



### Policy Brief 2:7

Excerpt from the Swedish report Konsumtionens gränser. (The Limits of Consumption)

## Mobilising Values for Sustainability Transformations

To enable transformations to more sustainable societies, sustainability-aligned values such as benevolence, care, and cooperation need to be mobilised. Currently, these values are rarely given much space in how society is organised or how consumption is governed. Instead, prevailing consumption patterns tend to be shaped by values associated with status, competition, and individual success, which risk undermining both social and ecological sustainability. Together with actors from the public sector, civil society, and the private sector, we have explored how sustainability-aligned values can be given greater room in policy, in collaboration, and in everyday practices.

Values function as organising principles that shape, and are shaped by, how people act, collaborate, and allocate attention and resources. They can therefore be understood as relational and embedded in societal structures, practices, and material arrangements. Values thus become visible in both language and action, for example in decisions and priorities, in policy, in ways of leading and organising, and in everyday ways of acting (often referred to as practices). When these patterns change, that is, when what people do and how they do things in society changes, the values that are given space and legitimacy also change. Steering towards sustainable consumption also involves creating conditions that allow sustainability-aligned values to take shape and gain traction.



**Hanna Eggestrand**  
PhD student and Lecturer,  
KTH Royal Institute of  
Technology

When we examined Sweden's national policy documents on sustainable consumption, we found that they largely rest on the assumption that more sustainable consumption can be achieved by improving existing consumption patterns, rather than by changing them more fundamentally. The measures proposed often revolve around individual choice: a motivated consumer is expected, with the help of better information, to choose more sustainable



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products developed through business-driven innovation and competition. The role of the public sector appears primarily to be to facilitate market actors. This logic reinforces values linked to status and competition, rather than supporting values such as benevolence, care, and collaboration. Our analysis therefore suggests that national policy struggles to mobilise values that could support deeper transformations, and risks slowing down rather than strengthening changes towards sustainable consumption.

But how do actors working with sustainable consumption themselves view the possibilities for mobilising sustainability-aligned values? To explore this, we invited professionals from different sectors to a series of workshops focused on values in consumption transitions. Participants came from, among others, the public sector, civil society, academia, and the private sector. The discussions made it clear that values aligned with sustainability, such as benevolence, care, and participation, are central for many participants, particularly within municipal organisations where such values are often seen as fundamental to the public mandate. At the same time, many described how these values are frequently sidelined in practice due to budget constraints, performance-based metrics, and short-term political goals. Despite these challenges, participants identified several opportunities to give sustainability-aligned values more space. Three strategies stood out in particular: clear political and organisational mandates, dedicated arenas for cross-sectoral collaboration, and intentional communication that makes these values visible and legitimate in everyday work..

