

# Climate-smart choices for sustainable lifestyles

*Summary and highlights from the climate project  
The low-carbon place 2016–2019*



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# Introduction

The low-carbon place – how on earth can you give such a title to a project? Well, our initial idea was never to publish the project name. Instead we wanted our climate efforts and raising the bar when it comes to ambition to speak for themselves. However, both the project and our climate efforts had to make an impression and although we're still not too keen on the name of the project, we're pleased to be able to share with you everything we've learnt in the project.

In recent years, we've become increasingly aware that our lifestyles are contributing to global warming, which is already having major consequences for people in other parts of the world. In time, global warming will also have an impact on how we lead our lives here in Sweden. To stop climate change, we need to change our lifestyles immediately.

Municipalities are important players who can facilitate such change. And this is what we've been working on during the three years of the project – developing tools to inspire others to make choices and lead lifestyles that are climate-smart.

We've faced both praise and criticism. The purpose has been to test new approaches and pave the way for a municipality that addresses the consumption aspect of our climate impact. As everyone knows, sometimes you need to make a stand and go outside of your comfort zone in order to break new ground – and that's what we've done.

In this report, we've summarised our work in the project and are sharing our experiences and highlights.



**We have:**

- developed unique new knowledge on Umeå's climate impact
- communicated positively and not always maintained our municipal appearance
- innovatively facilitated climate-smart choices for residents and businesses

# Our starting point

In recent years, we've become increasingly aware that our lifestyles are contributing to global warming, which is already having major consequences for people in other parts of the world. In time, global warming will also have an impact on how we lead our lives here in Sweden. To stop climate change we need to change our lifestyles immediately.

For many years, Umeå municipality has worked to inspire its residents to choose sustainable travel and transport. In recent years, the awareness of our impact on the climate increasingly relates to how we travel. Our whole lifestyle impacts the global climate – what we eat, how much energy we use and how we shop. Consequently, we wanted to take a holistic approach to our lifestyles and look at how we can step up our efforts to inspire others to make more sustainable and climate-smart choices.

To do this, we needed to develop new knowledge, exchange our thoughts, develop new ideas and put ourselves to the test.

## **We are the facilitators**

Municipalities are important players who can facilitate more sustainable lifestyles. We also need to be the role model who lead by example.

During the three years of the project, we've worked to inspire citizens to make choices and lead lifestyles that are climate-smart. The purpose has been to test new approaches and pave the way for a municipality that addresses the consumption aspect of its climate impact.

With the project, we wanted to raise the level of ambition of the municipality's climate efforts, break new ground and try new ways of working. Instead of focusing on one area or cause of climate impact, we wanted to take a holistic approach to our lifestyles and how different elements of life and municipal operations can facilitate more sustainable habits.

As a municipality, we are a facilitator for various sustainable behaviours, from snow clearance and public transport to libraries, school meals and waste collection. In the end, it's down to the choices and actions of the individual in having a lesser or greater impact on our planet, our starting point has been to explore how we can lay the foundations for reducing such an impact.

## **What we wanted to achieve**

The objectives of the project have been to:

- › make new data available on the local carbon footprint;
- › develop methods and tools to visualise statistics;
- › develop a public-sector toolbox; and
- › collaborate and share knowledge.

# Going car-free!

Ten families were given help in taking the step to go car-free for three months. Several of them have now sold their cars! In addition, their car-free lives have established new behaviours and knock-on effects:

- Fewer impulse purchases and small shopping trips
- Fewer visits to shopping centres and DIY warehouses
- Errands combined and completed in the same trip
- Less need to travel, even by bike or bus
- Better planning and less stress
- Increased climate focus, including reduced meat consumption and increased recycling

## What they got:



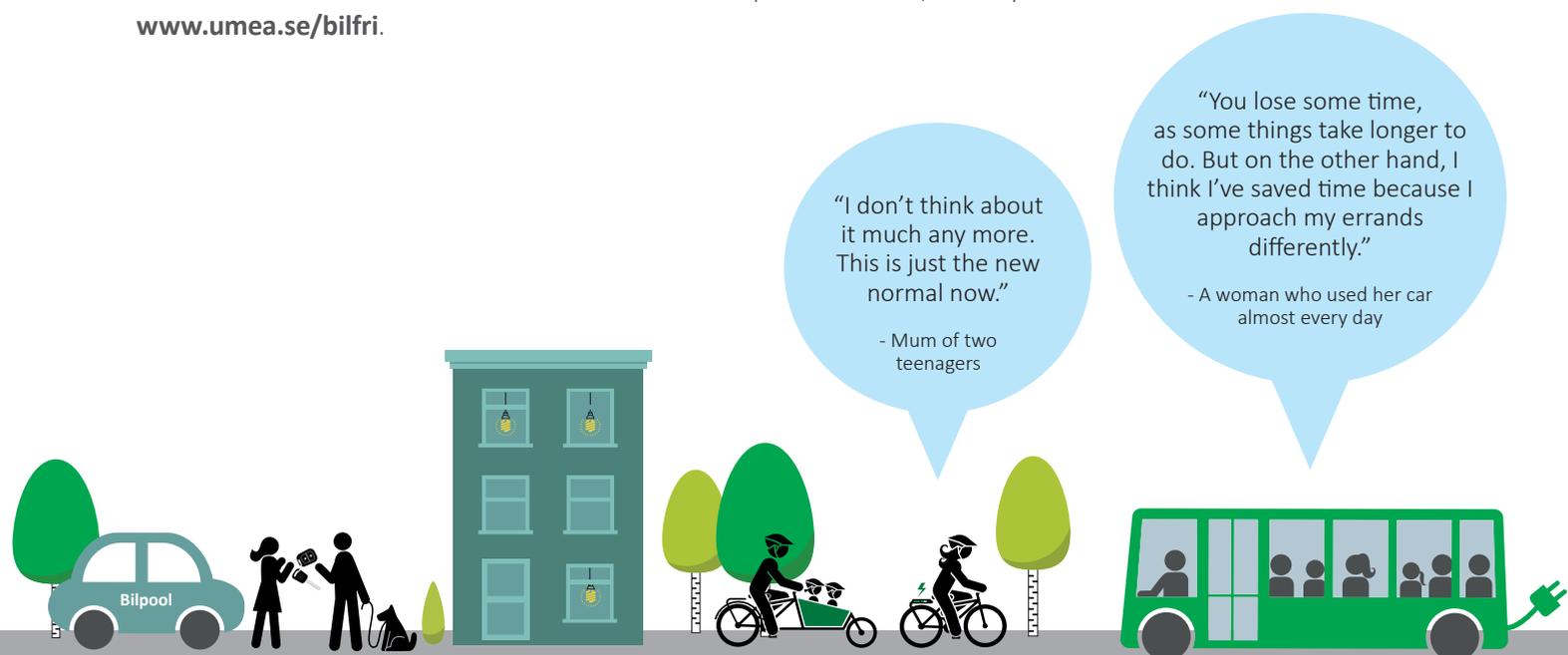
- › Borrow an electric bikel
- › Bus pass for the whole family
- › Access to an electric cargo bike pool with U-bike
- › Discounted carpool access

