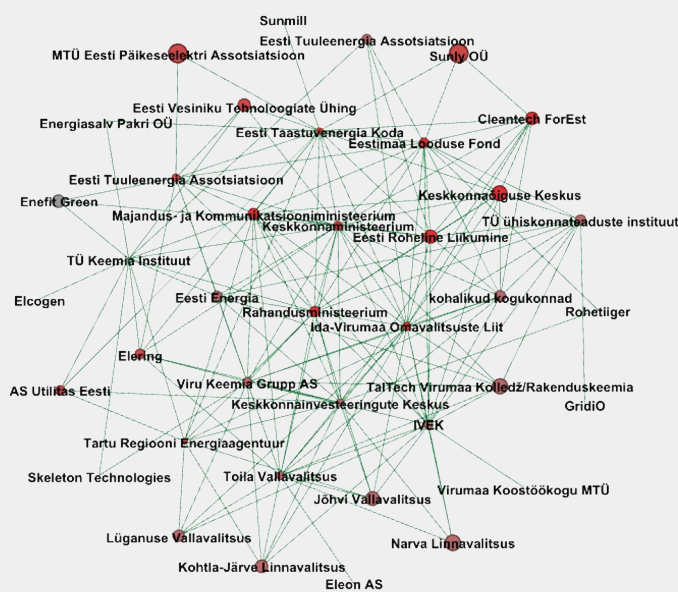
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[4] ProjectZero website. Available at: http://brightgreenbusiness.com/

Process Structure and Methodology Used

	2,5h	2,5h				2,5h
Network	1st meeting	2nd meeting				3rd meeting

Co-creation of proposals — 3h — 1st workshop in groups — 2h — 2nd workshop in groups

Impact assessment — Individual — by IBS (Institute of Baltic Studies)

Mapping and Launch of the Network

To map the network, we used **Mendelow's matrix**, as it allows us to position the parties involved in a problem or issue based on their influence on and interest in the question at hand. The matrix can be used to identify strategic partners whose participation in the process is necessary and parties who need to be kept informed and motivated to participate. To analyse the network, we used the **Social Network Analysis** (SNA) methodology for this project, as it allowed us to assess the relations between the members of the (co-creation) network and identify parties who play a more central role in the relations. A more comprehensive analysis of the network provides key information (e.g. how data moves, what the most effective actors are, the density of the network) for managing co-creation and making strategic choices. For example, the analysis helped us decide who to involve in communication activities and from whom to ask advice on involving less motivated participants.

Process Structure and Methodology Used

In co-creation, it is important to deal with the expectations of the people involved in the process. When drawing up the energy part of the green plan, the originally proposed methodology had to be changed because the parties were not prepared for the time-consuming daily discussions and, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the physical meetings. In order to meet expectations, the meetings were held **online** and their structure was intensified to keep the duration to a maximum of 2.5 hours. It was also important for the participants that, in addition to experts, local representatives and decision-makers were involved in the process as well. It was difficult to motivate both groups to participate in the preparation phase. In order to meet the expectations of the participants, Ida-Viru Enterprise Centre (IVEK) as a local reliable partner was involved in the preparation of the planned community meeting, and the last network meeting was organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications.

With the aim of strengthening the collaborative network and supporting co-creation, **three meetings** were held with the participants – first, an **introductory workshop** to get to know each other, introduce the plan and the aims of the process, and explain the expectations; second, **a workshop to create a common vision** (the focused discussion method was used); lastly, a meeting at the end of the process to summarise the results and link them to the regional and national energy policy choices of Ida-Virumaa. The last, **so-called extended network discussion** allowed us to also include in the discussion the parties who were not involved in the drafting of the proposals but who have an important role in their implementation.

Development of Proposals and Impact Assessment

In this process we used a combination of **co-creation** and **design thinking** methodologies and in the latter case, based on the IDEO design thinking model, we used the define and ideate phases. Design thinking is a systematic and creative method for analysing problems and identifying solutions that focus on the people with whom the new solution can be created and who are affected by the results of the process.

To develop more specific proposals, all participants were divided into four thematic groups: wind energy, solar energy, energy efficiency, and energy storage. The thematic areas were proposed by the project clients in cooperation with the process managers. Initially, a separate theme for "energy democracy" was requested. However, since no separate group for it could be formed, the few experts interested in it were placed in other thematic groups. Due to the dangers of COVID-19, all thematic co-creation meetings were held online and shortened. Each theme had **two workshops**.

Each theme group started their first workshop with a "How can we…" question based on design thinking. Based on a previously prepared digital **worksheet**, the participants first described their solutions individually using the brainstorming method and then grouped

them together in co-creation to create a unified solutions map. The map was used to identify the so-called core solutions that helped formulate the initial proposals.

The initial proposals were then distributed among the participants to individually prepare the initial impact assessments using the **impact assessment tool**. Some experts joined for an additional hour to refine and analyse the proposals together. At the second meeting, the descriptions and impact assessments of all proposals were collectively reviewed, amended and supplemented where necessary, and joint impact assessments were prepared in different categories (impact on the economy, environment, and social welfare).

