



**drift** for transition

---

publication

# An experiential guide for Transition Arenas

---

date  
September 2022

---

authors  
Igno Notermans  
Timo von Wirth  
Derk Loorbach



*This 'experiential' guide to the format of Transition Arena is based on the experience made with several transition arena processes conducted by DRIFT in the Netherlands. It acts as an inspirational guide with tips and tricks on how to organize and execute transition arenas in the context of the ACES project, which aims to adopt the principles of the method to the specific context of Norwegian ports.*

A special thanks to current and former DRIFT colleagues Gijs Diercks, Roel van Raak, Chris Roorda, Karlijn Schippers, Frank van Steenberg & Julia Wittmayer for their participation in the series of interviews.

This publication is part of the ACES project - Accelerating Energy and Sustainability transitions in ports: from national visions to co-constructed transition. Funded by the Norwegian Research Council (2021-2025).

*Please refer to this document as follows:*

Notermans, V.I., von Wirth, T., & Loorbach D. (2022). An experiential guide for Transition Arenas. DRIFT, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



Content

Introduction.....5

The transtion team..... 9

Participant selection ..... 11

The Arena steps ..... 14

Framing and analysis..... 17

Niche-regime interaction ..... 20

Organization..... 22

References ..... 25

Appendix A: Resource overview of the transition arenas ..... 26



Image 1: One of the transition arena sessions in the mobility arena Rotterdam, hosted in a place designed and built by underprivileged youth.



## Introduction

To break away from business-as-usual requires new approaches and strategies. Transition management has been developed explicitly as such an approach and as a strategy to open up desired transition pathways in societal contexts that are 'locked-in': situations, in which people and organisations are stuck into addressing persistent problems with improvements, instead of shaping transformative change towards new and desired futures. To proactively support desired system change (transition), implies an approach that develops the necessary transformative power: a compelling narrative, the critical mass, and a legitimizing analysis that all combined can help guide and accelerate fundamental change.

This experiential guide provides insights into the practical side of the transition arena methodology (Loorbach, 2007), based on experiential knowledge with transition arenas facilitated by the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT), mainly in the Netherlands. The aim of this document is to provide insight into the application of the transition management principles in practice through the organization of transition arenas in a variety of contexts. The diversity of applications shows that each context requires a different operational design of the arena, thereby adjusting the transition management principles and the generic methodology to the local transition context, actor constellations and particular societal dynamics.

We aim to empower and stimulate readers to organize a transition arena in their own (local) circumstances, by providing a set of ingredients and 'how-to's'. Specifically, this guide is written in the context of the ACES project (Accelerating Energy and Sustainability transitions in ports; funded by the Norwegian Research Council) for our research partners and beyond. In this project, DRIFT supports the consortium partners to apply transition management in the Norwegian port and maritime sector through the organization of translocally connected transition arenas.

The experiential guide is not a step-by-step handbook on how to organize a transition arena. For this we refer to other resources, such as the transition management manual (Roorda et al., 2016) or the more recent compilation of practical methods for transition processes in the TOMORROW Workbook (Silvestri, Wittmayer & De Geus, 2020). Here, we enrich the design of arena processes by providing input on different parts of the arena format and how we at DRIFT have dealt with challenges of carrying out arenas in the past. Each of these parts is illustrated by concrete examples from previous transition arena experiences. We provide different examples to show differences in the design and to share successes (do's) and pitfalls (don'ts).

Before reading this guide, we advise you to first learn about the basics of transition management and the transition arena approach. For example, the following papers by Loorbach (2010), Loorbach & Rotmans (2010), Loorbach, Frantzeskaki & Huffenreuter (2015) and the guidance manual by Roorda et al. (2014) provide a solid starting point.

Central to Transition Management is a set of principles, that are based on an understanding of the concept of societal transitions (Grin, Rotmans & Schot, 2010) as complex, non-linear, long-term processes of societal change. Transitions typically are disruptive because they are undesirable: human beings tend to prefer gradual change out of routine, self-interest, economic assets or lack of imagination. History however shows that if there are fundamental design flaws in existing systems (such as unsustainable use of fossil resources or structural inequalities and injustices), these will surface at some point in time and start triggering transitions.

So rather than to focus on optimising existing systems, as regular policy and management strategies often do, transition management seeks to anticipate transitions, accelerate and guide the types of emerging changes that could contribute to transitions with desired outcomes. Rather than system collapse or negative scenarios, transition management focuses on normative questions such as: how can the transition momentum be used to shift quickly to just and sustainable futures? To do so, there are a number of basic principles for a transition management “mindset” and for its operational practice (Loorbach, 2007):

- Systemic: *engage systemwide with emerging dynamics across societal levels*
- Back-casting: *taking desired, future transition states as a starting point*
- Selective: *focus on transformative agency already engaging with transitioning*
- Adaptive: *experimenting towards multiple goals and transition pathways*
- Learning-by-doing and doing-by-learning: *ensure monitoring and reflexivity*

These principles can be operationalized in different ways, whereby transition management always tries to influence change in four dimensions (Loorbach, 2007; Roorda et al., 2014):

- Strategic/Orienting: problem structuring, envisioning, and establishment of the transition arena
- Tactical/Agenda-setting: developing coalitions, images, and transition agendas
- Operational/Activating: mobilizing actors, executing projects, and experiments
- Reflexive/Reflecting: evaluating, monitoring, and learning.

The transition arena operationalizes and connects these four types of activities. It acts as a temporary innovation network aimed at developing radical ways of thinking and acting beyond 'business as usual'. And it is a collective and co-creative learning process that increases self-organisation capacity of the participants. The main outcome of the arena is a sense of direction, an impulse for local change and collective empowerment (Roorda et al., 2014). But how can these outcomes be achieved? More specifically, how could you organize such a process to reach these outcomes?

