

# Active8-Planet Newsletter

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IDEALIZING LEADERSHIP PREVENTS SUSTAINABLE

DEVELOPMENT

Interview with Edina Dóci

**COLLABORATIVE SUCCESS:** 

**VU ORGANIZATIONS UNITE FOR A CAPTIVATING GREEN EVENT** 

ADVANCING TOWARDS A CIRCULAR BUILDING ECONOMY:

**EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF URBAN MINING** 

Article by the Belgian team

**SWEDISH JOURNEY:** 

**ACTIVE8-PLANET ADVENTURE IN PICTURESQUE SALZBURG** 

Article by the Swedish team

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Cover photo: Active8-Planet Card Game, developed in the project

### **PREFACE**

ve dive deeper into the exciting world of innovating education.

A ctive8-Planet, a European project funded by Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances, brings together students, supervisors, professionals, and stakeholders in multidisciplinary teams. Our mission? Developing solutions for a better future for people and the planet. It's all about collaboration! We combine the technical mindset of the business world with a peopleand planet-centered approach. Because what good is a high-tech solution if it doesn't meet the needs of people or contribute to a sustainable planet?

This academic year, we tackled a range of challenges, from sustainable mobility to community gardens and the built environment. But in this newsletter, we'll take a closer look behind the scenes and explore the underlying themes of innovating education.

Inside this fifth newsletter, you'll find an indepth interview on leadership, valuable innovation tips and tricks from educators, and inspiring experiences shared by our students. Most importantly, we hope to ignite your own teaching innovation! Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, Twitter, YouTube, and our project website (www.active8-planet.eu) to stay updated on our work.

Have questions or ideas to share? Drop us a line anytime at info@active8-planet.eu.

On behalf of the entire Active8-Planet team,

Soesja van Wijgerden

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## Innovating in Academia:

## Tips & Tricks from Vaike Fors, Griet Verbeeck & Gregor Cerinšek

The academic work environment is known for its conservative nature, often restricting innovation and constraining creativity. Despite groundbreaking research taking place within academic institutions, the organizational structures, offices, managers, and work processes frequently fail to implement their own innovative research findings. With Active8-Planet we aim to break through these limitations and innovate the field. In this article, we will share insights from three of our team members who have been actively involved in driving this innovation.

### What personal skill has helped you the most?

Vaike: Personally, I have found that being friendly, curious, and having the courage to step beyond the boundaries of my own discipline to collaborate across sectors and subjects has been immensely beneficial.

**Gregor:** For me, it's about embracing new perspectives, actively listening to people who may be smarter or more experienced, and avoiding the urge to impose my own agenda. Additionally, I have found value in connecting different people, bringing them together to foster discussion and collaboration. In essence, my most helpful skills include openness, a willingness to learn, and the ability to connect the dots.

**Griet:** The personal skill that has been most beneficial to me is creative thinking, which extends beyond artistry and allows me to break free from siloed thinking, broadening the scope of my research.

### What is one mantra that everyone in this field should hear?

Vaike: I strongly believe that we don't have the time, nor the privilege, to continue to reproduce traditional disciplinary approaches. As we say in the Active8-Planet project; the planet needs us!

**Gregor:** It is essential to actively seek out and engage with individuals who possess a genuine passion for their work, who embrace innovation, and are eager to collaborate. It is crucial to set aside any academic ego and openly acknowledge when we lack knowledge, make mistakes, or when we are wrong.

**Griet:** If there is one mantra that everyone in this field should hear, it is to step outside of their comfort zones and explore beyond their domain of expertise, as the world beyond is so interesting!

### What was your most recent 'aha' moment?

Vaike: I wouldn't necessarily callitan 'aha' moment, but rather a pleasantly surprising experience that continues to amaze me. It's remarkable to witness how students from diverse countries can rapidly gain confidence when participating in well-facilitated, intense physical meetings. I think back to the international Active8-Planet meetings during Learning cycles 1 and 2.

