



Nordic Council
of Ministers

Transformative Governance for Nature-based Solutions

Key messages from the
Copenhagen Symposium
April 21, 2026

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Key messages from the Copenhagen Symposium

April 21, 2026



Group photo of the event participants.

Photo: Lars Kruse

On April 21, 2026, approximately 80 participants from policy, research, practice, civil society, and business gathered in Copenhagen for the symposium Transformative Governance for Nature-based Solutions.

The event explored how transformative governance can accelerate the mainstreaming and scaling of nature-based solutions (NBS), and how current policy frameworks, including the Danish Green Tripartite agreement, may

contribute to this transition. The event was organised as an interactive multi-stakeholder symposium consisting of presentations, panel discussions, Q&A sessions, and group discussions. This policy brief draws on the insights and reflections emerging from these different formats. Participants represented a diverse range of backgrounds and expertise, including researchers, policymakers, practitioners, NGOs, and other stakeholders working with NBS, which contributed to a broad and interdisciplinary exchange of knowledge and experiences.

The symposium was organised by the Centre for Nature-based Solutions at Aarhus University (C-NBS), the Nature-based Solutions Network (NBSN) at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), the Nordic Council of Ministers Nature Programme, The Tree Office (Trädkontoret), and the NetworkNature Nordic Hub.

A shared message:

Integrated visions and strategies are key

Across presentations and discussions, participants univocally identified that society is not facing isolated environmental challenges, but interconnected systemic pressures involving climate, biodiversity, water, health, land use, and social inequality at unprecedented scales and rates of change.

Transformative governance requires moving beyond fragmented pilot projects and short-term policy cycles toward long-term, integrated visions for society and landscapes was a recurrent message throughout the day. Participants highlighted that nature-based solutions should not be understood as isolated technical interventions, but as part of broader societal transformation.



*Sofia Biffi from C-NBS at Aarhus University participating in the discussion.
Photo: Lars Kruse*

Five key conclusions from the symposium

1. Long-term visions are essential for transformation

Several speakers emphasized the importance of ambitious and hopeful visions for the future. Drawing on examples such as the Dutch NL2120 vision, discussions showed how future-oriented narratives can help mobilise action across sectors and actors.

Rather than responding crisis by crisis, participants called for:

- long-term spatial planning,
- integrated land-use strategies,
- and governance approaches that place healthy ecosystems as the foundation for societal development.

”

We need inspiring and engaging visions,
not only plans.

2. Nature-based solutions must be embedded across governance systems

Participants stressed that scaling NBS requires transformation within governance systems, not simply more funding and projects.

Key governance principles discussed throughout the event included:

- integrative governance,
- inclusive decision-making,
- adaptive institutions,
- and pluralistic approaches that recognise multiple forms of knowledge and values.

The discussions also highlighted the need to:

- break down sector silos and work across administrative boundaries,
- strengthen coordination between local, regional, and national levels.

Several participants noted that climate adaptation, biodiversity, agriculture, health, and urban development policies must be addressed together rather than separately.

3. Communication, storytelling, and emotions matter

A strong theme throughout the symposium was the importance of communication and storytelling in enabling transformative change.

Participants repeatedly stressed that:

- people engage with stories and lived experiences, not only data,
- hopeful narratives are needed to counter climate despair,
- and emotional connections to nature are essential for public support.

Examples from cities and practice demonstrated how communication around trees, biodiversity, and public space can shift from "nice to have" toward "need to have".

The importance of language was also discussed:

- "spontaneous vegetation" instead of "weeds",
- and framing nature as infrastructure, care, wellbeing, and resilience.

4. Justice and inclusion must be central - not secondary

Across both panel discussions and workshops, participants emphasized that transformative governance must address questions of justice, equity, and power.

While nature-based solutions can create multiple benefits, they can also risk reinforcing inequalities if governance processes are not inclusive.

Key themes included:

- equal access to green spaces,
- inclusion of vulnerable communities,
- recognition of diverse knowledge systems,
- and ensuring that local communities and end users are actively involved in decision-making.

Participants also stressed the importance of involving the "silent majority" and building broader democratic ownership of transformation processes.

5. Transformation requires cultural change

Many discussions pointed toward the need for deeper cultural shifts in society's relationship with nature.

Participants highlighted the need to:

- restore human–nature relationships,
- challenge human-centred approaches,
- rethink economic incentives,
- and strengthen nature-based education from early childhood onward.

Several workshop groups pointed to education, new narratives, and institutional reform as critical leverage points for long-term transformation.

Priorities identified for future action



Panel discussion on transformative governance with Gustav Nässlander, Trädkontoret, Misagh Mottaghi, SLU, and Stefana Hoti, City of Malmö.

Photo: Lars Kruse

Participants identified several areas where action is urgently needed:

- Develop long-term funding and monitoring schemes for NBS
- Strengthen evidence on societal costs and benefits of NBS
- Improve communication and public engagement strategies
- Integrate justice considerations into all NBS governance processes
- Increase cross-sector and cross-border collaboration
- Mainstream nature-based education
- Create governance systems that support experimentation, learning, and adaptation
- Shift incentives toward regenerative and nature-positive development

Looking ahead

The symposium demonstrated strong momentum across the Nordic region and Europe for advancing transformative governance approaches to nature-based solutions.

At the same time, discussions made clear that achieving transformation requires more than technical innovation. **It requires new narratives, new partnerships, institutional change, and renewed relationships between people and nature.**

The event closed with a shared recognition that transformative change is already underway, but that accelerating it will require courage, imagination, and sustained collaboration across society.



Facilitated group work on transformative governance.

Photo: Lars Kruse.

About this publication

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The Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official body for inter-governmental co-operation between Åland, Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

In 2019, the Nordic prime ministers presented a vision of the Nordic Region as the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The work of the Nordic Council of Ministers is designed to pursue that goal by making the Nordic Region green, competitive and socially sustainable.

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