

A Playbook for Mid-range Transition Arenas



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A Playbook for Mid-range Transition Arenas

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Content

Transition Arena is a co-design method aimed at helping society cope with sustainability challenges in a variety of contexts.

This guide serves as an introduction to the Transition Arena process for anyone—whether they are public consultants, researchers or participants.

In this guide, you will find information on the background of the method, practical support and instructions for the work phases and the use of tools, as well as links to useful materials and publications. Our goal is to support the appropriate and timely use of methods to accelerate sustainability transitions and to identify and manage the impacts of policy. The guide is not exhaustive. Applying the method always requires context-specific consideration.

We welcome your questions and feedback; you can find our contact information at the end of this guide.

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Introduction



What is the Transition Arena Method?

Transition Arenas are facilitated workshop series where different actors co-create goals and transition pathways related to an identified sustainability challenge.

Transition Arenas are alternatives to traditional committees, that are intended for use when the challenges to be solved are complicated, and the aim is to co-create information that goes beyond mere statements.

Transition Arenas have emerged from the tradition of the Transition Management approach that was developed in the early 2000s to manage complex, cross-sectoral challenges. The original focus was on 50-year visions for societal transformations.

A variant suitable for mid-term change (10-15 years) was developed in Finland for the national Energy Transition Arena in 2017.

Uses of a Transition Arena



a method for increased ownership and alternative future pathways creation



a tool for the creation of official strategies or action plans



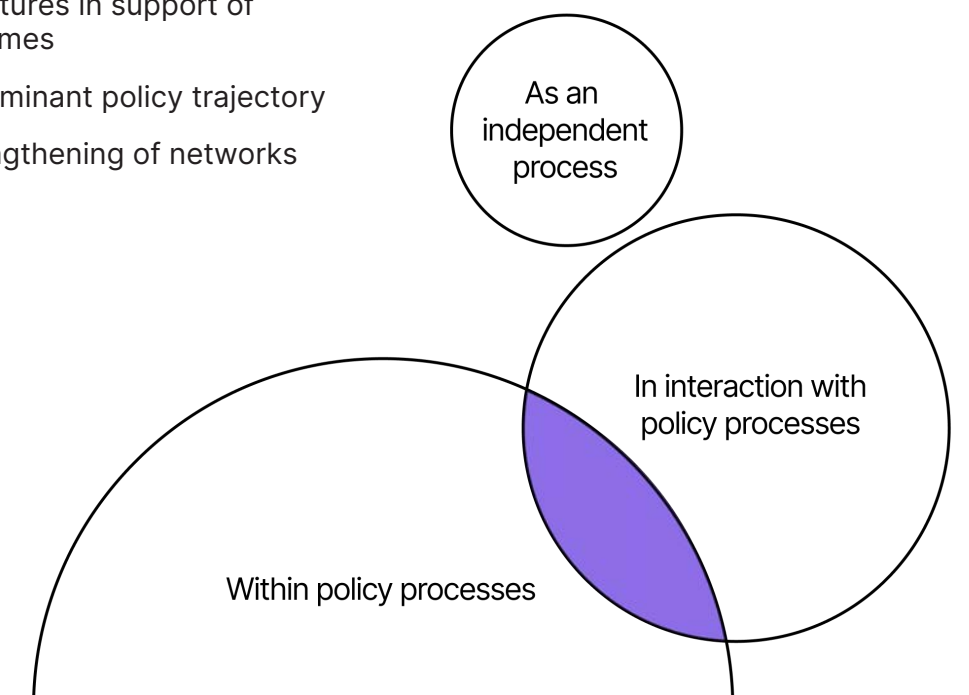
a way to build understanding and recommendations for challenging themes



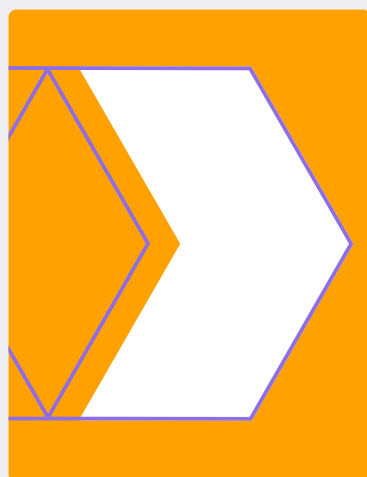
a process for networking and initiating trials