One conclusion drawn is that many people want to try a car-free life but need help making that step. Three months is enough time to give going car-free a real shot, ideally with support during this time. Regular interviews resulted in ongoing contact, which helped to keep the families motivated. Several families said they found it easier to go car-free than they initially expected.

An electric bike, ideally with a bike trailer, is a valuable alternative for occasions where a car would otherwise be indispensable, such as for large shopping trips, DIY purchases or some longer trips to places not served by buses.

The test itself has had knock-on effects. During the test period the participants spoke with their friends, relatives and colleagues about the life choices made in respect of cars, the health benefits of cycling and the financial aspects of not using a car.

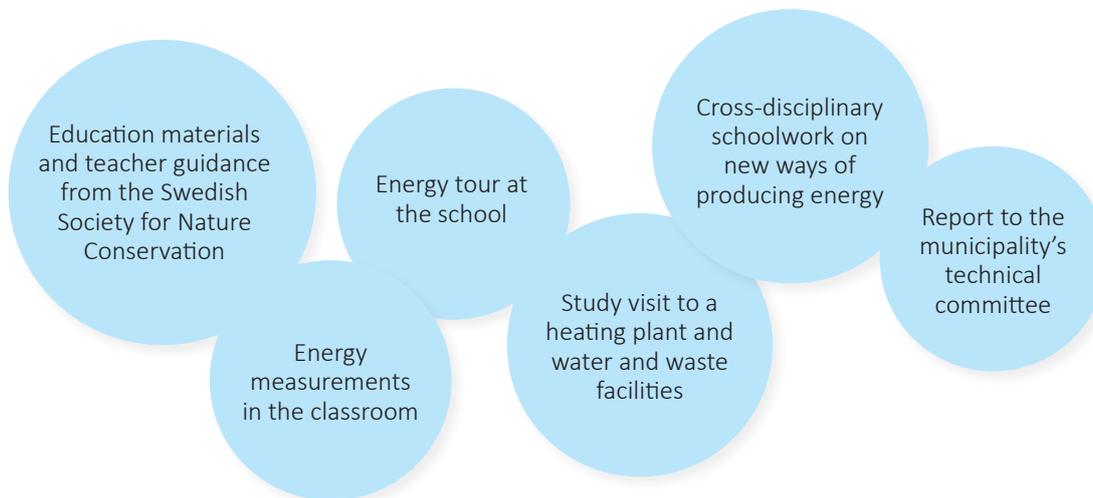
The families kept a diary and were interviewed by the Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics. We have summarised the results in a report and video, which you can find here [www.umea.se/bilfri](http://www.umea.se/bilfri).



# More energy in the schedule

A sixth-grade class at the Sjöfruskolan school in Umeå tried out an education package on energy which encompassed several of the school's subjects, including sciences, humanities, maths, art and physical training.

