



# **Transformative partnerships between society and academia**

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Experiences from University of Bergen  
in accelerating SDG action

# Research through collaboration

The Centre for Climate and Energy Transformation (CET) at the University of Bergen (UiB) conducts and promotes interdisciplinary research on strategies for accelerating sustainable development, with a particular focus on sustainable cities. We are committed to create “actionable knowledge” that is relevant for decision makers. Our research directly contributes to SDGs 7, 11 and 13.

Global challenges call for radical innovation in research, higher education, and governance. Many of our research activities are organized as partnerships between researchers and societal actors. By working together with a range of societal stakeholders – and our own students – we improve the quality of our research and generate knowledge that is relevant for society.

## Examples of initiatives

- Hordaklim, a project that develops down-scaled climate models together with local planners and decision makers in order to translate climate models to local realities.
- Field courses that investigate sustainable planning in different cities and are developed in close collaboration with local partners and municipal contacts. Students work with cases of local significance, but are free to take their research in whatever direction they choose.
- The UiB Collaboratory brings together students, researchers and societal actors to work on sustainability issues and experiment with innovative forms of collaboration, learning and governance to deal with the complexity of global challenges.

# Leveraging transformative partnerships

Societal actors often partner with researchers in order to get answers to basic questions. But partnerships with academia can deliver much more than basic facts: they give access to networks, competence and may uncover unexpected problems and opportunities. In our experience, partnerships between academia and societal actors are most effective when these broader benefits are recognized.

- Provide actionable knowledge: decision makers and citizens are not only interested in universal “facts”, but also knowledge that is relevant to the particular places and times where it will be used. Researchers can contribute with such contextual knowledge, which is often “co-produced” together with the societal actors that will use it.
- Reframe problems to open up for unforeseen solutions. Social scientists can play an important role in accelerating transformative change by asking critical questions, point to underlying assumptions that make solutions difficult to reach, or help envision new ways forward.
- Connecting actors and processes: decision making processes are often fragmented and complex, and individual actors often only see parts of the picture. Researchers can use their independence to create bridges and break down so-called “silos”.

Further reading: Haarstad et al. (2018). Transformative social science? Modes of engagement in climate and energy solutions. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 42, 193–197.



**cet** Centre for Climate and Energy Transformation



**SPACE LAB**  
Spaces of climate and energy laboratory