

Stockholm 25 november 2020

Societal Transformations for Climate Action

Revised November 25 2020, the word “impact logic” added within the brackets in the table on page 1.

Funding call for a research programme

The Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research (Mistra) invites research groups, jointly with civil society organizations, the public sector and other stakeholders, to submit proposals for a new research programme. The purpose of the call is to facilitate societal transformation for climate action through research and innovation. In line with Mistra’s statutes, the research programme shall be of strategic environmental importance. In this call, we specifically emphasise the role of civil society in a broader sense.

Background

The United Nations has declared the 2020’s to be the “decade of action”, in which sustainable solutions must be accelerated and put into practice. Mitigating climate change and addressing inequality at a local and global level are emphasized to go hand in hand in this process. While this is challenging for our societies, it also offers a momentum for transformative change and many new possibilities. Several of the foundational elements of our Nordic welfare states were established in an era which presented its citizens with different constraints, threats and possibilities. However, we now need to create new building blocks which can be used to establish and maintain a fundamentally different, net-zero emission, society. In this process, research and innovation will play an important role. In particular, we envisage that transdisciplinary and transsectorial approaches will be needed to explore and define altered or entirely novel pathways towards decarbonization.

Action is urgently needed to meet the ambitious targets set out in the Paris Agreement and in the Agenda 2030 as well as the European Commission’s Green Deal and long-term strategy for climate-neutrality by 2050. To meet the targets, we need to transform our society in a multitude of ways, building on our strengths and traditions, and encouraging innovative solutions that can make a difference. The challenge is global, but action needs to be taken on various levels, including at the local, regional and national levels.

When climate action measures are discussed, it is important that the benefits as well as the costs of the societal transition are justly distributed. Ensuring that the most vulnerable regions, citizens and groups do not end up at the losing end and that existing structural inequalities are not reinforced is crucial. In the Green Deal, which was launched in 2019, the European Commission proposes a “Just Transition Mechanism”. This mechanism, which is part of the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, is designed to support those regions and sectors most affected by the transition. It will focus on the movement from a dependency of fossil fuels or carbon-intensive processes towards low-carbon and climate-resilient activities.

Technological solutions are not the silver bullet for societal transformation. Affordable, scalable solutions are in fact in many cases available. However, the fast development and application of digital approaches will, and already have, a crucial impact on

society. Although digitalisation provides many opportunities, also for sustainable development, it will not automatically lead to resource efficiency, reduction of air pollutants, increased social cohesion, etc. Digital approaches may fail to challenge existing systems of provision, locking future societies into current patterns of production and consumption rather than pursuing more creative and /or radical alternatives. Digitalisation adds speed, but not necessarily in the right direction.

Organised movements within civil society have been shown to impact policy, economy and societal structures. Traditionally, this has happened by translating engagement into political action through the sluice model of deliberative democracy, resulting in changes in public policy. However, grass-root movements starting with a few individuals demanding transparency and change have also been shown to be able to create fundamental shifts in society. Young people all over the world are now engaging in climate action, challenging the current system and its inability to respond to the urgency of the climate crisis. In this call, we envisage creating new collaborations which tap into the experience and engagement of civil society in a broader sense, coupling and integrating it with research and innovation. However, it will also be important to critically appraise this collaborative process, reflecting on its boundaries and possible ethical risks involved.

This call for proposals is based on a background report prepared by an expert group (Appendix 1). Before the expert group was gathered, Mistra arranged a workshop with invited stakeholders from the public sector, industry and civil society organizations (Appendix 2). The background report is intended to serve as an inspiration for a proposal, but this call text will be the basis for the evaluation of submitted proposals.

Focus

The current research programme should focus on strategic environmental issues crucial for the urgent societal transformation towards a fossil-free economy, with an emphasis on civil society, equality and digitalisation for climate action. The programme should be clearly connected to the Paris Agreement, the Green Deal and more broadly to sustainable development. The proposed research programme should address the below three focus areas more elaborated in the background report. Interlinkages, interactions and conflicts between different goals are foreseen to be addressed in the programme, as well as potential solutions and their consequences.

Relevance and anticipated impacts of the research programme must be described in the programme proposal and should be presented visually in a one-page appendix using impact logic.

The emphasis of the programme should be on Swedish societal transformations for climate change, but a broader EU level and/or international perspective should also be included.

1. Civil society

When addressing this focus area, it is necessary to clearly show under which circumstances and in which situations civil society can contribute to climate change mitigation with an objective of equality and social justice. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand how digitalisation constructs and influences agents of civil society and their impact on climate change. Finally, there is a clear case of demonstrating under which conditions an empowered civil society (institutionalized or not) may take on more shared responsibility for climate change mitigation and societal sustainability with respect to its counterparts in government and commercial sectors of society. Potential drawbacks and goal conflicts need to be considered. Experiences and learnings also from civil society organisations which are not focusing on climate or other environmental aspects are foreseen to be useful.

2. Equality

The potentially strong tensions between measures to combat climate change and equality need to be investigated and addressed. These tensions may be negative in several ways as inequalities within groups managing a shared resource, may lead to loss of trust, less cooperation, and the unsustainable use of the resources. Concerted climate action that is just and equitable can compensate for unproportionate negative impact on certain regions or citizens. This is crucial in order to avoid negative consequences, including a dramatic increase in patterns of inequality. There is also the positive side of the relation between climate mitigation and equality that is important to address. Investigating how working for equality and a just transition can support (or counteract) climate change mitigation, and to further explore the connection of inequality and climate change mitigation is key.