In the following chapters we discuss the practical side of the transition arena method by discussing: the formation of the transition team, deciding on the focal issue, going through the arena steps, discussing the issue of (selective) participation, the tension of regime-niche

interaction, and the practical organization of the sessions in terms of timing, location, incorporating creativity and the art of facilitation. We illustrate these topics by providing examples from ten different transition arenas organized and facilitated by DRIFT, based on interviews with the involved transition researcher(s) from DRIFT. Table 1 provides an overview of the project contexts; appendix A includes links to (online) resources per transition arena.

Table 1: Overview of the ten included transition arenas orchestrated by DRIFT

Transition arena topic	Year(s)	Brief description
Long term care, Netherlands	2007-2010	The arena focused on the long term or chronic care in the health sector in the Netherlands. It was funded by the Ministry of Health as part of the Transition Programme for Chronic Care (Transitieprogramma in de Langdurende zorg, TPLZ).
Neighbourhood arena Carnisse, Rotterdam	2012-2013	The arena aimed to increase the resilience of the neighborhood of Carnisse in Rotterdam. Based on critique on the mainstream urban regeneration/'deprived' area approaches and with three other partners, a local arena was developed. The project was funded by different (research) funds of Rotterdam, the national government and EU.
Mobility arena Rotterdam	2015	The mobility arena in Rotterdam was commissioned by the municipality of Rotterdam. It aimed to connect the municipalities own new mobility vision to the dynamics and potential existing in the city to go even wider and further.
Inland shipping, Netherlands	2015-2016	The inland shipping transition arena focused mainly on the freight transport by water, but also connected it to other inland water functions. The Province of South Holland commissioned the project.
Strategic & biobased arena Port of Rotterdam	2015-2017	The two distinct but connected transition arenas focused on a) the internal organization of the Port of Rotterdam and b) a follow-up arena zooming in on one of the identified transition pathways in the first arena (biobased) with external stakeholders. Both arenas were commissioned by the Port of Rotterdam Authority.
Neighbourhood arena Tilburg Noord	2019	The neighbourhood arena aimed to channel different fundamental problems into a new transition perspective in Tilburg Noord together with the residents. It was funded by the municipality of Tilburg.
TOMORROW – energy cities	2019 - 2022	Part of the TOMORROW project was an arena consisting of civil servants from different European cities to develop local

		roadmaps for the energy transition. The project was funded by the EU under Horizon 2020.
Hydrogen arena Port of Rotterdam	2019-2020	The transition arena on hydrogen focused on a specific transition pathway for the Port of Rotterdam as a follow-up from two earlier transition arenas. It was commissioned by the Port of Rotterdam Authority.
PROSEU – prosumers for the energy union	2020	Part of the PROSEU project was a transition arena in which prosumer organizations gathered to discuss the different normative transition pathways in the energy transition. The project was funded by the EU under Horizon 2020
Digitalization in higher education	2021	This arena was funded by a collaboration of (applied) universities in the Netherlands in the Acceleration plan for educational innovation with ICT. It focused on ICT as a crowbar for the desired transition in the sector.



Image 2: One of the sessions in the neighbourhood arena in Tilburg Noord.



## The transition team

The transition team is the core group that manages and facilitates the transition arena process and adapts the principles of the transition arena using a variety of skills and roles to provide transformative impact. The team usually consist of around 5 people that combine three kinds of expertise:

- 1) problem owners. These are people/employees from the initiating organization that are key to the transition sustainability problem. In ACES these are probably the three local port authorities and a national public agency or interest organization.
- 2) transition management experts. These are usually the transdisciplinary researchers that have dedicated time and the necessary expertise to organize, facilitate and process the collaborative transition arena.
- 3) content experts. These can be the same people as the problem owners but can also be external experts on the central transition challenge and sustainability issue addressed.

It is important to have the problem owners as part of this team and in the arena as they are key to implement and follow-up the process beyond the sessions. Often the problem owner is the originator of the arena and/or the one that finances the project. The problem owners are the link between the 'shadow' process in the arena and regular policy and decision-making in the organization, and the arena is a learning and empowerment trajectory on their own role in relation to the focal issue of the arena. It is important to have a variety of capacities in the team and to see which ones might need to be brought in externally (for example facilitating or illustrating). The content experts are needed to deeply connect to the domain and speak the language of participants. In a local neighbourhood arena this can be a local resident, in another one this can be a technical expert.

What happens if the problem owner such as a municipality or ministry is not part of the transition team? For example, in the case of the long-term care transition arena, the ministry of health was not involved closely enough in the transition arena process, which did not create the necessary ownership to have the outcomes adopted by the ministry later on. Because of a wide variety of other actors were involved in the arena, over time, the findings of the arena did make their way to the ministry as well.

In another case in the neighbourhood arena Carnisse in Rotterdam, the municipality was left out of the team deliberately as this enabled the arena to address the real problem at hand. The municipality was part of the problem, as it framed the neighbourhood in terms of a 'problem area' and a constant switch of professionals each (half) year resulted in a gap between the municipality and the residents and ensured that structural problems could not be solved.



Image 3: The 'Carnisse garden', part of the neighbourhood arena Carnisse in Rotterdam. Images by Frank Hanswijk.



## Participant selection

Who are the right people to include in the arena? This touches upon the question of agency: “*the ability to act with intention as opposed to just reacting*” (De Haan & Rotmans, 2018, p. 278).

There is much to say about the ‘selective participation’ as a principle in transition management. In the initial phase of transition, it makes sense to include mainly frontrunners, pioneers and niche players and form new and different networks (Loorbach & Rotmans, 2010). With frontrunners, we commonly refer to people that are *frontrunning*: is the creative ability to deeply challenge stalled ideas and routines in a certain domain by acting innovative, radically and dissenting (Jhagroe & van Steenberg, 2014). However, there is a balance between being selective-exclusive and being broad-inclusive, with a focus on mainly pioneers or including a greater diversity of stakeholders. It is hard to fully avoid institutional representation, but it is good to let people participate on personal title beyond representation of existing institutional viewpoints as much as possible.