Suitability of a Transition Arena

- evaluating complicated sustainability challenges
- the co-creation of knowledge on a policy issue
- visualising possible futures in support of strategies or programmes
- for challenging the dominant policy trajectory
- the creation and strengthening of networks
- kickstarting actions



Examples of Transition Arenas Organised in Finland

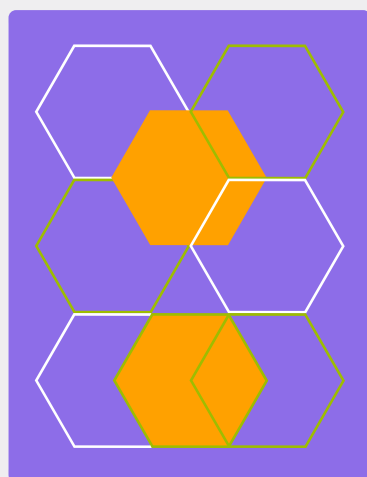


Smart Energy Transition

2017 · A PART OF THE SRC PROJECT

Accelerating the energy transition

[CLICK HERE](#) OR SCAN QR CODE TO OPEN REPORT:

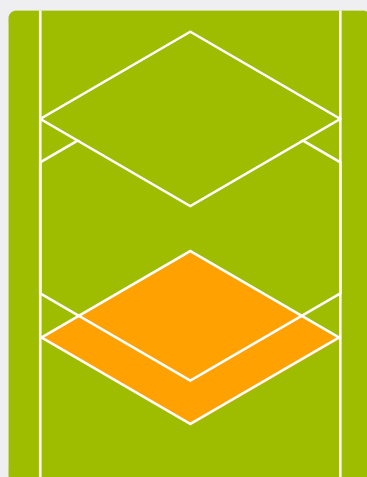


Biodiversity Arena

2021 · FINNISH ENVIRONMENT INSTITUTE, AALTO UNIVERSITY AND THE MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Preparing for the biodiversity strategy

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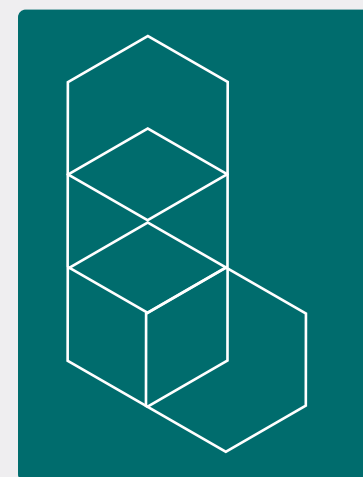
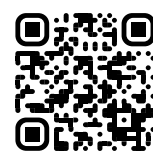


Citizen Energy Arena

2020 · RESEARCH CENTRES AND THE MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Increasing distributed renewable energy production in cities

[CLICK HERE](#) OR SCAN QR CODE TO OPEN REPORT:



Suburb Arena

2021 · A PART OF DECARBONHOME SRC PROJECT

A fair energy transition in the suburbs

[CLICK HERE](#) OR SCAN QR CODE TO OPEN REPORT:

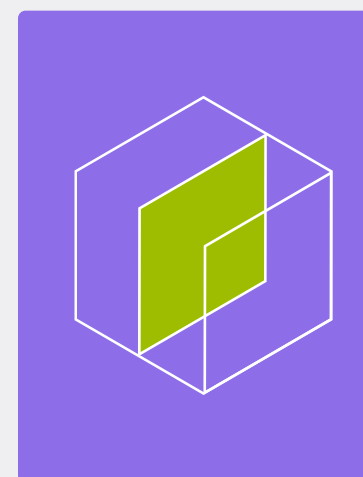


The Uusimaa Regions Circular Economy Arena

2024 · UUSIMAA WE MAKE TRANSITION!-PROJECT

Dialogue between civil society and municipalities to promote circular economy solutions

