SYNTHESIS DOCUMENT

Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Overcoming Barriers to Create Sustainable Cities

ORGANIZED BY ALINNEA - IE FOUNDATION

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Alinnea is a dynamic Think & Action Tank established in 2024 to accelerate effective and equitable climate solutions in Spain and beyond. We are supported by the European Climate Foundation (ECF) and hosted by the IE Foundation.
Alinnea's commitment is to identify specific barriers in different economic sectors and propose incentives and recommendations to reduce existing bottlenecks. We do this through multi-stakeholder dialogue. Our mission is to serve as a dynamic and independent platform, bringing to the table a broad interdisciplinary knowledge, from the public, private and social sectors, which allows us to understand and analyze proposals from the different actors that are part of each of the sectors analyzed. Alinnea relies on collaboration, knowledge sharing and innovative thinking to catalyze impactful solutions to the climate agenda.

Alinnea's main pillars of action are:

Multistakeholder Dialogue:

To foster an inclusive understanding of climate challenges and opportunities, we engage in open dialogue with all stakeholders, regardless of their level of involvement in the climate agenda. Through active listening, Alinnea surfaces concerns, interests, and potential losses associated with the transition, while also uncovering pathways for effective and equitable climate action.

Research & Knowledge Dissemination:

We generate comprehensive knowledge on topics aligned with its mission through in-depth analysis and by addressing gaps in existing research. This positions Alinnea as a valuable contributor to the field, providing insights that inform policy decisions and drive effective climate action.

Partnerships & Alliances:

We actively engage with other think tanks and national and global organizations and networks dedicated to advancing climate action to amplify impact and resources, and create shared strategies. By encouraging collaboration across sectors, Alinnea promotes transformative initiatives and mutually beneficial solutions.

Strategic Communication & Advocacy:

We share data-driven briefs and reports to provide incentives and inform key actors about the most efficient measures for climate action and just transition. By leveraging insights and advocacy strategies, Alinnea catalyzes transformative ideas for climate action.

Introduction

With two-thirds of the global population expected to live in urban areas by 2050, sustainable cities are critical to achieving net-zero goals and ensuring a resilient future. Rapid urbanization demands innovative solutions to balance economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social equity. Cities, as centres of innovation and activity, have the potential to lead the green transition.

To explore these challenges and opportunities, Alinnea conducted several one-on-one interviews to prioritize some of the burning issues around Sustainable Cities in Spain and convened an exploratory dialogue with experts from diverse sectors and organizations to debate and develop concrete recommendations to overcome them.

Objectives

The objective of the exploratory dialogue was to identify the main bottlenecks hindering climate action on the selected topic, assess each bottleneck based on its potential impact and feasibility for resolution, explore actionable solutions, and highlight best practices that could serve as models.

This synthesis document outlines the key findings and actionable recommendations proposed by participants during these discussions, providing a roadmap for future work on sustainable cities.

Methodology

To facilitate the exploratory dialogue, we employed the "Pro-Action Café" technique - a dynamic facilitation method designed to foster collaboration, creativity, and actionable outcomes. Participants were organized into small groups of 6-7 individuals per table, each focusing on one of the following topics:

- **Table 1: Consumption and Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)**
- **Table 2: Sustainable and Circular Construction**
- **Table 3: Sustainable Mobility**

At each table, a “host” was assigned to represent a person directly affected by the challenge. The host guided the discussion, ensuring the group remained focused on the topic. Meanwhile, a “harvester” was responsible for capturing key insights and ideas, using flipcharts as the primary workspace.

The discussions followed a structured approach:

1. **Identifying Bottlenecks:** Participants shared their perspectives on the barriers hindering climate action in each area.
2. **Prioritizing Challenges:** The group evaluated the bottlenecks based on their potential impact and the feasibility of addressing them.
3. **Exploring Solutions:** Participants proposed actionable solutions, identified key stakeholders, and highlighted best practices that could serve as models.

