

The County of Viken, Norway: THE SDGS AS A TOOL TO IMPLEMENT TERRITORIAL REFORMS

Key highlights

- Viken is using the SDGs to implement the national territorial reform that merges the counties of Akershus, Buskerud and Østfold to form Viken as of 1 January 2020
- Its Regional Planning Strategy is taking a knowledge-based approach building on a SDGs baseline where regional development trends in Viken are analysed using the SDGs as the overall framework
- The SDGs offer a key framework to address some of the challenges of Viken, such as a complex system of territorial governance and institutional fragmentation, employment, social inclusion, mobility and transport and climate action

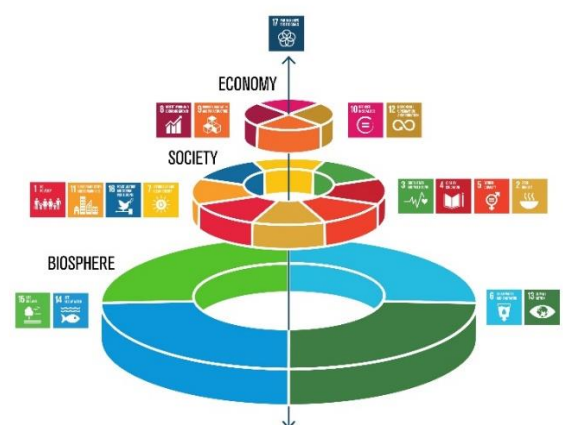
The SDGs form the basis for Viken’s development strategy. In 2018, the Joint Board of Viken consisting of political representatives from all three merging counties decided that the SDGs should form the basis of regional development in Viken. The main motivation for adopting the SDGs as the framework for the development of Viken is related to the expectation that the regional governments could act as “bridge builders” between policy sectors at national level and diversified local needs. This should allow them to take a stronger and more strategic and holistic role in regional development as part of the **2020** territorial reform.

The implementation of the SDGs in Viken is currently driven by two major process-developments: a Regional Planning Strategy and a new planning and steering system for the county administration. Being an overarching plan, Viken’s Regional Planning Strategy, sets the ambition level for the county, while subsequent plans will operationalise efforts to achieve its targets. Beyond that, through the development of a holistic planning and steering system, the SDGs are used as an opportunity to link overarching strategic goals with the 4-year regional financial plan, annual budgets and operational planning. The SDGs will be included as a distinct managerial responsibility and trainings will be provided to managers, employees and elected politicians alike. The SDGs will also be reflected in communication efforts, templates and routines.

Viken’s strategy builds on a SDG–driven knowledge base. The Joint Board of Viken decided that a Knowledge Base should be developed using the SDGs as the overall framework in the Regional Planning Strategy, with the goal of creating a SDGs baseline for Viken. The baseline will help the county prioritise actions and targets and to monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs. Prioritisation of actions will be done as part of the strategy formulation, while the SDGs are seen as a holistic framework and an indivisible whole. Viken has identified over 70 basic data sets relevant that provide an overview of the current state of affairs in the region, using the SDGs as a framework.

Viken has the ambition to develop targets within “planetary boundaries” in the upcoming Regional Planning Strategy, in other words promoting regional development while maintaining ecological support systems intact and using natural resources sustainably. Inspired by the “wedding cake” model, the working group for the Knowledge Base has searched for how to reflect the relation between socio-economic development and planetary boundaries (Figure 1). This has proven to be a challenging endeavour that needs further exploration beyond the Knowledge Base.

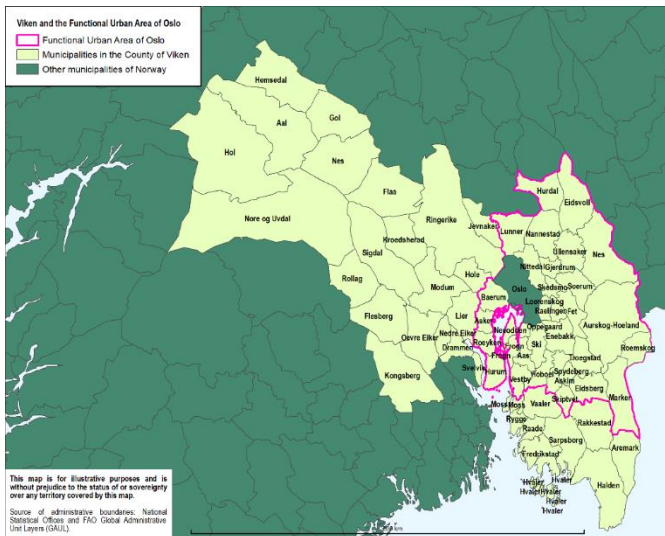
Figure 1: The Stockholm Resilience Centre’s SDGs “Wedding Cake” used by Viken