[CLICK HERE](#) OR SCAN QR CODE TO OPEN REPORT:



Rural Arena

2022 · A PART OF DECARBONHOME SRC PROJECT

A fair energy transition in rural areas

[CLICK HERE](#) OR SCAN QR CODE TO OPEN REPORT:



The Purpose of Use



The Impacts of Transition Arenas

As is often the case in politics, sustainability transitions are advanced through multiple processes simultaneously. In hindsight, it is difficult to say exactly what impact a particular arena has had on a specific issue, but the arena makes it possible to bring processes and actors together. Generally speaking, the arenas give rise to a wide range of impacts.



Networks, trust and ownership

The formation of new partnerships and networks, and the strengthening of trust between different actors.



Strategic and political impact

Inputs for strategies and programmes, impacts on policies, the creation of shared guidelines and goals.



A shift in understanding and mindsets

A refined understanding of systems and the dynamics of transitions, changes in operational cultures in the long term.



The start of action

Concrete trials, pilot programmes and financing.

The Selection of Participants

Participant selection is aimed at finding people with abilities related to promoting change in their environments and organisations. The number of participants varies according to the goals and execution of the arena, typically ranging between 15 and 50. The selection and invitation of participants should be made with consideration of the goals of the arena, following these principles:

1

There should be a diversity of perspectives to gain fresh systemic insight. Participants are invited from different domains of society: the public sector, companies, research, organisations and practitioners.

2

A shared understanding of the problem being tackled enables progress. Forerunners and change-oriented stakeholders are important in enabling radical ideas that can challenge path dependency.

Consider Another Method if...

... time is of the essence.

Transition Arena work usually lasts at least a few months.



... resources are limited.

Transition Arenas require preparation, multiple facilitators and follow-up work between workshops.



... the topic under consideration is highly contentious and requires conflict resolution.

Transition Arenas work best when the participants share a common vision of the desired future state but have differing perspectives on the means to achieve it.



... there are no resources or stakeholders to follow up on the results.

It is important that the arenas messages be disseminated soon after the results are finalised.



Implementation

Transition Arenas can be organised in a variety of ways and in different contexts. Here, we have compiled some perspectives and examples of how the method has been implemented.



Four Types of Transition Arenas

An Arena for Opening Up Alternatives

The arena for opening up alternatives aims to highlight the range of possibilities for achieving the objectives.

The objective is clear and the timeframe is strategic (~10 years).

Participants are carefully selected experts who complement one another.

The outcome is a variety of pathways and proposed measures for solving the challenge at hand.

An Arena for Developing Systemic Understanding

The arena for understanding transitions focuses on emerging issues with little organised activity.

The objective may be broad in scope, and the timeframe may be long.

The group of participants is not limited from the outset and can be expanded based on new information needs.

Outcomes often include a clarification of the information need, new project ideas and forms of collaboration.

An Arena for Direct Policy Interaction

The arena for direct policy interaction focuses directly on policy content and processes.

Objectives can be set in advance, and the timeline can be aligned with strategic goals.

Participants may be pre-designated stakeholders in the policy process.

The outcome can be, for example, a strategy document or an action plan to advance the issue.

An Arena for Launching Pilots and Experiments

In the arena for launching pilots and experiments the focus is on launching new initiatives.