Gregor: Inthe Active 8-Planet project I witnessed firsthand the profound impact of design anthropology on companies, as it prompts them to reevaluate their existing products and services. It challenges their ingrained assumptions and prompts fresh perspectives. During a recent presentation by one of the Active8-Planet teams, I was truly inspired by the idea that promoting shared mobility practices can be achieved through innovative vehicle design. By comprehending individuals' daily practices, habits, frustrations, and values, we can create meaningful and sustainable outcomes through thoughtful design and development.

**Griet:** My most recent 'aha' moment was when I discovered the approach adopted by our partner Halmstad, where they employ extreme scenarios, referred to as 'skewing,' to challenge research questions and shift the mindset of both students and companies. It was truly enlightening to witness the transformative power of this, to me, new approach.

By Soesja van Wijgerden

We hope these tips & tricks will inspire more people to break through the academic boundaries and innovate the field. Because, as our project states: "The planet needs you!"

## Idealizing leadership prevents sustainable development

Interview with Edina Dóci, associate professor at the School of Business and Economics, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

### Could you tell us about yourself and what drives you?

My academic background lies in sociology and psychology and my current research focuses on inequalities in organizations. Specifically, I explore the psychological dimension of inequalities and how they are reproduced over time. I obtained my PhD in leadership psychology. Apart from that, I've been involved in the sustainability work at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam for the past five years, working on integrating sustainability and climate education in study programs across the university. As part of these efforts, I founded the Sustainability Leadership Hub, which is a center for sustainability education advocacy. Over the and past years I've organized many workshops and trainings

for teachers on sustainability in

the climate crisis.

education and educational leadership in

I'm deeply concerned about the climate crisis, this is what drives me. Even though this is not my original field of study, I believe it's impossible to be alive at this time and age of climate crisis and not take action. That's also what interests me in my research; what activates people? What allows people to engage and persevere in the struggle? Connected to that, I study psychological resources such as hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resilience and have been mostly focusing on structural

inequalities in people's access to these resources. Recently, I became interested in the role of these resources in the climate crisis era; how can people maintain their psychological resources, while being active in combating the climate crisis?

My studies have made me question the prevailing paradigm in psychology.

Traditionally, mental health and psychological resources have been examined on the individual level.

This perspective presupposes that attributes such as confidence, optimism, resilience and hope are solely the individual's merit, implying that it is up to the individual to think

in the right manner, interpret situations positively and act constructively. I find this very individualistic and completely flawed in terms of the complexities of our mental states.

Edina is
an associate
professor at the
School of Business
and Economics,
Vrije Universiteit
Amsterdam

Instead, I believe it's more important to examine these phenomena on a social, relational and communal level. Let's consider people's psychological experiences in the context of the climate crisis. On one hand, we cannot cope with climate distress individually - this

is not an individual psychological problem that can be reframed or coped with individually, but a collective predicament that requires collective solutions. Similarly, one cannot effectively engage with the climate struggle on their own. We need one another to effectively tackle these complex, wicked problems. And we also need the psychological resources that emerge from positive relationships of mutual support and communal engagement to stay mentally healthy while being active in this field.

Leadership is a controversial topic.
Global political polarization shows how different people feel about it. With a PhD in leadership psychology and actively working in that field, how do you define leadership?

At the end of a guest lecture about climate leadership where we challenged all common assumptions on leadership, a student asked me how I would define leadership. There was a quote on one of the slides: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I pointed at it and said; if anything, that is my definition. I don't believe in the individualistic idea of leadership. I'm very sensitive to inequalities in power and generally very critical of authorities and our inclination to permit some individuals to wield power over others. I think the concept of leadership is often

used to legitimize hierarchies. social Moreover, in this era of climate crisis, conventional, the individualistic idea leadership simply not working. The notion that individual leaders have the capacity to solve these problems is very ineffective and hinders progress.