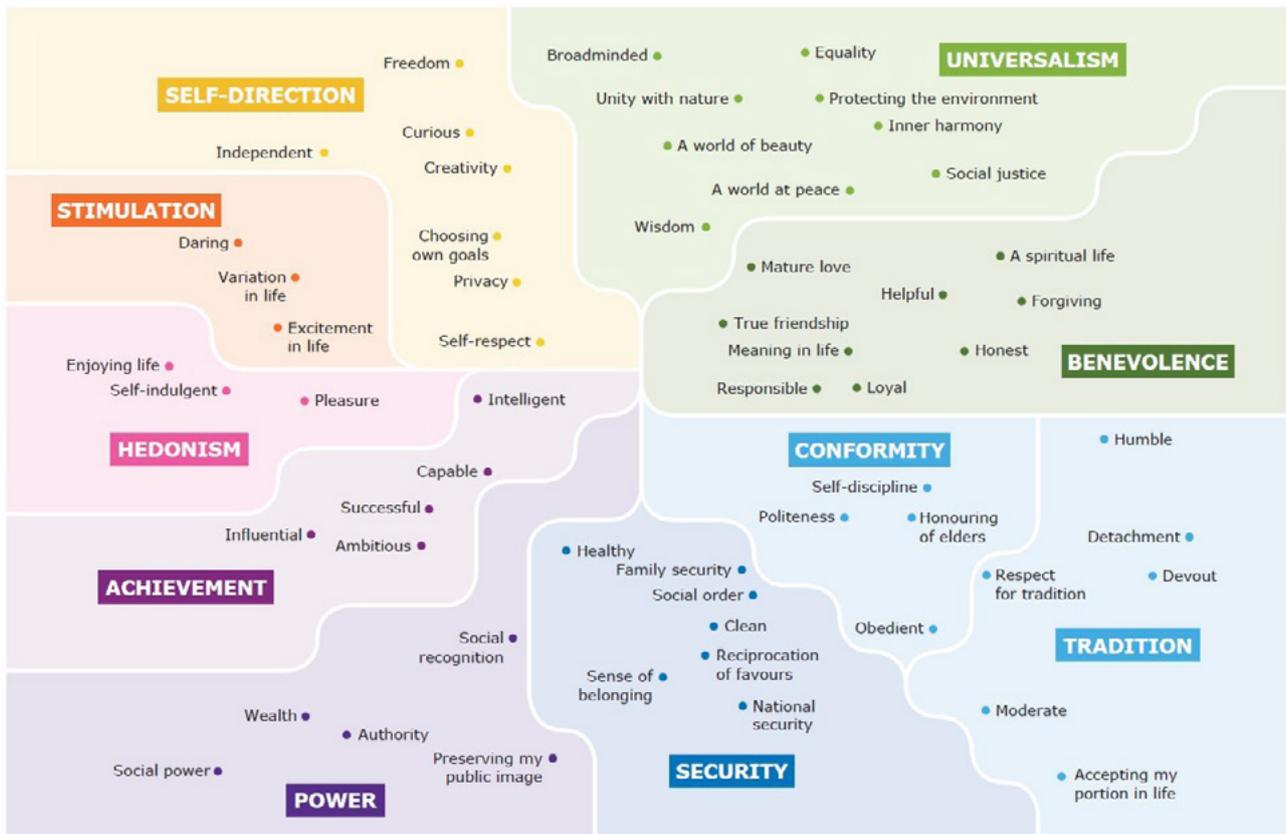


Reflection on values is a key part of deep and lasting change.

One way to examine how such and other strategies can be put into practice is through municipal initiatives. In this respect, the City of Gothenburg's cross-cutting strategy "We create conditions for sustainable living" is particularly interesting. The strategy aims to coordinate and guide the city's efforts to promote sustainable lifestyles within planetary boundaries. The implementation of the strategy offers an opportunity to follow how organising across sectoral boundaries can help make values such as care, responsibility, and connectedness more visible and more strongly embedded, while also revealing the organisational tensions that such approaches may encounter. Questions of mandate, division of responsibilities, and relationships with commercial interests become especially salient when a municipality seeks to coordinate action beyond traditional sectoral boundaries. Strategies of this kind can serve as a useful starting point for making values visible and mobilising them, but further exploration is needed to understand which organisational and political conditions can support such developments in practice.

Previous research highlights reflection as an important element in mobilising values in sustainability transformations. The workshops and interviews with public officials in the City of Gothenburg have functioned as reflective spaces, where participants were given time to think together about values, roles, and possibilities. While reflection alone is not enough to change governance logics or structures, most participants appreciated the opportunity to reflect. To support this work, we used a values model that served as a map, or a compass, in the conversations (see figure below). The model provided a shared language for exploring both tensions and opportunities related to values, and helped

make visible what is prioritised and what may remain in the background. Creating space for reflection on values may therefore be one possible entry point for deeper changes.



**Value relationships and dynamics**, based on research by Shalom Schwartz and colleagues. The model has been used as a compass for conversations about which values shape (un)sustainable. Design by [the Common Cause Foundation](#).



**Further reading - or ask questions using [www.greenchat.se/eng](http://www.greenchat.se/eng)**

- Eggestrand, H. (2025). *From control to care: mobilising sustainability-aligned values in local public sector organisations*. Local Environment.
- Eggestrand, H., and Hagbert, P. (2025). *Improving without transforming? The foregrounding of (un)sustainable values in sustainable consumption policy discourse*. Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy.
- Horcea-Milcu, A. I., Koessler, A. K., Martin, A., Rode, J., and Soares, T. M. (2023). *Modes of mobilising values for sustainability transformation*. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability.

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For further information, see:  
[www.sustainableconsumption.se/en](http://www.sustainableconsumption.se/en)

**Reference to this text**

Eggestrand, H. (2026). Mobilising Values for Sustainability Transformations. Mistra Sustainable Consumption – policy brief 2:12. Stockholm: KTH Royal Institute of Technology.