The barriers identified were categorized into the following themes:

1. Training, communication, and information needs
2. Dialogue and stakeholder engagement requirements
3. Regulatory frameworks and institutional coordination
4. Incentives and fiscal measures
5. Defining the scope of the problem or solution
6. Economic implications of proposed solutions or barriers
7. Data requirements and socioeconomic analysis
8. Systems thinking and integrated approaches

These categories provide a common framework for understanding the obstacles to advancing climate action. They are linked to actionable recommendations and best practices, as well as the stakeholders required to drive progress. While time constraints limited the ability to identify all barriers, actions, or actors across all thematic tables, the framework offers a robust foundation for future efforts.

Participants

The following table presents the organizations and people who participated in this exploratory dialogue on sustainable cities.

1	**Ana Barreira**	DFounding Director, IIDMA
2	**Carmen Duce**	Coordinator, Clean Cities Campaign
3	**Cem Kayatekin**	Professor, IE University
4	**Cristina Mateo**	Vice Dean, IE School of Architecture and Design
5	**Delphine Dura**	IE Sustainability Hub
6	**Efrén Feliu**	Climate Change Adaptation Manager, Tecnalia
7	**Elena Goicolea**	Project Coordinator, Icatalist
8	**Elena Lopez Gunn**	Founder, Icatalist – Senior Researcher, Real Instituto Elcano
9	**Enrique Dans**	Professor, IE University
10	**Fabrizio Salvador**	Professor, IE University
11	**Flavio Tejada**	Director, IE Real Estate Development Master Program (MRED)
12	**Gonzalo Sánchez**	Programme Manager, European Climate Foundation
13	**Gustavo Romanillos**	Associate Professor, Universidad Complutense
14	**Jerónimo Van Schendel**	Director, IE Master in Business for Architecture and Design
15	**Joaquín Tomé**	Adjunct Professor, IE University
16	**Jorge San Vicente**	Senior Associate, European Climate Foundation
17	**Juan Capeans**	Director, IE Sustainable Transition Hub
18	**Juan Fernando Martin**	Head of Sustainable Cities, Fundación Renovables
19	**Laura Vergara**	Manager, Conbici
20	**Manuel Perez Romero**	Chair, IE Center for Sustainable Cities
21	**Matan Mayer**	Associate Professor, IE University
22	**Ricardo Herranz**	CEO, Nommon
23	**Ruxandra Lancu Bratosin**	Associate Professor, IE Center for Sustainable Cities

MAIN FINDINGS

Table 1: CONSUMPTION AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS (NBS)

BOTTLENECKS IDENTIFIED

Training, communication, and information needs

- **Lack of knowledge and capabilities** – many employees in public administration often lack a clear understanding of climate action due to insufficient knowledge. This can lead to misunderstandings regarding the topic.
- **Absence of "Climate Champions"** – there is a shortage of skilled individuals who are committed to addressing climate challenges and are willing to undergo training in these essential areas.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Unlearning course - theory of the inverted U, based on Otto Scharmer's working methodology from MIT, known as Theory U, (https://www.u-school.org/theory-u). The focus is on unlearning what we already know in order to relearn it again from a different perspective.
- Expansion of curricular programs.
- Trainings sessions for legislators, policymakers, technicians, children, and others.

Dialogue and stakeholder engagement requirements

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Population survey on urban space usage and city planning preferences.
- Territorial dialogues to promote sustainable consumption in the area.

Regulatory framework and institutional coordination

- **Excessive regulatory hierarchy** – the division of administration into multiple levels complicates the implementation of NBS. Additionally, the process of implementing a Blue-Green Space Strategy (BSS) in cities can be time-consuming, as municipalities hold the primary responsibility for urban planning.
- **Insufficient political will** – this leads to a lack of resources, which is not merely an absence but also a misallocation of existing resources.
- **Poor integration of public policies** – rather than having one policy for each change, there should be an analysis / study of current policies to develop a cohesive and integrated approach.
- **Deficiency in urban planning** – this issue primarily stems from a lack of political will.
- **Inadequate integration of climate action policies** – there is a poor incorporation of policies related to climate action within city policies.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- "Legislative Sandbox" – this sandbox provides a controlled environment where organizations can test their products and services in a real market setting without having to comply with all the regulatory requirements that apply to established service providers.
- Best Practices: The New York City Council serves as an example of effectively integrating climate action policies. They have employed ad-hoc staff with a mandate to implement measures that ensure climate action is mainstreamed throughout the administration.