When teaching leadership, my aim is to convey to my students that leadership in itself is a hollow concept. We need to give it substance. Leading for what and towards what? I value individuals who take leadership when they find something worthwhile. They take responsibility and assert their agency. That, to me, is true leadership. But since leadership is socially constructed, I don't think there is an objective definition of it. It emerges through our relationships with others.

where only some individuals possess an innate

essence and required capacities to be leaders.

I disagree. We all have the capacity to take responsibility and leadership in the crisis. Our

political leaders are failing and we cannot wait

for them to show us the way.

Through my work with Scientist Rebellion, a climate movement of academics, I got to experience shared leadership in action. People take turns leading based on whether a particular theme resonates with their expertise, or having the time and resources at a given moment. Thereby, leadership is always in flux, making it a very appealing and healthy experience. But from that experience, I find it very hard to accept why anyone would feel entitled to label themselves a leader? Leadership is a process, not a title.

We cannot cope with climate distress individually - it requires collective solutions. Similarly, we need one another and positive relationships of mutual support to effectively tackle the climate crisis and maintain our mental health while being active in this field.

However, this does not imply that individuals do lack agency and cannot step up as leaders! But we have this essentialist idea of leaders, If you could change one thing in the education of leadership, what would that be?

As teachers, face we often the general expectation that we're supposed to offer objective and neutral education. sticking to topic and sharing objective, factual

knowledge with our students. I believe that's just not enough. The knowledge that we transmit from generation to generation in the university encompasses the very processes and practices that created this society, economy and the problems and multiple crises we face today. This holds particularly true in economics and related disciplines such as management science, which is my field. Simultaneously, this knowledge disguises itself as objective, devoid of any assumptions and ideologies. That means we're not willing to confront the ideologies that underpin the knowledge that we are reproducing and teaching. This does not benefit our students, as we fail to equip them with skills for deep critical reflection about society and the economy.

To initiate change, it is crucial to first understand the dominant mental models in society, and the dominant societal structures and processes resulting from those models and causing the climate and ecological crisis. We need to do this to be able to change our trajectory as a society, to discover a way out. I believe that this is one of our tasks, as educators.

If we want to take our societal role as educators seriously, merely transferring knowledge is not enough - we need to teach students how to engage with and critically reflect on the knowledge we are transferring. This means scrutinizing our dominant paradigms, questioning social practices that have been taken for granted. Why is society the way it is and how could it be different? It is important to recognise that objective and impartial knowledge doesn't truly exist, at least in social sciences and humanities. Sustainability itself is likewise a value, there's nothing objective about it - it's a very strong view of the world we want to create. To me, this is leadership in education: offering a vision and being honest and clear about the values that underpin this vision. It is not about enforcing it, but inviting students to reflect on their own values and vision, and how they can contribute to a better society.