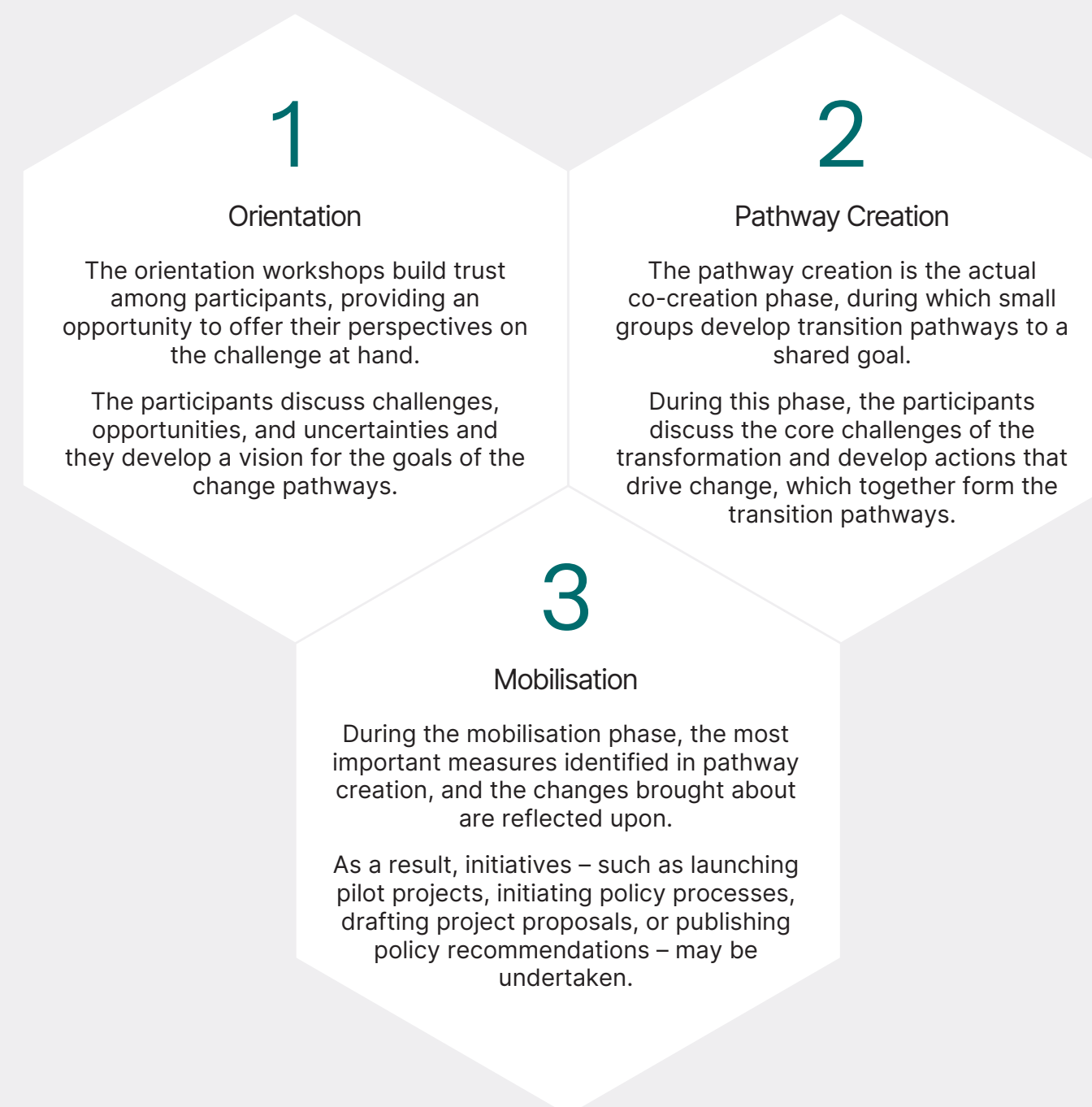
The goal is very concrete, with a timeframe of the next few years.

The participants are an open and motivated group of local stakeholders interested in the phenomenon.

The outcomes will be concrete pilots, networks and activities.

The Stages of Transition Arenas

The workshop process of Transition Arenas consists of three main phases: orientation, pathway creation, and mobilisation. As the Transition Arena progresses, it is important to allow sufficient time for preparing each phase and for refining the results between workshops. Typically, there is a 3- to 6-week interval between the workshops.