Incentives and fiscal measures

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Promote innovation (Legal, financing, etc.)
- Establish purchasing centers.

Defining the scope of the problem or solution

- **Lack of a comprehensive territorial analysis** that encompasses the vision, evaluation, management, and planning necessary for sustainable cities.
- **Lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a city model** – For example, are “15-minute cities” a viable option? What are people's opinions on this concept? Is it feasible, or are there alternative models to consider?

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Study of climate action policies and their possible integration.

Economic implication of proposed solutions or barriers

- **Profitability of Nature-Based Solutions** – a study is needed on how NBS can be profitable for investors in order to attract both public and private investment.
- **Municipal spending ceiling** – the maximum limit on public debt presents a significant challenge for municipalities, hindering their ability to invest.
- **Limited resources** – there are constraints in both human and economic resources that need to be addressed.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Remove the spending ceiling for cities regarding climate action investments.
- Enhance the distribution of European Union resources (Next Generation funds and others) and oversee their application in cities.

Data requirements and socioeconomic analysis

- **Lack of KPIs and Data** – it is essential to create a database or a list of business cases that exemplify "best practices" and can serve as models for others. This information should be widely disseminated.
- **Need for Discussion Processes** – we should engage in discussions to better understand the preferences of the population. Additionally, we need studies that combine good consumption habits with urban renaturalization.

Systems thinking and integrated approaches

- **Lack of systemic and cross-cutting thinking** among various stakeholders and interest groups, each focusing on their individual perspectives and interests, which are often driven by short-term goals.

MAIN FINDINGS

Table 2: SUSTAINABLE AND CIRCULAR CONSTRUCTION

BOTTLENECKS IDENTIFIED

Training, communication, and information needs

For attendees, the following bottlenecks may have a MEDIUM impact and a HIGH feasibility level:

- **Shortage of skilled workers**
- **Knowledge gap** within construction-related professions, excluding those focused on design.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Ad hoc training for male and female workers.
- Training for students
- Hands-on prototyping: advanced seminars and professional learning.
- Knowledge sharing on how to build business cases for circular practices.
- Make scholarships available for training in sustainable construction.

Dialogue and stakeholder engagement requirements

- Need to establish **communication channels and collaboration** among banking entities, the building sector, public administration at various levels (both state and local), and knowledge agencies such as the Green Building Council (GBC).

Regulatory framework and institutional coordination

For attendees, the following bottlenecks may have a HIGH impact and a MEDIUM feasibility level:

- The **"Construction product declaration"** is neither harmonized nor comparable.
- There are no **minimum requirements for Circularity i**n new construction or renovation projects.
- **The absence of life cycle analysis (LCA)** limits for buildings is a significant issue.
- **There is no clear definition** of "use of materials for reuse".
- **Standardization** of typologies and components is lacking.
- There is a **lack of agency** in addressing these issues.
- Public institutions, including the government, show a **lack of interest** in these matters.
- The most important **criterion** for awarding **public tenders is cost**, while circular or green construction practices receive little attention and are often perceived as irrelevant.
- **Building categories** are based on energy consumption rather than the circularity of materials. From a materials perspective, the scope of work is primarily local, particularly in civil engineering. In the construction sector, value chains could be more decentralized.
- There is also a lack of **solutions addressing liability issues** in cases of reuse in construction.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Open dialogue with the public administration.
- Shape public policies.

Incentives and fiscal measures

For attendees, the following bottlenecks may have a MEDIUM impact and a MEDIUM feasibility level:

- **Insufficient tax incentives** for the renovation sector and construction of “green” buildings.
- There is **no clear definition of financing options** for building renovation.
- There is a **lack of incentives for private companies** to participate.
- There are **no incentives for demolishing** technically obsolete houses.
- **Materials that are reused** or retained during rehabilitation **are not recognized or rewarded**.
- There is a need for **differentiated mortgage options** for sustainable buildings.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Incentives for renovation, recladding, and change of use.
- Financing for green projects.
- Creation of green funds and banks.