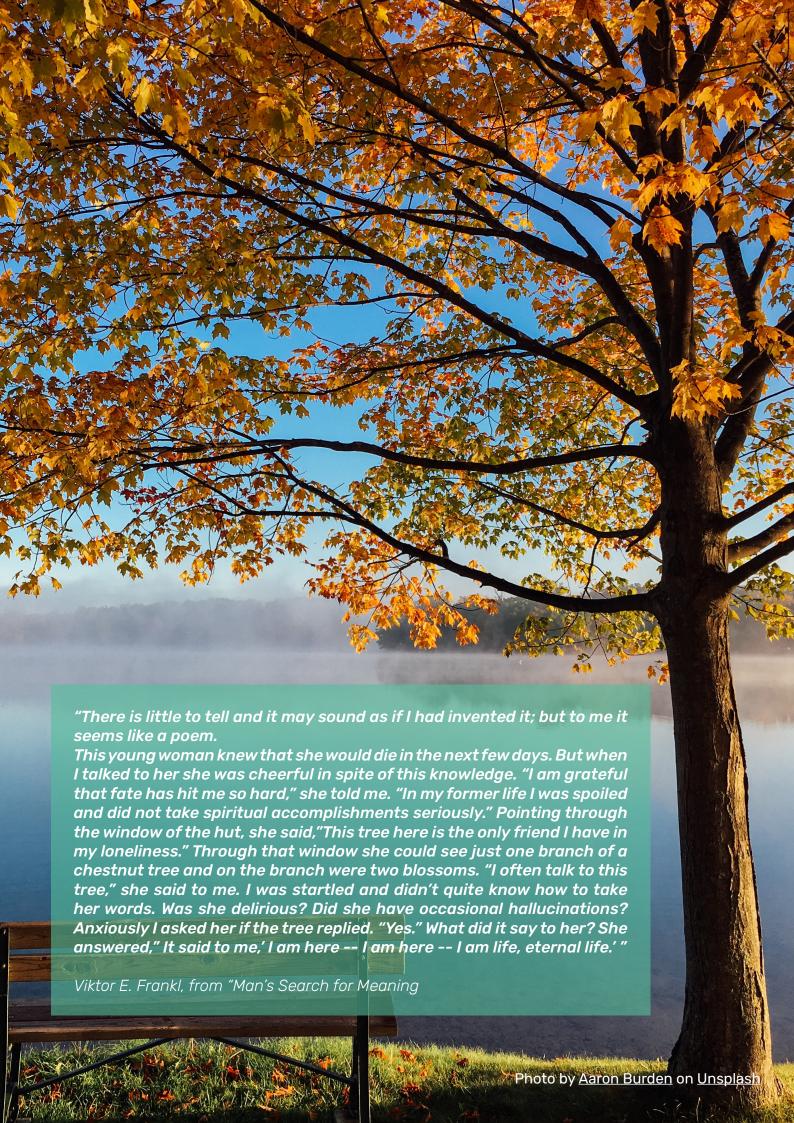
This reflection is dearly needed if we are to be effective in our collective efforts towards a livable future. It is one way in which we can take leadership as teachers. And of course by sharing how our respective disciplines can be aligned with the sustainability framework and how the specific skills and knowledge in those areas can contribute to finding solutions. Ultimately, it comes down to taking responsibility for the future of our students and the generations to come.

### What is one last tip you want to give our readers?

Self care in climate work is important and, admittedly, it can be hard! In this era, if you feel like a responsible person, you will often feel like you are falling short - there is always more to do. Therefore, it is super important to establish healthy boundaries. Your health and wellbeing are essential resources for being effective in any pursuit. In my experience, nature can play a significant role. It can provide a moment of space for reflection but also a visual reminder of hope and connectivity. Being outside literally grounds me and recharges my energy. I'd like to share this quote from a book about the Holocaust, describing someone's connection with a tree in a concentration camp, that captures something fundamental about trees that I couldn't articulate in my own words:

by Soesja van Wijgerden

In the era of climate crisis, the conventional idea of individualistic leadership is failing. We need to challenge the notion that only a few possess the innate essence to lead, as true leadership emerges through shared responsibility and collective action.





The uplifting ambiance at Botanical Garden Zuidas on Tuesday, June 27th, with mild weather and lush greenery, was further accentuated by green striped market stalls scattered throughout the garden. These stalls served as a platform to showcase various aspects of greening the VU Campus, as part of the Sustainable Summer Soiree, a joint effort between Active8-Planet, VU Sustainability Office, and the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute. This collaboration not only pooled their resources to bring this interconnected event to life but also forged new green alliances.

The focal point of the event was the Green Inspiration Market, where second-year BSc students from the course Organizations & Anthropology and VU staff engaged in discussions on sustainability. Students were tasked with presenting their research findings on different facets of Campus Greening to two stakeholders: the Botanical Garden Zuidas and the Facilitaire Campus Organisatie (FCO). With the freedom to design captivating market stalls to showcase their ethnographic discoveries, the students surpassed expectations.