The Emphasis of the Stages varies by Arena Type

An Arena for Opening Up Alternatives

ORIENTATION



PATHWAY CREATION



MOBILISATION



RECOMMENDED SPAN

4-5 workshops

An Arena for Direct Policy Interaction

ORIENTATION



PATHWAY CREATION



MOBILISATION



RECOMMENDED SPAN

3 workshops

An Arena for Developing Systemic Understanding

ORIENTATION



PATHWAY CREATION



MOBILISATION



RECOMMENDED SPAN

4-5 workshops

An Arena for Launching Pilots and Experiments

ORIENTATION



PATHWAY CREATION



MOBILISATION



RECOMMENDED SPAN

3 workshops

Examples of Implementation



2017

Energy Transition Arena

AN ARENA FOR OPENING UP ALTERNATIVES

This was an arena that challenged national energy policy, to which 24 experts representing a variety of perspectives were invited.

1

Orientation

This consisted of two half-day workshops that resulted in a vision for the transition, 20 transition goals, and lists of drivers, obstacles and uncertainties.

2

Pathway creation

This consisted of three half-day workshops, resulting in eight transition pathways.

3

Mobilisation

This consisted of a half-day workshop that resulted in a list of 100 policy recommendations.



2024

Uusimaa Circular Economy Arena

AN ARENA FOR LAUNCHING PILOTS AND EXPERIMENTS

This arena involved a dialogue between civil society and municipalities to promote circular economy solutions, and was attended by 31 experts.

1

Orientation

This consisted of a half-day workshop that identified challenges, refined the vision, and defined the topics and objectives to be addressed.

2

Pathway creation

This consisted of a half-day workshop that resulted in three transition pathways.

3

Mobilisation

This consisted of a half-day workshop that generated ideas for experiments, from which the winners were selected by vote.

The Necessary Resources and Know-how

The resources required to organise a Transition Arena vary depending on the aims and format. Typically, organising an arena takes at least a few months of labour as the work involves preparation, the arena process and reporting. There are various roles involved in organising the arena. The same individuals may hold multiple roles.

The role of the organiser is significant, which is why facilitators often receive separate training before the workshops. A concise background memo is prepared for participants at the start of the work, providing an overview of the topic to be discussed. The same individuals commonly take on several roles.



The core team

A team of 2-3, whose tasks involve planning and managing the process and drafting the report



Facilitators and scribes

Each group is recommended to have both a facilitator and a scribe. The tasks of these pairs include workshop preparations and post-processing



Experts

Experts create the background material given to facilitators and participants prior to the workshop phase



A communications specialist

A communications specialist shares results internally and externally

Keep the Following in Mind

Allow time to build trust among participants

The basic rule of facilitation; trust first also applies in a transition setting.



Include enough breaks in the programme

To allow participants a sense of ownership and to keep up with rapidly changing work phases.



Be flexible and adjust plans as needed

Whether it is a work phase or discussion that requires more time than planned, or if it becomes clear that it would be beneficial to invite new stakeholders to join the process, be flexible and adjust plans as needed.