3. Digitalisation

Digitalisation brings both opportunities and risks for climate change mitigation, and these must be placed within a broader context in order to ensure sustainable future societies. Digitalisation can alter the way people live, work and play, and this may be a good starting point for looking into how new digital tools can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As we face the crisis of climate change, the question is: what part can digitalisation play in its mitigation and, more widely, in shaping the sustainability of future societies? Risks for rebound effects need to be considered, in order to avoid that digitalisation leads to other negative effects, both on the climate and on other societal targets.

Programme planning must cover four years, but with an eight-year perspective. It is vitally important to involve stakeholders and partners right from the planning stage and further on, throughout the research process. Civil society has a key role to take on the challenges we aim to tackle and is expected to have an important role in the proposed programme. Interdisciplinary collaboration is expected in the programme.

The programme should be designed so that its' purpose can be fulfilled with a minimum of climate/environmental impact, e.g. through using virtual meetings and other solutions to avoid unnecessary travel. Mistra will require that the programme establish meeting policies and guidelines that enable this.

Mistra is non-discriminating and promotes equality in opportunity, diversity and inclusiveness. Expected features of the programme during its implementation include sharing of experiences and, where relevant, collaboration with other Mistra programmes.

Who can apply

The call addresses research groups in all academic disciplines working at Swedish higher education institutions and research institutes, as well as stakeholders such as civil society organisations, public sector and businesses. Researchers and organisations active outside Sweden may participate, but the principal applicant and planned programme host must be a Swedish institution. Only legal entities can apply for funding.

The host institution and other organisations taking part are expected to be coordinated in a consortium and to submit a joint proposal.

Special conditions

1. Current rules concerning indirect costs: see Appendix 3.

Application process and review

The application must be written in English, except for a summary in Swedish. It must consist of the following parts and appendices and comply with page limits specified. If the proposal exceeds any of the page limits it will not be processed. No appendices other than those listed below may be attached.

The main part of the proposal (a maximum of 40 pages) must include the following parts:

Summary in English and Swedish

1. Vision, aims and expected impacts (impact logic in appendix I)
2. Scientific value, including state-of-the-art
3. Benefits to society
4. Management and organisation
5. Skills and networks
6. Description of work packages, including deliverables
7. Communication
8. Budget (use the budget template)

The following appendices must be attached:

- I. Impact logic (see basic example in Figure 1, one page maximum visual illustration)
- II. CVs for up to 10 key people (maximum of one page per person)
- III. Certificate from planned programme host.

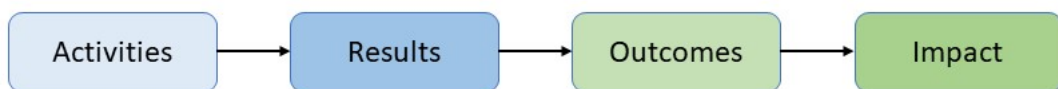


Figure 1: Basic example of the structure of an impact logic model.

Note that the following must be clearly specified on the front cover of the programme proposal: (a) preliminary programme title, (b) planned programme host, (c) planned programme director and (d) contact person for the proposal, with full contact details.

Although 40 is the maximum number of pages for the main part of the proposal, reaching this number is not a target as such. Writing concisely and readably is in every applicant's interest. If approved, the proposal will serve as the basis for the plan that steers the programme.

Attached to the proposal must be a certificate confirming that the planned programme host (and also the main applicant) is prepared to assume the role of hosting the programme and to make the requisite resources available, and also accepts Mistra's rules regarding indirect costs. This certificate must be signed by the Vice-Chancellor, Chief Executive or equivalent.

Note that heading a Mistra programme is normally a full-time commitment and that every programme is expected to have a communicator, and a well-considered and clearly defined budget for communication and implementation. It is advisable to read the section on 'Managing Mistra programmes' (under 'Research'), at www.mistra.org.

Mistra intends to award research funding for one (1) of the programme proposals submitted. It is not possible to apply for funding for individual projects within the scope of this call.

Note that Mistra is subject to the principle of public access to official records. This means that all documents received by Mistra, including proposals and applications, are public. On certain conditions, information may be treated as confidential.

Personal particulars received are managed in accordance with current legislation on data protection. For more information, see Mistra's data privacy policy (<https://www.mistra.org/en/data-privacy-policy>).

The proposal should be sent as a single PDF file (including appendices) by email to mail@mistra.org, to reach Mistra not later than 29 January 2021 at 4:00 pm.

Evaluation criteria

Every proposal will be evaluated against the criteria below, in which potential for environmental problem-solving and contribution to sustainable development are crucial.

1. Approach, i.e. how far the programme has a central, coherent idea and an innovative direction, as described in a well-defined impact logic.
2. Scientific quality, i.e. how well the programme meets the requirements of advanced research expertise, theoretical proficiency and methodological quality.
3. Benefits, i.e. how highly developed the collaboration with users of the research results is (and is expected to be), and which supportive communication processes and methods will be used to attain effective implementation.
4. Management and organisation, i.e. the manner in which the programme will be integrated in the host organisation, how it will be governed and structured, and to what degree it will make efficient use of resources.

An international expert panel will evaluate all research proposals that meet the formal criteria of the call. Hearings may be part of the process.

Time schedule

2020

3 September Call opens

2021

29 January Call closes
 January - March Proposals are evaluated
 March Funding decision by Mistra's Board
 June Programme start (preliminary)

Expected programme budget	A total of SEK 40 million over four years.
Mistra's financial contribution	Up to 100% of the total programme budget, subject to a maximum of SEK 40 million.
Length of research proposal	Maximum of 40 pages + appendices (impact logic, CV and certificate from programme host).
Research proposals to reach Mistra not later than	Friday 29 January 2021 at 4:00 pm. The application must be sent to mail@mistra.org as a single PDF file.
Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Background paper: Societal structures for climate change mitigation 2. Summary of workshop 3. Allowable costs and co-funding in Mistra projects 4. Budget template
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