

Who transforms cities?

Who transforms cities? Who are the actors who implement a more sustainable lifestyle in a city or a village? What are the obstacles keeping us from achieving our vision of a sustainable, equal and resilient community? We decided to approach these questions from the point of view of the most influential actors for transforming cities: citizens, politics and companies.

Firstly, we will discuss the potential citizens have to bring sustainable development to the place they are living in. Regarding their private life citizens can have a big impact by being conscious consumers especially in the areas of food, clothing, mobility and technology. As a community, citizens can engage in initiatives for instance: sharing food, community gardening, car sharing or political activism.

These initiatives can only succeed with the support of local politics, which is the second perspective we want to analyze. With financial resources and public facilities as well as uncomplicated bureaucratic processes, local governments can accelerate sustainable transformation and enable the majority of the population to participate in those initiatives. Additionally, politics should take action by themselves for example by increasing the accessibility of education and knowledge in the field of sustainability for everyone. Big effects can also be achieved by shifting the focus from supporting profit and growth-oriented companies to sustainable and local businesses, therefore reducing lobbyism.

However, the reduction of lobbyism has to be implemented by local companies as well to ensure the movement of financial means into the right direction. Furthermore, by focusing on environmentally friendly business structures and supply chains companies can reduce their carbon footprint and enable consumers to make sustainable choices. Likewise, customers support these local businesses with regular purchases.

When observing these three main actors one can notice that each party closely interplays with each other. Each group's sustainable actions have ripple effects on the other's development. But what if one group is not participating in sustainable progress? Citizens, politics and companies are often faced with challenges, which keep them from making the most of these previously named potentials.

In the following, each actor's obstacles will be discussed.

In terms of citizens' private engagement, it must be pointed out that being a conscious consumer is often directly linked to a higher budget. Organic food and clothing are not accessible to everyone and volunteering at political or activist initiatives is known to be very time consuming. These hardships are directly linked to local companies and politics, who depend on civil support to sustain an environmentally friendly structure.

If there is little political engagement by citizens, local governments will be ineffective in representing their inhabitants. Our current political system faces many obstacles when it comes to their financial scope and bureaucratic freedom, preventing environmental campaigns and programs from happening. This leads to missing funding for sustainable development of companies, also affecting the consumers.

Lastly, a big challenge for local businesses is the competition with global companies whose priorities lie in quick profit and cheap labor. Without the financial support of citizens and politics local businesses won't be able to keep up with the pace and reach of these enormous companies.

To answer the entry question, sustainable transformation is in fact dependent on citizens, politics and companies. However, various challenges prevent certain groups from reaching their full potential. We conclude that whenever environmental development is dependent on multiple actors it takes each actor's full engagement for this interrelationship to succeed.