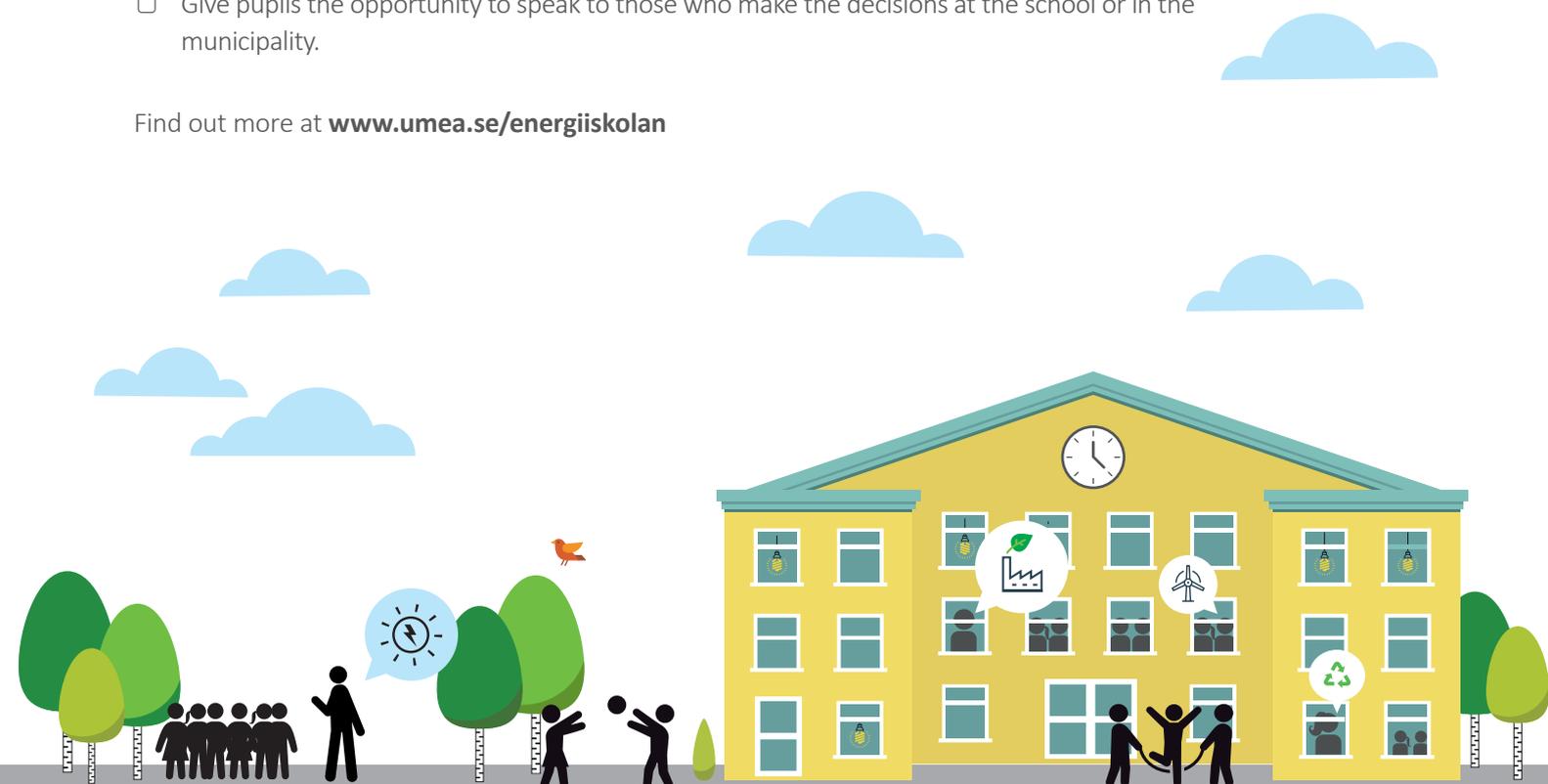
Some examples of the activities in the education package:



## How do we get more energy in the school? Our conclusions:

- Offer a wide range of activities.
- Integrate energy and energy-saving into several subjects at the same time.
- Ensure that the initiative is in accordance with curriculum for "Learning for sustainable development".
- Use energy tours and study visits to anchor the initiative.
- Minimise additional strain on teachers.
- Give pupils the opportunity to speak to those who make the decisions at the school or in the municipality.

Find out more at [www.umea.se/energiiskolan](http://www.umea.se/energiiskolan)



# Spurring on restaurants in their sustainability efforts

How can the municipality promote climate-smart solutions in restaurants and catering facilities? The low-carbon place initiated the Sustainable Restaurants network in Umeå. The network offers training for restaurants in various aspects of sustainability, while participants inspire one another and build up shared knowledge about a sustainable restaurant industry. The topics have been:

- Sustainable food
- Economy and energy
- Environment and climate
- Moral and social conditions
- Communication

Through education, advice and networking, the restaurants gain practical tools for developing their businesses in a sustainable direction. The restaurants also receive tips and support in how they can inform their guests about their sustainability efforts. Education has been integrated into the meetings with an emphasis on networking and the sharing of experience. In addition, the restaurants receive individualised current-status analyses and advice to enable them to implement relevant activities that take their sustainability efforts forwards.

The reactions from the participating restaurants have been very positive. There is a marked willingness to share their tips and what they have learnt with others. Despite the participants coming from both smaller gourmet restaurants and municipal catering, they've always found something to learn from one another. We've tested a network for restaurants and believe that this approach can work for other sectors as well, such as local food producers, retailers and grocery stores.