Walking past the 22 distinct stalls, visitors were treated to a sensory feast, from immersive experiences to intriguing murder mysteries,

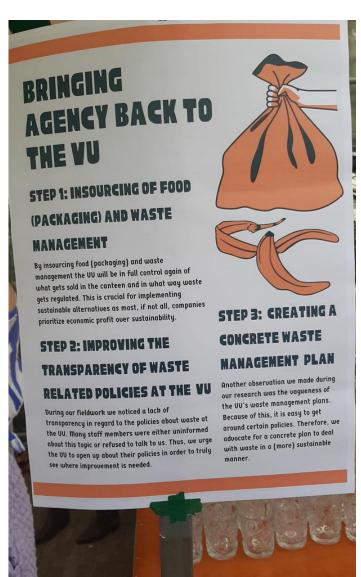
audio tours to intricate miniature garden models. The appreciation from all participants was palpable. Students expressed their satisfaction, feeling finally acknowledged and taken seriously, as FCO representatives visited their stalls and eagerly engaged in discussions about their findings. Teachers, on the other hand, reveled in the students' remarkable creativity, which not only made the grading process engaging but also enjoyable. Other VU staff members, drawn by curiosity, were enthralled by the vibrant atmosphere and voiced their desire for more such events at the VU.

The event effectively demonstrated the value of using quantitative research methods to delve into the complex challenge of greening the VU campus, resulting in a clear win-win situation. Soesja van Wijgerden, the project facilitator of the Active8-Planet project at the VU, was enthusiastic about organizing this event in a unique manner. "My project aims to foster connections between FCO, students, and other campus users, in order to truly understand the requirements for campus greenery before taking action. With this event, I sought to gather a diverse range of insights in an engaging and 'sticky' way, ensuring that students feel

heard and that FCO absorbs the wealth of perspectives to promote inclusivity in our new green campus. Today was undeniably a great success, and I hope that this practice doesn't end with Active8-Planet."









## Advancing Towards a Circular Building Economy:

### Exploring the Potential of Urban Mining

Our society is facing exponential growth in population, food demand, resource consumption, and energy usage, resulting in an escalating human impact on the Earth. However, it's crucial to recognize that our planet and its natural resources are limited, and exceeding the Earth's carrying capacity leads to irreversible damage.

The building industry plays a significant role in this scenario, consuming vast amounts of materials, space, water, and energy. Accounting for 40 to 50 percent of global resource usage, it has a colossal environmental footprint and is the largest contributor to waste production, responsible for 36 percent of total waste over the past decades.

European Parliament is currently promoting a sustainable model known as the Circular Economy (European Parliament, 2018). Circular building, based on this concept, aims to minimize waste and maximize the reuse of materials, products, and components (van Sante, 2017). It also focuses on reusing real estate and infrastructure without unnecessary depletion of natural resources, environmental pollution, or ecosystem degradation (Transition Team Circular Building Economy, 2018). A collective transition to a circular building economy, where material flows are closed within the construction and demolition sector. can make a significant difference.

What if we no longer consider materials from demolitions as waste but as potential resources to be kept in circulation? This is where the concept of urban mining comes into play (Vlaanderen Circulair, 2021). Rather than demolishing buildings, we should disassemble

them and "harvest" reusable materials. This way, the value of the resources and materials present in buildings can be preserved.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

The focus of our research within Active8-Planet was to delve deeper into the potential of urban mining and the reuse of materials and components.

#### **Exploring the Concept of Urban Mining**

To explore the concept of urban mining in the building industry, we embarked on a series of visits, masterclasses, presentations, and literature reviews on the themes of circularity, urban mining, digitization, and industrialization.

The first meeting of the Active8 team took place on November 30, 2022, in Kerkrade. Our team visited the SuperLocal project and participated in masterclasses on urban mining led by Prof. ir. Peter op T' Veld and Dr. Ir. John van Oorschot. Superlocal experimented with circular building, utilizing existing qualities, materials, and values to create a new residential complex. For example, the research team developed a



method to recycle old concrete into new concrete elements, which were successfully used in the construction of several houses. Three experimental houses were even built entirely using materials reclaimed from the demolition of old apartment buildings across the street.