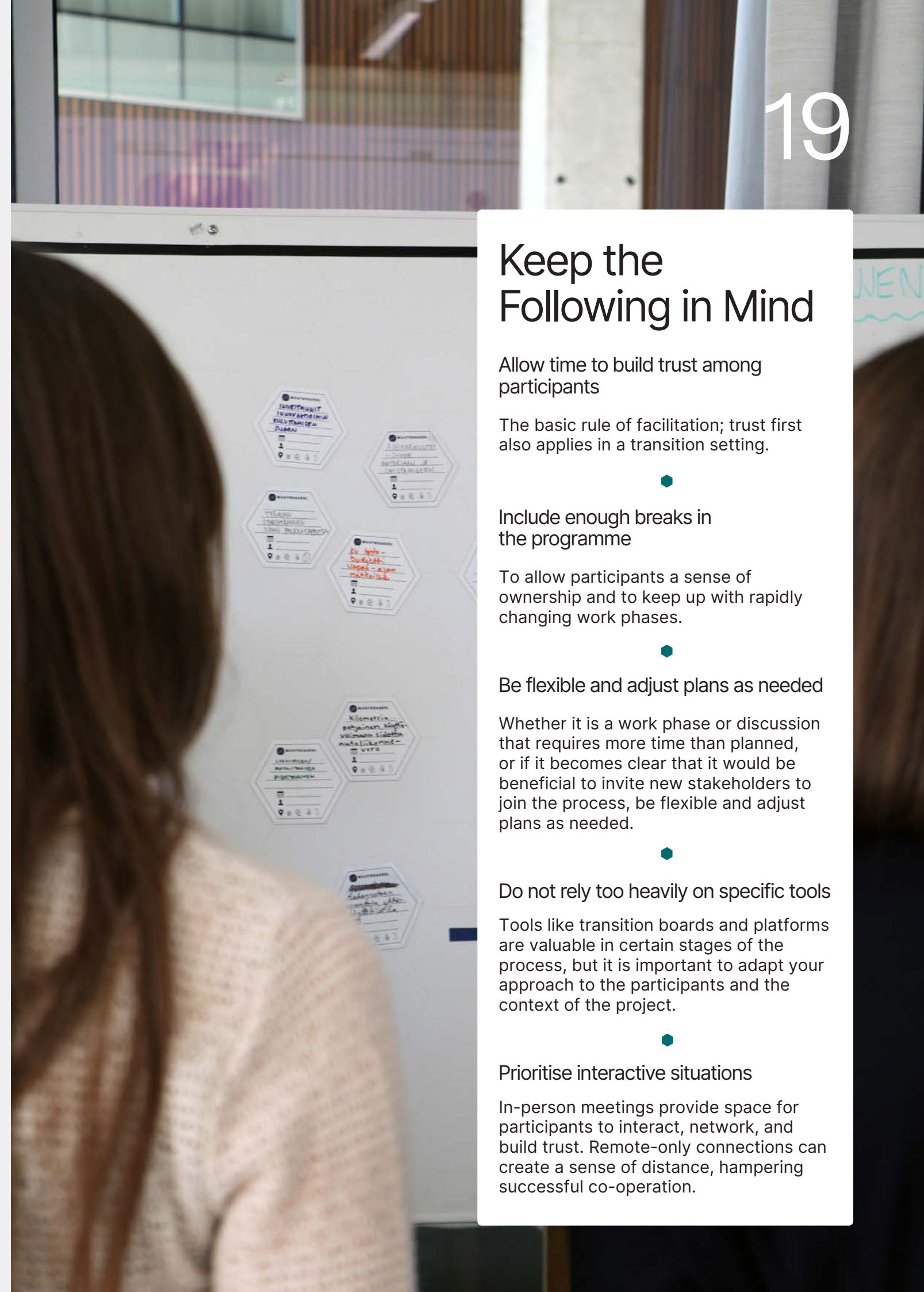
Do not rely too heavily on specific tools

Tools like transition boards and platforms are valuable in certain stages of the process, but it is important to adapt your approach to the participants and the context of the project.



Prioritise interactive situations

In-person meetings provide space for participants to interact, network, and build trust. Remote-only connections can create a sense of distance, hampering successful co-operation.



Materials and Publications

Alternative Tools for Pathway Creation

Different tools for pathway creation have been tested and developed:



A whiteboard with magnetic tools



A Miro board, used online or on-site

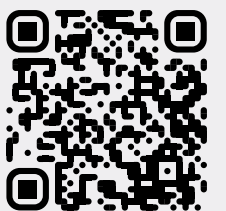


Flipcharts and Post-it notes

Physical tools provide concreteness, but require digitising after the workshop, whereas digital tools ease post-processing but potential technical difficulties may cause distractions. Working with Post-it notes and flipcharts is possible if need be, but remains more cumbersome.

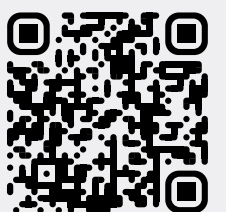
Guides and Files

You can find video and text-based instructions for both facilitators and participants, as well as tools for pathway creation, on the [Murrosareena.fi](https://murrosareena.fi) 'Materials' page by scanning the QR code:



Reports and Scientific Articles

You can find reports and scientific articles related to Transition Arenas on the [Murrosareena.fi](https://murrosareena.fi) 'Publications' page by scanning the QR code:





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