For good participant selection, a-priori personal conversation for example in the form of interviews are essential because during these you can gather impressions whether someone adheres to the principle of ‘selective participation’, although it is a sensitive and flexible concept. First, in such an interview you can gather whether a person agrees on the necessity of transition. Or, in other words, that the person is able to think from a systems perspective in his/her own way and agrees that certain problems are linked to the designs of the system. People included in the arena thus agree on the need for system change, but not (necessarily) on where to move away from and where to move towards. Still, the shared starting point of acknowledging the necessity for fundamental change is essential here.

Secondly, most people that are included in the arena are already working on the sustainability transitions they see, but do not necessarily do so from a system or transition perspective. They already do some ‘niche work’, engaging in alternative structures or practices compared to current mainstream. Thirdly, people can move beyond mere representation and do not just reproduce institutional viewpoints. And fourthly, people need to be connected to the topic. Often the people that are affected by problems are often not part of discussions and we talk ‘about’ them instead of ‘with’ them. The persons involved need some kind of personal motivation and urgency.

Having a person in your transition team that has a (large) network in the sector is essential to get to the right people for the interviews and the arena. Using existing networks is pragmatic as it builds upon established trust relations. It helps to identify the ‘right’ group of people you want to gather in the arena and increases the chance of committed participation.

However, you want to move beyond ‘the usual suspects’ as you actively try to surprise and develop other dynamics in the arena. Look for diversity: new or additional perspectives, people that act on the boundary of the system (half in and half out) and therefore can reflect well on the system dynamics, marginalized voices or groups, or other forms of diversity dependent on the

specific context. What dimensions of diversity can be used are shown in table 1 below. If these people are not yet in the network, you can start from the basic network and snowball via the contacts of the people you initially interview. Alternatively, you can actively scout people by going to local gatherings, discussions, meetings, conferences, etc. And of course, you can use established methods of actor mapping to identify your biases and gaps.

Table 2: Dimensions for diversity in participant selection (from: Silvestri, Hebinck, von Wirth & Mulders, 2022, p.16)

Dimensions	Participant types
Broader stakeholder groups	Public actors, civil society, private sector, researchers, citizens, NGOs, etc.
Sector	Engineering, medicine, social and public work, etc.
Geographical origin	Country, region, neighbourhood, continent, etc.
Gender identity	Male, Female, LGQBTIA+, etc.
Cultural identity and race	Caucasian people, people of colour, etc.
Socio-economic background	High-income, low-income, marginalized, or vulnerable groups, etc.
Transition logics	Radical thinkers, grassroots initiatives, unheard voices, incumbents, etc.

The interviews are usually done by the transition experts in the team but can also be carried out by the problem owners and focus on testing an initial problem framing and analysis and to let the interviewee reflect on the sector from a transition and system perspective. It helps to have an hour to go in-depth on the topic, to do interviews in person to read the non-verbal communication better and to have two transition team members present for a broader transfer of insights. The interviews are part of the problem analysis, but also help to scout the right people for in the arena.

In most arenas there is also a tension between selective participation and institutional representation: ideally people join on personal title. This depends on the cultural context as well, in some contexts being present on a 'personal title' is less common and in some arena contexts it is still needed to include people from certain organizations. This depends on the culture as well, in some contexts, it is needed to actively leave out certain people because they cannot move beyond mere representation or do not fit to the principles described earlier. Usually, between 10-20 people join the arena and the same group moves through the different steps together with no changes in persons in between. Sometimes it attracts people that invite themselves to join or want to just 'listen in'. You can think of creative ways to separately involve those, but it is good

to keep them away from the arena process itself. For example, you can do an interview, inform them after 2/3 of the sessions, but not having them in the session themselves.

Finally, participants also need to have a reason to join the arena. Usually, the urge for fundamental system changes or the actor(s) present in the transition team are reason enough to join. Still, it is good to think from the participants perspective: why would they join? What is in it for them? What can they influence, co-create and take away from the arena? Especially when involving marginalized voices participate in the arena this might not be obvious.



# Hydrogen for the Port of Rotterdam

**40** Epilogue

Hydrogen for the Port of Rotterdam  
in an International Context  
– a Plea for Leadership

June 18, 2020



In these last pages, all participants share their reflections on the arena process that has led to this report and their ideas about what should be prioritized today.

“The sessions provided Eneco the opportunity to give input on the vision formation of the Port of Rotterdam on hydrogen; it also sharpened our vision. The Port of Rotterdam can create an important new ecosystem for industrial companies to make their processes or feedstocks more sustainable. There is a clear interest for Eneco, as well, by creating partnerships with such parties interested in the use of green hydrogen directly coupled to our renewable assets, which lead to green and low-cost hydrogen.”

– Silvan de Boer & Elmer de Boer  
Eneco

“An interesting trajectory with good insights from different perspectives. For me, hydrogen plays a pivotal role in the energy transition, transforming the world of the molecule from a fossil origin to circular and biobased. Developing the different tracks was valuable and inspires me personally to intensify my efforts to accelerate and scale the green hydrogen and circular chemistry projects Nouryon has globally and for Rotterdam specifically.”

– Robert Bouma  
Commercial Manager Energy & New Business, Nouryon

“To successfully develop the ‘hydrogen economy,’ leadership across the entire chain is required (production / import, transport / distribution, market). As an infrastructure company, Gasunie works with the Port of Rotterdam Authority on the development of the regional hydrogen backbone, the connecting link between supply and demand. We want to make the final investment decision for this in 2021.”

– Hans Coenen  
Director strategy & Business Development, Gasunie

Image 4: Part of the front page of and participant reflections in the report as an outcome of the Hydrogen arena for the Port of Rotterdam.



## The Arena steps

The transition arena process tries to address all four dimensions described in the introduction but mainly focuses on the strategic and tactical ones. The operational plans are always developed with the transition team and specified for the contexts. For example, when there already is a lot of ongoing innovation and support for transition activities, the arena focuses rather on (already) identified transition pathways. But in a context where there is not a lot of support yet and little experimentation is going on, the approach will focus much more on developing a community of like-minded frontrunners and finding a common understanding of the needed and possible transition.