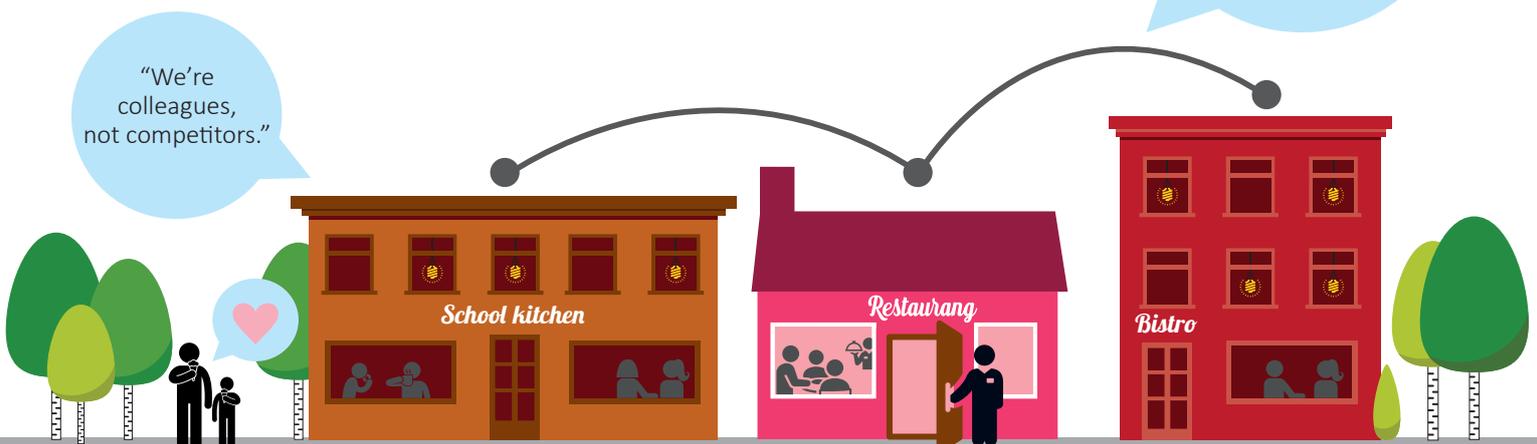
## Checklist

- Ensure that the network and its content are relevant to the sector you want to change.
- Who can co-ordinate and structure the network? It doesn't run on its own.
- Create a shared objective for a more sustainable sector.
- Make sure that you promote a climate where the members feel comfortable share with one another.
- Create clear expectations of the members' involvement in the network, such as a letter of intent.

Want to read more and watch a video about our networking initiative?  
Visit [www.umea.se/hallbararestauranger](http://www.umea.se/hallbararestauranger)

"We're colleagues, not competitors."

"When you become aware of your unsustainable behaviours, you become more conscious and try to change them."



# How to make a co-operative housing association a driver of change

Sustainability in the home can be so much more than just electricity and heating. How you live shapes your ability to lead a sustainable lifestyle. For this reason, we wanted to test whether a property owner or co-operative housing association could provide housing that is climate-smart and attractive while also saving money. Together with the municipality's energy and climate advisors, we invited people to a series of seminars on the topic of how housing associations can support climate-smart lifestyles.

## We offered Umeå's co-operative housing associations a range of inspiration, including:

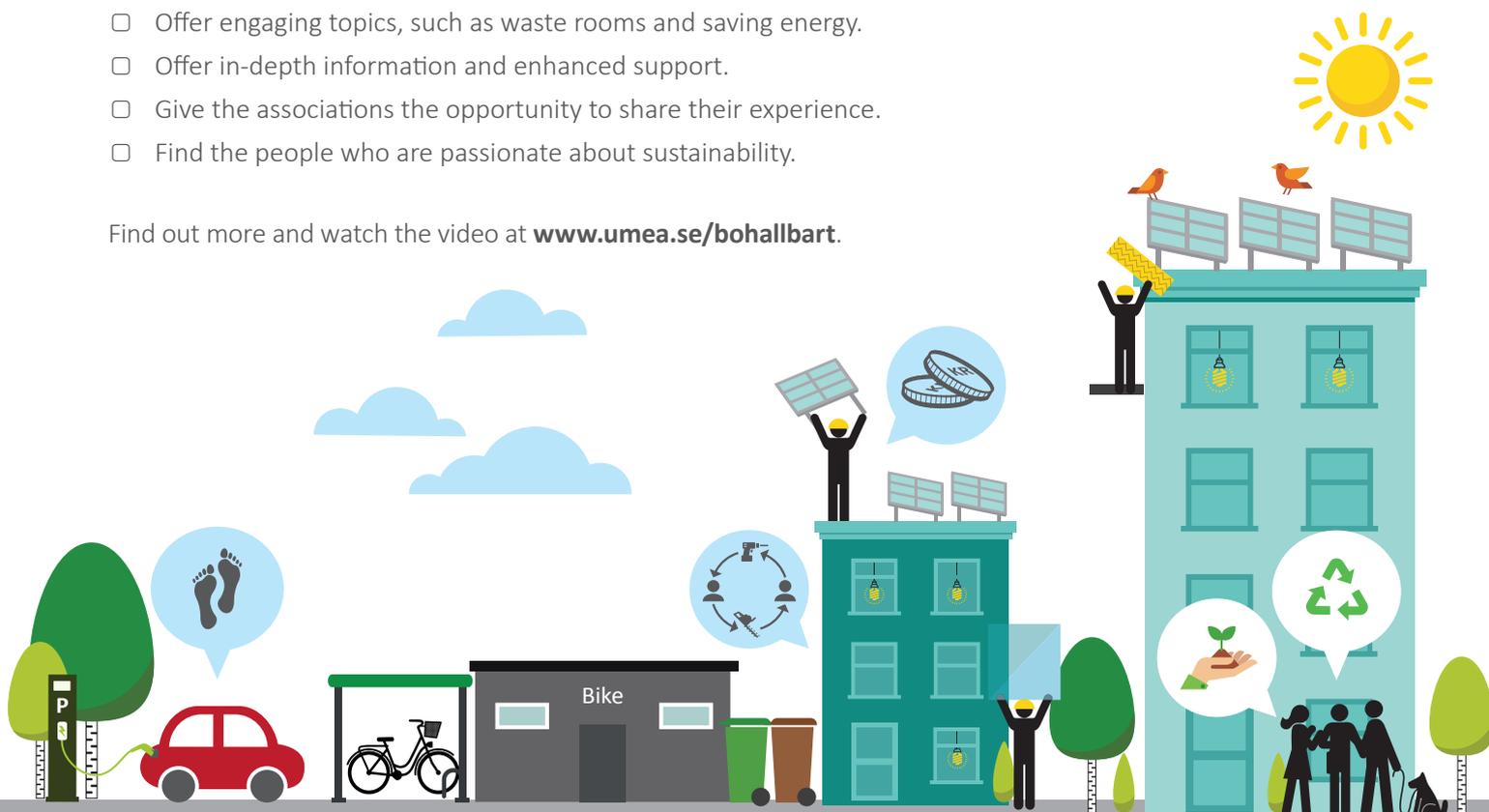
- bike storage that is protected and adapted for bikes with load carriers
- sharing services, from screwdrivers to car pools
- charging points and charging stations for e-cars
- nudging for reuse and recycling
- self-sufficient energy production by solar panels
- energy efficiency and heating

Many of the participants took part on several occasions and the seminars increasingly took on the form of a network where people shared their experience, sought more information and spurred each other on.