#### **Masterclasses**

The masterclasses were led by experts from different European regions who shared a common goal of applying circular methods in their respective areas. We were immersed in their world, gaining insights into existing tools, concepts, and companies. For example, we learned about BuildUpSpeed, which focuses on pop-up factories that bring together supply and demand, as well as Baukarusell, which introduced the concept of Social Urban Mining by incorporating social factors into the urban mining process, such as involving people facing employment challenges. We also witnessed emerging trends in building digitization, such as 3D scanning technologies that facilitate building inventories.

Our initial conclusions were as follows: (1) urban mining prevents the loss of valuable materials as waste, (2) the current application of urban mining in the construction sector is not yet economically viable, and (3) there are concerns regarding the safety of materials obtained through urban mining that need to be addressed. For example, it is unclear whether all materials should be tested or if sampling is sufficient. In any case, ensuring the safety of materials obtained through urban mining is crucial.

#### **Workshop - Active8-Planet Matrix**

To establish a concrete focus for our 7+1 team, we utilized the "Active8-Planet Matrix" tool.

We learned about Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics and linked it to the design of social and ecological impacts on both local and global levels.

Starting from the challenge, "How can we link materials to manufacturers?"—as we learned in our research it's difficult to align them-we delved deeper into the potential local (social and ecological) impact we could generate. We also explored the two global lenses, focusing on improving the well-being of people worldwide

and preserving the health of the planet.

During this initial brainstorming session, we came up with possible ideas, such as developing a workshop to inspire companies about circularity, creating a concept that



brings together contractors, architects, and manufacturers, designing a tool that facilitates the reuse of materials and makes it visually appealing, and more. It would also be valuable to involve the old Courthouse in Hasselt as a tangible case in the process.

#### **Proposals**

We continued working on these ideas by dividing the team into groups to work out and present proposals, allowing for further brainstorming. Some proposals included: (1) organizing a roundtable discussion to bring companies together, (2) hosting a themed week with workshops and debate sessions to educate both companies and the general public, including students, about the Circular Economy and Urban Mining, (3) developing a step-by-step guide to assist companies interested in urban mining but unsure where to start, (4) creating a framework with quality experts to address concerns regarding the quality of reclaimed materials, (5) developing a database that starts from buildings to make materials more tangible and visually appealing, while also providing transparent data, and (6) adopting an open-source model.

Several recurring themes in the proposals emphasized the importance of informing and providing guidance to businesses and individuals regarding reuse, offering transparent data, ensuring the quality of materials, and more. After a group discussion, we concluded that as a team, we would further develop two points: (1) a participation and communication day focused on the Circular Economy and (2) a tangible online database serving as a platform for urban mining.

Thus, two teams were formed: the Communication Team and the Platform Team. The Communication Team organized a debate with stakeholders involved in urban mining, while the Platform Team developed a digital platform that connects 'mined' materials with users and provides information. Building upon existing material databases, this platform stands out by being highly tangible, transparent, and accessible for stakeholders in the circular building economy.

On May 10, during UHasselt's Sustainable Week, our results were presented to the general public on our "Urban Mining Day." The mock-up of our platform was enthusiastically

received, and the debate saw a significant turnout. Various urban mining experts engaged in discussions, and the audience's numerous questions reaffirmed the importance of sharing information and knowledge on this topic.

In conclusion, as our society continues to experience rapid growth and resource consumption, it is essential to address the environmental impact of the building industry, which accounts for a significant portion of global resource usage and waste production. The concept of urban mining, through disassembling buildings and reusing materials,



presents a promising solution to minimize waste and preserve valuable resources. While challenges remain, such as economic viability and material safety, our research within Active8-Planet has highlighted the potential of urban mining and the need for collective action in transitioning towards a circular building economy. The development of a tangible online platform and the organization of a participation and communication day are important steps toward raising awareness, sharing knowledge, and driving the adoption of circular practices in the construction sector.