Notes: Photo credit: Azote Images for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University. Source: SRC (2016).

Geographical “mismatches” in a complex governance system of territorial actors and partnerships constitute key challenges for the future development of Viken. Administrative borders for regional state authorities, counties, regional councils and municipalities are not aligned, which results in a complex landscape for service provision and planning functions, from public transport and business development support to spatial planning. This has not been fully addressed in the territorial reform.

Figure 2. Functional Urban Area of Oslo and Viken



Source: OECD Metropolitan Database.

Using functional approaches can be valuable for reading and addressing geographic mismatch in Viken. For example, Functional Urban Areas (Figure 2) can help understand spatial development dynamics vis-à-vis territorial partnerships and actors in Viken. This will be

essential to meet challenges like a more efficient public transport system and balanced regional development outside the Oslo Metropolitan FUA.

Some key challenges for the future development of Viken will be to promote a well-connected region where no one is left behind, while minimising negative environmental impacts. The diverse size and characteristics of the county's 53 municipalities need to be taken into account to address spatial inequalities in the county. Developing urban centres outside the capital will help to promote a more balanced regional development.

There is also a need for strengthened collaboration with the private sector to leverage the contribution of businesses towards the SDGs including risk-reducing and incentive schemes for investment and R&D aimed at solving "SDG challenges".

The regional planning process for Viken will be designed for the involvement and participation of civil society and the population at large. Citizen engagement is deemed to be favourable in the context of Norway where many civil society organisations are already interacting with counties and municipalities to build awareness about the 2030 Agenda. Youth have a strong voice in advocating for and contributing towards achieving the SDGs in Viken and are already active change agents in this regard.

FORWARD LOOKING POLICY RESPONSES

Use the Knowledge Base as a tool to build and communicate the identity as well as to identify the priorities for Viken. The Knowledge Base is not an end in itself but provides a tool for policy dialogue in the Regional Planning Strategy process, its implementation and the achievement of the SDGs. It should be used to build and communicate Viken's identity and to prioritised goals engaging the wider public.

Raise the ambition for stakeholder engagement. Viken could develop a longer-term stakeholder engagement strategy, including a comprehensive mapping of the ecosystem of actors contributing to the SDGs in the county to promote further cooperation between public sector, private sector, civil society and academia.

Promote a functional approach to address geographical "mismatches" and key development challenges of future Viken. A functional approach (e.g. the FUA) can help to address geographical mismatches and strengthen regional planning and collaboration in Viken.

Identify an appropriate "soft" institutional framework/mechanism to coordinate the implementation of the SDGs in a holistic manner. Strategically positioning the SDGs will help to ensure that integration of the SDGs in all the work by the county administration and its partners is enforced and sustained over time.

Contribute to improved multi-level dialogue around the SDGs in Norway and further recognise the important role of sub-national governments in the 2030 Agenda. Local and regional needs must be further articulated for and understood by the national government and national actors can improve their communication regarding resources and support available.

Maximise private sector contribution toward the SDGs. Existing tools like public procurement and clusters policies can be used to leverage the key role of companies in, for example, de-carbonising the economy and promoting social inclusion. Beyond that, innovative public procurement strategies or R&D grants can be designed around SDGs challenges to incentivise and de-risk investment in new products and services.

Develop tools to analyse synergies and trade-offs between SDGs. Developing targets within planetary boundaries is a challenging methodological endeavour, but once the Knowledge Base has been developed, interlinkages between the SDGs can be explored through a matrix approach based on the most relevant development trends and environmental pressures identified for Viken.