

It Takes a Village — Accountability and Cooperation in Oslovian Environmental Policy

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Norway might be one of the world's biggest producers of oil and gas, but its capital city is in the midst of an extraordinary green revolution. Named the European Green Capital of 2019, Oslo has embraced the spotlight that comes with this title and is taking its responsibility as ambassador for sustainable and urban development very seriously. In the words of Raymond Johansen, governing Mayor of Oslo:

“ In 2019, we want to invite the world to Oslo — to share and to learn together. We aim to use our European Green Capital year to spread knowledge, inspire and mobilize our citizens and businesses to make more environmentally friendly choices. ”

USGRDCO was more than happy to take the Mayor up on his invitation, participating last month in the Smart Urban Mobility and Transportation conference hosted by Vice Mayor of Environment and Transport Lan Marie Berg. The event, which took place only three days before the Nordic EV-Summit, was dedicated to introducing the innovative solutions adopted by Oslo its decarbonization program. The agenda was packed with engaging presentations on the latest tech innovation, off site excursions and in-depth workshops run by senior representatives from Oslo's government.



Morielle Lotan (left) and Vice Mayor Berg (right) outside City Hall in Oslo

Morielle I. Lotan, our director of innovation, traveled to Oslo to learn about the historical evolution of Norwegian electric transportation, how they successfully introduced a profitable model for EV charging and how the cooperation between public and private sectors facilitated the city's transformation. Below are her three top takeaways from the conference:

If You Build it They Will Come — Infrastructure for Charging



Oslo has become a leader in electric transportation. Today a staggering six out of ten cars in Oslo are electric.

The struggle to understand who is going to bear the upfront cost of EV charging and the infrastructure to support it is a global one. It's the environmental equivalent to the chicken and the egg dilemma. Once electric vehicles cost the same as internal combustion engine cars and drivers have confidence they will easily access a charging station when needed, a drastic transition to EV is inevitable. But before that happens, the private and public sectors need to tackle the problem together, taking on the risks inherent in this type of infrastructure build out.

How then is it possible to make the business of charging economical? Part of the problem is that up until now this issue has been tackled from an either/or mindset, private responsibility or public service. What Oslo has cleverly done is cut out the biggest deterrent, financially speaking, otherwise preventing private investors from becoming involved. Recognizing that the government owns land in prime locations around the city, it incentivized investors by crafting a joint venture — the city provides the land and the private company builds the chargers. With the high cost of land out of the equation, developers were able to see a return on their investment in as little as three years and as a direct result, Oslo has become a leader in electric transportation. Today a staggering six out of ten cars in Oslo are electric.

Creating the infrastructure for charging while stimulating the EV transportation market has been one of their greatest success stories to date. In fact, 93% of revenue the city earns has gone towards financing infrastructure for charging.

Climate Goals are a Strategic Priority



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Municipal leaders in Oslo are increasingly shifting their focus towards the implementation of hyper reductions in carbon emissions. While most cities share the theoretical desire to pursue significant environmental change, more often than not those plans fail to be realized in practice because there aren't sufficient mechanisms set in place to help anchor them in reality.

The environment is considered with such high regard in Norway that policy makers have created an actual Climate Budget through which Oslo can set out to achieve its ambitious goals: **zero emissions by 2030** and a **plan to ban all sale of non EV's by 2025** to name two. The Business for Climate Network fosters cooperation among the business community, citizens and NGO's. Together they focus on ways in which businesses can turn around the impact their operations have on the climate from harmful to helpful.

The climate budget set forth in Oslo treats carbon emissions as it would dollars spent. The budget aims to hold people in leadership accountable and demonstrates that no single measure, no single group working alone can achieve the emissions reductions desired. In my opinion, if other countries were to follow suit and adopt Norway's collaborative approach towards environmental rehabilitation, the global benefits would be enormous.

Trial and Error — the Fastest Way to Build a Smart City



Norway is a testing ground for innovation in clean technology.

For countries looking to implement significant changes in their infrastructure and adopt an environmentally progressive mandate, Norway is an excellent role model. It has followed through with the process of developing technology from early inception stages to implementation in the real world.

Norway's status as one of the wealthiest countries in the world has allowed it to become an incomparable testing ground for innovation in clean technology. There is a tremendous amount of funding being poured into transforming the city of Oslo into an environmental utopia. Substantial funding means there is room for testing things, failing, optimizing and trying again. Consider them the early adopters who are taking calculated risks and stumbling blindly at first in order to then come up with a winning idea that others can greatly benefit from.

Inspire, Mobilize, Incentivize, Repeat



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On a personal level I left the Oslo conference feeling highly motivated. I believe that Norway's take on environmental accountability is refreshing. Clean air, green spaces and quality of life are valued as a right that transcends personal ideology. What has struck me most about Oslo's environmental policy is that as bold and ambitious as it may be, it is always pragmatic. The key to Norway's success and why I will continue to follow its progress attentively lies in the country's ability to inspire, mobilize and incentivize change across political lines as well as private and public sectors.

As we speak, grassroots organizations, the business community and academic institutions are joining forces in Norway with the common goal of transforming their local communities. Beyond that, there is a clear understanding that their local efforts have the potential for a substantial global ripple effect. At a time where we are inundated with so much information on a daily basis, it is easy to overlook the fact that we actually have the capacity to solve the problems we face. When I look to Norway, I find comfort in knowing that large scale change can be initiated and realized. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for Oslo and for the stakeholders wise enough to follow in their footsteps. I know we certainly will be.