## Put together your own package based on our experience:

- Ask what the association needs.
- Gather different skills from within the municipality and beyond.
- Provide specific examples of potential solutions.
- Take advantage of the fact that finances are an important driving force.
- Offer engaging topics, such as waste rooms and saving energy.
- Offer in-depth information and enhanced support.
- Give the associations the opportunity to share their experience.
- Find the people who are passionate about sustainability.

Find out more and watch the video at [www.umea.se/bohallbart](http://www.umea.se/bohallbart).

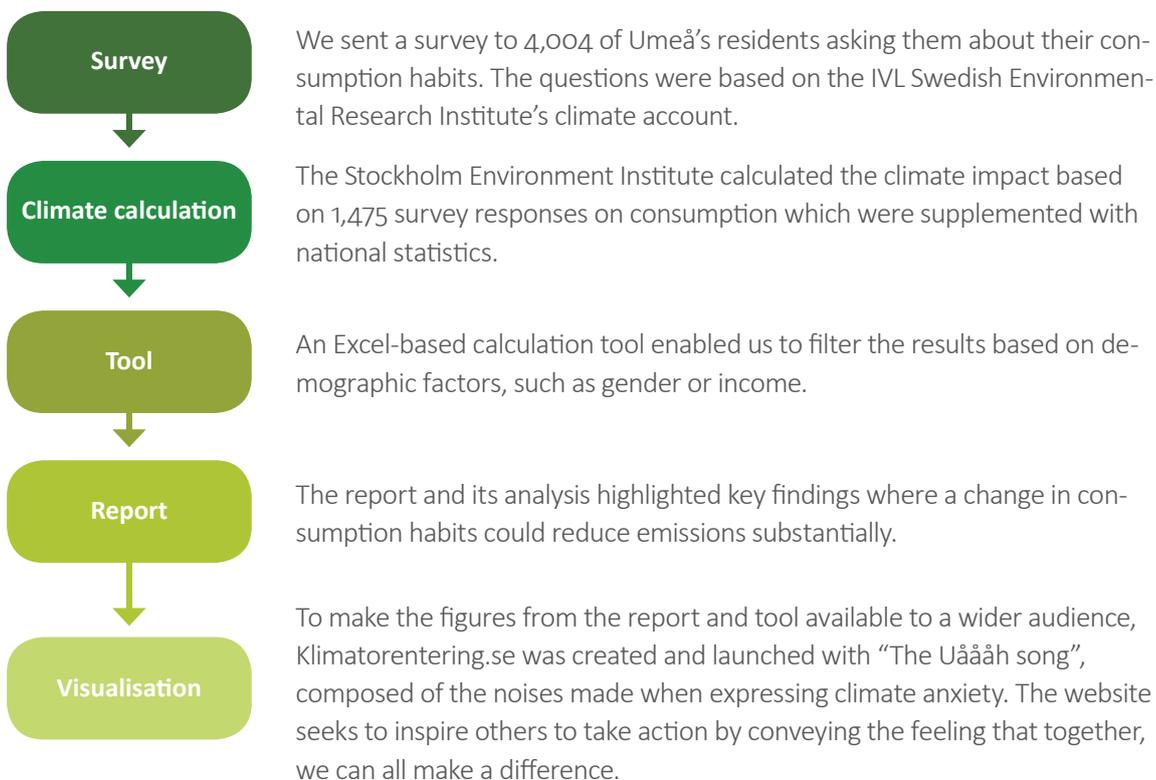


# How we calculated the climate impact of Umeå's residents

The consumption perspective is becoming increasingly important.

Umeå is one of the first municipalities in Sweden to explore and calculate the climate impact of consumption of its residents. The results provide a local carbon footprint as well as valuable knowledge for politicians and civil servants in their efforts to support residents in making sustainable choices in their day-to-day lives.