Britt Vossen & Wintha Van den Abbeele

### **Swedish Journey:**

## Active8-Planet Adventure in picturesque Salzburg

We had known from the start that the final section of the Active8-Planet project would be a meetup in Salzburg. Before heading there, we had several online meetings with the other participants discussing our related projects and how we could fill our Salzburg trip. This filled us with excitement for what was to come, and the experience sure lived up to expectations. The path for us in the Swedish team was firstly by plane to München, Germany. We then headed on a beautiful train trip from München to Salzburg. Even though we struggled with finding the right train tracks at first, we got our first taste of local culture right there at the train station when we stopped for pretzels. We arrived in Salzburg around dinnertime. We met up with some familiar faces at Augustiner Bräu for a taste of the local culture, and of course, the beer! We then headed to our hostel for a good night's sleep, and in the corridors we would meet the people who would become our friends in the coming days.

The following morning, we were guided to the house labeled quite

mysteriously as "activities", that would be held at the event location: a beautiful, spacious old building very close to where we had stayed overnight. We went through a few 'getting to know each other' exercises and got to talk with our peers about our surprisingly related projects. Later we got to explore the city together, and got to see its wonderful architecture. The city is split down the middle by a river, whose bridges we had to cross to get to different locations. We made



the most of every opportunity to explore the city. We looked up the best café in the town and enjoyed some great coffee, and they also served beautiful little chocolate animals. The city was a particular treat for me, as I'm a bit obsessed with old facades from different time periods. We were both fascinated and amused with the cultural differences compared to home. At one point I was questioned by a waiter for only ordering the small beer from the menu. That would never happen in Sweden! We ate a lot of fried food too, it was simply everywhere. And the airport hotel breakfast on the way home even served sour pickles! But I'm getting ahead of myself.

When we were not exploring the town we had different productive and trust-building activities at our event location. Since we hadn't met each other before, warming up with different name games and other exercises really made it easy to communicate. Josine, the event leader, had a great lecture about different cultures and cross cultural communication, which helped further. Although considering everyone was a university student, the differences weren't as big as they could have been. We also got to present our project works and give feedback to the others, to practice group presentations. Even though each of the groups had distinct focuses for their project works, we all shared the common denominator of sustainability in mind. This gave us a great baseline for feedback, and even though we were mostly done with

our projects it was a great learning opportunity.

Many of the other activities were also focused on allowing us to develop tools for further project work. We learned methods for seeing other group members' perspectives things. When collaborating towards a mutual goal, developing a joint vision seems to be key. One of the ways we got to practice this was through an exercise involving drawing up scales representing different features of what we were developing, such as "sustainability" or "shareability". Each team member then got to mark wherever they felt we were on the scale. This in turn could be used as a starting point for making a more unified vision of whatever was being developed.

After two days filled with food and drinks, great scenery, and new meetings, it was time to head home again. When trying to find our booked trains, it turned out the railway company was on strike! We simply had to find another solution. Very grateful for our smartphones, we looked up another company that operated on the same route, and the conductor on board was incredibly helpful. Back in Sweden we returned to our daily duties, wrapping up the final parts of our thesis work. Still, the sense of purpose these kinds of projects can give you is astounding. One might even learn a thing or two about navigating international railroads.









## **Active8-Planet partners:**



#### Slovenia

Institute for Innovation and Development of University of Ljubljana

http://iri.uni-lj.si/en/domov-2/



#### The Netherlands

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)

https://www.vu.nl/en/



#### **Belgium**

Hasselt University

https://www.uhasselt.be/en



#### **Sweden**

Halmstad University

https://www.hh.se/english.html



#### The Netherlands

Huygen Engineers & Consultants

https://www.huygen.net/



#### Slovenia

Endava

https://www.endava.com/



#### Sweden

Volvo

https://www.volvocars.com/intl



#### **Austria**

ICNM

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