In spite of the differences that relate to local context, the transition phase and dynamics of the particular system, and problem at hand, the arena process roughly follows a similar sequence of steps that are based on social learning theories and insights from co-creation and group facilitation methods. The guidance manual 'transition management in the urban context' (Roorda et al., 2014) describes the classic steps for a transition arena process in transitions that are not yet much developed. The arena steps include a) system and actor analysis, b) problem analysis, c) future visioning, d) transition pathways, e) transition agenda, f) dissemination, and g) transition experiments.

When the transition dynamics are more advanced and niches and/or future transition visions are emerging, the arena steps can be adopted. What does the specific context or transition phase ask for? More radicality, inclusion or institutionalization? How much is already happening in the transition? Instead of starting up something new, arena processes in more advanced transition contexts connect to already developed visions or pathways. Hence, depending on the transition analysis and dynamics in the specific context, they adjust the order of the steps or even take alternative steps as part of the process to develop meaningful transition impact. Other questions also emerge, like that of marginalization and inclusivity.

Below we describe three arena processes that take an alternative approach compared to the steps as described in the guidebook in more advanced phases of different transitions.

- In the PROSEU project, the transition arena focused on an existing niche within the energy transition: "prosumerism": people that both produce (generate) and consume energy. The first step was a system analysis finding out that a transition vision and transition pathways already existed, but there were inherent tensions that blocked the niche to further stabilize and mainstream. Hence, the arena focused on discussing the different normative directions by gathering actors from different prosumer organizations to reiterate on the transition pathways. This resulted in 10 roadmaps to mainstream prosumerism and marks the point where the arena ended.

- In the TOMORROW project, civil servants from six cities across Europe mapped the status of their city in relation to each city's own transition ambition on energy policy (system and problem analysis). As the energy transition was already more advanced, each city had developed a future vision (each city's climate policy) and it was not needed to include the visioning step. Rather, the second step in each city was reflexive monitoring in order to analyse the gap between the current status and the future vision. The following and last step was the development of transition pathways for the legitimacy and participation of the transition to move towards wider participation in the energy transition, and institutionalizing radicality or existing niches.
- In the neighbourhood arena in Carnisse, Rotterdam, the arena steps were adjusted to the local dynamics of a neighbourhood. Because the arena focused on the involvement and empowerment of the local residents to develop an alternative transition future to the framing of the municipality and a variety of professionals of the area as 'problematic', the arena did not start with a fixed group of participants. The first step, the problem framing, was conducted by interviewing a variety of local residents and professionals working in the area. The second step however focused on connecting more deeply to the envisaged participants to become part of local experiments in a community garden and community centre. It thus connected to the already ongoing energy in the neighbourhood and invited participants there for future visioning and the following other steps up to and including experimentation.

To illustrate more concretely how these steps materialize in a first arena session, we pick the example of the hydrogen arena for the Port of Rotterdam. In the first session, the system and actor analysis, problem analysis and future visioning came together. The main goal of the session was to discuss the problem framing, which was shared through a preparatory document based on interviews with the participants and other key stakeholders, analysis and reframing of stated problems from a transition and system perspective.

In this transition analysis, we often try to connect several things: how did we get here (path dependency), what are the persistent problems, what is the dominant regime, is the system already in transition, what are already emerging niches? During the session, DRIFT presented the problem framing briefly, after which we conducted an extensive introduction round and first responses and discussion by all participants on whether they recognize the analysis, (2 hours). After a shared dinner (1 hour), we had an additional hour of discussion where we tried to draw some conclusions, explicate critical issues, and provide an outlook to the second session.



Image 5: Illustration by Maria Fraaije as part of the transition arena digitalization in higher education on the gap between high and low educated in society.



## Framing and analysis

Each arena is organized around a transition issue, often in relation with a specific organization. This focus often develops in the conversations between the transition researchers and problem owners. In this, transition researchers take an explicit design or framing role: they reinterpret the issues and problems the practitioner faces from a transition perspective and reframe them as persistent problems linked to an existing societal regime in which transition momentum is building up. This reframing is critical as well as subjective: it is the start of the creative process of developing a new and guiding narrative in a sector, area, or organisation.

What is the right demarcation of the focal issue of the arena? How specific or general should the framing be? There is no scientific answer: it is the outcome of a co-creative and iterative process yet building on transition concepts these framings always have a similar structure. In general, the transition framing is focused on a persistent societal problem that is now predominantly addressed through incremental improvement that does not yield the perceived necessary fundamental changes. It puts a specific societal regime (in an area, organisation, or sector) within a broader (Landscape) context of societal change and emerging competition from social and technological alternatives (niches). The interaction between these might imply desired transformative changes on the long term and often cover connected transitions and multiple domains.

For example, the focal issue in the internal Rotterdam Port Authority arena was on the absence of an alternative future beyond a greener version of the existing one based on large scale transport, energy, and materials. Given global dynamics around climate change, geopolitics, and trade, combined with emerging niches like renewables, cooperatives, circularity etc, it was unlikely that the current model was indeed future proof. The transition identified was thus one in which the port has to reinvent its future existence, with diversity, flexibility and resilience as basic conditions. The focal issue is thus never a specific problem in isolation, but always connected to its wider system and transition dynamics. It is also always a confrontation with business-as-usual and raises the question: how will transition hit us when we continue along this pathway?

To illustrate we share five other focal issues below:

- In the neighbourhood arena in Tilburg Noord the area itself determined the system boundary and hence focused on the social, economic, and physical quality of life. The resident's experience was put central, which raised cross-border issues. The focal issue was the contrast between dominant negative and unconstructive frames and stigma of the neighbourhood as problematic area where other city residents have nothing to do, and the pride of local residents and their fatigue with focusing only on the negative.