## Here's what we did:



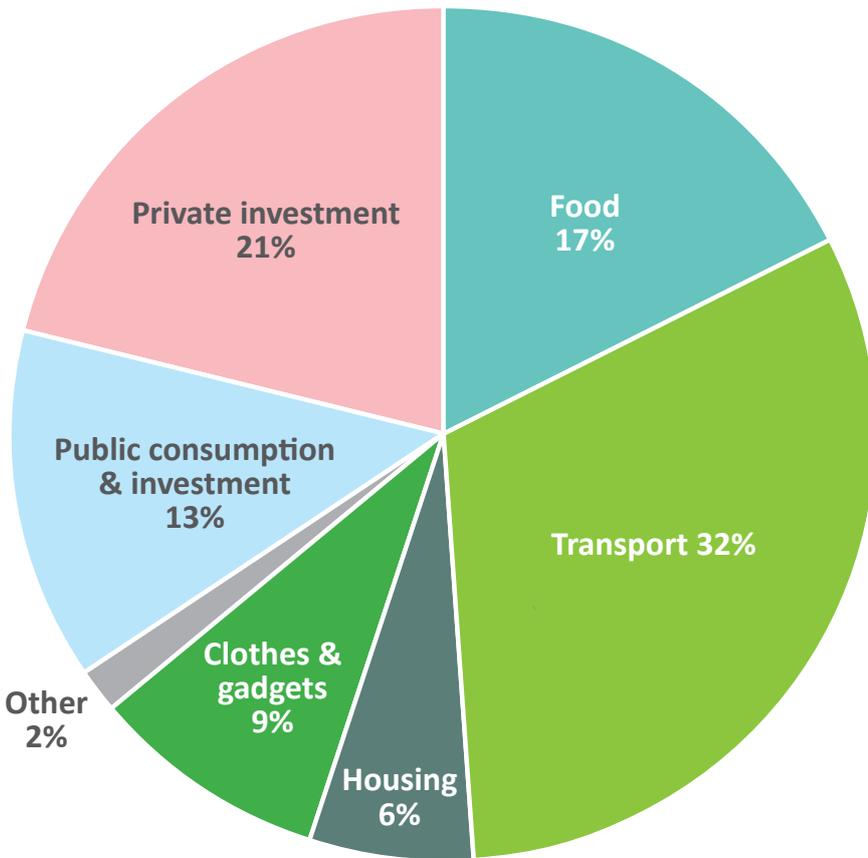
### Key findings

The report produced by the Stockholm Environment Institute identifies a number of focus areas with a substantial climate impact where a rapid reduction in emissions is possible:

- reduction in air travel and car use
- reduction in meat and dairy consumption and a reduction in food waste
- reduction in domestic energy consumption
- reduction in consumption and increase in the reuse of furniture and clothing

Find out more and watch the videos and presentations at [www.umea.se/konsumtionsvanor](http://www.umea.se/konsumtionsvanor). Please also visit [www.klimatorentering.se](http://www.klimatorentering.se).

# The climate impact of Umeå's residents



11.5 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per person, per year



# Challenging travel habits by trying new means of transport

How do you get men to travel like women? And how do you encourage those living outside urban areas to travel more sustainably? We've explored both of these issues in a test traveller project that takes a holistic approach to sustainable means of transport.

Women travel more sustainably than men, and outside of urban areas the dependency on cars is greater as there are fewer sustainable alternatives. Our way forwards was to ask the target groups how they want to travel and then offer several different solutions.

In order to solve identified challenges we gathered enthusiasts and focus groups and offered them to create a wide range of sustainable travel options. Overall, participants in the activity became very engaged and came up with many of their own suggestions. This resulted in test groups with electric bikes, public transport and car-sharing. A couple of the focus groups asked for a competition, so a competition was organised.

The key here is tailored activities without pointing fingers. Listening to the participants and their needs, yields better results.

## What we've learnt

- Several test groups running simultaneously requires more time in terms of planning, implementation and evaluation compared with test group projects that are more limited to a single mode of transport or target group.
- The packaging of the various activities also requires a well-thought-out communication strategy.
- Establishing good contacts with passionate people is an important prerequisite for disseminating information and anchoring the initiative.
- The focus groups offers valuable awareness of needs and conditions, and shows that we're listening to the intended users and adapting the solutions for them.

Find out more at [www.umea.se/testresenar](http://www.umea.se/testresenar).



# Sustainable means of transport in practice

“Environmentally friendly and really easy to use”, “Nice of the city to offer this service”. These are just two examples of the responses we got when we asked our members what is the best about U-bike.

“I’ve sold my car and use U-bike instead. It replaces everything I used the car for – big shopping trips, longer journeys, moving heavy things. And it’s so cheap! I love U-bike,” is another example.

We’ve established the hub Cykelstället and launched the electric cargo bike pool called U-bike to demonstrate that our investments in sustainable means of transport are genuine, not just empty words. U-bike enables Umeå’s residents to rent an electric cargo bike from one of two garages – one at the university and one at Cykelstället.

Cykelstället is a central hub for cyclists, where they can rent a parking in a locked and heated garage, pump their tyres, wash their bike, rent an electric cargo bike or just take a break.

The investment in Cykelstället has been debated, not least because of the construction costs. However, there is no doubt that the timing of the project is spot on since it has attracted attention both around Sweden and internationally. Cykelstället is perceived by its users as a safe and secure place.

The project The low-carbon place has launched, promoted and developed both Cykelstället and U-bike as a complement to day-to-day activities.

The investments have far surpassed its objectives. Now that the project is ending, U-bike has reached the maximum number of members possible, and the number of available parking spaces in Cykelstället’s locked garage is decreasing.

Find out more about what we’ve done to support sustainable travel and watch the video on Cykelstället at [www.umea.se/hallbararesor](http://www.umea.se/hallbararesor).



# A platform for knowledge development

Developing new knowledge together requires people to come together in an environment where they can exchange ideas and take time to reflect, as well as listen, discuss and ask questions. This has been central for The low-carbon place, since it is a collaborative project between Umeå Municipality and Umeå University.

## How we built our competence platform

A co-ordinator from Umeå University acted as the link between Umeå Municipality and the university. The co-ordinator set up meetings, establish contacts and ensured that collaborations could grow. These collaborations became increasingly self-sufficient as the project progressed.

