Executive summary

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During 2022/2023, Linköping Science Park has conducted a feasibility study that aims to investigate what is required to enable for more regional flagships – powerful initiatives to drive transformation on a system level. The project has generated a knowledge base as well as a framework that can be used by regions and municipalities in the initiation and planning of future regional flagships.

The feasibility study has been carried out together with the help of an Advisory Board consisting of representatives from the region, the municipality, regional innovation environments, the business community as well as the civil society. The project has also involved an accompanying researcher from the competence center for municipal studies, CKS, at Linköping University.

The Framework – A Path towards a Regional Flagship

To accelerate Sweden’s transition to become a more sustainable society, we need more initiatives that help drive systemic change. Regional flagships are examples of such initiatives. On the basis of lessons learned from major mobilizations in Skellefteå and in European regions like Leuven, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, the project has developed a framework to support the initiation and planning of Regional Flagships. The Framework – “A Path towards a Regional Flagship” aims to support the efforts of stakeholders to mobilize and enhance the conditions for driving a systemic change initiative. These stakeholders involve municipalities, regions and the business community. As shown in Figure 1, the framework is packaged in a model that shows the conditions which supports the progress of a regional flagship. The conditions demonstrate the complexity of initiating a regional flagship as major parts of the regional innovation ecosystem need to be engaged and mobilized.

There are three different layers to the framework, wherein the outer circle visualizes the conditions for a region or municipality in terms of identified directions (strategy documents, visions, etc.) and its comparative advantages. The two inner circles highlight the system perspective that stakeholders are expected to adopt in their work as well as the enablers that are needed to achieve large-scale change and system innovation.

The different elements of the framework are summarised below:

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The different elements of the framework are summarised below:
1. For a region or municipality to be capable of scaling an initiative into a regional flagship, the initiative should be aligned with the political directions (at different levels of society) as this better ensures the initiative to be prioritised by decision-makers. This could make it considerably easier to attract the necessary funding and mobilization. When an initiative strives to become a flagship and enable upscaling, the starting point should be based on comparative advantages in a region, municipality, or a specific industry or sector. In addition, the region should have a strong power of attraction or hold a plan for how this power of attraction can be increased. This is because a regional flagship will require both businesses and residents that want to work and live in the region.

2. It is essential that participating stakeholders in regions or municipalities should have a systemic perspective. This means analyzing problems, challenges, and solutions in the framework of the larger system that the stakeholders are part of. Rather than focusing only on a single aspect of a problem, stakeholders should consider the different components, stakeholders, and processes that work together in the system. There has to be an understanding that in order to scale an initiative, several systems may need to work together. Various aspects need to be taken into account, such as whether there is well-functioning infrastructure, where the funding might come from, and which sets of regulations and authorisation procedures may affect the process or needs to be redesigned. It requires engaging relevant stakeholders with the right expertise and that real society challenges are defined and their stakeholders are involved. Besides this, it is equally important that there is an idea of how to include individuals and citizens that will be affected by the change. It may involve working towards influencing prevailing norms and values, and this includes being aware of the norms and values that currently exist.

3. Finally, the initiative should be developed on the basis of enabling practices that can drive the process forward. For example, this can be cross-border interdisciplinary collaboration and user involvement. However, it is equally important to have an identified leadership where actionable.

There are in particular three groups of stakeholders who can make use of the framework:

Stakeholders such as the regions, municipalities, and the business community can use this framework in order to understand the way they can strengthen the conditions to run a regional flagship within a geographical area.

The framework can be used by project owners of a project or an initiative to take stock of whether the necessary conditions for running a regional flagship are in place in the region.

With the help of the framework, financiers can analyse future or ongoing projects in terms of their potential for success.

Summarizing the conclusions

After an extensive process including study visits, framework development, and piloting with regions and the innovation-ecosystems, some conclusions to support the work with system innovation to drive sustainable transition and growth though regional flagship initiatives. The results from the feasibility study shows that:

- The framework fills a gap and can provide a basis for taking the next step towards system innovation.
- Regions and municipalities are key stakeholders in driving system innovation.
- Multi-level cooperation is required and the government also needs to create the financial conditions for this.
- The regions’ and municipalities’ ownership of important development areas provides a good basis for driving the transformation.
- Large scale change requires leaders that holds great courage and have a long-term perspective.
- Regional flagships can be essential for growth and large-scale transitions
- The design-driven process has been a success factor in the framework’s development.

Summary of recommendations

The content of the framework and the case study identifies key capabilities, conditions, and enabling working methods for successful system innovation. The Framework is not the solution to everything but can be used as a starting point to provide direction and understanding of the capacity building required. We provide four recommendations for running regional flagships according to the content of the framework.

- Manage and promote the use of the Framework.
- Use the framework to build capacity.
- Give national authorities the assignment to coordinate initiatives that provide synergies at multiple levels.