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Author(s): Lina Ingeborgrud

Making cities more sustainable is high on the agenda in many countries, but a major challenge is the identification of which actors should contribute, and how. This paper departs from an assumption that visions may guide urban development work, and examines and compares national and local governments' visions of future sustainable cities in Norway. The case study is the urban multilevel governance program 'Cities of the Future'. Previous literature on urban sustainability and multilevel governance stresses the importance of shared visions and goals between stakeholders. However, the paper finds that, in the context under investigation, visions were partially dis-aligned between national and local stakeholders. Nevertheless, participants from both national and local governments considered the Cities of the Future program as successful. This was especially due to the learning networks facilitated by the program. The paper critically discusses the assumption of alignment and suggests a shift of attention from the content of vision to the processes of vision making. By this, we may understand visions as possible trading zones for the negotiation of future directions in urban sustainability.

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