- In the arena on digitalization in higher education in the Netherlands the starting point was not digitalization itself, but higher education and its sustainability issues (like the persistent gap in education levels) and how digitalization plays a role in these (strengthen or helps to solve it). This alternative framing was an important contribution of the arena.
- In the mobility arena in Rotterdam, mobility was not framed solely in terms of technology, but also in terms of public space (for example how much space is there for parking cars), urban development (densification challenge), social-economic (ownership, mobility poverty) and behavioural aspects (incentives and triggers).
- In the PROSEU project the transition arena focused on the different future images of prosumer (initiatives) in the energy transition across Europe. For example, one of the future images in which the different initiatives varied was the level of in- or exclusiveness of prosumerism. By putting this normative discussion central, the arena assisted in mainstreaming prosumerism.
- In the arena for the Port of Rotterdam around hydrogen, the starting point was a niche or solution pathway (low and carbon neutral hydrogen) within the larger energy and circular/biobased transitions of the port. It acted as an 'arena within an arena', as it was a follow-up to two previous arenas on the port authority itself and on circular/biobased transition.

What is helpful in formulating the focal issue of the arena is to question the durability or longevity of a system or strategy and ask the question whether it is transformative (enough) or mainly optimizing current system requirements. It is important that the problem owners can connect themselves to the transition framing, as otherwise the transition arena is not contributing to the challenge they face. Another important factor to consider is to match the problem framing with the correct geographical demarcation. For example, in the inland shipping arena for the province of South-Holland, the geographical boundary of the province did not match the sector. This sector predominantly has a national or even international focus. Hence, only a very small pool of people was active at the provincial level and thereby the arena missed expertise to really deepen the issues in the sector in full.

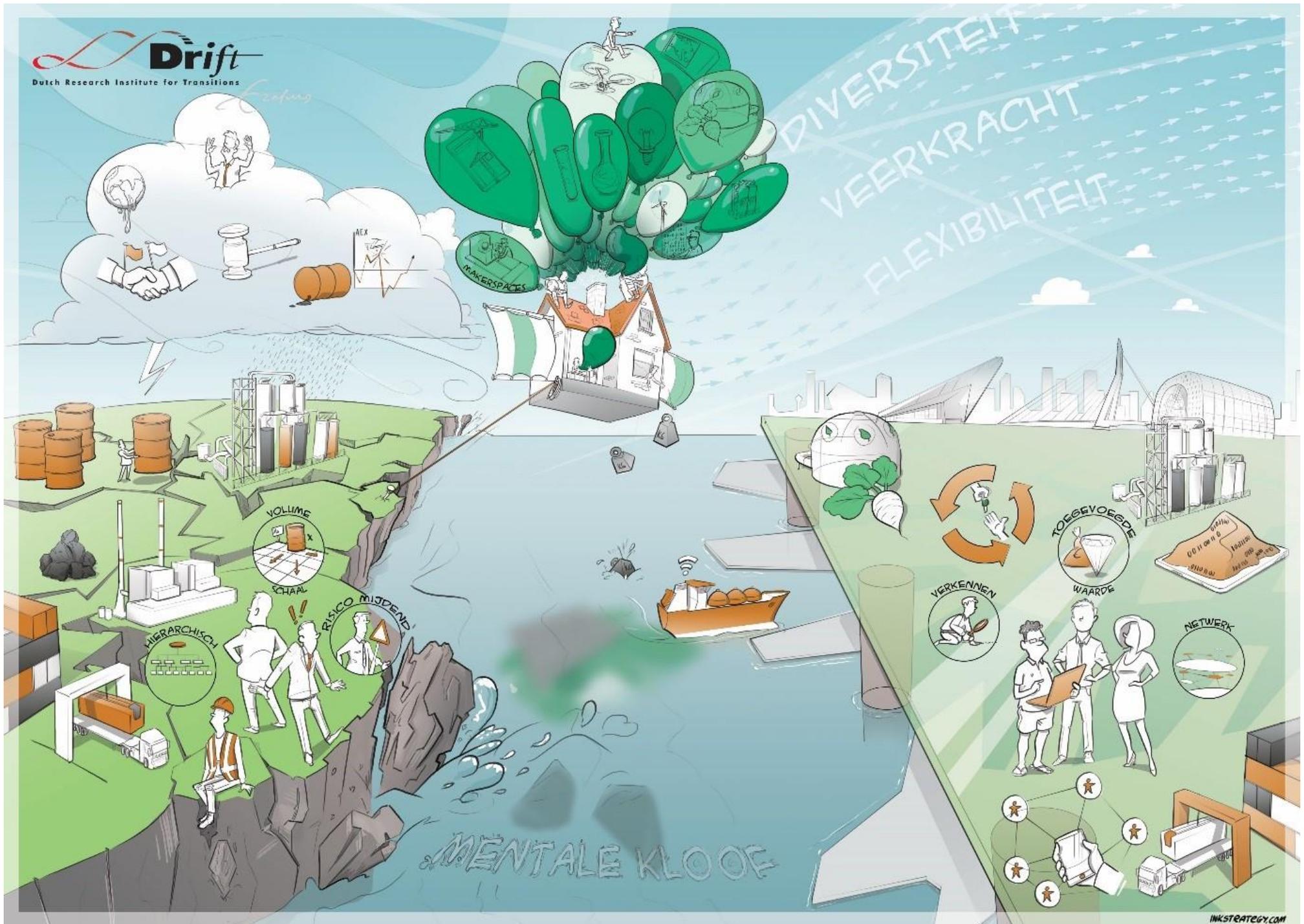


Image 6: The visualisation of the Transition agenda 'towards a diverse, flexible and resilient Port of Rotterdam' (in cooperation with InkStrategy).



## Niche-regime interaction

Ultimately, the arena is a form of a transformative space that empowers the participants to advance transitions towards sustainability. The arena thus works on radicality but is usually still embedded in existing regime structures. This can create tension in or outside the arena, or sometimes the facilitators actively seek such tension to provoke and generate reflection, temporary feelings of discomfort to stimulate transformative shifts with participants and transformative change of the arena.

The real niche-regime tension is often not manifest in the arena itself but rather in the surrounding of the arena. The group goes 'underground' (or: 'below radar') during the arena process, which means the process is not yet shared openly with others outside of the arena and is secluded for the people inside to find common pathways to move the transition further. It is aimed to increase the resilience of the niche, so they are up for confronting the regime. The arena process should be a safe space to question and discuss, but not to resolve the complexity of the transition itself. Still, some of the tensions need to be addressed to be transformative. Which ones to select depends on the specific arena.