Data requirements and socioeconomic analysis

For attendees, the following bottlenecks may have a HIGH impact and a MEDIUM-HIGH feasibility level:

- There is **no raw material available** for circular construction.
- There is a **lack of inventories** for secondary construction materials.
- There are **no effective inventory search tools** for secondary materials.
- **Material passports are unavailable**.
- There is a need for inventory, tracking, measuring, and traceability.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Generate a start-up incubator for secondary materials.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- IE School of Architecture and Design.
- Publicly traded corporations that are involved in the construction industry.
- Alinnea.

MAIN FINDINGS

Table 3: SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

BOTTLENECKS IDENTIFIED

Training, communication, and information needs

For attendees, negative opinions against sustainable mobility could have a HIGH impact and a MEDIUM feasibility level:

- There is a **lack of education** on this subject.
- The **belief of "inherited rights"**, such as the right to drive a car or access the city center by car, hinders change.
- There is **insufficient courage to make decisions** that prioritize children's health in school environments over the use of private vehicles.
- Decisions currently focus on the **centrality of private vehicles** in cities, which neglect other perspectives that could strengthen alternative mobility options.
- There is a strong tendency to **politicize this agenda**, leading to significant polarization among citizens. This polarization obstructs dialogue on potential solutions.
- Overall, citizens are often **afraid of change** because they are uncertain about its impact on their daily lives

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Conduct research and gather data to monitor mobility behavior.
- Provide urban cycling training programs.
- Implement non-political education and outreach campaigns to prevent polarization.
- To diminish the polarization and politicization of mobility, promote examples of notable individuals from various political backgrounds using bicycles, similar to the Netherlands, where the Prime Minister regularly rides a bike.

Regulatory framework and institutional coordination

For attendees, the bottlenecks related to regulatory delay may have a HIGH impact and a HIGH feasibility level:

- The current **standards are not aligned with European Union regulations** and their implementation.
- There is an opportunity to develop the **Low Emission Zone**, but progress has been very slow so far.
- The **lack of sufficient charging points** is hindering the widespread adoption of electric mobility.
- **Active mobility remains a significantly overlooked** aspect of mobility planning.
- **Shared mobility** does not have adequate space available.
- There **is a need for policies** that effectively change mobility **behavior** in a socially acceptable way.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Conduct a regulatory and comparative analysis of access to cities and mobility within the EU framework.
- Create more opportunities for dialogue on policy issues and collaborate with stakeholders.
- Implement incentives to make sustainable mobility a more economically viable option, such as intermodal fares to promote and facilitate public transport usage, social leasing for electric vehicle utilization, and incentives for bicycle use.

Incentives and fiscal measures

- There are strong **economic interests against decarbonization** within the automotive and energy sectors.
- There is **a lack of incentives for bicycle** use such as purchase subsidies or deductions.

Data requirements and socioeconomic analysis

For attendees, the bottlenecks related to logistics may have a LOW impact and a HIGH feasibility level:

- There is a growing **need for coordinating** logistics operations.
- The increasing level of consumption in cities via online purchases, leads to an **increase in last-mile logistics**.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Better logistics data.
- Create incentives to improve logistics.

Another aspect directly affecting people's mobility behavior is public transport accessibility. For attendees, the following bottlenecks may have a MEDIUM impact and a MEDIUM feasibility level:

- There is **a need for quality public transport** to promote the shift from private vehicles (cars) to other transportation modes.
- There is currently **a high dependence on car** use for mobility in cities.
- Some of the externalities related to electric vehicles are similar to those of combustion vehicles.

Actions identified as necessary to reduce barriers:

- Gather data on population mobility patterns: travel, modal choices, etc.
- Produce a robust analysis of public transport deficiencies to propose informed recommendations for improvements (e.g., mobility demand analysis to identify areas and connections that are less well served by public transport).
- Define options to improve intermodality (train/ bike and bus/ bike) and the proper integration of new mobility modes (micro-mobility and shared mobility, on-demand transport systems, etc).

Systems thinking and integrated approaches

- There is a need for **more integrated transport** and **land use planning** (e.g., in new urban developments, account for mobility needs and impact from the outset).

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