For additional **impact assessment**, the impact assessments prepared by the experts in co-creation were sent to the analysts of the Institute of Baltic Studies who systematised and supplemented them with their own desk research and described the common parts of and the interrelations between the proposals. The proposals and their impact assessments were compiled into a final report.[5]

Communication of Proposals

Upon completion of the initial versions of the proposals, a **community discussion** was held in a virtual environment (Zoom) with the aim of introducing the green plan and developing interest in the communities to create links between the completed proposals and the development opportunities of the area. To get as many locals to participate in the online event as possible, we previously contacted local governments, regional newspapers and development organisations, as well as local Facebook groups. The bilingual discussion was focused on the three proposals developed in the thematic groups, and, in addition to the feedback given, it also allowed us to include in the further process the interested representatives of local associations, enterprises and government.

During the process, the organisers also urged the participants to provide input through national and local **media** in the form of interviews and news. At the end of the process, all proposals were published on the websites of Kliimadialoog[6] and Kliimamuutused[7] to collect feedback; however, they are also available on the websites of all project clients. Participants were invited to use and share the proposals. Project communication was conducted on an ongoing basis in both Estonian and Russian.

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[5] Available at: https://kliimadialoog.ee/roheplaan
[6] Website of Kliimadialoog. Available at: www.kliimadialoog.ee
[7] In cooperation with experts and the local community of Ida-Virumaa, proposals in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency have been completed. Available at:
http://www.kliimamuutused.ee/uudised/roheplaani-taastuvenergia-ja-energiatohususe-valdkonna-ettepanekud

Lessons learned

1. Preparation of the process

2. Involvement of participants

3. Proposal development workshops

4. Implementation of methodology

5. Impact Assessment of Proposals

1. Preparation of the Process

At the beginning of the process, it would be beneficial to work out the division of roles between the organisers, process designers (if outsourced) and participants. For example, it would be helpful to agree on who will be responsible for communicating with the parties and implementing the proposals during or after the end of a specific project to make sure they are not left lying around to collect dust and will be forwarded to the right parties in good time.

It is advisable to map all parties before the beginning of the process and to discuss the co-creation plan with all the strategic actors of the field to ensure their readiness for the process. The role of the owner of the process must also be considered, and, in addition to the above, the fact that the process client often has greater legitimacy than the process designers (outsourced company) which is important for motivating participants and developing proposals.

The communication of the entire process must be strategically planned from the beginning – to whom, with what messages and when to turn to – based on the objectives and impacts you want to achieve.

2. Involvement of Participants

The involvement of participants was challenging due to time constraints – difficult to motivate all experts and employees of ministries to participate. For experts and officials, the ideal period of advance notification would have been 2–3 months (in this case it was a few weeks). This would have made it possible to introduce the plan undertaken,

prepare the participants, and design the process at an early stage, taking into account the possibilities of participants. The main obstacle for experts was the lack of time. However, the aspect of remuneration was also pointed out (usually working hours are paid but participating in the process was voluntary). In addition to experts, the involvement of the employees of ministries was also important, as the provision of some proposals depended on them (e.g. removal of obstacles).

Even though the participants were already mostly familiar with each other, getting to know the participants at the beginning and agreeing on a common vision created a more unified group which made it easier to find time collectively to listen to each other's proposals and provide feedback. The vision was not formulated as a single sentence but was laid down as the thematic areas that were the answer to the following question: "In 2030, when the energy part of the Ida-Virumaa Green Plan has been implemented, Ida-Virumaa will have…?". As there was a strong emphasis on co-creation in the process, the use and facilitation of a coherent network was a prerequisite for the functioning of the process.[8]

Since the process took place virtually, it may have been inaccessible or difficult to understand for certain participants. Sometimes some participants did not show up or had to leave before the end. However, we were quite successful in engaging participants because at the beginning of the process we placed specific emphasis on setting expectations, introducing the process and getting to know each other.

A community event also took place in a virtual environment, due to which the involvement of participants suffered (it seemed that not everyone got a chance to speak). Due to the limited time, it was not possible to have deep discussions and the focus was only on the 3 of the 18 proposals. It would be beneficial to discuss with locals what the resources and obstacles are on the ground in implementing the proposals, in order to create a greater connection between the proposals and local life. The involvement of local residents and policymakers was important both for the expansion and proper functioning of the collaborative network. In future work, it is important to find more opportunities for this than the timeframe of this project allowed.

In addition, when organising further similar processes supporting fair transition, it would be necessary to plan more time to bring together a wider array of parties, to strengthen their cooperation and to experiment with solutions. It should be clearly stated how much time the experts are expected to contribute.

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[8] Ibid.

It is useful to involve in the process both those parties who agree on potential solutions and those who have different opinions and objectives. However, it will require time to iron out different and conflicting solutions. Due to time limitations, there was not sufficient time to analyse and bring together different perspectives this time.

3. Proposal Development Workshops

In the co-creation process, time is extremely important for both participants and process organisers[9], especially given the short timeframe of this process. Thanks to skillful process management, it was possible to quickly adjust the timeframe according to the wishes and resources of the participants, even though around 30 experts participated in the process.