The main tension that is central in the arena is *'thinking radically, acting diplomatically'*. Being radical in the arena is in addressing the roots causes of the problem via system thinking and transition analysis. By framing the problem differently and confronting those with the system, other future (solution) pathways for the system will open up. Being diplomatic refers to starting from a constructive attitude, not accusing/addressing people individually or personally on undesired or regime actions but zooming out and co-creating an alternative transition paradigm and allowing participants take and realize these steps themselves step-by-step.

For example, in the first arena for the Port of Rotterdam at first, there was quite some scepticism on the need for and added value of such an arena. And more importantly: on the port expertise of the transition academics. But instead of questioning the exact sustainability strategy and its speed, the question of how long the current status quo could be sustained opened a reflexive dialogue and the insight that a new story was needed.

Another tension in the arena is between the radicality of system change in transitions and institutionalizing alternatives. The risk is that niches will 'fit and conform' rather than 'stretch and transform' the regime they become part of (Smith & Raven, 2012). This is particularly a risk for arenas that are organized in a more advanced transition context. In an arena on the higher education in the Netherlands the team searched for someone within the regime that could take the outcomes of the arena to a higher strategic level. They found such a person (already in the preparatory interviews) and estimated him to have transformative power in the regime among more conservatives and be the right one to spread the message.

When the arena enters on the surface again, it is thus key to find ways to secure the insights, beyond the potential experiments and actions that have emerged from the arena. Sometimes

this happens organically, for example in the neighbourhood arena the problem owners (civil servants from the municipality) in the transition team initiated the recording of videos, flyers with the new compass for the area and include the story in other communication. Moving beyond projectified ways of conducting an arena towards a culture of transition thinking and experimenting should be a guiding objective (Torrens & von Wirth 2021).

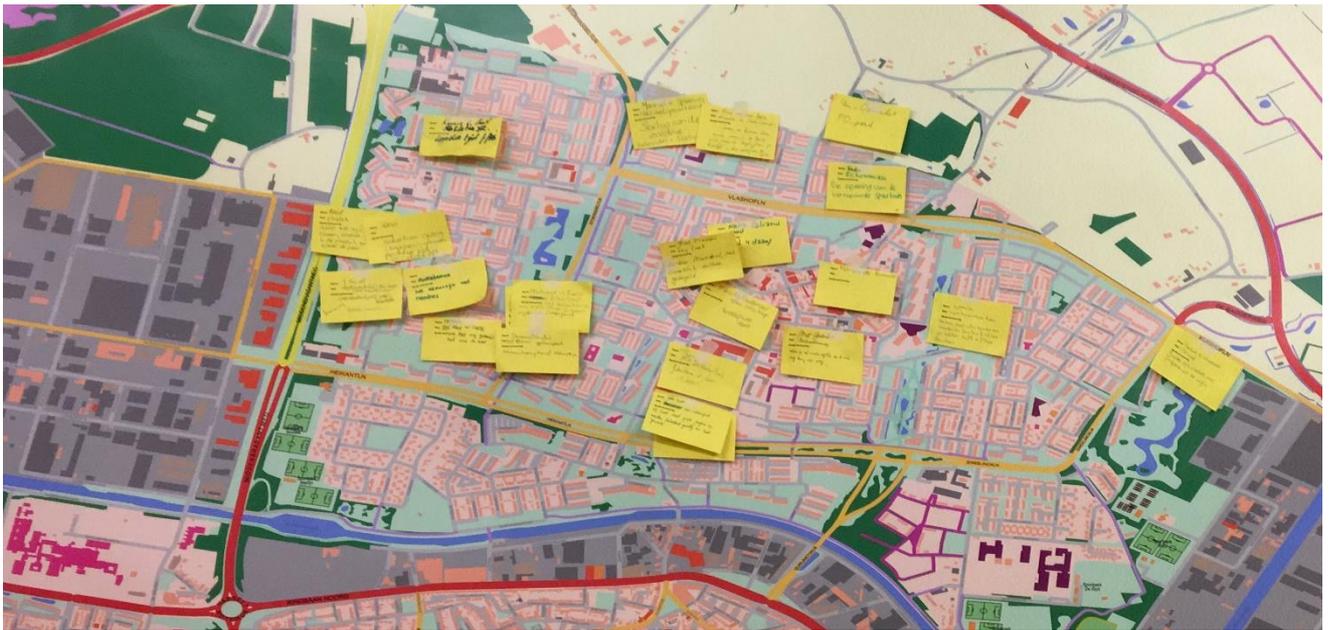


Image 7: Participants in the neighbourhood arena Tilburg-Noord mapping their favourite places in the area.



## Organization

### *Timing*

Usually, a transition arena including preparations and dissemination lasts about 0,75-1,5 years, depending on the time between the sessions, varying approximately from 1-2 months. There are about 4-6 arena sessions, roughly estimated, you need 1-2 sessions on the problem framing, 1-2 sessions on the future vision, 1-2 sessions on pathways and agenda/actions, and then a public event where you share the insights of the arena with the outside world.

Sometimes the arena needs 2 sessions on the same step (or combining steps) as it needs more discussion, deepening or when hiccups need to be resolved. Often, the next step then goes quicker again. It is thus key to adjust the planning on the way and sometimes even during arena sessions. These numbers are averages and there are outliers as well. For example, the arena on long-term care in the Netherlands lasted for two years, eight arena sessions and with eight people in the transition team there was much room to deepen insights and shape the arena.

The timing of the individual sessions largely depends on the availability of the participants. For example, in a neighbourhood arena people might only be available in the weekend. A session usually lasts 3-5 hours and is organized at the end of the day including dinner (16:30-20:30). In this part of the day, people are usually available, and it does not interfere with regular working hours or work activities. This helps to put people in a more intimate and personal setting, especially when food is served.

### *Location*

The location of the arena sessions is very important. Such places need to get the participants out of daily routines, make meaningful personal connections between them and spark their imagination. There are several ways to do so. You can ask participants to alternate the hosting of the sessions to create a sense of ownership and personal connection. Depending on the type of participants, it can help to get them out of their comfort zone and meet in an atypical place: a local youth shelter, the library, a boat, a room with a view, or a luxurious location with good food to make people comfortable and more inclined to come. Just note that the food should not interfere too much with the content of the session. A three-course dinner is nice, but hardly facilitates a good discussion.

In the Rotterdam arena on mobility, they took the location to the next level. For example, hosting one of the sessions on a location outside the city centre to let participants experience how poorly accessible it was. Or hosting a session in a parking garage but transforming it into a temporary beach with real sand and showing what alternatives or possibilities the place provided. Or one place that was designed and built by underprivileged youth and where participants had to sit on pallets (see image 1). In the arena for the Port of Rotterdam the port authority itself hosted the sessions on their innovation floor. High in their tower, with a good view

on the city and the waterways, with artificial grass on the floor and uncommon couches to spark the imagination.

### *Creativity*

Because for most people it is quite hard to disengage from our current dominant structures, cultures and practices and really imagine fundamentally different alternatives, it helps to set the right mindset with creative exercises. These can be small, for example by including energizers, icebreakers, relaxation in breaks (going outside) or, as they did in the arena on higher education in the Netherlands, a check-in and check-out. This creates a group feeling, everyone is heard, and in follow-up sessions they asked accessible questions like whether they want to share any news since they last met related to the core topic, or how busy people were at that moment.

Key to get participants into the right mindset is on how they enter the space of a session. Often, it helps to emotionally engage participants from the start. For example, by opening the session with a song or by printing pictures or quotes, hanging them on the wall and asking participants to choose a quote or picture to introduce themselves (or to represent their position in the system, or to do a system analysis based on pictures or a live constellation work, or some other creative exercise). Another example from the neighbourhood arena in Tilburg Noord is an exercise where participants had to map their favourite parts to break through the negative stigma in the area (see image 7). It thus helps to have creative exercises that connect both emotions and cognition to support the specific goals of the session.

Lastly, including a visual notetaker helps to translate the (content) discussions into creative output. This is helpful for digesting insights between sessions, but also to communicate them to outsiders during or usually after the arena. The visual notetaker can also take a role in the session itself, by providing visual feedback in real time.

### *Facilitation*

The facilitation of the arena needs to balance a couple of things: balancing insider and outsider perspectives with building trust and shared expertise, balancing content and process facilitation, and balancing good and bad cop roles. Usually, the transition experts are from outside of the system that is central in the arena. This helps to bring in a fresh outsider perspective and can easily ask 'stupid' or 'obvious' questions resulting from the transition analysis. Still, it is also needed to build expertise to be taken seriously in the discussions and proposals. It helps to stay close to your system/transition analysis and ask essential questions that result from it, which can be stimulating enough for the arena. If needed, you can bring in alternative or more radical (outsider) perspectives yourself or invite others into the arena that can bring in such perspectives.

Balancing process and content facilitation also means balancing provocation and harmony in the arena. Provocation on the content is often needed to get some of the participants to question the system and their own position. The content facilitator that gives presentations on the analysis and preparatory work is often the person that takes this provocative role. The

process facilitator usually makes sure everyone in the arena is heard, keeps track of time, and makes sure that discussions do not heat up too much and in the end harmony of the group as a whole is maintained. This is not just a play, as clashes can be real, but dividing these roles can help to bring the arena further.

Lastly, facilitation is not just needed during the sessions, but also in between sessions as it creates co-ownership of the process. For example, participants help to deepen parts of the analysis in written analysis or through additional discussions in groups or one-on-one (phone call) interactions. You can actively invite participants to co-write a final piece that represents the viewpoints of the arena. Or to invite external experts to answer specific questions. The exact role division between the transition team and participants depends on arena to arena and the composition of participants.



Image 8: One of the transition arena sessions in the mobility arena Rotterdam om the city.



## References

De Haan, F. J., & Rotmans, J. (2018). A proposed theoretical framework for actors in transformative change. *Technological forecasting and social change*, 128, 275-286.

Grin, J., Rotmans, J., & Schot, J. (2010). *Transitions to sustainable development: new directions in the study of long term transformative change*. Routledge.

Jhagroe, S., & van Steenbergen, F. (2014). *Van koplopers naar koplopen: een pleidooi voor inclusief leiderschap*. Essay number E 2014.4. DRIFT, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. <https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2017/03/E-2014.04-Van-koploper-naar-koplopen-Jhagroe-Van-Steenbergen-2014.pdf>

Loorbach, D. (2007). *Transition management. New mode of governance for sustainable development*. Utrecht: International Books.

Loorbach, D. (2010). Transition management for sustainable development: a prescriptive, complexity - based governance framework. *Governance*, 23(1), 161-183.

Loorbach, D., & Rotmans, J. (2010). The practice of transition management: Examples and lessons from four distinct cases. *Futures*, 42(3), 237-246.

Loorbach, D., Frantzeskaki, N., & Hufenreuter, R. L. (2015). Transition management: taking stock from governance experimentation. *Journal of corporate citizenship*, (58), 48-66.

Roorda, C., Wittmayer, J., Henneman, P, Steenbergen, F. van, Frantzeskaki, N., & Loorbach, D. (2014). *Transition management in five European cities – an evaluation*. DRIFT, Erasmus University Rotterdam. [https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2016/11/DRIFT-Transition management in the urban context-guidance manual.pdf](https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2016/11/DRIFT-Transition%20management%20in%20the%20urban%20context-guidance%20manual.pdf)

Silvestri, G., Hebinck, A., von Wirth, T., Mulders, W., 2022. *SHARED GREEN DEAL Arena guidelines: designing translocal, inclusive spaces for co-creation to achieve the EU Green Deal*. Cambridge: SHARED GREEN DEAL.

Silvestri, G., Wittmayer, J., & De Geus, T. (2020). *Workbook for urban transition makers*. Tomorrow. [https://www.citiesoftomorrow.eu/sites/default/files/documents/TOMORROW\\_workbook\\_Web.pdf](https://www.citiesoftomorrow.eu/sites/default/files/documents/TOMORROW_workbook_Web.pdf)

Smith, A., & Raven, R. (2012). What is protective space? Reconsidering niches in transitions to sustainability. *Research policy*, 41(6), 1025-1036.

Torrens, J., & von Wirth, T. (2021). Experimentation or projectification of urban change? A critical appraisal and three steps forward. *Urban Transformations*, 3(1), 1-17.

## Appendix A: Resource overview of the transition arenas

Transition arena	Year(s)	Resources & weblinks
Long term care	2007-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>van Raak, R. (2016). Transition Policies; connecting system dynamics, governance and instruments in an application to Dutch Healthcare. <a href="https://repub.eur.nl/pub/80061/Dissertatie-VanRaak.pdf">https://repub.eur.nl/pub/80061/Dissertatie-VanRaak.pdf</a> (specifically section 7.3)</li> <li>Report as outcome of the arena (in Dutch): <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2022/09/mensenzorg-EEN-TRANSITIEBEWEGING.pdf">https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2022/09/mensenzorg-EEN-TRANSITIEBEWEGING.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Neighbourhood arena Carnisse, Rotterdam	2011-2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project description: <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/cases/veerkracht-carnisse/">https://drift.eur.nl/cases/veerkracht-carnisse/</a></li> <li>Wittmayer, J. (2016). Transition management, action research and actor roles: understanding local sustainability transitions. <a href="https://repub.eur.nl/pub/94385/">https://repub.eur.nl/pub/94385/</a> (Specifically Intermezzo B)</li> <li>van Steenberg, F. (2020). Zonder marge geen centrum: Een pleidooi voor rechtvaardige transitie. <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2020/10/Zonder-marge-geen-centrum-Van-Steenbergen-2020_def.pdf">https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2020/10/Zonder-marge-geen-centrum-Van-Steenbergen-2020_def.pdf</a> (specifically section 2.7)</li> </ul>
Mobility arena Rotterdam	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project description (in Dutch): <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/publications/mobiliteit-katalysator-duurzaam-rotterdam/">https://drift.eur.nl/publications/mobiliteit-katalysator-duurzaam-rotterdam/</a></li> <li>Report as outcome of the arena (in Dutch): <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2016/12/Nieuwe_wegen_in_slaan_mobiliteitsarenaRdam.pdf">https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2016/12/Nieuwe_wegen_in_slaan_mobiliteitsarenaRdam.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Inland shipping	2015-2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report as outcome of the arena (in Dutch): <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2022/09/Brochure-vervoer-over-water-160329-web.pdf">https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2022/09/Brochure-vervoer-over-water-160329-web.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Strategic & biobased arena Port of Rotterdam	2015-2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bosman, R., Loorbach, D., Rotmans, J., &amp; Van Raak, R. (2018). Carbon lock-out: Leading the fossil port of Rotterdam into transition. <i>Sustainability</i>, 10(7), 2558. <a href="https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/10/7/2558">https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/10/7/2558</a></li> <li>Final publication of the arena (in Dutch): <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2018/02/Transitie-agenda-Biobased-Haven-Rotterdam.pdf">https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2018/02/Transitie-agenda-Biobased-Haven-Rotterdam.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Neighbourhood arena Tilburg Noord	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future vision broadcasted in local media (in Dutch): <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDdogeeTwds">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDdogeeTwds</a></li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief description of the arena (in Dutch) <a href="https://www.tilburg.nl/noord2040/">https://www.tilburg.nl/noord2040/</a></li> </ul>
TOMORROW – energy cities	2019 - 2022	<p><i>The arena described in this guide was one only one of the elements in the project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project description: <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/projects/tomorrow-2/">https://drift.eur.nl/projects/tomorrow-2/</a></li> <li>Project website: <a href="https://www.citiesoftomorrow.eu/">https://www.citiesoftomorrow.eu/</a></li> </ul>
Hydrogen arena Port of Rotterdam	2019-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project description: <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/cases/hydrogen-and-port-of-rotterdam/">https://drift.eur.nl/cases/hydrogen-and-port-of-rotterdam/</a></li> <li>Report as outcome of the arena: <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2020/06/KSD_DRIFT_Hav-enbedrijfRotterdam_vDEF.pdf">https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2020/06/KSD_DRIFT_Hav-enbedrijfRotterdam_vDEF.pdf</a></li> </ul>
PROSEU – prosumers for the energy union	2020	<p><i>The arena described in this guide was one only one of the elements in the project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliverable on the outcomes of the arena: <a href="https://zenodo.org/record/4568680#.Yx7lynbP2Uk">https://zenodo.org/record/4568680#.Yx7lynbP2Uk</a></li> <li>Project description: <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/projects/proseu-renewable-energy-prosumerism/">https://drift.eur.nl/projects/proseu-renewable-energy-prosumerism/</a> &amp; discussion of the outcomes <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/publications/at-three-crossroads-where-does-prosumerism-lead-us/">https://drift.eur.nl/publications/at-three-crossroads-where-does-prosumerism-lead-us/</a></li> <li>Project website: <a href="https://proseu.eu/">https://proseu.eu/</a></li> </ul>
Digitalization in higher education	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project description (in Dutch): <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/cases/versnellingsplan-onderwijsinnovatie-met-ict-digitalisering-als-transitie-breekijzer/">https://drift.eur.nl/cases/versnellingsplan-onderwijsinnovatie-met-ict-digitalisering-als-transitie-breekijzer/</a></li> <li>Report as outcome of the arena (in Dutch): <a href="https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2022/02/Transitieagenda-leren-digitaliseren.pdf">https://drift.eur.nl/app/uploads/2022/02/Transitieagenda-leren-digitaliseren.pdf</a></li> </ul>



# drift

for transition

---

This is a DRIFT publication.

We are 30+ experts working on fundamental change towards just and sustainable futures. As a social enterprise, we support people, cities, companies and sectors striving for such change.

We do so by developing and sharing transitions know-how and how-to through research, consultancy, education and activism!

To learn more, go to [drift.eur.nl](https://drift.eur.nl)