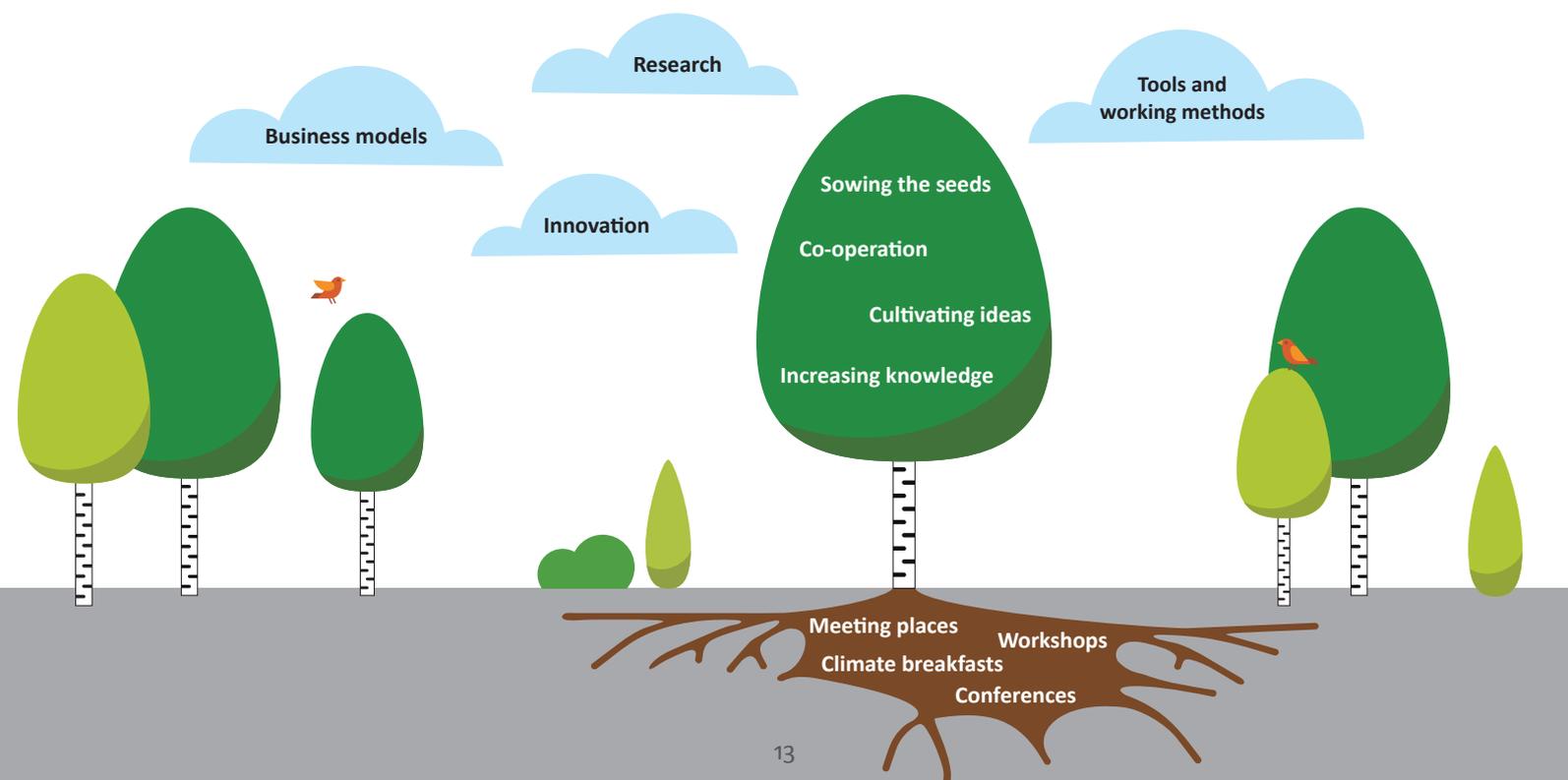
The competence platform has been an integral part of the project's other activities. By creating opportunities – that is to say spaces and occasions for dialogue and discussions, where stakeholders can interact regardless of their profession, sector, municipal department or university institution, be they researchers or civil servants, in the public or private sector – we have built skills and produced knowledge.

## What we've done

Within the project we arranged workshops, information meetings, climate breakfasts and panel discussions. We've tested various methods and formats for the meetings including post-it notes, flipcharts, digital tools, coloured pens, cheerful workshop leaders, and boring lecturers. Yes, we probably tried everything.

Each year we held a national conference, often with international elements, in collaboration with other stakeholders.

In a way, the competence platform also served as a testbed. A testbed for methods of meetings, the joint development of skills, challenging ourselves and others and not least for discovering and testing the issues that we uncovered within The low-carbon place.



# A summary of the project



## Have we achieved the objectives of the project?

Yes, we've definitely achieved the project's objectives. That said, it's not always possible to measure the impact of the project in terms of kilowatt hours or tonnes of carbon dioxide. We have achieved what the project set out to do.

We have:

- › developed unique new knowledge of Umeå's climate impact
- › communicated positively and not always maintained our municipal appearance
- › innovatively facilitated climate-smart choices for residents and businesses

Changing behaviours, increasing knowledge and moved positions are all difficult to measure in numbers, but in summarising the project we can conclude that in accordance with our objectives we have:

- developed new data and made it available
- developed a public-sector toolbox
- tested low-carbon solutions for sustainable means of transport, housing and consumption
- made impact on our target groups and built up knowledge about sustainable travel, housing, and consumption patterns, with awareness of the difference between the consumption patterns of men and women and how these have an impact on the climate

Knowledge, communication and creative methods have permeated the entire project.

## Knowledge

We have developed new knowledge, from both local and national perspectives. By trying out new methods of travel surveys, we gained insight into how travel for example changes with the weather. We have developed new ways of gaining more knowledge about Umeå residents' consumption patterns and how these affect the climate, which has attracted interest all around Sweden.

Through the conferences we hosted, where pressing issues were raised, and where we spoke about our work, we provided meetings of both national and international importance. We spread knowledge and created a forum for cultivating ideas. In addition, we provided specific target groups with the opportunity to increase their knowledge and offered a series of public climate breakfasts.

## Communication

Nudging, gamification and service design – we have tried lots of different ways of changing behaviours. Some suited us, others didn't. Some had a big impact, others less so. We sent text messages to new citizens. We interviewed, spoke with and conducted user tests with passers-by in the square. We handed out magazines, bike lights and bananas. We've been on TV, in the pa-

pers and on radio. We had big campaigns and small ads on social media. Regardless of the channel or format, the conclusion is that we have to be seen and heard where our target groups are and on their terms.

### **Creative methods**

Developing new methods requires us to step off the well-trodden paths and try new things. Sometimes we used established ways of working, and sometimes we ventures into completely uncharted waters. During the journey, we gained insight that made us reconsider some ideas and try things that didn't turn out as we'd hoped. But we also developed methods and ways of working that have not only become successful but attracted interest right across Sweden and which have sometimes been copied by others.

In this publication we've talked about our most successful examples, which we hope will continue in the municipality's day-to-day activities or sow the seed for processes and new ideas that can be tried out in subsequent projects or by other municipalities.



### **Lessons we've learnt**

Our journey to the low-carbon place has at times been seamless, and at times full of obstacles. Either way, we've learnt a lot that we'll take with us and which we're happy to share:

#### **1. A communicative project needs developed target-group thinking**

Success hinges on thinking through what you want to achieve, who the recipient is, and what the target group needs and wants for each and every sub-activity. For co-operative housing associations, money talks louder than sustainability. Children are effective messengers, but how can we support the work of their teachers? Women are generally more interested in the environment than men, while men have, on average, more challenges when it comes to sustainability. A car-free life requires a variety of different solutions, not just buses or bikes. There are lots of different methods to help the project team maintain the user perspective throughout the process. Make sure you use them!

#### **2. Changing norms is difficult and takes time**

A key insight we gained through the project is the importance of social norms for long-term sustainable habits and behaviours. Norms are slow to change, but we're convinced that those who took part in our activities are, in various ways, contributing to this shift in norms through their newly found habits, knowledge and attitudes to the climate.

Personal norms and habits change gradually when people take a first step towards something new, which eventually becomes a habit. This is true for both municipal activities and personal choices. Climate-smart choices often start with a single step that feels easy, but which is often followed by other sustainable steps, such as what we eat, how much we buy or what we do on our holiday. And this is why it's good to adopt a holistic approach to sustainable lifestyles.

### 3. People are motivated by meeting others who are in the same boat

Facilitating meetings with others who also want to act, establishes the sense that we can bring about change together. The car-free families started their journey together, which reinforced the fact that there were others challenging themselves at the same time. Both small gourmet restaurants and large school kitchens serving thousands of meals came together and learnt from each other. Co-operative housing associations discussed shared challenges and exchanged ideas. The site Klimatorentering.se has also been founded on the idea of demonstrating the changes we can achieve together as residents of a municipality.

### 4. Start with the ripe fruit

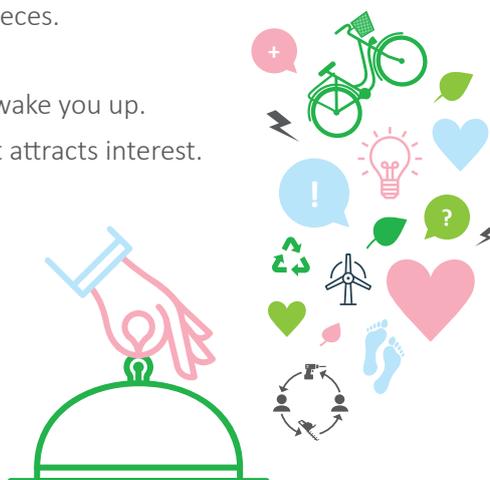
Capture those who are receptive to change. They can act as role models and frontrunners for those who are yet to reach this point. We tried to capture those who were interested in leading a car-free life instead of encouraging those devoted to their cars to take the bus. Sometimes we started collaborations before finding out that the time wasn't right yet and so we backed down. Some restaurants were part of the network from the start, while others followed later, which inspired those who weren't part of the network, showing them that it is possible for them to make changes as well. So start with those who are open to change and the others will follow later.

### 5. Creating talking points takes things a step further

Campaigns that attract attention and extreme challenges give rise to discussion in the media, at coffee breaks at work and around the dinner table with friends. It makes people think and establishes a sense that there are many of us who want to make the journey to the low-carbon place. To raise awareness, sometimes we need to step outside the notion of how a public organisation should act and communicate. Sometimes we have to dare to try new things and be prepared to take criticism.

## Recipe for The low-carbon place

- Start with a generous splash of headaches.
- Crack some hard nuts and roast them.
- Sprinkle with meetings and occasions for coffee.
- Simmer researchers' knowledge together with practitioners' thoughts.
- Chop hard-to-digest parts into manageable pieces.
- A scoop of courage.
- Garnish with some unexpected flavours that wake you up.
- Serve everything nicely together in a way that attracts interest.



*We would like to thank all our partners, participants, and everyone we met on the journey towards a low-carbon place. The train is at the platform, so welcome aboard!*  
*We would like to extend our special thanks to the project financiers, the European Regional Development Fund, Umeå Municipality, Umeå University, Region Västerbotten, Upab and Umeå Energi.*

**Want more information about our work? Get in touch!**

**Visit our website:** [www.umea.se/co2platsen](http://www.umea.se/co2platsen)  
Watch our videos with subtitles!

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