As the coronavirus was spreading during the process and face-to-face meetings were thus more difficult or prohibited, all discussions took place online (Zoom, Google Meet, Miro). The quality of the discussion had to be constantly monitored and stimulated if necessary. For best results, workshop participants were asked to keep their webcams running. The participants were reminded that co-creation is effective when all participants find a way to be present at the discussions from start to finish, which was initially difficult for busy experts.

Due to the short timeframe, some proposals remained quite vague and some participants felt that they would have liked to go into more detail. However, some proposals could not be formulated more precisely until more detailed national volumes were approved, e.g. regarding the size of financial instruments and phantom mergers.

Additionally, special attention should be paid to how to identify and assess proposals that are potentially cross-cutting or require the implementation of other proposals at an early stage to create a more comprehensive picture of relevant actions.

The proposals that emerged in the process were a combination of well-known ideas and new concepts. Even if not all proposals were new for the ministries and local governments, the submission of proposals by a broad group of experts added legitimacy and validated them. The participating experts were often the enthusiasts in the area of the thematic group, which is why they also advised the project organisers to prepare a subsequent advocacy strategy.

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[9] Puumala, E., Helena,L. (2020) "What can co-creation do for the citizens? Applying co-creation for the promotion of participation in cities" Kättesaadav: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2399654420957337

4. Implementation of Methodology

To ensure co-creation, the **Miro platform** was used so that the participants could write and move the input they had written (solutions, proposals) which in turn increased involvement and will to further work with the ideas. Limiting group size was very important to maintain the quality of the discussion and to keep the participants focused on the objective. The recommended group size for a 2.5-hour workshop is a maximum of eight people – if there are more than eight participants, it is important to organise work in smaller groups so everyone gets a chance to speak and different opinions can be heard.

A co-creation based approach is often not compatible with existing institutional practices because public sector organisations focus on short-term efficiency, stable operations and risk elimination.[10] Additionally, a sense of competition was present for new proposals which is natural for changes in the public sector.[11] For example, the issue of whether Ida-Virumaa needs a centre of competence that would take a part of the investments aimed at improving local life was brought up.

In the process, it would have been necessary to gather and provide more examples of similar co-creation processes from other parts of the world where the transition process is happening or has already taken place. This would have demonstrated to the participants that such an approach is possible and would have made the participants more effective in refining their proposals.

In future processes, it would be beneficial to include an activity plan development phase that would provide an opportunity to move from proposals towards their implementation and to involve parties in change management. Participants also suggested the creation of an ad hoc working party.

5. Impact Assessment of Proposals

For the second workshop of proposals, the experts had to analyse a proposal of their choice with the help of the impact assessment worksheet which took the participants a few hours to complete. The previously created sense of collective unity contributed to the readiness to work independently. Experts also took advantage of the network and asked for help from colleagues or other specialists in the field. According to experts, the PESTLE analysis used in the impact assessment tool was a useful and effective instrument to refine the proposal. However, the experts did not fill in all of the boxes in the impact assessment tool because these thematic areas had no factors to assess. In future processes, it might be useful to customise the impact assessment tool for each thematic area so that it would take into account the factors of that particular area.

[10] Torfing, J, Sørensen, E, Røiseland, A (2019) Transforming the public sector into an arena for co-creation: Barriers, drivers, benefits, and ways forward. Administration & Society 51(5): 795–825

[11] Bason, C. (2018). Introduction. In *Leading public sector innovation (second edition): Co-creating for a better society* (pp. 1-22). Bristol: Bristol University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctv1fxh1w.8

Project:

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Promoters:

The project was managed by DD StratLab (DDS), Sotsiaalse Innovatsiooni Labor (SiLab) and Institute of Baltic Studies (IBS).

Clients:

The clients were the Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF), the Estonian Green Movement (ERL) and the Estonian Environmental Law Centre (KÕK) in close co-operation with the Ministry of Finance and other drafters of the Ida-Virumaa and fair transition plans.

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Organisations:

Renewable energy organisations: Estonian Wind Power Association; Estonian PV Energy Association; Estonian Renewable Energy Association.

National decision-makers: Ministry of the Environment; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications.

Local decision-makers: Association of Local Authorities of Ida-Virumaa; Ida-Viru Enterprise Centre; Jõhvi Local Government official; Toila Local Government official.

Research institutes: University of Tartu (Deep Transition working party); Tartu Regional Energy Agency; Virumaa College of TUT.

Enterprises: Sunly, Utilitas, Sunmill; Fusebox; Eesti Jõujaamade ja Kaugkütte Ühing; Energiasalv Pakri OÜ; Viru Keemia Grupp (VKG).

Locals: active people who are interested and want to think with us, offer solutions, and implement them.

Environmental organisations: Estonian Fund for Nature, Estonian Green Movement, Estonian Environmental Law Centre.

Environmental associations and initiatives: Green Tiger; Cleantech For Est.

In addition, we also communicated with the following organisations: Environmental Investment Centre and KredEx; the drafters of the plans B, C and E CIVITTA and Enerex; State Shared Service Centre; Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation.